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Unsafe in Tory hands

James Linney urges resistance to the 'organisation of misery' imposed on the NHS

A 'British winter' can mean many things - we each have our own experiences and memories, adding to the complex and unique picture, but there will inevitably be many elements that we all share (usually featuring the weather).

But in recent times there has occurred a new, and much more malignant and worrying, shared winter experience. One which also dominates the news, but to a much greater extent than the weather: the annual crisis that affects the national health service. Each year the crisis seems to deepen, and its effects this year have been even more devastating than the last. And last year, we will remember, the situation was so dire that the Red Cross described it as a "humanitarian crisis".¹

So how bad is the current situation? And why is it that the winter, something humans have been able to predict since the birth of our very culture, seems to take the health secretary by surprise every year?

A quick glance at the news each morning gives an impression of how dire the situation in GP surgeries and hospitals is right now. But you only get a real sense of how bad things are if you are unfortunate enough to work in these conditions, where your desire for providing an efficient and high standard of care is virtually impossible to deliver; or if you are even more unfortunate and are seriously unwell, when you will be forced to wait many hours before you get your 'urgent' treatment. For example, in the last week of December, NHS England reported that over 16,900 people were left waiting in ambulances for more than 30 minutes before being able to even get into accident and emergency departments.² Considering that people who arrive by ambulance are obviously much more likely to require immediate, potentially living-saving treatment, this is a horrific statistic.

When people eventually arrive in A&E, the situation is no better. Patients are regularly having to wait very long periods - in some situations more than 12 hours - just to be assessed. Social media is full of pictures and videos of departments bursting at the seams, people squeezed into overcrowded wards or on trolleys lining the corridors. There are record numbers of people attending A&E. In 2017, nearly 24 million people were seen, an increase of three million compared to 2016 (another record-breaking year³). Of these 89% were reported to have been seen within the four-hour (!) target.



NHS staff are being forced to work under intolerable pressure

But the number is almost certainly lower than this, as a certain amount of 'creativity' has always been used on the wards to get better scores on targets, ever since they were introduced by Tony Blair in 2004. This is largely due to managerial pressure and threats toward staff, who are told to meet the targets or be disciplined. Meaning that patients are often moved to less well staffed holding wards, discharged home prematurely or admitted into hospital unnecessarily.

A&E is just one department and the overcrowding and bed shortages are affecting all wards. More people than ever are attending with acute illnesses, yet there are fewer hospital beds available. The total number has halved in the past 30 years despite the record number of attendances - the figure has gone down from around 299,000 to 142,000.⁴

And the situation is made far worse by the social care crisis that is taking place in parallel. People who are medically stable but unable to look after themselves have nowhere to go. Both home care and residential care homes (which have always been hugely underfunded) have been in decline for decades, largely due to their privatisation.

So the bed shortages are a very real and a dangerous reality. In at least one hospital people were forced to sleep on the floor because bed shortages were so acute. Infamously, Tory health minister Philip Donnan has since 'solved' this problem by helpfully pointing out in parliament: "There are seats available in most hospitals where beds are not available." Tory NHS crisis

management in all its glory.

Yet hospital capacity is just a small part of the story - one which is more depressing than a Thomas Hardy novel. Every part of the NHS has suffered nearly a decade of Tory cuts. NHS salaries have been falling, nurses' bursaries have been terminated, there are alarming staff shortages, junior doctors have been forced to accept a contract which they warned would be unsafe for patients and all the time inadequate numbers of overworked and overstressed staff are trying to do their best.

The sum of all this is that there is not just an NHS winter crisis: the NHS is in perpetual crisis, which just gets worse in the winter. Meanwhile the privatisation of the NHS continues, the next step being Accountable Care Organisations. These will open the door for private companies to take over responsibility for health and social-care provision for decade-long contracts. "We are currently being given a demonstration of how this would end up with the collapse of Carillion. But when private healthcare companies go bankrupt then the situation will be unimaginably worse."

Better prepared

The Tory government, of course, wants us to believe that the problems in the NHS are a result of a run of bad luck. Its mantra has been: a spell of cold weather, followed by a bad outbreak of flu, has left hospitals overstretched but coping. OK, NHS England had to cancel 55,000 elective operations, but this was all part of the plan. This may very well be true,

but what plan? The one the public are sold (albeit with less and less conviction), where the NHS is, according to Theresa May, "better prepared for winter than ever before", or the plan that got discussed between May and Hunt in 10 Downing Street on the morning of May's pathetic attempt at a distracting reshuffle? Hunt not only retained his job, but was given more control over social care. Whether this was the result of the prime minister's weakness, or because he was simply being rewarded for mismanaging the NHS with great skill, is inconsequential. Either way, as the NHS approaches its 70th birthday, its future is looking more than bleak.

Yet the voices of resistance are growing louder. Some groups within the NHS have started to make strong statements in favour of more funding. For example, a group of 66 A&E consultants sent an open letter to May detailing their "very serious concerns for the safety of our patients", because "the NHS is severely and chronically underfunded".⁵ Similarly, NHS Providers - the body representing front-line trusts - has written to Jeremy Hunt, stating that the levels of underfunding mean:

We have now reached a key watershed moment. Put simply, the NHS can no longer deliver the standards enshrined in its constitution; standards that were drawn up to reflect safe, decent levels of patient care.

Additionally, there is a group of doctors and NHS activists, led by Allyson Pollard, attempting to force a judicial review to

prevent the introduction of Accountable Care Organisations. But it is going to take much more than this to save the NHS.

The NHS is a special industry within Britain. Despite the creeping privatisation over the past two decades it remains in the public's perception a unique service, that does its best to provide care to people, irrespective of bank balance or class. The underfunding of the NHS is also very real and apparent to the working class - ie, those who rely on its services. It is workers who have to queue in A&E and witness the staff desperately trying to keep things going. They are the ones who make up its workforce (the NHS is the fifth largest employer in the world). This immediately exposes the government's lie - that it cares about the NHS.

You still have a group of misguided lumpen who blame immigration or 'benefit scroungers' for the problems, but more than ever the vast majority of people are conscious that underfunding and privatisation are threatening its existence and causing harm on a daily basis. But the situation remains the same as when the NHS was created: it can only become a thriving, effective and democratic institution if the working class wills it. Obviously, will alone is not enough: there also needs to be a political organisation able to express this will.

Jeremy Corbyn's Labour Party is clearly the only option for the NHS's survival in the short term. Its pledge to increase NHS spending would be the defining issue if there was a general election this year. We will get a taste of the growing discontent on February 3 when the People's Assembly hosts what is likely to be a very well attended demonstration in defence of the NHS.

However, now more than ever it is important that the left does not settle for just calling for more beds and more funding. Labour's proposed increased funding has so far been pretty underwhelming - even the Institute for Fiscal Studies recognises this.⁶ We need to oppose Tory-led privatisation and demand more funding, of course. But this must run in parallel to our highlighting why people are attending A&E in such large numbers in the first place.

Workers are repeatedly subject to conditions that make them ill. The vast majority of mental health problems, alcohol dependence, cardiovascular disease, cancer, diabetes, etc result directly from inequality. A&E attendance numbers are like a barometer, measuring how unhealthy capitalism is for the working class. And, to borrow a phrase from the communist poet, Pablo Neruda, to overcome these conditions we need to rise up against this "organisation of misery" •

Notes

1. www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/nhs-british-red-cross-chief-executive-mike-adamson-defends-humanitarian-crisis-remarks-47516751.html.
2. www.england.nhs.uk/statistics/statistical-work-areas/winter-daily-streps/winter-daily-streps-2017-18-data.
3. <https://fullfact.org/health/accident-and-emergency-attendances-and-performance>.
4. www.kingsfund.org.uk/publications/nhs-hospital-bed-numbers.
5. See "Planning the final assault" *Weekly Worker* December 7 2017.
6. www.theguardian.com/society/2018/jan/11/nhs-patients-dying-in-hospital-corridors-doctors-tell-theresa-may.
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Hard, soft or no Brexit?

The working class needs a strategy that tails neither big capital nor backward-looking politicians, argues Jack Conrad



Britain's political class is being taught a lesson in global economics

Carolyn Fairbairn, director general of the Confederation of British Industry, has made a desperate call for the government to present a "clear agenda" when it comes to negotiations with Brussels. Otherwise technology, aerospace, pharmaceutical, energy, manufacturing, banking and financial services firms will trigger plans to relocate various UK operations in mainland Europe.¹

A no-deal Brexit, said Fairbairn, would amount to an act of "great economic self-harm". Billions of pounds of extra costs would be imposed on UK goods and services and vice versa. Not that a Canadian or Norwegian trade deal would provide the CBI with an acceptable outcome: "Economics and prosperity must be put ahead of politics and red lines," Fairbairn insisted. In short, the UK must stay inside the customs union and maintain strong trade links with what is, after all, by far its largest market.

A year ago, of course, Theresa May specifically ruled out remaining a member of the single market and the customs union. Instead the concept was to speedily negotiate trade deals with the United States, China, India, etc. Britain would become a giant Singapore ... according to Boris Johnson, David Davis and Liam Fox. Doubtless that absurd line chimes with the *Express*, *The Sun* and the *Daily Mail*. But it is as delusional as it is destabilising. Needless to say, by contrast, the CBI's director general stresses industrial capital's craving for stability: "Frictionless trade within the European Union is worth more than having the potentially unknown value of trade deals in other parts of the world."

There can be no doubt that the dominant sections of capital look upon the prospect of Brexit with a combination of disbelief and dread. That is why Downing Street's attempts to persuade big private companies and selected FT-100 firms to endorse the hard Brexiteer vision of a "global Britain" were met with contempt and derision. Many

capitalists fear they will face tariffs and other barriers after the two-year transition ... if Brexit goes ahead. Nor do British capitalists have any liking for repeated government pledges to limit immigration to the tens of thousands.

That Theresa May and her government could even imagine that they could gain big-business backing for a hard Brexit shows in no mistaken terms that the preferred party of capital simply does not understand the elementary needs of capital. Political short-termism and Britain's half-crazed rightwing press adds ministerial brains.

A diagnosis amply confirmed by the visit of Philip Hammond and David Davis to Germany the other week. The two ministers seriously seemed to believe they would get a sympathetic hearing from Germany's political and business elite. Writing in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, the double act pleaded: "It makes no sense to either Germany or Britain to put in place unnecessary barriers to trade in goods and services that would only damage businesses and economic growth on both sides of the Channel."²

The visit culminated in a set-piece address to the *Die Welt* economic summit. Before that there was a series of specially arranged meetings. Davis dealt with the politicians; Hammond business leaders. Their aim was to shift German opinion in the direction of a bespoke deal for Britain. Not surprisingly, neither Germany's business leaders nor Germany's politicians were in any mood to sign up. Angela Merkel's spokesperson told the press corps that Berlin would not divide the ranks of the EU's 27.

After all, what is at stake with Brexit is not merely the relationship between the EU and the UK. It is the integrity of the EU itself. Germany doubtless values British customers, suppliers and global banking connections. However, what allows Germany to rank as the world's third largest exporter, and run a huge

trade surplus, is the existence of the single market and the customs union. For the sake of German industrial prowess that cannot be compromised. Hammond and Davis therefore returned to London empty-handed and humiliated.

The exact same message came from the French president, Emmanuel Macron, during his Sandhurst talks with May. He likewise explained the elementary political and economic facts of life. To maintain frictionless access to the European single market Britain must continue with budgetary contributions and membership of the customs union. That means the free movement of goods, capital and people. There can be "no cherry-picking", vowed Macron.

So the pressure to compromise is on Theresa May. She is, nonetheless, surely confronted with an impossible task. On the one hand, she is urged to prevent Brexit doing "great harm" economically; on the other hand, she is expected to satisfy the hard Brexit demands of Jacob Rees-Mogg and the frothing Tory Europhobes. That circle cannot be squared. Something has to give. My bet is that at the end of the day there will be no hard Brexit. Maybe no Brexit at all.

Though Boris Johnson famously told the EU to "go and whistle", the UK has already agreed to pay a €50-€67 billion divorce bill. Even more to the point, the UK has committed itself to maintaining a frictionless Irish border. How that fits in with a hard Brexit - ie, leaving the single market and the customs union - is beyond me. It points to the "softest of soft Brexits" (former Tory minister Lord David Prior). A terminological Brexit.

Meanwhile, of course, Keir Starmer has succeeded in getting the shadow cabinet to oppose a hard Brexit. The mantra is exactly the same as the CBI's "put jobs and the economy first".³ Hence the striking paradox: on Europe it is not the Conservative but the Labour Party which is articulating the interests of big capital. Not that big capital

will reciprocate and back the Labour Party in the next general election. It is, after all, led by Jeremy Corbyn: pro-trade union, pacifistic and a friend of all manner of unacceptable leftists.

Referendums

Contrary to the opinion of many on the left, referendums are not the apogee of democracy. In fact they serve to hoodwink people, to lead them by the nose. That is exactly why Louis Bonaparte, Benito Mussolini and Adolf Hitler favoured them. It is also why Marxists have traditionally condemned referendums and instead championed representative democracy and building mass workers' parties. Referendums bypass democratic institutions, reduce complex questions to a false binary choice and tend to split the electorate along artificial, non-class lines.⁵

Hence, it would certainly be a big mistake to tail behind the Tony Blair-John Major call for a "second referendum" (an idea momentarily toyed with by Nigel Farage and which constitutes the "immediate slogan" of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty social imperialists⁶). Journalists are making much of recent opinion polls showing a majority favouring a second referendum ... if there is a no-deal Brexit. In fact a second referendum would just be another opportunity to con the population by presenting another false binary choice.

To all intents and purposes, David Cameron's June 23 referendum was designed as a repeat of the first European referendum in June 1975. Harold Wilson staged that not because he was unhappy with the European Economic Community. No, it was a "ploy" dictated largely by "domestic politics".⁷ Ted Heath oversaw Britain's EEC entry in 1973; nevertheless, Labour could gain electoral advantage by promising a "fundamental renegotiation" of Britain's terms of membership ... to be followed by a referendum.

Wilson also wanted to show Labour's Europhobes - ie, Tony Benn, Barbara Castle and Michael Foot - who was boss (he did so thanks to the *Mirror*, the BBC and big-business finance). On June 5 1975, 67% voted 'yes' and a mere 33% voted 'no' to Britain's continued membership. Despite that overwhelming mandate, and given the abundant promises that joining the EEC would bring substantial material benefits, it is hardly surprising that Europe became a "scapegoat for economic malaise": the 1974-79 Labour governments could do nothing to reverse Britain's relative economic decline.⁸

Cameron's referendum had nothing to do with some grand plan for a British geopolitical reorientation. By calculation, if not conviction, Cameron is a soft Europhile. And, despite tough talk of negotiating "fundamental, far-reaching change" and gaining a "special status" for Britain, just like Harold Wilson he too came back from his Brussels negotiations with precious little. Apart from two minor adjustments - a reduction in non-resident child benefits, which Germany too favoured, and a temporary cut in tax credits - what Cameron secured was purely symbolic (ie, the acceptance that

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Britain did not necessarily favour "ever closer union").

Transparently Cameron never had any intention of Britain leaving the EU. His commitment to holding a referendum was dictated solely by domestic considerations - above all, remaining as prime minister. By holding out the promise of a referendum, Cameron, together with his close advisors, figured he could harness popular dissatisfaction with the EU - not least as generated by the rightwing press. Moreover, in terms of party politics, Ed Miliband could be wrong-footed, UKIP checked and Tory Europhobes conciliated.

Of course, Cameron's expectation was that he would never have to deliver. Most pundits predicted a continuation of the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition after the 2015 general election. With Nick Clegg, Vince Cable and Danny Alexander still sitting around the cabinet table, there would be no referendum. They would have blocked such a proposal with threats of resignation. Yet, as we all know, despite the opinion polls, the Tories secured a narrow House of Commons majority. So Cameron was lumbered with his referendum.

Under such circumstances, for leftwingers and working class partisans to have taken sides was a fool's game. No, what was needed was an active boycott. That is why Labour Party Marxists urged people to go to the polling station and spoil their ballot paper: instead of voting 'remain' or 'leave', we said, write 'For a socialist Europe'. There were, in fact, 25,359 spoiled ballot papers - how many of them involved writing 'For a socialist Europe' is impossible to tell.

The whole EU referendum campaign was from the start characterised by lies, lies and more lies ... on both sides. The cross-party Britain Stronger in Europe sneakily implied that three million jobs would be lost following a withdrawal.⁹ Today, of course, the government boasts of record levels of employment (true, accompanied with stagnant levels of productivity and shrinking real wages). For its part, Another Europe is Possible - a typical soft-left lash-up - told us that "walking away from the EU would boost rightwing movements and parties like UKIP and hurt ordinary people in Britain".¹⁰ Ironically the Brexit vote robbed UKIP of its purpose. Nowadays, it limps on ... as a political joke.

Vote Leave traded on the politics of a backward-looking hope. It wanted Britain to "regain control over things like trade, tax, economic regulation, energy and food bills, migration, crime and civil liberties".¹¹ Then there was Boris Johnson's '£350 million a week' promise to boost NHS finances. In exactly the same lying spirit Get Britain Out sought to "bring back UK democracy".¹² The *Morning Star* patriotically rejected the "EU superstate project" and likewise sought a restoration of Britain's "democracy".¹³

Bringing back democracy assumes, of course, that prior to the January 1 1973 accession to the European Economic Community, Britain was democratic and is now undemocratic. Obviously, both propositions are radically wrong. Bourgeois democracy is largely formal: every four or five years it requires establishment politicians to make many extravagant promises and seek out scapegoats to explain their many failures. So, necessarily, bourgeois democracy involves the fostering of sectional hatreds and produces widespread cynicism. But, though it can be highly mediated, that is how the rule of capital is maintained. Genuine democracy is only possible when the majority - ie, the working class - rules. The demand to "bring back UK democracy" amounts to a forlorn bid to restore past glories and in practice means upholding the monarchy, the second chamber, the presidential prime minister, judicial review, the established church, the secret state and other grossly anti-democratic parts of the constitution. As for regaining control, as negotiations in Brussels are proving, that was always illusory.

Britain, to state the obvious, no longer possesses a global empire. Its former position as world hegemon was taken over by the United States with World War II. The

Suez fiasco in 1956 definitively saw Britain abandon its futile bid to expand its African and Middle Eastern colonies. Instead it settled for being America's closest ally. A position that it quickly came to treasure and, as everybody knows, goes under name of the "special relationship" (a phrase coined by Winston Churchill in 1946). That is exactly why general Charles de Gaulle twice said *non* to British membership. He rightly saw Britain as a pliant US satrap. Even a US Trojan horse. And, once it was inside the EEC, that indeed was the role played by Britain. Either way, no country has full control over its own affairs. Each country is dependent on others. Britain is no exception. The only question is where a country stands in terms of the global pecking order. Nowadays, Britain ranks below China, Japan and Germany economically. And if Brexit goes ahead there can be no doubt that its value to the US will decline in importance.

Obviously, Cameron never thought he would lose the referendum. He did after all have the backing of big business, international institutions, celebrity endorsements ... and Barack Obama. Nevertheless, there was an obvious point to make: "Cameron is gambling on an often fickle electorate" and referendums can go "horribly awry for those who stage them, especially when issues such as austerity, mass migration and international terrorism are included in the mix."¹⁴ The actual vote on June 23 2016 was narrow: but by 51.89% to 48.11% 'leave' won.

However, what I was convinced of - and still remain convinced of - is that, barring some major accident, even with a 'leave' vote, Britain will 'remain'. The election of Donald Trump in November 2016 introduced a wild card. Hillary Clinton would have simply instructed David Cameron's replacement to sort out the damn mess. Nevertheless, despite Trump's sometimes unhinged rhetoric and wild outbursts, there is no US campaign to encourage or smooth Britain's exit.

While it is far from impossible that negotiations between David Davis and Michel Barnier will end in a no-deal exit, the political and economic realities of 21st-century capitalism mean that, in all probability, the Brexit vote, and then the triggering of article 50, will represent nothing more than a long, costly and highly disruptive detour for British capitalism. The whole self-inflicted episode will accelerate relative decline and maybe eventually force establishment politicians to confront the reality of Britain's much diminished position in the global pecking order. We shall see.

Against Brexit

Communists do not uphold the 'jobs and economy' slogan. Nor do we advocate a second referendum or a Swiss or Norwegian 'solution'. Nor do we oppose Brexit because we oppose Theresa May and the Tory government. No, there is a far more important reason to oppose Brexit. We positively favour a united Europe - even if that comes about under the conditions of capitalism.

That hardly commits us to supporting the existing EU. Far from it.

The fact of the matter is that the EU is only quasi-democratic. Jean Monnet, the *Pater Europae*, believed that the whole 'project' would have to rely on deception. Back in 1952 he wrote:

Europe's nations should be guided towards the superstate, without their people understanding what is happening. This can be accomplished by successive steps, each disguised as having an economic purpose, but which will eventually and irreversibly lead to federation.¹⁵

The lustre of the Monnet 'project' has long worn off. Nevertheless, Jean-Claude Juncker, president of the EU commission, comes from the same mould. He is contemptuous of democracy. Certainly, it is the unelected commissioners - and behind these appointees the council of

ministers - who make the decisions. The directly elected European parliament is almost entirely a talking shop. It possesses very little in the way of real power.

Today's EU is no superstate, nor even Monnet's federation. It is a creaking confederation of often fractious states, which show precious little in the way of solidarity the one for the other. Britain wants out. Poland defies EU rulings over its press and judiciary. The Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary and Slovakia refuse to take their quotas of refugees. Following the 2008 financial crisis, the EU, ECB and IMF imposed a savage austerity regime on Ireland, Portugal, Cyprus, Spain and Greece. Indeed under the leftwing Syriza government of Alexis Tsipras, Greece has been reduced to an impoverished debt colony. Because of that deeply disappointing reality, Martin Schulz, leader of Germany's Social Democratic Party and potential deputy chancellor, has renewed the call for a United States of Europe. After all, that is what "ever closer union" unmistakably implies.

As for the single currency, it is clearly malfunctioning. The launch of the euro in 1999 was widely greeted as an historic triumph. No longer. During the financial crisis there were serious concerns for its very survival. Hence Macron's proposals for a separate euro zone budget to lessen the impact of future economic shocks.

Yes, the EU is undoubtedly a 'bosses' club' which aims to increase the exploitation of European workers in order to allow European capital to compete more effectively in world markets. Revealingly, the EU constitution includes a binding commitment to neoliberal economics in its text. That is why the likes of Carolyn Fairbairn and the CBI feel so at home in the EU and are so reluctant to leave. And then there are the infamous Laval and Viking Line judgments. With them the ECJ imposed "substantive new restrictions on the lawfulness of industrial action" and "provided employers with a potent new weapon with which to oppose industrial action" (Daniel Ornstein and Herbert Smith).¹⁶ The claim that Brexit poses a threat to workers' rights is certainly true; doubtless the Tories are eager to use the so-called 'Henry VIII powers' to that effect. But those trade union leaders, such as Frances O'Grady and Dave Prentis, who paint the EU as some kind of a friend of the working class are clearly talking rubbish.

Siding with either the Brexiteers or the 'remainers' is fundamentally mistaken. Both sides are reactionary in their different ways. Nevertheless, the Marxist strategy for achieving socialism is predicated on large states: in our case the continental-wide terrain established by the treaty of Rome, Lisbon, Maastricht, Nice, etc. Marxists argue and work towards the unity of our forces across the whole of Europe. Instead of the Europe of the bourgeois politicians, grasping capitalists and unelected bureaucrats, we stand for a Europe without monarchies and without standing armies: a fully democratic Europe, an indivisible Europe, which is constitutionally committed not to neoliberalism, but international socialism.

It is in that revolutionary sense and that revolutionary sense alone we support continued UK membership of the EU.

Ideas that our side would be collectively strengthened if we aligned ourselves with an inward-looking faction of the ruling class with a view to forcing a Britain, a France, or a Greece to withdraw from the EU displays a lack of both internationalism and seriousness. Socialism in a breakaway country is the socialism of fools. Any reformist or revolutionary government that might arise amidst the national chaos would suffer instant retaliation - a legal coup or, that failing, isolation through asphyxiating trade embargoes and perhaps a joint EU-US military 'peacemaking' force.

Our strategy is resolutely opposed to any renewed 'Balkanisation' of Europe. Whether it comes from right or left, the nationalist fragmentation of the EU can do the working class nothing but harm: xenophobia, economic regression, interstate conflict leading, once again, to war

on the continent.

Marxists strive for working class unity within, but against, the existing EU. Winning the battle for democracy in the EU and securing working class rule over this small but politically important continent is by far the best service we can do for our comrades in the Americas, Africa, Asia and Australasia.

The EU provides us with the wide sphere of operations needed to organise the working class not only into a ruling class, but a class that, having come to power, can realistically expect to make a decisive, strategic breakthrough in terms of the world socialist revolution. A United Socialist States of Europe could stand up to US imperialism and spread the flame of liberation to Africa, Latin America, Asia ... and finally North America. A socialist regime in France, a socialist regime in Greece, a socialist regime in Portugal could never do that.

Hence this seven-point programme:

1. For a republican United States of Europe. Abolish the council of ministers and sack the unelected commissioners. For a single-chamber executive and legislative continental congress of the peoples of Europe, elected by universal suffrage and proportional representation.

2. Nationalise all banks in the EU and put the ECB under the direct, democratic control of the European congress. No to the stability pact and spending limits. Stop privatisation and so-called private finance initiatives. End subsidies to, and tax breaks for, big business. Abolish VAT. Yes to workers' control over big business and the overall direction of the economy. Yes to a massive programme of house-building and public works.

3. For the levelling up of wages and social provisions. For a maximum 35-hour week and a common minimum income. End all anti-trade union laws. For the right to organise and the right to strike. For top-quality healthcare, housing and education, allocated according to need. Abolish all restrictions on abortion. Fight for substantive equality between men and women.

4. End the Common Agricultural Policy. Stop all subsidies for big farms and the ecological destruction of the countryside. Nationalise all land. Temporary relief for small farmers. Green the cities. Free urban public transport. Create extensive wilderness areas - forests, marshes, heath land - both for the preservation and rehabilitation of animal and plant life, and the enjoyment and fulfilment of the population.

5. No to the rapid reaction force, Nato and all standing armies. Yes to a popular democratic militia.

6. No to 'Fortress Europe'. Yes to the free movement of people into and out of the EU. For citizenship and voting rights for all who have been resident in the EU for longer than six months.

7. For the closest coordination of all working class forces in the EU. Promote EU-wide industrial unions - eg, railways, energy, communications, engineering, civil service, print and media. For a democratic and effective EU Trade Union Congress ●

Notes

1. *The Guardian* January 21 2018.
2. *New Europe* January 11 2018.
3. *The Sun* July 20 2017.
4. <https://labour.org.uk/manifesto/negotiating-brexit>.
5. See B Lewis, 'Referenda and direct democracy' *Weekly Worker* September 18 2014; K Kautsky, 'Direct legislation by the people and the class struggle' *Weekly Worker* March 31 2016.
6. www.workersliberty.org/story/2017-10-18/stop-brexit.
7. D Reynolds *Britannia overruled* London 1991, p249.
8. (*Ibid*) p250.
9. www.strongerin.co.uk/get_the_facts?id=AmHjOJGfmYbZtJ57.
10. www.anothereurope.org.
11. <https://d3n8a8pr07vhms.cloudfront.net/voteleave/pages/98/attachments/original/1457545797/website-brochure-hq-mar16-2.pdf>.
12. <http://getbrtainout.org>.
13. Editorial *Morning Star* March 4 2016.
14. *Weekly Worker* April 14 2016.
15. Quoted in www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Jean_Monnet.
16. www.elaweb.org.uk/resources/ela-briefing/laval-viking-line-and-limited-right-strike.

1. The central aim of Labour Party Marxists is to transform the Labour Party into an instrument for working class advance and international socialism. Towards that end we will join with others and seek the closest unity of the left inside and outside the party.

2. Capitalism is synonymous with war, pollution, waste and production for its own sake. Attempts to rescue the system through Keynesian remedies are diversionary and doomed to fail. The democratic and social gains of the working class must be tenaciously defended, but capitalism must be superseded by socialism.

3. The only viable alternative is organising the working class into powerful and thoroughly democratic trade unions, co-ops, and other schools for socialism, and crucially into a political party which aims to replace the rule of the capitalist class with the rule of the working class.

4. The fight for trade union freedom, anti-fascism, women's rights, sexual freedom, republican democracy and opposition to all imperialist wars are inextricably linked to working class political independence and the fight for socialism.

5. Ideas of reclaiming the Labour Party and the return of the old class four are totally misplaced. From the beginning the party has been dominated by the labour bureaucracy and the ideas of reformism. The party must be refounded on the basis of a genuinely socialist programme as opposed to social democratic gradualism or bureaucratic statism.

6. The aim of the party should not be a Labour government for its own sake. History shows that Labour governments committed to managing the capitalist system and loyal to the existing constitutional order create disillusionment in the working class.

7. Labour should only consider forming a government when it has the active support of a clear majority of the population and has a realistic prospect of implementing a full socialist programme. This cannot be achieved in Britain in isolation from Europe and the rest of the world.

8. Socialism is the rule of the working class over the global economy created by capitalism and as such is antithetical to all forms of British nationalism. Demands for a British road to socialism and a withdrawal from the European Union are therefore to be opposed.

9. Political principles and organisational forms go hand-in-hand. The Labour Party must become the umbrella organisation for all trade unions, socialist groups and pro-working class partisans. Hence all the undemocratic bans and proscriptions must be done away with.

10. The fight to democratise the Labour Party cannot be separated from the fight to democratise the trade unions. Trade union votes at Labour Party conferences should be cast not by general secretaries but proportionately according to the political balance in each delegation.

11. All trade unions should be encouraged to affiliate, all members of the trade unions encouraged to pay the political levy and join the Labour Party as individual members.

12. The party must be reorganised from top to bottom. Bring the Parliamentary Labour Party under democratic control. The position of Labour leader should be abolished along with the national policy forum. The NEC should be unambiguously responsible for drafting Labour Party manifestos.

13. The NEC should be elected and accountable to the annual conference, which must be the supreme body in the party. Instead of a tame rally there must be democratic debate and binding votes.

14. Our elected representatives must be recallable by the constituency or other body that selected them. That includes MPs, MEPs, MSPs, AMs, councillors, etc. Without exception elected representatives should take only the average wage of a skilled worker, the balance being donated to furthering the interests of the labour movement ●



End the witch-hunt

Stan Keable, secretary of Labour Against the Witchhunt, reports on the lobby of Labour's NEC

Around 40 Labour Party leftwingers and Corbynistas gathered in London on January 23 outside the posh Labour headquarters at 105 Victoria Street. We were there for Labour Against the Witchhunt's lobby of the party's national executive committee. The NEC was meeting for the first time with a clear pro-Corbyn majority, following the election of Jon Lansman and two other Momentum and Campaign for Labour Party Democracy-backed comrades, Yasmine Dar and Rachel Garnham.

We are demanding an end to the rightwing witch-hunt against the left. And among us were quite a few 'witches' - those suspended or expelled from the party, some for simply being socialists, some on fake charges of anti-Semitism. Activists from Grassroots Black Left joined supporters of Jews for Boycotting Israeli Goods, Jewish Voice for Labour and Free Speech on Israel to drive home the message that opposing Zionism does not equal anti-Semitism.

A message was read out from LAW honorary president Moshé Machover, who was unwell and unable to attend. I am "with you in spirit", he said. Comrade Machover himself had been expelled in October 2017, but, following a huge outcry by Labour branches up and down the country, was then reinstated. An important victory.

NEC members are responsible for the

witch-hunt still being carried out by party officials. Although the independently elected national constitutional committee (NCC) hears disciplinary cases referred to it, 'automatic' expulsions are effected instantly by paid officials acting on the authority of the NEC, using the bureaucrat's catch-all dream of rule 2.1.4.B - a member or 'supporter' of any political organisation which is not affiliated to Labour and is not a party unit can be instantly expelled, with no right of appeal. Would that include CND? Or Stop the War Coalition?

That is what happened to me on October 2 2017 - I am a prominent supporter of Labour Party Marxists. In an empty gesture towards fairness, I was invited to "challenge the validity of the evidence" within 14 days, which I did, but I received no reply to my statement, entitled 'No case to answer.'

Likewise, the flimsiest of allegations against Corbyn supporters of bullying or aggressive behaviour, or of anti-Semitism, are accepted as good coin by the Blairite apparatus of Labour's compliance unit. Such allegations are used to justify instant suspension without trial, which may leave the member - such as LAW comrades Jackie Walker, Marc Wadsworth and Tony Greenstein - deprived of membership

rights and forbidden to attend their

Lobbying NEC: Jeremy Corbyn needs to break his silence

'Whenever you have a need Harken not to others' greed Cast a stone and truth you'll know'

party branch meetings. They could be left in limbo literally for years before their cases are referred to the NCC.

To its shame - as revealed by Tony Greenstein's successful high court injunction against Labour general secretary Iain McNicol - the NCC evidently believes it can ignore the drawn out period of limbo suffered by the victims of the witch-hunt, and then finally reveal the exact charges and associated evidence (normally) six weeks before the actual hearing. An almost impossible time to prepare a comprehensive defence. The high court considered that this procedure violated the duty of care that the Labour Party should have for its members. It is in the power of the NCC - and of the NEC - to do what the LAW lobby demands: drop the charges against Jackie, Marc, Tony and many others; end automatic expulsions and suspensions; and implement the recommendations of the Chakrabarti report calling for natural justice and due process.

Our lobby achieved considerable social media coverage, and LAW chair Jackie Walker appeared on the BBC's *Daily politics* show, despite being constantly interrupted by the programme's rottweiler, Jo Coburn, who did her best to prevent viewers hearing what Jackie had to say. There is no rightwing witch-hunt, Coburn argued (in the form of questions, of course), because the expulsions and

suspensions all happened under Jeremy Corbyn's leadership of the party, and Momentum's Jon Lansman demoted Jackie because of her alleged anti-Semitism - so the right cannot be responsible.

However, BBC reporter Ian Watson, reporting from the lobby, gave a much more honest commentary. LAW, he said, was lobbying

to stop the expulsions of people thrown out of the party for having leftwing views. People who may have been to the left of Labour in its Blairite past and then wanted to come into the party genuinely to support Jeremy Corbyn and are now being chucked out for views they have expressed in the past. Fundamental to this is the question of anti-Zionism versus anti-Semitism. These two issues are being conflated, they say, and people are being accused of anti-Semitism in order to get them expelled.

Thank you, Ian. NEC members, wake up. Jeremy, take note. The witch-hunt is not only against your supporters - it is against you ●

Notes

1 <http://labourpartymarxists.org.uk/expulsion-from-the-labour-party-no-case-to-answer>.



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