

# Britain: RMT rail union launches nationalist platform for European elections

Julie Hyland  
7 April 2009

On March 18, Bob Crow, leader of the Rail and Maritime and Transport workers union (RMT), launched the No2EU platform to contest June's European elections. At a press conference in London, Crow was flanked by leading members of the Communist Party of Britain and the Socialist Party, who are to supply the campaign's "activists".

According to their hype, No2EU represents the first challenge to Labour by a section of the trade unions and a genuine "working class alternative" in the elections.

It is a fraud on both counts. The RMT has made explicit that the platform has been created solely for the purpose of contesting the European elections, and nowhere in the statements released by the platform is there any call for a political break with the Labour Party.

Nor is there any reference to the unfolding of the greatest economic crisis since the 1930s, and Labour's insistence on bailing-out the banks and financial institutions with billions of taxpayers' money while tens of thousands of workers have lost their jobs and suffer pay cuts/freezes. Indeed, none of the basic policies of the Labour government—the undermining of civil liberties, holding down of wages, privatisation of essential services, the waging of illegal wars of aggression—are mentioned.

Instead, the assault on workers' conditions is attributed exclusively to the European Union, which, as an "undemocratic, neo-liberal superstate", is denounced for undermining "sovereign" nation states.

Any socialist intervention in the European elections would have to challenge the anti-democratic, big business character of the European Union. The EU has rehashed its previous constitution, rejected by Dutch and Irish voters in 2005, as the Lisbon Treaty, consolidating the EU as an economic and political bloc based on the free market and "liberalisation".

But the fundamental standpoint of genuine socialists is to counterpose to the capitalist European Union, a United Socialist States of Europe based on the unification of the working class across national borders in a common struggle against the profit system.

This perspective is inseparable from a broader political struggle against the bourgeoisie and its political representatives—including the nominally social democratic parties—within each nation state, at whose behest the EU functions. The British bourgeoisie in particular, under the Conservatives and Labour alike, has been at the forefront of demands for the diminution of workers' rights, and the "neo-liberal" offensive across Europe.

No2EU's perspective is the very antithesis of this principled stand. The British ruling elite is given a free pass by No2EU's claim that it is the EU that is responsible for imposing "lower wages and worse

working conditions, creating a 'race to the bottom'". This exclusive focus on the ills of the EU is the means through which the RMT and its allies seek to advance a common cause between the British bourgeoisie and British workers.

## Championing economic nationalism

Under capitalism, globalisation and the processes associated with it are used by the transnational corporations and the major powers to increase the exploitation of the international working class and set them into competition against one another. However, a genuinely progressive struggle in opposition to the bourgeoisie can only be based on the fight to abolish private ownership and with it the nation state system based on production for profit. This would enable the positive potential contained within globalisation—in particular its objective strengthening of the working class as an international force—to be realised through a worldwide struggle against capital, laying the essential foundations for the rational and harmonious utilisation of the globe's resources in the interests of humanity.

No2EU rejects this approach. Its standpoint is that of a section of the petty bourgeoisie and national labour bureaucracies who have no interest in a genuine revolutionary struggle against capitalism, but merely want to carve out an accommodation with it that will preserve their own privileges. They seek to realise their aims not through a mass social and political mobilisation of the working class, to which they are organically hostile, but by reinforcing the nation state apparatus, which they falsely claim to be the guardian of the working class.

Central to the No2EU's platform is its championing of the Lindsey oil refinery protests, opposing the use of foreign labour and demanding "British jobs for British workers".

The Socialist Party and the CP were the primary cheerleaders for this attempt by a section of the trade union bureaucracy to divert legitimate grievances into a divisive campaign for economic nationalism. While the SP claimed that any concerns over the xenophobic character of the protests were outweighed by the fact that the trade unions were finally leading a struggle, the CP, unsurprisingly, was less abashed in its open support for the protectionist demands at their core.

While similarly defending the Lindsey protests as a fight for equality for "local" labour, the No2EU spells out their reactionary logic.

“To ferry workers across Europe to carry out jobs that local workers can be trained to perform is an environmental, economic and social nonsense,” it claims. “If ‘food-miles’ represent an unacceptably large carbon footprint, then ‘labour-miles’ and shunting human beings around Europe in the pursuit of profit is even more damaging.”

This attempt to create an ecological argument to attack the free movement of labour is obscene. On such grounds No2EU would be better placed demanding that British workers stop taking holidays abroad or travelling anywhere in the world.

No2EU goes on to claim that its opposition to “labour miles” is aimed at resisting “the EU turning human beings into commodities to be shunted around Europe while local workers are excluded from being able to provide for their families”.

Only when the EU is involved are workers treated as commodities and exploited, according to No2EU. And it repeats the spurious claim of every nationalist that what prevents workers from “being able to provide for their families” is the employment of foreign labour.

The orientation of this organisation is typified in its complaints against “social dumping”, which, redolent with contempt for the poorest and most vulnerable sections of the working class, reeks of the social prejudices of the right.

Fundamentally it insists, “Nation states with the right to self-determination and their governments are the only institutions that can *control* the movement of big capital and *clip the wings* of the trans-national corporations and banks” (emphasis added).

There is something grotesque in the assertion that British imperialism has lost its “right to self-determination”. Given the criminal record of the British bourgeoisie across the globe, the oppressed peoples of the Middle East, Asia and Africa will rightly treat such claims with the scorn they deserve.

But under the guise of “self-determination”, No2EU outlines the demand for Britain to “return to creating wealth-based [sic] especially in manufacturing, hi-tech and trade across the world”. The UK must end its “dependence on service industries” and a return to “an economy based on manufacturing requires massive investment and where appropriate protection of home industries”, it states.

Not fortress Europe, but fortress Britain! This is not a plan for a workers’ paradise, but for a nationalist dystopia.

Some 80 percent of the UK workforce is employed in the service sector, which accounts for approximately 77 percent of GDP. Even if the change demanded by No2EU were realisable—and it is not—its attainment would require a major dislocation of economic life and the destruction of vast swathes of essential services. Such a national autarchic economy is a kind of capitalist version of the Soviet Union that only a Stalinist fantasist could envision. For the USSR it ended in disaster, even when applied on a vast swathe of territory and with the benefit of state planning and an absence of private ownership. The USSR collapsed because it was cut off from the globally organised production that has been developed under capitalism and that must now be liberated from its division into the antagonistic nation states, which the No2EU instead insists must be defended.

As for the “protection of home industries”, what is this other than a euphemism for a massive increase in the exploitation of wage-labour, coupled with fiercely protectionist policies, with all its terrible consequences?

No2EU is not the product of “rank and file” pressure, as claimed by the Socialist Party and CP. The entire project was drawn up behind closed doors by a section of the trade union bureaucracy and its apologists. Even the platform’s election statement was not completed at the time of the launch, because the various fractions were still involved in horse-trading: in order to get Scotland’s Solidarity organisation, led by Tommy Sheridan, on board, the option was left open to tone down the “Britishness” of the draft in order to accommodate support for national separatism.

Currently, most of the supporters of the No2EU project are either RMT functionaries or members of the CP or SP—who were informed of the new platform long before any “rank and file” workers.

In addition, No2EU has already prescribed who can be considered as supporters. According to an internal circular sent to members of the CPB by national organiser Andy Goodall, “ultra-left groups” are not “considered eligible” for participation. Citing the Socialist Workers Party amongst others, the circular states that this is because they had “criticised the Lindsey strike movement”, a “leading figure” of whom is to be one of the candidates.

The real milieu to which No2EU is orienting is illustrated by its assertion that, under conditions in which Labour is facing a potential wipe-out in the European elections, only it will be able to stem the gains otherwise expected for the ultra-nationalist British National Party. An organisation formed with the purpose of siphoning off support from fascist tendencies, and adopting arguments long associated with the far right, has no right to claim association with the workers’ movement or socialism.

A lesson must be learnt from this development. It is significant that the first electoral breach between Labour and a section of the trade union bureaucracy should take place on political lines barely distinguishable from the UK Independence Party or the BNP, both of whom were also great enthusiasts of the Lindsey oil refinery strike.

No2EU does not represent a “rebirth” or “renewal” of militant class struggle, but the opposite. Its espousal of a form of populist nationalism is the outcome of the protracted degeneration of the labour and trade union bureaucracy and its incorporation into the capitalist nation state.



To contact the WSWS and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://wsws.org/contact)**

## Siphoning off BNP supporters