EVALUATING THE RESULTS OF THE EU REFERENDUM

THE RESULT OF THE EU REFERENDUM

There has been an immense populist and nationalist rebellion that has led to the victory of the forces that wanted the UK to leave the EU. This nationalism has been based on a simple ideology: 'I was born in the UK, the UK is great, but foreigners are undermining the greatness of the UK.' The simplicity and emotional strength of this nationalism has meant that the arguments of bourgeois economics were not listened to during this campaign. Instead an inter-class alliance of small business, reactionary sections of the middle class, and working class, have combined to create a populist revolt which in an alienated manner acted to oppose the interests of big business which wanted the UK to remain part of the EU. This populist alliance could become the basis to develop a mass movement for reaction which ultimately would be used to oppose the interests of the labour movement and the most advanced sections of the working class. In other words the majority vote to 'Leave' could become the basis to establish an intolerant and authoritarian society that would be used to undermine democratic freedoms and establish a regime with Fascist characteristics, even if was not identical to the fascism of the 1930's. The responsibility for this situation is with the leaders of the trade unions and Labour Party. They have refused to encourage the development of a principled movement of opposition to austerity. This mass movement of opposition to austerity and capitalism could have become the basis to develop the struggle for socialism, and in this manner undermine any reactionary influences within the working class. Instead of this possibility the trade union bureaucrats have discouraged any militant activity, and the new Labour leadership has disappointingly not attempted to challenge this inaction. Furthermore, the Labour leadership during the EU referendum campaign did not attempt to energetically oppose anti-migrant attitudes within society. Instead Corbyn tried to ensure that the Labour Party became nothing more than a second eleven for Cameron, and company, during the period of EU referendum campaigning. We heard nothing of the socialist reasons why the UK should be part of the EU. However, this criticism does not mean that we support the challenge within the Parliamentary Labour Party to the leadership of Corbyn. The right wing of the Labour Party was content to be the most vocal supporters of Cameron. They acted in a manner which increased the sense of distance between the majority of the working class from the Labour Party. Hence the right wing provides no principled alternative. Instead we say to Corbyn, you must improve and start to act in accordance with your convictions. Begin to provide arguments for an alternative to capitalism!

The above standpoint is not meant to suggest that it will be easy to develop a socialist alternative to capitalism within the UK. Most regions of England are dominated by Little Englander nationalism. This situation also characterises Wales. Scotland is under the political hegemony of more progressive nationalism, and Northern Ireland is based on the Sinn Fein-DUP alliance. What we are suggesting is that the role of Marxists is to promote the development of a militant minority which could begin to oppose the influence of nationalism within society. This minority would argue for internationalism and socialism, and try to prepare a programme of action to oppose the inevitable austerity measures of the new Tory government which will replace the present Cameron administration. It is necessary to be prepared for the introduction of further austerity measures which will accompany the creation of an isolated capitalist state. The subsidies of the EU will be replaced by public expenditure cuts and the undermining of the NHS. These reactionary economic policies will be justified in terms of the introduction of restrictive immigration policies and the promotion of the ideological standpoint of national sovereignty. These reactionary views and policies will be utilised in order to justify repressive measures against the Labour movement. Indeed nationalism will become the political basis to promote and construct the most reactionary form of society. Unless internationalism is advocated in order to defend the interests of working class militancy, the dominant influence of nationalism could be utilised in order to create an authoritarian state. It is because of this possibility the creation of a militant minority is vital. It was the Shop Stewards movement in Glasgow and Sheffield during world war one which began the opposition to the imperialist conflict. These developments were based on the influence of the Marxist British Socialist Party, and above all were inspired by the revolutionary leadership of John Maclean. Unfortunately, instead of upholding the principles of proletarian internationalism many of the Marxist groups have adapted to the nationalist views of the Leave Campaign. Hence we lack the ability to respond to this reactionary situation with the integrity and dynamism of a John Maclean. However, the Marxist organisations can start to overcome these limitations by promoting a movement for proletarian internationalism and the Socialist United States of Europe. We need to recognise that nationalism is the most reactionary influence within the working class. This influence threatens to develop support within the working class for the most reactionary measures of the Tory Party. We need to be prepared to oppose this development.

The point is the project of a nationally isolated utopia is deeply reactionary in the era of globalisation. It is argued by the Tory-sceptics that they will be able to realise a trade agreement with the EU. This is empty posturing. The EU will not be inclined to bestow favours on a country that has rejected membership of its organisation. Instead they will only grant trading concessions in the most prohibitive terms. But this prospect does not undermine the ideological audacity of the Tory-sceptics because their project is the creation of an authoritarian state. In this manner they can effectively end the role of the welfare state and repress opposition from the labour movement. They will also contemplate ending parliamentary democracy and therefore promoting new institutional forms for political governance. This is the hidden agenda of the Tory right wing. The first stage of this perspective has been completed with the victory of the Leave Campaign. Only by making society more intolerant can this reactionary process be completed. What will result is a form of Bonapartism, in which the state assumes executive and political independence. The Tory clique will rule on behalf of the bourgeoisie. Hence economic interests will be subordinated to the task of making this Bonapartism successful. They have already achieved their initial task by humbling the bourgeoisie in the referendum. Only total political power will satisfy the ambitions of this reactionary clique. The potential for Bonapartism means that we should develop the opposition of the Labour movement. Consequently, the Marxist Left should organise a conference at which this opposition should begin to be organised. We should develop a short programme which represents our strategy to promote the overthrow of the formation of the most reactionary Tory government, which will occur in October after the Tory party conference. The Tory party has become an organisation that advocates the view that the survival of capitalism requires the formation of a reactionary type of nation state. They will undermine Parliamentary democracy in order to uphold their perspective. In order to sustain popular following for this standpoint they will promote the most vulgar forms of nationalism. Anyone opposed to their policies will be labelled a 'traitor'.

Marxism and the Labour movement should be aware that we are faced with the most formidable challenge since the 1930's. We should not shirk this challenge. This is why we should finally reject any accommodation to Euro-scepticism and instead embrace genuine proletarian internationalism. Only with the perspective of European and world revolution can we begin the struggle to overcome national chauvinism within the working class. It has been the decline of working class consciousness that has led to this sorry state. Hence we need to promote a cultural revolution that will challenge the influence of nationalism. This task cannot be effectively realised by supporting ethical clichés. Only the politics of the class struggle can overcome the domination of the standpoint of 'defence of the fatherland'. The alternative is that Europe will once again become the terrain for inter-imperialist struggles. In this situation, Tory Britain will be the aggressor. If this prospect is to be avoided it will be necessary to combine the struggle for peace, democracy and socialism. We must overthrow any future Tory Bonapartist government.

It will be argued that this is a foolish task because the majority of the people, including a considerable section of the working class, will be supporters of a Tory government after Cameron is replaced. This point is true. But what we have to understand is that this government can only be credible if it carries out measures to undermine the material conditions of the working class. This development will mean the influence of nationalism within the working class can be undermined. However, this possibility relies on Marxism acting effectively and in a principled manner to promote the ideas of internationalism, the necessity of the class struggle, and socialism. At the moment it is doubtful whether the various Marxist groups are suited for this task. Instead they have become accustomed to having a marginal role within society. They often fail to recognise the problem of nationalism and have accommodated to this standpoint in terms of promoting an anti-EU message. Whilst the new Left Unity organisation has been undermined by their members joining the Labour Party. It is alarming that within society very few people know what is meant by socialism, and capitalism is both economically and ideologically dominant. The only current that challenges the supremacy of capitalism is reactionary nationalism. This standpoint has nostalgia for a mythical era before globalisation, the British Empire, and so its proponents are vague about their present economic programme. However, we must be explicit: populist nationalism can only sustain itself on the basis of a most reactionary programme of undermining the living standards of the working class. In this situation the contradictions of society will intensify. The reactionary inclined sections of the working class will begin to consider that their aspirations have been betrayed. This means the situation could become favourable for Marxism.

The contemporary validity of Marxism is based on a situation in which the domination of capital implies the tendency for the undermining of the material conditions of the working class and the erosion of the quality of welfare services. This development should imply increasing support for the socialist alternative. But this possibility is complicated by the reactionary influence of nationalism. The discontent of the working class with capitalism is expressed in an alienated manner, of blaming scapegoats for the present situation, such as migrants from the EU. The result of this reactionary ideological tendency is that support for right wing populism increases, but progressive and socialist type ideas are marginalised or opposed in a hostile manner. Even the ideas of the establishment can be opposed by the populist alternative. Cameron has had to propose his imminent resignation from the Premiership because his explicit support for capital and the EU was opposed by a resurgent nationalism. The situation is reminiscent of the Falkland Factor of 1982, but at that time it was the ruling class that was able to utilise nationalism for the direct ends of capital. Under present conditions the ideologies of capital and nationalism are differentiated. But ultimately they will have to be united in terms of the establishment of new political conditions for the furtherance of accumulation. Without the growth of the influence of Marxism, the working class will remain continually susceptible to the role of nationalism and populism. This will mean the Tory sceptics will be able to carry out their reactionary agenda. However, it is to be hoped that a revival of Marxism, combined with the worsening social conditions of a UK outside the EU, will bring about the regeneration of class struggle. In this situation nationalism can be challenged as it was at the time of the miners’ strike of 1984 and the Poll Tax agitation of 1989. But in order for this possibility to occur, Marxism has to examine critically its theory and strategy. We need to consider how the socialist alternative can be promoted under what seem to be adverse conditions. This task will require consideration of how we can promote the unity of Marxism on the basis of the adoption of a common programme of action. This process will involve rejecting the traditional sectarianism and developing a willingness to engage in dialogue. We have to recognise the seriousness of the situation in which a possible majority of the working class has put allegiance to a mythical nation before that of class and livelihoods. Hence our tasks are complicated and do not promise inevitable success. But we must try to advance the aims of internationalism and socialism under difficult conditions.

An occasional contributor to the Weekly Worker has managed to recognise the character of the campaign about membership of the EU by the UK: ”Anti-establishmentarianism is not making people less likely to buy politicians bombast. It is making them more likely to do so – as long as this bombast is dressed up in anti-establishment rhetoric with a good dose of 'elite' bashing on the side. The 'leave' campaign took full advantage of this.”(1) But the point is : what is the ideology that is motivating this standpoint, and what is its political significance? It is disturbing that the writer seems oblivious to the problem of nationalism and its effect on the working class. Instead he is only able to describe the surface manifestations of this standpoint. The central issue is that nationalism has been the political impulse that has motivated this anti-establishment standpoint. It is disturbing that the only popular alternative to bourgeois economics, and the justification of austerity, is crude nationalism. Opposition to genuine proletarian internationalism takes the form of dislike of the EU and support for a 'Little Englander' vision of the future of the UK. Hence the real, and yet unknown issue of the referendum, was between internationalism and nationalism. Support for being in the EU meant ultimate recognition that only a united states of Europe could represent the possibility of a historically progressive resolution of economic and political problems. In contrast a 'leave' vote meant the justification of national insularity in the name of sovereignty. However, this internationalist perspective was never advanced, and certainly not by the Marxist Left which generally seems complacent about the economic and ideological effect of an isolated UK. Nor have the Marxist groups come to terms with the reactionary effects of the manifestation of popular nationalism.

In other words it is time for organised Marxism within the UK to recognise the reactionary implications for separation from the EU. The complacency of one commentator is alarming: “But for all the claims that this is a 'once in a generation ballot' determining Britain's relationship with the EU.....it is not actually going to directly impact on the working class very much.” (2) What is not understood is that the loss of the single market means the ability of the UK to expand its productive forces is diminished. There is no guarantee that access to the single market will be continued after the UK leaves the EU. Hence it will become economic necessary to intensify the exploitation of the workers of the UK. There will be political pressure to reduce the value of wages, and further austerity budgets will become inevitable. This was the very point made by George Osborne. The response of the Marxist Left should be to promote internationalism in terms of the necessity to struggle for the United States of Europe and in favour of the UK's membership of the EU. This development will help to promote the international unity of the working class within Europe. The alternative is national isolationism and the formation of a regressive exploitative society. The point being made is that the popular nationalism of the working class of the UK is against their interests. The influence of nationalism can only promote measures to undermine the gains of the working class within society. For example, the very continuation of the welfare state is under threat because of the decision taken on June 23rd. Therefore we should not underestimate the reactionary character of the decision that has occurred concerning the UK's membership of the EU. The only way capitalism can survive in the UK is to intensify the exploitation of the working class, and the prospect of the renewal of class struggle opposition to such a situation could be possibly undermined by nationalism. Furthermore, Marxist theorists continue to undermine our concern about what is happening with complacent comments such as: “Over the long term, whether the UK is in or out of the European Union would not have a decisive impact on the relative health or otherwise of British capitalism” (3) The writer, Michael Roberts is more concerned with world recession. This is a wise concern, but he is also glossing over the regressive effects of the UK leaving the EU. Just because establishment experts have outlined visions of doom does not mean it won't happen. A national based capitalism is unviable in the era of globalisation, but this is the perspective of the Tory sceptics. What is certain is that capital will have to undermine the standard of living of the working class in this situation. Marxists need to be prepared to provide leadership for opposing the attacks of capital. Instead our tendency to justify complacency means that we are unwilling to relate to the possible situation in the near future. We need to improve our economic analysis if we are to be able to provide accurate and principled advice for the working class.

The basis for complacency is primarily an acceptance of the very views of the Euro-sceptics. They argue that the economic situation of the UK will not deteriorate because it will be possible to obtain a trade deal with the EU. The fact is we do not know whether this claim is a certainty, and it is possible that, with a trade deal will come higher tariffs on goods. The point is that the EU will not be favourably minded towards the UK. They will want to ensure that the UK does not benefit in any manner from leaving the UK. Nor is it a certainty that trade deals will be signed with other countries like China and India. What we do know for certain is that the UK will be an isolated country, and the forces of capital will be under immense pressure to intensify the exploitation of labour. In this situation the Euro-sceptics will show their true colours, they will support an offensive of capital against labour as being in the national interest. At this point the working class will have a tremendous decision to take: will it support the interests of class against those of 'nation'? It will be the task of Marxists to influence the working class to arrive at a decision that represents their class standpoint. The role of bourgeois ideology will attempt to persuade the working class that it should sacrifice in the 'national interest'. But Marxists should oppose this view and instead advocate militant action as the only principled basis to uphold the interests of the working class. We should argue that the very vulnerability of capital has created possibilities for the intensification of the class struggle. In this context we need to call for the overthrow of the Tory-sceptic government and advocate the holding of a new referendum about the membership of the EU. It will be necessary to develop workers councils that can mobilise in order to promote a general strike that bring about the overthrow of the government.

However, it is possible that a reactionary section of the working class will still support the appeal of nationalism and continue to uphold the Tory sceptic government. This is because the influence of nationalism has been very enduring and is based on the ideological mythology generated by the historical period of the British Empire. In this situation the Labour movement should act to attempt to obtain support from this reactionary layer because of the potential success of the methods of class struggle. Hopefully, because of the possibilities to promote the dynamics of what is becoming a revolutionary process, the opposition of this reactionary layer and its petty-bourgeois allies will be neutralised. But we should be aware that the choice in this situation will be between the success of revolutionary transformation or the formation of a semi-fascist government. The reactionary Tory government will have the initial advantage of having been able to create a populist alliance of diverse social forces whilst the Labour movement has been in disarray. It will have the formal democratic credentials for carrying out measures to undermine the interests of labour. But Marxism should attempt to promote opposition to this development and in the process aim to undermine the popular basis of the government. The ultimate test will be the effectiveness of the general strike. Will it advance revolutionary transformation, or instead be catastrophically defeated? Because of these conflicting possibilities we cannot be content to allow the TUC General Council to conduct affairs. Instead the rank and file of the trade unions should become the leadership of the strike. This development will not ensure success, but it will mean that the strike is not betrayed. If the strike is defeated it will be because the ruling class is stronger and has been able to maintain its reactionary support because of the influence of nationalism. In this situation it is to be hoped that the advanced sections of the working class do not become demoralised, and instead accept the need to prepare for future class conflicts. At the very least the intensification of class struggle will generate the creation of a mass revolutionary party and promote consciousness.

However, Marxism and the advanced sections of the working class may be caught unawares if we underestimate the adverse consequences of the UK leaving the EU. Nor should we console ourselves with the illusion of a second referendum, or that the process of withdrawal is long and protracted. Instead we should expect that with the formation of the new Tory-sceptic government that it will attempt to introduce measures, such as a new austerity budget, in order to undermine the interests of labour and therefore promote the standpoint of capital. The fact that this may be a Bonapartist government that acts on behalf of capital, rather than directly represent its interests, does not mean that it will not act ruthlessly to promote the extraction of surplus value from the working class. The split between the Tory Party and Capital has deeply reactionary implications, such as establishing the political basis for an authoritarian state. Osborne is the ruling class candidate to be the next Prime Minister, but his claims have been undermined by the referendum result. In order to try and provide a mass basis for the next Tory government, their deputy chair has suggested that he will launch a campaign to undermine the support of working class voters for the Labour Party. There is a perspective to re-create the One-Nation Conservative party in the most reactionary and populist manner.

The immediate post-referendum situation is very volatile. The government is completely demoralised, whilst the EU is demanding that the UK acts now to leave. It is obvious that the Tory sceptics have no plan for leaving, and they squabble about whether they want to try and re-join the single market. We can have no confidence that a new reactionary Tory government will act to defend jobs and services. Many people voted 'Leave' as a protest vote and they are now worried about the consequences of an actual Leave situation. Furthermore, over 2 million people have signed an on-line petition calling for a second referendum. Many people are confused and demoralised by the situation. The UK seems divided into two political nations and they lack the common ideology to engage in constructive dialogue. The working class is actually split between a progressive and reactionary section. But in relation to the progressive forces the influence of genuine internationalism and socialism is miniscule. Instead people have supported the arguments of bourgeois economics as against nationalism. The Labour Party made no attempt to define a distinctive understanding of why the UK should be in the EU, and instead adapted to the arguments of Cameron.

In this uncertain situation the forces of Marxism could have exerted an influence, and attempted to rally the Remain voters in a Progressive coalition. Instead the anti-EU stance of many Marxist groups means they are effectively disarmed by the situation. Effectively groups like the SWP have accommodated to nationalism in the name of opposing the capitalist character of the EU. They have not recognised the internationalist argument in favour of Remain, and instead have seemed oblivious to the popular role of nationalism. The major concern of Marxism should have been to oppose the development of nationalism within the working class. Instead it collectively seemed oblivious to the political requirements of the present situation and was content to repeat the views inherited from the past. Some groups repudiated the necessity of having any coherent position, and called for a boycott. It was not understood that what we should be primarily concerned with is how to promote the class consciousness of the working class, and this meant the advocacy of internationalism as against nationalism. The reactionary role of nationalism within capitalist society is about rejecting the importance of a class viewpoint. Concerns of class are considered irrelevant, and instead the nation is defined in mythical and illusory terms. Hence it was common place to hear that with Leave, Britain would be 'Great Again'. This view was very popular because the related view that the UK was 'bossed' by the EU was taken as a commonplace truism. Hence people were not concerned that the EU was a capitalist institution, but rather that it was an international entity that dominated the UK. In this context such a standpoint would be completely opposed to the United States of Europe. Instead it seemed that what people would be most comfortable with was the break-up of the EU, or at least that it should adopt a more modest role. The point being made is that people could not envisage what is meant by internationalism instead they can only comprehend a world of competing nations. With the ideological hegemony of this nationalist standpoint it was the obligation of Marxists to try and provide an alternative based on internationalism. But this could not be realised because most of the Marxist groups shared the common concern that the EU was the major problem in this situation. Hence they were reconciled with the nationalist hysteria and the demand for 'Leave'. They did not seemed concerned that the success of this demand would result a more reactionary political situation. The Labour Movement has been defined as' traitors', and only the most crude and nationalist opinion seems 'respectable'. It is necessary that Marxism wakes up from its complacent slumber and responds to this situation.

We have already mentioned the necessity for an emergency conference to discuss the situation. But what is also called for is urgent theoretical work. The working class in the UK has been generally unresponsive to calls to oppose austerity, and yet sections are motivated by the aspirations of nationalism. This understanding does not mean that we should label the working class as reactionary. Far from it. Instead we attempt to understand this development in order to oppose it and propose a principled alternative. We do not mean to stigmatise sections of the working class, instead we need to understand their concerns and elaborate answers. The problem has been that the Labour Party has ignored the alienated concerns of working people, and the result is likely electoral defeat in 2020. Instead we have to argue why the free movement of labour will occur in the era of globalisation. Hence what is needed is more homes, better schools, and strong trade unions. But we oppose the attempt to define people from different countries as the 'alien other'. Instead we are all brothers and sisters united by reasons of our common class location. This is precisely why what is ultimately at issue is internationalism versus nationalism. In defining what people have in common we can begin to understand that these united interests can only be advanced by means of international revolution. National policies can only result in an authoritarian state. This situation will only be considered intolerable by a majority of the working class when it is understood that their material interests cannot be realised in this reactionary manner. Only an international socialist state can ensure that needs and welfare are upheld. But in order for this development of an understanding of society to occur it is necessary that Marxism becomes more influential. Only this approach can connect the concerns of working people with an answer in terms of internationalism and socialism.

The problem with the progressive liberalism that motivates some of the supporters of the Remain campaign is that they have a situation of material privilege, and represent uncritical support of the establishment. Their standpoint is that of bourgeois economics. This approach cannot attract support from the disaffected working class who are inspired by nationalism. Hence they support Tory sceptics who do not seem part of the establishment. The problem with Marxism is that it does not seem relevant for either side of the referendum divide. This situation can only be overcome if we uphold progressive liberal values whilst adopting a different economic approach and making new arguments for Remain. (Re-join) But the problem is the possibilities of the present situation are complicated by defeat in the recent referendum. Hence it is too late for any prospect of membership of the EU to be realised in the near future. Instead our starting point is an isolated UK. In this context the arguments for internationalism have to be developed and become more effective. Marxists have to accept that the genuinely internationalist standpoint has effectively been confined to ourselves. The mass appeal of Marxism has gone. We have to make new arguments for internationalism that can have popular appeal, and we have to be aware that this is a very difficult task because we live in one of the most nationalist countries in the world. Yet if success in this task is not realised the possibility for the revolutionary transformation of society will be undermined by the influence of this reactionary trend. This is not an argument in favour of pessimism, but instead an attempt to understand the ideological situation in the UK. The point is the result of the referendum has been an immense defeat for the working class interest. The fact that the working class participated in generating the referendum result does not mean that this defeat of the class has not occurred. Instead because of low class consciousness sections of working people have made it more difficult to struggle for socialism. The UK is now more isolated and the possibility of internationalist alternatives are more difficult to achieve. This complex situation does not mean that Marxists should accommodate to this defeat, but instead we should prepare ourselves to orient more effectively in the future in order to relate to any upsurge in the class struggle. We would be pessimists if we believed that the class struggle was over, but what we should be more concerned with at present is the effects of reactionary ideology which has undermined the development of the political independence of the working class.

Sinn Fein has decided to attempt to utilise the fact that 56% of the population of Northern Ireland voted to remain in the EU in order to strive to obtain a situation in which they are able to obtain a continued relationship with the EU. We should support this aim, and the same point could be made about Scotland. The only distinct territorial units that decisively voted in favour of Leave were England and Wales. In contrast the democratic wish of the people of Northern Ireland and Scotland was in favour of Remain. Scotland voted 62% in favour of Remain. The majority for Remain in these areas provides democratic legitimacy to reject the overall Referendum result and instead support negotiations by Scotland and Northern Ireland about maintaining a relationship with the EU. This development would also encourage the process of Irish unification and Scottish Independence. We would suggest that the referendum result in Scotland and Northern Ireland enhances the democratic legitimacy of national aspirations in these areas. It is recognised that the financial viability of Scotland and Northern Ireland is undermined by the recent referendum vote. The economic and political viability of these areas is upheld by them being part of, or at least in a relation with the EU. In contrast, the isolated UK cannot guarantee the continued economic wellbeing of Scotland and Northern Ireland. Indeed the referendum vote in England indicated that the continued integrity of the UK had become a fiction. People in England voted with disregard for the wishes of the people in Scotland, and the obvious intention was that the isolated UK should become a Little England and Wales. The point is that this referendum result indicates that the political unity of the UK has become a fiction. Instead of attempting to support an untenable political structure we should advocate a perspective that upholds democratic aspirations. This situation is not ideal, and it is difficult to uphold internationalism in the context of fragmenting national unity and cohesion, but the dynamics of national self-determination seem irreversible. Indeed, we would question whether Scotland needs a new independence referendum given the results of recent Scotland elections and the EU referendum. It should declare its independence now!

The Parliamentary Labour Party has decided to challenge the leadership of Jeremy Corbyn. This is a crude attempt to utilise a difficult situation in order to scapegoat the Labour leader for the referendum result. The point is that the Labour campaign, which was based on tamely supporting Cameron, was ineffective and did not outline distinctive reasons for Remain. This campaign was led by the right wing of the Labour Party, but they have chosen to exonerate themselves and instead blame Corbyn for what happened. However, Corbyn's apparently sceptical and pragmatic support for the EU was unconvincing. Primarily he did not outline any internationalist and socialist reasons for support of Remain. Instead he provided a slightly more left wing version of Cameron's message. He failed to express political confidence and conviction. The point is he tried to evade developing policies in a difficult situation. He was possibly too concerned with undermining Labour support. However, his failures were also expressed by Marxist organisations, who seemed to have little understanding of what was happening. We should reject any attempt of the right wing of the PLP to bring about a new Labour leader election. What the Labour Party should be concerned with is how to develop an effective message that can win increasing support. In this context, it has failed by being reluctant to lead a struggle against austerity, and instead the message of what is meant by a Corbyn leadership has been increasingly diluted. At some point the continued tensions between Left and Right Wing within the Labour Party need to be resolved. The Referendum campaign has only increased these tensions. Hilary Benn has been sacked from the shadow Cabinet. But what is crucially needed is an ideological struggle to outline the differences between Left and Right Wing. The right wing need to be isolated rather than continuing to be at the centre of power. Unfortunately Corbyn is a left wing leader of a bourgeois reformist party. He needs to begin the process of its transformation if the Labour Party is to express principled politics. However, it is possible that his period of leader may soon be over. This may result in the generation of a Labour party that accommodates to the nationalism within the working class. Such a situation will increase the urgency of Marxism to strive to develop the influence of internationalism.

CONCLUSION

It would be a serious error of Marxists to accept the view that the working class has spoken in the EU referendum. Instead it would be more accurate to suggest that working class anger represents alienated consciousness, which is based on the influence of nationalism and dislike of EU migrants. Furthermore, it is necessary to recognise that working class opinion was divided. The majority of people in work supported remaining in the EU. Hence we effectively have a working class that is fragmented into progressive and reactionary sections. In relation to Marxism, there was an emphatic underestimation of the political importance of nationalism within the working class. The supposed Left Wing Opposition to the EU had a fictional existence. But the same can be said of Remain/Internationalism. In other words, Marxism had no effect on the character of the referendum campaign, which was effectively conducted in terms of the factional struggles of the Tory party. In this manner the Establishment retained control of the referendum campaign.

Marxists have to accept that the result of the referendum means that it is more difficult to struggle for socialism within the UK. No longer can this struggle occur within the EU, but instead it is limited to the UK, which is itself a fragmenting political unit. Furthermore, the influence of nationalism and reactionary jingoism has developed to oppose the attempt to develop proletarian internationalism. But Marxists should recognise that we need to promote both internationalism and socialism as the answer to the limitations of capitalism. What can provide us with confidence is that the reactionary economic policies of a Tory-sceptic government could generate mass support for opposition to capitalism. But this is not guaranteed if we continue to ignore the influence of nationalism. We must attempt to transform nationalism into proletarian internationalism if the struggle for socialism is to begin. There has been one thing useful about the EU referendum. It has revealed to all Marxists and progressive forces the depth of the influence of reactionary and nationalist ideas. Hence any complacency about the difficulties involved in the struggle for socialism should be overcome. Instead we have to recognise that 'everyday common sense' is differential towards the establishment whilst full of contempt for workers from other countries. This is why we urgently need to develop intellectuals who can promote an alternative common sense that is based on principles of solidarity and unity within the working class. Such a process also means embarking on the neglected ideological task of undermining the influence of the Conservative party within the working class. Much has been said about UKIP, but Marxists ignore the fact that the Conservatives can engage in bitter in-fighting and yet remain the most popular party in the UK. Furthermore, the ruthless and efficient George Osborne is transforming himself into being the spokesperson of a post EU UK economy. He could yet become the leader of the Tory-sceptics!

With these difficult challenges, Marxists need to improve their economic and political analysis of the UK and begin to engage in dialogue with the working class. We also need to discuss what our strategy should consist of in the post EU situation in the UK. We need to develop new arguments for socialism and internationalism. But above all we should no longer be complacent or passive in relation to the tasks of class struggle and the attempt to realise socialism. The dynamics of the EU referendum should have revealed that without the influence of a revolutionary party mass anger with the deteriorating conditions of capitalism will become an expression of reactionary views. This is why Marxists should accept that our present advocacy of our politics is ineffective and unpopular. The reason for this is not because our views have become antiquated but because we do not argue for them with conviction and confidence. However, we do need to make our standpoint more contemporary and therefore corresponding with developments within society. Primarily, it is necessary to accept that the Leave/Left wing approach was totally discredited by events. An adaptation to nationalism can never be a substitute for genuine internationalism.

FOOTNOTES:

(1)Comissaress: The politics of Platitudes, Weekly Worker 1112, June 23 2016 p5

(2) ibid p4

(3)Michael Roberts, Brexit, China and the Fed, Weekly Worker 1112, June 23rd 2016 p7

POSTSCRIPT

The analysis in this article of the potential effects of the referendum result upon the Conservative Party has been rapidly outdated by the collapse of the ‘Eurosceptics’ during the party’s leadership succession struggle, following the resignation of Cameron. The ‘coronation’ of Teresa May as uncontested Conservative Party Leader has placed the candidate of capital into the position of Prime Minister, nullifying the possibility of a Bonarpartist course unfolding.

In Socialist Standpoint no. 13, we will examine in another article, the aftermath of the referendum result and the apparent rapid resolution of the ensuing Tory Party crisis.