

THE BRITISH LEFT AND THE UK STATE

From the British Left's 'national exceptionalism' during the 'IndyRef1' campaign to acting as Left outriders for the UK state during the Brexit campaign



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1. Introduction - the relationship between the UK state and the British Left

For those less acquainted with the intricacies of the British Left, and its myriad parties and fronts, this article provides a challenge, especially following all the organisations' names and initials. The article mainly deals with the relatively larger, non-Labour, Socialist organisations (which hold to a number of views about what Socialism actually is). These have gained public representation in Westminster, its devolved institutions, local councils, or have had influence through holding senior positions in the trade union bureaucracy. The three main British Left organisations are the Communist Party of Britain (CPB), the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) and the Socialist Party of England and Wales (SP (E&W)). Beyond these lie a whole host of smaller organisations, many of which have their origins in these three organisations or their predecessors.

There was a time when the organisations examined in this article were larger and felt they could become political parties, with an organised relationship with the politically advanced section of the working class. Nowadays, despite retaining 'Party' in their names, they have gone no further than being 'party' sects. Although sects are often the subject of derision, there are times, particularly in the present circumstances of the Right's political domination, when any Socialist organisations is likely to be small. Today's political sects, though, are sects in a similar manner to the earlier Christian sects. They have their own leaders, loyal bands of followers, and 'scriptural' dogma, through which they try to uphold their own version of Marxism, Leninism or Trotskyism as being the only 'true' faith.

This article is mainly confined to looking at the political effects of social unionism, or more precisely, the British Left unionism found on the Left in the UK or more usually, Great Britain. The analysis examines these organisations' more recent record, largely since the Scottish independence referendum campaign from 2012-14 ('IndyRef1'). However, it also provides some earlier historical material to help understand how these British Left organisations have tried to grapple with challenges to the UK state.

One thing that has united these organisations is their Britishness (often undeclared, but more clearly revealed by their organisational basis across the whole of Great Britain). They often claim this to be a form of 'internationalism'. The CPGB and its successor, the CPB, have been very proud of their Britishness looking to the USSR/UK World War Two alliance

as the highpoint of British progressiveness - one unionist state allied to another. British Trotskyist organisations, like the SWP and SP(E&W), are more wary about any openly declared Britishness. But the recent involution of both of their 'party' sect Internationals - the International Socialist Tendency (IST) and Committee for a Workers International (CWI) - into their British sections (with a partial exception in Ireland) has exposed their underlying Britishness.

In the period when Blairite neo-Liberalism was in the ascendancy in the Labour Party, some of these Left British organisations were able to make limited electoral headway, either at Westminster or local council level, often through front organisations. These included Respect and the Trade Union & Socialist Coalition (TUSC). They did this by donning the clothes of Left social democracy or 'Old Labour' (especially its 'Spirit of 45' variety). However, any hopes of their inheriting the mantle of 'Old Labour' and Left social democracy were dashed when Jeremy Corbyn became Labour leader in 2015. His supporters claimed the legacy of Keir Hardie, the ILP 'father' of the British Labour Party, and of Clement Attlee, who's post-1945 government ushered in the era of the UK's social monarchist, unionist and imperialist, welfare state.

These 'party' sects have made no serious public attempt to highlight the difference between social democracy and socialism/communism. In their political interventions they tend to suggest that socialism means greater levels of state intervention, especially nationalisation. Sometimes this can be supplemented by a recognition of a need for sub-national public bodies and cooperatives more responsive to local conditions. But this is still essentially a Left social democratic version of socialism. Instead of seeking to end capitalism's wage slavery and other linked forms of exploitation and oppression, such as domestic, chattel and debt slavery, social democracy seeks to use the state to achieve 'house slave' status with better pay and conditions for workers.

Another marked feature of post-1914 social democracy has been its nationalist orientation, with the Right openly championing its own states and the Left seeing these as adequate for their proposed reforms. Before this, social democracy was divided into Right, Centre and Left components. The Left acted as revolutionary social democrats and championed an organised international socialist strategy to be promoted in democratic republican states. Before the First World War break, the term social democracy itself still had revolutionary connotations. The word 'democracy' was equated with

republicanism. The addition of the ‘social’ prefix to ‘democracy’ was to highlight that without social as well as political power, meaningful democracy would not be available for the working class, and they would not be able to win or hold on to power without socio-economic emancipation too.

The collapse of the Second International, due to the pro-war and the pacifist and state accommodating politics of the Right and Centre, marked the end of the possibility of Left or revolutionary social democracy coexisting in a political organisation with the Right and Centre. After the break in 1914, what had been revolutionary social democracy found a new home as communism during the 1916-21/3 International Revolutionary Wave. This was initially signalled by the formation of the Communist or Third International in 1919.

Since the demise of the original Second International in 1914, what had previously been understood to be social democracy would better be termed social parliamentarianism. In the UK this has gone a step further, with social democrats accepting the UK’s anti-democratic constitution with its Crown Powers. The UK parliamentary system does not stem from any popular democratic revolution from below. It came about through a compromise between two wings of the ruling class, represented by the Whigs and the Tories, over an extended period from 1688-1845/50. Chartism represented the last major attempt to transfer sovereignty to the people; whilst the Irish Republican/Free State breakaway left the constitution of the remainder of the UK untouched. Any reforms in the UK’s liberal political system are concessions made from above, under political pressure. With sovereignty lying with the Crown-in-Westminster, the ruling class can more easily undermine or roll back these concessions in periods of crisis.

British Labour’s social parliamentarianism could also be termed social liberalism. This amounts to a political projection of British trade unions’ economic bargaining with the employers, to political bargaining within the existing UK state. The main divide between Left and Right British social democracy is over the extent to which they are prepared to use the UK state in their attempts to improve working class economic and social welfare.

British social democracy has often played a substantial role in upholding the British Empire (with some Labour Left dissent) and has played an even more central role in upholding the Union (especially through its Scottish and Welsh branch offices). Support for the Union (a precondition for what became the global domination of British imperialism until after World War

1) has met with virtually no Labour Left dissent, and indeed often enthusiastic support (e.g. the Red Paper Collective and then wannabe Labour returnee, George Galloway with his ‘Just Say Naw’ campaign during IndyRef1 from 2012-14¹)

This article will show how support for the UK, or its dominant Great Britain component, has impacted on the politics of the three largest Left organisations (and many of their breakaways), particularly when the UK state has faced political challenges. The social democratic, British Labour Party has been so dominant that those Left social democratic organisations, which had their origins in the CPGB or British Trotskyism, have often defined their politics on the basis of their relationship with the Labour Party. This holds whether that have been or remain directly affiliated, Labour entrust sects or organisationally independent ‘party’ sects. And another shared feature of their organisation has been their British unionist basis. The closer their relationship to the Labour Party, the more they tend to equate Left social democracy with socialism and to pursue a British nationalist road.

In a sense, these British Left organisations represent an updated version of the nineteenth and early late twentieth Lib-Labs. Many British socialists (including Keir Hardie) found it hard to escape the embrace of the Liberal Party, particularly its Radical wing. What became Left Labour, like the earlier Radicals, prioritised the need for party unity in order to keep open the possibility of taking office in the UK state. They have been trapped within the Labour Party embrace. This has meant they are loath to break with the Right. When they have broken with Labour Party e.g. the Independent Labour Party in 1932, this was followed by the eventual return of their elected MPs to the Labour Party on its terms.

The Liberals were originally an all-UK unionist party, before they lost their last 15 MPs in Ireland in the 1885 general election (although occasionally winning the odd seat in north east Ulster until 1910). After this, the Liberals became a Great Britain-only party. Politics in Ireland had moved from an earlier divide between Irish-British Conservatives and Irish-British Liberals to a new divide between British unionists (overwhelmingly conservative unionist) and Irish constitutional nationalists looking to the British Liberal Party to implement a liberal unionist Home Rule settlement. It was in Ireland that the seeds of a ‘national exceptionalist’ approach emerged, in the British political parties’ handling of national democratic and other challenges to the UK state.

There was never an all-UK Labour Party, although its Independent Labour Party predecessor did organise for a time in Belfast before the First World War. The post-1918 Labour Party has operated entirely within a Great Britain framework. The old Northern Ireland Labour Party was organised quite separately. Although the British Labour Party has recognised the constitutional nationalist, Social Democratic and Labour Party as its sister party in Northern Ireland, it was kept firmly at arm's length. Such support for the SDLP was not given through any commitment to Irish reunification (which was never much of a priority for the SDLP anyhow), but mainly as a means to get votes from the Irish living in Great Britain.

2. The challenge to British Left unionism represented by 'IndyRef1'

When the prospect of 'IndyRef1' emerged in Scotland in 2012, this reopened some political problems which the British Left had long had in relation to Ireland/Northern Ireland. These problems flowed from the long-held British Left view that the UK represents a historical gain for the working class (or Great Britain at least, after the British Left was forced to recognise the loss of 26 counties in Ireland and the ambiguous position this left the remaining 6 Irish counties in). Since the UK/British state is seen to be the focus of Labour's desired reforms it must be defended when under attack, whether from other imperial states, e.g. by the Right and Centre over Germany in World War 1, or from below, e.g. by the Right, Centre and many on the Left when Sinn Fein and the Irish Republican Movement made a challenge from 1918-23.

The Labour Party, including much of the Left, has a long record of weakness when attempting to address challenges to the unionist nature of the UK state. Their over-riding priority has been trying to maintain the unity of this state, The Independent Labour Party was initially supportive of Irish Home Rule, something it largely inherited from the Liberal Party. This was seen as a liberal unionist solution to better keep the multi-nation state together. During the First World War and afterwards, the Right wing 'national Labour' leadership was fully committed to defending the UK, condemned the 1916 Easter Rising, offered no support to the First Irish Republic from 1919 and backed the British imposed, counter-revolutionary Treaty from 1921. The national Labour leadership's acceptance of the Treaty followed the thinking of the British ruling class in wanting to hold on to as much Irish territory that they could. Even the infant CPGB, which sought Labour Party affiliation, needed prompting from the CPSU over the issue of support for the First Irish

Republic. Throughout the 1916-21/3 International Revolutionary Wave, ‘national Labourism’ remained the dominant force in the Labour Party, with the ILP and others on the Left subordinate.

Thus, a key feature of the UK state’s relationship to Ireland remained its ‘national exceptionalist’ approach. It was this relationship that many amongst the British Radical Liberals and later, the Labour and non-Labour Left, replicated in their politics. The Radical Liberals in the nineteenth century had hoped that with the extension of the franchise, the whole of the UK would be ruled in a shared manner. Ireland and Scotland would be reduced to similar provincial and cultural status as say the North of England. County and borough/burgh councils would form the only political layer below Westminster, with much local autonomy, but with its limits always decided by Westminster.

However, there was so much social and political unrest in Ireland, that UK laws had to be regularly suspended and special often coercive laws put in place. The 1801 Union modified but did not overthrow the underlying imperial relationship between Ireland and the rest of the UK. Ireland has had a long history of ‘national exceptionalism’. This was taken a step further following the defeat of the First Irish Republic and the enforcement of Partition. ‘National exceptionalism’ was given greater constitutional force in the new United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. A devolved Orange-run Stormont administration was put in place to deal with the ‘exceptional’ conditions needed to maintain British unionist and imperialist control.

The British Labour and non-Labour Left had largely gone along with Irish then Northern Irish ‘exceptionalism’. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries this Left mostly supported the Liberals’ method of dealing with situation - Home Rule for Ireland. Scottish and Welsh Home Rule supporters sometimes tried to extend Home Rule to their own nations, but with little support either from Liberals or Socialists outside their own nations. Furthermore, there were always supporters of conservative unionism amongst Liberals (the misnamed Liberal Unionists), Labour, and later some on the non-Labour British Left too. Once Stormont had been set up, the majority in the Labour Party and many in the non-Labour British Left duplicated the UK state’s semi-detached relationship with Northern Ireland. This was partly justified by them seeing Northern Ireland as a ‘tribal’ territory, whose inhabitants hadn’t risen to the clear Labour ‘class politics’ of workers in England, Scotland or Wales.

Elements of the old Liberal-inherited support for Scottish and Welsh Home Rule remained in the ILP and amongst some Scottish and Welsh Labour Party members. Home Rule was briefly taken up by the CPGB during its late 1930s ‘Popular Front’ period. However, the post-war Labour government was central in suppressing liberal unionist and constitutional nationalist challenges, particularly in Scotland (the Scottish Covenant Movement) and Ireland/Northern Ireland (the Anti-Partition League). Strengthening the Union went along with the maintenance of as much of the British Empire as possible, in Labour’s post-war, social monarchist, unionist and imperialist, welfare state. The post-war boom gave this an economic underpinning that is no longer available to the British ruling class today.

Furthermore, the CPGB in its attempt to maintain the wartime alliance of two unionist states – the UK and USSR - abandoned any real commitment to Home Rule. It looked to the USSR as the centralised unionist state model which a Labour government should take inspiration from to bring in its reforms. In the CPGB’s 1951 programme, *The British Road to Socialism*, there was still a call to end the “enforced partition of Ireland” and for the “full recognition of the national claims of the Scottish and Welsh peoples.”² However, there was no recommendation about the form these should take. And this sat somewhat uneasily with “Our call is for the unity of all true patriots to defend British national interests and independence”. In practice, with the post-war Labour government having abandoned liberal unionism for conservative unionism, the CPGB tacitly followed it.

However, in the late 1960s, new challenges to the UK state appeared. There was a renewed national democratic movement in Ireland and new national democratic movements in Scotland and Wales. British Left organisations had to decide whether these movements for national self-determination were progressive and if so, what degree of self-determination should be permitted, consistent with the maintenance of the UK or British state. In coming to their decisions, Left British organisations fell back on older traditions which had developed with this end in mind.

For Scotland and Wales, they either advocated constitutional reform through Home Rule/Devolution (liberal unionism) or maintaining the constitutional status quo (conservative unionism). The CPGB, recalling its earlier pre-Second World War, Popular Front, Home Rule stance, joined with sections of the Labour Left (invoking the old ILP tradition) and came out in support of Scottish and Welsh Devolution. Together they were influential in pushing

the STUC, and the newly founded Welsh TUC to back Devolution. They in turn were influential in pressuring the British Labour Party to adopt Devolution in 1974. This was done to derail the new electoral challenge from the SNP and Plaid Cymru. But political devolution faced conservative unionist opposition from Scottish and Welsh Labour officials in particular.

For Northern Ireland, the Left was split between those who wanted to reform Stormont, those who looked to a hybrid Labour, constitutional nationalist (supporting the Social Democrat and Labour Party – SDLP) road to Irish reunification and a small minority who supported the Republicans' armed struggle in Ireland, albeit still looking at Ireland/Northern Ireland's relationship with the UK in a semi-detached manner.

And there was political basis for these 'national exclusivist' approaches, given the UK state's very different methods of maintaining control in Ireland/Northern Ireland. In Scotland and Wales there were Administrative Devolution and shared all-British political parties – the Conservatives, Labour and the Liberals. But in Northern Ireland new forms of Administrative Devolution had been supplemented by Political Devolution and oppression through Orange Stormont. When Stormont was closed down in 1972, Administrative Devolution continued, with Political Devolution replaced by Direct Rule. This was accompanied by repression by the British army and security forces. However, throughout all this, 'Ulster' unionist and constitutional nationalist parties at Westminster both remained semi-detached from the all-British parties.

For those British Left parties, anxious that the UK state should maintain control over as much of its territory as possible (to maximise the area for their proposed economic and social reforms), there had been the earlier warning of the impact of national democratic movements on all-UK (or later all-Britain) Left organisations. In Ireland, the exercise of self-determination in 1919 left behind no British Left parties there. At first glance the history of the infant Communist Party of Ireland (CPI) seems to contradict this. The CPI, founded in 1921, was soon treated as a branch office of the CPGB. But this was on the instructions of Third International (Comintern). In 1923, the CPGB took a key part in closing down the CPI. Re-established in 1933, the CPI was dissolved again in the Irish Republic in 1941, leaving only a partitionist Communist Party of Northern Ireland.

It wasn't until 1970, under pressure from the growing movement for Irish reunification, that a reunited CPI was formed. CPGB members did have an

influence in taking this decision. But, again they were acting in the interests of the USSR party-state. When it came to international affairs, the relationship between the CPGB and Irish Communists was determined by the USSR/CPSU state directed Comintern, then later by the Cominform. The Cominform's political influence was asserted through the *World Marxist Review* published by the Information Department of the CPSU.

Thus, the various international organisations, which the episodic CPI belonged to, were never directly British controlled. This was different from the 'party' sect 'internationals' of the two main British Trotskyist organisations. Sometime after leaving the official Fourth International (with its main political centres in France and the USA), in 1950 the Socialist Review Group (later the International Socialists, then the SWP); and in 1965 the Revolutionary Socialist League (later Militant Labour, then SP(E&W)), formed and maintained sect 'internationals' in their own image - the SWP dominated, IST in the late 1970s, and the Militant Labour then the SP(E&W) dominated, CWI in 1974.

However, from the late 1960s, and particularly the early 1970s, the rising national democratic movement in Scotland, led to a new challenge to Left British unionist organisation. After the defeat of the 1979 Devolution referendum, support for Scottish self-determination was largely confined to the cultural arena. But in 1988, ex Labour MP, Jim Sillars took the Govan seat for the SNP in a by-election following Labour's collaboration with the Thatcher government over the implementation of the poll tax in Scotland.

It was the collapse of the USSR in 1992, which provided the final spur for the formation of the Communist Party of Scotland (CPS). The CPS declared its support for Scottish independence. But significantly, it retained no official international affiliations, confirming its Left nationalist nature. After the Scottish Socialist Party was formed in 1998, it became part of the European Anti-Capitalist Alliance, an indication of a more Scottish internationalist approach. Today, however, the SSP has degenerated into another 'party' sect, and no longer has any active international affiliations.

Both the CPS's and SSP's limited internationalism has been coupled to their failure to develop an understanding of the unionist nature of the UK state with its Crown Powers. Their solely national basis means they find it hard to adopt an 'internationalism from below' alliance between socialists in Scotland, England, Wales and Ireland to challenge the all-UK alliance of the British ruling class, or the more limited all-Britain alliance of Labour Party

and British unionist Left. This has led to both the CPS and SSP (which some leading members of the CPS joined) tailending the constitutional nationalist SNP's 'Indy-Lite' under the Crown Powers political strategy.

However, the Communist Party of (the no longer so Great) Britain (CPB) formed in 1988, continued to organise and compete with the CPS in Scotland. The CPB, followed the old CPGB policy, dating from the 1970s, and has supported liberal unionist reform (Devolution) of the Union in order to better maintain the UK's territorial integrity. The CPGB has had its own Scottish branch office. During the 1970s, following the CPGB's commitment to Devolution, it encouraged research into Scotland's popular and working class history and culture and produced the influential *Scottish Marxist*. The CPGB's successor organisation, the CPB, still maintains that defence of the Great Britain's territorial integrity is necessary for British working class unity. The CPB has retained more influence than the CPS in Scotland. This is mainly due to the support it gets from key Scottish trade union officials and indirectly from the STUC. British based trade unions provide career opportunities for trade union officials, just as the UK state does for Labour politicians. The *Morning Star*, closely associated with the CPB, promotes the social democratic political outlook of Left trade union officialdom.

But the CPB's support, along with some of the Labour Left in the Red Paper Collective, for a 'No' position during the IndyRef1 campaign, undermined the credibility of their Left British unionism. They were unable to break the much more influential Labour Right's open 'No', 'Better Together' alliance with the Tories. The Labour Left's failure to dislodge the Right has contributed to British Left unionism becoming a rapidly shrinking political force in Scotland. Today this could lead to other Scottish breakaways, following the example of the Scottish Labour Party (1975-81) (SLP), Labour for Independence³ (2013-5), or it could lead to individual member transferring to the SNP, following the pattern of one-time CPGB members, e.g. Jimmy Reid and Jeane Freeman and one-time Labour members, Jim Sillars and Alex Neil (via the SLP) and later Tommy Sheppard.

Once the STUC had come out in favour of Devolution in the 1970s, Militant (then a Trotskyist entrust grouping in the Labour Party) gave its support. However, Militant underwent a further development in the face of the rising movement for Scottish self-determination, following its bruising experience in the Labour Party in the late 1980s. Faced with a choice of kowtowing to the Labour bureaucracy, or of maintaining its new support from those who had been involved in the Anti-Poll Tax Movement, which had been launched

in Scotland, Scottish Militant Labour (SML) was formed in 1991. This was at the same time as British Militant broke from the Labour Party. SML represented a new organisational development. Previously Militant Labour in Scotland has been organised through its British regional committees of West Coast (largely Glasgow based) and East Coast Scotland (Edinburgh, Dundee and Aberdeen).

SML remained an autonomous national section of (British) Militant Labour, which later became the Socialist Party (England and Wales) - SP(E&W) in 1997. This was an indication of a new Scottish 'exceptionalism' to add to a longstanding Irish/Northern Irish 'exceptionalism' on the British Left. When the Scottish Socialist Party (following the Scottish Socialist Alliance of 1996) was created in 1998, SML became its leading platform, renaming itself the International Socialist Movement (ISM).

The ISM committed itself to Scottish independence in 1998, whilst initially still remaining part of the SP(E&W). This highlighted the anomalous position of the ISM, which should have become a fully autonomous section of the CWI, like the Socialist Party of Ireland. The tensions between the SP(E&W)'s remaining Left British unionism and the ISM's growing Left Scottish nationalism became more apparent. The ISM followed the CPS's organisational path as a political organisation and broke from its parent organisation, in this case the SP(E&W) and CWI. From 2002, ISM published its own magazine *Frontline*. ISM became organisationally independent, ditching Left British unionism but revealingly initially only for Scotland.

ISM like SP(E&W) had no understanding of the unionist nature of the UK state based on the sovereignty of the Crown-in-Westminster. So, it could only react to events when the growing demands for national self-determination produced increasing tensions in the constituent units of the UK state. Recognising this would have led to an understanding that with the continued decline of British imperialism, the desire for the self-determination in the UK's constituent units would only increase. This would unravel not only the Scottish-British, but the Welsh-British unionist glue (as it once had unravelled the Irish-British glue) that held the state together. Not able to anticipate this and relying solely on the rise of constitutional nationalist parties to register their views over the growing political crisis of the UK state, Militant Labour, then the SP(E&W) could only end up tail ending the constitutional policies of the nationalist parties.

The CPB had had to respond to the formation of the CPS (they originally worked out of the same Glasgow office) and the divide between them grew. Now the SP(E&W) and CWI, like the CPB, responded defensively to the independent development of the ISM, by forming the International Socialists (Scotland) - IS(S). IS(S) remained the autonomous section of the SP(E&W) – in effect, its Scottish branch office.

The SP(E&W)/IS(S)’s ‘Scottish exceptionalist’ position was highlighted by its continued support for Scottish independence. whilst it still upheld the union of England and Wales. Meanwhile, in relation to Northern Ireland, the SP(E&W) still mirrored the UK state, in its semi-detached and ‘national exceptionalist’ relationship. It maintained a connection to its partitioned Socialist Party of Ireland (SPI) section through the CWI, which it dominated. Furthermore, the CWI’s underlying Britishness was highlighted by its continued apologetics for Loyalist organisations and its greater hostility to Irish Republicans than to the UK state.

But the SP(E&W)’s ‘national exceptionalist’ attitude (in its case both to Ireland and now Scotland) was also continued by the breakaway ISM in its relationship to Ireland/Northern Ireland. Initially, the ISM also offered apologetics for Loyalist organisations in Northern Ireland. This was highlighted by the ISM dominated SSP executive decision to invite the sectarian Billy Hutchinson of the Progressive Unionist Party (which did get Loyalist working class votes) and the Ulster Volunteer Force to speak to a conference, supplemented by Daithi Doolin of Sinn Fein, to be ‘balanced’ by Peter Hadden of the SPI’s, in effect, partitionist Northern Irish section.’

After ‘Tommygate’, IS(S) went on to form part of the Left populist and Scottish nationalist, Solidarity - Tommy Sheridan’s vanity ‘party’. When Solidarity failed to make any breakthrough, IS(S) opted to become the Socialist Party Scotland (SPS) in 2010. It was by then, though, a very much diminished organisation, compared to the old SML. However, the SPS has outlived the ISM, which, after the SSP split, dissolved itself into a ‘Think Tank’. This meant abandoning its platform status and changing the nature of ISM and *Frontline*. It eventually succumbed to the post-‘Tommygate’ crisis in the SSP.

The other relatively large British Trotskyist organisation, the SWP, has faced similar trials and tribulations in trying to maintain a British dominated ‘party’ sect and wider islands-wide organisation under the conditions of new

national democratic challenges to the UK state. If the CWI reflected British conservative unionist pressure by being organisationally partitionist in Ireland and accommodating to Loyalism; then the SWP reflected a different form of adaptation to conservative unionism in Scotland. In 1979, during the Scottish Devolution campaign, the SWP called for ‘Revolution not Devolution’. In this, the SWP fell back on abstract propaganda. There were no workers’ councils or workers’ militias to make the ‘Revolution’. But the SWP did make its own small contribution to defeating Scottish devolution. But instead of ‘Revolution’ we got Thatcher!

The SWP joined the SSP in 2001, becoming its main British Left unionist tendency. But the SWP could see that as the Scottish democratic movement grew, adhering to a British Left unionist stance could make them as marginal as the pro-British unionist, Workers Unity (WU) platform in the SSP. However, in 2006, the SWP jumped ship, along with the IS(S), into Sheridan’s Solidarity. WU also left at the time of the Sheridan split, but soon fragmented into tiny grouplets - not a very good advert for the benefits of British Left unity! However, with Sheridan attracting the most nationalist element of the old SSP, the SWP soon found itself even more distrusted for its British Left unionist politics.

The SWP also maintained a semi-detached relationship to the Irish SWP, which could at times be partitionist in character. However, unlike the old Irish Militant Labour, and later SPI, which mainly operated out of unionist communities in Northern Ireland and reflected that pressure in its politics, the Irish SWP mainly operated in nationalist communities. This sometimes also led to a tacit acceptance of partition. But this was more a reflection of the SWP’s economicistic politics, which downplayed the nature of the UK state in Northern Ireland, focussing instead on bread and butter issues which they thought could unite trade unionists under the existing political set-up.

It was the election of a Tory government in 2010, which finally gave the SWP the reason/excuse it needed to support Scottish independence. Independence was now anti-Tory. But by this time, both the SWP-promoted Respect (in England and Wales) and the SWP-supported Solidarity (in Scotland) had become little more than vehicles for ‘celebrity socialists’ – George Galloway and Tommy Sheridan.

Despite the SWP’s belated political support for Scottish independence, it made no organisational changes to accommodate this. Like the pre-SML, Militant Labour, the SWP’s local organisations only had a direct and

subordinate relationship to the British party centre. But, unlike the turn to a specifically Scottish ML, originally intended as the new national branch office, the SWP still did not create a national ‘branch office’ in Scotland. Its local branches in Scotland (and Wales) have the same direct relationship to the SWP centre as those in England. The SWP remained an all-British organisation, with even less acknowledgement of Great Britain’s multi-nation nature than that the UK state had been compelled to adopt after its post-1998 ‘Devolution-all-round’ deals. This reflected the SWP’s shared lack of understanding with the SP(E&W)/SPS about the unionist nature of the UK state based on the sovereignty of the Crown-in-Westminster

However, the SWP was soon to be plagued by major splits - Counterfire in 2010 and the International Socialist Group (Scotland) - ISG(S) - in 2011. After this another internal crisis was pending. The SWP was not in a good position to benefit from its belated turn to supporting Scottish independence in the run-up to ‘IndyRef1’.

The Scottish based, ISG(S), following its break with the ‘party’ sect organisational set-up of the SWP, began to pursue a ‘Movementist’ path. ‘Movementism’ looks to ‘spontaneous’ movements and either sees no necessity for or downplays the need for political organisation – pre-parties or actual parties. The ISG(S) was very much a product of the 2011 International Revolutionary Wave. Its members were inspired by the Indignados of Greece and Spain (and later by Syriza and Podemos), Occupy, and the Arab Spring. They played a leading role in the Glasgow University, Hetherington House student occupation.

The ‘IndyRef1’ campaign took off in mid 2012. Unlike the SSP, which mainly operated through the official SNP front organisation ‘Yes Scotland’, the ISG(S) took the bold step of initiating the independent Radical Independence Campaign (RIC). RIC attracted many from various organisations, including republican socialists, Left SNP members, Left Scottish Greens, some Labour Party members, anarchists and people from a variety of campaigning organisations in Scotland. On November 24th, 2012, RIC’s founding conference in Glasgow had an attendance of 800.⁴

The ISG(S) remained influenced by the late Neil Davidson, then still an SWP member, albeit now a dissident. So, SWP-type politics still had an impact on RIC at one remove. The continuing crises in SWP led to further defections, which in Scotland took the form of the International Socialists Scotland (ISS). Neil remained in SWP until its ‘Comrade Delta’ sexual

assault,⁵ ‘car crash’ had played out by 2014. He became a leading figure in the rs21 breakaway, which in Scotland joined the ISS. The SWP was hamstrung by its refusal to address the issue of sexual assault in the ‘party’ in an open and democratic manner. In ISG(S) it was facing the sort of national breakaway challenge that the SP(E&W) had faced in 2002 with the ISM. In both cases, these left the original parent organisations in Scotland, either in the minority or with considerably less influence than their breakaways.

The underlying relationship between the SWP and the SP(E&W) (organised in a national branch office, through the SPS) and their members in Scotland was revealed during the ‘IndyRef1’ campaign. In 2012, both ‘party’ sects supported Scottish independence. But their campaigns were not organised on a UK-wide, nor an all islands internationalist basis, despite their membership and control of sect ‘internationals’, the IST and CWI. Their campaigning was overwhelmingly confined to their local organisations in Scotland. There were no major public campaigning tours, nor any demonstrations organised by their members in England, Wales or Ireland. This was another indication of a ‘national exceptionalist’ approach. This meant that the SP(E&W) and the SWP could keep the issue of Scottish independence and its wider consequences for the UK state at arm’s length. So, the ‘IndyRef1’ campaign was left largely to SWP and SP(E&W)/SPS members in Scotland. This was to form a pattern of behaviour.

If there was one place, where there was considerable anti-unionist sentiment, it was Ireland. The hill behind West Belfast bore a massive ‘Vote Yes’ sign, shaped in stones. This was in defiance of Sinn Fein’s official abstention over the issue of Scottish independence. This followed Sinn Fein’s acceptance of its allotted role after the Good Friday Agreement – the representative solely of the Nationalist and tacitly Catholic community. Of course, this self-denying ordinance was not respected by the ‘Ulster’ Loyalists, who joined Orange anti-independence marches in Scotland. Neither the Irish SWP, nor its party front, People before Profit (PbP) were involved in the ‘IndyRef1’ campaign. The Socialist Party of Ireland’s (SPI) adaptation to partitionist politics and Loyalism in Northern Ireland would always have made that unlikely.

In contrast, RIC invited speakers over from Ireland, Wales and England (and elsewhere) and sent speakers to all these nations (and elsewhere) on an ‘internationalism from below’ basis. RIC brought Bernadette McAliskey to Glasgow, and RIC supporters in England brought her to London. RIC also

sent a speaker to Ireland, South and North, to address public meetings and a union conference (Independent Workers Union of Ireland). RIC brought Plaid Cymru's republican president, Leanne Wood to Glasgow.⁶

The SWP did send a single speaker to the 'London Says Yes' rally, addressed by Bernadette McAliskey, Allan Armstrong (RIC) and Steve Freeman (Left Unity Party RIC supporter) on September 6th, 2014.⁷ But the SWP neither publicised the meeting, nor brought anybody else along. Campaigning against and challenging British unionism in both its Right and Left forms in England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland is something the leaders of the British Left unionist 'party' sects find difficult. In addition to their 'national exceptionalist' approach to Scottish (and Irish) politics, this stems from trying to maintain their front organisations' relationship with the Labour Left and Left trade union bureaucrats. who overwhelmingly support the continuation of the UK state.

Between 2012-14, the ISG(S), in line with its 'Movementist' politics, more or less dissolved itself when RIC was at its height, with former members taking leading posts. However, more recent SWP breakaways have seen the need for a supplementary political organisation, but not an open platform in any pre-party organisation. rs21 has published a magazine, and organised meetings in conjunction with ISS. They sometimes promote the idea that they represent the 'best' of old IS/SWP tradition which the SWP itself had abandoned. They also further developed the 'Think Tank' approach, similar to that adopted by the ISM in the SSP after 'Tommygate'.

After the 2014 'IndyRef1' campaign was over, some of the leading former ISG(S) members, along with others in ISS, began to look to the example of Syriza in Greece and Podemos in Spain, both of which had had considerable electoral impact. This meant pushing for a new political organisation, which was, in effect, a hybrid movement/electoral party. To do this they initiated the Scottish Left Project (SLP).⁸

Above all else, electoralism and the prospect of the 2016 Holyrood election dominated the thinking of SLP. Its leaders approached the SSP in order to get agreement over candidates in this election. Respect, Independence, Socialism and Equality – Scotland's Left Alliance (RISE) – was cobbled together, without any agreed strategy, programme, or even an adequate manifesto. RISE leaders buried any politics they thought too controversial or divisive, e.g. using the election to mount a republican challenge to the SNP (warning of the likely use of the UK state's Crown Powers) or taking an

attitude towards EU membership. Furthermore, with leading lights in RISE never making it clear that they were not speaking for RIC, this was seen as an attempt to substitute RISE for RIC. This caused some resentment amongst the other components of RIC – Left SNP, Left Greens, independent Socialists, anarchists and those in autonomous movements.

RISE's two candidates made no electoral impact. So, RISE's two leading partners, ex-ISG(S) and the SSP then went their own way. The SSP moved further towards being another 'party' sect, with no recognised platforms or international affiliations. It turned back to much of the politics and style of Scottish Militant Labour, before SML had initiated the SSA. The inner leadership felt threatened by independent thought and tried to hold on to members through a 'hamster-wheel' of 'party' activity, particularly stalls. As far as possible, they have avoided autonomous organisations and movements. Even in trade unions, a direct relationship is sought between SSP leadership figures and the Left trade union bureaucracy. There is no attempt to link up with others to develop a genuine rank and file movement. This approach minimises the contact between the SSP and the wider Left. The self-perpetuating inner leadership is surrounded by an outer layer, chosen for their loyalty to the leadership. But individuals are soon discarded if they show any signs of political independence.

The other leading section of RISE, the ex-ISG(S) members abandoned the organisation following the 2017 general election. It was revealed, at a national forum, that there had been an even split between those RISE leaders voting SNP to improve the chances for 'Indy-Ref2', and those voting Labour, now that Jeremy Corbyn was creating some new Left social democratic excitement on the British Left. In contrast to the very limited political discussion before the 2016 Holyrood election, there was no organised prior discussion over policy or strategy for the 2017 Westminster general election.

With RISE dissolved, ex-ISG(S) and ISS leaders began to look around for other movements. They also adopted the 'Think Tank' approach and started to publish *Conter*. *Conter* joined a field which includes the *Scottish Left Review* (with priority given to trade union officials and Left academics), *Commonweal* (which acts mainly as a pressure group on the SNP, promoting Scandinavian-style social democracy), and the non-party Scottish independence supporting *bella caledonia* (independence, autonomy, self-determination). But the two main 'party' sects, the SWP and the SP(E&W) /SPS, have continued to exist, since that is their purpose above all else. But now they are considerably smaller and have less influence on the wider Left.

3. From IndyRef1 in 2014 to the Euro-referendum in 2016 – the British Left begins to dig a hole for itself.

For all their political weaknesses, the SWP and the SP(E&W)/SPS were on ‘the side of the angels’ during ‘IndyRef1’. However, the tacit and unacknowledged Left Britishness of their leaderships led them to cross over to the ‘the dark side’ in the UK’s EU referendum campaign in 2015-6. They supported a ‘Leave’ vote and then backed the implementation of Brexit. The CPB/Labour Left-led, Red Paper Collective and George ‘Just Say Naw’ Galloway had already pursued a pro-British unionist path during ‘IndyRef1’. But from 2015, the SWP and SP(E&W) joined the CPB in providing a Left cover for the newly rising Right Populism, initially being pushed by the then still minority, but also the most reactionary section of the British ruling class.

However Right Populist politics was moving from the political margins to being adopted by a significant section of the British ruling class backed by Donald Trump’s ‘America First’ corporate supporters. Vladimir Putin, backed by Russian kleptocrats, also promoted Brexit for his own anti-EU reasons. Putin has attempted to woo the Left through the state-run *Russia Today* TV channel, which when addressing the reality of life within the Russian Federation is about as useful as the *Soviet Weekly* in the old USSR. Despite the Russian Federation being a kleptocrat-run, repressive capitalist and declining imperialist state, it still attracts some old USSR apologists. Perhaps its Putin’s origins in the KGB that makes them see some continuity.

The nature of the political challenge to the UK state represented by Scottish independence and Brexit was quite different. Scottish independence amounts to the beginnings of the break-up of the UK state. This represents a major challenge to the British ruling class. Leaving the EU, however, represents a strengthening of the UK state - “bring back control” to the British ruling class. Membership of the EU had never represented any real challenge to the UK state, since the EU is an alliance of existing states. Despite the existence of the EU Court of Justice, it never interfered when either the UK (or Spain) resorted to brutal suppression (including the use of death squads) of national democratic movements in Ireland (or Euskadi).

But the balance of power can shift within existing state alliances, such as the EU, and this can lead to growing concerns amongst their component ruling classes. Therefore, despite the exemptions given by the EU to British

employers over workers' rights, and the political backing of the USA, the British ruling class still found itself losing out against the more economically competitive Germany. This became more evident following the 2008 Crash. And given the negative role of the financial sector in this Crash, EU leaders began to consider greater regulation. This was anathema to the City of London (and to those in Wall Street finance with strong City connections). It was these developments, which led to sections of the British ruling class to move from a Eurosceptic and pro-USA, neo-Liberal attitude to the EU, to an EU-phobic, Hard Right attitude, increasingly backed by the rise of Right populist forces in the USA.

Such has been the level of economic integration (both of capital and labour), following over forty years membership of the EEC/EC/EU, that any attempted severing of these links can only cause major disruptions, the costs of which British capital will impose on the working class. A stepped-up British chauvinist and racist offensive is a necessary accompaniment to divert attention away from their offensive. Particularly reactionary sections of the British ruling class conjured up the prospects of 'Empire2' after Brexit. But this was as delusional as any new trading prospects which might have been offered by 'Left' Brexiteers (Cuba, Venezuela, Russia, or fully signing up to China's turbo-capitalist, 'Belt and Road Initiative'). The 'Left' Brexiteers were so narrowly British in their thinking, they didn't really consider what the economic alternatives to the EU there were, under the political conditions of the current global order.

However, the more pragmatic members of the British ruling class always knew that, rather than 'Empire 2', the real alternative to the EU was even closer links with the USA. Furthermore, any trading deal with the USA could be conducted completely out of sight, without the public scrutiny that accompanies new deals in the EU. This too was a valuable feature. Not that the British ruling class has ever felt much necessity to consult the people over its favoured deals, e.g. over Maastricht. Yet this was permitted under EC rules. Italy, Ireland, France and Denmark all conducted referenda.

In the lead up to the EU referendum in 2016, the largest non-Labour Left organisations in Great Britain, the SWP, SP(E&W) and CPB (which had been 'flirting' with one another since the 1990s following the demise of the USSR), all came out in support of a 'Leave' vote. For the CPB, this took the form of a Left Populist Brexit, backed by some trade union officials who supported 'British jobs for British workers'- e.g. Len McCluskey, general secretary of UNITE. The Lexit Brexit promoted by SWP and its breakaways,

opposed the EU's immigration regulations but were strangely quiet over the 2014 and 2016 British Immigration Laws, and the exclusion of non-UK EU residents from the Euro-referendum franchise. The SP (E&W) balanced between these two Brexit approaches. Despite their differences, Left Populist and Lexit Brexiteers were united in their British defence of the UK state and its removal from the EU inter-state alliance.

The main distinction between the two 'Left' approaches is that Lexit Brexiteers oppose, whilst Left Populist Brexiteers support 'non-racist' immigration controls. The whole purpose of immigration controls is to reduce migrant workers' ability to move freely. However, British Left populists do not like the open racism of the Far Right. But if immigration is policed by state bodies, then this is all right. It's a bit like extra-marital sex – OK if conducted out of sight, therefore out of mind!

However, the SWP Lexiters who opposed immigration controls on paper, soon showed that they were prepared to back the Left populist Brexiteers (and in Scotland, Scoxiters, e.g. Jim Sillars) who support immigration controls. The SWP has a front organisation, Stand Up to Racism (SUtr), for combatting racism. But in order to keep Left Labour Party and trade union officials on board, then their acceptance of state racism (which has been promoted as much by Labour) isn't publicly challenged, just the activities of the Far Right and sometimes the Right Populists. So Lexit and Left Populist Brexiteers ended up working for the same ends, providing a 'Left' cover for an overwhelmingly Right led campaign.

The British Left 'party' sects' saw Brexit as representing support for British 'national liberation' from the EU's 'neo-Liberal Empire'. It was argued that, for all its faults, the UK is more democratic than the EU. This is like trying to compare fishes with bicycles. The 'fishes' are states such as the UK, Germany, France, Italy, Spain, Poland and Hungary. The 'bicycles' are trading organisations like the EU, World Trade Organisation, the lapsed Transatlantic Trade and Partnership Agreement and the secret trade talks between Trump's and Johnson's administrations.

Therefore, trying to claim that the UK is more democratic, is to give credence to one of the most undemocratic states in the western part of the EU (semi-Francoist Castilian Spain is another). The UK is a state with a 400 years long imperial record, and an anti-democratic (even by normal parliamentary standards) political system based on the Crown-in-Westminster, with its Crown Powers, as well as its constitutionally privileged position for the City

of London, which is allowed to maintain offshore tax havens. The UK has an army, navy and air force, secretive security agencies (MI5 and MI6), a police force and a judiciary unconstrained by any written constitution.

The EU, as a non-state organisation, has the equivalent of none of these. It depends on its member states to impose its decisions. The EU is a treaty organisation made up of existing member states and is not a state itself. It remains essentially an multi-state economic institution creating the best political conditions for wider trade and investment to enhance business profitability. Since the neo-Liberal Maastricht Treaty, the EU-wide laws have put increased emphasis on the free movement of capital and goods, but they have provided far less in terms of uniform working conditions, minimum pay levels, or social security provision for labour.

This difference has been pointed out by such critical supporters of the EU as Joseph Stiglitz and Yanis Varoufakis. It was exposed very publicly when major problems emerged involving the euro, the EU's currency, following the Troika (the European Central Bank and European Commission plus the IMF) imposing draconian Austerity upon Ireland in 2010 and Greece in 2015. When the post-2008 Crisis hit the UK and USA, Austerity was also imposed in the UK and USA. But there is a common fiscal and social security (less so in the USA) regime throughout territories covered by the USA and UK, despite domestic variations within each state. In this respect, these states' direct fields of action coincide with their domestic dollar and sterling zones. This state unity helped to prevent the degree of misery imposed on the EU's eurozone peripheral states by the dominant states at its centre.

However, outside their own state boundaries, the USA's Wall Street and the UK's City of London have imposed more misery than the Troika. This had been seen earlier in the punitive Structural Adjustment Programmes (the original model for the EU's later Economic Adjustment Programmes) which they had imposed on the 'Third World'. After the 2008 Crisis, these programmes were imposed by the UK government upon Ireland and Iceland (which was declared a 'terrorist state' by Gordon Brown for trying to resist!)

The misery imposed by the Troika, stemmed not from some EU-wide, neo-Liberal conspiracy, but mainly from the activities of the German state acting in the interests of the Bundesbank. It was operating from a position of relative weakness compared to Wall Street and the City. This is why the Bundesbank had decided to promote the development of the eurocurrency. This widened the scope for the operations of German banks and businesses

and lessened dependence on the dollar and sterling. France was more guarded in its support, but had a history of resisting Anglo-American pressure, and the euro was seen as way of doing this. The ruling classes of the Benelux countries had long been keen on promoting greater German/French cooperation, their economies being closely linked to these states' fortunes. The Italian ruling class, if not quite so motivated, was one of the original six EEC members and went along with the euro. The Irish ruling class saw the euro as a way of lessening the economic dependence on the UK. The Spanish, Portuguese and Greek ruling classes saw the euro as a way of affirming their Europeanness, after many years of fascist or military junta isolation. Many East European member states had been keen to join. It took the uneven impact of the 2008 Crisis to raise doubts about the euro in many of these states.

The EU, reflecting its member states, has always been a capitalist institution, but is not some hardwired neo-liberal state. Instead, its politics reflect those being pursued by the majority of its key member states at any particular time. From its foundation in 1956, the EEC pursued Social Market policies, backed by both Social Democrats and Christian Democrats. It took until 1992 before the political balance of forces had changed enough for neo-liberal policies to finally gain ascendancy in the EU. This was heralded by the signing of the Maastricht Treaty.

The principal state pushing the EC/EU towards neo-liberalism and the Right since 1979 has been the UK, in alliance with the USA. When a new challenge began to emerge from the further Right populist-led, East European member states, following the 2008 Crisis, the Tories were the first to make alliances with these parties. The Tories are members of the same European Conservative and Reformist Party grouping as the racist and anti-semitic Polish Law and Justice Party and the Spanish chauvinist Vox in Spain. Trump also adopted this approach, adding support for Right Populists beyond the EU's boundaries. The main challenge to the EU's current neo-liberalism now comes from Right populism.

At the beginning of the EU referendum campaign, British ruling class Eurosceptic Remainers had majority support over minority British ruling class Europhobic Leavers. The Lib-Dem, Europhile Remainers were always British ruling class outsiders. But as the referendum campaign developed, the Europhobes gained more financial backing (much of it 'dark money') and media support than the Eurosceptics, and crucially, assistance from the rising Right Populists in the USA, organising around Trump.

‘Left’ Brexiteers denied the significant rising ruling class backing for Brexit and claimed the British ruling class was overwhelmingly opposed. They saw the Brexit campaign essentially as a competition between themselves and non-Tory Right populists against neo-liberalism. Right populists also looked for support amongst the large numbers of atomised, marginalised and alienated working class, who had been the victims of the Thatcherite and Blairite neo-Liberal offensive. In such a competition with the Right populists, the ‘Left’ Brexiteers thought that they would be better able to prove their anti-Tory credentials than UKIP. So many of UKIP’s leading members, including Nigel Farage and its sole MP, Douglas Carswell, had been and still look very much like traditional lower echelon Tories.

Ignoring the growing ruling class support for Brexit, how did the ‘Left’ Brexiteers measure up their support against that of the non-Tory Right populists and the Far Right Brexiteers? The CPB, following the onetime official CPGB’s longstanding opposition to the EEC/EC/EU, had been the only Left party to continue to publicly support leaving the EEC/EC/EU after 1975. However, the impact of Thatcherism had very much reduced Left Labour and trade union opposition to the EEC/EU. Therefore, it wasn’t until the Trotskyist ‘British roader’ SP(E&W) adopted an anti-EU stance, that the CPB joined it to contest the 2009 EU election with a joint front organisation – No2EU. The EU-phobic No2EU tested out Left anti-EU support in this election. No2EU received 1% of the vote. But on the non-Tory, Populist Right, UKIP received 16% of the vote and got 13 MEPs, whilst the Far Right, BNP received 6% of the vote and got 2 MEPs. The balance of forces didn’t look good!

No2EU had another five years to prepare and try to alter this balance of forces between Left and Right over the EU. But in the 2014 Euro-election, No2EU only got 0.2% of the vote, an 80% drop! The non-Tory, Right Populist, UKIP now got 26.6% of the vote and 24 MEPs, whilst its breakaway, An Independence for Europe got 1.4% of the vote. Although the Far Right, BNP lost its 2 MEPs, its vote was still five times that of No2EU, whilst one of its breakaways, the English Democrats, got four times No2EU’s vote. Indeed, No2EU was eighteenth in a list of contending parties. It came below eight which only stood in particular parts of the UK or of Great Britain. These election results, which also didn’t account for the significant hidden Tory Europhobic vote, should have been a warning that there was no prospect of a Left-led Brexit under the prevailing political conditions.

But the SWP, in a typical Johnny-come-lately political move, also came around to supporting ‘Leave’ in 2015. If the SP(E&W) had a shared anti-EU campaigning experience with the CPB, when No2EU participated in the 2009 and 2014 Euro-elections, by 2015, the SWP also had an anti-EU experience to draw upon. The SWP has an IST affiliated organisation in Greece, which forms part of the Antarsaya alliance. In 2015, Antarsaya had 9 Regional Government representatives, as well as local councillors, whereas neither the SWP (nor any of its ‘party’ front) organisations any longer had any MPs, Local Assembly members or local councillors.

The CPB could also look to the experience of the considerably larger Greek Communist Party (KKE). This party has the same international affiliation as the CPB in Great Britain. The KKE then had 15 MPs and 2 MEPs. The CPB had no MPs, MEPs and only 1 local councillor.

What made 2015 so significant was this was the year Greek workers mounted the biggest challenge in Europe since the French workers in 1968. This was the situation those claiming to be revolutionary socialists dream of - testing their politics against the reformist Left. Following the 2008 Crisis, the ECB had been imposing Austerity upon Greece. In 2010, the mainstream social democratic party, PASOK, led by George Papandreou, promised to resist the pressures but capitulated almost immediately when elected. (The leader of the mainstream French social democratic, SPF, Francois Hollande, was to make similar unfulfilled promises in 2012.)

A hybrid Left social democratic/Left populist party, Syriza, led by Alex Tsipras, was given added impetus by the ‘Movementist’, Greek Indignados. Syriza won the general election in January 2015. It formed a government coalition with Right populist ANEL. They pledged to oppose the Troika imposed Austerity. Although Tsipras was considerably to the Left of later opponents of neo-liberalism (e.g. Corbyn and Sanders, trapped within existing Right dominated parties), he still adhered to a version of nationally based, neo-Keynesian, economic policies to bring about significant changes through the existing state institutions. And it was a specific condition of Syriza’s alliance with its Greek chauvinist, Right populist partners ANEL that these institutions were not to be challenged. Tsipras saw no problem in giving ANEL control of the defence and foreign policy ministries. ANEL demanded that the close relationship between Greek state and the reactionary Greek Orthodox Church be maintained. The church had links with the neo-Nazi, Golden Dawn.

Syriza Finance Minister, Varoufakis also believed that the leaders of the EU/Troika could be persuaded to see the error of their ways. But competitive capitalism has no inbuilt safety mechanisms which more enlightened Left social democrats can conjure up. Following the 2008 Crisis, after over quarter of a century of globally dominant neo-Liberalism, there was a deep-seated crisis of profitability, just as there had been in 1975, after thirty years of Social Market domination. Therefore, by 2015, there was no scope for any power, including the dominant USA, a rising China, the declining Russian Federation, or an aspiring EU leadership, to pursue the kind of costly neo-Keynesian reforming policies, which would have placed them at a competitive disadvantage relative to the others.

Tsipiras, though, called a referendum asking the Greek people if they were prepared to accept the Troika's draconian proposals. They replied with a resounding 61.3% 'Ochi' ('No') to the proposed EU deal. From this point on, Socialists were no longer being asked to give support to Syriza, but to the Greek people, particularly the Greek working class, which had been involved in many strikes and demonstrations.

What was required were massive international mobilisations. The IST, CWI and ex-official Communist Party 'internationals' had played a significant part in the major anti-corporate globalisation and anti-Iraq War mobilisations in the early 2000s. It was international support at this level that was required. But this would need to be extended through international solidarity with industrial action. However, these 'internationals', including their Greek sections, did not organise EU wide demonstrations in support of the Greek working class. In the UK, the largest solidarity demonstration was organised by RIC in Glasgow.⁹

Instead, the KKE and Antarsaya (the CWI has no significant forces in Greece) opted for abstract propaganda directed against Syriza. Their international affiliates did the same. They used the excuse that they would not mobilise for Syriza, which after the bailout referendum was no longer the issue. It was the Greek people and working class who had shown their willingness to fight through their resounding 'Ochi' vote. But what did the KKE and Antarsaya call for in their propaganda – a national 'solution' - Grexit! This placed them on the same side over this key issue as the neo-Nazi Golden Dawn.

In July 2015, Syriza capitulated, even quicker than many Socialists had expected. Tsipras was forced to call a new election in September. This was

the time, when either the KKE or Antarsaya should have made the sort of electoral advances that Syriza first made in 2012, if their strategy, tactics and policies, for such a turbulent period as 2015, had been correct. But the KKE increased its vote by just 0.08% to a 5.55% total. Antarsaya increased its vote by 0.17% to 0.85%. The Grexit party which did best was the neo-Nazi, Golden Dawn. It increased its vote by 0.71% to 6.99%, bigger than the KKE and Antarsaya combined vote, winning an extra MP.

However, the most remarkable thing was that, despite a fall in the election turnout, due to disillusion following the Syriza leadership's post-referendum climb down, Syriza still remained the first placed party, with 35.5% of the vote (and another 2.9% for its Left breakaway). Despite all the misery Greece had endured at the hands of the Troika, the Greek people, including the working class, did not want Grexit. The EU provides wider access to jobs and higher education. More Greeks are now involved in mixed nationality relationships with partners from other EU member states. And Grexit was associated with a return to pre-EC Greece, and the political and social isolation resulting from rule by the military junta from 1967-74 - not an attractive prospect!

Since the 2008 Crisis, the EU leaders had clearly shown that, in the absence of the economic expansion which had fuelled earlier wider support, particularly in the Southern and Eastern Europe and in Ireland, the promises of Social Chapter and Regional Development reforms would now be ditched. They adopted this approach to maintain the EU for the sake of bankers' and major corporations' profits threatened by the growing global economic crisis and more cut-throat competition.

It was not a time to retreat into national isolation to be picked off by global corporate power and its backers in the EU or USA, or to believe that Putin's Russia or Xi Jinping's China were going to provide alternative trading partners without imposing their own onerous terms. Socialists needed to take up the baton of European unity dropped by its current leaders. In the UK, this meant prioritising the defence of the 2.8 million non-UK EU migrants and asylum seekers being lined up for attack. It also meant looking for political allies in the EU by advocating an independent international constitutional path and campaigning for a federal, democratic, secular, social and environmentally sustainable, social European Republic. This proved to be a step beyond the British roaders in the CPB, SWP or SP(E&)/SPS/

4. The ‘Left’ Brexiteers, the 2015 Westminster general election, the 2016 Euro-referendum and on to the 2017 Westminster general election – giving succour to the Right Populist and Hard Right Brexit offensive

When the outcome of the 2015 UK general election made it clear there would be a Euro-referendum in 2016, the ‘Left’ Brexiteers girded their loins. They found arguments which convinced themselves, but few others. The places the ‘Left’ Brexiteers held most of their meetings were the larger cities with the most ethnically mixed work forces, and with young higher and further education graduates who are more and more dependent on precarious work. They voted to Remain. Those smaller cities and towns in the declining industrial areas with their older more atomised, alienated, and marginalised workforces, following the ravages of Tory and New Labour neo-Liberal deindustrialisation, saw few if any ‘Left’ Brexiteers (especially Lexiters).

These areas mainly looked to the Right Brexiteers, who offered them scapegoats and saviours. Indeed, much of the growing anti-asylum seeker, anti-migrant, and Islamophobic politics had already been mainstreamed by the Tories, New Labour and its successor Miliband’s ‘One Nation’ - read ‘One State’ - Labour. But the Right populists were prepared to take this much further. In the process, onetime Labour voters became more prepared to vote for further Right parties, even over Labour Right and ‘Left’ Brexiteers.

The ‘Left’ Brexiteers in the SWP and in the SP(E&W) argued that a ‘Leave’ vote would lead to a severe crisis for the Tories and the British ruling class. Therefore, this demanded something more politically challenging than the lacklustre Labour Party, divided between Remainders and Leavers. In 2010 (the year after the SP(E&W)’s first No2EU Euro-election challenge) it had stood as the Trade Union and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) in the Westminster election. Their 44 candidates gained an average of 1% of the vote. But as with No2EU from the 2009 to the 2014 EU election, TUSC had another five years before the 2015 Westminster election to win wider support. And by 2015, the SWP was giving its support and provided candidates for the TUSC electoral challenge.

But the considerably increased number of 135 candidates now only gained an average 0.1% of the vote, a decided drop (a similar sort of pattern to No2U in the 2014 Euro-elections). The prospects for a Socialist challenge in the event of a ‘Leave’ vote, which would bring about a severe crisis for the Tory Party and the British ruling class, were looking somewhat doubtful. But surely a good ‘Left’ Brexiteer campaign could still change things

dramatically? But the problem did not arise from the inability of the CPB, SWP and to win over the majority of the Left or members of the Labour Party to support Brexit, and thus make it a working class led issue. The SWP, SP and CPB were already the three largest non-Labour Left organisations in Great Britain. The failure to win wider support for a Left Populist or a Lexit Brexit arose from the fact that under the existing economic and political conditions an inward turn to a ‘British road’ could only have reactionary consequences. This had already been shown by the failure of the significantly larger section of the Greek Left, represented by the KKE and Antarsaya to make any gains with their Left Grexit. Thus, many workers looking at Farage and the Right populists instinctively sensed this and supported ‘Remain’. Others, highly sceptical about the neo-liberalists, thought the Brexiters to be no better, and when it came to the 2016 referendum they abstained. Those who voted ‘Leave’, though, became more and more likely to vote for Right-led parties. and paid little or no heed to Left Brexiteers.

Despite the starkness of the 2009 and 2014 EU election results, the ‘Left’ Brexiteers ploughed on. They continued to make their ‘Left’ case. They argued that the EU has a ‘democratic deficit’ and is a ‘super state’ congenitally tied to hated neo-liberalism. This already represented a false assessment of the nature of the EU. But the EU does have some particularly unpleasant features and policies. These include the Schengen Agreement, which has closed the EU’s external border to many thousands of asylum seekers and other migrants seeking work. This has led to the horrific deaths of many thousands by drowning in the Mediterranean Sea. There have also been the 2008 EU Viking and Laval rulings, which allow employers to bring labour from one member state to another, but on the pay and conditions of their state of origin. And there has been the Troika’s draconian imposition of Economic Adjustment Programmes upon the Irish Republic in 2010 and Greece in 2015.

However, the much more widely supported Right Brexiteers had their own answers for all these arguments. The UK had not signed up to the Schengen Agreement, because the walls aren’t high enough to keep out migrants. But this wasn’t enough, and the English Channel had to become a highly fortified moat after Brexit. After Brexit, the Viking and Laval rules could be replaced by gastarbeiter (later Australian) type immigration laws that allow much cheaper labour with far fewer rights, to enter the UK for strictly proscribed periods of time. And after Brexit, Austerity would not be imposed, under the cover of the EU. The UK government would mount its own open attacks on its working class. Under the auspices of ‘America First’/‘Britain Second’,

bureaucratic red tape (i.e. protective regulations covering workers, consumer and environmental conditions) would be ended.

And, as for the EU's 'democratic deficit', no one on the Eurosceptic or Europhobic Right ever made any attempt to extend the EU's very limited democracy, wanting to maintain it as an inter-state body. The Right Brexit demand to 'Bring back control' was not a demand for more democracy in the UK state, but for the British ruling class to have even more control, ready for a stepped-up attack on existing hard-won democratic rights. Any transitional 'problems' would be drowned by a rising crescendo of scapegoating using chauvinism, racism, sexism, homophobia and transphobia.

The Left Brexiteers also highlighted the pressures exerted on the European Commission by corporate business interests (including those from outside the EU). However, this is every bit as much the case with each individual EU member state government. Westminster and Holyrood are subjected to much corporate lobbying and bribery. Many MPs and MSPs receive payments from businesses, some involved in illegal activities. There is no way that leaving the EU would change this. Indeed, given the Right forces behind Brexit, the corruption was only likely to become worse.

Furthermore, the 'Left' Brexiteers largely ignored the link between Eurosceptic Remainders and the Europhobic Leavers over migration controls. David Cameron's Con-Dem and subsequent Tory governments had already brought in the Immigration Acts of 2014 and 2016, without much opposition from Labour. Amongst other things, these acts have extended the active policing of asylum seekers and migrants by a wide number of public sector workers and by landlords. However, this was nothing like enough for Europhobic Brexiteers. They flagged up even more draconian immigration laws.

Similarly, the 'Left' Brexiteers also ignored the marked difference between the franchise for 'IndyRef1' in 2014 and for the Euro-referendum in 2016. This time most non-UK EU residents and all 16-18 year olds were excluded. Given the narrowness of the final Brexit vote, it is quite likely that if these people had been included, the vote would have gone the other way; especially since as potential voters they would have been given some voice in the media coverage, instead of which, as non-voters, they were largely ignored.

It is no surprise that the Right has constantly demanded that the 2016 Brexit vote be recognised. However, no Socialist should invoke any 'democratic'

legitimacy for a franchise, which excluded so many. Without any challenge from the ‘Left’ Brexiteers over this, the Right was able to claim that the vote meant a hard Brexit, which was not on the ballot paper. Indeed, the ‘Left’ Brexiteers’ logic of seeing the EU as an imperial ‘super-state’ tends to lead to support for a hard Brexit. This has left them unable to counter the Right Populist offensive.

The CPB and Scottish Labour Left in the Red Paper Collective, along with George ‘Just Say Naw’ Galloway, as consistent upholders of a ‘British state road to socialism’, lined themselves up with much larger Right forces in both the 2014 and 2016 referenda, but maintained their organisational independence. But by 2016, super-egotist Galloway could see where he had to go to get greater publicity. So, along with Kate Hoey, Labour’s Countryside Alliance and Ulster Unionist supporting MP, he signed up directly for Nigel Farage’s Brexit campaign.

It is telling that the SWP and the SP(E&W), in trying to claim some political consistency for their public support (in Scotland anyhow) for a ‘Yes’ vote in the 2014 IndyRef1 and for a ‘Leave’ vote in the 2016 Euro-referendum, showed a complete inability to distinguish between Left and Right. This was less a problem for those influenced by the old CPGB tradition which had a history of promoting Left/Right alliances, e.g. with the Powellites in the 1975 EEC referendum.

During ‘IndyRef1’, the ‘Project Fear’ coming from conservative unionist ‘Better Together’, was contested primarily by the ‘Project Hope’ of the wider ‘Yes’ movement. The ‘Left’ ‘No’ supporters were marginal, their votes just reinforcing the Right. During the Euro-referendum, the ‘Project Fear’ of the conservative unionist and Eurosceptic, ‘Britain Better in Europe’, was contested primarily by the ‘Project Hate’ of the further Right Europhobic and reactionary unionist, ‘Grassroots Out’ (it had a symbiotic relationship with the official Tory led ‘Vote Leave’). The marginal ‘Left’ Brexit and Lexit campaigns just further reinforced the Right populists.

With Right populist parties having already breached the EU’s earlier West/East political divide, and now a growing in force in Austria, Italy, France, Sweden, and Germany, neo-liberalism, far from being hardwired in the EU, could be dropped or considerably watered down by a further Right pushing an alternative national authoritarian and economically protectionist order. This would severely curtail the movement of labour for non-White migrants or their descendants living in the EU. The EU’s remaining

economic and consumer protection and civil and minority rights would be under attack and the EU's Court of Justice severely restricted.

Under the strain, the EU might break-up into a better off northern and poorer southern union, or fragment completely. Any Socialist who thinks that this would provide better political opportunities is nearly as misguided as those German Communist Party members in 1931, who eagerly anticipated the demise of the Weimar state, claiming "After Hitler our turn!" (The current Right Populists are not Fascists, but unlike Germany in 1933 or Italy in 1922, today the various national ruling classes within the EU or the USA do not need to resort to full-blown fascism, in their attempt to break working class resistance, because the organised Left is considerably weaker.)

When it came to actual campaigning before the 2016 referendum, the 'Left' Brexiteers organised no major public meetings, local or national marches or demonstrations in what became the majority 'Leave'-supporting Labour 'Red Wall' constituencies. And just as revealing, there were no major public speaking tours bringing across speakers from their 'party'/sect 'internationals' or taking their British (or Irish) members on campaigns around the other EU states. Thus, despite the 'Left' Brexiteers' rhetorical claim of the benefits which leaving the EU would bring to the wider European working class, this was not reflected in their political practice. This repeated the 'national exceptionalist' pattern established by these 'party' sects during the 'IndyRef1' campaign.

The immediate lead up to and aftermath of the 2016 Brexit vote was not marked by joyful demonstrations, colourful street stalls and vibrant meetings as in the run-up to 'IndyRef1' on September 18th, 2014. Instead, in the run-up to the EU membership referendum on June 23rd, 2016, tensions increased. These led to the murder of Jo Cox MP, who had publicly supported asylum seekers. And in the aftermath of the Brexit vote victory there were no public celebratory events, organised by the Left, but a spike in racist attacks which led to the murder of Arek Jozwuk in Harlow, Essex and the suicide, following racist bullying of schoolgirl, Dagmara Przybysz in Devon.

After all this, the SWP did mobilise its front organisation, 'Stand Up to Racism' (SUtr). But having advocated a 'No' vote, which contributed to the rise in racist attacks, this was like running up a down-going escalator. SUtr concentrated its attention on the Far Right and ignored both the state racism and the effects of the Brexit campaign. But soon the Far Right, which pushed for an ever-harder Brexit, in order to provide the best opportunity to

advance its own racist agenda, grew in size, benefitting from Brexit's success in pushing politics further Right.

The Brexit vote did create some tensions between the Eurosceptic and Europhobic wings of the British ruling class. But these were nothing compared to the problems faced by Socialists who had supported Brexit. After the vote in 2016, they ceased to have any independent political presence over the Brexit issue. Instead, the SWP and the SP(E&W) transferred their support to the new Left social democratic 'kid on the block' - Jeremy Corbyn, offering him advice. However, he preferred to look to influential trade union bureaucrats like Len McCluskey and his close associate Karie Murphy, backed by the longstanding ex-CPGB EU-phobic Seamus Milne and Andrew Murray - the 4Ms.

During the Brexit campaign, Corbyn had been a somewhat reluctant Remainer. He seemed to be bored with the issue, adhering to the classical social democratic view that constitutional issues are a diversion from the 'bread and butter' issues which concern the working class. However, the EU had provided a useful excuse for New Labour claiming, for example, that it prevented the government from implementing their 1997 Westminster election manifesto pledge to renationalise the railways. But many EU member states have nationalised railways (and the Dutch and Spanish nationalised railways own companies in the UK!). Later the SNP Holyrood government successfully defended Calmac Ferries from privatisation. The reality is that the main barrier to the sort of neo-Keynesian reforms wanted by Left Social Democrats, lies not in the EU (although still an obstacle), but in the British ruling class and its UK state, particularly given the privileged position given to the City of London. But since Left social democrats accept the existing UK, the EU has also provided them a useful scapegoat to cover their unwillingness to challenge the UK state or the City of London.

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 gastarbeiter system of migrant labour control as one of the prime purposes of Brexit. And, when Donald 'Brexit plus, plus, plus' Trump became US 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 – all jumping to Trump's tune.

May decided to cement her position by holding a general election in June 2017. Despite May standing on a hard ‘Brexit means Brexit’ platform, the Hard Right UKIP still challenged the Tories for an even harder Brexit. At last the opportunity had arrived for ‘Left’ Brexiteers to put forward their own alternative. The SP(E&W) and the SWP had campaigned for the UK to leave the EU, so they should have been able to come up with some new version of No2EU/TUSC and put forward their own ‘Left’ Brexit policy and candidates.¹⁰ However, instead of increasing the 135+ candidates fielded in the 2015 Westminster general elections, the SP(E&W) and the SWP put up exactly 0 candidates in the 2017 election!

Instead, they now supported Corbyn-led Labour. Yet, the majority of the Labour candidates, whom the SP(E&W) and SWP were asking people to vote for, were existing Labour MPs who were neo-Blairite and had supported Tory Austerity measures. Many had joined Cameron’s Eurosceptic, ‘Britain Stronger in Europe’ and the conservative unionist, ‘Better Together’ campaigns. TUSC did not challenge the non-Tory, Hard Right Brexiteers, the Tory Right government Brexiteers, or the divided Labour Party.

Their failure to stand was an indication that their Brexit predictions had completely collapsed, especially all the grand claims that a Brexit vote would favour Socialists and the wider working class. There weren’t even any SWP or SP(E&W) electoral leaflets warning of the dangers of draconian new immigration laws, the removal of votes from EU residents, or the likely roll-back of the limited self-determination provided for Scotland and Wales under ‘Devolution-all-round’.

5. The CPB, SP(E&W) and SWP provide cover for McCluskey’s anti-democratic, ‘British jobs for British workers’, racist and Right accommodating Brexit

Aware of the ‘Remain’/‘Leave’ divisions in Corbyn-led Labour, the SP(E&W) and the SWP increasingly looked to those trade union leaders, who supported a Brexit based on ‘British jobs for British workers’, to advance a ‘Left’ Brexit cause. They began to fall in behind Len McCluskey and his allies’ portrayal of the struggle being between the neo-Blairite, neo-liberal Right, who supported ‘Remain’, and the Labour Left who supported ‘Leave’. From this viewpoint, Labour’s Right Leavers, such as Gisela Stuart

(chair of ‘Vote Leave’), UKIP-Lite, racist Tom Harris, and Kate Hoey (who campaigned with Nigel Farage) were airbrushed out of the picture.

What was also glossed over was the shared desire, stretching from Right Remainers, Chuku Umanna and Tom Watson through now ‘Left’ Leavers, Jeremy Corbyn and Len McCluskey, to further limit immigration. And what was even more overlooked was their shared defence of the UK constitutional status quo following the shock of ‘IndyRef1’. This also went for their failure to challenge the rigged referendum franchise, which excluded EU residents and 16-18 year olds, despite the precedent for this franchise extension having been established in the 2014 Scottish Independence referendum. Beneath all the careerist motivated jockeying for position in the Labour Party, leading to the acrimonious squabbles amplified in the media, the Labour Leavers, Right and ‘Left’, and Labour Right Remainers’ shared beliefs were hidden.

The Labour Party entered May’s snap 2017 election with a classic fudge over Brexit. This was designed to keep the Labour Party, Right and Left, Leave and Remain, on board. Significantly, the manifesto included the ending of free movement of people from the EU, and opposition to greater Scottish self-determination.

However, the *For the Many, Not the Few* manifesto motivated many new young members, including some with EU migrant backgrounds and those from a BAME background, through to students with large loans and recent graduates in precarious jobs facing high rents and insecure tenancies. Many of these Labour Remainers believed that the British ruling class would not go for a Hard Brexit, so perhaps Corbyn might be successful in getting backing for a soft Brexit or BINO (Brexit in name only). So, they were won over by the economic and social reforms offered in the *For the Many, Not the Few* manifesto.

Corbyn’s fudge did lead to Labour increasing its vote by 9.6% and gaining 30 MPs, giving a total of 260 compared with the Tories’ 317 MPs. However, in a warning of problems to come, Labour still lost 7 long-held seats in ‘Red Belt’ ‘Leave’ voting areas to the Tories. They were being drawn further Right. It also contributed to the illusion that Labour had its Remainer vote in the bag and needed to shift to accommodate that section of its traditional support that was moving the Right, after being attacked or ignored by New Labour. Here many of the working class’s earlier organisations have been broken or badly damaged, paving the way for a more individualistic thinking

which favoured the Right, including the politics of promoting saviours and scapegoats.

Despite May standing on a ‘Brexit means Brexit’ platform, the Hard Right UKIP still stood, winning 594,068 votes. With TUSC abandoning the electoral arena, this was left to Scargill’s Socialist Labour Party which could only muster 3 candidates and 1154 votes. The Tories actually increased their vote by 5.5% (mainly at the expense of UKIP) but still lost 13 seats.

Overall, though, the clear-cut reactionary unionist Brexiteers performed considerably better than the clear-cut liberal unionist, 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.¹¹

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. They were looking for the first opportunity to ditch Corbyn. In contrast, the Tories, were largely unfazed by the loss of their overall majority. Any attempt to go for a softer Brexit, e.g. a Norwegian style deal, which even Nigel Farage had suggested in 2016,¹⁰ was now summarily dismissed, in favour of ‘No Deal is Better than a Bad Deal’.

May, despite ever increasing pressure from the further Right, took comfort in the far greater divisions in the ‘Remain’ camp, and an even more divided Labour Party. It could offer no alternative Brexit plan, since there wasn’t one which could defend the existing EU workers’, consumer and environmental safeguards, in a world of ever greater cut-throat competition, and with US corporate capital providing the main trading alternative. The battle-hardened working class in Greece had understood this when they overwhelmingly rejected Grexit.

Corbyn-led Labour then actually began to help the Tories move the terms of the Brexit debate ever further to the Right. In February 2017 Corbyn had given May a green light to go for a harder Brexit by voting for a Section 50 withdrawal order without any preconditions. Soon after the election, Corbyn

ordered his MPs to vote against Umanna's parliamentary amendment to the Queen's speech ruling out a 'No Deal' Brexit. Umanna was opposed by Corbyn because his stance undermined Labour's commitment to ending the free movement of workers from the EU!

So, feeling no pressure to moderate the Tories' increasingly hard Brexit stance following the general election result, May made a Westminster deal with the most reactionary force in mainstream British politics - the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) (sometimes and only half-jokingly called 'the Provisional wing of the seventeenth century'!)

And from this point, Johnson and the Right Populist wing of the Tories, and Jacob Rees-Mogg's Hard Right, European Research Group, backed externally by the DUP and Trump, launched a political offensive to clear out any surviving Tory Remainers and softer Brexiteers from the party. They also now wanted to ditch May, who had been a useful transitional figure, but whose time was now up. In 2019 the Tory Hard Right went on to use Farage's new Brexit Party, DUP and Trump to mount pressure on May from outside the party.

In contrast, Corbyn, advised by the inner coterie of the 4Ms, based his strategy on appeasing the Labour Right to hold the party together for the next general election. This could only lead to a lack of any unity of purpose. Such was the depth of the multifaceted crises the UK state faced that this centred on an ongoing constitutional crisis, which Labour did not recognise, but the Hard Right fully appreciated. This failure of Corbyn and his allies greatly helped Boris Johnson, who was uniting the party behind 'Get Brexit Done'.

The Labour Left leadership was now in full-scale retreat. McCluskey had pushed for Labour to accept Trident renewal soon after he was elected leader in 2015. Always a privileged bureaucrat at heart, McCluskey also helped Corbyn ditch the possibility of mandatory selection of parliamentary candidates at the 2018 party conference in favour of trigger ballots. This was a bureaucratic mechanism which the Right soon mastered. McCluskey also told Corbyn to bow to the Zionists' Right backed, bogus antisemitism offensive and sign up to the apartheid Israel apologetic 10 IHRA principles. This whilst completely ignoring the rampant Islamophobia and anti-migrant politics of the Labour Right, including depute leader Tom Watson and the continued membership of war criminal, Tony Blair. Watson became the party's chief 'witchfinder general'.

6. Two forces for possible future Socialist advances – Ian Allinson’s Grassroots Left election campaign for the UNITE general secretary and the appearance of anti-racist, pro-migrant, Left Remain forces in the new Labour intake.

However, during 2017, there was another election campaign, this time for the position of UNITE general secretary. Like Theresa May, Len McCluskey called this unnecessary election to consolidate his position. This way he would still be in office after the next general election, following which he hoped a new Jeremy Corbyn-led Labour government would be formed. This would bring back Old Labour’s 1970s relationship with the trade union bureaucracy - only instead of beer and sandwiches at No. 10 Downing Street, it would now be prosecco and canapes. As one of the highest paid general secretaries and leader of the largest union, McCluskey likes the high life. His close associate, Karie Murphy turned out to be even more ambitious, seeking a place in the House of Lords.

McCluskey is one of those classic Left union bureaucrats, who ‘talk Left’ and ‘walk Right.’ This was clear when UNITE was the first union to break the unity following the massive Pension Strike on November 30th, 2011 and its capitulation before INEOS at Grangemouth in 2013.¹¹ Anyone who still thought McCluskey was a Left candidate was deluding themselves.

Back in 2010, when McCluskey was first elected UNITE general secretary, he gained 101,000 votes, with rank and file Grassroots Left candidate, Jerry Hicks coming second with 53,000 votes and the neo-Blairite candidate Les Bayliss third with 47,000 votes. However, in a reflection of the lack of direct membership involvement, only 16% of the members had voted. This declined to 15% in the 2013 election, where Hicks received 80,000 to McCluskey’s 145,000 votes. McCluskey monopolised the union machinery and resorted to a red-baiting campaign.¹² The degree to which McCluskey relied on bureaucratic inertia, and his own appointed officials was to be further revealed in the 2017 general secretary’s election, when only 12.2% of the members voted, despite this supposedly being a time of heightened political activity on the Left. In this election, McCluskey was challenged by the Grassroots Left candidate Ian Allinson and the neo-Blairite candidate, Gerry Coyne.

In the 2017 election, unlike McCluskey and Coyne, two union full-timers, who had access to UNITE’s bureaucratic machinery, the Grassroots Left

candidate, Allinson, a shop steward, mounted a vigorous rank and file campaign. He challenged McCluskey's poor record and both McCluskey and Coyne's bowing to racist pressure,¹³ as well as McCluskey's role in the Labour Party in accepting the Israel-apologetic IHRA.¹⁴ McCluskey's bureaucratic manoeuvring, since joining Corbyn's inner coterie, was also weakening the Left inside the Labour Party.

UNITE is a Labour Party affiliated union. Allinson, is not an individual Labour Party member, but had to take cognisance of the party in his campaign, where Corbyn's role was an important issue. Allison did this by saying he would be a more reliable Corbyn supporter than McCluskey (pointing to McCluskey's opposition in 2010 to John McDonnell as the Labour leader candidate). However, McCluskey was now Corbyn's most important backer. With UNITE's financial backing, McCluskey's earlier support for Ed Miliband could be overlooked. Allinson's attempt to appear more Corbynite than McCluskey was politically misplaced. And indeed, the criticisms which Allinson made of McCluskey over bowing to racist and Zionist pressure could have been applied just as easily to Corbyn. One issue entirely missing from Allinson's campaign was any reference to Brexit, despite McCluskey being a well-known supporter of a 'British Jobs for British Workers' Brexit.

The mutual attraction between Corbyn and McCluskey lay in their shared belief in bureaucratic manoeuvring over democracy. Furthermore, Corbyn, in the event of a Labour general election victory, was looking to McCluskey to police UNITE members, in a similar manner to the way Left general secretaries Hugh (later Lord) Scanlon (AEU) and Jack Jones (TGWU) had done for Labour under the Social Contract in the late 1970s.

In engaging with union militants, Allinson was displaying a key aspect of industrial republicanism. This is upholding the sovereignty of union members in their workplace over that of the bureaucrats in their union HQs. But he provided no supplementary political republican support for the sovereignty of the people over the UK's anti-democratic Crown Powers. A combined industrial and political republican approach would have provided a better basis for defying the anti-Trade Union Laws, long upheld by both the Tories and Labour.

Such an approach could also have provided Allinson with a distinctive political cutting edge in Scotland and Ireland. UNITE is an all-islands union, with members throughout the UK and the Irish Republic. In Scotland, the

issue of the right to hold ‘IndyRed2’ would have challenged McCluskey’s continued evasiveness over the issue. Support for the exercise of self-determination is popular with many union members, who in Glasgow and Dundee in particular, had voted in 2014 to secede from the UK. McCluskey’s ignominious role at Grangemouth in 2013 could also have been highlighted. In Ireland, a declaration of support for Irish reunification could have been linked to a challenge to the trade union bureaucrat social partnership deals with the Irish Dail and Stormont. These reduce trade union leaders to helping co-manage the implementation of Austerity, either through the ‘Croke Park’/‘Haddington Road’ Agreements in the Irish Republic or the ‘Fresh Start’ Agreement in Northern Ireland.

Allinson, is member of rs21, an SWP breakaway, which has links with International Socialism Scotland (ISS). However, his campaign was not taken to Scotland. Furthermore, rs21 enjoys a relationship with People before Profit (originally set up by the SWP in Ireland, but now acting as a Socialist Workers Network ‘Think Tank’). But in a continuation of the ‘Irish exceptionalist’, ‘Leave Ireland to the Irish’ politics inherited from the British SWP, it does not seem to have occurred to rs21 to take Allinson’s campaign to Ireland. Here it could have sought the help of PbP, which had 3 Dial members and 14 local councillors in the Irish Republic and 1 MLA and 1 councillor in Northern Ireland.

Yet, it was perfectly clear that Allinson was the only genuine Left candidate, and a worker, not somebody who had climbed through the union full-timer hierarchy. Despite this, whole swathes of the Left, including the SP(E&W), gave their backing to McCluskey, whilst SWP support was lukewarm. Yet McCluskey was working fulltime to undermine and marginalise any politically independent Left in both UNITE and the Labour Party.

Mirroring the continued decline of membership participation under McCluskey, his vote fell back to 59,000, only narrowly beating overt Right winger Coyne, who got 54,000 votes. In the face of declining member participation, the SP(E&W) and some other Socialists backing McCluskey, Allinson received 18,000 votes. These breached the ‘jobs for the boys’ full-timer attempted monopolisation of UNITE. This was one of the highlights of this period for any Socialists committed to independent working class organisation.

The other positive development was the emergence of Left Remainers, many within the younger Corbyn Labour intake. They had the backing of some

trade union leaders e.g. Manuel Cortes of TSSA (significantly a migrant himself) and the late Dave Hopper of the Durham Miners' Association.

Ironically, it was the Right Remainers, increasingly marginalised as key sections of the British ruling class transferred their support to Brexit, who had to take to the streets, not something they were very familiar with! They organised 'Peoples Vote' marches, hoping to precipitate another EU referendum, whilst maintaining their Eurosceptic opposition to the free movement of EU migrants, which they shared with Right and 'Left' Leavers. The Left Remainers, however, opposed the racism associated with Brexit and the Right Remainers. They organised their own 'Another Europe Is Possible' (AEiP) contingents on the 'Peoples Vote' marches in June 2018 and October 2019 (whereas the 'Left' Leavers left the street mobilising to the Right Brexiteers).

Furthermore, the influx of young Labour Left Remainers ensured that a motion was passed at the party's July 2019 annual conference which proposed to extend the free movement of people, the closure of all detention centres and equal voting rights for all UK residents.¹⁵ This was opposed by Right Remainers, Right Leavers and 'Left' Leavers alike. But it was McCluskey who manoeuvred to ensure that this policy never made it into the 2019 general election manifesto.

The main weakness of AEiP was its continued illusions in Corbyn. Corbyn had stooped to a particularly low point, when he refused to impose a three line whip to oppose May's new Immigration Bill on January 29th, 2019. Many Labour MPs, including some claiming to be 'Left' absented themselves. Two Tories were more principled in attending Westminster and voting against.¹⁶ And, although AEiP Labour activists could see the betrayal of their July 2019 conference resolution, they still looked to the Green New Deal proposed in Labour's 2019 *Its Time for Real Change* manifesto.

However, there was little appreciation in AEiP of the political significance of Labour being a non-existent force in Northern Ireland and having a rapidly declining, further Right membership in Scotland than in England and Wales. As well as the Greens in England and Wales, whom AEiP acknowledged, any appeals for a wider Left Remain would need to extend to Left Republicans in Ireland, Left SNP and Left Scottish Greens in Scotland, Left Plaid Cymru members in Wales, and independent Socialists in all the constituent units of the UK.¹⁷ The inability of AEiP to appreciate the

reactionary pressures resulting from the UK being a British unionist state are particularly strong in the Labour Party and some of its entrust groups.

Nevertheless, Socialists wanting to relate to those drawn to the Labour Party should have devoted themselves to working with the Left Remainders who included the party's most anti-racist wing. Giving support to the slippery 'Left' Leavers, led by McCluskey, was just another way of providing cover for the Right and marginalising those migrants and asylum seekers in the frontline of attack, whether from the Far Right, Hard Right, Right and 'Left' 'British jobs for British workers' Leavers or from Right Remainders.

7. The growing ascendancy of the Hard Right and the final demise of 'Left' Brexit in the December 12th general election

The 'Left' Leavers in the SP(E&W) and the SWP, who unlike Farage's new Brexit Party, had mounted no independent political campaign to push for their version of Brexit (which was decidedly unclear anyway), began to get worried that Corbyn's 2017 election fudge might not be enough to hold Labour's 'Red Wall' constituencies. These largely voted for the Brexit Party in the June 2019 EU election. The Brexit Party came first in every constituency except London, Scotland and Northern Ireland. In this election, the Tory Hard Right was even more successful in diverting votes from the May-led Tories to the Brexit Party, than the Labour Right was in undermining Corbyn through its trumped-up 'anti-semitism' offensive. But for Boris Johnson and co, tacit support for the Brexit Party (and open support for the DUP) was just a tactic to shift the Tories further Right before dispensing with Farage, the Brexit Party and the DUP. Thus, Farage and the Brexit Party paved the way for Right populist Johnson to become leader of the Tory Party. Meanwhile the Labour Left's original 'tactical' bowing before the wider Right was to become central to their future Westminster general election campaign.

However, the fudge which had managed to keep the new Labour Remainders members on board in 2017 (they had been looking to economic and social aspects of the *For the Many, Not the Few* manifesto) was no longer working. Labour Remainders were becoming increasingly alarmed by Corbyn's complete inability to prevent a harder and harder Brexit. So, whereas Labour Leavers in the 'Red Wall' constituencies voted for the Brexit Party, many Labour Remainders in London now voted Liberal or Green (4 MEPs to Labour's 2), in Wales voted Plaid Cymru (1 MEP each) and in Scotland

voted SNP (3 seats to Labour's 0). Even in the East of England and South West England, the Greens gained 1 MEP to Labour's 0, and in the West Midlands and Yorkshire, Labour and the Greens held 1 MEP each. The 'Left' Leavers advice to adopt a clearer Brexit position to win the next general election to hold off the Right Brexiteers was revealed as patent nonsense.

The 'Left' Leavers, in their blindness towards ever growing British ruling class support for Brexit, continued to warn of how the British ruling class, the City and CBI, committed to neo-Liberalism, would pull the plug on Brexit. The hollowness of this was revealed in the lead up to the June EU election. The British ruling class gave no effective backing to Chuka Umanna's breakaway Independent Group, soon to be Change UK, despite some 'Left' Leavers' warning of British ruling class support for a new British Macron-style party. Nor did the City of London organise any runs on the pound, a long-favoured tactic to derail the policies of incumbent governments they did not like. Then on October 19th, 2019 Mark Carney, governor of the Bank of England, announced his support for a Johnson-led Brexit.¹⁸ Two of the City's offshore tax havens, Jersey and Guernsey already made their own deals with the EU to protect the financial sector.¹⁹

But just prior to this, on September 24th, the UK Supreme Court had ruled Johnson's proroguing of parliament, to force through his Brexit deal, illegal. Corbyn gave his thumbs up to McCluskey at the Labour Party conference then going on.²⁰ He believed that British ruling class was about to ditch Johnson. The Labour Left's naivety about the nature of the UK constitution and the majority of the British ruling class's commitment to 'Remain' was soon to receive a very sharp knock. The ruling class took no further action, other than making Johnson apologise to the queen. It then allowed him to proceed with his plan B, a general election, without any further impediment.

Johnson, having cleared out any last Remainers or even soft Brexiteers, had a united party. He soon forced Farage and the Brexit Party to stand aside in Tory held constituencies. The Tory Hard Right could see that their party held a significant lead in every poll. They upfronted the constitutional issue - 'Get Brexit Done' - whilst making it perfectly clear to the ruling class that this was to be accompanied by major attacks on the working class and a bonanza of lucrative contracts for those who contributed to party coffers.

This approach completely confounded Corbyn and other Left social democrats. They wanted to upfront economic and social issues, believing that the UK constitution was quite adequate for their purposes. Despite the

constitution's massive ruling class privileges and all the anti-democratic weapons which it places in its hands (which could be used against Corbyn's neo-Keynesian programme), it was the Right who were demanding radical political changes. They wanted even more centralised power. Like other Right populists they were looking to a new national authoritarian political order.

However, the real problem for Corbyn was that there was no possible fudge over Brexit. Johnson and his backers understood this and had acted accordingly. They forced every Tory candidate (most did not need much persuading) to stand on the party's clear 'Get Brexit Done' platform. There was no chance of Labour winning the 2019 general election by trying to occupy this ground. There were less chance of this than for Labour's attempt to beat the Tories in Scotland by becoming the most unionist party. Up to 2015, Scottish Labour had many more MPs, up to 2016 more MSPs, and up to 2017 many more local councillors than the Tories. But as Labour tried to out-unionist the Tories it was overtaken by them in the number of MSPs in 2016, the number of MPs and local councillors in 2017 and the number of MEPs in 2019. But Labour's 'consolation' in its 2017 local council results was that they had 5 Orange Order councillors to the Tories 1, not something indicating Scottish Labour's move to the Left!²¹

Corbyn's best, but far from guaranteed chance of leading a new Labour government in 2019, was to take the lead of the 'Remain' camp (and put a Left social democratic gloss on that). An overall Labour victory was never on the cards in the December 12th general election. Forming a Labour-led government would have meant striking a deal with the SNP to enable 'IndyRef2', if the SNP still had the majority of MPs in Scotland after the election. It wasn't necessary to commit Labour to Scottish independence, and it could have offered a 'Devo-Max' option. Plaid Cymru might have been won over with a further extension of Welsh devolution. The Labour Left excuse that the SNP, Plaid Cymru or the Greens aren't Left wing, and aren't backed by the trade unions (read trade union bureaucrats) was feeble. All of these other parties' voting records at Westminster was better than that of Labour, which had so many Right wing MPs who often voted with the Tories. And when it came to the issue of migration, any SNP, Plaid Cymru or Green MP had a better voting record than some on the Labour 'Left'.

In the immediate run up to the December 12th general election, the 'Left' Brexiteers realised that campaigning over Brexit wasn't going to win the election. They fell back on traditional social democratic thinking that

constitutional issues are a diversion from the ‘bread and butter’ issues which concern the working class. They emphasised the *For the Many, Not the Few* manifesto’s defence of the NHS and its neo-Keynesian, new jobs promoting, ‘Green New Deal’. However, the Tories prioritised the constitutional. ‘Get Brexit Done’ and ‘No IndyRef2’ were linked to a ‘stronger Britain’, more immigration controls, the scrapping of ‘red tape’ (i.e. the not spelled out labour, consumer and environmental regulation) and the Right populist ‘nirvana’ that would follow a ‘Boris’ victory.

But Corbyn’s 2019 manifesto, like Miliband’s 2015 and Corbyn’s 2017 manifestoes, still bowed to the Right populists’ racist agenda. McCluskey took a key role in eliminating the Left Remainders’ 2019 Labour conference anti-racist policies. The constitutional section of the manifesto, consigned to page 81, opposed a Scottish independence referendum, wanted the reinstatement of the bi-sectarian Stormont Executive and continued to support (business friendly) directly elected mayors – all Tory polices too.

When the December 12th general election occurred, the walls of the hole the ‘Left’ Brexiteers had been digging for themselves finally caved in. Far from opening up a new door to a ‘British road to socialism’, or a revived ‘Spirit of 45’ social democracy, the ‘Left’ Leavers had helped to pave the way for the triumph of British Right populism and reactionary unionism. The Hard Right were open in their support for Trump’s ‘America First,’ somewhat hopefully thinking he would make ‘Britain Second’. In reality, key sections of the British ruling class instead of having a significant vote in the EU, now looked, if somewhat nervously, to Trump’s USA for assistance.

The UK’s even greater subordinate political relationship to the USA would place it politically somewhere below that of Alaska and Puerto Rico! The City of London would be the only British based (but not solely British owned) institution carrying any economic and political weight in the USA through its overlapping links with Wall Street. Other sectors of British industry would have to find the economic niches which American corporate capital, especially Big Pharma and agribusiness, permit. However, the ‘Left’ Brexiteers suggested no alternative international allies, to implement a ‘Corbyn Brexit.’

8. The ‘Left’ Brexiteers export their Brexit illusions

Thus, for SP(E&W) and the SWP, British ‘national liberation’ from the EU was deemed to be more important than any Scottish, Irish (or Welsh) self-determination challenge to the UK state. They mounted their ‘Left’ Brexit campaigns across Great Britain, although mostly in ‘Remain’ areas. They largely left the ‘Leave’ areas to the Right. And more revealing, despite their claims of the internationalist benefits for the European working class of Brexit, neither of their sect ‘internationals’, the CWI nor the IST, organised public tours or demonstrations involving their other European sections. And this went for Ireland/Northern Ireland too, despite the obvious negative effect Brexit would have there.

The nature of the relationship of the SWP and the SP(E&W) to their fraternal organisations in Ireland - the Irish SWP and the SPI - demonstrated over Brexit, reflects that of the UK state to Ireland/Northern Ireland. Although Northern Ireland continues to be part of the UK state, it has retained a semi-detached relationship under the post-GFA arrangements. This suits the British ruling class, which wants to ensure that the unsavoury methods its ‘Ulster’ unionist partners use to maintain the Union and their Protestant supremacist politics, receive as little Westminster and British media scrutiny as possible.

The SWP and SP(E&W) have adapted to the nature of the UK state’s relationship to Northern Ireland by adopting their own semi-detached relationship, which is mirrored in Ireland by an ‘Irish exceptionalism’ in the SPI and the Irish SWP towards the wider unionist nature of the UK state. They have no shared all-islands ‘internationalism from below’ strategy to overcome this. The relationship between the SWP and SP(E&W) in Great Britain and the Irish SWP and the SPI in Ireland has been through the IST and CWI. Until more recently, this relationship has tended to be as one-sided as that between mainstream British unionism and its Northern Irish allies.

This British dominance was shown when the Irish SWP and SPI both adopted Irexit after the commitment of the British SWP and the SP(E&W) to Brexit. Neither the Irish SWP electoral front, People before Profit (PbP) nor the SPI’s electoral front, the Anti-Austerity Alliance (AAA), had stood on an Irexit platform in the February 2016 Dail elections. They then received 42,174 and 41,174 votes respectively winning a total of 6 TDs (an increase of 2). It was only the long term, EU-phobic CPI and the Workers Party, which stood for Irexit, receiving 185 and 3243 votes respectively. On May

5th, 2016, in the Northern Ireland Stormont elections, again before PbP raised Brexit/Irexit as an issue, it won 13,761 votes and gained 2 MLAs to add to the councillor gained in the 2014 local authority elections. The EU-phobic Workers Party received only 1565 votes.

Now, as with Greece, Ireland had been subjected to draconian post-2008 Crisis treatment at the hands of the Troika. This went as far back as the 2010 Economic Adjustment Programme, implemented without the slightest hint of Irish government opposition. However, it wasn't only the Troika which gave the Irish working class a severe doing-over. They had also been done over by the UK government, the City of London and the Edinburgh headquartered Royal Bank and Bank of Scotland. The UK government pushed the Irish government into backing the garda evictions of mortgage defaulters. The Irish government also allowed British vulture capitalists to asset strip and buy up property which had depreciated in value after the 2008 Crisis.

Both Baron Nigel Lawson of 'Vote Leave' and Nigel Farage of 'Grassroots Out' welcomed the prospect of Irexit, looking for Ireland to return to its pre-EEC status as a neo-colony of the UK. But if kowtowing to Trump's American corporate backers is the only economically viable alternative to the EU for the Brexit-supporting wing of the British ruling class, then kowtowing to 'America First'/'Britain Second' is the only economic alternative for Ireland to being in the EU under current economic and political conditions.

However, many in Ireland remember those past days of the 'true' Irish nation. This had been socially policed by the Catholic hierarchy in a very traditional and conservative manner. Many sexual abuse scandals had been covered up. Prior to joining the EEC, the Republic of Ireland had looked like provincial Britain decades before, only painted green and with rosary beads. Going back to such a past (as in Greece) was not an attractive option.

Despite Ireland's recent historical background, and the prospect of even closer links to a strengthened and more stridently British supremacist, UK state allied to Trump's Amerika, the SPI and Irish SWP followed SP(E&W) and the SWP in supporting leaving the EU – Irexit. But so also did the reactionary Right in Ireland. They blamed the EU for the top-down liberalisation in Ireland. This had given women, gays and trans-gendered people more confidence, had weakened the social stranglehold of the Catholic hierarchy, and had opened up the doors to 'foreign' immigration.

The socially conservative and increasingly Hard Right, Renua Party was formed in 2015 and the Far Right, National Party was formed in 2016. These were the only parties to officially campaign against the repeal of the 8th amendment banning abortion in 2018. In this, though, they were joined by the Catholic bishops' conference, the Presbyterian Church of Ireland, the Islamic Cultural Centre and the Orange Order. They were also backed by money and personnel from the US Protestant fundamentalist and conservative Catholic Hard Right.

However, another source of support for increasingly Right anti-EU parties came from the socially conservative wing of Sinn Fein. Sinn Fein had received a big shock in the 2018 Irish presidential election. Peter Casey an openly racist, anti-Traveller, anti-migrant candidate, came second with 23% of the vote. Sinn Fein did particularly badly, losing half its previous votes. Many of its more socially conservative supporters voted for Casey. Some socially conservative Sinn Fein members went on to form Aontu in 2019, or became Independents, whilst others joined the more overtly Right, Irish Freedom Party (set up after a conference which Nigel Farage attended in Dublin in 2018). Aontu now holds 4 local council seats in the Republic of Ireland and in Northern Ireland, as well as a TD in the Dail. There is also an anti-abortion, former Sinn Dein, now Independent TD. And amongst the other Independent TDs, there are open racists, like Noel Grealish.²²

Like the mainstream Irish parties, Sinn Fein had never been to the forefront of campaigning over social issues effecting women or gays. They wanted to hold on to their socially conservative supporters. These parties only slowly adjusted to the social liberalisation which followed EU membership. Instead, the main campaigning over progressive social reform came from independent women's and gay organisations and from Left organisations (including the SPI, Irish SWP, Workers Party and the CPI).

Following PbP's decision to support Brexit/Irexit, after the British 'Leave' vote, it stood in the 2017 Westminster election. But PbP's vote fell by 19% compared to 2015, despite doubling its number of candidates, and it lost an MLA in the 2017 Stormont elections. Its total vote was 5509, compared with the 2 Brexit supporting parties (the DUP and Traditional Unionist Voice) combined 294,598 votes – 'Left' Brexit – 1.9%, Hard Right Brexit 98.1%. On top of that the most vehement support for Brexit came from the neo-Fascist Loyalists looking to restore pre-1972 Orange supremacy. And some dissident Republicans also supported Brexit/Irexit, looking to revive their

armed struggle by bombing any new border posts, erected as a consequence of a hardening Brexit. PbP soon backpedalled and began to argue that it was against a hard border (aligning them more closely with Sinn Fein) and for an anti-Tory Brexit, as if such a political possibility existed.

The DUP has always been a Right populist and reactionary unionist party. However, in this, before Brexit, it had been alone amongst the other UK unionist parties. Ever since the Belfast flags protest from 2012 the Loyalist base had been pushing the DUP leadership to undermine the already watered-down St. Andrews Agreement accommodation with the Sinn Fein. ‘Parity of esteem’ with Irish nationalists remained anathema. However, this wasn’t making too much headway with a UK government keen to uphold the neo-partitionist Good Friday/St Andrews Agreements, with the support of Irish nationalists. However, the possibility of Brexit provided the DUP and its Loyalist base with the opportunity to forge a wider pan-UK reactionary unionism, opposed to the EU, one of the props for the post-GFA settlement.

With some undoubted nervousness amongst unionists in Northern Ireland about a return to ‘The Troubles’, the DUP muddied the water in a similar manner to the Hard Tory Right. They claimed that Brexit would have few consequences for relations with Ireland. This wasn’t done out of political naivety. It was a tactic to get to the first stage, Brexit, and then use that as a base to move further Right, in an attempt to strengthen the UK and wider unionist rule. The British Right populists had made similar claims about very little really changing for most Brits in relation to access and trading with the EU in the aftermath of any Brexit. But the aim was never really to get Brexit done, but to maximise the opportunities to move politics further Right, with the EU providing another continuous scapegoat to cover-up the British ruling class’s reactionary politics. Behind the scenes, they could make their own deals within the EU, as demonstrated by Jacob Rees-Mogg moving his investment funds to Dublin.

Meanwhile, in the Republic of Ireland, the Left’s vote also began to go into decline. This was shown in the 2019 local council elections, when PbP lost 7 councillors and Solidarity (the new name for the AAA), lost 10 councillors. Much of this was due to continuing splits in these and their parent organisations, rather than directly the result of their Irexit politics. However, in the simultaneous EU elections, their votes also declined, despite an electoral deal between PbP and Solidarity, which hadn’t occurred in the 2014 EU election. Irexit wasn’t popular.

But the pro-EU Sinn Fein's spectacular drop from 3 to 1 MEP and from 169 to 81 councillors in these elections stemmed more from a combination of the party's Rightwards accommodation to become part of a future Irish government coalition (with Fianna Fail in mind), and from the impact of the socially conservative breakaway Aontu.

However, following these setbacks, Sinn Fein's southern organisation took a sharp Left populist turn for the February 2020 Dail elections. Sinn Fein's manifesto, *Giving Workers and Families a Break*,²³ emphasised its commitment to the EU. Sinn Fein increased its vote by 10.7% points to 24.5%, becoming the leading party. It increased its number of TDs from 23 to 37. This had a negative impact upon both PbP's and Solidarity's votes. And these would have been worse for both if Sinn Fein had put up more candidates.

It was only in Northern Ireland where Sinn Fein has continued its Right accommodation with the DUP, that PbP has been able to advance once more. It gained 4 new councillors in the May 2019 local council elections. Even the SPI's partitionist election front, Cross-Community Labour Alliance (CCLA), managed to gain a councillor at Sinn Fein's expense in Enniskillen in this election (he later adopted a Militant Left label when the CWI split).

In the December 2019 Westminster election, PbP did partially retrieve its pre-Brexit 2015 election vote, again at the expense of Sinn Fein, but they made sure they weren't too closely associated with Brexit this time. PbP studiously avoided standing any candidate in the June 2019 European elections, not wanting to draw too much attention to its previous electorally costly Brexit/Irexit stance.

In all this, the role of the SWP-dominated IST and the SP(E&W)-dominated CWI did little to assist either the Irish SWP or the SPI. Despite the ups and downs of their electoral fronts - the PbP and AAA/Solidarity - both the Irish SWP and the SPI have had a considerably better record in elections than their British fraternal organisations. The growing disagreement between the Irish SWP and the British SWP was highlighted when the Irish SWP abandoned the British SWP's 'party' sect approach in 2018 and became the Socialist Workers Network (SWN). In effect the SWN is now a 'Think Tank', giving advice to the electoral wing of what is seen as a PbP 'Movement'. Where the political decisions are actually taken is not all clear in this 'Think Tank'/'Movement' scenario.

In the past, such a departure from the British SWP ‘party’ line would have led to disciplinary action. This is what happened when the International Socialist Organisation in the USA was expelled from the IST in 2001, after it had the temerity to disagree with the SWP leadership. Today however, the SWP is so shell-shocked by a series of breakaways, that the SWN has been permitted to remain in the IST. However, this remains only as a diplomatic alliance, not an international organisation to mount joint campaigns.

PbP did lose one of its TDs to the United Left in 2013 (later to Independents4Change, then Right 2 Change). But compared either to the British SWP or the SPI, the Irish SWP/SWN has been relatively unaffected by splits. But with even weaker international links, the SWN/PbP is likely to become more localist, and not break from the longstanding Irish Left’s ‘national exceptionalist’ thinking with regard to the UK’s unionist set-up.

The SPI, though, has faced the loss of more TDs, first to the United Left in 2014 (later Independents4Change), then to RISE (Revolution, Internationalism, Socialism and Environmentalism) in 2019. RISE, though, still remained part of the wider Solidarity/PbP electoral alliance. RISE has adopted a much more eco-socialist profile than the SPI. Like PbP, it has called for a Sinn Fein-led Left government. RISE’s CWI-inherited hostility to Irish Republicans has become more muted now that Sinn Fein is a constitutional nationalist party. RISE has no organisation in Northern Ireland. But RISE has also looked to new international links in the USA and Germany.²⁴

Meanwhile, the SPI has had considerably better, albeit declining, electoral fortunes, than its sister party in the CWI - the SP(E&W). The SPI still has 1 TD and 4 local councillors. So, in 2019, the SPI was able to successfully challenge the SP(E&W) leadership of the CWI sect ‘international’, over strategy. This was a reversal of its old subordinate relationship. However, in response, the SP(E&W) formed a breakaway CWI, which it can still dominate. It backed the Militant Left (Ireland) breakaway from the SPI, taking its one Northern Ireland councillor, and further reinforcing its partitionist politics.

It is very unlikely that an SPI dominated CWI will prove to be any more effective internationally than the old SP(E&W) dominated CWI. It had been easier for the SPI to grow, when Irish Labour was so far to the Right, it joined Fine Gael and Fianna Fail governments. However, when Sinn Fein adopts a

Left populist colouring, as it had done in city local elections, e.g. Dublin and Cork, and in the February 2020 Dail elections, this provides a bigger challenge. Already PbP and RISE have been drawn into the slipstream of Sinn Fein, as shown by their call for a Sinn Fein led ‘Left’ government. Sinn Fein is calling the shots on the Left, whilst still being prepared to tack Right if a Fianna Fail coalition seems a possibility in the future. The SPI is opposed to such political developments, but tends to fall back on economicistic (supplemented by more recent social, e.g. around feminism) politics. It provides no immediate constitutional alternative to Sinn Fein’s Irish reunification strategy, falling back instead on an abstract propagandist call for a Socialist Ireland.

Like the SWN, neither the SPI nor its breakaways will be thinking of developing a joint all-islands strategy to challenge the Right Populists and reactionary unionists now dominant in the UK, or the neo-Liberal upholders of the constitutional status quo and closer links to the EU bureaucracy. This is still dominant in the thinking of Fine Gael and Fianna Fail in the Republic of Ireland. Meanwhile, Sinn Fein looks to the EU Ministers and Commission, and also to the Democrat Party in the USA to defend Ireland’s interests against the UK government. Although Sinn Fein is part of the former Communist Party dominated European United Left, the Nordic Green Left, (GUE/NGL) EU parliamentary group at Strasbourg, this didn’t figure in its election manifesto. But GUE/NGL is hardly any more politically coherent than the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats, which Labour MEPs had been members of.

Neither the parliamentary Social Democrat and ex-Labour ‘international’, nor the sect ‘internationals’ with their different versions of bureaucratic ‘internationalism from above’ are very effective. This ineffectiveness can best be countered by democratic ‘internationalism from below’, but the SWN/PbP, the SPI and its breakaways’ lack of comprehension about the wider unionist nature of the UK state and their recent support for Irexit makes them less able to mount the internationalist challenge needed.

9. Conclusion - challenge the UK and partitioned Irish states, their ‘internationalism from above’ allies and the disunited Left’s ‘national exceptionalism’ with a socialist republican ‘internationalism from below’ strategy

The first thing needed to develop a Socialist strategy to counter the continued slide to the Right in these islands is an appreciation of the political forces that are leading this attack, and how they are preparing to meet the challenges they still face. One of the most significant of these challenges comes from the national democratic movements in Scotland, Northern Ireland/Ireland and potentially in Wales too.

Since the 2016 Brexit vote, with the rise of Right populism, its victory in the UK reaffirmed by the December 12th Westminster general election results, the constitutional nationalists of the SNP and Plaid Cymru no longer face a confident liberal UK state. When 800 lawyers sign a petition accusing Boris Johnson and Priti Patel of endangering them,²⁵ it is clear that the old liberal UK political order is being hollowed out, as in several other, particularly East European states (e.g. Poland and Hungary). The Right populists are putting a new British authoritarian order in place.

In Scotland, the SNP leadership has no effective strategy to defy Boris Johnson and Scottish Secretary, Alister Jack's continued denial of the right to hold 'IndyRef2'. Neither the SNP's December 12th, 2019 Westminster electoral surge (vote up 8.1%, MPs up 13), nor any further electoral advance at Holyrood in 2021, is likely to make any difference in shifting the Tory government. The SNP leadership is concerned that any popular mobilisation around a new independence campaign could fall out of its hands and frighten its existing and potential business backers. Above all else, its strategy is to keep Scottish business on board. Scottish independence supporting 'Business for Scotland' has two fronts. One, "the Saltire Club offers a powerful networking opportunity for leading pro-independence business leaders. Saltire members meet approximately ten times a year over intimate and informal lunches in some of Scotland's most exclusive hotels and restaurants."²⁶ Nicola Sturgeon has attended. Another word for "networking" is lobbying.

However, 'Business for Scotland' has another front, 'Believe in Scotland', to try and control the political agenda of existing 'Yes' groups. A key part of this is keeping independence supporters on board with the First Minister's cautious strategy (but even 'Business for Scotland' thinks that Andrew Wilson's Sustainable Growth Commission proposals are too blatantly right wing to convince most independence supporters!)²⁷ This constant emphasis on the need to work within the limits of the UK's anti-democratic constitution is continuing to block even the SNP's 'Indy-Lite', under the Crown, British High Command and NATO.

Divisions have opened up in the SNP. This has led to the emergence of a possible alternative leadership around Joanna Cherry and maybe Alex Salmond. However, they also accept the need to work within the limits of the UK constitution. It was under Salmond that the SNP's 'Indy-Lite' proposals were first adopted. However, Joanna Cherry wants to mount a stronger legal challenge through the Supreme Court, following her 'success' in getting Johnson's attempt to prorogue Westminster ruled as illegal. However, this did not stop Johnson going ahead with his Brexit plans anyhow. Salmond, a natural populist, might be prepared to go further, and call for some legal extra parliamentary action to increase the pressure on the UK government. But as someone just as committed to serving the needs of Scottish business, with his close links to the Royal Bank of Scotland, his record of trying to out neo-Liberal, Gordon Brown before the 2008 Crash, any public derring-do will be linked to behind-the-scenes reassurances to Scottish business. And if it proves necessary to rein in any civil disobedience, Salmond will throw his weight behind such moves.

Nicola Sturgeon is a competent, centre social democrat and social liberal, but one whose independence strategy has stalled in the face of Tory reactionary unionism. Alex Salmond may be a more maverick character, prepared to take chances, but his underlying politics are right social democrat, with a socially illiberal streak, shown by his 2008 attempt as MP to rein in abortion rights²⁸ and his personal attitude towards women. He is also a strong supporter of the queen. Salmond will certainly not be wanting to put any immediate economic and social demands at the centre of any Scottish 'Indy-Lite' campaign. He may well, though, make all sorts of 'promises' to be considered after independence.

By that time, the SNP leadership's carefully nurtured Scottish ruling class-in-the-making, formed round 'Business for Scotland'²⁹ would be in control, if their 'Indy-Lite' policy was ever to be implemented. And, as in Ireland from 1921, with the emergence of the 'Free Staters', former unionists would rush to join them. Together they will demand that workers tighten their belts. Under the SNP's constitutional monarchy within the British Commonwealth, the UK's Crown Powers will still be available to them. These have a long reach as Gough Whitlam's mildly reforming Australian government found, when it was toppled in 1974. But an SNP run, 'Scottish Free State' is unlikely to make such challenges.

And furthermore, with Salmond’s “sex pest” record, acknowledged by his court defender, Gordon Jackson,³⁰ and his earlier attempts to curtail abortion rights; along with Cherry’s attempts to undermine transgender rights (even accepted by an earlier Cameron government and by the Irish government), their rightwards slide opens the door to anti-gay, anti-women and anti-English, Scottish nationalists. They were marginalised during ‘IndyRef1’ by its rainbow alliance nature and civic national approach to Scottish independence. But some of these Right nationalist political forces have become more vocal, whether online, e.g. ‘Wings Over Scotland’, or hovering around potential ‘Indy only’ slates for the 2021 Holyrood elections.

But some on the Left in Scotland, sometimes unwittingly, can also provide a conduit to socially conservative and ethnic nationalism. The journalist, Kevin McKenna has attacked the SNP government’s promise to honour its commitment to legally entrench transgender rights.³¹ Using the language of the Right Populists he has dismissed this as ‘woke’ politics.³² Many of McKenna’s articles do make trenchant criticisms of the SNP leadership, over civil liberties, support for neoliberalism and its attitude towards the Scottish working class. McKenna remains a Catholic who has not been afraid to criticise the church hierarchy. A former Labour supporter, he has become a strong supporter of Scottish independence.

After ‘IndyRef1’, Scottish workers from an Irish Catholic background have been seen to be very much part of the emerging Scottish political nation and no longer outsiders. They were key to Dundee, Glasgow, North Lanarkshire and West Dunbartonshire voting to secede from the Union. However, this dramatic switch in allegiance from Labour unionism to Scottish independence could only come about because of the multi-ethnic, non-sectarian, civic national nature of the ‘IndyRef’ campaign. And in addition, ‘IndyRef1’ was a rainbow alliance, attracting those from an LBGT background. McKenna’s attacks on the transgendered people, invoking the sort of prejudices once raised against gays (over toilets) represent an attempt to exclude some from the Scottish nation. Others would go much further in their exclusions as the influential ‘Wings over Scotland’ shows.

However, McKenna’s view on transgendered people feeds into a wider Left view which counterposes class to identity politics. But such economicistic thinking has not been able to get beyond its own identity politics. Whenever its proponents have tried to imagine their ‘pure’ working class politics, its ideal worker soon appears to be male, white, straight, manual and a trade unionist. Sometimes, they might have tolerated, women, gays, ethnic or

religious minority workers. But it was only through struggle that these other workers have gained recognition by those workers who were once more dismissive. Class and particular oppressions (the only ‘identities’ with political significance for Socialists) may be conceptually distinct but are united in real people. Thus, the working class that Socialists should be supporting is one united in its diversity.

Another indicator of the growth of exclusionary politics on the Left is Tommy Sheridan, Left (but for how much longer?) Populist Brexit/Scoxit supporter and sexist. He is trying to make another bid to become an MSP and has joined Action for Independence.³³ This has been formed for the 2021 Holyrood election by ex-SNP MSP, Dave Thompson, opponent of same sex marriage.³⁴

The mounting anger over Johnson’s refusal to concede ‘IndyRef2’ could well be overshadowed by his reactionary unionist attempts to roll-back the existing post-1998, liberal unionist, ‘Devolution all-round’ settlement’ in Scotland. Growing numbers of unionists in Scotland have been more impressed by Sturgeon’s public handling and use of the limited powers the Scottish government has to deal with Covid-19, than by Johnson’s shambolic handling of the problem. However, the Tories’ post-Brexit, Internal Market Bill (IMB) is designed to considerably rein in the powers already devolved to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. This is, of course, entirely consistent with Brexit’s ‘bring back control’ to the British ruling class.

It’s not only the constitutional nationalist SNP and Plaid Cymru that can see the nature of the IMB attack, but the liberal unionist, Labour-led Welsh Cardiff Bay government. It has described the IMB as “an attack on democracy and an affront to the people of Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland”.³⁵ And the broadly Labour supporting, STUC, WTUC as well as the NIC-ICTU have all issued a joint statement condemning the IMB.³⁶ Thus, far from trying to cement wider political support behind the Tory government, Johnson is pushing liberal unionists towards the constitutional nationalists. At the same time, he is infuriating rank and file independence supporters even more. This further highlights the SNP government’s lack of any effective strategy to deal with the Tory government.

This could precipitate civil disobedience and possibly mass popular action, way beyond the limits which might be suggested by the Plan B advocates within the SNP or by Salmond. Should this occur, the British ruling class may have to reassess its ‘No IndyRef2’ stance. It could turn to the Labour

Party or to the Lib-Dems for an alternative strategy to derail Scottish independence. With the Left trounced, Sir Keir Starmer has indicated Labour's willingness to act as the British ruling class's 'fire and theft' insurance party, should the Tories lose too much support. Labour could dream up various schemes to try to derail any 'IndyRef2'. This could involve imposing a higher voting threshold in a future referendum or resorting to the UK state's last ditch option – the 'promise' of federalism. However, this can never amount to more than 'Devo-Max' under the UK's Crown-in Westminster constitution and can always be rolled back later.

Despite Johnson's hard line approach towards 'Devolution-all-round', the even Harder Right want to go further. Johnson's strategy would marginalise the Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly by weakening their devolved powers. However, the institutions would still be kept in place. Increasingly reduced to 'talking shops', they could still offer second or third incomes to Tory politicians. MSPs and MWAs can attend Holyrood or Cardiff Bay when their other interests don't interfere. Scottish Tory leader, Douglas Ross has set the pattern with his rugby refereeing job.³⁷

However, the former leaders of UKIP and the Brexit Party in the Welsh Assembly have reconstituted themselves as the Abolish (the Welsh Assembly) Party, ready for the 2021 Cardiff Bay elections. They have also attracted the Tories' former Welsh depute chair.³⁸ With Johnson's lackadaisical approach to Covid-19 leading to a surge of new cases, and forcing him into an England-wide lockdown, he is no longer able to highlight his support for less restrictive measures compared to the more cautious Holyrood and Cardiff Bay administrations. This leaves the Abolish Party open to an alliance with Farage's latest political reincarnation, the anti-lockdown, Reform the UK Party. And it's revealing that Farage has returned to the use of 'UK' found in his first political incarnation – UKIP. The Hard Right have a more 'internationalist' strategy than the British Left.

Farage has just returned from the USA, and campaigning for Trump's re-election.³⁹ Trump has used Covid-19 to try to broaden support for 'America First' politics with a 'Me First' appeal beyond his reactionary base. This has been countered by the Democrats with a more social liberal approach to Covid-19. In the UK, this sometimes invokes the wartime spirit of 'We are all in this together'. Of course, Socialists point to the very evident class divide in Covid-19 regulations and want to take the social approach further by invoking active working class solidarity. But judged from either a socialist or liberal, social responsibility stance, Farage and his 'Me First'

backers look like an updated version of the Second World War spivs, defying official policy for their own very selfish ends. And this mentality extends deeply into a British ruling class, with its constitutionally underwritten, offshore tax havens, their tax avoidance lawyers and accountants, and their own private education, health and care services. And when it comes to maintaining their profits, the social aspect of some neo-liberals also soon becomes less social, with calls to return to ‘business as usual’. So, as with Brexit, the British ruling class is hedging its bets over how far Right ‘Me First’ politics can be pushed.

Johnson’s plans for a post-Brexit North and Midlands are designed to bypass local authorities, a point he has made against Andrew Burnham, Labour’s right wing, mayor of Manchester, in their conflict over Covid-19 regulations in the city. The Tories are also preparing to end the already pretty limited local planning regulations.⁴⁰ They are promoting ‘free ports’ to cut business rates, undermine workers’ rights and environmental regulations. (It should come as little surprise that SNP controlled Dundee City Council is looking at the prospect favourably).⁴¹ The common feature of all these Tory policies is to remove any remaining official democratic accountability, whether in the form of Devolution, Local Councils or planning appeals procedures. Control of future economic and social developments will be in the hands of businesses which have given large enough donations, i.e. bribes, to the Tory Party. They will be able to proceed with their chosen projects without taking any account of people’s needs, health or environmental concerns. When their projects go pear-shaped, they will expect public bailouts.

Northern Ireland/Ireland is an area where Johnson’s Tory government faces a one of its biggest challenges. Johnson courted the Right Populist and reactionary unionist DUP in his bid for the leadership of the Tory Party. However, as soon as he had achieved this, the DUP was unceremoniously dumped. Its delusions of grandeur were pricked in the December 12th election. Now Johnson is every bit as concerned as the DUP for the UK to hold on to ‘Ulster’/Northern Ireland. A British ruling class, which cannot hold on its own state’s territory, cannot hope to maintain its position in the global corporate order as the US’s ‘Britain Second’. It would be very publicly exposed as the third-rate imperial power it is. But the Tories know that the DUP has nowhere else to turn. It has no international allies, other than US Protestant fundamentalists, who even under Trump have not been able to undermine US state commitment to the Good Friday Agreement. This was unanimously backed by the US House of Representatives on December 3rd, 2019.⁴² In January, following the DUP’s poor Westminster

election results, Johnson's new Tory government was able to push the DUP into re-joining the Northern Ireland Executive and Stormont, on the UK government's terms.

Furthermore, British capitalists have considerably greater economic interests in the Republic of the UK than in Northern Ireland. Therefore, the Tory government will not be moved by any unnecessary Loyalist promoted, Orange-flagged, lambeg-drummed provocations, supported by the DUP. The Tories are exerting their own pressures on the Republic of Ireland. Compared to the UK's bargaining position with the EU as a whole over Brexit (the EU is the destination of 43% of UK exports, whilst the UK is the destination of only 18% of EU exports⁴³), the UK is in a much stronger position in relation to the Republic of Ireland (which is the destination of 5.9% of UK exports,⁴⁴ whilst the UK is the destination of 10.3% of exports from the Republic⁴⁵). Last October, Irish, Fine Gael, Taoiseach, Leo Varadkar, buckled in the face of such economic pressure and signed up to Johnson's calculatedly vague UK/EU 'border in the Irish Sea' provisions in his Brexit deal.⁴⁶

With Johnson's position reinforced by the December 12th, 2019 general election, he is proceeding with his hard Brexit course, which has major implications for the Border and all the destabilising consequences that brings. The Tories have now openly reneged on their October Brexit deal and the Good Friday Agreement with their Internal Market Bill. This reopens the prospect of a land border between the UK and EU within Ireland.

There have been a lot of reassuring media comments in the UK, dismissing the prospect of any hard land border. But the threat of a hard border in Ireland is real. The Border could quite quickly become a violent place again with smugglers and people traffickers, dissident Republicans wanting to bomb border posts, armed Loyalists trying to mark UK state territory. Even during an earlier period, when both the Republic of Ireland and the UK were still within the EEC/EC/EEU, successive British governments were quite prepared to enforce a very hard border and have a military occupation and repressive policing. Then the 'border in the Irish Sea' meant something rather different - the quarantining of the political situation in Northern Ireland/Ireland and the attempt to keep its consequences out of Great Britain. And as long as that remains the situation, few Tories are not going to show much concern.

On February 8th, 2020, the Dail general election took place in the Republic of Ireland. Unlike the UK, the Republic of Ireland did not pass over to Right populist control. There is little doubt that sections of the Irish ruling class were unhappy with the loss of the longstanding Fine Gael and Fianna Fail monopoly over Irish governments; just as the British ruling class were shaken by the size of the ‘Yes’ vote in IndyRef1. Nevertheless, the Irish ruling class was able to exert the pressure to create a new, but still essentially neo-liberal, Fianna Fail/Fine Gael/Green coalition government. This coalition is also of a decidedly conservative constitutional nationalist hue. It does not want to rock any boats. With Johnson ditching his deal with Varadkar (who is still Tanaiste in the coalition), the new Irish government has been left high and dry. It is looking to the EU and a hoped-for Joe Biden-led Democratic government, to deal with Johnson’s reneging on the Irish border deal.

Despite Sinn Fein’s remarkable election result, it is in no position to dictate politics in the Dail. It only holds 23% of the seats. Even if the short-lived fantasy, Sinn Fein ‘Left’ coalition government had come about, Sinn Fein faced major problems in trying to push its manifesto commitment to Irish reunification. And these weren’t confined to the lack of Dail allies committed to Sinn Fein’s Irish reunification proposals. The Irish ruling class does not want to take responsibility for running Northern Ireland anytime soon. Even economically powerful West Germany took about ten years to absorb economically run-down East Germany, and this was with the overwhelming support of those in the East. The ruling class of the economically crippled, post EU ‘bailout’, Republic of Ireland has no wish to absorb the economically run-down Northern Ireland, nor is it wanting to deal with Loyalist intransigence. There is little prospect of getting a vote for an Irish reunification referendum in the South through the Dail. And this feat has to be pulled off with a Stormont vote for a simultaneous Irish reunification referendum in the North.

Sinn Fein’s own election manifesto made no attempt to win over Northern Irish unionists or others from a non-unionist Protestant, other religious or non-religious backgrounds, but looked to “demographic trends {which} suggest a nationalist voting majority in the north is close.”⁴⁷ This head count view mirrors the longstanding Loyalist sectarian view of how to ensure Northern Ireland remains part of the UK (which is why Partition was first introduced). Sinn Fein’s claim is based on the changing relationship between the percentage of Protestants (down 4% to 41.6% from 2001 to 2011) and

percentage of Catholics (up 0.6% to 40.2% over the same period) in Northern Ireland.

What was entirely missing from the manifesto was any mention of the most significant cross-border, cross community social movements, which could contribute to ‘Irish ‘reunification from below’. These movements have been around gay and abortion rights, and in opposition to reaction North and South. But in the Dail election, it was more important for Sinn Fein to hold on to its socially conservative voters in the South. Nor does the Sinn Fein manifesto mention EU migrants or asylum seekers living in Ireland. They are also likely to be key supporters of Irish reunification. (More worrying, “Sinn Fein does not want open borders”,⁴⁸ not making it clear which borders it is talking about – Ireland’s or the EU’s. This seems to be a calculated evasiveness, after the racist Peter Casey’s ability to win socially conservative Sinn Fein votes in the 2018 Irish presidential election).

Furthermore, Sinn Fein’s own poor election results in Northern Ireland in the December 12th Westminster elections (down 6.7% in the vote), and the rise of the Northern Ireland Alliance Party (up 8.8%) and the return of the SDLP (up 3.1% and now with 2 MPs), places renewed attempts to reform Stormont in a stronger position amongst constitutional nationalists and liberal unionists in Northern Ireland. However, Alliance/SDLP hopes of significant Stormont reforms are unlikely to meet much success either, in the face of continued DUP intransigence, and the Tory government’s dependence on the officially recognised ‘Ulster’ unionists of all hues to maintain the defence of the Union (along with a ‘blind eye’ turned, whenever unsavoury Loyalist methods are used).

The dire economic and social implications for the working class of Sinn Fein’s continued attempts to keep the Stormont Executive on the road through its acceptance of ‘Fresh Start’, may lead to some rhetorical stepping up of a call for Irish reunification in Northern Ireland by the Left. But with the Unionist constitutional veto over any Irish reunification referendum, the prospects for this happening in Northern Ireland by adopting a constitutional nationalist approach are very unlikely. And support for Irish reunification has to be won in two simultaneous referenda, North and South, the latter also being opposed by the ruling class in the Republic, who control the coalition government there.

But in Northern Ireland, and in the Republic of Ireland, unlike Scotland and Wales, there are other political forces, beyond the constitutional nationalists.

which have a toehold in the parliamentary and local council institutions. Dissident Republicans hold local council seats in Derry City and Strabane, Fermanagh and Omagh, Mid-Ulster, and Newry, Mourne and Down in Northern Ireland, and a councillor in Connemara South and TD for Donegal in the Republic of Ireland. Although dissident Republicans, they don't all necessarily hold the same attitudes to armed struggle or to Brexit/Irexit.

Those looking to an early return to armed struggle support Irexit on Irish nationalist grounds. For them, it is the likely return of a hard border (precipitated by a hard Brexit) which justifies armed attacks on border posts and personnel. But the ability of British intelligence to penetrate armed Republican groups, was highlighted by its role at the time of the Omagh bombing and the death of 29 people in 1998.⁴⁹ And the dead end 'politics' of those dissident Republicans, who give priority to the use of arms, were highlighted in the tragic killing of the journalist Lyra McKee in Derry on March 31st, 2019.⁵⁰

The dissident Republican, 1916 Societies take an alternative political path and do not support Sinn Fein's constitutional road or advocate the dissident Republican military organisations in their plans to bring about Irish reunification.⁵¹ They have called for a 32 Counties Citizens Initiative referendum. However, the 1916 Societies' publicity and activities are still framed in a very Irish nationalist way. Their self-description as being a "separatist movement"⁵² seems to apply not only to Ireland being free of British control but also being separate from the sort of cross-community and international campaigning which could bring about Irish reunification. The issues of cross-community opposition to social reaction, of the role of migrants and asylum seekers in Ireland, and an 'internationalism from below' strategy involving those opposing unionism and the UK state in Scotland, Wales and England (other than appeals to traditional Irish-Scots, London, Liverpool, and Manchester, Irish Republicans) do not appear on their online media.

Although both the pro-EU Sinn Fein and the anti-EU dissident Republican oppose a hard border, they draw different conclusions. Where there is a political overlap is that whilst both support the free movement of Irish people, they are much more ambiguous about those who will be even more harshly affected – migrant workers and asylum seekers. This despite the long history of the Irish as enforced migrants and of Irish Republican fighters as political asylum seekers. A narrow Irish nationalist approach also goes for those in or close to the CPI. The CPI still carries some weight in the Irish trade union

bureaucracy. In a similar manner to their CPB counterparts, they support ‘Irish jobs for Irish workers’ and argue for the chimera of ‘non-racist’ migration controls.

People before Profit (PbP) is the Socialist group most likely to tail Sinn Fein’s constitutional nationalist, twin-track, Dublin Dail plus Northern Ireland Stormont road to Irish reunification. Having given support to the SDLP/Alliance attempts to get Stormont back on the road in 2017, PbP has now switched its support to Sinn Fein’s Irish reunification campaign, following the latter’s success in the Irish Dail general election. This also enables them to put their earlier, unpopular Brexit/Irexit stance behind them in Northern Ireland. They can join a wider shared, anti-hard border campaign, which has much more resonance.

However, there is still a common political factor underlying PbP’s 2017 support for a restored Stormont and its 2020 support for Stormont and Dail organised, Irish reunification. Rather than put forward their own immediate democratic or constitutional aims, they tail-end those put forward by others, falling back on the argument that they can only support a Socialist Republic. This leads to an abstentionist attitude, e.g. tail-ending the constitutional demands of the SDLP/Alliance in 2017 and Sinn Fein since 2020. Where they differentiate themselves is not over the immediate aims of these constitutional campaigns (as was also shown by their British SWP counterparts in Scotland over ‘IndyRef1’) but in their call for more extra-parliamentary action, e.g. demonstrations. This is usually accompanied by a rhetorical call for trade union action, which, given the ICTU-NIC and affiliated union bureaucracies’ support for ‘power-sharing’ and social partnership, is unlikely to happen. Nevertheless, no matter how much extra-parliamentary action is mounted, this still amounts to external pressure to implement others’ constitutional ‘solutions.’

In contrast to Sinn Fein, most dissident Republican and Left social democrat approaches to Irish reunification, a socialist republican reunification campaign would be based on ‘internationalism from below’ principles. As well as supporting cross border community defiance, this could also assist in the cross-border movement of migrants - perhaps a new version of the American Civil War, ‘Underground Railway’. And cross-border mobilisations against reactionary social legislation have already shown their ability to mobilise young people both from former Catholic and Protestant backgrounds. Such political practice would internationalise the campaign for a united Ireland, rather than nationalising it. And it would be good to see

Scottish Socialists and others joining these campaigns, and not just leave it to the Orange Order to march in each other countries' streets.

Sadly, the majority of the British and Irish Left have taken a 'national exceptionalist' stance to the emergence of the issue of national democratic self-determination. This had been especially the case in Northern Ireland/Ireland and reappeared in their response to 'IndyRef1'. This in turn has also led to a Left nationalist response, longstanding in Ireland, but more recent in Scotland, e.g. the Scottish Socialist Party. A shared characteristic of British, Irish, Scottish and Welsh exceptionalism' is its inability to conceive of an overall strategy to counter the UK and partitioned Irish state or their 'internationalism from above' allies.

Central to any socialist republican, 'internationalism from below' would be a strategy try to match and surpass the 'internationalism from above' opposition. This opposition includes the reactionary unionists - both the Right populists, who extend their campaigns across the whole of the UK, and the Tory Hard Right, which uses its control of the UK state to stymie any democratic challenges (On occasions, both have been prepared to further extend their campaigning to the Republic). It includes the British Labour Party and its conservative unionist defence of the UK state (sometimes disguised by liberal unionist 'promises').

A socialist republican 'internationalism from below' strategy would also challenge those British Left unionists and the Left nationalists with their, disconnected and 'national exceptionalist' approaches to the crisis of the UK state. A socialist republican-led, 'internationalism from below' campaign to break-up the UK and reunify Ireland, would extend beyond Great Britain, and the wider UK, to cover the whole of these islands. But with migrant workers from the EU, and asylum seekers fleeing the barbarism inflicted by corporate capital, its imperialist state military backers and their local allies, there is also a need to offer the possibility of an immediate new constitutional order to defend the rights that still exist. These cannot exist in a Right populist dominated global order. Nor can they be defended adequately in a neo-Liberal order, which far from promoting the free movement of labour, has erected more draconian migration controls and walls in this world than have ever existed before.

If the remaining EU internal freedom of movement for migrants is rolled back, there is far less possibility of moving forward to the free movement of people throughout the world, which is central to any international socialist

vision. During the 1984-5 Miners' Strike, some Right wingers argued that support shouldn't be given to 'well-off' miners when there were many less well-paid workers. When the miners were defeated, their lost wages certainly didn't end up in the pockets of the less well-paid. Instead, the miners' defeat immensely strengthened the hand of all employers. The new Immigration Bill may allow more migrant workers from outside, but only if they accept far worse pay, conditions and far fewer rights (including no right to vote) than British subjects and their enforced return when the employers decide they are no longer needed for their current job, or they have found even cheaper labour. In immediate terms, just as with the miners in 1984-5, the attacks on EU migrants represent an attempt to worsen all workers' pay, conditions and rights.

However, the EU bureaucracy's 'internationalism from above' imposed by member states has led to an 'internationalism from below' response. Migrant workers, their families and students have moved from one member country to another, formed nationally-mixed personal relationships, made friends from other nationalities, joined trade unions and community organisations, participated in political organisations and have created elements of a new multinational culture. Therefore, the material base already exists for a federal, democratic, secular, social and environmentally sustainable, social European Republic.

The socialist republican call for the break-up of the UK state and for Irish reunification is also a call for a higher level of internationalism initially at a European level, which the EU bureaucracy no longer even pretends to uphold.

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