

**THE LEFT**  
**AGAINST**  
**BREXIT**

**AN INTERNATIONALIST  
CASE FOR EUROPE**

**ANOTHER EUROPE IS POSSIBLE**



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CASE FOR EUROPE**

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Another Europe is Possible is an alliance of progressives  
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# INTRODUCTION

Luke Cooper

IT'S INCREASINGLY CLEAR THAT THERE is no such thing as a 'good Brexit', let alone a 'people's' or 'left' Brexit – and this reality is gradually becoming obvious to millions of people in Britain. Brexit, after all, has always been a right wing project. Ardent eurosceptics from Nigel Farage to Daniel Hannan have long harboured a nationalist dislike for the idea of European unity – a hostility that has always gone alongside an aggressive support for Thatcherism and an extreme free-market ideology that yearns to emulate the US by, for example, abolishing the NHS.

Brexiteers dream of a Britain 'unchained' from the shackles of European regulation – in other words, even more of a capitalist dystopia. They want a country where workers' rights are thrown on the bonfire, environmental and social regulations are slashed, and the country returns to levels of inequality not seen since the Victorian era. These tendencies already exist in our broken economic system, but the hard Brexit project wants to further turbo-charge them. They would turn Britain into something akin to a large offshore tax haven (see page 11). An economy where finance is already prioritised at the expense of the real economy would become even more unequal.

Today, their empire nostalgia is recast as a 'global Britain', but retains the same underlying fantasy that Britain alone can re-write the global rules and the rest of the world will just have to go along with it. The national trauma of Brexit lies in the melancholic (for

some) realisation that Britain is no longer an imperial state. The European Union (EU), as the world's largest economic bloc and Britain's biggest single export market, very much holds the cards. As a member of the EU, Britain had a say over its rules through the EU's internal decision-making processes. As a non-member, it is only 'freed' to make the illusory choice of whether to accept EU rules or suffer massive economic damage.

Unlike Tory backbenchers, Theresa May (who was still prime minister at the time of writing) seems aware of this situation. The 'Chequers deal', which she attempted to broker with her divided Cabinet, proposes a partial integration into the EU's single market, particularly for manufactured goods. It would mean accepting EU rules that the UK does not have control over in a number of different areas, but would allow for 'divergence' in others. However, even this was too much for the hard Brexiters to stomach, prompting the resignations of Cabinet ministers David Davis and Boris Johnson, who have committed to voting against a deal struck on these lines.

If that wasn't enough, the EU has already branded the Chequers deal unworkable. This means that despite failing to convince her party of the compromises so far, May will need to make further concessions if a deal is going to be secured. These issues are further complicated by the political landscape in Ireland, where the reintroduction of a hard border – the inevitable consequence of some form of exit from the EU's single market and customs union – would inflame an already difficult peace process. This is unacceptable to the left, and indeed, on paper at least, to all but the most hardline of Brexit fanatics.

## THE COMING CRISIS

A major political crisis looms. Theresa May is likely to have to delay signing the EU's favoured agreement until the very last moment. Severe economic dislocation – with the fear of a cataclysmic 'no deal' Brexit – will have to have started in order for her to have any hope of getting the deal through parliament. The prospects of the government falling are clearly very real.

For the radical left to be able to prosper in this situation, however, requires getting our own house in order over what Brexit represents and why it can't work for the left (page 23). Many of the criticisms of the nationalism that animates the hard right of the Tory party are taken for granted by progressives. But the evident power disparity between the UK and EU in the Brexit negotiations also poses an



equally strong question for us: is our radical programme helped or hindered by this self-inflicted Brexit crisis?

For Labour, the issue has tended to be cast as a crude electoral calculation. This involves identifying a number of Labour-held constituencies that voted Leave and repeating *ad nauseam* that their vote must be respected. It avoids any strategic consideration of whether Brexit, in any form, is favourable to working class voters. And it avoids any sense that the job of politicians might be to lead, rather than follow, on a vital issue that will shape the future of the country for generations to come.

It also, however, side-steps the fact that even in ‘Leave constituencies’ the result wasn’t mainly driven by Labour voters: a majority of Labour voters in Labour-held seats in the north of England and the Midlands voted Remain (57%) according to the British Election Study. This is not so different to the national picture, where at least 2 in 3 Labour voters backed Remain. We also now know that Labour Leave voters are much more likely to have changed their mind about Brexit than their equivalents on the Tory side. Polling by Best for Britain and Hope Not Hate has calculated that as many as 1.4 million Labour Leave voters would now back Remain.

The shift of these voters makes sense in the context of the ideological climate that characterises the Leave–Remain split. Labour voters care passionately about their communities. The economic carnage of a hard – or worse still a ‘no deal’ – Brexit wouldn’t be felt by the financiers of the City of London. It will hit most severely what’s left of a UK manufacturing base battered by decades of Thatcherism. Regions outside of London, particularly in Wales and the North East, are especially exposed.

For the Tories, the chaos of a no deal Brexit would be an opportunity. They want to create an economy locked into the American sphere of influence, without European standards for healthcare, workers’ rights and the environment. This was never the case for Labour Leave voters. For many it was a protest vote against a system that they could see was failing their communities. The disastrous official Remain campaign led by David Cameron and George Osborne just poured petrol on this fire of discontent. Now, as the shambolic reality of Tory Brexit rumbles on with apparently no end in sight, it is little wonder that many Labour Leave voters are starting to reconsider.

Among the wider population too, most polls now give Remain a consistent (though small) lead – essentially reversing the split at the referendum itself. But beneath the surface the Leave vote looks

increasingly fragile. The results of an August 2018 poll from YouGov were particularly revealing. They found 62% of Leave voters agreed with the statement “Problems in the negotiations with the EU make it likely that Britain will get a bad deal”; 84% accepted the point that “the process of leaving the EU so far has been a mess”; and 58% of Leave voters thought the promises made by politicians in the referendum would be broken. Perhaps most significant, however, given the likely course of the negotiations towards Britain becoming a ‘taker’ and not ‘maker’ of EU rules, was the relatively small number of Leave voters, some 19%, who said they would be prepared to change their vote if “the UK would still have to obey EU regulations without having any say in them”. This would amount to a huge swing if they did indeed change their votes.

## REMAIN AND THE LEFT

The left has a unique role to play in this situation. Only the left has the politics and critique to understand where the Brexit vote came from: a cry of anguish against status quo Britain. We also have an obligation to working class people to take practical steps to transform our economy in their interests.

Anti-Brexit organisations have an understandably poor profile amongst the radical left. With leading figures wedded to the collapsing Blairite ‘centre ground’ – notably Tony Blair himself, along with his fixer Alastair Campbell – the mainstream Remain movement will never appeal to those of us who believe Europe needs radical change.

This opens up a space for the political ideas that this pamphlet addresses. There is a distinct radical case for staying in the EU, which starts from the assumption we cannot light a path to a new society through nationalist division. Instead, we need to work together with our allies across Europe to realise a bold and transformative socialism.

Radicals need to make an unromantic assessment of the tasks at hand across the continent. The EU has many negative qualities – just look at its treatment of Greece (page 29). But the solution to this can only be brought about – like so many issues we encounter in the twenty-first century – through international cooperation, not ‘going it alone’.

Staying in the EU and working across borders to tackle the many problems the continent faces is the best and only viable option. The alternative is to roll the dice on a Tory hard Brexit and hope for the best. Faced with this choice, leadership from the left is now required.

# BREXIT AND THE HARD RIGHT'S AMERICAN DREAM

Nick Dearden

**N**O SINGLE PERSON BETTER EMBODIES the right-wing world of Brexit than trade secretary Liam Fox. Fox inhabits a parallel universe in which buccaneering adventurers scour the world for new wonders to sell in an ever-expanding marketplace ruled over by the imperial warships of Britannia.

Fox's own civil servants brand his trade strategy 'Empire 2.0', fitting for a man who chooses to have a picture of arch-imperialist Cecil Rhodes looking over his office. Even by the standards of the current government, Fox is a hard right free marketeer, close to Trump-supporting US groups like the Heritage Foundation. This might be why Theresa May retains his services. He moves in circles with climate deniers, Big Pharma CEOs, oil men, billionaires. The 0.1%.

So Fox can teach us an awful lot about Brexit – not in terms of understanding the myriad reasons that Britain narrowly voted to leave the EU, but recognising where hard Brexit will take us unless we stop it in its tracks. For beneath the bumbling, the bluster, the seeming incompetence of Fox and his hard Brexit companions, is a deadly serious vision for a very different Britain, stripped of social protection and dedicated to the pursuit of profit above all else.

Fox is also important because he inhabits the key ministry for bringing this vision to fruition. After all, for the leading Brexiteers, unlike the masses who voted with them, the core of their vision is not limiting immigration, nor even parliamentary sovereignty, but Britain's right to sign independent trade deals. Through these deals, a new world will be created – that is, unless we stop it.

## CORPORATE COURTS

Liam Fox is a hardcore Atlanticist who regards Europe as a nightmare of socialist bureaucratic hell. He dreams of deregulated markets, where the state is reduced to one man sitting in an office with a nuclear weapon. And he plans to use trade policy to inch us closer to that place. How? Well, trade today is not simply about finding ways to sell more cars and clothes (or even financial services). Rather, trade deals are about deregulation, liberalisation and muscular corporate power. They are about a set of rules that put the 'right to profit' above any social or environmental objective.

Nothing better illustrates this than the corporate court system, politely known as 'investor protection'. These are secret courts, embedded in many modern trade deals, which allow big business to sue states if government policies endanger corporate profit. Governments might do this, say, by putting cigarettes in plain packaging, removing toxic chemicals from petrol, increasing the minimum wage, or placing a moratorium on fracking. In fact, these are all real cases. The government in question has no right to appeal, no right to take a similar case of its own against a corporation, and must pay extortionate legal fees for each case, win or lose.

Up to now, Britain has shared the European bloc's standards and regulations. Many of us regard these standards as pandering to the interests of the corporations that lobby for them. But for people like Liam Fox, even these standards are far too high. They would far rather we shared the low standards of the North American bloc. This would mean out of the window go workers' rights, food standards and the 'precautionary principle', which makes sure something doesn't do harm *before* allowing it to go on sale.

Fox has been consistently embroiled in stories about chickens, because US farm standards allow chickens to be washed in chlorine to burn away the diseases of a deeply unpleasant life. Fox likes the idea, because it creates cheaper chickens, but the EU bans chlorinated chicken imports because it makes it easier to keep hens in atrocious conditions while they're alive. A US-UK trade deal would likely insist

upon letting them in. But, really, chlorine chickens are the tip of the iceberg. The US is pretty public about what it would want from a trade deal with the UK – they have published a 400-page document to tell us exactly what they don't like about EU standards. This includes a stomach-churning list of foods the US would like to import into Britain – including meat from animals stuffed with hormones, steroids, ractopamine, and endocrine disrupters (chemicals that mess with animals' hormones and can cause cancer and birth defects), more genetically modified foods, and more pesticide residue allowed on fruits and nuts. They even think the amount of 'somatic cells' allowed in milk in the EU is too restrictive – the US allows more white blood cells in milk than anywhere else in the world, even though this often indicates infection in the cow, and in turn more pus in your dairy.

The US argues that this is a matter of 'consumer choice'. But that's disingenuous, both because importing this food will inevitably drive down standards here, and because, as we discover in the document, the US anyway dislikes the sort of food labelling that would allow the consumer to make an informed choice.

It gets worse when you look at the other side of the 'staying healthy' equation: treatment. Medicines in the US are vastly more expensive than they are in Europe, and the US is unhappy about the (still very moderate) limitations that many governments place on pharmaceutical corporations. The US wants Big Pharma to have more say over the prices charged for medicines, curtailing the NHS's limited power to negotiate pharmaceutical pricing. And the US wants to make it easier to renew patents on medicines, allow an even greater degree of corporate control over clinical test data, grant new patents on biological medicines (including many new cancer treatments), and give corporations a greater say in healthcare policy.

If the US successfully pushes through these top-line demands in a trade deal with the UK, the NHS would either have to spend more money on drugs each year, or more patients would be denied access to those drugs. The reality is that regulation is already too lax. In the last five years the cost of medicines to the NHS has increased 29% – that's more than the NHS's total deficit. It can't afford US drug prices. Indeed, most Americans can't either.

On top of this, a US trade deal would give US corporations greater powers over public services like the NHS. US corporations would have more rights to bid for contracted-out bits of the NHS, and could then use the corporate court system described earlier to

make it nearly impossible to ever bring those contracts into public ownership. While the government has previously claimed that the NHS is at no risk from a trade deal with the US, legal advice sought by trade union Unite disagrees with their assessment.

## THE BREXIT EMPIRE

The list of potentially weakened regulations and standards goes on and on: it includes threats to our online privacy, to our ability to move to renewable energies and our right to pass public health regulations. This ideological vision of Britain's future has been described as 'Singapore-on-Thames', an (inaccurate) shorthand for a low-regulation, low-tax, free-market paradise.

It's not all about the US. Liam Fox is talking trade with a whole host of countries. The oil tyrants of the Gulf. The rising right-wing governments of Latin America. Erdogan of Turkey and Duterte of the Philippines. Any dictator or anti-democratic thug seems ideal for a trade deal. More recently, Theresa May has toured Africa, promising to spend aid money to help us get trade deals, in an effort to re-create imperial trading relationships. Her hope is that Britain will soak up cheap food and basic resources (even though those countries require them for their own development), and we will sell them back financial services at vastly over-inflated prices. That's how the empire worked – a core economy and a periphery.

So in this Brexit Empire, we will be the trader of every dirty derivative ever invented, the purveyor of luxury apartments to every oligarch who'll wash a small fortune in London, the chief flogger of arms to those others wouldn't touch. We will have no farmers or industrial workers, only high-flying executives, corporate lawyers and financiers – and the army of baristas and cleaners and waiters needed to serve them.

Of course, this vision wouldn't go down well with many of those who voted for Brexit. For many people, Brexit was a rejection of the 'market knows best' ideology of the last 40 years – an ideology that has impoverished and marginalised them. Opinion polls show that Fox is wildly out of step with the British public. One poll by Opinium showed that a whopping 82% of Brits would rather walk away from a trade deal with the US than sacrifice decent food standards. (Only 8% would put a trade deal first.)

But the hope of the Brexiteers is that the economic and political freefall that would result from hard Brexit will allow all manner of previously unthinkable ideas to be pushed forward in the chaos. It's

a classic example of what Naomi Klein calls the 'shock doctrine' – using a disaster to overcome opposition and re-shape society in the interests of a tiny majority. You can already imagine the story: we are desperate for trade deals, don't look at the small print, just get it through. And the closer we step towards the US trade bloc, the further we get from the European bloc. Rejoining would become much more difficult. For Fox and friends, no deal is better than a good deal.

MPs currently don't have any power to stop or change trade deals. Despite attempts by opposition MPs to give parliament and the public some voice in trade deals, Fox's Trade Bill, currently making its way through parliament, has conceded nothing substantial to date. The trade secretary acts under royal prerogative and has set up more than a dozen trade working groups to begin negotiating post-Brexit trade deals behind closed doors. The most MPs can do, if they're really lucky, is to postpone ratification of a trade deal for a month. So much for the all-important concept of parliamentary sovereignty.

## BREXIT AND TRUMPISM

One way to undermine Fox's vision is obviously to remain in the EU. Given the popular mandate given for leaving, it's hard to imagine anything short of a referendum could achieve that (see page 45). Such an outcome looks increasingly possible, as there seems no parliamentary majority for any specific deal.

But a second referendum is not a long-term solution. After all, Brexit did not fall from a clear blue sky. Along with Trump, and the rise of the far right across Europe and authoritarianism across the world, it is a symptom of the deep problems at the heart of our economy and society. As scary as Fox's economic vision may be, the reason that he's even able to contemplate it is that trade deals have become gigantic vehicles for securing corporate power and the rule of the 1%. Their provisions regularly override democratic decision-making. In contrast to the lack of effective structures to enforce human rights or environmental protection at a global level, trade deals have given big business their own special legal system to challenge any government regulation or social protection they don't like.

This is the legacy left to us by the political centre and even by social democratic governments across Europe. Many politicians and media commentators from the political centre scratch their heads in amazement at the current political situation, without taking any responsibility for the crisis we are in. Indeed, they have no solutions to offer other than to return to the recent past, in the hope that

a charismatic leader might solve everything with no real changes needed. Nothing could be more short-sighted. While a People's Vote is necessary, on its own it is not sufficient. We require radical change to massively reduce inequality, constrain the power of the 1% and protect the environment. And those messages must be part of any new referendum campaign, if we're to have any chance of winning.

There are many different policies that will be necessary for this transformation – both of Britain and Europe – and massive mobilisations of public support are the only way to achieve them. One important component is rethinking the global system of neoliberal trade rules. Neoliberalism is dying, and the battle today is about what takes its place. Neoliberalism was defined by freedom of capital to move where it wants, when it wants, to do what it wants. Free trade and investment deals have been one key mechanism to achieve this.

That's why Donald Trump's flirting with protectionism – however 'real' it is – resonates with many working class communities, fed up with being told their rights and protections cannot be allowed to obstruct the all-seeing market. When people's experience of globalisation is simply unemployment, commodification and marginalisation, a nationalist agenda, especially when it is depicted as an 'anti-establishment' insurgency, becomes attractive.

National (or even better, EU) law needs to be reclaimed as a means of controlling big business and 'investment' to genuinely build a more equal and sustainable economy. But that doesn't mean that erecting trade barriers everywhere is desirable, or that propping up corrupt industries is the best use of taxpayer money. Trump's beggar-my-neighbour policies are based on the idea of a zero-sum global economy in which the US can only gain by undermining everyone else's economic interests. This is fascist economic policy, and will lead seamlessly from economic war to real war. Unless the left can come up with its own alternative to neoliberalism, one that resonates with the millions of people who have lost control of their lives under that economic model, we will see 'Trumpist' policies grow in strength.

The left needs to redefine the purpose and limits of trade policy. Trade is not an end in itself, and where it takes place it should benefit the people of all participating countries, rather than being used to exploit. Labour's 'Just Trading' initiative is a good start, but it needs to go much further. Trade deals should never trump climate or environmental obligations. Intellectual property rules, which continue to make medicines unaffordable for millions of people, should be dropped from trade deals. Corporate courts should be abandoned



altogether and replaced with a mechanism that allows ordinary people to take action when their rights are undermined by trade deals. Public services and government purchasing should also be removed from the deals.

Governments also need to recognise that there are losers from trade deals, just as there are from automation for example. Society as a whole might still benefit – from more choice, from more efficiently produced goods – but the losers need local investment to provide new jobs, new training, new skills. Strong industrial strategies are vital.

Some of this can be achieved at the level of a nation state. But in an era of overwhelming corporate power and global problems like climate change, it cannot be achieved by individual governments alone. ‘Socialism in one country’ will crash against the power of big business. That’s why early on in the life of the radical Latin American governments, they devised an economic trade arrangement, one of many attempts at integration to help the people of that region stand up to global capital.

Economic integration doesn’t have to be neoliberal. The key to success is that integration must have a strong social and environmental basis, and even stronger democratic control. For all its faults – and they are huge – the EU is the world’s biggest trade bloc with such social and democratic elements.

What’s more, economic integration cannot be based on the super-exploitation of the planet’s limited resources or of poorer countries, as the World Trade Organisation dictates. Developing countries should be encouraged and supported in forming their own regional integrations, with strong laws to control investment and trade. This is the very opposite of the Empire 2.0 logic of hard Brexit.

## **AN INTERNATIONALIST POLICY**

There are other elements of economic integration that can free people, rather than capital. At the centre of this is free movement of people, an idea that is currently being hotly contested in the Labour Party (see page 19). For some, free movement of people is seen as no different from the free movement of capital – a plot by big business to ensure they can use the resources of the world (in this case workers) as they like. But this is a misunderstanding. Free movement doesn’t ‘allow’ business to pick up and relocate people in order that they can produce more efficiently – rather, that is how virtually every other migration system works: power resides with the economic giants and

what they demand. Free movement is different. It's one of the only immigration systems where the ability to move is a human right. Free movement gives ordinary people rights to organise for better conditions and pay on the same terms as domestic workers.

'Free trade' Tories, who speak endlessly of liberty, freedom and openness, only apply those terms to the wealthy. They believe the 1% and their investments should be free from regulation. For Liam Fox, migration is better when it comes without rights – then it really can undermine terms and conditions. While much can be said about the EU's own barbaric immigration policy, the answer is not to rescind free movement rights from ordinary people in Europe, but to extend them to more people beyond Europe.

Our internationalist economic policy should combine two important principles. On the one hand, rebuilding local economies and local democracies – giving people real power over their communities. On the other hand, giving people much greater citizen rights at European and global levels, fostering much bigger democratic discussions over how we trade, how we control corporations, how we ensure that humanity survives the climate catastrophe we're facing.

This also allows us to develop a clear and compelling vision for an international economics that taps into the concerns of those who voted for Brexit out of desperation, while preserving our internationalist outlook. It is the only progressive future for Europe.

# FREE MOVEMENT: A WORKERS' RIGHT

Ana Oppenheim

IT IS SADLY RARE TODAY to hear a positive case made for freedom of movement. In debates about the UK's relationship to Europe, more often than not, the free movement of people is understood as a 'necessary evil', a concession we reluctantly accept for the sake of single market membership. Even when freedom of movement is defended, it's often from a purely economic perspective. We hear about migrants' contribution to GDP, sometimes about rich and famous individuals who arrived in the UK from abroad, or occasionally about migrant doctors saving British lives every day. There is little space in this picture for the voices of migrants themselves: ordinary people travelling in search of a better life.

Why is it that so many even on the left are apparently more interested in making sure that a tin of beans can cross borders than defending the right of people to do so? And why are many so comfortable with reducing the discussion about migrants to sets of numbers, when we wouldn't speak the same way about UK nationals?

It is time we wholeheartedly embraced freedom of movement – a right that primarily benefits working class people, since the wealthiest can live almost anywhere they choose anyway. It is a right that not only lets individuals explore the world and broaden their horizons, but also allows millions to escape poverty, unemployment and

oppression. A freedom that means a Polish woman can settle somewhere where her reproductive rights will be respected, that a gay couple from Latvia can move to a place where they can get married, that a trans person from Finland can live in a country where their gender is recognised without having to undergo sterilisation. That people can fall in love and move in together without asking the Home Office for permission.

## DON'T BLAME MIGRANTS

For too long we have conceded the narrative to the right, particularly by accepting the false premise that migration is to blame for low wages and poor working conditions. This is a myth that has been disproven by study after study. To give just one example, major research published by LSE in 2016 showed that higher EU immigration has not had a significant impact on pay or jobs available in the UK. But even if this wasn't the case and migration did affect wages, would that be enough to deny people rights based on the logo on their passport? After all, the same accusation of driving down pay was once made when women were entering the workforce – something hardly anyone would dare to say today, and definitely nobody who can legitimately call themselves a progressive.

The labour movement should fight for workers' freedom to move because it's the right thing to do – but also because it benefits all of us. Contrary to what we so often hear from those with an interest to divide us, what does indeed lower wages is not immigration, but border controls. An August 2018 report by the Migration Observatory warned that replacing EU free movement with a visa scheme would leave more workers' migration status at the mercy of their employers, therefore facilitating exploitation and abuse. This echoes what Another Europe found in last year's report *Brexit and Immigration: Prioritising the Rights of All Workers*. Any restrictions on migrants' rights to settle and work legally in their destination country lead in consequence to undermining the rights of all workers. When losing your job means deportation, workers are pushed to accept worse conditions and discouraged from unionising – as is already the reality facing many non-EU migrants. There have even been cases, such as the infamous 2009 incident at SOAS, where employers helped to deport their own workers in order to clamp down on trade union organising. This would not have happened under a system of free movement, where migrants have the right to work, to defend themselves from exploitation, and to organise.

Despite these obstacles, precarious migrant workers have been at the forefront of many of the most impressive trade union struggles, organising and winning. To name a few recent ones: cleaners in universities including SOAS and LSE, in Sports Direct, in Harrods and even in the *Daily Mail* headquarters – proving that, despite what that tabloid likes to claim, migrants can in fact help increase pay for everyone. Migrant workers have also been instrumental during the UCU pensions dispute, and forced the Home Office to include strike action in its list of exceptions for workplace absence rules.

As socialists, we know that the working class is stronger when united in struggle than divided by nationality. This is why the Labour Campaign for Free Movement has adopted the slogan “build unions not borders”. It is not our fellow workers who drive down wages – unscrupulous bosses do. It is not migrants who underfund the NHS, cut money for schools, decimate our public services – it’s the government and their neoliberal agenda. Blaming foreigners only lets the elites off the hook and undermines our argument that austerity is not a necessity, but a political choice.

## FORTRESS EUROPE AND FORTRESS BRITAIN

The European Union, as it currently stands, is by no means a holy grail of progressive migration policy. Far from it – there is no excuse for ‘Fortress Europe’, which pours millions of euros into strengthening the EU’s external borders and allows refugees to drown in the Mediterranean. There’s no use sugarcoating it: these policies are racist, violent and morally unjustifiable.

But Britain leaving the EU will only make the situation worse. Far from dismantling Fortress Europe, leaving the EU would mean locking ourselves in a Fortress Britain. The 2016 Leave campaign was largely built on stirring up fear of European and non-European migrants alike. The idea that post-Brexit Britain would be any kinder to asylum seekers can only be called a delusion. The government negotiating the UK’s post-Brexit border policy is the same one that engineered the hostile environment and caused the Windrush scandal.

At a time when the far right is increasingly coordinating its efforts across the continent, when Matteo Salvini (leader of the far right Northern League, now with a prominent role in Italy’s coalition government) is meeting with Hungarian prime minister Viktor Orbán to discuss an anti-immigration alliance, the left cannot walk away and leave them to it. It has never been more urgent to build a cross-border, anti-racist movement to transform Europe.

Rights are not a zero-sum game. Taking them away from one group of migrants will do nothing to benefit others. A world of open borders will not happen tomorrow but – unless we're happy to accept a society where people's life chances are subject to the lottery of birth – it's an ideal to strive for. There is no way around it: an end to free movement after Brexit would be the biggest expansion of border controls in recent memory – more deportations, separated families and ruined lives.

The interests of migrants are not opposed to those of 'ordinary people' – we are ordinary people. And issues facing migrants are not separate from the concerns of the labour movement – we are, and have always been, a part of it. The freedom to move is a workers' right and one we must fight for.

# RAILWAYS AND THE EU: TIME FOR THE TRUTH

Manuel Cortes

**T**HERE HAS BEEN A LOT said in recent years about Brexit and the future of our railways. Lexiters (left-wing Brexit supporters) claim the Labour Party's manifesto pledge to bring our railways back into public ownership is only possible by departing the EU. What rot! Like right-wing arguments in favour of leaving the EU, the Lexit 'facts' do not necessarily coincide with the truth. Old anti-EU dogma blinkers them to political reality.

And in rail terms, reality comes no starker than this: arch-Tory Brexiter and transport secretary Christopher Grayling has this year again been forced to bring the East Coast mainline rail service into public ownership – *without a murmur from the EU!* Likewise in 2007, Labour's transport secretary Andrew Adonis created East Coast Trains in public ownership, with no prevention or intervention from the EU. But rather than using these facts as precedents for the exciting possibilities of a nationalising Corbyn government, Lexiters' fall-back mantra is that the EU allows nationalisation only as a temporary measure. Again, what rot! Time for more truth to out.

In the run up to the 2015 general election, with no prospect of us leaving the EU on the cards, then Labour leader Ed Miliband

pledged to ensure Britain's eastern rail artery remained in public ownership forever and a day. There were neither EU armoured divisions nor legions of Brussels lawyers gathering on the Normandy beaches waiting to charge towards Westminster in the event of Ed becoming prime minister. Nor was there any left cry that permanent nationalisation was not possible. And alas, the Tories also knew the EU to be no bulwark against Ed's pledge, hence chancellor George Osborne's hurried sell-off of the successful, profitable and public East Coast Trains to Virgin and Stagecoach.

In France, François Hollande defied an EU directive seeking to separate the management of rail infrastructure from service operations. Both have remained in public ownership thanks to the former Socialist president. And, you know, France has not even been fined for such an act of defiance! So Lexiters misguide us when they cite the EU as the obstacle to public ownership, and consequently they distract from building efforts to defeat the privatisation of public transport – privatisation that, in reality, is home-grown.

## **BLAMING THE EU IS A SMOKESCREEN**

Our union, the Transport Salaried Staffs' Association (TSSA), has long argued that the one thing stopping public ownership of our railways has been the complete lack of political will in Westminster – nothing whatsoever to do with the EU. To pin the blame elsewhere is to let the villains of the piece here off the hook. It has become commonplace for UK politicians to blame others – and particularly the EU – for their unpopular decisions.

For one specific example, look at the tendering of lifeline ferry services serving the Scottish islands. For well over a decade successive Scottish governments told trade unions this was required under EU legislation. We vehemently challenged this opinion, eventually forcing the then transport minister Humza Yousaf to seek an opinion from the European Commission. The EU informed him that... ownership issues were a matter for the Scottish government! These services should have been exempted from tendering from day one. Unions were vindicated, which is why are disappointed that the Scottish government is still tendering services for the Orkney and Shetland Islands rather than directly awarding these routes to public operator CalMac, as the EU Commission told them they could.

It is British politicians who have been responsible for privatising our buses, our railways and our ferries – including a botched attempt to introduce a Public-Private Partnership in London Underground.



Margaret Thatcher and the Tories started this process, which sadly was later aided by the indifference towards ending this free market dogma on the part of their New Labour successors and devolved administrations. So the main enemy of public ownership remains at home, and blaming the EU is just a smokescreen behind which our neoliberal political class like to hide.

As part of an internationalist movement, socialists should argue for joining hands with our European sisters and brothers to fight whichever detrimental legislation the EU seeks to bring into being. However, it's folly not to realise that beating neoliberalism on our doorstep is the necessary first step towards defeating this toxic ideology. Let's face it, Thatcher would have faced stiffer resistance when trying to spread her free market fundamentalist mantra across Europe had we defeated her at home. That's why defeating the neoliberal, austere Tory government in Westminster and replacing it with the Corbyn vision 'for the many' must remain our political priority.

Time is now of the essence. On 30 March 2019, if we have left the EU, Britain will remain a capitalist country within a largely neoliberal world. We had a bourgeois referendum which at its core was full of anti-migrant sentiments. The Brexit vote has put a spring in the step of the alt-right. There is nothing progressive to be salvaged here. Aspirations for 'socialism in one country', if it were ever possible, are not remotely the reality of our times.

No: what we now face is Nigel Farage, Boris Johnson and Jacob Rees-Mogg's baby. And with former Trump adviser Steve Bannon as their godfather of choice, their vision of workers' post-Brexit future ain't pretty. To defeat their pernicious right-wing ideology, sinking their alt-right battleship, Brexit, must be our shared task. To think otherwise is to fall into the dangerous 'social fascism' trap of yesteryear. We need a united front to defeat the alt-right's emerging fascist threat. To join them, however unwittingly, in becoming a Brexit foot soldier is a serious dereliction of socialist duty.

That's why our union supports the continuation of free movement of people across Europe, irrespective of Brexit's fate. We have debated this issue at three annual conferences since 2015. We have come to the same conclusion every single time. Scapegoating migrants for crap wages or terrible terms and conditions is what the bosses do to try to extract greater profits from us. Their job is to divide us, ours is to unite our class. As ever, our unity remains our strength. What we need is to end the exploitation of all workers, irrespective of nationality. Our movement was created on this basis and

when Jeremy Corbyn's Labour government is in power, our impact will be felt.

## A BONFIRE OF WORKERS' RIGHTS

Our union has never believed that the EU is a socialist paradise, and we have opposed many things it does. But we would be totally blinkered if we accepted being led by the nose by Tory and UKIP Brexiters whose *raison d'être* is an even more deregulated economy on our shores. Their aim is to create a bonfire of workers' rights. Ours is to give them the bloody nose that stops them in their tracks.

Make no mistake, the alt-right's plan for a post-Brexit Britain is to build a market-fundamentalist paradise. They oppose the EU's – and any other – rules-based regulatory system, which sets minimum standards. Regulation is complete anathema to our enemies. We are hearing that rail bosses are already looking to ditch EU regulations after Brexit to cut costs: make no mistake, this will lead to lower standards and make our railways less safe. Frankly, there is nothing in this for working people.

Brexit is catnip to the alt-right. The left must not share their litter tray. Remaining in the EU would be a huge and important defeat for them. Remaining will also mean that our union and others will continue being a critical voice within the EU, standing shoulder to shoulder with our European sisters and brothers against any attempts to attack working people.

The 2016 EU referendum was such a nasty and divisive experience that most of us would want to steer clear of a repeat. However, with a clear head, our union is now committed to a popular vote on any Brexit deal – and a vote to reject the deal must surely mean staying within the EU. Supporting a popular vote on the content of any Brexit deal (or no deal) will not just up the pressure on Theresa May, it will help to bring forward a general election.

With time now running very low, the most immediate task we face is to stop the ticking Brexit clock before the time bomb explodes. We can't be bound by May's artificial countdown or partisan departure timetable, which was a prelude to last year's failed attempt to deliver a three-figure Tory majority.

At the start of the Tory Brexit process, Jeremy Corbyn called for a long transition period of at least five years. He was right to do so. As a minimum, our party must seek an extension to Article 50. Given that the next European elections are in May 2019, we should now be exploring how to extend Article 50 to at least the end of

2023 – just before the next Euro-elections are due. That would allow Labour negotiators a reasonable period in which to work out how to recalibrate our relationship with Europe.

Transitional arrangements when we joined the European Economic Community (as the EU was then called) lasted seven years, enabling our economy to adapt to a changed environment. May's forced disentanglement of over 40 years of joint policy-making in just a two-year period was as politically and economically reckless as David Cameron's decision to call a referendum without an exit strategy in the first place. The Tories' failure to negotiate anything acceptable to the British people over the last two years shows we do need more time to resolve the complexity of any separation. This can't be a rush job as the stakes are far too high. So revoking May's arbitrary and dangerous negotiation deadlines is now the best method of stopping our country going over that Brexit cliff edge at the end of March.

Labour's manifesto *For the Many, Not the Few* has brought a fresh perspective to the future of British politics. It has given hope to millions that the everyday austerity they have endured for too long can end. Our party knows that now is the time to raise itself against the Tories' reckless Brexit game. A defeat over a no-deal Brexit – or whatever scraps the Tories may cobble together as a deal – is likely to bring down the government. A general election would then be on the cards. It's a general election that will be Labour's for the taking.



# AUSTERITY AND RESISTANCE IN EUROPE

Marina Prentoulis

**T**HE ONSET OF THE 2008 Great Recession showed that neoliberalism had failed. Yet a decade on, despite emerging challenges from the left, this political and economic orthodoxy endures, now through ‘austerity’ policies – a neoliberal response to neoliberalism’s own crisis. The consequences of these intertwined ideologies and policies are still destroying millions of lives, contributing to ever-growing inequality, and enabling the rise of fascism, nationalism and xenophobia across Europe.

## FROM NEOLIBERALISM TO AUSTERITY

Neoliberalism is a governing logic of late capitalism. It sees itself as a new trajectory for Enlightenment (17th and 18th century) liberalism. Liberalism was about pondering the limits of the state and the best way to organise a liberal society – a society that will respect the individual lives of its citizens. For liberals, the best society is one where the state has limits, and activity associated with private life or the market are not part of any state regulation. These areas are instead regulated by autonomous institutions like the church or charitable organisations, without state interference. *Laissez-faire* (unregulated) economics reigned.

Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan rewrote the rules of capitalism in the 1980s, giving it its neoliberal direction. This direction encouraged deregulation and promoted financialisation which ultimately led to the 2008 crisis. Financialisation pays little attention to the 'real' economy (for example industry or agriculture), and instead prioritises the financial, which becomes the main source of income, ultimately leading to increased inequality and an economy of instability and risk.

The factors associated with the 2008 crisis are related to this process: the almost absent regulation of the banking sector, the bust in the US mortgage market, the European debt crisis, the failure of corporate management and risk management of financial institutions.

The 'formal' announcement of the crisis was the bankruptcy of Lehman Brothers in September 2008. Soon national governments had to step in to bail out the failing institutions with billions of dollars, pounds and euros of taxpayers' money. To pay for the bailouts, the solution pursued by European governments, including Britain, was to turn to austerity. The logic behind this decision was very much in line with neoliberalism and was presented to the people of Europe as the only solution: public spending cuts would allow the repayment of spiralling public debts.

This 'solution' was popularised in the mainstream media by drawing a false parallel between household economics and macroeconomics, a parallel which nevertheless was convincing in its common sense appeal: in the UK, George Osborne was explaining that when you max out a credit card, you have to cut other expenditures to pay it off. Similarly, he argued, a government has to cut its expenditure to pay off its debt. What he did not say is that a national economy works differently: investment creates growth, which in turn brings down the need for benefit payments and increases tax revenue. In other words, when there is a recession, austerity is exactly the wrong move. The result for Britain was a loss of GDP growth and the further erosion of the welfare state. A decade after the crisis, the impact of austerity in Britain has refashioned society.

According to a recent report by the Resolution Foundation, despite a 'boom' in jobs on the surface, workers are on average £13 a week worse off than 10 years ago and 800,000 workers are in zero-hours contracts with no secure income. According to the Office for National Statistics, life expectancy (which was steadily rising for the past few decades) has now slowed down faster than in any other industrial state. The *British Medical Journal* argues that austerity is

linked to 120,000 extra deaths since 2010. The cuts to the NHS and social care have led to great distress for those in need. The repulsive cuts to the Employment and Support Allowance, and the inhumane regime of assessments and a number of other reductions in income since 2010, have had a profound effect on disabled people in Britain. The increase in the use of food banks speaks volumes about the poverty levels in the sixth richest economy in the world. In 2017 it was estimated that 14 million people in the UK lived in poverty. The list is endless, and the pain caused has little visibility in the mainstream media, even though each one of us could at any moment become a Daniel Blake.

The consensus around austerity as the only solution was embraced not only by the right but also by the centre-left, as much in Britain as in Europe. And despite European social democratic parties losing votes and power at a striking pace, austerity remained the only solution they were willing to offer.

## **SOUTHERN EUROPE GETS THE BLAME**

The most severe and shocking effects of the crisis in Europe were experienced by a group of countries mainly in the European South, the inelegantly named PIIGS (Portugal, Ireland, Italy, Greece and Spain), all members of the euro currency area (the 'Eurozone'). Unable to pay their government debt or bail out their indebted banks, all of these countries were forced into a regime of severe austerity by their governments, together with the European Central Bank (ECB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The European elites advanced a narrative that blamed the affected countries for 'imprudent' fiscal policies, namely their public spending. As incomes fell and taxes on low-income households rose, the working classes were reduced to pauperisation and the middle classes started to collapse.

Greece in particular became the laboratory of austerity in Europe. The crisis, and the successive 'Troika' bailouts that enforced austerity, had devastating effects on Greece. Between 2009 to 2013, unemployment increased from 9.5% to 27.9%. (Today it has just fallen below 20%.) During the same period, average wages decreased by almost 40% and pensions by 45%. By 2013 almost half of the Greek population had an income below the poverty line. Since austerity measures were introduced, health services have totally deteriorated and millions have been excluded from the healthcare system. During the first two years of austerity, suicide rates increased by a third and depression rates almost tripled.

When in 2015 the newly elected SYRIZA/ANEL coalition government tried to negotiate with the Troika, it was forced to accept a third memorandum agreement, which continued on the path of neoliberal logic (privatisations) and further austerity. Even after Greece formally exited the memorandum agreements in August 2018, it is still under 'supervision'. The Greek debt that is now considered 'sustainable' is close to 180%. Despite a ten year period that allows some breathing space, the requirement of budgetary surpluses and repayments until 2060 (!) are not a cause for celebration.

While Greece was the first time that such punitive action, demanding structural adjustment irrespective of the cost in human lives, took place in Europe, it is important to remember that the global neoliberal hegemony in the 1980s and 90s had imposed austerity in return for loans time and again across Asian, African and Latin American countries, inflicting devastation on them that persists to this day.

## AUSTERITY, CRISIS AND BREXIT

Although the mainstream media argues against the possibility of another global debt crisis, there are many worrying signs. For the unreformed Eurozone, Italy is the biggest headache. The Italian economy is ten times bigger than Greece, and a default on Italy's public debt could have catastrophic effects on the other Eurozone members – effects that will again be disproportionately shouldered by the most vulnerable parts of the populations.

At the same time, Italy – being one of the countries hit hardest by the 2008 crisis – has opted for a eurosceptic, xenophobic right wing government, which is now advancing demands for the end of austerity from a right wing perspective. For those eager to argue for the benefits of leaving the EU, Italy is not the only worrying sign. A brewing debt and exchange crisis in Argentina and Turkey may have significant implications for the global economy.

What is for sure is that neoliberalism and austerity are at the root of previous and future crises. What is needed therefore is the electoral victories of socialist governments at the national level: governments that refuse to adopt the far right agenda of nationalism and xenophobia. It is only then that we will be able to collaborate and start taking seriously the demands of a new economic governance, operating at the transnational level, confronting the effects of globalisation. This is the current challenge and the only direction for the left.

Britain leaving the EU will do nothing to help Greece and



nothing to help this project. While neoliberalism and austerity dominates in today's EU, this does not mean this dominance is structural and eternal (see page 35). It is a product of Europe's politics.

Today, the 751 seats of the European Parliament are dominated by right wing parties. Similarly, the European Council – in charge of defining the overall political direction of the EU – is made up of the heads of governments of member states, most of them supporters of neoliberalism and austerity. Finally, the European Commission (with one member from each EU state), has and most probably will have in the future a right-wing president. So yes, every institution in the EU is currently dominated by the right, austerity is the economic orthodoxy – and the main challenge to this orthodoxy comes from eurosceptic, far-right parties, not the left.

However, it does not follow that we should line up with the euro-sceptic left – and the eurosceptic hard right – in saying we should leave the EU. Defeating neoliberalism in Europe is possible, but it must come first through putting forward a convincing alternative to neoliberalism in national elections and winning. When and if the left has a majority across Europe, it can – and must – put forward proposals for different transnational governance.

In Britain, though the pre-Brexit period is likely to seem mild in retrospect compared to a post-Brexit one, the economy has shrunk, real household incomes are smaller and the value of the pound has fallen. In the short term, as the Conservatives have more or less already promised us, there will be more austerity, more cuts, more job losses and more disruption to the economy. The unions know this, and that is why one by one they are coming out against Brexit, in favour of a people's say on the final deal.

What should also be a concern, however, is what will happen if we do get a Labour government – a government that is against austerity – in a situation where Brexit goes ahead as planned. For all the (false) talk about how the EU would restrict a socialist government, the real potential tragedy here is that Corbyn's Labour government could be restricted in the ability to carry out its policies by a vicious, Brexit-induced recession. For the sake of the next election, and far beyond, we need to put forward a socialist alternative to Brexit.



# THE EU, A 'NEOLIBERAL PROJECT'?

Niccolò Milanese

**G**EORGE ORWELL WROTE IN 1947 that 'a socialist United States of Europe seems to me the only worthwhile political objective today'. He was hardly alone: amongst members of the European resistance such sentiments were common, and indeed the 'Ventotene Manifesto', written by prisoners of Mussolini on an island just off the coast of Naples in 1941, provided an inspirational vision of a socialist Europe beyond the nation state. Yet today, the very idea that the EU could be transformed in a socialist direction looks implausible. What happened?

One thing that happened is, of course, that the EU that actually exists has been built in a very different way, usually by people on the right of politics. The leading socialists and communists who did take part in constructing what would become the EU were usually in the position of trying to combat the way it had been built on the basis of resuscitating the nation-states after the Second World War.

Altiero Spinelli is the best example: the leading resister who co-wrote the Ventotene Manifesto, and who later became European Commissioner and was elected to the European Parliament as an independent on the Communist list, spent most of his time trying to

redirect the trajectory of the European Communities (as the EU was then) towards a parliamentary democracy with a federalist constitution. He made incremental progress in improving the influence of the parliament, to the extent that today it has co-decision powers over most European legislative decisions. But the treaties of the EU today are neither federalist, nor based on socialism.

### **INTRINSICALLY NEOLIBERAL?**

The Maastricht criteria for joining the euro currency, the Stability and Growth Pact (which limits government deficits and debts both inside and outside the euro), and more recently the European Semester, the European Financial Stability Facility, Euro-Plus pact, the Six Pack and the Stability Mechanism, and the intergovernmental Fiscal Treaty: all of these agreements, inside and outside of the European treaties and European decision-making, have become names for the ways the European project limits the economic autonomy of its member states and rules out Keynesian economics. Where the Treaty of Rome that established the European Communities in 1957 carefully limited European competences, the development of the single market and euro have broken down this separation, and in some cases the prerogatives of the market have been allowed to trump the protection of social rights.

Still, while the overall trajectory is clear, it would be a huge exaggeration to suppose that the EU is intrinsically neoliberal, or that leftist forces and ideas have had no influence in it at all.

The Maastricht treaty (1992) – which merged the various European Communities (Economic, Coal and Steel, and Atomic Energy) into the European Union and introduced the euro – also introduced for the first time a social chapter (which the UK opted out of until 1997). Before that, with the creation of the single market through the Single European Act in 1986, French president François Mitterrand and Greek prime minister Andreas Papandreu managed to introduce social cohesion as a pillar of the European project, in addition to economic cohesion.

Anti-discrimination, equal protection, environmental protection, health and safety protections: all of these things were introduced to the EU from the left. While the criticism should be made that the social democrats and the left failed to leave a coherent mark on the EU when they had the opportunity, most notably in the timid Amsterdam Treaty of 1997 – which Tony Blair and French prime minister Lionel Jospin were involved in drafting at a rare time when

the Socialist and Labour parties had a majority across Europe – it is simply mistaken to say that the left has not had any say at all.

A quick look at the current European Treaty belies the idea that it is merely a 'neoliberal straitjacket'. You only need to read as far as Article 2 to read the grand values of human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, rule of law, human rights, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between men and women. Article 3 says the EU's aim is to promote peace and well-being, and mentions a social market economy aiming at full employment and social progress, with high protections for the environment. These are not the first articles of a socialist EU, but neither are they pure neoliberalism in which socialist ideas are totally absent.

The recent actions of the EU – whether it is not effectively dealing with the euro crisis and enforcing austerity, or a dysfunctional migration and asylum system that has been turned into the basis for establishing 'Fortress Europe' – are surely less to do with anything inherent in the treaties and more to do with the politics: the balance of forces across Europe.

## NOTHING IS INEVITABLE

Worryingly, as at the most dangerous moments of recent European history, there is currently a convergence of ideas between parts of the left and parts of the right around certain dogmas that make the future look inevitably tragic. Two of these dogmas about the EU are that it is intrinsically neoliberal and that it is unreformable. In the UK and elsewhere on the left, these two dogmas motivate variants of a 'Lexit' position which argues that there is a better chance of socialism at national level outside of the EU. In other parts of the European continent, these two dogmas lead to a position with a nominally different political polarity: namely, what we could call the 'Schäuble doctrine', that since no alternative to the current institutional set up is possible, and the EU is essentially neoliberal, the role of the EU has to be to enforce austerity, otherwise it will economically diverge to a point where it is unsustainable. Either get with the programme, or leave. It isn't quite a Thatcherite 'there is no alternative', but a rather close 'There are no alternatives (in the EU)'.

Why would anyone resign themselves to this political impotence regarding the EU, when at least in some parts of Europe there has been a decisive rejection of neoliberal inevitability when it comes to more familiar national politics? Why would you think that socialism is within grasp in a country like the UK, with its deeply-entrenched

capitalist system, and impossible in an EU that has several times over shown its capacity to stand up to capitalist and corporate interests, most notably Microsoft and Apple?

Various explanations could be given: changing the EU is slow and patient work, and it is also a more complex set of institutions than any one national government. The chances of socialist governments having a majority throughout Europe, let alone winning unanimity around a radically transformed constitution for the EU, seem slim at the moment. Still, none of these explanations justify vacating some of the most powerful political institutions in the world and leaving them open for the right and far right, short of believing not only that the EU is unreformable and neoliberal but also that it will shortly collapse and disappear.

This view is not only a total misevaluation of the degree to which the EU and its institutions are deeply entrenched and have strong political support across Europe, but is also likely to be a misunderstanding of what the far right is interested in if it takes power in more European countries: not disbanding the EU, but using its powerful instruments to create an authoritarian, illiberal and ethnically purified 'Union of Nations'.

Orwell in 1947 admitted that a socialist European Union was highly unlikely, but held to it nonetheless as the only worthwhile objective. The anti-fascist resistance fighters writing the Ventotene Manifesto on an island prison in 1941, with the Axis powers occupying almost all of Europe, large parts of North Africa and of Eastern Asia, could hardly have felt like a socialist Europe was the most likely future, but had the courage and conviction to call for it and organise a clandestine movement against the odds.

Since the Second World War, perhaps many European populations have become accustomed to leaving politics to their elected representatives, entrusting the future to their states and its machinery, and maybe vestiges of this outlook are why the future still looks inevitable. But in recent years, new waves of grassroots politics and a clamour for participation, organisation and solidarity have spread across the continent. On this basis surely we can do better than throwing a spanner in the works of the machine: we can invent an alternative future, and realise again that this is in our power.

# CORBYNISM AND EUROPE

Mary Kaldor

**I**F BREXIT HAPPENS, WE WILL look back at this period as a moment of terrifying global irresponsibility. The European Union, for all its flaws and there are many, remains a beacon for human rights at a time of creeping fascism in Russia, Turkey, the US, India and China, not to mention the growth of right-wing populism inside Europe itself. Brexit will embolden the far right and contribute to disintegrative tendencies, including within Britain.

On the other hand, if we are able to reverse Brexit and stay in the European Union, a Corbyn government could play a key role in mobilising progressive forces across Europe in support of policies at European and global levels that would directly address some of the problems that have contributed to the rise of fascism.

## WHAT IS THE EU?

For years there was a debate about whether the European Union was a super-state in the making – a ‘United States of Europe’ – or an inter-governmental institution like the United Nations. Now there is general agreement that it is neither, or both. It is an institution established through treaties among sovereign states but which has acquired, on the basis of those treaties, a set of institutions that resemble domestic institutions – the European Council and the European

Parliament (the legislature), the European Commission (the executive) and the European Court of Justice (the judiciary). It is a new kind of 'inside-outside' institution that involves the pooling of sovereignty and, at least in procedural terms, a degree of direct accountability to citizens, through the parliament and also through a range of mechanisms for involving civil society such as the European Citizens' Initiative or various forms of structured dialogue.

One way to describe the EU is as a new model of global governance. In an era of interdependence and interconnectedness, the various cross-border phenomena that directly affect our lives (such as carbon emissions, financial flows, the activities of multinational corporations, transnational crime, or the spread of global disease) can no longer be regulated only at national level.

Global governance does not mean the end of the nation-state. Rather it means the capacity to re-empower the nation-state, and indeed regional and municipal organisations, by regulating those aspects of global activity that national and local institutions cannot control. At the same time, the integration of nation-states in a thicker system of global regulation helps to restrain the worst aspects of nation-states – in particular, the capacity to make war and to repress their own citizens. Paul Mason has described the EU as a 'regulatory super-power'. We need those regulations in an interdependent world, but we need to be able to participate in deciding what they are.

For many on the left, the EU is viewed as an unaccountable 'capitalist club', enforcing neoliberalism across the continent. It is true that business and capital have hugely benefitted from the single market, and that the introduction of the euro meant the imposition of austerity rules and a growing inequality among debtors and creditors. But the EU is also much more. From the beginning it was designed as a peace project – the aim was to prevent the recurrence of fascism, imperialism and war. In pursuing these aims there was always an emphasis on social solidarity and social protection, as exemplified in the agricultural policies or the structural funds. In recent years, the European Union has been at the forefront in new areas of concern such as digital rights.

As for unaccountability, while the role of the European Parliament could and should be strengthened, the problem is less to do with the absence of procedures and more to do with a lack of political engagement. We lack a 'European democratic consciousness' as Altiero Spinelli, one of Europe's founders, put it, or a 'European public sphere' in the words of the philosopher Jürgen Habermas. The



problem is that European policy-making has largely been left to governments – what is known as the ‘permissive consensus’. Neoliberalism in Europe was actively promoted by governments, not least by British governments. The single market was enthusiastically promoted by Margaret Thatcher, and the proposals of Jacques Delors, then Commission President, for a Social Europe were thwarted first by Thatcher and Major and then by Blair (despite foreign secretary Robin Cook’s decision to join the Social Charter when the Labour government came to power in 1997). There has been very little public discussion and deliberation about the kind of Europe we want.

### **WHAT COULD A CORBYN GOVERNMENT DO?**

A Jeremy Corbyn-led Labour government in Britain would have a unique opportunity to change this. The Labour Party is now the biggest single political party in any EU country and represents a positive example for the left across Europe. A Corbyn government could ally with progressive forces across Europe to oppose fascism and push for the transformation of the European project.

There are already tentative moves away from the dogmatic neoliberal economic policies to which successive UK governments made such a big contribution. The left-wing Portuguese government has demonstrated how an anti-austerity policy can dramatically improve economic performance. There are proposals to close tax havens for multinational corporations and a proposal for a common consolidated corporate tax, something the UK has strongly opposed in the past. France’s President Macron is pushing for reform of the Eurozone and the establishment of a common European budget (even while he is pursuing neoliberal policies domestically). Olaf Scholz, the Social Democrat German finance minister, wants to establish a Financial Transaction Tax, which would curb financial speculation and generate revenue for a Europe-wide unemployment insurance scheme, which would necessarily involve redistribution to poorer areas. New proposals to stop undercutting, where companies recruit workers abroad under the worse pay and conditions of the countries where they are recruited, have just been passed.

Yet these proposals may be difficult to implement without at least one major EU power seriously committed to them. For example, in the wake of Brexit, some countries are engaging in beggar-my-neighbour policies in order to take over the UK’s former leading positions, especially in financial services. A Corbyn-led government could be key to making sure reforms happen.

It is not only in opposing neoliberalism that a Corbyn government could play a transformative role in Europe. A Corbyn government would also be important for those areas where EU policy has, in the past, been relatively progressive – digital rights, climate change and ending global conflicts, for example. Thanks to active protests across Europe, EU policy on digital rights, defending online privacy and the ownership of personal data, has been rather progressive – yet without continued active engagement, along the lines of Corbyn’s *Digital Democracy Manifesto*, there is a risk that this might be undermined by anti-terror legislation.

In the case of climate change, there is considerable momentum for far-reaching efforts to keep climate change under 2%, including the ‘Clean Energy Package for All Europeans’ and the ‘EU Roadmap for 100% emission cuts by mid-century’. These initiatives would mean a massive transformation of the European economy, affecting almost every sector. But, given powerful vested interests in our current carbon-based economy, these plans won’t happen without substantial pressures from parties and movements across Europe. A Corbyn government could be a key part of this.

As for ending global conflicts, the new global strategy presented by EU foreign affairs representative Federica Mogherini to the European Council the day after the British referendum envisages an external security policy aimed at human security (the security of people and the communities in which they live) rather the security of borders. This policy was formerly blocked by the UK, which preferred the geopolitical approach of NATO, but is now moving ahead. Nevertheless, it requires much stronger political backing and more of the kind of resources in which the UK has a comparative advantage.

Finally, a Corbyn-led government could change the conversation about migration. Anti-immigration sentiment promoted by unscrupulous politicians, it can be argued, produced the refugee crisis. We live in a world of migration and it is more or less impossible to control. Instead of the current border-security complex, we need a resettlement policy across the continent. A Corbyn-led government could push to replace the current dangerous, securitised approach with one based on humanitarian and development considerations.

If Brexit goes ahead, not only will Labour be unable to oppose neoliberal policies in Europe – which will affect us profoundly whether we are in Europe or not – but we may also lose the benefits of the positive aspects of the EU in the areas of social, digital and environmental rights. We would be much less able to contribute

to a more humane European and global migration policy, which is desperately needed. A Corbyn government outside Europe would also be hugely vulnerable to pressures from capital markets and from global business. Corbyn, for example, has talked of taxing Google to generate revenue to support public service broadcasting – but can he achieve this outside the EU?

## TAKE BACK CONTROL?

The Vote Leave slogan ‘take back control’ channelled a pervasive loss of trust in political institutions and a frustration with the functioning of actually existing democracy. What we lack today is what can be called substantive democracy – that is to say, the ability to participate in and influence the decisions that affect our lives. This is partly to do with globalisation – the decisions that affect us are taken in the headquarters of multinational corporations and on the laptops of financial speculators, as well as in Brussels and Washington. But Brexit will not solve the problem. It will make us even more powerless.

The only way to affect those global decisions is through an organisation like the EU that has the potential to tame globalisation. In practice, Brexit is likely to hand control not to ordinary citizens, nor even to the UK parliament, but to an unaccountable British executive – this is the main import of the EU Withdrawal Act that went through parliament this spring, which abandoned many key democratic provisions such as the Charter of Fundamental Rights and accorded the government what are known as ‘Henry VIII powers’.

That unaccountable executive is likely to be dominated by Brexiteers. ‘Taking back control’ turns out to mean handing it to the likes of Boris Johnson or Jacob Rees-Mogg.

The Lexit argument that the EU is a ‘capitalist club’ also applies to Britain itself. The British government is a neoliberal, militarised institution. This is one reason why people in Scotland, Northern Ireland and perhaps Wales will want to leave the UK if Brexit goes ahead. It will be much harder to transform Britain in isolation than in cooperation with friends and allies across Europe.

Above all, those who favour Brexit appear not to care about what happens to our fellow Europeans and indeed our fellow human beings. The European Union is the only institution, at present, that has at least the potential to tackle the existential issues of our time: climate change, war and fascism, extreme poverty, global disease. While the Brexit vote has been a wake-up call for many Europeans, stimulating greater concern and interest in the state of the European

project across the continent, Brexit itself will represent a counter-trend – contributing to disintegrative tendencies and a downward spiral of economic recession, increased violence and growing far-right populism.

But if we stay in Europe, we would have a chance to transform both the EU and the British state and to control the dark forces of globalisation. We could help to build a European democratic and socialist consciousness. That is the role Corbynism could play in the EU, and its importance to the future not only of Britain but of Europe and the world.

# CONCLUSION

Alena Ivanova  
and Michael Chessum

**T**HE BRITISH LEFT IS AT a crossroads unlike any other in its history. Just as the Corbyn moment gives us hope, the Brexit moment presents us with an unprecedented crisis. Domestically, we face an entrenched regime of deregulation combined with an emboldened far right whose anti-immigration narrative has soaked into the mainstream.

The choices we face are not unique to us. From the emerging splits in Germany's Die Linke to the 'sovereigntist' approach of some on the French left, the temptation to give in to the politics of nationalism and border-building is stronger than ever.

Our strategy for battling Brexit and the rising far right starts from an understanding that only the left can win against the encroaching darkness. Only a transformative, socialist vision can compete with the politics of hate and the reality of social crisis. And the agents of change will be workers and ordinary people – in all their diversity – not the morally bankrupt establishment.

But what comes next is not just a question of understanding or analysis – it is a question of doing. Intervening into the mechanics of Brexit and trying to stop the train crash seems like an arduous task, but it is essential. The price of defeat would be the biggest expansion of immigration controls in Britain's recent history, a decimation of

our rights, a deregulatory trading agenda that will make TTIP look progressive, and a major economic crisis.

## DEMOCRACY IS THE ONLY WAY

All of these effects, and the right wing narratives that feed on them, will hurt both Labour's electoral prospects and its prospects in government. For those in charge of it, Brexit is not just a policy but an ideological project designed to permanently shift power in favour of the forces of the right.

Winning against Brexit and building a future we can be proud to leave to our children is a process that must begin with a fresh referendum on the terms of Brexit – a 'People's Vote', as it has become known. Any attempt to block Brexit via parliament alone, even with a mandate from a general election, would prove pyrrhic. Crucially, this is not a 'second referendum' on the same issue – it is a substantially different vote, giving the people the right to determine their own destiny in light of the specifics of the exit deals on offer. Brexit is now a solid object, not a mere concept.

Neither the Conservative government nor the deal it negotiates will command popular support. It may well also not command a majority in parliament. MPs have the opportunity to vote down the deal. We must mobilise to put pressure on them to do so at every opportunity, building a mass movement led by the left and the labour movement. Regardless of whether the deal passes in the autumn, our demand must be for more democracy: the people must be allowed a final say.

A People's Vote is not, however, an alternative to a general election. On the contrary, Labour should fight to bring down the government and force an election at the earliest possible opportunity. But we need to be clear – Labour must put a People's Vote in its manifesto. Without this commitment, Labour would go into an election either promising a 'bespoke Labour Brexit' that it has no time to negotiate, or offering a Norway-style deal that is straightforwardly worse than EU membership and will leave Corbyn with no seat at the European table.

It is entirely plausible, however, that the parliamentary arithmetic will make a general election impossible. Conservative Remainers will vote against the deal, but they may not vote to bring down the government if that means losing power (and their own seats). In other words, there could be a parliamentary majority for a referendum but not an election. Getting a People's Vote, and defeating the

government in it, is the surest (if not the speediest) way to achieving a general election. But getting a referendum is only a minority of the task – we would have to win it as well.

## **NO TO THE STATUS QUO**

In 2016, the Remain campaign was dominated by a political establishment that just didn't 'get it'. Britain Stronger In Europe focused on economic doom, roaming data charges and house prices, and featured a revolving carousel of centrist politicians and high-profile bosses. If we are honest, Labour's official campaign was barely better; it largely said the same things as Stronger In, with added rolling coverage of the fact that Alan Johnson used to be a postman.

The establishment still doesn't get it, and it can't be allowed to lead the anti-Brexit campaign in any People's Vote referendum. We, the left, must lead the battle this time, and use it as a means to put forward our vision for a future of hope and solidarity. In a People's Vote, we would be up against a Conservative Party defending its toxic deal – a much better context than 2016 to launch an insurgent, anti-establishment campaign. This is not only a question of principle but also essential to victory: an anti-establishment movement would have a good chance of winning, while another elite-led coalition could lose once again.

Ours is a future of solidarity between people and across borders. We are not interested in preserving the status quo in the EU. Labour must go to the public clear in its resolve to fight the right wing establishment in Brussels just as much as the Westminster elites – to end Fortress Europe, push back against the neoliberal economic consensus and build unity between workers across the continent. That could well mean breaking the EU's rules where we have to, but it definitely means building a serious pan-European left.

Another Europe is Possible will be here at every one of these strategic stages: persuading Labour and the left to oppose Tory Brexit, winning a general election, getting a People's Vote, winning the referendum, and building an internationalist left that can turn the tide in Europe and beyond. And we hope you will be too.





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## **MORE PUBLICATIONS FROM ANOTHER EUROPE IS POSSIBLE**

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[anothereurope.org/the-corbyn-moment](https://anothereurope.org/the-corbyn-moment)

A look at the critical role that a Jeremy Corbyn-led Labour government could play in transforming Europe's politics, working from within the EU.

### *Brexit and Immigration: Prioritising the Rights of All Workers*

[anothereurope.org/brexit-and-immigration](https://anothereurope.org/brexit-and-immigration)

A report that examines various proposals for post-Brexit migration systems, pointing out that all workers will suffer if migrants are left more vulnerable to super-exploitation, and proposing an alternative system of 'free movement plus'.

### *The Great Repeal Bill: Addressing Unaccountable Power*

[anothereurope.org/great-repeal-bill](https://anothereurope.org/great-repeal-bill)

A briefing on the almost unprecedented level of unaccountable power granted by the Great Repeal Bill (since renamed and passed as the EU Withdrawal Act), including the 'Henry VIII powers' and how they threaten our democracy.



# BREXIT IS A HARD RIGHT TORY PROJECT – THE ONLY WAY TO RESIST IT IS FROM THE LEFT

Brexit is a Tory plot to turn Britain into an offshore tax haven with a deregulated economy, do dodgy trade deals with Donald Trump and move the country into the US sphere of influence. The left should be on the front lines of the resistance to this hard right takeover.

But hang on: isn't the EU a 'neoliberal project'? Wouldn't it stop a Corbyn-led government from renationalising the railways? And what about Greece, and Fortress Europe?

These arguments and more are answered in this pamphlet, which puts forward distinct left wing reasons to oppose Brexit. Our case, unlike the centrists who have given anti-Brexit activism a bad name, is committed to freedom of movement, workers' rights – and a Corbyn government.

This is our internationalist case for Europe.

