

## Notes on WPB Forum June 29<sup>th</sup> 2013

### No2EU and the Socialist Alternative – A Report

*There were two speakers, so the meeting covered the EU first followed by discussion and after a break we heard from the second speaker on the wider global situation, again followed by discussion.*

*Given the nature of a forum I have tried to combine some similar points together to try and make the report less disjointed. This means that the points have not necessarily been written in the order spoken at the meeting. Some points are short and at some stage could be developed.*

No2EU has been revived at the instigation of the RMT and in the light of the election success of UKIP. There are two aspects to this strategy. Firstly No2EU will fight in the forthcoming European elections. Secondly there is an urgent need to change the mind of the TU movement about the EU. The attitude of the Trade Unions to the EU has deteriorated over the last few years, as it has lost sight of the nature of the problem. So there is a need to produce proper intelligence of the causes of the problems we are facing.

We were referred by the speaker to the new pamphlet produced by No2EU (see attached pdf) and this account includes some of the key points.

Unemployment across Europe is around 26 million – about the same as the entire working population of Britain - and this has been the case for many years as a result of neoliberal policies.

European leaders like Jaques Delors understood it was important to target the TUs. The EU was portrayed as a progressive antidote to the Tory govt and US imperialism. We could have US gangster capitalism or the soft cuddly EU version. Action (eg strikes, demos and general unrest) taken against EU policies was ignored by the media.

Our political leaders going back to Heath and Thatcher have been proponents of what was the Common Market. Thatcher ditched our exchange controls. When she opposed some of their policies she was got rid of.

Foot was also stabbed in the back and Kinnock joined the EU gravy train. Who are the commissioners – who has heard of Baroness Ashcroft?

The EU has always been portrayed as a very complex organisation. This has led to the grants being viewed as benefits, even though we contribute more to the EU and lose control of our expenditure.

We have the illusion of democracy in the EU Parliament but in reality they cannot legislate freely as everything is controlled by the Commission and a round table of industrialists who even have their own website.

These institutions have overseen policies such as the destruction of pensions, especially final salary pensions. They have overseen the reduction of employers' contributions while increasing those of the workers. They have liberalised pension funds and told all countries that they must report on progress. Meanwhile the unions have failed to look at the cause of the pension problem.

They have also been behind the attack on public services – the treaties are based on privatising public services and, for example, the end of local government. There is a refusal by many in the TU movement to believe that privatisation originates from EU directives. The RMT and the rail unions across Europe are fighting to retain national railways.

A new feature of the EU is the move to new trading agreements, promoting trade liberalisation. The US failed to dominate the world because the developing world has rejected their policies, so the new US/EU agreement is being put in place instead as a counter to this. It will lead to an open market and will threaten many institutions such as our health and education provision as well as possibly the BBC. For example Academy Trusts will be ripe for takeover by private US education providers.

The UKIP manifesto does not oppose the US/EU treaty and indeed UKIP would be happy with a similar UK/US treaty. They are not about trade barriers, but non trade barriers such as workers' rights and regulations. The regulation of fracking is an example, where US firms don't have to disclose information, but only work to 'set standards' which are not defined. Some US states are already derecognising unions. Lockouts have been used against, for example, utility workers and private companies exist to provide scab labour.

Now we see in Cyprus and Greece TU leaders are being faced with jail and/or anti strike legislation.

The US unions and the ETUC know what the dangers of an EU/US trade deal are but do not come out with a definite opposition – it is enough to be consulted.

Young people from places like Greece and Portugal are now leaving their countries in droves – a roaming army of unemployed, which is what capitalists want as it will help to bring down wages and conditions across Europe. The number of workers across Europe who are covered by collective bargaining has dropped from 80% to 20%. Marx's writing on immigration is worth rereading. Tebbit's 'on your bike' attitude is reflected in Merkel inviting foreign workers to Germany.

The TU strategy to combat this and the ensuing problems of racism is to suggest recruiting immigrants, fighting for higher wages and to train British workers. In a few cases such as the Olympics, unions like UCATT managed to hold a line on employment, training and using local workers, but it does not address the bigger picture.

There is still a fear in the left about seeming racist, so there is no discussion about the EU and workers' nationalism. It has proved difficult enough to fight austerity and there seems to be no forum to discuss the EU.

### **International situation 2013**

The world is overwhelmingly capitalist but is not longer dominated by one power – the US. This is because of their decline – both economic and 3 strategic defeats in war (Vietnam, Iraq, Afghanistan). They invaded Afghanistan and Iraq in part to overcome the blow to their prestige of their defeat by Vietnam. Also they wished to prove that their overwhelming military power could not be opposed and therefore their policies for the Middle East and the rest of the world had to be accepted by countries there or elsewhere. Neo-liberalism and US supremacy had to be accepted or it would be imposed. Their defeat in Iraq has in fact resulted in a strengthened and more

influential Iran in that region - the opposite of their intended result.

In the West financial capitalists still dominate and have become richer – hence neoliberalism and globalisation is still their dominant ideology and will not change without a big struggle. The 2008 financial collapse has not stopped the development of speculative capitalism. The dominant financial and transnational corporations demand neoliberal policy imposition by the US while denying it any resources through massive tax avoidance and financial bailouts. Their parasitism is now destructive of society and large parts of productive capitalism and state institutions. In crisis it does not reform but moves elsewhere like India. India's capitalism, like that of the West is increasing inequality and spawning billionaires at a great rate, which will eventually lead to a crisis.

The last financial crisis in the West is still unsolved – no real recovery in Europe or the US and a new one already brewing.

There are big threats to humanity, like climate change, which are largely ignored or made worse by capitalist speculation – for example on food, oil and other commodities.

Capitalism is discredited – seen as failed and having no moral authority, but the alternatives are not yet a powerful movement for change, although there are signs everywhere of embryonic change.

Where change erupts without socialist leadership, as in the Arab Spring, it deteriorates into civil war and stagnation, pointing the way to a renewed need for socialism.

### **Progressive Forces**

The few surviving socialist states – Cuba, Vietnam, North Korea and to a certain extent China, have created examples and valuable aids to nations exercising sovereignty and independence.

Without Cuba, apartheid would have taken two more decades to defeat. Their help to African liberation forces at Cuito Cuanavale in the defeat of the apartheid military force in Angola 25 years ago was key to the end of apartheid, as recognised by Nelson Mandela.

China provides indispensable economic trade, technology and finance to promote development outside control from the West and the IMF.

BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India and China) countries have provided a challenge to financial and political domination and often important decisions at the UN, denying imperialism a cover for their aggression.

Latin America is a beacon of independence and social progress but is primarily social democratic and with a relatively small GDP compared to the EU, US or China. They are developing fast and their mutual cooperation and innovative democratic and social policies are providing a useful example to the world.

Most importantly there has been a great development of alliances to defend each others sovereignty from destabilisation and economic and military threats. A good example is the alliance of all South America, Central America and the Caribbean, (CELAC) excluding the US and Canada, which includes military co-operation. The US threat is recognised by all and both left, centre and

right of centre governments recognise the need for mutual support and ensuring international legality.

ALBA (Bolivarian Alliance for Our America) which includes Cuba, Venezuela, Ecuador, Bolivia and Nicaragua and several Caribbean countries has the highest level of cooperation and is providing ideological leadership.

Africa too is asserting its independence. In this situation the US is seeking to regain its dominance and the EU is following its plans. To do this the dominance of neoliberalism has to be restored.

### **The characteristics of Neoliberalism:**

- Explicitly against the post-war social democratic consensus of a state role for public services and strategic industries.
- Against national sovereignty to protect industry, jobs, environment, natural resources.
- Against Keynesianism in economic policy. Monetarism and now Austerity to replace it. But supports public subsidy for banks and transnationals.
- For international capital – transnational treaties and bodies, like the EU or IMF to prevent sovereign control. Democracy limited to small decisions, no real control of economy.
- For domination of real economy, policy, state and resources by finance sector and transnationals.

It has gone through three phases:

1. Triumph of Thatcher and Reagan, military interventions in Central America and the Caribbean, coup in Chile, military dictatorships and death squads in Argentina, Uruguay, Bolivia, support for terrorist groups like the Contras in Nicaragua and UNITA in Angola. IMF imposition of privatisation and austerity as in Argentina. Chicago School Economists in many government and international bodies. Institutionalised privatisation and capitalism as in EU.
2. Failure of neoliberal model in Latin America, resistance and progressive victories in Venezuela, Brazil, Bolivia, Ecuador, Nicaragua and other Latin American countries, survival of Cuba despite collapse of Soviet Union, chaos and war after capitalist restoration in Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, defeat of US in Iraq and Afghanistan, restoration of sovereignty in Russia with Putin election, emergence of China as economic power which supports national sovereignty. Defeat of apartheid and assertion of independence by some African states. 2008 financial collapse and non-recovery in US and EU.
3. This phase has just started and is in progress. It is an attempt to regroup and reassert neoliberalism by the back door using the subservience of EU politicians and bureaucrats to US diktats and the common interest of the elites in those countries in protecting their power against their populations who are increasingly questioning current policies and structures. Their strategy is the imposition of the US-EU trade treaty, The Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP), which has as its main objective the removal of regulation and Trade Union organisation. On this there is much confusion among TU leaderships in Europe and the UK.

The world is highly unstable – so both dangerous and promising. Lots of Frankenstein monsters left by imperialism like Israel and Al Qaeda.

Globalised trade has an impact on national power with no respect for national borders. Finance capital has thrown away the idea of the nation state.

We have a great need for new progressive alliances, ideas and organisation. We must assert national Independence and sovereignty to make progress.

People argue for a return to post-war situation but we can't repeat history – we have to argue for a new socialism and have a vision for internationalism and cooperation between socialist countries. We need to spend some time discussing China. We should also develop our own socialist constitution for Britain.