THE QUESTION OF THE EUROPEAN UNION REFERENDUM BY PHIL SHARPE

The central issue which Marxists and principled socialists should be concerned with in relation to the forthcoming European referendum is how to promote the possibility to develop the international unity of the working class. In this context we recognise that the supporters of the No vote are attempting to promote national chauvinism in the form of anti-immigration sentiment and the standpoint of isolationism. However, it is argued that the Yes campaign will be restricted to the promotion of David Cameron's proposals to change the EU, and this does not represent an alternative because of their conciliation of the standpoint of the No vote. But the alternatives do not consist of two reactionary standpoints. The actual question on the ballot paper will ask whether voters want to support or oppose the UK's membership of the EU. This question provides scope to develop a socialist form of the Yes vote. We can argue in our own terms that we favour the continued membership of the EU by the UK in order to promote the international struggle of the working class against capitalism within Europe. Membership of the UK within the EU develops the possibility of generating international working class activity in order to oppose austerity, and undermines the possibility of the EU imposing economic restrictions on national governments. In contrast a No vote can only generate support for national chauvinism and uphold the illusion that isolation can develop common welfare and prosperity.

The Weekly Worker has recently argued in favour of a boycott campaign in the forthcoming EU referendum because of the reactionary politics of both sides. Eddie Ford maintains that: 'it is still the case that a vote for continued EU membership is essentially a vote for the status quo, Fortress Europe and ultimately David Cameron himself.....This can in no way promote the interests of proletarian internationalism.'(1) You would be forgiven for thinking that the only option on the ballot paper was support or opposition for the reactionary proposals of David Cameron concerning the question of UK's membership of the EU. In fact the actual question will simply ask whether you uphold or reject the continued participation of the UK within the EU. The broad character of this question means that it is possible to elaborate principled and pro-socialist reasons for the working class to support continued membership of the UK within the EU. These reasons primarily involve the strategic necessity to create an international mass movement to struggle for the socialist transformation of the EU. This development would mean that the imposition of an austerity policy onto radical governments, as occurred in Greece, could never be repeated. Instead the EU would become the basis for the struggle of revolutionary socialism against the reactionary forces of trans-national capital, and the aim would be to transform the EU into the United Socialist states of Europe. In contrast, the supporters of withdrawal from the EU are motivated by reactionary ideas and Conservative Euro-scepticism, and this point has been recognised by Jeremy Corbyn who has become a supporter of the UK's membership of the EU despite many years of upholding the policy of withdrawal. There is no principled socialist argument for the withdrawal of the UK from the EU. Instead this standpoint can only result in accommodation to the politics of the Conservative Party right wing and the forces of UKIP. This approach is motivated by hysteria about immigration and is connected to nostalgia about the British Empire.

Hence the call for a boycott is a policy of vacillation and indecision that provides no sense of leadership and guidance for the working class. The CPGB justify this standpoint in the following terms: “Communists support neither of the alternatives that will be on offer in the referendum: on the one hand, an endorsement of the current undemocratic EU of the bankers, or, on the other a nationalist withdrawal into British isolationism.”(2) But the point is a Yes vote does not prevent us from striving to realise a democratic and Socialist EU. In contrast, a No vote would mean acceptance of the agenda of the forces of right-wing national chauvinism. We can utilise a yes vote in order to begin the struggle for a united socialist states of Europe. A boycott vote will not make the slightest difference, and could contribute to the strength of the forces of national insularity and reaction. In other words a boycott would be ignored and can only create confusion within the working class. Instead of this vacillation we should attempt to provide genuine leadership on an issue that has led to massive confusion and reactionary attitudes. Let us not be mistaken.

The working class support of the No vote is primarily motivated by the view that withdrawal from the EU can promote the possibility to 'control our own borders', and so restrict the growth of immigration. In other words the support for the No vote is not based on intricate arguments about economics, or the wisdom of creating a European super-state, and instead is effectively motivated by fears of increasing immigration from the EU countries to the UK. The continuation of this expression of national chauvinism can only undermine the development of an internationalist class consciousness within the working class. This will mean that the potential to develop support for international socialism will be replaced by the authoritarian aspiration to create a reactionary populist regime. This situation will mean that the development of a principled No vote will be a fiction. A 'socialist' variation of the No vote could only be possible by conciliating the forces of national chauvinism. This has already been expressed by those groups that consider an isolationist UK could be the most effective basis to promote the United Socialist States of Europe. In actuality a popular socialist form of the No vote has not developed because of the recognition of the fact that it could only accommodate the forces of the existing reactionary campaign. But for complex reasons the development of a revolutionary form of the Yes Vote has also not developed, and is instead supported only by the AWL and a few other small groups.

The important argument of left-wing opponents of the Yes Vote is that the EU is a bourgeois organisation and so should not be supported. Instead the internationalism of the working class should be supported in different terms, in the form of separation from the EU. In replying to this objection, it can be said emphatically that the EU is a bourgeois political organisation that promotes the accumulation of capital, production and trade. But this economic role is not in dispute. What seems to be problematical with the voters is the development of a European super-state that aspires to introduce its own legislation such as the free movement of labour. The progressive alternative to the role of the EU is not its dismantling into distinct national states, but instead its transformation in terms of the promotion of socialist objectives and therefore becoming the expression of the interests of the international working class. This cannot occur without the role of mass struggle and the importance of action like international general strikes. Hence genuine proletarian internationalism does not require national states leaving the EU, but instead the working class of the EU should act together in order to develop the transformation of this supra-national institution into an organisation that promotes the development of international socialism. This aim can be upheld in terms of a critical form of the Yes Vote in the forthcoming referendum in the UK.

We can promote our opposition to Cameron's interests by supporting a type of a yes vote that is progressive and internationalist. In contrast Cameron's only concern is to conciliate the Euro-sceptics. He wants a Europe that is united by economic aims and yet is distinct and independent in terms of the political integrity of the national states. This standpoint is reactionary and is not upheld by our distinct and independent reasons for voting yes. We are not concerned with making concessions to reactionary forces and instead want to advance the cause of international socialism. The choice is not between the policies of two forms of conservative ideology, and instead there is a socialist voice that deserves to be made. This voice cannot be advanced by either a No vote or by means of a boycott. The objective of uniting the workers of the countries of Europe can be advanced by means of a Yes Vote.

It is obvious that Cameron is presently only worried about his right wing constituency of Euro-sceptics. His rhetoric is about making the best possible agreement for the interests of the UK, but he is constantly trying to appease the right wing of the Tory party. The labour movement makes no intransigent intervention that would imply a different perspective based on democracy and the advance of socialism. Hence the present expression of bourgeois politics only allows for the influence of the working class in terms of the alienated voice of nationalist opposition to the EU. This means the role of progressive politics is marginalised and isolated and the initiative seems to be with the populist forces of UKIP. In this situation it is not surprising that some of the Marxist left becomes influenced by right-wing opinion. Steve Freeman has recently characterised the EU as a 'bureaucratic super-state' which means he is completely confused about what should be the attitude of the working class of the EU and UK in particular. He comments: “The EU and even more the euro zone is thus divided ever more sharply into Euro capital and Euro democracy: in other words the blood sucking vampires and the working people of Europe. If Euro-capital is more integrated than ever before, it has exposed the fact that Euro-democracy is lagging way behind.”(3) This analysis provides no direction about the immediate question of voting in the UK referendum. Instead this rhetoric about the democratic revolution only provides ambiguity about the issue of membership of the EU. Such a vague standpoint seems to be part of a trend that contrasts democratic aspirations and working class solidarity with justification of the lack of definite answers concerning the precise relationship of the UK to the EU. The point is that we know the EU is an institution that promotes the interests of international capital. This is not in dispute. But the struggle to begin the attempt to promote an international mass movement against the reactionary limitations of the EU does not mean support for the withdrawal of the UK from the EU, and instead we must be explicit that the international mass movement of the working class can most constructively begin within the EU, and in order to transform the character of that institution. We know the EU is bourgeois, but the possibility to change its character begins from inside, by a movement to change the character of the EU into becoming an expression of the socialist nature of the United States of Europe. This process is not promoted by movements of separation and isolation. Steve Freeman is accommodating to the influence of national chauvinism because he is vague about the vital issue of the status of the UK's membership of the EU. Ambiguous references to the democratic struggle within Europe do not resolve the importance of precision in relation to concrete questions.

Lana Zhet argues unambiguously that: “There is a case to be made that Britain outside the EU would be a lot nastier, with a 'leave' result riding on a storm of xenophobic and particularly anti-migrant feeling, and a Tory government forced both to reflect that and carve out a new political and economic niche in the world. Little Englanders looking to a renewed 'Great' Britain. That would be a definite defeat for the working class, for migrants, for internationalism and for socialist ideas.”(4) This is an eloquent summary of the reactionary possibilities if the UK leaves the EU. But we cannot be content with an emphasis on the negative aspects of the issue. We must also emphasise that a Yes vote enables us to promote the possibility of international working class struggle within the EU in favour of a socialist Europe. This task would be made more difficult if a No vote was successful. Hence a yes vote is not a capitulation to the standpoint of bourgeois class interest, and is instead an expression of what is the most principled and imaginative basis to develop a strategy to unite the European working class. This possibility would be undermined by the formation of a 'fortress UK' that effectively ended migration from Europe and encouraged a chauvinist attitude towards the EU. The major reason to vote yes is that it is the only expression of the most effective encouragement of the development of international solidarity within the EU. Of course, a yes vote would not automatically generate this development. The struggle for international mass action would still have to be encouraged. But at least the possibility for a serious development of international action would have been encouraged.

It could be argued that the strategy being advocated is unrealistic. The political situation is characterised by the ascendency of national chauvinism within the UK, and in Europe in general. In these circumstances the possibility of international working class action seems to be fantasy. We can certainly agree that nationalism is very influential within the EU. This situation seems to suggest that the prospects for the development of international working class solidarity are bleak and unlikely. However, we must elaborate strategy in terms of what is necessary and principled, and not accommodate to the limitations of the existing situation. If we are to realise socialism then international working class action within the EU is necessary and vital. The defeat of the left-wing government in Greece, when it attempted to implement anti-austerity measures, is an indication of the flaws involved in any conception of a nationalist understanding of the prospect to realise reforms or radical change. Hence the major problem involved in the attempt to develop a realistic strategy of change is expressed by the political limitations represented by the influence of nationalism. This influence has been expressed by the rise of UKIP in the UK and the National Front in France. In contrast, the forces of international socialism are marginalised and very small. However, the only policy that will transform the character of the EU will be the international mass action of the working class. This means we have to promote the ideology of proletarian internationalism. In this context we can utilise a yes vote in the UK referendum in order to begin the process of struggle for a socialist United States of Europe. This vote will indicate that the forces of national chauvinism can be defeated and that the alternative of internationalism can become a realistic option.

However, pessimists will argue that all that could happen is a victory for Cameron over the Euro-sceptics. This is one possible interpretation if a yes vote occurs. But it is our task as Marxists to argue that the most principled and practical implementation of a yes vote requires the development of an international mass movement against austerity and in favour of a socialist Europe. We should develop the argument that Cameron's vision for the EU is not democratic, progressive and internationalist, and instead the only alternative is provided by the development of a mass trans-national struggle for a genuinely united Europe. We should begin to undermine the initiative of Cameron and instead develop support for our alternative agenda. It could be argued that we have little chance of success in the UK of 2016 which has effectively accepted the economic agenda of Cameron and Osborne. But if we accepted the pessimistic logic of this argument nothing would be realised that represented the interests of socialism. The point is that a yes vote, despite its confused character, would express the potential to generate popular support for the realisation of a socialist Europe. In contrast a No vote would only confirm the strength of the forces of national isolationism, and so represent a serious setback in relation to the task of promoting the international struggle for a Socialist Europe. Paradoxically a yes vote would be the most effective basis to end Cameron's domination of the EU agenda. In other words a yes vote would not necessarily represent support for his proposals and instead could be interpreted as an aspiration for a democratic and socialist Europe. The point is that a yes vote is how we can effectively reject his proposals and instead advocate an alternative. Hence the very victory of Cameron could be transformed into his defeat, and express the beginning of the development of an alternative to the Tory agenda. In this context, it is a yes vote, rather than an ineffective boycott that represents the political basis to promote an alternative to Cameron. We can begin to establish an alternative to Toryism on the issue of the EU.

The present agenda on the character of the EU seems to be dominated by the various establishment politicians. Thus the issue of contention is that which concerns opposition to, or support of, a federal Europe. Cameron has also added the issue of benefits to migrants and the influence of non-Euro countries. We cannot support his proposals which represent the interests of British finance capital and which express concessions to the Euro-sceptics. But we can still vote yes in the UK referendum because we interpret this result in a different manner. It could mean the beginning of an aspiration for internationalism, for a democratic and socialist Europe. Hence the practical conclusion of a yes vote is to develop support for international mass action in order to transform the EU. The actual alternatives are those of various forms of nationalism versus principled internationalism. Progressive supporters of the yes vote can advocate the latter option in terms of the possibility of the united solidarity of the working class of the EU against the forces of capital.

The difficult and protracted negotiations about Cameron's proposals indicated the opposition to him within the EU. This difficult situation indicated that the priority of Cameron is to try and satisfy the growing ranks of the Euro-sceptics within his party. He is constantly antagonising the leaders of the various countries within the EU. The point is that the difficult character of the negotiations indicated that his loyalty to the EU is inconsistent and indecisive, and instead his priority is to please the right-wing members of the Conservative party. This standpoint reflects the view that the interests of the UK within a globalised economy could mean the necessity of political independence and the connected attempt to establish the pre-eminence of the city of London. Washington has already criticised this thinking as being reckless and wants the UK to remain within the EU, but Cameron increasingly seems to think that the UK economy is being undermined by the bureaucratic regulations of the EU. This view does not seem to be the opinion of UK companies, but they prefer a diplomatic silence rather than entering into open opposition to the party of the ruling class.

These developments indicate that Cameron is not a principled supporter of the EU. His major concern is accommodating the growing Euro-scepticism of the Conservative Members of Parliament. This situation makes his negotiating stance tougher. His attitude is also defined by the concern that the No vote may win in a referendum. Hence his approach is pragmatic. The major priority is to be on the winning side in the referendum. The view of many EU leaders is that unnecessary compromises should not be made to the UK. This means the federal ideal of the EU should be maintained and not diluted in order to please Cameron. There is also a reluctance of many countries to appease Cameron on the question of restricting benefits for migrants. The French President has also criticised the notion of privileges for the City of London. The possibility for a quick settlement has not been realised and instead the only firm ally of Cameron is the German Chancellor and the leaders of some of the smaller countries of the EU. But many other countries have been antagonised by Cameron's tough negotiating stance and that his priorities seem to be to please the Tory Party.

However, the labour movement can utilise the difficulties of Cameron. We can suggest that the only principled alternative to the secret diplomacy of Brussels is to develop the strength of the international working class in order to transform the EU in a democratic and socialist manner. It is necessary to begin the process of trying to convince the working people of the UK to vote yes in the forthcoming referendum and not to be fooled by the tactics of the Tory party. What is at stake is the struggle in favour of proletarian internationalist ideology against the national chauvinism of the Tories and UKIP. The point is that the political instability of the situation creates opportunities to challenge the ideological hegemony of Cameron's policy concerning the EU. Unfortunately, most of the 'Marxist left' has accepted that the situation is defined by the various diplomatic actions of Cameron and so they effectively deny the possibility to develop an alternative. But we can reject the various attempts to define the EU in the image of the aims of the Tories by developing a revolutionary alternative. This means the advocacy of internationalism instead of nationalism, and upholding the preference for socialism instead of capitalism. Primarily what has to be recognised is that the working class can be turned from being supporters of national chauvinism and instead becoming advocates of international mass action if we promote a strategy of the European general strike as an alternative to the passivity of the present. It will be argued that this task is too difficult because the working class has an imperial identity that is indifferent to internationalism and instead is only motivated by national concerns. This development is the legacy of the ideological effects of the offensive of capital against labour and the anti-migrant propaganda of UKIP. However this situation does not have to be permanent and instead can be challenged by the role of Marxism and the development of increasing opposition to the anti-working class agenda of austerity. What would be problematical is for the Marxist left to accommodate to the temporary reactionary moods within the working class by supporting the No vote in the referendum.

What should be understood is that the Tory Euro-sceptics are attempting to win over Labour Party voters by their support for a No vote. There is a concerted attempt to develop an authoritarian atmosphere or a shift in attitude towards right wing populism in order to develop a reactionary consensus in favour of Tory policies from issues like austerity to the question of Europe. This creation of a right wing popular mood will be utilised in order to undermine the possibility of the development of trade union struggle on issues like defence of the public services and opposition to local authority cuts. In this context the beginning of opposition to the Tory agenda starts with advocating a progressive Yes vote in the referendum. This point has been recognised by Jeremy Corbyn, who is calling for support of a democratic Europe. But this point has not been understood by various left-wing groups like the SWP and Socialist Party. They refuse to connect their policies to the circumstances of the present and instead are rigidly attached to the approach of the past such as the attitudes they adopted in relation to the referendum on Europe in 1973. This support for dogma means that an important issue of the present, which is opposing authoritarian populism, is ignored. Instead they consider that it is possible to oppose EU membership in progressive and socialist terms. They have yet to explain how an isolationist UK would advance the cause of international socialism and promote the development of revolutionary consciousness within the working class. Instead they can only create mythical schemas of social transformation in which a UK outside the EU can somehow advance the cause of the formation of a socialist United States of Europe. What is crucially not explained is how a nationalist influenced and motivated working class can become suddenly and abruptly an advocate of international socialism? How can a working class influenced by the Tory right wing and UKIP become changed into supporters of international socialism? Indeed, we are not told how the campaigns of the SWP and SP in favour of a No vote can differ from the campaigns of UKIP? In contrast, the support of the Marxist left for a Yes vote would create a clear dividing line and demarcation from the forces of right wing nationalist populism. What would be established is that the Marxist left is not afraid to be unpopular in its emphatic support for internationalism and socialism. Support for a yes vote would mean we are prepared to offer an alternative to UKIP for the working class and also to provide reinforcement for the essentially principled standpoint adopted by the Labour Party leadership. In contrast, the standpoint of the SWP and SP amounts to a capitulation to the 'defence of the fatherland' approach adopted by the parties of the Second International in 1914.

David Cameron obtained his renegotiated agreement with the rest of the EU in the early hours of Saturday February 20th. The Times editorial was unimpressed. It commentated: “The changes to the draft deal are incremental. Taken together they amount to a rag bag of adjustments that may eventually feature in the margins of a European treaty. They are nowhere near the reformed union that the prime minister pledged would be the basis for his campaign to stay in. Back in Britain the question is whether Mr Cameron can sell a variant of this deal to the voters. They are sceptical and right to be. He is a good salesman, and he will need to be.”(5) This comment is an indication that the anti-EU forces are likely to go onto the offensive. Cameron is to be criticised for the cosmetic changes that he has promoted and instead it will be argued the only valid option is for the UK to leave the EU. But the principled arguments are not about the results of Cameron's diplomacy. Instead the issue is what type of society do we support and uphold. The forces of the anti-EU campaign envisage the generation of an isolationist UK with the ability to impose restrictive forms of immigration control. Labour Party supporters of opposition to the EU are being fooled to think they can create an opposition that has a focus on other issues such as the support of the EU for capitalism. Hence LP opponents of the EU are being drawn into a reactionary alliance with the supporters of UKIP. But the alternative is not to support the Cameron led campaign for a yes vote in the referendum. Instead we should develop a distinctive campaign which emphasises the socialist reasons for a yes vote. This campaign would be different from that of the right wing 'Labour in For Britain'. This organisation consists of right-wing Labour MP's who emphasise the interests of British business, trade and a common defence policy. This approach is not dissimilar from that of Cameron, and does not differentiate the LP from the majority forces in the Tory Party.

The only principled manner in which socialists and the working class can be differentiated from both the chauvinist anti EU lobby and the forces of Cameron, is to develop an independent and principled expression of the Yes vote. This means adopting the slogan and policy of transforming the EU into the Socialist United States of Europe, and in this manner we do support a federal Europe based on the realisation of the highest levels of economic and political centralisation. The creation of a progressive European super-state will mean that national boundaries will become superfluous and therefore overcome tensions between remaining national entities. In contrast, the major concern of Cameron is to uphold the importance of London as a financial centre and to oppose the influence of the Euro countries. This narrow economic aim was obscured by his emphasis on restricting the benefits of EU migrants to the UK, but what this situation indicated was that inter-imperialist rivalries have not been overcome by the development of the EU. The French government was the major defender of the interests of the Euro countries whilst Germany adopted a more neutral stance. Cameron's vision of the EU does not differ dramatically from that of the British Euro-sceptics, but he believes that the interests of British trade can be upheld most effectively in the form of the supposed reformed EU. He is completely indifferent to the political objectives of the EU. His only concern is to defend the role of British capital within the EU. He knows that trade and economic links would be undermined if the UK was not part of the EU. In contrast, the Euro-sceptics gloss over this issue of economic uncertainty in order to emphasise the question of EU migrants. But Cameron was not concerned with the details of his agreement with the EU; instead he was concerned was to show he could negotiate seriously and intransigently in order to uphold the claim that he has reformed the EU. In this context he has been successful even if the Euro-sceptics are contemptuous about his results. He has just about managed to successfully realise a public relations exercise. The supporters of Marxism should be indifferent to this shallow diplomacy. We have no illusions concerning the recent actions of Cameron, but nor do we support the criticism made by the Euro-sceptics. Instead we develop our own independent policy based on the aspirations of internationalism and socialism.

The Conservative party is in an acute crisis after Cameron's attempt to create a distinctive role for the UK within the EU. The Cabinet had an acrimonious meeting and divided into pro and anti factions.(6) The point is that Cameron's attempt to reconcile the interests of British capital with the nationalist ideology of the Tory party have proved to be a failure. It is estimated that between 140 to 160 Conservative MP's will rebel on the question of the EU. It is possible that for the next four months before the referendum, the Conservative party will indicate its deep divisions on the question of Europe. The situation is favourable for a labour movement offensive in order to take advantage of the divisions within the Conservative party. But this is not likely to happen because the unions are themselves unsure about what position to adopt. They have traditionally been anti-EU, but also recognise that this standpoint can adapt to the reactionary politics of UKIP and the Tory sceptics. However the call for a 'Social Europe' is vague and without content or popular appeal. Also the unions are wary of raising the issue of the international solidarity of the working class because it implies the prospect of supporting militant action like a general strike. Hence it is entirely possible that the unions will attempt to have a low key role that tries to avoid making many policy comments. In other words it is entirely possible that the Conservative party will be able to emerge from the situation of factional squabbles without any negative consequences. This possibility is furthered by the inept performance of Corbyn who is also reluctant to promote an explicit 'yes' standpoint in relation to the EU. His approach represents indecision and vacillation, and so is unable to take the limelight from Cameron. The point is that presently the labour movement does not present an alternative to both wings of the Conservative party on the question of Europe. Hence it seems to the public that the Conservative party is still establishing the political agenda despite the symptoms of fragmentation.

Thus this situation actually indicates the deeper crisis of the labour movement. It is unable to present a policy on the EU that can promote popular support within the working class and general population. Instead the agenda is established by the feuding wings of the Tory party who are able to disguise their crisis because of the greater political problems of the labour movement. The Marxist left is also unable to intervene because it is also divided and tends to uphold an anti-EU stance, and so accommodates to the forces of national chauvinism. This situation indicates the limitations of economism. The fact is that the labour movement is unable to articulate credible policy beyond the remit of economic and welfare issues. Consequently the question of the EU has been neglected and instead it has been left to the Conservative politicians to define a national standpoint. This has meant the conception of the role of a UK within a reformed EU has not been challenged. Thus despite the emerging political crisis within the Tory party, the ideas of David Cameron on the EU are still ideologically hegemonic. His approach is an expression of the popular opinion of common sense. In contrast, anti-EU sentiment is based on vague and alienated opposition to the role of EU migrants. This standpoint is unlikely to defeat the sense of the fear of the unknown that Cameron will attempt to utilise during the EU referendum campaign. However the extent of the xenophobic dislike of the EU is an unknown factor. There is still residual support for the conception of the independent role of the UK within the world. In other words the character of the EU referendum will be likely to be expressed in terms of the terrain of bourgeois and petty-bourgeois ideology. This means the Tory party will be able to resolve its crisis without detrimental consequences. The labour movement will have acted in a tame supporting role in this process of the struggles of the establishment generated by the EU and its relationship to the UK. But the situation is never too late. It is possible for the labour movement to hold a conference at which it elaborates credible and potentially popular policies for the referendum campaign. Only in this manner will it be possible to seize the initiative from the Tory politicians and instead promote the connection between working class aspirations and the role of the UK within the EU.

The types of politics that can be articulated include rejecting the austerity policy of the EU; support for an international general strike in order to end austerity; promoting the democratic accountability of the EU parliament to its voters; the establishment of a European living wage and minimum wage; and the promotion of the socialist transformation of the EU by the methods of international working class solidarity. It could be argued that these demands are unrealistic and do not engage with the aspirations of the voters in the UK referendum. This point is presently true, and it is why we require a campaign in order to engage with working people in order to indicate the relevance of socialism and the role of a mass movement for change. The reason that the Tories are ideologically hegemonic is because the people are ignorant about the emancipatory possibilities of the vision of socialism. To most people the only credible system is capitalism, and this is the reason why they support the austerity policy of the Conservatives. The labour movement accommodates to this situation with its refusal to challenge the Tories on anything but the most minimal issues. The result is that we have nothing precise and imaginative to argue on the question of Europe. It seems that the only realistic approach towards Europe is that which is upheld by Cameron or the alternative of the Euro-sceptics. This situation means the labour movement becomes subordinated to Conservative politics on an important issue of politics. Hence the LP and trade unions divide between the Cameron camp or the Euro-sceptics. But it is possible to establish an independent campaign in favour of the yes vote and this would mean articulating the socialist reasons for being in the EU. It is fear of being tagged with socialism that explains the reluctance of the LP and trade unions to articulate a distinctive policy. Instead because of their attempt to acquire respectability they accommodate to both wings of the Tory party. It is the Tories who have the initiative on the question of Europe despite their divisions.

The ideological limitations of the labour movement mean that it is not possible to take advantage of the problems within the Tory party. These ideological flaws amount to a lack of vision about the alternative to capitalism. The LP has a new left-wing leader but his conception of the caring society is argued without conviction and is not related to concrete questions like the EU. The working class is not provided with political leadership, and so the situation becomes favourable for reactionary ideas to be popular in relation to the issue of the EU. But the Marxist left does not provide an alternative because it is limited by dogma, or tries to avoid adopting a definite standpoint by advocating a boycott standpoint. But a boycott position is no credible alternative to the influence of bourgeois ideology, and instead will be totally ignored. The only way to challenge bourgeois ideology is to transform the Yes campaign and develop a socialist approach as to why we should vote Yes in the EU referendum. It could be argued that Europe is not the issue that should concern the labour movement. But the point is that we do not choose our issues. Any question of importance, and the relationship of the UK to the EU is very important, should promote an independent response of the labour movement. The failure to develop an adequate response indicates the weaknesses of the labour movement and is an expression of the depth of its ideological crisis. This situation is the legacy of the defeats of the recent period. The result is a failure to challenge the Tories even in this period of their own political crisis. Hence the Tories are able to boast that they are still the 'only show in town' and it will be their vision of Europe that will be discussed in the period leading up to the referendum. It is not too late to alter this situation if the labour movement acts with urgency. We can campaign on our own independent programme and policies, and in this manner provide an alternative to the Tories. But at present Labour MPs are even reluctant to appear on TV shows about Europe and their major campaign is presently a copy of that presented by Cameron. However time is still on our side. It is possible to rectify existing limitations with the generation of decisive action. We can appeal to Labour voters who yearn for an independent campaign on Europe. It would be a serious defeat to let Cameron remain unchallenged by the LP and trade unions. This ineptness would enable the Tories to resolve their present political crisis without major trauma.

The Guardian editorial had this comment shortly before the agreement was realised in Brussels: “Mr Cameron may get his deal in the end. We hope he does. We hope he wins the referendum. We want Britain to remain in Europe. But the last 72 hours are a reminder that, when he started this process, Mr Cameron was taking a needless gamble with the national interest in order, if he was lucky, to solve a party management problem....If Mr Cameron had led rather than followed his party, he might never have got into the tangle in which his plans became ensnared this week, and by which, if he fails to do better in the months ahead, his whole prime ministership may be glumly defined.”(7) But the point is that the task of progressive and left wing opinion is not to support Cameron in winning his referendum. Instead the labour movement needs to create a situation in which the issues are posed in terms of an alternative between the vision of Europe held by socialists and the chauvinist approach of the Euro-sceptics. At present the issues are posed in terms of the opposition between Cameron and the Euro-sceptics in his party. This situation represents the factional fighting of the establishment and the interests of working people are ignored. Furthermore, the right wing of the LP is happy to also define the campaign about membership of the EU in these terms. They also concern themselves with questions of trade, security, and the problems of an unknown future, and so represent the second eleven of Cameron's campaign team. In contrast to this servility, the labour movement needs to develop distinctive reasons for the continued membership of the EU by the UK. This standpoint will not be promoted by vague reference to workers’ rights. The point is that workers’ rights really become meaningful and profound in connection to the establishment of an alternative society that is not capitalist. Hence the primary significance of workers’ rights is that they are realised in the context of the transformation of the EU in a socialist manner. In this context what is more concrete and specific is to advocate the development of international mass action by the working class of the EU in order to promote the aims of socialism and the emancipation of humanity. If we could establish a successful campaign in these terms it would be possible to elaborate the alternatives in the EU referendum in class terms. The differences would become between the supporters of a socialist Europe and the reactionary alternative of defenders of a capitalist UK.

However the failure to establish a principled and intransigent campaign for a yes vote means that the political dynamic is dominated by the factional infighting of the Tory party. Already many of the left wing supporters of the No vote are becoming loyal supporters of the campaign led by UKIP. In contrast, the LP Yes voters follow the concerns of Cameron. But the alternative is not to support the boycott. This position will not make the slightest degree of difference and instead can only contribute to the victory of the No vote. The boycott position is based on the false premise that the EU campaign is defined exclusively by the contrasting voices of bourgeois opinion. This pessimism does not allow for the possibility to develop a principled form of the Yes campaign. But instead of this inertia we can begin as urgently as possible to develop the policies of a principled Yes campaign. What is required is imagination and the confidence that we can present a credible alternative to the approach of the competing forms of Conservatism. The Conservatives have not got the monopoly of opinion on the EU question, and instead it is possible to challenge them with a credible vision of an alternative. The tentative comments of the LP leadership do not amount to the promotion of this imaginative policy on Europe. Indeed we are not really sure what the LP leadership stand for. In place of this indecision and deference to the Tories we need to develop a socialist campaign in favour of the Yes vote. This can enhance the morale of Labour voters who are presently confused by the reactionary character of both sides of the EU referendum campaign. Decisive leadership and imaginative policy can create an inspiring campaign by the labour movement.

It has been argued that the contemporary working class is demoralised and influenced by nationalism rather than internationalism. Hence it is likely to vote in favour of the UK leaving the EU. This situation seems to be accurate and partly explains the rise of UKIP in working class constituencies. But this alienated character of the working class vote is because the LP has failed to inspire and motivate support from the working class in the present, and the LP collapsed in Scotland because of the challenge of nationalism. However, we would be pessimists and defeatists if we considered that this situation could not be changed. What is required is that the LP and labour movement in general tries to seriously engage with people in working class communities and presents the arguments in favour of socialism and internationalism. We have already seen that discontent can be transformed in a progressive manner with the election of Jeremy Corbyn as leader of the LP. But the offensive of capital against labour over the last 40 years has led to a demoralised and marginalised working class that expresses its discontent in a nationalist manner. The election campaign of Bernie Saunders in the USA indicates what can be done with a sense of imagination and determination to popularise socialist ideas within the working class. This possibility should include the promotion of internationalism as the alternative to Euro-scepticism. If we are to argue that internationalism can never become popular within the working class then we might as well also maintain that socialism can never be realised because the only prospect of authentic socialism is when it is realised in international terms. Hence the hegemony of nationalism within the working class should be conceived as being temporary, or a condition that can be overcome.

The left wing supporters of a No vote adapt to this nationalist sentiment within the working class and so express their own sense of demoralisation about the prospects of promoting internationalism. They blame the EU for undermining the national prospect of socialism in Greece and other countries. This adaptation to nationalism is unprincipled and will not obtain supporters for genuine socialism which is essentially international in theory and practice. Nor will the perspective of principled socialism be advanced by adapting to the false bourgeois internationalism of the existing EU. Only a revolutionary perspective that aims to transform the EU can uphold both the aims of socialism and genuine internationalism. Developing the popularity of this standpoint will be difficult given the ideological acceptance of capitalism and nationalism by many sectors of the population. However if we do not try to promote support for internationalism we will have rejected the development of ideological struggle in order to facilitate the possibility of creating a popular movement in favour of opposing the nationalist attempt to isolate the UK from the rest of Europe. The most principled manner in which a 'Fortress UK' can be opposed is by connecting the aspiration of internationalism with socialism. This means rejecting the bureaucratic European super-state that promotes a type of imperialism within a globalised world economy. Instead we are for a European state that is based on the principles of peace, ecology, socialism and genuine internationalism. In this context, federalism does not mean the supremacy of Germany, France, or the UK, but instead represents the international unity of the working class and the creation of a democratic state that transcends national limitations. We believe that support for this vision is possible and that the ideological hegemony of nationalism is not eternal. The very ascent of nationalism is because it has been tolerated by the Marxist left and the labour movement. It has been considered to be a permanent situation. However we should utilise the opportunity of the EU referendum campaign to make the argument for internationalism and socialism. It is possible that our efforts may be unsuccessful, but this should not be an excuse to reject explaining the necessity of advancing the political struggle for internationalism. Primarily we should reject any temptation to adapt to the existing situation and so consider that the struggle against nationalism is too difficult. Instead we recognise that internationalism is a credible standpoint because it corresponds to the material interests of the working class. In contrast, bourgeois nationalism is an alienated political standpoint that can only promote the interests of capital and undermine the aspirations of labour.

However the apparent optimism of the above analysis has to be qualified by the view that the population of the UK has been based on an imperial rather than a European identity. (8) Since Victorian times the working class of the UK has been influenced by the ideology of Empire and monarchy. This standpoint is continued in terms of sympathy for Euro-scepticism and mistrust of the political connections between the UK and EU. Marxists would argue that it is possible to undermine this ideological approach. The First World War led to the October revolution, and the prospect of similar developments led to militancy and the development of proletarian internationalism. Then the general strike of 1926 raised the actual prospect of revolutionary change which was only undermined by the moderate actions of the TUC General Council. But it has to be admitted that the overall situation is characterised by many working class people voting Conservative, and there is presently a lack of real engagement between the LP and its traditional supporters. Hence this situation of low political involvement of most people means that the ideology of the UK is characterised by nationalism and support for the monarchy. The result is a high level of electoral success of the Tory party, and the aims of socialism have become ignored by the LP and trade unions. This political situation would seem favourable for the victory of the Euro-sceptics in the referendum on Europe. Such a possibility means that it is vital that the labour movement campaign actively in favour of the yes vote. We need to provide popular reasons for the yes campaign such as the aim of developing a democratic, progressive and socialist UK. Hence we have to make socialism relevant for working people, and undermine the hegemony of imperialist ideology in the process. Hence we have to provide strong arguments as to why nationalism only benefits the forces of capital and conservatism, and therefore outline why internationalism is in the interests of the working class. We will be attempting to break with many years of tradition, and this development will involve promoting an internationalist and European identity as the alternative to the anachronistic imperial identity.

It is possible to undermine the ideological coherence of the imperial identity because we can argue that it has become a myth which can never be resurrected. The world situation is no longer characterised by the actuality of Empires – apart from the US empire – and so the imperial identity represents nostalgia for something that is impossible to recreate. Furthermore, the British Empire was based on the oppression of colonial peoples, and so was not progressive, and could not be an expression of a noble ideal. The only possible result of Empire is the revolt of the people who are oppressed and subordinated by its dominating role. In the present period the myth of Empire means a yearning for national isolation and opposition to a relationship of the UK with Europe. But national isolation is also a myth in the contemporary world of globalisation and inter-dependent production and trade. The relationship of the UK with the EU would be replaced by the more uncertain connections with the rest of the world. This attempt at establishing a Fortress UK would also suggest the possibility of political authoritarianism and ideological conformity in order to withstand the pressures of isolation. However a No vote would be an attempt to perpetuate the importance of the imperial identity in terms of the ending of the political relations between the UK and the EU. It is necessary to recognise that the imperial identity has been one of the reactionary expressions of bourgeois ideology within the UK. A No vote would represent a grotesque attempt to perpetuate this ideology in the form of the nostalgic view that an independent UK can become great once again. We need to undermine this standpoint by developing a progressive form of the Yes vote in terms of the approach of internationalism and socialism. The rivalry between the European identity and the imperial Identity can be resolved in terms of connecting the European identity with socialism and the international solidarity of the working class. In contrast the imperial identity is a reactionary anachronism. We should not perpetuate it by voting No in the referendum. This is the objective result of voting no whatever our subjective intentions. A No vote will promote the nostalgia of the imperial identity. We can only oppose this reactionary standpoint by a progressive and socialist Yes vote. The point is that a European identity can be considered to be progressive when compared to the imperial identity because it can be expressed in terms of the international cooperation of various nationalities, the common development of the productive forces, and the objective potential for socialism. In contrast the imperial identity refers to a previous form of capitalist development, and this was regressive and based on the denial of national self-determination for colonial peoples. Hence in voting to uphold a form of European identity in opposition to the imperial identity we are not necessarily voting for one form of bourgeois ideological standpoint as against another. Instead we can connect the European ideal of co-operation between nations with its socialist potential. In contrast, the imperial identity is a reactionary anachronism.

DISCUSSING THE LEFT WING ARGUMENT FOR A No VOTE

Matt Widowson proposes that a left wing argument for the UK to leave the EU can be made that is differentiated from the reactionary and xenophobic views of organisations like UKIP. (9) He argues that the primary interests of the EU are those of capital, and to that end it is based on unaccountable institutions like the European Central Bank that imposed the reactionary settlement with the left wing government of Greece. Consequently he concludes: “As a regional free trade block the EU does not represent “internationalism” as some of the Left claim. At best the Union represents the internationalism of the pro-EU capitalist class – transnational movement of labour and capital and the harmonisation of regulation. It certainly does not represent internationalism for the European working class any more than NATO is a shining beacon of internationalism for the Western working class.”(10) Hence he defines the EU as an embryonic super-state that acts in the interests of European capital and so should be opposed. The political conclusions to be made from this situation is that the standpoint of socialism can be upheld in the most principled and effective manner by realising genuine national self-determination, and this aim can best be upheld by a No Vote in the referendum: “We recognise both the British state and the EU super state for what they are. We all want to ensure that a popular left-wing government has access to the levers of power – and this requires national sovereignty.”(11) He suggests that this viewpoint can be argued distinctly against the nationalist aspiration of the most reactionary section of the capitalist class to be protected from the rigours of competition inside the EU. Instead the argument for socialism can be connected to leaving the EU: “The anti-EU left are not petty nationalists. We too desire an end to the divisions of the world population based on arbitrary lines on maps. We too look forward to the end of borders, war and imperialism. However we recognise that in this era of nation states ordinary people will benefit from a return to national self-determination.”(12)

In reply it is necessary to be emphatic that the Marxists supporters of the yes vote are aware of the pro capitalist character of the economic and political institutions of the EU. This is precisely why we are for the transformation of the EU by the methods of international class struggle. However, the alternative is not to call for a No vote in accordance with the wishful view that this development would somehow advance the cause of socialism. In the present political conditions a successful No vote can only promote the interests of authoritarian populism and establish a type of society that is based on the most reactionary form of nationalism. This situation cannot encourage the development of socialism which requires a connection to internationalism. In order to advance this possibility we need to encourage the united struggle of the working class within the EU in favour of socialism. The working class of Greece was defeated because of the very imitations of a national struggle that was not connected to establishing solidarity with the working class of the rest of the EU. Hence the establishment of progressive national self-determination is an illusion if we wish to further the cause of socialism which requires its connection to the international activity of the working class. However, the most important illusion is that it is possible to develop a progressive campaign for the No vote that is somehow differentiated from the reactionary role of UKIP. The point is that UKIP are defining the No campaign and emphasising the issue of migration. They want a fortress UK, and so the aspiration of the left for national self-determination will become subsumed within this xenophobic campaign. In contrast, the cause of socialism requires internationalism and this is why the only principled tactic is a yes vote. The point is that we must also relate tactics to circumstances. At this present moment in time, which is likely to be unchanged in the near future, the character of the support for the No vote is defined by the reactionary role of UKIP and the Tory Euro-sceptics. In this situation the only possible and feasible tactic for Marxists and socialists is to call for a critical form of a yes vote. Only in this manner can we advance the common cause of internationalism and socialism.

It is also necessary to reject national self-determination as the strategy to realise socialism. In the very world defined by globalisation and large trading blocs, the possibilities to advance socialism in national terms are slim. Indeed it can be questioned whether national self-determination still has important meaning in this globalised world. Therefore the only principled basis to strive for socialism is to unite the working class across boundaries and develop international forms of mass action that can bring into being a large economic and political state. This is why nationalist ideology is the most important problem undermining the development of international class struggle. Hence nationalism should not be accommodated in the form of advocating that national self-determination will advance the struggle for socialism. Indeed in terms of comparisons, the capitalist based EU is still a more favourable terrain to begin the struggle for socialism when contrasted to a fortress UK which is politically independent. However the emphasis by the Morning Star on the role of national self-determination as the basis to establish socialism is an indication that they still have illusions in 'socialism in one country'.

Chris Bambery has also argued in favour of a No vote. (13) He also argues that the EU is reactionary and represents a neo-liberal project, and based on unaccountable institutions and the democratic wishes of member states are frequently ignored. The EU is dominated by powerful states like Germany and by the unaccountable European Commission, European Central Bank and the IMF. He concludes: “As someone who regards themselves as European, I want a Europe of the peoples, not the corporations, one based on solidarity, welfare and peace. The EU can never be that. There is no mechanism for internal reform.”(14) This is the most serious argument in favour of a No vote. It is based on the aim of establishing an alternative United Socialist States of Europe that is not undermined by the bureaucratic and capitalist limitations of the EU. But his approach is tactically inept because he does not recognise that the immediate political and ideological effect of a No vote in the UK will be to promote the cause of reactionary forces and to create the possibility of an isolated fortress state. Instead in complacent terms he suggests that the outcome of the referendum if a No vote occurs is the development of left-wing activism. But the opposite situation could occur. What will have been encouraged will be the forces of right-wing populism. In order to promote left-wing activity we need to vote yes in the referendum, and therefore in this manner promote a mass movement of opposition to capital. Crucially, Bambery cannot outline how a No vote can advance the struggle for a different type of Europe. How will an isolated UK advance the struggle for a Socialist Europe? Once again, he is basing his argument on dogma and refusing to recognise the importance of the current circumstances and the related trajectory of the campaigns concerning EU membership. In this sense he is indifferent to the fact that the LP and the trade unions are overwhelmingly supporters of the yes campaign, and the forces of the right-wing support the No vote. Hence his idea of a principled No campaign is a product of his imagination. His internationalist impulses remain unrealistic and illusory because they are not connected to the alternative possibility of generating a real principled form of the Yes vote.

The left wing version of the No vote is based on the denial of the consequences of actions. This is because the direct result of the victory of the No vote will be the strengthening of right wing forces. The trend of authoritarian populism becomes stronger and the consciousness of the working class is undermined by the success of anti-migrant xenophobia. This situation cannot promote the development of the connection between the left wing supporters of the No vote and the aim to promote the struggle for socialism. Instead the prospect of a descent into fascism is advanced. It is true that the likely outcome of a yes vote is to generate the stability of the Cameron government and to promote its austerity campaign. In this context the international struggle of the working class may seem to remain an ideal that is not yet realised. But this situation is not merely the expression of the lesser evil because circumstances become favourable to the promotion of the international struggle of the working class. The point is the regression to authoritarian populism has been defeated, and so this development is a victory for the working class and undermines the regression into an ideological condition of insular nationalism. In contrast, the situation may become conducive to begin the struggle for the revolutionary transformation of the character of the EU. This position is not an adaptation to empirical reality. We do not want a Cameron government to remain in office, but nor do we the advance of authoritarian populism. The success of the No vote would mean the progress of the influence of national chauvinism within the working class. The struggle to develop the cause of internationalism and socialism would become more difficult.

The left wing supporters of the No vote ignore the reactionary circumstances of the victory of their tactic. Instead they present an imaginary scenario of either the generation of a national struggle for socialism, or the advance of the European opposition to capitalism. But none of these aims will be realised by the effective advance of the forces of reaction. The victory of the No vote will mean the working class becomes more confused and alienated, and the ideological situation will become more authoritarian. The possibility of advancing the cause of socialism will have suffered a setback in these retrogressive circumstances. Only the success of a yes vote can provide hope that the cause of socialism can make progress. In contrast the left wing supporters of the No vote dismiss the significance of the reactionary character of the leadership of the No campaign. The generation of illusions means that they can gloss over the significance of the xenophobic character of the No campaign. The alternative is not to capitulate to Cameron. We can establish principled reasons why the Yes vote can advance the cause of international socialism. In this manner we will be trying to undermine the influence of nationalism within the working class and opposing hatred of migrants. In reply, the left wing supporters of the No vote may contend that the EU is a bourgeois institution. We do not dispute this point. But the struggle for socialism is not advanced by unilateral withdrawal from the EU. Instead the aim should be to transform the character of the EU by means of international mass action. This is not a reformist illusion, but is instead based on a revolutionary perspective of the necessity of the struggle for socialism. It is also necessary to understand that there is something more reactionary than the EU, which is the regression into national isolation and the establishment of a Fortress UK. We have to recognise what is reactionary and progressive in any situation. The EU can become a transitional form to the realisation of internationalism and socialism. In contrast an isolationist UK is the possible prelude to a carnival of reaction. It would be a mistake for socialists to argue in favour of this latter option because of an illusory conception of the realisation of socialism via the role of national self-determination. The EU exists, and it is an imperfect institution. It is bourgeois and represents the neo-liberal project. But it has also brought about a potential unity of the international working class. We can utilise this potential in order to advocate the formation of a United Socialist States of Europe, via the revolutionary act of the transformation of the EU. This perspective cannot be realised by the retrogressive act of withdrawal from the EU.

The Socialist Party are also opposed to the EU. They also maintain that the EU is based on the single market and the promotion of neo-liberal policies. They suggest that the attempt to realise European union can only intensify contradictions between capitalist states. Hence it is not possible to resolve the contradiction between the international development of the productive forces, as expressed by the role of the large European companies, and the political importance of the nation state. This tension means that European unity on a capitalist basis cannot be realised: “It is necessary to warn of the consequences of the attempt to unite Europe 'from above', in the interests of capitalism and instead say 'No to the EU constitution and the euro', while arguing the case for the real collaboration of peoples that can only be achieved on the basis of a socialist Europe.”(15). This approach represents a dogmatic claim that European unity cannot be realised on the basis of capitalism. It has been possible to promote the advance of European unification in terms of the creation of the single market, open trade and the development of the Euro. This means it is possible to develop the productive forces in international terms on the basis of capitalism and the role of the nation state. But, primarily the argument is not convincingly made that the alternative is to leave the EU. The only view that is outlined is that the development of the EU in capitalist terms implies the suggestion of the necessity of the working class to support withdrawal. Hence the alternative of the international working class supporting the transformation of the EU by their militant action is not discussed. The choice is not between critical support for the bourgeois EU or withdrawal, but instead the necessity to transform the EU by international working class action. Nor does the article elaborate the conception of how a socialist Europe outside of the EU could be realised. Instead it is assumed that a socialist Europe is the only alternative to the bourgeois EU. But it is entirely possible that the disintegration of the EU could result in the formation of many reactionary national and isolated capitalist states. This would be a retrogressive backwards development that would end the economic progress represented by the international economic and political character of the EU. Instead of this possibility of the regression represented by the disintegration of the EU we should call for its progressive transformation by the advance of the role of international solidarity of the working class.

A recent editorial of the Socialist argues in the most dogmatic and opportunist manner that: “An out vote would strike a mortal blow at the government. It could lead to the calling of a general election and the downfall of the detested Tories from power. So voting out is particularly important.”(16) This standpoint ignores the fact that a No vote would only enhance the influence and power of the Tory Euro-sceptics and UKIP. The editorial tries to dismiss this prospect with the following comment: “Working class people have no shared interests with pro-big business, cuts inflicting right wing politicians, whether they are for or against EU membership. Whilst strongly distancing itself from the nationalist pro-capitalist politicians of anti-EU Tories and UKIP, the workers movement needs its own voice against the EU in this referendum, to oppose the bosses club that the EU is, and to fight for the interests of ordinary people in Britain and across Europe.”(17) This perspective is an illusion. The character of the anti-EU campaign can only be defined by the role of Euro-scepticism. Hence the advocacy of a distinct working class alternative is an expression of wishful thinking. The dominant ideology of the anti campaign is defined by vicious nationalism and populism and anti-migrant sentiment. Nor will the victory of the No camp lead to the demise of the Tory government. Cameron has pledged to continue in office, and so he will negotiate the exit of the UK from the EU. The forces of right-wing populism will have been strengthened in relation to the continuation of a discredited Tory government. The prospect for the victory of the Labour Party in the next general election will not have been advanced. In contrast, if Cameron wins the referendum with the support of Labour voters this will raise the morale of the LP to strive to win the next general election.

The editorial tries to uphold its argument by contending that the EU is an organisation to promote capitalism, and to this end has imposed austerity on many member countries. This is true, but the alternative is not the effective realisation of independent nation states within Europe and the disintegration of the EU. The aim of a united socialist Europe is not advanced by the process of the disintegration of the EU, but instead the character of the EU should be transformed by the united international action of the working class. What does not seem to be recognised by the 'Socialist' is that the immediate result of the victory of the No campaign is the advance of the forces of reactionary national chauvinism and the regression of the cause of international socialism. It is also argued that the attitude of Corbyn has enhanced the aims of Cameron: “Jeremy Corbyn and others on the left were wrong to succumb under pressure from Labour's right wing to the argument that the EU is advantageous for workers and so advocated a vote to stay in it. One of the consequences of that mistake is that his referendum campaigning will be improving the chances of a victory for Cameron and the continuation of Tory austerity.”(18) This viewpoint represents formal logic. It is perfectly possible to campaign for a yes vote in different terms to those of the Tories. Indeed the only principled course of action is to strive for the realisation of the social Europe or the socialist EU. In this manner our demands and programme has nothing that is similar to the approach of Cameron. The editorial argues that a Corbyn government would be undermined by the restrictions of the EU. This is true. But the answer is not to advocate a policy of withdrawal. Instead we should struggle within the EU in order to create a mass movement in favour of opposing austerity and so aim to realise socialism.

The Socialist argues that the EU is a undemocratic institution that is able to undermine the possibility of progressive change: “Rather than entering into struggle to attempt a futile task of 'democratising' the EU, the attitude of working class people across the EU lies increasingly in the direction of rejecting and escaping from that distant, bureaucratic and unaccountable institution.”(19) This is a pessimistic standpoint that denies the possibility of struggling to introduce democracy and end the domination of the EU by a few bureaucrats. Instead we think that it is perfectly possible to begin the process of introducing democracy within the EU institutions by the development of a mass movement that aims to generate the advance of this perspective. The Socialist party argues that its aim is not the creation of an independent capitalist Britain and instead it is striving to create a democratic socialist confederation of Europe. The problem with this standpoint is that the political logic of their approach is to further the cause of the creation of an independent capitalist UK. This will be the result of a No vote, and the cause of international socialism will have suffered a setback. To support a No vote means that the generation of a distinctive working class campaign is an illusion. Instead the combined forces of the No vote can only uphold the interests of the most reactionary and insular forms of capital. In contrast, the cause of international socialism is advanced by a Yes vote.

Judith Orr of the SWP in an editorial contends that the EU is a fortress territory that is opposing the efforts to allow migrants in from outside its borders.(20) This a caricature of the truth when the EU is trying to both assist and oppose the process of migration from outside the EU. However, she admits that the most dominant party in any anti-EU campaign will be UKIP and that few Labour MP's will support a no vote. It is also admitted that the big unions will vote yes. Despite this reactionary situation it is argued that it is possible to develop a principled and progressive campaign in favour of a No vote that is based on the principles of internationalism and socialism. In this context it is possible to argue in favour of the movement of migrants to the UK: “Part of the reason why we oppose the EU is because we believe that all migrants are welcome here. It doesn't matter whether they are from within the EU or from anywhere else in the world.”(21) This standpoint is a complete illusion that ignores the fact that the anti-EU campaign is based upon effective opposition to all migration, whether from inside or outside the EU. The effective beginning of support for migrants requires the reform and transformation of the EU and not xenophobic withdrawal. Also solidarity with the workers of Greece does not mean withdrawal from the EU.

In other words the effective basis of the reason for the No vote is reduced to supporting a defeat for Cameron: “The EU serves the interests of bankers, bosses and big business. That's why Cameron and his rich friends are desperate to stay a part of it. We want to see them beaten and a No vote would rock them.”(22) But the point is that this standpoint represents dogmatic logic. Cameron is not ousted by a No vote. Instead he becomes the unprincipled leader of a UK that has recently left the EU. The most effective manner in which to undermine Cameron is to develop support for a progressive, anti-capitalist Yes vote. The SWP also consider that they can reconcile support for a No vote with adherence to the principles of internationalism and solidarity. This is an illusion because the only gainers of a victory for the No vote will be the Tory Euro-sceptics and UKIP.

ANY PRINCIPLED ALTERNATIVES?

The other policy advocated by the Marxist left is that of boycott. This tactic is advocated as being more principled than adopting a position that could be said to represent an adaption to the bourgeois interests represented by either a Yes, or No vote. Formally, this view is correct, but the problem is that the boycott standpoint does not alter the outcome of the referendum. It means that you are a spectator to a political process that is occurring without your effective intervention. Hence what this means is that you can uphold your principles without having any direct practical involvement in what is happening. In other words nobody will know that you are involved in carrying out a boycott. You will be able to satisfy your principles without being able to influence the outcome of the referendum. The CPGB (as already mentioned) are among the advocates of a boycott. This is because they already assume that the character of the referendum campaign will be defined by the role of the factional in-fighting of the establishment. Hence in a pessimistic manner they have decided in advance that the Marxists will not be able to influence the development of the referendum campaign. However it is also necessary to mention that the CPGB seem to adopt the standpoint of boycott in relation to any referendum. This was their position in relation to the Scottish referendum campaign despite supporting the principle of a federal republic and therefore effectively supporting self-determination. In other words the boycott standpoint enables the posture of being revolutionary to be upheld without having any definite political commitments. It is the politics of evasion and indecision.

In contrast to this vacillating standpoint we would argue that the forthcoming EU referendum does pose a definite choice between authoritarian populism and international socialism. The forces of the most vicious reaction support a No vote, and the principled alternative is not represented by Cameron and the establishment. Instead the genuine opposition is represented by the connection of the yes vote to the struggle for international socialism within the EU. But the advocates of the boycott cannot envisage this possibility, and instead they admit in advance of the actual referendum campaign that they will have little influence on its outcome. Thus they defend their socialist principles in the most impotent and ineffective manner. Nobody will take any notice of their standpoint, and it is being advocated in the most resigned and defeatist manner. But instead of this justification of indifference we should be concerned about the outcome of the referendum. We should encourage the labour movement to intervene actively in order to influence the result in the direction of the aims of socialism and internationalism. We should not let Cameron take the initiative in the yes campaign and instead undermine his activity by opposing the view that what is primary is the interests of British capitalism. In this manner the yes vote becomes transformed into being an instrument for the advance of socialism. The boycotters will have refused to get their hands dirty and so as a result, been completely ineffective. This is not the basis to promote the politics of socialism. Instead on most occasions we have to make definite choices, even in the form of adopting policies that may involve compromise and even a sense of retreat. The compromise we make on this occasion is to be in the ballot box making the same choice as David Cameron, but we do so on the basis of completely different politics and inspired by different motives. His aim is to defend British capitalism; we have the alternative standpoint of upholding the aspiration of internationalism and socialism. But the boycott campaign has already left the field of battle, and in these futile terms they announce the realisation of victory! We have no such illusions. Only if the labour movement presents principled reasons for the Yes vote – which do not echo those of Cameron – can we derive some sense of satisfaction from the EU referendum campaign. But the boycott campaign will have missed an opportunity to present socialist politics in a relevant manner. They will have upheld their principles but at the cost of being totally inept, dogmatic, and accepting the role of passive bystanders.

An article by Paul Demarty in Weekly Worker seems to outline some sort of critical support for a yes vote when he outlines the reactionary character of the left wing support for the No vote in the following terms: “Fighting for genuine internationalism by surfing a tidal wave of reactionary chauvinism – this is alchemy, not politics, comrades. We sometimes get the feeling that the left thinks it can put a 'progressive' spin on something by saying that we ourselves aren't racist, or nationalist, or whatever, and this is certainly the case here. Socialist Worker, a paper with 0.1% of the influence of Nigel Farage, thinks it can make an 'out' voice into an expression of internationalist anti-racism. Good luck with that.”(23) But instead of making the conclusion that the alternative is a left-wing campaign in favour of the yes vote, it is argued that the only expression of this standpoint is support for Cameron: “Either we vote for 'Fortress Europe' plus a few reactionary concessions to Cameron's dignity, or we vote for Farage, for a miserable small minded Albion, criss-crossed with privet hedges and ringed with barbed wire.”(24) Hence it is admitted that the revolutionary standpoint cannot intervene and provide a principled standpoint in relation to the EU referendum. The only approach is passivity that is obscured as abstentionism. Corbyn has a more principled position because at least he is committed to advocating the struggle to promote a progressive and democratic EU. In contrast the CPGB has accommodated to the No vote because they accept that there are no principled reasons for supporting membership of the EU. This capitulation is disguised as not providing justification for Cameron's proposals to reform the EU. But this is not the choice. It is perfectly possible to support the development of an alternative type of Yes campaign that is based on the advocacy of internationalism and socialism.

Instead of recognising this progressive alternative to the No campaign, the CPGB statement relies on the arguments of the left-wing supporters of the No vote in order to justify its boycott stance. It argues : ”The European Union as it exists is a mechanism for capitalist exploitation. Its institutions are overwhelmingly unelected and uniformly pro-capitalist.”(25) But the answer is not to equate the character of a yes vote concerning UK membership of the EU with support for the class content of Cameron's proposals: “His arguments, when they are not wholly specious, are focused solely on the health of British finance capital, and the peace of mind of petty-bourgeois reactionaries.”(26) Hence the CPGB rejects making a choice between one or the other of the following forces: “Cameron's referendum is thus a cynical manoeuvre that pits reactionaries against more reactionaries.”(27) Instead of these dismal options and choices we can develop with determination and confidence an alternative that campaigns in favour of the yes vote based on the principles of socialism and internationalism. We can make Cameron wish he had never called his referendum by undermining the present emphasis on the views of the pro-bourgeois forces and instead promoting the popular development of socialist reasons for a Yes vote. In contrast, a boycott will have no influence, and at worst can only provide indirect encouragement for the No campaign.

CONCLUSIONS

The options are not between upholding Cameron's proposals to 'reform' the EU, or accommodation to the populist and xenophobic No vote. There is an alternative. We can build upon the support of the labour movement in favour of a Yes vote in order to challenge the domination of this presently constituted bourgeois standpoint, and instead connect the Yes campaign with the aim of promoting democracy and socialism within the EU. Ultimately we need to develop an international mass movement to transform the EU. In contrast the left wing supporters of the No vote are living in a world of fantasy. The aim of international socialism cannot be promoted by the UK leaving the EU, whilst the boycott campaign is a nonsense and accepts its own irrelevancy. In effect, the boycotter's leave the initiative with Cameron and his cronies. However, we can only undermine the campaign of Cameron if we enthusiastically campaign for a socialist interpretation of the Yes vote. Passivity will mean the domination of the political process still remains with Cameron.

APPENDIX

The 'Labour Leave' campaign blames the EU for policies of privatisation, austerity, de-regulation, and various other anti-working class measures. Its statement suggests that leaving the EU is compatible with internationalism, and therefore glosses over the significance of the reactionary and nationalist campaign to leave the EU. It concludes that: “Voting to leave the EU will not only contribute to winning back everything that has been stolen from us by means of that tool in the hands of the banks and speculators. It will also deliver a fatal blow to it, and so help each of the peoples of Europe win back the powers and sovereignty that has been confiscated from them.”(28) You would be forgiven for thinking that the reactionary role of past Tory and Labour governments has not been of significance because of the apparent omnipotent powers of the EU. This nationalist nonsense has to be rejected. The policies of the EU are based on the relationship of its transnational institutions like the Council of Ministers with the various national governments. (29) Indeed because the various organisations of the EU have a close involvement with national politicians it is inconceivable that the EU could have acted without the consent of the various UK governments. Hence it is not the EU that is the major problem but instead the domination of the standpoint of capitalism within the various national governments of the EU. Consequently the aim of the working class should not be to support what can only be a course of national isolationism by supporting the withdrawal of the UK from the EU. Instead we should promote the international action of the working class to transform the character of the EU by the action of the overthrow of capitalism. The point is that the antagonist of the interests of the working class is capital and not the EU. Thus by opposing the forces of international capital we can bring about the transformation of the EU into an institution that can act in the interests of the working class. The alternative of national isolationism is not a principled and credible strategy to advance the international interests of the people of the EU. Hence the case of socialism will not be served by the effective formation of a fortress UK.

Left Unity has issued is statement: 'Another Europe is Possible'.(30) Unfortunately in the most negative manner possible it outlines all of the various limitations of the EU and does not outline a strategy to unite the working class within the EU in favour of the transformation of this organisation. Instead in negative terms it provides a reluctant justification for voting in favour of being in the EU: “A vote to leave will not create the political space for a socialist Europe. The fragmentation of the EU would be on a right-wing, intolerant and nationalist basis. It would be a Europe of Le Pen, Farage, Orban and others on the right. This is why we say that another Europe is possible, why we work in solidarity across Europe for a social Europe – extending people's rights and improving living standards, and why we say there are no national solutions to Europe's crisis.”(31) This comment is inadequate. We are not for a social Europe primarily because of the reactionary problem of the right-wing populist forces. Instead we are for the revolutionary transformation of the EU because this process can generate the completion of the process of the international development of the productive forces by the methods of economic co-operation and bring about the creation of political institutions that can promote harmony and the advance of a classless society. Thus we are for the Social Europe not merely because it unites activists around good causes but because this expression of internationalism generates the prospect of progress towards the formation of the communist society. The EU can become a transitional form towards the realisation of communism if the international working class unites in order to bring about this development.

FOOTNOTES:

(1)Eddie Ford: Selling a Pig in a Poke, Weekly Worker, 1093 February 11th 2016, p5

(2) ibid p5

(3)Steve Freeman: Euro-democracy, Weekly Worker 1094 February 18th 2016, p2

(4) ibid: Lana Zhet: Garbled guff, p 2

(5)Times Editorial, February 20th 2016 p27

(6)Independent on Sunday, February 21st 2016 p4-5

(7)Guardian Editorial February 20th 2016 p28

(8)Andrew Gamble: Between Europe and America, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2003

(9)Matt Widowson: But the Anti-EU Left is Nothing like UKIP, Morning Star February 16th 2016

(10) ibid

(11) ibid

(12) ibid

(13) Chris Bambery: For a Europe of Peoples, Counter-fire, February 15th 2016 p1-5

(14) ibid p4

(15)The Socialist 'Why Socialists Oppose the EU', 20th May 2009 p3

(16)The Socialist: 'EU Referendum: Vote OUT the Tories', issue 890 February 23rd 2016, p1

(17) ibid p1

(18) ibid p2

(19) ibid p2

(20)Judith Orr: No To a Bosses Europe, Socialist Worker, 16th July 2015, number 2458 p2

(21ibid p2

(22) ibid p3

(23)Paul Demarty: A Carnival of Reaction, Weekly Worker February 25 2016, Number 1095 p6

(24) ibid p6

(25)CPGB statement, ibid p6

(26) ibid p6

(27) ibid p6

(28) Labour Leave Campaign: Vote to Leave, p2

(29) John McCormick: Understanding the European Union, (sixth edition) Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2014

(30) Left Unity: 'Another World is Possible'

(31) ibid p2