



'The Left Speaks on BREXIT'

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Opening Remarks

The Referendum is over.

We've had the debate, we've had the discussion and the votes were counted eighteen months ago.

We are exiting the European Union.

So, don't let's waste the afternoon looking for ways to re-run the vote, contest the outcome or pretend that there was an opt out clause in the small print.

The referendum is over and the outcome decided.

We are leaving the European Union.

We are leaving the European Union but we are not leaving Europe.

We are as European today as we have ever been.

Our social, cultural, political and yes our economic links remain.

The latter will change in time and we will develop new relationships - but we are still Europeans and some of us still believe in the socialist project, the unity of working people in all countries and the overthrow of capitalism.

What we don't believe in is the EU.

For us this is not a new position.

We opposed entry to the Common Market in 1973 and again to the EEC in 1975.

We have opposed every European treaty since:

- the Maastricht Treaty,
- the Amsterdam Treaty
- the Nice Treaties
- the Lisbon Treaties and
- the more recent Fiscal Stability Treaty

and we opposed them on the same basis that we opposed entry in the first place - because the founding principles, the direction of travel and the policies of the European Union were designed to strengthen and secure the capitalist economic, financial and social model and smother any radical socialist alternative to that system.

There is not one person in this room today who will be able to convince me that that is not what has happened in the past forty years, that that is not what the EU has become and that that was not its objective from the outset.

As an internationalist party - not limited by the political constraints and blinkers of narrow nationalism - The Workers Party sees a wider world and a bigger political picture. One in which working class people across Europe and beyond has a loyalty and a responsibility to each other - not to failed capitalist institutions like the European Union. Let me briefly set out the reasons why voting to leave the EU was the correct thing to do and the only position which a principled socialist party should have taken.

Firstly,

The EU is undemocratic

- The EU is not just undemocratic. Its centralised fiscal policy makes it inherently anti - democratic.
- We've witnessed the EU's treatment of Ireland and Greece which demonstrated its contempt for national sovereignty, democratic rights and the welfare of working people.
- The EU dictates a "common" foreign policy and grows ever closer to NATO
- Membership of the European Union mandates the prioritisation of "market" economics, employment "flexibility", "competitiveness" and privatisation.
- It prohibits the socialisation of the economy, the nationalisation of strategic sectors of the economy and, of course, the banks, unless of course, the losses are to be socialised to bail out the bankers
- Power is vested in the unelected and unaccountable elite who make laws - in secret - to preserve the status of large multinationals at the expense of small and medium-sized enterprises
- The three top posts within the EU are appointed within the corridors of power rather than through elections by the public;

The EU is irreformable

- The EU can't be progressively reformed because that would defeat the very purpose of its existence.

- Countries joining the EU stop being sovereign states - they become member states of an increasingly monolithic structure designed to facilitate multi-national corporations, progress the modern capitalist project and prioritise markets, profit and control over working people.

The European Union is anti- worker

- The myth that the EU promotes and protects workers' rights is exactly that - a myth. The EU is anti- worker.
- The EU has cut living standards and economies have withered under forced austerity measures.
- Thousands of people have been forced to move abroad to look for work.
- One in four workers are now unemployed in Greece and Spain, with youth unemployment at double that.
- Three-hundred thousand Irish working people have left their homes to look for work overseas since the 2008 banking crisis
- In the infamous cases of the Viking Line and Laval, workers tried to contest their employers replacing them with lower-paid workers from another EU country. But the European Court of Justice found in favour of employers rather than workers.

There is no 'Social Europe' - it is a capitalist project with imperialist aims

- If it ever actually existed, the myth of a social caring Europe is long gone also
- Once promoted as a symbol of prosperity, the EU is now the bringer of austerity and the strengthening of the market economy
- This intensified competition between Europeans has led to a "race to the bottom" in which member states with the least protective social standards would be most cost-competitive
- The European Union has taken part in the imperialist wars in Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya together with the US and NATO, and has played a leading role in the intervention and threats against Syria and Iran.

- “Fortress Europe” ensures that those outside the EU cartel of nations are subject to vicious discrimination - if they are lucky - and drowning in the Mediterranean if they are not.

Opposing the EU is an act of international solidarity with other countries and other workers world wide

- Socialists are primarily and instinctively internationalists.
- Voting to leave the EU was an international act of solidarity with the working-class people of Greece, Portugal Italy and the many other European countries - including of course the Republic of Ireland - whose living standards, jobs, opportunities and democratic rights were trampled on by the Troika as the European Union bailed out banks and stretched the more marginal and weaker members states on the economic rack to pay for it.
- It was an act of international solidarity with all those who stood against the EU directives to sell off and privatise public utilities, including water and lay off millions of public sector workers.
- It was an act of international solidarity with the many, many thousands of people who lost their lives on the doorstep of Fortress Europe as they were forced to flee from the economic and military adventures of the EU.
- No self-respecting party of the left could do other than vote to get out.

That analysis may not be very popular in this room today. But it is a reality.

In fact it is *the* reality

Talk of referendum re-runs, revisions and recounts are all great stuff for radio phone-in programmes - but we are still leaving the European Union, and with good reason.

We have the opportunity for an informed and mature discussion today so don't let's waste it inventing problems that haven't arisen or worse still that don't exist.

Don't let's use this time to scaremonger and frighten people. We have enough legitimate reasons to be anxious and concerned.

Parties of the left have a responsibility to present honest analysis and find socialist solutions.

Let's do just that!

