

## **The SWP: Repeating mistakes is a sign of political bankruptcy.**

In 1989 and 1991 the SWP welcomed the collapse of the USSR. Infused with the theory of state capitalism, they saw the collapse of the USSR as the fracturing of capitalism which opened up a range of opportunities for intensified class struggle. Seldom has a group, which calls itself Marxist, misread a situation with such profound strategic consequences. While the USSR was not socialist, neither was it capitalist. Its collapse, however, restored capitalism to a part of the world from which it had been excluded and encouraged China back into the world market. It helped prepare the political conditions for globalisation.

The capitalist restoration in what was the USSR and in China represented an undeniable defeat for the international working class. It tilted the balance of forces decisively in favour of the capitalist class while ideologically undermining the working class. The scale of this defeat is only now understood to be a generational defeat. It has taken twenty-five years for the red shoots of struggle to re-appear around the world once more.

And yet, at the time, the SWP welcomed as an advance what was in reality, a retreat. The SWP's position was a classical case of opportunism – the positing of a short term gain, without consideration of the longer term consequences. In other words, exaggerating the immediate opportunity, succumbing to one sidedness and blinded by short sightedness. The same accusation is levelled at them with regard to their position on the EU referendum. They are on the side of *Leave* Europe with their own brand – LEXIT. Their position today mimics that of 1989. To paraphrase a famous scientist, repeating the same mistake is a sign of political madness.

Perspectives and tactics can be compared to weather forecasting. If the forecast is for the weather to turn cold, the response should be to wear a winter coat, not a sleeveless shirt. Indeed, choosing the wrong garment can jeopardise one's health. It is for this reason that this posting is limited to what is, not what we would like it to be or what could be. It is the examination and response to the real forces that led to the referendum and which drive the two opposing sides. We reiterate, this referendum is capitalist driven, it represents a clash of interests as to whether it is more profitable to remain within or to leave the EU. Under these circumstances, whether to leave or stay is driven by what is in reality the lesser evil for the British working class.

We will therefore refrain from a beauty contest between the EU and Britain. We are unconcerned which one is a stronger fortress, which one has provided more workers' rights, which state is more distant and unreformable, which state has more barriers to nationalisation, which one treats migrants more cruelly and so on. It is silly to compare and contrast one capitalist state with another. All capitalist states represent the rule of the capitalist class in one variant or another. Nor will we engage with the argument as to who created Austerity. If anything it is the financial markets that are the originators of this rather than the EU. If Ireland, Britain and Greece suffered the heaviest cuts to spending, this was to save the large banks. The only difference was that Greece was sacrificed to save not their own banks, but a German Bank (Deutsche Bank) and a French Bank (Societe Generale) whereas in Britain it was the Royal Bank of Scotland and Lloyds and in Ireland it was Allied Irish and The Bank of Ireland.

No, the central argument of the SWP as to why we should support BREXIT is that it will weaken the British capitalist class together with their European counterparts. There is an element of truth in this which is incontestable. *Leaving* Europe will undermine both the British and European economies if not the vulnerable world economy. The Financial Press is full of criticism of the Tory Party for calling a referendum at a time of such economic fragility. Clearly the dysfunctional Tory Party at present is of little use to the capitalist class.

Why else would that pimp for the capitalist class, Tony Blair, arise from his political slumber? He and his supporters know a political vacuum has opened up which could be filled by the Labour Party. But if the Labour Party is to assume its role as the current favourite party of the capitalist class it has to purge Corbyn and his followers. This war criminal envoy, having failed to stop wars in the Middle East, is now seeking to foment a civil war in the Labour Party with the help of the BBC and the media.

It is unlikely that Blair will succeed in the short term. This leaves the capitalist class with two divided parties on their hands. It is therefore clear that this referendum has weakened the British capitalist class whichever way the vote goes. It is also likely that, should Britain leave, the Tories will split and this will lead to a leadership challenge against Cameron and Osborne.

This is one side of the equation. What about the British working class? The SWP avoids a serious assessment of the consequences of *Leaving* as they stay focused on all those opportunities afforded by this growing political instability. The first question to be asked is why we are having this referendum in the first place. More exactly, why are we having a referendum which coincides with the emergence of a number of very large right-wing parties throughout Europe, each with a considerable working class following, all with same policy of *Leaving* the EU? And if we look further abroad, we may include Donald Trump. In other words, we are dealing with an international phenomenon formed as a reaction to globalisation. This is the antithesis of internationalism, because what each response has in common is a national solution to this international crisis or, simply put, beggar thy neighbour.

This phenomenon represents the centrifugal and destructive forces unleashed by a stagnating world economy, which cannot provide for the people of the planet, and the desperation this engenders. When capitalism is in an expansive phase, generating jobs and increased wages, centrifugal forces are minimised. The opposite is the case when the majority of workers in the developed capitalist world face intensified competition for fewer and fewer real jobs. Centrifugal forces are never progressive, but are always reactionary. They represent a xenophobic reflex in a world where globalisation has led to alienation and disempowerment. It is no accident, that the key demand of the Brexit camp is for the control of immigration, the demand to regain control of our borders; metaphorically to wall off this island.

But these centrifugal forces tearing British workers away from European workers exist within the British working class itself. Alex Salmond has stated that should Britain vote to leave the EU, Scotland would hold a referendum within two years to re-join in order to avoid the need for any renegotiation with the EU. Thus *Leaving* the EU will split English and Scottish workers. Clearly Scottish workers feel that Westminster, rather than Brussels, oppresses them more. This clearly undermines the argument that Westminster is somehow more democratic than Brussels.

Wales is more complicated, although it appears that a growing majority of the Welsh electorate will vote to stay. Indeed, the latest ICM poll published in the Scotsman on the 27<sup>th</sup> May shows that, of Celtic voters, *Remain* votes stand at 54% (compared to *Leave* at 32%). It therefore cannot be ruled out that Wales may follow Scotland's lead out of the UK at some stage.

Let us consider Ireland. If Britain leaves, this will lead to aggravated divisions in the Irish working class. Ireland will once again be divided with part of it in Europe and the North out of it. A new land border will appear on the island of Ireland. The new Irish Prime Minister has said as much after months of silence. This new border is bound to strengthen the hand of the loyalists in the Six Counties. Whether the malleable 'Common Travel Agreement' between Britain and Ireland will survive this split is difficult to forecast, but if Europe is to make an example of Britain so that others think twice about leaving, as it will, then expect a regular border in Ireland.

What about the English working class itself, constituting as it does 85% of the total British working class? It too is suffering a hierarchical split between its more xenophobic sections and its more cosmopolitan sections or between the more insecure and less secure strata of the working class. If we assume that the majority of Celtic voters support *Remain*, and the majority of Tories now support *Remain*, this means that the *Leave* position has huge traction in the English working class. How else can we explain the narrowness of the polling margin in favour of staying Europe?

A victory for the *Leave* campaign will consolidate the section of the working class that sees immigration controls as the way to protect themselves and grant greater access to scarce services. It will be this section of the working class that will be in the political ascendancy should *Leave* win. UKIP currently in decline will get a renewed lease of life. It will claim victory for forcing through the referendum, and it will use this victory to legitimise its divisive policies. It will grow into the space vacated by the disconnected Tory Party.

The result will be a nationalistic, inward looking country, ruled by the smaller capitalists who, if they are to survive an increasingly competitive world market, will have to tear up what is left of workers' rights, consumer rights, environmental protection etc.

In sum nothing good will come out of *Leaving*. There is no guarantee, given the level of class consciousness and organisation, that the economic crisis would automatically translate into a political crisis. The opposite could be the case, and is likely to be the case. Given the direction of travel, policies could be made more reactionary. Rising unemployment could very easily provoke calls for tighter immigration controls, for sending immigrants home, for denying them medical treatment etc.

We need to be realistic. The capitalist world economy is stagnating. It cannot provide. It is setting off predictable centrifugal forces. This fracturing process is dangerous in the extreme. With the capitalists facing not profits, but the need to avoid losses, hostile camps are emerging. Under the guise of defending against Iran, the US is placing a belt of their latest quick response hypersonic anti-missiles around Russia. Under the guise of protecting against North Korea they are doing the same against China. The desperate Chinese have for the first time sent an obsolete strategic missile carrying submarine into the Pacific in an attempt to outflank the US. This is the world we live in.

The only counter-weight to these reactionary, backward driving, dangerous centrifugal forces, is the international working class. It alone has the interest and power ultimately to develop the centripetal forces to neutralise and finally overwhelm these disintegrative forces which potentiate war. All our tactics must be devoted to ensuring that we reduce the forces seeking to divide our great class. It is in this context, and this context alone, that we must ask: will *Leaving* the EU in the long run, make this task easier or more difficult?

Here the answer is clear. *Leaving*, as outlined above, will add to the divisions in the European working class and within the British working class. And they will endure long after the immediate economic crisis has subsided and the British capitalist class has re-consolidated. There is no good argument for seeking to exploit the dominant reactionary international movement for alternative ends. Jumping on the front of a train and running towards the rear will not slow down nor reverse the direction of travel. Instead the train will roll on and the tiny SWP will find itself trapped in the rear carriage stranded at a destination both hostile and uncomfortable. Should Europe collapse for the wrong reasons, then it will give rise to small minded countries garlanded by razor wire and ruled by right wing nationalists. The SWP is playing with fire.

The SWP does some good work on the ground opposing racism, supporting immigrants and organising workers. However, when it comes to the strategic issues, issues that will shape world politics for the foreseeable future, their response is juvenile in the extreme. As in 1989, now in 2016 they misjudged events, the course of the events and the consequence of the events. Just as in 1989 these opportunists believe that *Leaving* will weaken the capitalist class and strengthen the working class. Learning from mistakes is an essential condition for developing political maturity thus earning the right to lead. The SWP has forsaken this, and it remains what it was, a relic of the twentieth century.

### **Postscript: The Human Rights Act.**

One of the arguments for not *Leaving* is that leaving will lead to the loss of the Human Rights Act. The Human Rights Act however is not what it seems. It has its origins in the (U.N.) Universal Declaration on Human Rights, passed in Paris in 1948. The purpose of this declaration was not so much to enshrine human rights as to be a propaganda tool in the cold war by illuminating the absence of democratic rights in the USSR and Eastern Europe - and later in China.

From its inception it was a bourgeois document. Article 17 enshrines the right to private property. Article 17 (ii) states that no one shall arbitrarily be deprived of their property. This is of significance to the debate on nationalisation and EU competition law. Already we see strictures against the confiscation of property which deprivation of property implies.

While Article 17, (clearly the authors were bright enough not to make it Article 1) defends private property positive workers' rights is nowhere found. There is no unconditional right to strike, there is no strictures against lock outs, no right to belong to a trade union, or in other words no empowerment of workers against the power of capital. In 1952 in Rome, additional Protocols were added. Article 1 states: "Every natural or **legal person** is entitled to the peaceful enjoyment of his possessions. No one shall be deprived of his possessions except in the public interest....." Here there are to be found three additions. The first is that of the legal person (our emphasis) which recognises the entitlement of companies to own and act on their own behalf and which gives them parity with individuals. In other words, private and social capital are to be treated as one (as found in national law in any case). The second is the principle of enjoyment which strengthens opposition to any act which interferes with the capitalist class' entitlement to rents, interest and profits. Finally, there is the introduction of a public interest element. This is pure sophistry because the public interest cannot conflict with the earlier provision that every natural or legal person is entitled to the peaceful enjoyment of their possession.

Hence nationalisation of profitable companies cannot have a public interest which overrides this peaceful enjoyment of this property and the profits it provides. This Article is incorporated verbatim into the European Convention on Human Rights, though the original Article 17 found in the UN document is excised. Obviously it was too bland, too transparent. It is worth commenting on the new Article 17 that replaces it in the EU Act entitled: "Prohibition of abuse of rights". Here we have the reinforcing element to Article 1 in the Protocols, namely that there can be no destruction or the abuse of the rights and freedoms set out in this convention, which has to be understood to include the rights and freedom of capitalist private property and the enjoyment of its spoils.

In 1998 Britain adopted this convention as the European Human Rights Act and it became part of English law. This Act was promoted by the same Blair government that resisted rolling back the anti-union legislation put in place by Thatcher. In short, the Human Rights Act has not reversed any legislation intended to disadvantage and oppress the British working class. But what this Act does imply is legal opposition to nationalisation. It does not make any difference whether *Leave* wins and

a British Human Rights act replaces the European one, containing a clause that explicitly prohibits nationalisation. It is already latent in the current act. The European competition act that explicitly bans nationalisation and state support, is not in contradiction with the European Human Rights Act, it necessarily flows from it.

World history is littered with these Acts, "we the people..." These classless acts have but one purpose, to treat all people as equal regardless as to whether they belong to the class empowered by their monopolisation of the means of production, or to a class of people (the majority) disempowered through non-ownership, who are therefore forced to work for those that do own. But if master and wage slave are treated as equals, the rights enshrined have to include the right to be a master as much as it to be a wage slave. And if this is the case, the Human Rights Act is nothing more than a document that represents the interest of the capitalist class - for it deprives workers of the right to take back what they have produced, the property claimed by the capitalist class.