

THE EU REFERENDUM, 8.6.15

Allan Armstrong (RCN) and Donny Gluckstein (SWP)

The following motion from RIC Edinburgh was passed unanimously at the RIC National Forum held in Perth on May 30th:-

"This National Forum calls upon the International Working Group to prepare a paper for a RIC Scotland campaign to address the forthcoming EU referendum. This paper should be circulated to all branches and members for discussion, prior to a National Forum held no later than September."

It was also agreed that branches should initiate discussion and actively seek a wider engagement with others from socialist organisations in Europe, migrant workers groups, Women for Independence, etc. This follows from the precedent established by RIC during the referendum campaign of organising on the basis of 'internationalism from below'.

Edinburgh RIC decided to initiate the debate by asking Allan Armstrong and Donny Gluckstein to put the case for voting for and against staying in the EU in the referendum, at its meeting on 8th June. These are very much preliminary contributions. It was also recognised that a case could also be made for abstaining. Other meetings will be organised and other RIC groups contributions circulated.

Furthermore, comments from RIC members will be added to the Edinburgh RIC blog.

1. THE CASE FOR A 'YES' VOTE TO STAY IN THE EU

Allan Armstrong

The background

Following the Second World War, and after Germany and France had been in three wars against each other, key European figures decided that their only possible future lay in greater economic and political unity. It was clear to them that the major European states were no longer the dominant powers in the world, and any future intra-European wars would prove suicidal. The USA and USSR had taken their place, 8.6.15. Therefore, one of the major considerations behind the initial negotiations that led to the EEC was the desire to create a new European-wide imperial centre, which could survive in the new post-war world.

We have arrived at the current phase of the EU in five main stages:-

1. The creation of the European Coal and Steel Community (free trade in iron, coal and steel, and no more wars between France and Germany over vital resources) in 1951 (6 members).
2. The creation of the European Economic Community (towards a complete free trade area with free movement of capital and labour) in 1956 under the Treaty of Rome (6 members)

3. The creation of an expanded EEC/EU. The UK joined the EEC in 1973 followed by Ireland, Sweden and Denmark (10 members). The next two major waves of accessions followed the ending of fascist or military regimes in southern Europe, and the demise of the Warsaw Pact in eastern Europe. There are now 28 EU members and 5 applicant members.

3. The creation of the European Union (a political union with shared citizenship) in 1993 under the Maastricht Treaty (12 members).

4. The creation of the Euro currency, now used by 19 member and 2 non-member states. This is run by the European Central Bank (ECB), of which the largest shareholder is the Deutsche Bundesbank.

Power is mainly divided between the heads of the member states, represented in the European Council, and the European Commission, which has a more all-EU identity. The European Parliament is very much a subordinate element of the EU set-up. Germany has replaced France as the most powerful member state, due to its greater economic strength and population, particularly since German reunification. Germany is now the state with the greatest ability to determine policy in the European Council and ECB. However, the European Commission is less a centre for competing member states, and more a body where multinational corporations can make their influence directly felt. This is where the TTIP initiative came from.

The politics of the EU

The underlying politics of the EU have been dominated by an alliance between Christian Democrats (social conservatives) and Social Democrats. Until the 1990s their policies were therefore largely based on the idea of the social market, with protection for small farmers and workers. This contrasted with the more 'free' market politics of the USA on one hand, and the statist politics of the USSR on the other.

From the early 1990s, following the collapse of the USSR and the wider impact of neo-liberal politics (originating in the 1970s Pinochet's post-coup Chile and taken up in the 1980s by the Reagan and Thatcher governments) there has been a move away from the earlier social to a neo-liberal market model in the EU.

The UK and the EEC

The UK, as a declining imperial power, has had to adapt to the growing power of the EU. After the Second World War, both Conservatives and Labour agreed that Britain's economic future lay with continued trade with the Empire (renamed Commonwealth), and closer political links with the USA. They decided not to join the EEC negotiations. By the 1970s it was patently obvious that there was no future in building the economy around trade with the Empire, which had fallen apart. This was when the British ruling class decided that the UK would have to join the EEC.

Under the Conservatives, the UK joined the EEC in 1973. In 1974 the new Labour government was committed to a referendum on continued membership. The Labour government campaigned to stay in. The opposition came from two sources - Left and Right.

The Labour Left and British Communist Party opposed membership, because they thought the UK could be pushed further along the social democratic path on a 'British road to socialism'. They saw the social market model of the EEC as a barrier to achieving this. There were aspects of the UK economy and social provision, which were more progressive, e.g. the system of agricultural subsidies (c.f. the EEC's Common Agricultural Policy), whilst the NHS provided a beacon for directly state provided welfare (c.f. state subsidised private insurance health provision in Germany and France).

However, there was also a Right opposition to the EEC involving small businessmen and various reactionary British chauvinists, worried about the UK's continued economic decline and the demise of the British Empire. The anti-immigrant, ultra-unionist, Tory MP, Enoch Powell, led this Right.

At that time of greater working class confidence it was possible to argue that staying out of the EEC would allow the Left greater influence in the UK. However, even then, the dangers of the Left becoming involved in a British chauvinist campaign were apparent. In 1975, I attended an anti-EEC rally organised by the CPGB-dominated Edinburgh Trades Council. Amongst those on the platform was a Powellite speaker, whilst the wall behind the platform was adorned with a large Union Jack!

The UK and the EU

By the 1990s, though, there was little doubt where the primary axis of anti-EU politics lay in the UK - on the Right. But this Right was itself divided over how to address the situation.

Thatcher, followed by Blair (both backed by the US), argued for the UK to be in the EU, and to act as a 'Trojan Horse' for US-style neo-liberal economics. They wanted to undermine the EU's social market provision. By pushing for the rapid accession of former Warsaw Pact countries, they hoped to find neo-liberal allies for their strategy. These new member states would also diminish the influence of the core seven states, (the original Six plus Spain), particularly Germany. At the same time, both Tories and New Labour pushed for British exemptions when it came to social provision, so they could undercut working conditions, e.g. on maximum working hours.

Due to the continued decline of British imperialism, the Thatcher/Blair strategy of the UK becoming the leading force in the EU, in alliance with the ex-Warsaw Pact countries, did not come to pass. This economic decline is measured in real terms such as labour productivity, as opposed to profits from fictitious capital and property values loved by the City of London and successive British governments. German industrial and financial power has increased. Germany now enjoys hegemony over the former Warsaw Pact countries too.

Furthermore, much to the chagrin of the many, including sections of an increasingly atomised working class susceptible to the politics of fear, the accession of eastern and southern European countries has led to large-scale economic immigration into the UK. The neo-liberal economic politics of successive UK governments have led to particular skill shortages due to the neglect of industrial training, (e.g. in the construction and repair sector where Polish workers have filled an economic niche), the driving down of pay and conditions in the NHS and Local Authority care work, and the expansion of a low pay service work at the cost of

better paid industrial work. These types of employment have all proved attractive to migrant workers, particularly from eastern and southern Europe.

The emergence of a new independent British Right

Therefore, the UK failure to take the lead in the EU, or even to maintain its relative economic position, has led to the emergence of a new independent Right, not just within the Tory Party (c.f. the Powellites of the late 1960s and 70s), but outside, with the initial rise of the BNP, and now the right populist UKIP.

UKIP has been able to force Cameron to promise a referendum providing for a Brexit option. UKIP won the largest number of MEPs in last year's Euro-elections. It has been cultivating links in the UK with Loyalists, in the European Parliament with other national chauvinist and anti-immigrant parties, whilst also exploring extra-parliamentary links with other far Right parties, e.g. the Front National in France and even openly fascist parties, such as Jobbik in Hungary.

If UKIP and the Tory Right were to get Brexit, then their aim would be for the UK to become an offshore European economy, with British subjects taking the work of EU migrants. They hope the UK would be able to compete internationally through imposing slashed pay, economic conditions and welfare benefits. UK defence and police spending would be increased, with particular attention focussed on immigration control. The remaining liberal social features of 'British' society would also likely come under attack - human, women's and gay rights, whilst the reactionary features of the UK state would be buttressed against ongoing moves towards a more open and secular society. The politics of fear would be pushed to new levels to counter the effects of the social breakdown, which would inevitably arise.

The battle on the Right over the EU

The Conservatives and Labour hope to use this Right wing campaign for their own ends, to buttress their failing strategy of subverting the EU from within. Cameron is seeking negotiations with the intent either of lowering the EU's social regulations across the board, or of getting further exemptions for the UK. He wants to protect the City of London from the threat of even the mildest EU banking regulation and to further undermine other social regulation, e.g. over health and safety. Both the Conservatives and Labour are viciously playing the anti-migrant card, since they too need scapegoats when pushing their austerity measures.

The majority of the British ruling class, backed by the US, is behind Cameron's strategy of 'reforming' the EU, and the UK's relationship with the EU, as far as possible, before throwing their weight behind a 'Yes' vote in the referendum. However, both the Conservative government-led 'Yes' and a UKIP-led 'No' campaign share a common Right wing drive - to intensify the attack on workers pay and conditions, to further privatisation, and to promote scapegoating by attacking migrants.

Therefore, at first, the political logic would appear to be 'a plague on both your houses' and to recommend abstaining. However, I think that a 'No to the EU' vote would pull politics much further to the Right in the UK.

The politics of the EU referendum compared to the Scottish independence referendum

Cameron has just declared who is able to vote in his EU referendum. In direct contrast to the progressive franchise in the Scottish independence referendum last year, this referendum excludes 16-18 year olds and 1.5 million EU citizens living in the UK (including an SNP MEP). Anti-migrant politics will completely dominate the campaign. Migrants' position will most likely be worsened under Cameron's negotiations prior to him recommending a 'Yes' vote (e.g. the removal of welfare benefits for EU immigrants for a number of years, although not the obligation to pay N.I. or taxes).

However, in the event of a 'No' vote and Brexit, the position of 1.5 million EU citizens (not to mention many other non-EU residents in the UK) will become much more precarious. Their presence will provide an opportunity for the Far Right to regroup, and begin a massive campaign of intimidation, whilst mainstream politics will be moved even further Right. Migrant families would face the most immediate and direst consequences following Brexit, but such a Right wing victory would effect us all.

Another Europe is Possible

If those of us on the Left are ever asked, "What has the EU ever done for us?", the answer clearly lies in the much more multi-ethnic society we now live in. In this respect, Edinburgh has very much changed for the better. It is a very different place to the narrow provincial city of 20 years ago.

Many migrant families joined the 'Yes' campaign, highlighted particularly by the Edinburgh North and Leith Walk day of action on Leith Walk on August 23rd, and RIC's September 17th rally on the Meadows.

The 'No' campaign will be completely dominated by the anti-migrant politics of the Far Right. Any socialists attempting to fight for a 'Leave' vote on their own anti-EU grounds will be even more marginal than the Red Paper Collective was in the 'No' campaign during the Scottish independence referendum.

There will be a number of 'Remain' campaigns. Whether the Conservatives, Labour and Lib-Dems will form a new 'Better Together in the EU' campaign is a moot point. However, together or apart they will be pushing the same neo-liberal austerity agenda. The SNP will mount its own liberal 'Remain' campaign, with qualified support for migrant workers. They will also be looking to the possibility of a Scottish 'Remain' / rUK 'No' to vote precipitate another Scottish independence referendum.

Given the horrific consequences of a 'Leave' vote, the continued anti-working class basis of the mainstream unionist 'Remain' campaigners, and the inevitable weaknesses of any official SNP 'Remain' campaign (as we also saw in the Scottish referendum campaign), I would argue that RIC should launch its own 'Remain' campaign. Following our 'Yes' campaign in the

recent referendum, we should appeal to socialist organisations in the EU (including the rest of the UK), and to migrant workers' organisations in the UK, to join us in new campaign - Another Europe is possible.

2. THE CASE FOR A 'NO' VOTE AND LEAVING THE EU

Donny Gluckstein

EURO DEBATE

Capitalism and imperialism throughout its history -

- Schuman 1950
- develop intra-European trade by reducing tariffs and other barriers to the expansion of trade, (Iron and Steel community)
- achieve conditions for better utilisation of labour.

COLD WAR PERIOD

Raymond Aron's contention that the ECSC was intended as a movement away from United States domination

1957 - EEC The **European Atomic Energy Community (EAEC or Euratom)** founded in 1957 with the purpose of creating a specialist market for nuclear in Europe, developing nuclear energy and distributing it to its member states
Germany economic - French military/imperial

1973 UK joins - France is against - why? Britain lost empire, not sure of US - so plays for both... France afraid of losing hegemony but too small to counter US/Russia

EU TODAY

Development of capitalism. Pressure for states to cluster together in regional blocs. Since the 1970s huge "multinational" firms began to dominate Europe's economy.

Only 1 percent of Britain's top bosses supported leaving the EU in a recent poll, but almost half wanted to "reform" it into something looser.

But contradictions - City of London loves EU. Levels of investment in German companies vastly greater than UK, so small firms feel threatened.

Germany 115, Sweden, Denmark, France, Finland, Luxemburg, Austria etc. UK 94 - Italy, Ireland, Slovakia, Baltic states etc.

CONSEQUENCES

Fortress Europe - led to thousands of drownings
Austerity in Greece, but don't forget suffering already imposed on Ireland, Spain, Italy, Portugal etc. - domination of Germany using these countries...
TTIP

Make war impossible - but look at break-up of Yugoslavia - Serbia .v. Croatia, look at Ukraine today...

REFERENDUM

UKIP wants tougher immigration controls through Brexit. We stand at forefront - Stand up to UKIP in Thanet... etc./ UAF / M21 / Glasgow's Welcome Refugees campaign - recently at Glasgow girls meeting - stressed this...

SIDING WITH CAMERON won't weaken racism. Choice of racisms - based on skin or E European.

Siding with bosses is the opposite of workers' internationalism. Show solidarity with Greece by breaking up the EU. Show solidarity with victims of imperialism in Middle East by breaking up fortress Europe - in just the same way that we argued for real solidarity of workers north and south of the Scottish border by breaking up the British state.

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NOT PRETENDING IT IS EASY... BUT IF YOU DON'T TAKE PRINCIPLED STANCE... YOU TAKE UNPRINCIPLED STANCE...

Discussion

The following people contributed to the discussion - Alistair, Ally, Allyson, Callum, Kate, Pat, Penny, Roger, Sophia

Additional points made for a 'Yes' vote included:-

The EU bureaucracy has often been blamed, particularly by New Labour, for forcing through neo-liberal measures. However, as can be seen in the case of continued public postal services and publicly owned railway companies in other EU countries, it is quite possible to defend these. New Labour was just using the EU as an excuse for pushing through or accepting the neo-liberal policies it wanted anyway.

The UK pulling out of the EU would not end Fortress Europe, but just add another set of high walls further, increasing the difficulties for asylum seekers and others. UKIP and the far Right want more barriers not less.

The importance of a 'Yes' vote in Scotland and a 'No' vote in England, in providing the opportunity to trigger off another Scottish independence referendum was emphasised.

Additional points made for a 'No' vote included:-

The social provision provided by the EU is pretty worthless. Only workers taking their own action can defend pay and conditions. We should not be encouraging people in believing a 'Yes' vote can help workers protect themselves.

The social provision in the EU came about as a result of the Catholic social thinking of the Christian Democrats, particularly in Bavaria and the Rhineland. Such thinking had always

been a counter to socialism, and after 1945, the main motivation was to counter the influence of the state provided social provision in the USSR. It is not surprising that after the demise of the USSR, the EU has increasingly abandoned social provision.

Farage isn't the main enemy and leaving the EU is a challenge to the British ruling class and particularly the City of London. They would ensure that it was defeated, because it wasn't in their interests. Therefore we must be seen to support those who oppose the British ruling class.

Summing up

Donny emphasised the fact that the EU was a bosses club, committed to imperialism and austerity. He argued that the overwhelming majority of the British ruling class, backed by the US, wanted the UK to stay in the EU. Their economic weight would be reflected in the official 'Yes' campaign, against which the 'No' campaign, even with the *Daily Mail*, would be completely outgunned. Therefore, there was little danger of a socialist 'No' campaign contributing to a 'No' victory led by the Right.

The inability of Syriza to put forward its anti-austerity programme whilst within the EU means that we should be offering solidarity to the Greek people in leaving the EU.

We are all internationalists. Socialists can still unite to defend migrant workers. Socialists should stick to their anti-EU principles and recommend a 'No' vote.

Allan said that Donny had really made a case for an abstention. The unionist, imperialist and monarchist UK state was the original bosses' club and had been the largest imperial power on this planet. The UK government was just as committed to austerity as the EU bureaucracy. It was the UK's Labour government that declared Iceland a terrorist state when it refused to buckle down to City of London demands. British owned banks like the Anglo-Irish and Bank of Scotland have played a major part in enforcing austerity and house repossessions in Ireland.

Donny's arguments reminded him of the SWP's position in the 1979 Scottish Devolution referendum, when they argued 'No to Devolution, Yes to Revolution'. Well they got 'No' to Devolution, but instead of revolution they got Thatcher!

Allan thought that a populist 'No' vote could not be ruled out, in a context when mainstream parties are losing support throughout Europe. Furthermore, there are occasions when socialists do fight alongside (not with) key sections of the ruling class. That is when the alternative is even more reactionary. Socialists campaigned for a 'Yes' to gay marriage in the recent Irish referendum, alongside an Irish government coalition delivering austerity, and an official campaign receiving considerable corporate backing.

Finally Allan argued for applying the 'September 19th Test'. After a 'No' vote, who would be out on the streets celebrating? The motley crew of rampaging loyalists and fascists in George Square would be nothing compared to what happens after a 'No' vote prior to Brexit. The DUP would be celebrating the prospect of the erection of border posts in Ireland, and with the help of loyalists try to re-establish Unionist ascendancy. Migrant workers everywhere in the UK would be living in fear. This is not a prospect that can be ruled out.

