The anti-working class politics of the pseudo-left

Left Unity endorses pro-EU offensive to overturn Brexit referendum

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Left Unity, the small party fronted by director Ken Loach, is playing a key role as advocate of the demand in ruling circles to overturn the June 23 referendum vote for the UK to exit the European Union (EU).

The Leave vote sent a shock wave through the ruling elites in Britain, Europe and internationally. It not only threatens Britain's substantial trade with the continent, but the stability of Europe and the survival of the EU. In addition, it is seen as a potential factor destabilising NATO by encouraging Germany to pursue its ambition to create an EU army. It has acted as a catalytic economic event, prompting runs on global markets.

Reversing the result is, therefore, a strategic imperative for many in the bourgeoisie. Calls for overturning the referendum have been made by newspapers across the official political spectrum such as the *Financial Times*, the *Times*, the *Guardian* and the *Independent*. Proposals made include demanding a second referendum after negotiations on the terms of UK withdrawal are complete, or for the majority of pro-EU MPs to assert the sovereignty of Parliament and vote it down.

Most significant is the move spearheaded by the Blairite wing of the Labour Party to remove its leader, Jeremy Corbyn. This is at the centre of attempts to shape a new political formation.

The Scottish National Party, Liberal Democrats and Plaid Cymru (Party of Wales) are all pledged to keeping the UK in the EU. But they are not considered viable vehicles for opposition without the backing of the Labour Party, especially as the SNP and Plaid have tied their pro-EU position to support for independence and devolution.

To create the basis for such a constellation of political forces, over 80 percent of Labour MPs moved against Corbyn, charging him with betraying the fight for a Remain vote by his barely disguised Eurosceptic position. The intention is either to secure their unchallenged control of the party, or, if necessary, split and form a new parliamentary entity. In either case, this would provide the centre for a future broader pro-EU alliance.

Left Unity is deeply implicated in these manoeuvres through their alliances with its main actors and its determined efforts to provide them with a left cover. Its intervention is led by a core of long-time apparatchiks drawn from disparate pseudo-left groups, of which two are affiliated to the Pabloite United Secretariat—Socialist Resistance, led by Alan Thornett, which is supported by Loach, and Socialist Action. They play a leading role in what remains of Left Unity after most of its membership re-joined the Labour Party following Corbyn's election as leader last year.

During the referendum campaign, Left Unity came out for a Remain vote and joined Another Europe is Possible. Claiming to offer a progressive argument for supporting the EU, signatories to Another Europe is Possible included Caroline Lucas, MP for the Green Party; Cat Smith, MP and then Labour shadow minister for women; Clive Lewis, MP and then Labour shadow minister for energy and climate change; and Owen Jones of the *Guardian*. It was also supported by Neal Lawson, the head of Labour's right-wing Compass think tank.

Another Europe is Possible claimed that support for the EU was a stand against nationalism and racism, and that aligning with forces such as Syriza in Greece, Die Linke in Germany, Podemos in Spain and similar parties would allow for the building of a "Europe of Solidarity." Left Unity also cited the support of the Labour Party and the Trades Union Congress for Remain as proof that theirs was the progressive choice compared to the "Little Englander" nationalism advanced by the Tory right and the UK Independence Party (UKIP).

Speakers at its events included Yanis Varoufakis, the former economy minister in Greece's Syriza government, who, alongside Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras, insisted that any opposition to austerity must be subordinated to maintaining Athens' membership of the EU. He opportunistically ended his period in office just as Tsipras overturned a massive referendum vote against a fresh austerity package.

For the desired pro-EU political realignment to take place, the necessary social base must first be mobilised, not merely to lend a popular veneer to an anti-democratic offensive orchestrated and planned by Britain's ruling elite, but to counter the opposition—political and social—that an overturn will inevitably provoke.

Support for remaining in the EU has been mobilised by directing anger towards the millions of working people, routinely described as "stupid" and "racist," who voted Leave due to their legitimate hostility to both the EU and the pro-Remain forces led by Conservative Prime Minister David Cameron.

Left Unity endorse the EU

Left Unity has lent its services to this campaign to whip up sections of student youth and middle class professionals behind a pro-EU, anti-working class agenda. The stand they have taken was determined weeks before the June 23 result in collusion with their allies in Another Europe is Possible.

Michael Burke of Socialist Action wrote on Left Unity's web site on June 17, "Remain supporters in Britain will certainly consider a second referendum. They could legitimately claim the terms for Britain leaving the EU were not put to the vote this June so the actual Brexit terms subsequently negotiated with the EU should be put to a second referendum, if these terms for leaving were rejected Britain would remain in the EU.

"One way or another the huge social forces that back Remain would

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continue to fight and the immediate period after a Brexit vote would be chaotic, with the increased possibility of political realignment."

In the vote's immediate aftermath, a flurry of articles was published by Left Unity advancing a politically slanderous depiction of millions of workers supporting the racism of the Tories and UKIP. Its executive committee wrote that it "deplores the Leave outcome of the EU Referendum" which came "from pressure from the far right—driven by anti-immigration sentiment, fuelled by racism."

Socialist Resistance wrote that the Brexit vote was "a disaster," declaring baldly that all of those "who voted for Brexit did so because they accepted the argument that the worsening of living standards and public services were caused by immigration ..."

On both the Left Unity and Another Europe is Possible web sites, Neil Faulkner wrote, "Socialists should not kid themselves that the danger is not serious until we have Brownshirts on the streets. Classical Fascism certainly took this form: it required paramilitaries to physically destroy mass working-class organisation. The labour movement today, by contrast, is hollowed out by 40 years of neoliberal counter-revolution. Fascism need not take the same form, or follow the same trajectory, as in the 1930s."

Left Unity is seeking to exploit real concerns over the slew of anti-immigrant rhetoric and the political gains made by UKIP by tarring millions of workers as being gripped by fascist reaction. To this end, Phil Hearse of Socialist Resistance uses the results of a post referendum survey by Lord Ashcroft to denigrate all those who voted Leave and to portray the views of Remain voters as entirely progressive.

He writes that the "people who tended to have left or progressive views voted Remain, while those with socially conservative or right wing views voted Leave. With the exception of 'Globalisation' and 'Capitalism' (50 percent of both Leave and Remain viewing capitalism negatively), every other significant category like Immigration, Feminism, the Green Movement and Multiculturalism was viewed negatively by Leave voters."

Hearse underscores his appeal by declaring that a Remain vote was delivered in "solidly working class and multicultural inner-city areas in London. ... But of course that is indeed one factor, often the key one: multicultural. As opposed to say areas like Sunderland, where there are very few immigrants that voted 60 percent for Brexit."

These are revealing passages. Hearse is calling for a cross-class Popular Front alignment of the metropolitan areas such as London behind a pro-EU movement by insisting that cultural mores rather than class are the basic division in society. What matters, he stresses, is a shared commitment to feminism, multiculturalism and reducing your carbon footprint!

This is a focused appeal to upper layers of the middle class—those who have benefited from the shift of societal wealth away from the working class and who believe they share a common lifestyle whether they support Labour, the Greens, the Liberal Democrats or even the Tories. They may on occasion complain about the fate of the Greek people and blanch at the brutal treatment of refugees in Fortress Europe, but they are all too easily convinced that such "aberrations" can be sorted out by discussions among like-minded progressives. Cushioned by rising property and share prices, they see the EU as a force for maintaining their privileges against the threat from the "uneducated," "ignorant" masses.

The purpose of such assertions is to justify lending support to those parties now designated as representing the forces of "progress." Socialist Resistance describes these as the "sections of the left and the labour movement" who "recognised these dangers." They continue: "The launch of Another Europe is Possible was an important step. Corbyn and [Labour Shadow Chancellor John] McDonnell, Momentum, Left Unity and Ken Loach, most Greens and especially Caroline Lucas worked hard to stem the racist bile."

On Saturday, July 2, a "March for Europe" through London attracted 20,000-30,000 people. Like earlier, smaller protests, pro-EU banners were mixed with those calling for a second referendum before Article 50 of the Lisbon Treaty triggering a Brexit is enacted. Speakers at the rally included Liberal Democrat leader Tim Farron, Labour MP David Lammy, *Guardian* journalist Owen Jones and Labour peer Michael Cashman.

Left Unity gives this demonstration a glowing bill of health, with Faulkner describing its politics simply as "unformed and therefore complex and contradictory." He then declares it to be "a popular revolt against racism and nationalism. ... It is an assertion of an alternative identity that is multi-cultural and international."

Faulkner calls this the birth of "what might be described as an 'Anglo-European' identity... an essentially progressive political reaction." In reality, an "Anglo-European identity" is simply a euphemism for supporting Britain's EU membership. Far from being an expression of genuine internationalism, it is the product of a deliberate, sustained and immense propaganda campaign seeking to dress up a defence of Britain's national interests in a progressive "European" garb.

The reactionary role of Another Europe is Possible

Another Europe is Possible has called its own demonstration today in London, "Rise up for Europe," urging its supporters, "Write to your MP and ask them to back the Early Day Motion calling for a new referendum once an outline of the terms of exit has been negotiated."

There is a political logic to such positions. This is a call that upholds the authority of Parliament, of the state apparatus, and its right to dictate events—on the basis that millions of working class people have endangered the economic and strategic interests of the UK. This is the same argument cited for opposing strikes in vital industries, for clamping down on free speech and for every other authoritarian measure and right-wing dictatorship ever imposed.

Left Unity's role in the referendum campaign and its aftermath confirms the class character of the pseudo-left forces in Britain and internationally. Its web site is now headed with an appeal to "Be part of Europe—join the European Left!"

"Many parties, movements and trade unions across Europe" are "working together," it states, noting that "Left Unity is part of the European Left Party, founded in 2004, drawing together parties from over 20 European countries."

These 20 parties include Syriza, the Communist Party of France and the Left Party, Die Linke, the United Left in Spain and the Left Bloc in Portugal. As was proved by Tsipras in Greece, there is nothing left about these parties. Many have formed or become part of bourgeois governments, combining vaguely leftist rhetoric with a determination to implement austerity measures and military aggression on behalf of the ruling class. They are bourgeois formations, dedicated to preserving capitalist rule and its key institutions such as the EU and NATO from any threat from below.

The Socialist Equality Party called for an active boycott of the referendum, explaining that the Remain and Leave camps were both hostile to the fundamental interests of the working class. We made clear that the EU was a weapon of the European ruling class for imposing austerity and conducting military operations against Russia in alliance with NATO. We stressed that those who cited "freedom of movement" as the basis for attributing to the EU a progressive aspect ignored both the deal struck with Cameron to restrict the rights of EU migrants and Fortress Europe's murderous policies towards the victims fleeing imperialist wars in Africa and the Middle East.

The support of the Labour Party and the trade unions for Remain,

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combined with the nationalism and class collaboration of the advocates of a “Left Leave” vote such as George Galloway, meant that the xenophobia and anti-migrant rhetoric of the Tory right and UKIP dominated the Leave campaign. But we stressed in the aftermath of the referendum that, without ignoring the efforts to whip up anti-immigrant sentiment, for the most part the Leave vote was “a cry of social distress,” particularly from the poorest layers of workers who were justifiably hostile to the EU. Moreover, the result emerged out of the failure of the post-war project of European unification under capitalism, and not simply the lies or failings of the Remain and Leave campaigns.

Against those who are now calling for the EU to be saved, we insist that the necessary unification of Europe is the task of the working class and must be guided by genuinely socialist and internationalist leadership. This means opposing all attempts to sow divisions within the working class and line up workers and youth behind the rival strategies being fought out between the pro- and anti-EU wings of the ruling elite.

It is striking in this regard that Hearse, in citing Ashcroft’s survey of voter attitudes, dismisses completely what is its most significant finding: that half of both Remain and Leave voters see capitalism as a force for ill rather than a force for good.

Years of cuts, closures, job losses and the destruction of vital services, combined with nearly perpetual wars of colonial intervention and the growing danger of conflict with Russia and China, have had a profound impact on the political consciousness of millions. The referendum campaign was utilised to sow confusion and nationalist poison by both sides. But class antagonisms continue to deepen, creating the basis for the fundamental political issues to be clarified.

All factions within the ruling class are intent on deepening the attack on working people and offloading on them the full cost of a second great recession that is now looming. To oppose these dangers means advancing a clear political perspective for the working class, based on the fight for international working class unity in the struggle for a United Socialist States of Europe, above all through a relentless exposure of the anti-socialist politics of the pseudo-left.

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