

# **INDEPENDENT SOCIALISTS AFTER THE DECEMBER 12<sup>TH</sup> GENERAL ELECTION**

## **From Illusions in a Lexit Brexit to a Disillusioned Lexit from Brexit Politics**

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*Sunday Telegraph* backs Lexit  
with 'revolution' and a 'people's Brexit'

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**a) The 2015 general election provided a warning**

The centrality of constitutional issues in the current political situation has wrong-footed Socialist organisations both in Great Britain (England, Scotland and Wales) and Ireland (the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland). Far happier addressing ‘bread and butter’ issues, the largest independent Socialist organisations, particularly the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) of Great Britain and the Socialist Workers Party (Ireland) - SWP(I), and the Socialist Party of England and Wales – SP(E&W) (with its autonomous section, the Socialist Party of Scotland – SPS) and the Socialist Party (Ireland) - SP(I), have largely left the constitutional nature of the states they operate in to the ruling class, or political representatives of would-be ruling classes. Many Socialists tend to tail-end one of these ruling or would-be ruling classes’ constitutional agendas, either when divided over the constitutional future, or when providing a challenge to the existing constitutional order.

Sometimes, these Socialist organisations add a face-saving abstract propagandist ‘Socialist’ prefix to justify their choice, and failure to provide an immediate democratic alternative (e.g. a Scottish Republic) based on the real balance of class forces in a non-revolutionary situation. If these Socialists took the same attitude in rejecting immediate democratic demands into the economic sphere, they would oppose fighting for wage rises because they reinforced wage slavery. Whereas Socialists should see the political, economic and social arenas as schools of struggle in which to develop independent class organisations.

Since the 2008 Crisis, sections of the British ruling class have become acutely aware that, despite the formidable powers they enjoy under the UK’s anti-democratic Crown-in-Westminster set-up, these need reinforced as they prepare to launch a stepped-up offensive on workers’ pay, conditions, welfare, trade union and civil rights and consumer safeguards. The ruling class has provided an object lesson in its linking of economic and social issues with constitutional issues. It has now abandoned its earlier ‘New Unionist’ strategy to hold together the UK, with its liberal unionist gradual extension of political devolution. ‘New Unionism’ had been adopted to counter the growing democratic demands for greater self-determination in Ireland, Scotland and Wales. The majority of ruling class has also abandoned its earlier commitment to EU membership. It

has opted for Brexit, in alliance with Donald Trump's Right Populists. Both of these political changes have been undertaken so it can free its hands for further attacks.

The 2015 Westminster general election was the last one in which independent Socialist organisations made a concerted electoral challenge in Great Britain. The absence of such a challenge on December 12<sup>th</sup>, 2019 is a strong indication of the decline of these organisations as a consequence of making poor political choices. There are times in history, when independent Socialists operating from particular national bases, with shrinking international links and support, are overwhelmed by wider events. However, this article will argue that, despite facing what should have been more favourable political opportunities with a divided British ruling class, the politics of the main Socialist organisations in the UK (and elsewhere), could not cope with a crisis, which has taken on an openly constitutional form. These organisations look to economic crises to gain wider support. They are unable to see today's multi-faceted crises – economic, social, environmental – are intimately linked to constitutional crises, to which immediate political answers are required.

Therefore, it is necessary to examine the record of these independent Socialist organisations, during IndyRef1 from 2012-14, through the 2016 Euro-referendum and beyond to the December 12<sup>th</sup>, 2019 general election, to highlight the missed opportunities and the reasons for the poor political choices they made. These have contributed to the marginalisation of independent Socialists. They are also likely to contribute to the decline of the wider Left in the British Labour Party, following Labour's election defeat under Jeremy Corbyn's leadership.<sup>1</sup>

Many independent Socialists have left their previous organisations and joined the Labour Party as individuals; others have tried to form internal factions; and yet others have acted as external factions. Whatever political differences they had held with the Labour Party in the past, most slipped fairly easily into Left social democracy. They share an essentially national, statist and economic politics.<sup>2</sup> This pays little regard to the real nature of the UK state, the global shift from neo-Liberalism to Right Populism, or the necessarily interconnected relationship between production, distribution and in particular, migrant labour, under global capitalism (or modern day imperialism).

During the 2015 Westminster general election campaign, just after IndyRef1 and before the immediate prospect of an EU membership referendum, the largest independent Socialist organisations mounted their electoral challenge.<sup>3</sup> SP(E&W) and SWP managed to overcome enough of their mutual animosity to join together in the SP(E&W)-initiated Trade Unions and Socialist Alliance

(TUSC). It stood 135 candidates across England, Wales and Scotland. Furthermore, it made a pact with the Left Unity Party (LUP) in England with 7 LUP candidates standing on a joint slate and a further 3 given a free run. In Scotland, TUSC made another pact with RISE not to stand against each other.<sup>4</sup> RISE was an electoral stitch-up between the leaders of the Scottish Left Forum (SLF) and the Scottish Socialist Party (SSP). The SLF hoped to convert the impact of the Radical Independence Campaign (RIC) during IndyRef1 into electoral gains, following the model of the Indignados and Syriza in Greece and Podemos in Spain. The SSP hoped to cash in electorally on its participation in the official SNP-led 'Yes' campaign.<sup>5</sup>

Significantly, TUSC's electoral alliance did not extend to Northern Ireland. The SWP(I)'s front organisation, People before Profit (PbP), which organises on both sides of the border, could form a joint slate in the Republic of Ireland with the SP(I)'s front organisation, the Anti-Austerity Alliance (AAA). But with the SP(I) in Northern Ireland mainly operating out of the unionist community, this organisation acts in a partitionist manner. Therefore, the AAA does not extend north of the border. So PbP stood alone in the 2015 general election with 1 candidate, Gerry Carroll, in West Belfast. He received 19% of the vote, easily the best result of any independent Socialist candidate in the UK.

But in England, Wales and Scotland, the 2015 Westminster election results were a disaster for independent Socialist organisations. TUSC gained an even lower percentage of votes than it had managed in 2010, despite fielding a considerably greater number of candidates than previously, with wider Socialist organisational support. And at the same time, TUSC also made its largest local council election challenge in England. But it lost 2 sitting local councillors. LUP candidates in England fared equally badly. Furthermore, neither TUSC nor RISE candidates in Scotland did any better, despite the Left's participation in Scotland's 'democratic revolution' between 2012-14.

In Scotland, TUSC and RISE had nothing distinctive to say on the constitutional issue, which dominated the election. The SNP was given a clear run over the immediate constitutional future. The SNP leadership was now giving its support to 'Devo-Max' and delaying an opportunity to push for IndyRef2 until the future. In effect, it was calling upon an Ed Miliband-led Labour government to honour Gordon Brown's IndyRef1 'Vow'. Yet the British ruling class, scared by the mainstreaming of Scottish independence as a political issue following IndyRef1, was not prepared to concede 'Devo-Max' This might be seen as a concession to the SNP, or open up the prospect of an even wider challenge to the UK state. And Miliband was soon to reveal that 'One [read state] Nation' Labour was following the ruling class in its retreat.

TUSC and RISE did not focus their political attention upon an increasingly undemocratic UK state, now in the hands of conservative unionists. The response of TUSC and RISE to this political situation was to fall back on the Left's long-standing economism (inherited from the old Militant in the SSP's case and from the SWP in the RISE leadership's case). Economic and social issues were raised to address areas the SNP ignored or vacillated over. But the SNP's 'Independence-Lite' Scotland and its acceptance of a liberal unionist-assisted, British constitutional road to its proposed independent Scotland was never challenged with an immediate political alternative.

If Socialist candidates had stood on an immediate social republican, 'internationalism from below' platform, and in opposition to the looming reactionary unionist 'Leave the EU' challenge, this may not have won many more votes, or even the same limited number of votes as the TUSC/LUP/RISE alliance in the 2015 general election. But it would have provided a better political basis for further advance, in the face of the continued degeneration of the UK state, with its ever more centralised power and the Right's open resort to national chauvinism and racism. In Scotland, such an approach would also have been able to provide a political lead to those who were to become disillusioned over the inability of the SNP leadership to address the now entrenched conservative unionist opposition to any prospect of IndyRef2.

### **b) After 2015 - an increasingly floundering Left**

After TUSC's election failure, it soon disappeared as an independent Socialist alliance, with the SP(E&W)/SPS and SWP going their own sectarian ways. In Scotland, RISE split into its two components. The ex-SLF leadership was heavily influenced by movementism. Its idea of getting potential future electoral support was not to discuss anything controversial – republicanism, Leave/Remain, or later, how to respond to the rise of Jeremy Corbyn. It soon abandoned the Radical Independence Campaign (RIC) in practice, because this was no longer where the 'action' was.

The SNP leadership had appreciated the post-referendum threat from RIC. It had organised the 'anointment' of its new leader, Nicola Sturgeon, at a 12,000 strong rally held at the same time and next door to the 3000 strong RIC conference in Glasgow on November 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2014. But in the absence of 'action' the ex-SLF RIC leadership in Glasgow never followed up this conference. This very much reflected their one-time SWP training. It was left to other local groups to uphold RIC as a republican and Scottish internationalist coalition. So, RIC ceased to be an effective national organisation and largely fell back on a localist practice. Over time some other local groups followed Glasgow and

disbanded, with individual members looking elsewhere to find the ‘action’ in their areas. Meanwhile, the SSP retreated back to the sectarian style of pre-SSP Militant, dismissing other Socialists, and counterposing its own activities, mainly based on ‘bread and butter’ issues, to working within autonomous organisations.

This meant the political direction of the non-official (i.e. not SNP controlled) Scottish independence movement was left largely uncontested by the majority of Socialists. But ‘All Under One Banner’ (AUOB), whose leadership mainly came from the ‘We are the 45’ Independistas, understood that, whatever ‘action’ was not happening at the official political level, those mobilised for IndyRef1 had not gone away. Later it was not RIC, but the large street demos organised by AUOB, which began to concern an SNP leadership keen to maintain control over the wider independence movement.

Independent Socialist organisations, without their own immediate constitutional proposals to complement their economic and social demands, were left looking increasingly irrelevant. It’s not surprising then, that if there appears to be a constitutional blockage to further reform, and if the Socialist organisations don’t have their own immediate social republican alternative, with an ‘internationalism from below’ strategy to achieve this, then workers and others will give their support to those who do offer other ways to break the current political logjam.

### **c) Northern Ireland – a different pattern**

In Northern Ireland, despite being part of the same UK union as England, Scotland and Wales, the political situation is different. Northern Ireland has a semi-detached relationship to the rest of UK. Thus, the main UK parties, the Conservative & Unionists, Labour and the Lib-Dems are largely absent. The Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) and Traditional Unionist Voice (TUV) take their place on one side of a divided community. There is also another unionist party, the Alliance Party of Northern Ireland (APNI) (the Lib-Dems sister party). On the other side of the divide lies the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) (although a constitutional nationalist party, it is also British Labour’s sister party); and Sinn Fein, without a British equivalent, lies beyond these parties. A one-time ‘beyond the Pale’, revolutionary nationalist party, Sinn Fein has also become a constitutional nationalist party. And, in a further reflection of the somewhat different constitutional position of Northern Ireland, Sinn Fein has been mainstreamed and officially recognised as the leader of the Nationalist/Republican bloc.

Following the 2006 St. Andrews Agreement (the successor to the continually stalled Good Friday Agreement), the UK administered Northern Ireland through the Executive and Assembly (a revamped Stormont). The DUP and Sinn Fein have held the first minister and deputy first minister posts. This arrangement had been operating without interruption for eight years. At Holyrood, the SNP had introduced some modest reforms, or defended older ones now abandoned by Westminster (and the Labour 'opposition'). But virtually no reforms had been achieved under the post-Good Friday Agreement, bi-sectarian, Stormont set-up.

So, in the Republican/Nationalist communities, Sinn Fein was far more open to criticism, especially as its role had been reduced to co-managing the UK's constitutionally entrenched 'sectarian' (in reality nationality<sup>6</sup>) divide in Northern Ireland. The formation of Stormont Mark 2 had been accompanied by promises of a 'Peace Dividend'. But following the 2008 Crash, these had remained unfulfilled. Many people in the Republican/Nationalist areas of Northern Ireland saw Sinn Fein as being jointly responsible with the DUP for the lack of real opposition to Austerity in Northern Ireland. This provided an opening for People before Profit (PbP).

PbP operates mainly within the Nationalist/Republican areas of Belfast and Derry. Here it confronted the all-Ireland Sinn Fein. But PbP also has cross-border links and is also able to present itself as an all-Ireland party. The mainstream parties in the Republic of Ireland had lost much credibility amongst the working class, after capitulating to the post-2008 pressure from the European Central Bank (ECB) and the City of London. In the 2011 Irish general election, PbP had formed part of a wider electoral United Left Alliance (ULA) ULA gained 5 TDs<sup>7</sup> including 2 PbP members; and in the 2014 Irish local elections, PbP gained 14 councillors.<sup>8</sup>

Thus, with many in the Nationalist/Republican areas looking beyond the border, PbP was able to gain some influence in West Belfast and Derry. Despite not presenting itself as part of the wider Republican tradition (and not joining the Nationalist/Republican bloc in Stormont), PbP was able to benefit from the older 'community of resistance' traditions in these two cities. It had already won its first local councillor in the Northern Ireland elections in 2014. PbP benefitted from worker disillusionment and made an impressive 11.6% gain in votes in the 2015 Westminster general election. This was in stark contrast to independent Socialist organisations elsewhere in the UK.

However, PbP did not form part of any wider Socialist electoral challenge throughout the UK, despite it being part of the British SWP's International Socialist Tendency (IST). Neither viewed their political activities as part of a

shared struggle against the Union. For the PbP, as for many other Socialists in Ireland, Unionism is merely a political designation for those parties that have wanted to keep Ireland (in the past) or ‘Ulster’ today within the UK state. The UK state’s wider unionist nature, and how this is used by the British ruling class, with its hyphenated national British components (Scottish, ‘Ulster’ and Welsh), to enforce its rule over these islands, is of little concern to these Irish Socialists. This, and the UK’s continued support for a semi-detached constitutional relationship to Northern Ireland, helps to explain the semi-detached politics pursued by many Irish Socialists, when it comes to wider challenges to the UK state and its British, English-British, Scottish-British and Welsh-British unionists.<sup>9</sup>

In contrast to the independent Socialist organisations, Farage’s reactionary unionist UKIP was already thinking in all-UK terms.<sup>10</sup> He had been a regular visitor to Northern Ireland since TUV was formed in 2007. UKIP gained an MLA in 2012, and 3 local councillors in the 2014 elections (helped by transfers from the TUV and Progressive Unionist Party (PUP) (linked with the UVF). UKIP faced a crowded reactionary unionist field when it contested the 2014 EU-election in Northern Ireland, with both the DUP and TUV standing. But Farage was the first to appreciate the significance of the ‘Ulster’<sup>11</sup> link to the creation of an all-UK reactionary unionist alliance. This largely ‘below-the-radar’ connection was to emerge in the 2016 Leave campaign.<sup>12</sup> But it was to become mainstreamed by Theresa May’s Tory government in 2017.

But, if Socialists in Ireland, Scotland, Wales and England could not see the link between the national democratic movements and their role in challenging the UK state, there was no such short-sightedness in ruling class circles. Steering the ‘Peace Process’, the Good Friday Agreement, its successor agreements, and seeing off IndyRef1, were very much at the centre of successive British governments’ concerns, none more so than Cameron’s Tories. They placed opposition to these two major challenges to British rule right at the heart of their 2015 Westminster election campaign.



The Tories issued a poster, ‘Your worst nightmare ... just got even worse’, depicting Labour’s Ed Miliband with the SNP’s Alex Salmond and Sinn Fein’s Gerry Adams. Given that Sinn Fein was not going to take up its seats at



Westminster, another poster concentrated its fire on Salmond, this time depicting Miliband in his top pocket. The Tories' accusation was that Miliband could only form a government to introduce his very mild social democratic proposals by coming to a deal with the SNP at Westminster. So, a government committed to some shared social democratic reforms and more devolution – perish the thought! Miliband quickly stepped in saying he would rather have a Tory government than make such a deal – and he got his wish.

#### **d) Reactionary unionism and Europhobic opposition to the EU**

But there was another issue rising to prominence in British politics. This was the future relationship of the UK to the EU. Euroscepticism had been the key feature underpinning this relationship under successive Tory, New Labour and Con-Dem governments. But there had also long been a Europhobic Right (dating from Enoch Powell's days) and Left (strongly associated with the official Communist Party of Great Britain CPGB - and its successor, the Communist Party of {the no longer so Great} Britain (CPB).

The United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) had been formed as long ago as 1991, but following the 2008 Crisis, it moved from the Right fringe. It equalled the Europhile Lib-Dems in the number of MEPs (12) it won in the 2009 EU-election. UKIP became the first party in the 2014 EU-election (24 MEPs). This impacted most strongly upon the Tories. Two lords had defected in 2007 but in 2014 two Tory MPs defected. However, the Europhile Lib-Dems, within the 2010-2015 Con-Dem government, had prevented Cameron from resorting to a referendum over continued EU membership in order to dish the Europhobic Right. But they hadn't prevented Cameron's hardening Eurosceptic shift in the face of growing pressure from the further Right.

Up to this point, the UK state had acted in concert with the US state to undermine the EU's remaining Social Market features and push it further down the road to full-blown neo-Liberalism. But, ever since the 2008 Crisis, it had become increasingly apparent that such a strategy had failed to stem the relative decline of British capitalism, and worse still for the City of London, the EU was now looking to increase the regulation of the financial sector.

The success of UKIP in the May 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2014 Euro-elections where it gained 24 MEPs (up 11), and in the English local elections where it gained 166 councillors (up 163) on the same day, had further concentrated Cameron's mind. This was during the run-up to Scottish Indy Ref1. Cameron and his 'Better Together' supporters had developed 'Project Fear'. This was designed to fend off the 'Project Hope' challenge from many rank and file Scottish nationalists

and most of the Scottish Left. In contrast, the SNP leadership had wanted to run a ‘There’ll be little change, you’ll hardly notice it’ independence campaign. But at the same time, Cameron was already looking to the possibility of another ‘Project Fear’ to fend off the growing Europhobic ‘Project Hate’ from the reactionary unionist Right. Cameron’s two aims were to maintain the UK’s constitutional status quo and its continued membership of the EU.

Cameron ensured that an EU referendum formed part of the 2015 general election manifesto to keep the Hard Right on board. Neo-Liberal Euroscepticism was beginning to yield before Right Populist Europhobia. But central to both sides were stepped up attacks on migrants and asylum seekers. Up until this point, successive governments had mainly left the promotion of anti-migrant activities to the state – building new detention centres, passing new draconian immigration laws, implementing punitive administrative measures, and promoting ‘British culture’. But Tony Blair and Gordon Brown had already resorted to a more public Islamophobia during the Iraq War, and Theresa May had run a ‘Go Home’ public advertising campaign, designed to win wider support to increase pressure on migrants.

So, to appease the Right Populist clamour, an openly anti-migrant agenda was taken into the Tories 2015 election manifesto. It made five specific attacks on EU migrants, and a ‘deport first/appeal later’ proposal to deal with other migrants.<sup>13</sup> Miliband-led Labour also got in on the act – producing its notorious election mug with ‘Controls on Migration - I’m Voting Labour’. This was no more successful in appeasing Hard Right racism, than Miliband’s election attempt to appease conservative unionism over a possible Labour/SNP deal. But Cameron also found that the UK’s out-of-sight,<sup>14</sup> state-managed anti-migrant practice did little to appease the further Right, both inside and outside his party.

Although the Tories increased their vote in 2015 by less than 1% (winning 330 MPs, an extra 24), the large 7.9% drop in the Lib-Dem vote (leaving them only 8 of their previous 49 MPs) meant that the small 1.4% increase in the Labour vote, actually led to a fall in their number of MPs from 258 to 232. UKIP’s vote was 12.6% overall (with 13.6% in Wales, 2.6% in Northern Ireland,<sup>15</sup> and 1.6% in Scotland). Cameron now had an absolute majority of MPs and looked to derail the Right’s Europhobe challenge. He proceeded to organise an EU membership referendum for 2016.

#### **e) The largest independent Socialist parties walk into the Brexit trap**

It was following the re-election of the Tories, that the two largest Socialist parties, SP(E&W) and SWP (and its breakaways), became completely

disorientated politically. These parties often prioritised defeating the Tories in elections. This is based on their argument that the Tories are the party of the British ruling class. Whilst this is true, Labour has also acted as its alternative ruling class ‘fire-and-theft’ party in times of crisis (e.g. in 1974, under Harold Wilson, at the time of the Miners’ Strike); and as an alternative safe-pair-of-hands (in 1964 under Harold Wilson, and in 1997 under Tony Blair) after the Tories had become discredited when they had held office for too long.

But what was new in 2015 was the nature of the growing divide amongst the British ruling class, following the 2008 Crisis. Such was the depth of the crisis, that it wasn’t Ed Miliband’s moderate ‘One Nation’ Labour that growing sections of the British ruling class turned to, but the Right Populists, outside and inside the Tory Party. Nigel Farage’s UKIP began to be treated by large sections of the media as a mainstream party, and by some sections as the main ‘opposition’.

Between 2012-14, during IndyRef1, the hapless Red Paper Collective in Scotland (backed from afar by some Socialists and Left Labour members in England and Wales) had argued that Socialists could take the leadership of the ‘No’ campaign out of the hands of the British ruling class. However, their influence was minimal over either the ‘No’ or ‘Yes’ campaigns. It was the union-jack bearing Loyalists and neo-Fascists who rampaged and celebrated in Glasgow’s George Square the day after ‘No’ victory on September 18<sup>th</sup>, 2014.

But in the run-up to the 2016 EU referendum, such anti-Indy, Left British unionists were joined by the recently pro-Indy, SP(E&W)/SPS and SWP (along with others who had inherited chunks of their politics), now that they were facing the Tories in office once again. This U-turn was easier to adopt in England and Wales (and amongst their fraternal Northern Irish organisations) because campaigning for ‘Yes’ during IndyRef1 had largely been left to their Scottish members. There had been very little coordinated all-islands solidarity action (never mind taking the issue to their European sections). So, when the prospect of an anti-Tory campaign reared its head in 2006, SP(E&W) and SWPs’ underlying ‘British road to socialism’ politics were reasserted.

For many of the British Left, the EU was seen as a ‘super-state’ and British ‘democracy’ as being under threat. They saw the EU, and not the British ruling class or the City, as the main blockage to any progressive reforms in ‘Britain’. Just cast off those EU ‘chains’, and the Left would be able to lead the British working class out of Austerity to a new social democratic future. This ‘future’ though looked rather like Clement Attlee’s post-1945 or Old Labour’s post-1974 Britain, before such worrying threats as Scottish and Welsh devolution,

and Harold Wilson's 1975 referendum which confirmed EEC membership, upset things.

The reality, though, is that the EEC/EU is a treaty alliance of existing member states, with no army, police or significant bureaucracy to enforce its treaties or regulations within each member state. The degree to which the EU pursues a particular socio-economic path, whether the Social Democrat/Christian Democrat, Social Market in the past; or the Conservative/Liberal/Right Social Democrat neo-Liberalism more recently, has been in the hands of member state governments acting through the Council of Ministers. And it was the UK, with the backing of the US and the earlier East European Right, which had pushed the EU furthest along the neo-Liberal road.

But because the EU still has too many multi-lateral restraints for sections of British finance, commerce and industry, the Right Populists now offered them the prospect of ending these by leaving the EU. Their allies in the USA and Europe were now on the Hard Right. Their wider electoral appeal was to the atomised, alienated, and marginalised victims of the neo-Liberal drive, who had had their independent organisations broken up. These people are more likely to look for saviours and scapegoats. Right Populists offered themselves as saviours, whilst migrants, asylum seekers, Travellers, welfare dependents (and potentially others too) became the scapegoats.

Since the late 1970s, opposition to the EEC/EU had been confined to the CPGB, and later the CPB, Communist Party of Scotland (CPS), some Left and Right British Labour Party MPs, councillors and members, and some fellow-travelling trade union leaders. They believed in a 'national road to socialism'. EU-phobic trade union leaders looked to defend 'British jobs for British workers.' The Left sometimes gave this political cover with the chimera of 'non-racist' immigration controls.

But, following the defeat of the miners in 1985, many Socialists, Labour Party members, the TUC and most trade unionists had abandoned such thinking. The EEC, later the EU, seemed to offer some prospect of defending workers' pay and conditions, and providing regional and social funding, in the face of the Thatcher-led British ruling class offensive. This 'generosity' had nothing to do with the inherently 'liberal' nature of the EU, but reflected the remaining strength of trade unions, especially in Germany and France.

But the post-2008 Austerity offensive, led by key EU member states, brought about a reassertion of Euroscepticism and even of Europhobia in sections of the British Left. In 2009, SP(E&W), with the support of RMT general secretary, Bob Crow, and the CPB<sup>16</sup> formed 'No2EU/Yes2Democracy'. Where this

democracy was located was unclear, but the implication for British Socialists was that it lay in the UK state.<sup>17</sup> But this electoral alliance soon became known just as No2EU. No2EU stood in the 2009 Euro-elections when it received between 0.6% and 1.4% of the vote in 11 of the 12 Euro-constituencies (characteristically No2EU did not stand in the Northern Ireland constituency, nor form part of any EU-wide electoral challenge).

In the 2009 Euro-election, the Europhobic UKIP gained 16% of the vote and 11 MEPs, and the BNP 6% of the vote and 2 MEPs. No2EU now had five years, before the next EU election, to establish whether it was possible to challenge the Right for leadership of the anti-EU forces. But when it came to the 2014 EU elections, the vote for No2EU actually fell by 0.8% to a lowly 0.2%. It was even further marginalised by UKIP, now with 26.6% of the vote and 24 MEPs. And it was also overtaken on the Right by Independence from Europe (1.4%), BNP (1.1%), and English Democrats (0.8%). This decline and marginalisation of the Left should have acted as a warning as to the political nature of any future anti-EU referendum campaign.

But following the 2015 general election, Cameron's pro-Austerity Tories had won a second term of office. Left Leavers<sup>18</sup> saw the Right Leavers, both outside (UKIP) and inside the Tory Party, as a relatively marginal political force. They largely dismissed these Leavers, seeing their support as being confined to the die-hard traditionalist Right, the petty bourgeoisie and some misguided sections of the working class, supplemented by a few ruling class mavericks. Since the Right Leave campaign was seen to have no significant ruling class backing it would be relatively easy to marginalise. British SWP and SP(E&W) argued that the working class could be won over by a Left Brexit campaign. A Leave victory would represent a significant blow for the British ruling class and the Tories.

Here was the first test for SP(E&W)'s and the SWP's politics. They predicted that a Leave campaign would shift British politics to the Left. And in the process, despite the bruising experience of the 2015 general election, Socialists would be able to rebuild their forces. In contrast, other Socialists argued that a Leave victory would greatly strengthen the Right. It would take until the December 11<sup>th</sup>, 2019 general election before one or other of these two predictions would be conclusively confirmed.

But, long before then, there was mounting evidence, not just in Great Britain, but in the wider UK, the USA and a growing number of EU member states, that anti-EU politics were reinforcing the Populist and Far Right. International trade links cannot be avoided, so in the absence of any socialist, or even radical democratic trading alliances, then the only significant alternatives are the other

major imperialist powers, the USA and China.<sup>19</sup> Because of their economic size both can enforce harsher trade deals. And, despite certain Tories' Empire2 illusions, the real alternative to those British neo-Liberal Remainers' wanting to keep their seat on the EU top table, is the Right Leavers' acceptance of an even greater subordination to a 'US First' and 'Britain Second' (when it suited US corporate and state interests) 'special relationship'. Under this, there would not be any top-table position for the representatives of British capital. Instead, the UK would hold an institutional position beneath that of Alaska and Puerto Rico.

#### **f) The official Remain and Leave campaigns – two wings of the British ruling class**

The official 'Vote Leave' was set up by Hard Right political lobbyists, Dominic Cummings and Matthew Elliott in October 2015. 'Vote Leave' appointed Lord (Nigel) Lawson as chair. Hardly a ruling class outsider, Lawson declared that, "Brexit' gives us a chance to complete Thatcher's {counter} revolution." However, this patrician appeal to old neo-Liberalism was later to give way to a new Right Populism, once outside pressure had been exerted by the US Hard Right and its corporate and hedge fund backers. At this early stage, the public face of a British ruling class-backed Right Populism emerged – Boris Johnson.

The division amongst the British ruling class over upholding neo-Liberalism (Remain) or going for Right Populism (Leave) could not have been clearer. Cameron headed the official 'Britain Stronger in Europe' and Johnson became the public face of the official 'Vote Leave'. They had both attended Eton, Oxford University and had been members of the exclusive Bullingdon Club. These two campaigns were launched soon after Jeremy Corbyn was elected Labour leader, when Miliband resigned following his 2015 general election defeat. If ever there was a time when independent Socialist organisations, linking up with the Labour's new Corbynista intake, could have made a political impact, this was it. What was required was a mass active boycott campaign, which argued that there was no real choice in the referendum. There were only two Tory-promoted ruling class options, both about the best way to screw the working class.

An important feature of such a campaign, would have been the call for all EU residents and 16-18 year olds to be taken on to the referendum franchise, just as they had been in Cameron's IndyRef1. Such electoral provision, involving those most effected, should have been central to any Socialist or genuine democrat thoughts. And, in the context of an active boycott campaign, it would also have provided a focus of activity, to create a wider franchise. This would reduce the

proportion of those voting for either ruling class option even more, further undermining the referendum's political legitimacy.

Corbyn, reflecting the Labour Left's longstanding hostility to constitutional issues, did not really want to participate on either side of the EU membership campaign. This is one reason why independent Socialists and rank-and-file Corbynistas might have persuaded Corbyn, or at least, significant numbers of his supporters, to become involved in an active abstention campaign. But SP(E&W) and SWP had other ideas, and the Corbynistas never organised themselves as an independent, democratic force within the Labour Party. They were corralled into Momentum, a Corbyn fan club.

In the new greatly expanded Labour Party, Momentum took second place to what was to emerge as Corbyn's inner coterie – the 4Ms<sup>20</sup> - of whom Len McCluskey, UNITE general secretary and 'British Jobs for British Workers' advocate, became the most significant. They had retained their old hostility to the EU – which conveniently also gave trade union leaders an excuse for their own lack of real opposition to the UK state's neo-Liberal offensive. But Corbyn, not wanting to join with the Tories and repeat the mistake of the IndyRef1 'Better Together', allowed the Labour Right and Centre to run the party's official Remain campaign. He was probably quite pleased that this would tie their hands for a time.

The two main 'Brexit' campaigns - the official 'Vote Leave' and Farage's unofficial 'Grassroots Leave' (also backed by Left/Right populist, George Galloway and Labour MP, Kate Hoey) - had the support of large sections of the Right wing dominated press, the new Hard and Far Right alternative online media, whilst the BBC continued to indulge Farage. Behind the scenes 'dark money' was being channelled from the Hard Right in the US. Public meetings supplemented the Brexiteers' media campaign, but these were less significant. They were not accompanied by much in the way of public demonstrations, which could attract some unsavoury forces. Farage prefers to deal with the Far Right as individual followers, rather than as publicly organised, unsavoury and threatening street forces.

So, if the Left Brexiters had been correct in their assessment of the possibilities of mounting a campaign, which could mobilise the working class, they would have organised large public meetings and demonstrations in working class Leave strongholds like Doncaster, Stoke, Sunderland and Merthyr Tydfil (and perhaps offered support to PbP for such activities in East Belfast). One is left with the distinct impression that they bottled out of making such links because they were well aware of who might turn up. Instead, Lexiters organised small meetings speaking mainly to themselves, mostly in what turned out to be

Remain-voting cities. So, they were doubly ineffective! A lot of their activity was taken up trying to persuade others on the Left what a good idea voting Leave was, and how Tory rule could soon come to an end.

### **g) The Lexiters' false arguments**

Most Left Brexiters argue that the EU is hard-wired neo-Liberal super-state, which cannot be reformed. But, under the pressure of the EU's existing state members, it had already been 'reformed' from a Social Market EEC to a neo-Liberal EU. The main pressure for further 'reform' is from the Right Populists. They want a European confederation of existing member states, with new internal barriers to free movement, reduced access to welfare benefits across state boundaries and a curtailment of civil and human rights. Their new internal 'walls' are to be added to those external Schengen barriers directed against people from outside the EU.

Farage's 'Breaking Point' poster made it strikingly obvious that attacks on asylum seekers were central to the nature of the Right-dominated 'Brexit' campaign. This went along with other racist attacks on EU residents living in the UK, especially those from Eastern Europe. The Lexiters' argument that voting to Leave would be a protest against EU inhumanity towards external migrants and asylum seekers was extremely far-fetched. Those running the two main 'Brexit' campaigns wanted even higher walls and even less official concern over the plight of migrants and asylum seekers.

The brutal treatment of Greece in 2015 by the Troika (in which the ECB played a central role) was also raised. Yet, neither the UK government nor the City of London had ever raised any criticisms of this (far less provide some assistance). New Labour, followed by the Con-Dems, had pursued near identical politics. Gordon Brown had declared Iceland to be a 'terrorist state, because its government had not gone along with converting Icelandic banksters' private debts into public debts to satisfy the City of London banksters. And, alongside the Troika's own vicious Austerity package, the UK government fully backed the Anglo-Irish Bank, the Royal Bank of Scotland and the Bank of Scotland in their demand that the Republic of Ireland government enforce evictions upon mortgage defaulters. They had become victims of these banks' insatiable greed. The Left Brexiters argument that the UK, if no longer an EU member state, would end Austerity was a bad joke.

The dominant Right Brexiteers' alternative to the EU is a British economy dominated by the UK state-backed City of London. But this has its own centuries long brutal record and has been involved more recently in imposing



Structural Adjustment Programmes upon imperially dominated states across the globe, and Austerity in the UK and elsewhere within the EU. The Left Brexiteers provided a lot of evidence concerning the anti-democratic institutions and the influence of corporate lobbying upon the EU. But the same failings can be directed against the Right Brexiteers' alternative - the UK state - only with knobs on. The UK also has an army, police force and reactionary judiciary to back it up.

For the European capitalist classes, the EU's 'internationalism from above' was designed to encourage the free flow of capital and profits, with the internal free flow of labour following from these. And when the 2008 crisis came, its leaders soon gave up any pretence that the EU was for the many not the few. Up to this point, it had been economic growth, which gave the impression that living standards could continue to improve, particularly for migrant workers. And EU member state citizens also included those from Asia, Africa, Latin America, the Caribbean and Oceania who, being from former colonial migrant families, were now French, Dutch, Spanish or Portuguese citizens. EU migrants took up jobs, studentships and formed personal relationships, across the existing EU state boundaries. In the process, they have created a new 'internationalism from below' legacy, leading to hybrid or hyphenated European cultures. And, particularly when it comes to taking industrial action, some of these migrants have been to the forefront of militant action, e.g. Latin American cleaners in London.

This 'internationalism from below' has also proved attractive to many from non-state nations or the part-nation (partitioned Ireland) within the EU. Many of their residents who would rather consider themselves to be outward looking Scottish, Welsh, Irish, Catalan, or Basque-Europeans than provincial Scottish, Welsh, 'Ulster'-British or Catalan and Basque-Spanish. And even in some existing EU member states, e.g. Ireland and Greece, the rise of Right Populism has made being an Irish-European or a Greek-European more attractive than being socially conservative, ethnic, Catholic Irish, or equally social conservative, ethnic Orthodox Greek, with all the experiences these have been associated with.

This point was completely lost on the Lexiters, who argued in 2015 that the Greek working class should support Grexit, in response to the ECB's draconian Austerity measures. The incoming Left Populist, Syriza government (considerably to the left of Corbyn) organised a referendum in June 2015, calling on people to reject the ECB's demands. The Greek working class led the wider Greek people in voting 'Oxi', or a decisive 'No', by 61% to 39%. The Left Grexiters anticipated Syriza leader, Alexis Tsipira's climb down. But in contrast to their earlier participation in organising mass opposition to G8 conferences and the war in Iraq, they did not mobilise international support for

the Greek ‘Oxi’ voting working class. They confined their activity to abstract propaganda directed at the EU and Syriza. Following the climbdown of the Syriza government the Left Grexiters awaited the Greek general election in September 2015 to make political gains.

But far from making a political breakthrough, the Left Grexit Antarsaya (which included the SWP’s fraternal organisation) only increased its vote by 0.17% giving it a 0.85% vote share. The even more anti-EU Greek Communist Party increased its vote share by 0.08% giving it 5.6%. The most vehement Grexit advocates were the Far Right, Golden Dawn. Their vote increased by 1.1% bringing them up to up 7%.<sup>21</sup> But even pro-EU Tsipira’s Syriza and breakaway Popular Unity were able to get 35.5% and 2.9% of the vote respectively. Whatever a battle-hardened Greek working class thought about the ECB and the EU bureaucracy, the prospect of political isolation (given the Greek military junta record from 1967-74) and economic isolation (given the particularly backward nature of the economy before EEC membership in 1981) was distinctly unappealing. This was especially the case with younger Greeks, who often migrated to EU member countries for jobs and educational opportunities.

By 2016 in the UK, those advocating a Left Brexit showed a disregard for the reactionary unionist offensive, soon to be joined by a rising cross-state, Right Populist offensive, with its powerful US corporate and hedge fund backers. The Left Brexiters’ approach became strongly associated with a Socialist nostalgia, looking back, somewhat uncritically to post-1945 Labour or Old Labour in the 1970s heydays of British working class struggle. Should any of those Left Brexiters have read or re-read the section in Marx’s *Communist Manifesto* entitled *Reactionary Socialism*,<sup>22</sup> they should be able to recognise themselves as its latest manifestation.

#### **h) The political options open in the run-up to the 2016 EU referendum**

It soon became clear that, because of Corbyn’s political shortcomings, associated with his lack of appreciation of the real nature of either UK state or the EU treaty-based alliance, there was no prospect of Socialists pushing the Labour Party into a mass active abstention campaign in the 2016 EU referendum. Instead here were now three political options.

The first was to resort to an abstract propagandist abstention campaign. There is a long history of this approach amongst small Socialist sects. Neo-Liberals, Right Populists and indeed Social Democrats are all supporters of capitalism so, under Socialist sect thinking, it makes little difference which particular political

course these political forces are asking backing for. They are all to be rejected. Like earlier 'true believer' Christian sects, they think that the wider world will eventually 'see the light', spurred on by their tracts and select gatherings.

The second approach was to see Brexit as a fundamental challenge to a neo-Liberal ruling class and its party of first choice – the Tories. This meant welcoming the surge in anti-Establishment, anti-EU feeling, whilst overlooking the fact that this included such Establishment figures as Nigel Lawson, Jacob Rees-Mogg, Boris Johnson and plenty of other Tories. Expecting a 'No' vote to lead to the defeat of the Tories, this section of the British Left accepts that the UK state is an adequate framework for winning significant reforms (leading eventually to British socialism). Looking back once more to the 1970s 'glory days' of working class struggle, the British Left overlooked the UK's simultaneous 'dirty war' in Northern Ireland within the state's own boundaries. Many of those senior officers in the armed forces and security services went on to give their backing to Margaret Thatcher. When elected in 1979, she extended the full-blown ruling class offensive against the British working class.

The third approach was to counter the EU bureaucracy's increasingly narrowly drawn 'internationalism from above' with a European-wide 'internationalism from below' campaign. This was now Marx responded to the rising capitalist classes' attempts to create new larger capitalist states, the better to exploit their growing working class. Marx's politics were built not by looking to a nostalgic past, but to those sections of the new working class that the political situation had created. He worked with the internationalist Fraternal Democrats and helped form the internationalist Communist League, to develop an 'internationalism from below' response across Europe (and beyond).

Since the 1970s, the European ruling classes have been implementing their own 'revolution from above'. But since the 2008 Crisis they have become divided over how to deal with a latent 'revolution from below'.<sup>23</sup> In 2016, the Socialist potential to take on the divided ruling classes lay not in existing states, but in those EU migrant workers and their organisations in the frontline of the Right Populists' offensive. Such a campaign could also involve other, already more politically aware Socialists and workers in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland/Ireland, who think and are prepared to fight in outward looking European-wide terms. And it would also include those from non-state nations, e.g. Scotland and Catalunya, denied the right of self-determination by their existing states, or by the EU bureaucracy based upon these states.<sup>24</sup> And if these political forces could have been brought together, then important sections amongst women, LBGT, welfare recipients, minority language speakers and asylum seekers, who are in the longer term and shorter sights of the Right, could also have been brought into a campaign of active solidarity.

This meant mounting an all-islands and cross-Europe, ‘internationalism from below’ campaign to vote ‘Remain’. This was to oppose the reactionary unionists’ and growing Populist Right’s drive. They want to centralise the UK state, further hollowing out its limited democratic features. They want to undermine the rights of non-UK EU residents, especially migrant workers and asylum seekers. Opposing the Right on these two fronts would have been the best way to have taken the Remain campaign out of the hands of the, neo-Liberal Remainers. Their campaign was based on a very limited, self-serving ‘internationalism from above’ alliance focussed upon the EU bureaucracy and appeals to an increasingly jaded, Barack Obama and Hilary Clinton-led Democrat government in the USA.

Why did a Left Remain campaign not emerge until 2018? In 2016, Socialists operated in the immediate political context of the IndyRef1 set-back, and the completely unexpected revival of Left social democracy. This led many, who might have been attracted to an alternative, immediate, social republican, ‘internationalism from below’, Left Remain alliance to look elsewhere. Some opted for the socially liberal SNP, others for the now Corbyn-led Labour Party, and yet others to sympathetic NGOs, to take a lead, against the Right Populist offensive. So, it wasn’t until 2018 that the first signs of an independent Left Remain campaign emerged.

This is not to blame many who became involved in the earlier politically disparate Remain campaigns, but to highlight the failings of those independent Socialist organisations which had jumped on to the Right-led, Brexit bandwagon in 2016; just as others had also jumped on to the SNP-led ‘Yes’ bandwagon between 2012-14. But in making the latter choice, no matter how ineffective they were in the longer term, independent Socialists at least contributed to the wider campaign for Scottish self-determination. But those taking the Left Brexit option unwittingly reinforced the position of the Hard Right who given their long history of Europhobia and the existing international context, were always going to be Brexit’s leaders.

**i) From 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2016 to 8<sup>th</sup> June 2017 – A victory for the Left or the Right?**

On June 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2016, the Left Brexiters got ‘their’ victory. 51.9% had voted Leave. Even the Right was somewhat taken aback by its victory. The Left Brexiters initially had the streets to themselves, if they had chosen to organise celebratory demonstrations and publicly fight for a Lexit version of Brexit. The organised Far Right was still trying to assess its new opportunities, no doubt

welcoming the rise in racist attacks. Brexit's political climate had already affected people beyond the organised Hard and Far Right. Dagmara Przybysz, a schoolgirl who had suffered racist bullying, committed suicide on May 17<sup>th</sup>, 2016. Jo Cox, Labour MP and asylum rights campaigner, was murdered by a lone fascist on 16<sup>th</sup> June. Arek Jozwik was murdered by a teenager for speaking Polish on Harlow's streets on 27<sup>th</sup> August. The police acknowledged a spike in racist attacks.

The British SWP's response was to revive its front organisation, 'Stand Up to Racism' (SUtR). It concentrated its attention on the Far Right, and completely ignored both the state racism and the effects of the Brexit campaign. Indeed, one of its main aims was to recruit new members to the SWP from amongst the Corbynistas by inviting Corbyn to a SUtR conference in October. Clearly, this meant keeping shtum over Corbyn and his close allies' complicity in letting the Tories get away with the restricted EU referendum franchise, the draconian 2016 Immigration Act, and indeed the Brexit vote itself.

Cameron resigned after the official Remain defeat, but the Tories managed a fairly seamless transition to Brexit convert, Theresa 'hostile environment' May. Her own anti-migrant record made her an ideal choice for Tory Brexiteers. They always saw the imposition of a new gasterbeiter system of migrant labour control as one of their first jobs. And, when Donald 'Brexit plus, plus, plus'. Trump became president in January 2017, the main political pressure on May, came not from the now retreating neo-Liberal Remainers, and certainly not from the Left Brexiteers, but from the Hard Right European Research Group (ERG), and the Right Populists - Farage and Johnson.

May decided to cement her position by holding a general election in June 2017. At last the opportunity had arrived for the Left Brexiters to put forward their alternative. SP(E&W) and the British SWP had wanted the UK to leave the EU, so they should have been able to create some new version of TUSC/No2EU, or if mutual antipathy was too much, put forward their own candidates.<sup>25</sup> They had both forecast auspicious post-Leave political conditions. But instead of increasing the 135+ candidates in the 2015 Westminster general elections, SP(E&W) and the SWP put up exactly 0 candidates in the 2017 election!

But worse, in the one place where there was an independent Socialist candidate, Northern Ireland, the PbP vote fell back in West Belfast from 7,854 in 2015 to 5509 in 2017. This was preceded in March 2017 by the PbP's share of the vote in West Belfast falling from 22.9% to 12.2%.<sup>26</sup> PbP had adopted the Brexit stance of the British SWP in Northern Ireland and extended this to Irexit in the Republic of Ireland. In Northern Ireland, the most significant political forces backing Brexit are the DUP, TUV and the 'ex'-Loyalist paramilitaries. They

want a hardened border to return to a pre-‘parity of esteem’ ‘Ulster’. There is also a group amongst the dissident Republicans, who look forward to the creation of border posts as an opportunity to restart a military campaign directed at these and the personnel manning them. Perhaps, not surprisingly, the PbP’s Brexit/Irexit proved not to be a vote winner in the 2017 Northern Ireland Assembly or Westminster general elections.

Instead of offering an independent Socialist, Left Brexit alternative, both SP(E&W) and the British SWP now retreated behind Corbyn’s decidedly fuzzy social democratic Brexit. The independent Socialists’ abandonment of the political field had already been highlighted in the slightly earlier 2017 local elections in England, Wales and Scotland. SP(E&W), SWP, LUP, SSP and RISE put up no candidates. The Corbyn-led-Labour Party, still lost 382 councillors and control of 9 councils. The Lib-Dems were unable to mobilise any more support on a pro-EU basis. They were still reeling from their participation in the 2010-2015 Con-Dem coalition. They lost 47 councillors. Although, local issues can often displace wider political issues in such elections, May’s Tories were already preparing to wipe-out UKIP by taking over much of its political agenda, under the slogan ‘Brexit means Brexit’. UKIP lost all but 1 of its 146 local councillors, whilst the Tories gained 563 (more from Labour than from UKIP), taking over a further 11 councils.

Corbyn, though, was unfazed by electoral setbacks<sup>27</sup> and entered the June 2017 Westminster general election campaign with his Left social democrat manifesto - *For the Many, Not the Few*. This failed to contest two key aspects of UK politics, which the Right had foregrounded – opposition to IndyRef2<sup>28</sup> (which now had political justification through the ending of ‘Better Together’s IndyRef1 promise to keep Scotland in the EU<sup>29</sup>); and opposition to free movement of labour from the EU.<sup>30</sup> However, many independent Socialist organisations were quite prepared to overlook these and dress up those Left social democratic, socio-economic aspects of the manifesto, if not as Socialist policies, then as the best available transition to these.

SP(E&W)’s and the SWP’s failure to stand in the local elections a month earlier had no effect in preventing Labour’s drubbing. However, their now eager support, for Corbyn, along with the enthusiastic canvassing by many new Momentum activists (who included former TUSC members) did contribute to the unexpectedly good showing of Labour in the June 2017 general election. Labour increased its vote by 9.6% winning 30 new MPs, bringing it to a total of 262 to the Tories 317. Labour’s gains were nearly all in Remain voting seats and Labour actually lost 7 long-held seats in Leave-voting areas. Ironically, the Tories also increased their vote by 5.5%, but apart from the 7 local gains from

Labour, their voting gains came from UKIP who had no Westminster seats to win. The Tories lost 13 MPs.

However, the loss of an overt Tory majority was compensated by a reinforced conservative and reactionary unionist vote. This was decidedly hard Brexit and formed a coherent political block, especially when compared to the divided Remain and the soft Brexit camps. In Scotland, the Tories increased their vote by 13.7% and gained 12 seats giving them a total of 13 MPs. They replaced Labour as the main unionist party. The DUP increased its vote by 10.3%, gaining 2 seats to bring them to 10 MPs and the majority of Northern Ireland seats at Westminster. They were soon to form another block in the reactionary unionist hard Brexit alliance. Ironically, despite the Tories increasing their vote in Wales by 6.3%, they lost 3 MPs.

Rather than experiencing a real setback, as a result of the loss of an overall Tory majority, the wider conservative and reactionary unionist Brexiteers performed considerably better than the Lib-Dem and constitutional nationalist clear-cut Remainers. The Lib-Dems' vote declined by 0.5% although their number of MPs rose from 8 to 12. The SNP vote declined by 13.1% and their number of MPs fell from 56 to 35, the largest loss to the clear-cut Remain camp. Plaid Cymru's vote declined by 1.7%, although it now held 4 seats, a gain of 1 from the Lib-Dems. But this was a move within the Remain camp. Sinn Fein's vote increased by 4.9% and their number of MPs rose from 4 to 7, but again this was largely a move within the Remain camp, as the SDLP lost its last 3 MPs.<sup>31</sup> Labour's apparent gains disguised the fact the party was completely divided, with its machine under the Right's control, and the majority of its MPs on the Right or Centre of the party, looking for the first opportunity to ditch Corbyn.

During the lead-up to the 2016 referendum, SP(E&W) and the British SWP had anticipated a major crisis for the Tory Party, leading to big advances for the Left, if there was a Leave vote. By 2017, SP(E&W) and the SWP had abandoned the electoral field altogether. And their hopes now lay in the Corbyn-led Labour Party. The next two years were to reveal whether it was the Tory Party or SP(E&W) and the SWPs' 'Socialist' substitute, Corbyn's Left social democratic Labour Party, which faced the biggest crisis in the ongoing 'Great Moving Right Show'.

#### **j) 'Independent' Socialists and 'Oh Jeremy Corbyn'!**

The overwhelming majority of the Tories were committed to some form of Brexit, with harder Brexit support increasing amongst the party members. They were also now committed reactionary unionists. Most of all they were

encouraged by the growing backing of Trump's Right Populists. The Labour Party however was stretched out along a pro-Remain to Hard Brexit spectrum and from liberal, through conservative to reactionary unionism.

The Hard Right did not blink an eyelid at the Tories' 2017 electoral setback, confident that Labour divisions and Labour Brexiteers would help them overcome the shrinking band of committed neo-Liberal Remainers at Westminster. Johnson's backers and the ERG decided not to bother much about Corbyn's 'soft' Brexit alternative which, given that it was never made very clear, is not surprising. They decided to push May and the wider Tory membership into an unquestioning backing for a hard Brexit.

There was no such political coherence in the Labour Party. Both the Remain and Leave camps within Labour were further divided into Right and Left. Even, many independent Socialists were cock-a-hoop at Corbyn's electoral advance, cheering him on or offering 'useful' advice from the outside. 'Oh Jeremy Corbyn' cries and T-shirts became 'de rigeur' for many. Some abandoned their sects or their main front organisation, TUSC and joined the Labour Party and Momentum.

The majority in Momentum was in the Remain camp but, holding longstanding economic politics, this was secondary to building electoral support for the socio-economic policies of *For the Many, Not the Few*. The numerically smaller but more influential 'British Jobs for British Workers' UNITE officials and their former CPB allies were in the Leave camp. Leaving the EU was more central to their old Bennite, neo-Keynesian, national statist, Alternative Economic Strategy politics. These had had the support of many amongst Left Labour, the CPGB and the *Morning Star*. This wing of Corbyn's support inherited its politics from of the later 1970s and early 1980s. Corbyn, perhaps thought that following the 2016 Brexit vote, and Labour's increased 2017 election vote, that these days had returned. So, he dropped his lukewarm Remain stance from the 2016 referendum campaign and committed himself to the Leave camp. He had taken on board the 4Ms to shield himself from any Remainers, Left or Right.

But, unlike the Tory Right who were more than prepared to use outside parties and purge their own MPs to create a united party, to win elections, Corbyn believed that the only way to win elections was to keep the Left, Centre and Right united. This meant either dropping anything too controversial or devising 'clever' political fudges to cover up deep divisions. And most people, who had wanted a Labour victory in 2017, had to vote for Right and Centre MPs, who were bitterly hostile to Corbyn and Left social democrat politics.



Now any independent Socialist would be well aware of the dangers presented by Right and Centre Labour MPs. These people did not hide their animosity and resorted to outside Right-wing forces, e.g. the Right-wing press, Israeli state-backed Zionists, and the Tory-led Jewish Board of Deputies to mount their full-frontal attacks. But both longer-term and recent history should have also warned independent Socialists to identify those Left-talking, Right walking, politicians and trade union leaders who would stab you the back.

Experience of John Lansman's proprietary control over Momentum would be new to many recent members. His methods were partly disguised by his conversion of Momentum into a Corbyn fan club. But hundreds of thousands of workers had had direct experience of McCluskey's 'Grand Old Duke of York' industrial action; whilst others, including UNITE's Grangemouth refinery members, sacrificed to advance McCluskey's Labour Westminster ambitions, had paid with their jobs, pay and conditions. McCluskey, and other 'sham' Left trade union leaders were looking to a Corbyn-led Labour government to bring back the glory days of tea and sandwiches at no.10 under Old Labour in the 1970s, only now it would be prosecco and canapés.

There was an organised opposition to McCluskey's 'sham Left' politics in the form of Grassroots UNITE. Jerry Hicks won 78,819 votes or 35.5% of the total when standing against him for general secretary in 2013. Since then, McCluskey's self-serving and bureaucratic practices have led to a decline in direct union participation and the emergence of a Labour Right, which tried take advantage of the mounting disillusion in the union, peddling racism. In the 2017 general secretary election, the Right candidate gained 41.3%, to 'sham Left' McCluskey's 45.5%, with a much-reduced electorate.<sup>32</sup> McCluskey bowed to racist (and other Right wing) pressure.

In the 2017 general secretary election, some former members, and others still in 'independent' Socialist organisations, gave their backing to McCluskey. This despite Grassroots UNITE putting up a rank and file candidate, Ian Allinson. Ian was a worker (not an official) and had a fighting record. He put forward principled anti-racist and pro-migrant policies. In the face of the Right, 'sham Left' and 'independent' Socialist opposition, Allinson gained 17,143 votes, 13.2% of the total.<sup>33</sup> This is a far better basis for building a genuine independent Socialist challenge than any 'independent' Socialists' petty politicking and manoeuvring. This may advance careers for a few but will bring no real gains for the many.

**k) Corbyn and the 'independent' Socialists unwittingly help Boris Johnson to victory**

An earlier article<sup>34</sup> outlined how Corbyn and his immediate allies helped to pave the way for the election of Boris Johnson as Tory leader on July 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2019 and win an electoral victory for a full-blown Right Populist Tory government on December 12<sup>th</sup>.

Many of those new, especially younger, members drawn to the Labour Party were to the Left of Corbyn. They wanted to increase democracy in the party by introducing mandatory selection. Many Labour MPs think they are entitled to a job for life, enjoying pay levels and pension rights way above the majority of their constituents, drawing exaggerated and sometimes fraudulent expenses, and receiving corporate hospitality from sponsors or lobbyists, paving the way for well-paid sinecures, consultancies or post-Westminster jobs. Mandatory selection would arouse the fury not only of the Labour Right and Centre (and indeed some Left Labour MPs), but other Right politicians and the Right-wing media. But taking this head-on could win over many who had become very jaded over MPs feeling of entitlement and the corruption.

But it wasn't the Right who killed off mandatory section when it was raised at the 2018 Labour Party conference. Corbyn, with the assistance of McCluskey and the rest of his 4M coterie, followed by the backdown of John Lansman, leader of Momentum, was able to get this proposition dropped. A byzantine trigger ballot system was substituted. This was grist-to-the-mill to these seasoned bureaucrats, but did it not upset the Right too much. They were pushing their own top-down bureaucratically imposed mandatory reselection through trumped-up 'anti-semitism' charges. By October 17<sup>th</sup>, 2019, the *Guardian* was able to report that, "The trigger-ballot battles taking place across the country have allowed the Labour leader's critics to come out largely unscathed and better organised than ever."<sup>35</sup>

Clearly, any independent minded Socialists within the Labour Party were going to have to organise independently of the two wings of the 'sham Left'. However, the main attention of 'independent' Socialist organisations outside the Labour Party lay elsewhere. Having given up on their own independent Brexit challenges, they now became cheerleaders for the 'sham Left' Brexiteers in the Labour Party. They may have held some doubts, but these were set aside, when McCluskey insisted there were only two wings in the Labour Party, the Right Remainers and the Left Leavers – so back me.

However, there were Right and Left Leavers and Right and Left Remainers in the Labour Party. And McCluskey was prepared to work behind-the-scenes with Right Leavers who looked to the Tories to deliver Brexit. On September 1<sup>st</sup>, 2019, he revealed that he would support Right Leavers led by Stephen Kinnock

MP, against any threat of de-selection if they voted for Tory Leave proposals.<sup>36</sup> The issue that united McCluskey's 'sham Left' and Right Leavers was opposition to free movement of labour from the EU. The Eurosceptic, neo-Blairite and Blue Labour Right were also opposed to this.

If those more independent minded Labour Left members had been defeated by the Right and 'sham' Left at the 2018 Labour conference, some Left Remainers organised themselves for the 2019 conference. This time the conference passed the motion, which overturned *For the Many, Not the Few* ending of the free movement of labour. It also called for the closing down of detention centres and the extension of the vote to all migrants resident in the UK.<sup>37</sup>

The 'sham Left' and the Right were furious. McCluskey saw his key role, between September and any future general election, as being to marginalise this. He used his influence over the drafting of Labour's new manifesto, *Its Time for Real Change*,<sup>38</sup> to drop this conference policy. Instead, the manifesto advocated "a work visa system". This is another version of the *gastarbeiter* system advocated by Johnson. Bowing to Right pressure has been a constant hallmark of McCluskey's politics.

A significant number of those who had joined the Labour Party developed a almost messianic belief that Corbyn could lead them to the *Time for Real Change* 'promised land' following Labour's victory on December 12<sup>th</sup>. But few independent Socialists could have believed that these Corbynistas' dream of an outright election victory was going to happen on December 12<sup>th</sup>. A hung parliament was their best hope.

In the event of this, the most important thing for any genuinely independent Socialists was to prepare those less naïve Labour members for what was in store, following such an event. Corbyn would be under constant attack from the Right, inside and outside the party. They would ratchet up their British chauvinism and anti-migrant racism (under the cover of a stepped-up bogus 'anti-semitic' campaign). Meanwhile British capital, headed by the City of 'London, would resort to its own 'industrial action' – runs on sterling, investment strikes, and attacks on workers' jobs, pay and conditions. They would hope to bring about a National government of Right and Centre Labour, the Lib-Dems and the Tories (with Northern Irish politicians added on, if necessary, to make up the numbers).

Independent Socialist organisations like SP(E&W) and the British SWP could anticipate a Corbyn government under attack. Indeed, they looked forward to some 'action'. They would call on trade unions to help a Corbyn government stick to his manifesto commitments by taking industrial action. But the problem with this is that 'sham Left' leaders, like McCluskey, or Centre and Right leaders currently lead these unions. They would be pulling out all the stops to

prevent their members 'from rocking the boat'. And in this, going by the previous experience of their relationship, Lansman would bow to McCluskey. This would lead to Momentum either strongly backing the trade union leaders' stance or offering some half-hearted apologetics.

Therefore, the first part of any independent Socialist strategy, would have been to identify Labour candidates, who would publicly declare they would stand by conference policy on free movement, oppose the 'anti-semitic' witch-hunt, support the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions Campaign to help enforce Palestinian self-determination, and support the Scottish people's right to hold to exercise self-determination through a referendum. Whatever labels Left Labour candidates like to give themselves - Left social democrat or Socialist - failure to publicly support such basic internationalism and democratic rights would reveal that, in the face of the pressing UK-wide, international and national issues, such people would be on the other side. But those who did sign up, no matter how few, could form an important part of a future genuinely independent Socialist organisation.

And another important area where independent Socialists should be organising now is in trade unions, in opposition to both Right and 'sham Left' leaders. McCluskey's tenure as UNITE general secretary has led to an increase in the strength of the Right. He will be retiring in the next 2 years. He should be replaced by a rank and file worker, and not by either a Right, or another 'sham Left' official, who has been groomed to replace him. Genuine independent Socialists should not be bulldozed into voting Broad Left ('sham Left') to keep out the Right. All that 'sham Left' trade union officials' incumbency does is let the Right increase its influence due to the resulting disillusionment amongst the membership. In contrast, rank and file politics represent the republican sovereignty of the members in their workplaces over the 'crown' powers of the union bureaucrats in their HQs, hiding behind the bogus 'parliamentary' sovereignty of the union conference.<sup>39</sup>

But the important feature about such a genuinely independent Socialist approach, either to Westminster politics, or trade union politics, is that it contributes to building up a genuine independent Socialist organisation. In the December 12<sup>th</sup> Westminster general election, such an approach would not provide many candidates, whom genuine independent Socialists could campaign for. Many of those living in highly varied constituencies, without such a choice, e.g. in Scotland, Welsh-speaking Wales, Northern Ireland or Brighton Pavilion, would not surprisingly give their vote, either in hope, or for purely tactical reasons, to others.<sup>40</sup> This is not something to be criticised but is a reflection of independent Socialists' own current weak position.

But the best thing about an independent Socialist approach, which concentrated its attentions on those prepared to defy the Labour (and trade union) leaders, is that it was appropriate in the three possible post-election scenarios - a Corbyn minority led Labour government, a National government, or a Johnson-led Tory government. The first would soon buckle under attack, whilst either of the other two options would lead to an immediate ruling class offensive against workers, migrants and national self-determination, whilst bowing before US imperial demands.

### **1) Independent socialists after the December 12<sup>th</sup> general election**

On December 12<sup>th</sup>, Labour's vote share fell by 7.8% and its number of MPs decreased from 262 to 202. The Tories' vote share rose 1.2%, but its number of MPs increased from 317 to 365. The gap in the vote share was 11.4%, 32.2% for Labour and 43.6% for the Tories.<sup>41</sup> Not surprisingly a shattered Jeremy Corbyn offered his resignation, opening up the prospect of a new leadership campaign.

Subsequent disillusionment will lead to many one-time Corbynistas to drop out the Labour Party. Others will turn to Sir Keith Starmer, standing as replacement Labour leader. He has adopted a Centre position, to woo both sides, following Labour's defeat. Starmer had been a Right Eurosceptic Remainer, who wanted to continue David Cameron's policy of undermining free movement of labour from within the EU.<sup>42</sup> His post-election strategy depends upon the British ruling class getting sick enough of the Tories to consider allowing a tame Labour 'opposition' to take office. Meanwhile existing Labour MPs will line their pockets and advance their careers in and out of Westminster. And any workers or others taking action to defend rights will be subjected to official Labour attacks.

The Right will probably throw its weight behind Starmer, in the leadership election, although Lisa Nandy and Emma Thornberry are there as alternatives. Both the Labour Right and the Left, though, have billed Rebecca Long-Bailey as the 'Corbyn continuity' candidate. This is true in the sense that she is the 'Corbyn constant climb-down continuity' candidate. When pressured by the Tory-led Board of Deputies, she retreated even faster than Corbyn. She has signed up to their '10 Pledges'<sup>43</sup>, which give support to apartheid Israel, with its oppression and expulsion of Palestinians, Jewish supremacist nationality laws, and its demand for a witch-hunt against those supporting Palestinian rights and self-determination, especially the Jewish Voice of Labour.

But even more amazingly, Long-Bailey said, “she’d be prepared to use nuclear weapons”.<sup>44</sup> It was clear that even Corbyn was unhappy at being pressured by McCluskey to support Trident renewal. It’s hard to believe, despite his many other retreats, that Corbyn would ever have said he was prepared to use nuclear weapons. So, perhaps, Long-Bailey is more the ‘McCluskey continuity’ candidate! She received UNITE’s backing on 24<sup>th</sup> January.<sup>45</sup> But McCluskey’s dreams of prosecco and canapés at no. 10 had evaporated. Instead his partner, Karie Murphy, one Corbyn’s key 4Ms and election organiser was put forward for the House of Lords. Presumably she can invite a guest!

Long-Bailey is the latest ‘sham Left’ candidate. She clearly would not give a positive reply to three of the four questions suggested in section k) of this article. And her likely reply to the fourth and currently very relevant question, “Do you support the Scottish Parliament’s right to hold to exercise self-determination through a referendum?” has already been shown. Long-Bailey said she would not stand in the way of a second Scottish independence referendum, but added that, “I’m fully committed to the union and I don’t think that should be shaken in any way”<sup>46</sup> – truly the voice of the British Left!

There are no Labour leadership candidates<sup>47</sup> who would strengthen the position of Left social democrats, never mind Socialists, within the party, and certainly not within wider society. Those ‘independent’ Socialists who think that their time should be spent trying to prop up a social democratic party which is most likely to decline, like many of its European counterparts,<sup>48</sup> are acting as a barrier to the creation of a genuine socialist republican organisation, on an ‘internationalism from below’ basis across these islands in the face of Johnson’s Right Populist government. It does have a united, top-down reactionary unionist ‘internationalism from above’ strategy across the UK, which also extends to the Republic of Ireland.

### **m) Independent Socialists in Scotland and Northern Ireland/Ireland**

Looking to Scotland and Northern Ireland, some independent Socialist parties have adopted other strategies. The SSP had opposed Brexit, and the illusions of the Lexiters, in the 2016 referendum campaign, because it correctly anticipated that these would strengthen the Right. However, the SSP did not look at the deeper issues raised – the anti-democratic referendum franchise which excluded EU residents and 16-18 year olds; the stepped-up state offensive against migrants shown by the 2016 Immigration Act; the UK-wide strengthening of the state; and the political consequences of the denial of the Scottish people’s opposition to leaving the EU. Nor does the SSP recognise the longer-term purpose of the Right Populists’ Brexit campaign.

Thus, following the 2016 referendum vote, the SSP came to accept that Brexit was something that was going to happen, and that the earlier this happened the better. The way would then be clear for a return to good old ‘bread and butter’ politics. But formally leaving the EU on January 31<sup>st</sup>, 2020, is only the beginning of the Brexiteers’ planned offensive. In a context of long-term negotiations with the EU (and a tense new deadline on December 31<sup>st</sup>), Johnson’s government intends to mount a proxy war (invoking World War 2, the White Cliffs of Dover, Spitfires, etc.), in which EU residents and migrant workers become ‘hostages’ and asylum seekers people to be repulsed. The national chauvinist and racist rhetoric will be stepped up even further. At the same time, Johnson is introducing a new Immigration Bill, which intends to create a hierarchy of rights of access and continued residency and will further strengthen the Right. So, unless the Brexiteers’ continuing offensive is opposed politically, any campaign confined to ‘bread and butter’ issues, will have a limited impact.

A UK, which has little bargaining power against the Germany/France-dominated EU, has a lot more leverage over the Republic of Ireland. This state is economically much more dependent upon the UK. Leo Varadkar, Taoiseach of the Republic of Ireland, had already bowed down to Johnson’s ‘Backstop’ deal in October. His government’s decision to include the Royal Irish Constabulary in the Republic of Ireland’s 1920-23 centenary commemorations may have proved ‘a bridge too far’.<sup>49</sup> Perhaps, he should have approached Boris Johnson first asking for a quid pro quo - a UK public commemorations of the setting up of the Irish Republic!

In the December 12<sup>th</sup> general election, Northern Ireland was the only place where independent Socialists stood candidates. People Before Profit (PbP) won 15% of the vote in West Belfast, a 5.6% improvement on their poor 2017 election result, after they had adopted Brexit/Irexit. But their vote fell back marginally in Foyle to 2.8%. But, as in the 2015 and 2017 Westminster general elections, PbP’s independent Socialist stance was way in advance of its recent IST sponsor - the British SWP. The SWP provided no independent Socialist challenge and backed Labour elsewhere in the UK.

PbP had stood in the Northern Ireland local elections, earlier in the year. It gained 5 councillors – 3 in West Belfast and 2 in Derry City. PbP did not stand in the EU-election, possibly to avoid any focus in its disastrous Brexit/Irexit policy, when it was standing in the local elections that month.<sup>50</sup> PbP, though, had already backpedalled on its open support for Brexit/Irexit. It came out instead against a Tory hard border. But this brought it into line with Sinn Fein,

SDLP, Alliance and some UUP supporters - so, no more accusations from Sinn Fein of siding with DUP, TUV, PUP and other Loyalists.

What this political ‘diplomacy’ amounted to is an effective retreat from constitutional politics in Northern Ireland. PbP opposes ‘sectarianism’, seeing itself standing against the ‘sectarian’ parties, e.g. the Unionist/Loyalist DUP, UUP, TUV, PUP and UKIP; and against the Nationalist/Republican Sinn Fein and SDLP. PbP supports trade union action, which can bring together Nationalist/Republican and Unionists/Loyalist workers. However, such a stance avoids any recognition of the constitutionally embedded bi-‘sectarian’ nature of the UK state’s continued presence in Northern Ireland, or its wider relationship to the UK’s unionist set-up.

Therefore, PbP did not use the December 12<sup>th</sup> general election as an opportunity to highlight the continued presence of 5000 non-Northern Irish, British troops, or the role of the MI5’s new purpose-built Northern Ireland HQ in Palace Barracks just outside Belfast. ‘The Brits’ - “they haven't gone away you know”! And the trade unions in Northern Ireland, both individually and through the Northern Ireland Committee of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (NIC-ICTU), are fully committed to upholding the existing constitutional order in Northern Ireland. NIC-ICTU hopes through ‘Fresh Start’ to mitigate the effects of UK-imposed Austerity, by pleading for more money and sharing out the cuts between the constitutionally recognised Nationalist/Republican and Unionist/Loyalist communities – a sure-fire recipe for stoking up ‘sectarianism.’

After the earlier setbacks, following its commitment to Brexit/Irexit, PbP has developed a method of survival. It has largely withdrawn from any attempt to address the major constitutional issues and concentrates on economic and social issues. This has led to a growing tendency to localism. The SWP(I) has moved away from its British SWP IST affiliates, and from being a party to becoming a movement. SWP(I) has become the Socialist Workers Movement (SWM), which, in effect, means acting as a think-tank for PbP. Even under the IST (in reality British SWP) auspices, SWP(I) and PbP kept politics in Northern Ireland separate from politics in the rest of the UK. This mirrors the UK state’s arms-length constitutional relationship. But in making a necessary break from the politically sectarian British SWP/IST, a PbP that has internationalist aspirations, would need to develop a socialist republican ‘internationalism from below’ approach, to avoid a further slide into localism.<sup>51</sup>

The SP(I) front organisation in Northern Ireland, the partitionist, Cross Community Labour Alternative (CCLA) gave its backing to an independent Labour candidate, Caroline Wheeler. The British Labour Party had suspended her for trying to organise the party in Northern Ireland. She stood in Fermanagh



and South Tyrone and gained 1.5% of the vote.<sup>52</sup> CCLA's existence has very much been tied up to the rise of Corbyn in the Labour Party. CCLA has pushed itself as the representative of the absent Labour Party in Northern Ireland. Now that the Corbynista project is in decline, the SP(I) could well retreat back to trade unionism, the one arena which is organised on a cross community basis, provided that constitutional politics are kept at arms-length.

And like the British SWP and SWM, the SP(I) has faced a split, which is reflected in the SP(E&W)-controlled Committee for a Workers International. Paul Murphy, SP(I)'s one-time MEP and TD, has formed new party, RISE<sup>53</sup> - Radical, Internationalist, Socialist, Environmentalist, in the Republic of Ireland.<sup>54</sup> As with the British SWP and now the Irish SWM/PbP, such fragmentation could accentuate a localism, which is already a marked characteristic of the SP(I) which is partitionist in practice.

However, for any independent Socialist organisation committed to Irish reunification, Sinn Fein badly exposed its own strategy. This is dependent on the Republic of Ireland government. In August 2019, Conor Murphy, Sinn Fein MLA for Newry and Armagh, said that "Irish interests will be defended, not by Westminster, they will be defended by the Irish government, by the European Union {and} by the Americans on Capitol Hill"<sup>55</sup> – Leo Varadkar, Donald Tusk and Donald Trump! And despite all the talk of the December 12<sup>th</sup> general election in Northern Ireland opening the way for a reunited Ireland, the unionist vote (DUP, UUP, Alliance Party and Northern Ireland Conservative Party) Ireland was 59.5%, whilst the constitutional nationalist (Sinn Fein, SDLP, Aontu and Irish Freedom Party- IFP) pro-Irish unification Left (PbP) only came to 40%.<sup>56</sup>

And the share of the vote for party most committed to Irish reunification, Sinn Fein (but without a viable strategy to achieve it) fell back by 6.7%. Two other pro-unification parties, Aontu and IFP are socially reactionary and oppose EU membership, because the EU is too socially liberal! How pleased Ian Paisley would have been! But the growth in the vote for both the liberal unionist Alliance and the moderate constitutional nationalist SDLP is more likely to push Northern Irish politics back into the hands of Stormont and continued behind-the-scenes manipulation by the UK state. And PbP was the party, which made the earliest push for this Stormont orientation,<sup>57</sup> so it is unlikely to challenge this.

The one thing that is clear, though, is that the re-establishment of the Northern Ireland Executive and Assembly will not lead to any longer-term improvement for the vast majority. Johnson's new union-jack flagged funds and infrastructure projects, targeted at Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales and the North and

Midlands of England, are going to be somewhat stretched. They will be blown away in the event of another economic crisis. But whilst they are still being dispensed, they will be diverted away from the devolved parliaments and handed over to shady politicians with their personal business links, ensuring very little gets into the hands of local working-class communities.

So far, the most effective all-Ireland campaigns, supported in both communities in Northern Ireland, have been the widely supported social movements – over gay rights and abortion – fighting against socially conservative and reactionary values, both south and north of the border. Independent Socialists have been prominent in such campaigns.

But they are up against reactionary Nationalists who look to changing demographics to bring about a united Ireland through an eventual Catholic Nationalist majority in Northern Ireland. But they face the reality that sections of the Catholic middle class have benefitted from the post-GFA arrangements. The opening up of the Police Service of Northern Ireland to Catholics/Nationalists, in the absence of many other jobs for workers, will also change it into something more like the old pre-partition Royal Irish Constabulary. This acted in the interests of both Unionist and Nationalist industrial owners and landlords against workers and peasants. So, these factors are more likely to reinforce support for the existing constitutional set-up amongst better-off sections of Catholics/Nationalists. However, amongst many of the young, there is still a cross community, cross border, appreciation of the need to challenge both traditional Catholic and evangelical Protestant social conservatism.

Migrants are another group, who have attracted hostility from both traditionalist Catholics and Protestants. And, migrant workers will attract the particular attention of the UK government in the context of a more significant border. Under Johnson's government this border will be hardened for people, at the slightest hint of 'illegal' cross border migration, even if goods, services (and of course profits) are allowed a more friction-free border crossing. Therefore, migrants have a particularly strong reason to oppose borders. This is why independent Socialists should be championing their case, particularly in the context of growing anti-migrant and Traveller feeling in Ireland.

And there is also the role of British (especially Scottish-based) banks in the ongoing housing crisis south and north of the border. This is another arena in independent Socialists could make more impact.

Looking to Stormont or the Dail to bring about Irish reunification represents a political dead-end. These two institutions are locked into a subservient role, the

first directly, the second indirectly, within the British imperial set-up. This is supported by the US and will likely soon be backed by the EU as part of any post-Brexit deal. Both the Irish government and the Northern Irish Executive continue to back partition, whatever modifications are found necessary to ameliorate or disguise its negative effects. The British ruling class cannot surrender any UK territory and maintain itself as an imperial (or ‘America First’/ ‘Britain Second’) contender on the world stage.

## **n) Conclusion**

The majority of the British ruling class are now backing Johnson’s Right Populist strategy, which clearly extends across these islands. Genuine independent Socialists need to match the territorial extent of their organisations, by adopting an immediate social republican, ‘internationalism from below’ strategy and organisation.

After a long internal struggle, the Radical Independence Campaign (RIC) has been reformed at a national level in Scotland. One immediate objective could be to approach ‘All Under One Banner’ (AUOB), which organises in Scotland and Wales. AUOB’s mobilising skills would be valuable for organising a march in London. This would demand the recognition of the right of self-determination, not only for Scotland, but for Wales and for a divided Ireland. RIC could form the ‘break-up of the UK’ and Scottish internationalist contingent.

The British SWP, even if for its own opportunist reasons, took a joint England/Scotland contingent on the AUOB march in Glasgow on January 11<sup>th</sup>. An open appeal to the Socialists in England to abandon their Left British unionist roots and join a London demonstration would represent a challenge to the only form of Britishness now sustainable in the current crisis-ridden world – Johnson’s reactionary Britishness - for the Crown, Union and Empire. Already English Scots for YES are welcome on AUOB marches in Scotland. And perhaps if enough people from the Scottish, Welsh, Irish and English Left could be attracted, RIC could be widened to cover the whole of these islands and given a new name - the Republican Internationalist Coalition.<sup>58</sup>

And fortuitously, Glasgow hosts the major COP26 Climate Change summit in November. AUOB is already committed to organising a major demonstration. But activists are coming from all over Europe. RIC was formed in the more immediately hopeful days of 2012. Its Scottish internationalism was reflected on its banner, ‘Another Scotland, Another Europe and Another World are Possible’. The continuing environmental degradation across the world; the rise of the Populist and Far Right in the EU member states; and the political

degradation of the UK state with its reactionary unionist politics and alliance with Trump's USA, has increased the sense of urgency. A key national democratic movement in Catalunya, has already taken the republican road in Europe, but confronts the repression of its own reactionary unionist state the still semi-Francoist, Castilian supremacist Spain. 'Another Scotland, Another Europe and Another World are now Necessary'.

**Allan Armstrong, 4.2.20**

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## References and Footnotes

<https://allanarmstrong831930095.files.wordpress.com/2020/01/the-end-of-shortlived-maybrynism/>

Indeed, many of these Socialists and Left social democrats equate capitalism with 'free markets' and socialism with nationalisation or public control, sometimes supplemented by various forms of workers' control. However, the essence of capitalism is wage slavery under which other forms of exploitation and oppression contribute to maintaining the system. What social democrats (and many independent Socialist organisations) want is for the majority of workers to move from their current 'field slave' status to 'house slave' status – with the state guaranteeing better wages, conditions and welfare rights, rather than the abolition of wage slavery and the full democratisation of the state to the point in which any necessary functions have been absorbed by society.

The last major independent Socialist electoral challenges took place in the late 1990s and early 2000s This were the heydays of the time of the Scottish Socialist Party and the Socialist Alliances in England and Wales. In the 2005 and 2010 Westminster general elections, the George Galloway-led Left populist, Respect also stood candidates.

The only other relatively equivalent and relatively significant Socialist party which did not join this wider pact, was Arthur Scargill's Socialist Labour Party. Despite its Socialist label, Scargill's personal domination of this party, like George Galloway's later personal domination of Respect, made the SLP more of a Left populist party. In the 2015 Westminster election, the SLP concentrated all its attention upon Wales, fielding 6 candidates there. It did have a position on the constitutional issue of further Welsh self-determination. It was opposed to such reform. Thus, the SLP offered a Left conservative unionist counterpart (getting 0.4 - 1.7% of the vote) to UKIP's Right conservative unionist challenge in these seats (which got 8.5% - 16.3% of the vote). However, the SLP did beat TUSC in the 2 seats where they stood against each other. It was maybe having some coherent (even if misguided) constitutional position, which helped in these 'two bald men fighting over a comb' politically sectarian electoral contests.

Individual members of the SSP had also participated in RIC. But the leadership paid far more attention to the official 'Yes' campaign, which it signed up to. This allowed

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its chair, Colin Fox, and others to speak at large official gatherings, with the immediate aim of party recruitment. A fuller engagement in RIC would have exposed new SSP members to a wider range of Socialist and Radical arguments. This is one reason why the SSP has always been wary about participation in autonomous organisations.

Sectarianism implies a religious struggle to establish a single form of religious practice within a state (a particular variety of ethno-cultural state). Nationality refers to a cultural or ethnic difference. Ethnic states organise themselves on the basis of constitutionally entrenched ethno-cultural differences; civic states on the basis of people who choose to live there and adopt that state's citizenship, But the constitutional divide in Northern Ireland is between the Irish and 'Ulster'-British (who do not see themselves as a separate nation, but merely a component part of a British 'nation'). Indeed, historically Protestant identities in Ireland have been fluid, with early colonists considering themselves to be English or Scots, then later becoming Anglo-Irish or Scotch-Irish, with some going on to become Irish (particularly amongst the United Irishmen). Following the United Irishmen's defeat most Protestants became Irish-British; then following Partition, 'Ulster'-British or Northern-Irish-British in Northern Ireland, or just Irish in the Republic of Ireland.

The other partners were the Socialist Party (I), which also gained 2 TDs, and the Workers and Unemployed Action (W&UA), which gained 1 TD.

The W&UA gained 1 TD, whilst the SPI(I)-PBP alliance breakaway, the United Left, also gained 1 TD. The Irish STV voting system is much kinder to relatively small political organisations, even after splits.

There is a theoretical underpinning for this approach to Unionism. Many Irish Socialists place their main emphasis upon the colonial aspect of Britain's relationship to pre-1923 Ireland, and the neo-colonial aspect of Britain's relationship to the Irish Free State (and later to the still partitioned Republic of Ireland). Certainly, the economic basis for the colonial nature of the relationship, inherited from the pre-1801, or pre-1829 Anglo-Irish Ascendancy, was never completely displaced following the Act of Union and Catholic emancipation. However, in its literal sense, the earlier mainly English and Scots colonial settlement had ended. It was replaced, particularly after the Act of Union, by the mass migration of the forcibly uprooted or starving Irish to Great Britain. The unionist nature of the state made this migration 'easier', even if the racist resentment the Irish faced was often more vitriolic than that experienced today by many migrants trying to cross the UK state's boundaries.

Following the 1801 Union, the colonial Anglo-Irish Ascendancy gave way to an indigenous Irish Unionism with a major reconfiguration of the now Irish-British sub-state's class basis and relationship to the UK. This change was powered by a rising industrial capitalist class (particularly in north east Ulster), which opposed Home Rule because it needed the numbers provided by an undivided Westminster supremacy to retain its control over Ireland. But the mainly agricultural and commercial Catholic capitalist class also supported a British-Ireland, under the Union and Empire, looking for Home Rule within this set-up. However, the UK's specifically unionist constitutional set-up gave the Irish Unionists (and later 'Ulster-

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Unionists) a decided advantage. And Westminster brought them into much closer contact with their unionist class cousins in England, Scotland and Wales. They saw undivided Westminster supremacy as a necessary buttress to the British Empire. This is why any fundamental challenge to 'Unionists' cannot be confined to Northern Ireland/Ireland. It must be part of an all-islands, republican 'internationalism from below' and wider anti-imperial challenge.

A genuine independent Socialist alternative would have been organising on an all-islands basis. The post-1997 liberal unionist 'Devolution-all-round' settlement with its Good Friday Agreement, including the British-Irish Council, is designed to create the conditions for maximum corporate profitability throughout these islands, in cooperation with the USA and the EU. The territorial basis independent Socialist organisation should at least match that of the political forces it confronts.

Ever since Partition in 1921, the large majority of Unionist in Northern Ireland have rejected a Northern Irish identity, considering themselves to be 'Ulster'-British. (Their 'Ulster' is also partitioned since 3 of the original 9 Ulster counties lie in the Republic of Ireland). The use of the term 'Northern Ireland' has been confined to the official UK state-backed bodies, and to the liberal unionist, Northern Ireland Labour Party (1924-87) and Alliance Party of Northern Ireland (from 1970).

'Dark money', probably originally sourced from the Hard Right in the USA, was channelled by the DUP to illegally finance the Brexit campaign in England:-  
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-44624299>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/election-2015-32302062>

Of course, if you are Black or Muslim then the UK state's everyday racism is much more visible.

The reactionary unionist vote went mainly to the DUP (25.7%), although UKIP did beat the TUV (on 2.3%), which stood 3 fewer candidates.

In Scotland, Tommy Sheridan's populist, Left nationalist Solidarity joined No2EU rather than the CPS. But Sheridan has also made an electoral deal with anti-Scottish independence, populist George 'Just Say Naw'. He is decidedly Europhobic.

Such politically unbalanced u Yes2/No2 couplets had a long tradition amongst British Socialists. In the run-up to the 1979 Scottish devolution referendum, the SWP came up with 'No to Devolution/Yes to Revolution'. The SWP got its 'No to Devolution', but instead of 'Revolution', it got Thatcher! This was an eerie precursor to 'No2EU/Yes2Democracy' which got its 'No2EU' in 2016, but instead of 'Democracy' got May then Johnson!

Left Leavers covers three distinct, if at times overlapping groups. The most influential group was to be found amongst the 'British Jobs for British Workers' trade union leaders e.g. Bob Crow (RMT) and Len McCluskey (UNITE), backed by the CPB. The SWP and its various spin-offs formed the Lexiters (Left Brexit). They tried to form another popular front ('Stop the War' had already brought these two groups together)

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with this group. They found it hard in the face of McCluskey and others' constant retreats before racism. SP(E&W) formed the Socxeters (Socialist Brexit). This was a classic SP(E&W) case of adding a 'Socialist' prefix to justify external support for a very non-Socialist, indeed anti-Socialist, Right-led, vote Leave.

There are a few, particularly from one-time official Communist parties, whether backed by the old USSR or China, who argue you can build Socialism in one country. Examples include Albania, North Korea and Kampuchea, which hardly form appealing precedents. Cuba, which has had to endure US-imposed economic isolation, sees this not as something to be celebrated, but campaigns to end such sanctions.

The 4Ms included Len McCluskey, his partner, Karie Murphy, and two ex-CP members, Seamus Milne and Andrew Murray

A badly mauled Syriza still went on to win the September 2015 general election. It implemented the ECB's draconian austerity package. So, the Greek Communist Party and Antarsaya had another four years before the 2019 Greek general election to persuade the Greek working class of the superiority of its Left Grexit politics. In the 2019 general election, the even more ECB-compliant, New Democracy ousted Syriza. But the pro-Grexit Greek Communist party vote share fell by 17% to 5.3% and Antarsaya's vote share fell by 0.45% to 0.4%. Revealingly, the only Left party to increase its vote was the pro-EU membership, but EU-leadership critical MeRA25, led by Yanis Variufakis. It gained 3.4% of the vote and 9 new MPs.

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<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/Manifesto.pdf> = p.28-9

<http://republicancommunist.org/blog/2016/10/18/the-reality-of-the-european-democratic-revolution/>

A key argument against those who argue that the EEC/EU automatically brought greater peace, was the EEC's silence in the face of the long 'dirty wars' conducted against the Irish and Basques seeking greater national self-determination by the UK and Spanish governments (both Right and 'Left'). So, although the EEC has had a Court of Justice, since 1952, it has been powerless to intervene when member states resorted to internal violent repression. The creation of the EU with its Charter of Fundamental Rights in 1990 has highlighted the inadequacies of an organisation based on existing states. On this basis, the EU backed the UK government in its opposition to Scottish independence. More recently the EU has been powerless in preventing the forcible repression of Catalan self-determination within Spain's state boundaries. This goes along with the EU turning its back on Right Populist, Eastern European governments' repression of minorities, e.g. Gypsies and migrants, and their curtailment of constitutionally independent judiciaries.

Their fraternal organisations, PBP (front for the SWP(I)) and SP(I) stood their own candidates in the 2014 EU election, when the SWP(I) and SP(I) had predictably fallen out. It was also revealing that the SWP(I) front organisation opted for a politically sectarian challenge to the incumbent SP(I) MEP, that cost him the seat. The principled thing to have done, would have been for a PBP candidate to stand in the Northern

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Ireland EU constituency, to emphasise its all-Ireland politics, as opposed to the partitionist politics of the SP(I).

The SP(I)'s partitionist front organisation in Northern Ireland, the Cross-Community Labour Alternative (CCLA), also stood in these two Northern Ireland Assembly elections (but not in the 2017 Westminster general election). Operating mainly out of the Unionist/Loyalist areas, the CCLA's votes' share, with 3 (2016) then 4 (2017) candidates ranged between 1.2% and 2.7%. So, it is less a significant organisation than the all-Ireland PBP, which mainly operates out of the Nationalist/Republican areas. In its two main bases PBP gained a vote share of 22.9% (2016), 12.2% (2017) in West Belfast and 10.5% (2016) and 10.7% (2017) in Foyle (Derry). CCLA has tried to present itself as a combination of the old Northern Ireland Labour Party (1924-87) and the local representative of the absent British Labour Party in Northern Ireland, especially since Jeremy Corbyn became leader.

This was little doubt because like most Socialists and Left social democrats this had been a common shared experience! In this at least Corbyn was hardened.

*The Extending Democracy* section of the *For the Many, Not the Few* on p. 102, was characteristically headed by a large union jack! - <https://labour.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/labour-manifesto-2017.pdf>.

Gordon Brown's 'Vow', although agreed by Cameron, had also promised 'Devo-Max'. But this had never been part of any written commitment, any more than Alex Salmond's 'Once in a generation' referendum statement had.

The *Immigration* section of *For the Many Not the Few* on p.28, stated categorically that "Freedom of movement will end when we leave the European Union" - <https://labour.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/labour-manifesto-2017.pdf>

One of these seats fell to the reactionary unionist DUP, but this was partially compensated by Sinn Fein taking another from the conservative unionist UUP (which was backed by the DUP)

One of the main ways UNITE grows in numbers is through McCluskey's 'imperial' takeover of other unions, offering their former officials' well-paid jobs. It's not so much 'One Big Fighting Union' that McCluskey seeks but one big fat pay cheque.

To its credit, this was one instance when the SWP stuck to its former independent Socialist politics and backed Ian Allinson. However, the *Socialist Worker* statement still wrote about McCluskey, "the towering figure on the Labour Left" and "McCluskey has to his credit put Unites' support behind anti-racist initiatives." Presumably this was designed to hold on to McCluskey's support for the SWP's front organisation 'Stand Up to Racism'. Through such arrangements, trade union officials get to burnish their Left credentials, in return for providing official cover for SWP fronts.

Allan Armstrong, *The End of Short-Lived Maybyrnism and the Victory of Full-Blown Right Populism? – the December 12<sup>th</sup> general election will decide:-*



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<https://allanarmstrong831930095.files.wordpress.com/2020/01/the-end-of-shortlived-maybynism-3.pdf>

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/oct/17/labour-trigger-ballot-deselection-campaign>

<https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2019/sep/01/unite-will-support-labour-mps-who-vote-for-a-new-brexite-deal>

<https://labourlist.org/2019/09/labour-conference-approves-motion-to-extend-free-movement/>

There were quite a number of other features of the *Its Time for Real Change* manifesto that independent Socialists should have questioned. Allan Armstrong, *The End of Short-lived Maybynism and the Victory of Full-Blown Right Populism? – The December 12<sup>th</sup> general election will decide*, section g:-

<https://allanarmstrong831930095.files.wordpress.com/2020/02/the-end-of-shortlived-maybynism.pdf>

This approach was developed particularly by the Building Worker Group and by Scottish Rank and File Teachers:-

<http://republicancommunist.org/blog/2019/07/16/brian-higgins/> and

<http://republicancommunist.org/blog/2011/02/11/report-of-the-third-global-commune-event/>

If there had been a genuine Socialist ‘internationalism from below’ alliance across these islands, it should also have been possible to devise appropriate demands for a wide political range of candidates in the SNP, Plaid Cymru, PBP, Sinn Fein, the Green Party of England and Wales and the Scottish Green Party.

A full analysis of the vote in each of the constituent units of the UK is made in the first part of this article:- <http://republicancommunist.org/blog/2020/01/24/the-impact-of-the-december-12th-general-election-across-the-constituent-parts-of-the-uk/>

42 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Keir\\_Starmer#Shadow\\_Brexit\\_secretary](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Keir_Starmer#Shadow_Brexit_secretary)

<https://www.thejc.com/news/uk-news/board-of-deputies-demands-labour-leadership-conrest-race-candidates-sign-up-to-pledges-antisemitism-1.495274>

44 <https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/politics/rebecca-long-bailey-says-shed-21230115>

45 <https://www.ft.com/content/9c164fca-3ed6-11ea-b232-000f4477fbca>

<https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2020/jan/12/rebecca-long-bailey-wants-to-abolish-the-house-of-lords-scottish-independence>

In the deputy leadership elections, Richard Burgon has refused to sign the Board of Deputies 10 questions. He is the one candidate who Socialists or Left social democrats within the Labour Party or affiliated trade unions could direct the four

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suggested questions to. If the Right take over though, it is unlikely that Burgon's party membership will go unquestioned.

Support for the Socialist Party of France in the French Legislative Assembly has declined from 29.4% in 2012 under Francois Hollande (in many ways politically similar to Jeremy Corbyn) to 7.5% in 2017. Support for PASOK in the Greek parliament has declined from 44% under George Papandreou (a slippery populist) in 2009 to 8% in 2019. The Spanish Socialist Workers Party (PSOE), under Pedro Sanchez, has been able to retain 28% of the Spanish electorate's vote and is currently in office. But this is because the Spanish ruling class tolerates the PSOE, because it is prepared to go along with the Spanish semi-Francoist state's Castilian supremacist basis. The PSOE upholds the legality of, and the draconian sentences imposed upon 12 Catalan political prisoners. The only European social democratic party that has bucked this trend is the Socialist Party of Portugal, currently in government with 36.3% electoral support and 108 out of 2230 Assembly of the Republic members (ARMs). But significantly, the PSOE government has only been prevented from moving further Right by the existence of independent Socialist parties – the Left Bloc (9.5% electoral support and 19ARMs) and the Communist Party (6.3% electoral support and 17ARMs).

<https://www.irishtimes.com/news/ireland/irish-news/ric-controversy-has-set-back-bid-for-united-ireland-says-varadkar-1.4134165>

In May 2019, PBP stood candidates both in the Republic of Ireland local elections and the EU elections. It lost 7 of the local councillors they had won in 2014, whilst its EU candidate's vote share fell from 6.8% to 3.0%.

Certainly, localist Socialist politics can be sustained for a lengthy period. Declan Bree was a founder member of Sligo/Leitrim Independent Socialist Organisation (SLIS) and became a town and county councillor on both in 1974. He has held these positions ever since, whether under SLIS, Irish Labour Party, Independent or Independents4Change colours. Similarly, Jim Bollan has been a West Dunbartonshire councillor who became the Labour council leader. But he resigned and has held his seat under Independent, SSP and today West Dunbartonshire Community Party colours. But neither national nor international Socialist organisations have ever been built on a localist basis.

This was in the same area where CCLA gained its first local councillor in the May 2019 local council elections. Gaining 1.4% first preference votes, the CCLA candidate benefitted from transfer votes, probably on a cross community basis. This is not something that happens on any significant scale in Belfast, the other place CCLA stood a candidate. Here, after receiving an initial 1.5% of the vote there were very few transfers (not even all the PBP vote, whose support in East Belfast is small)

RISE (Ireland) has obviously not looked into the sad fate of RISE (Scotland). It shared the same meaning for the last two initials – 'S' and 'E'. But in Ireland, the politically ambiguous 'Radical' takes the form of the more vacuous 'Respect', and the better 'Internationalism' takes the place of 'Independence'. RISE (Scotland) is no

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more, confined to a magazine and online *Conter*, which has no relationship to any wider political organisation.

Solidarity, the SP(I)'s renamed electoral front (the former AAA), PBP and RISE have come to an electoral deal for the general election in the Republic of Ireland on February 8<sup>th</sup> but will be competing against former comrades now in Independents4Change.

<https://www.theneweuropean.co.uk/top-stories/sinn-fein-on-brexite-and-absentionist-policy-1-6240398>

<http://republicancommunist.org/blog/2020/01/24/the-impact-of-the-december-12th-general-election-across-the-constituent-parts-of-the-uk/> - section g)

<sup>57</sup> <http://www.socialistdemocracy.org/RecentArticles/RecentTheWedeservebetterFantasy.html>

Well, whilst using the RIC initials of the Radical Independence Campaign would be a fitting tribute to RIC's republican and Scottish internationalist legacy, perhaps they would need to be extended to AIRIC – the All Islands Republican and Internationalist Coalition, given the connotations of RIC – the Royal Irish Constabulary – in Ireland!