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Britain

Against austerity, Brexit and Fortress Europe

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Description:

Britain is in the midst of a profound political crisis around the question of how to navigate "Brexit". The outcome of the EU referendum in 2016 now sets the coordinates for the main political parties, none of which wanted the result, "leave". The Liberal Democrats pushed for a referendum that they were sure would endorse "remain" as a tactical manoeuvre within their coalition with the Conservative Party, and the Conservative Party split over the issue, a split that has led to recent ministerial resignations at the rate of more than one every six weeks. The Labour Party campaigned for "remain", but cautiously so, with Jeremy Corbyn, the Party's new radical leader, elected the year before, quite rightly responding to a journalist question about his enthusiasm for the EU that he was about "7 out of 10" in favour of it.

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Corbyn recognises well that the EU is a neoliberal power-bloc intent on privatisation, and very willing to collude with the US over trade deals like the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership which would have put the National Health Service and other welfare bodies in jeopardy. Socialist Resistance, the Fourth International in Britain, called for a "remain" vote because the polarised debate was characterised by an intensification of xenophobia, an analysis that was confirmed by an increase in racist attacks immediately after the result was announced.

The election of Corbyn as Labour Party leader opened up new possibilities for resistance to austerity, with the Party increasing its membership, mainly among young newly-politicised activists, to over half a million; it is now the largest mass-membership social democratic party in Europe. This has had consequences for activists, including those from Socialist Resistance, who were active in the small "left of Labour" party Left Unity (which was formed after a call by Ken Loach to defend the National Health Service as one of the historic gains of the working class). There are some marginal groups of revolutionaries who still stand outside Labour giving advice to Corbyn, but the main struggle now is inside the Party.

Members of Socialist Resistance are active in a new formation inside the party "Red Green Labour" which takes forward ecosocialist politics that characterise the Fourth International in Britain. This was a distinctive political position that enables us to connect with anti-fracking movements and a range of other pan-European and international projects building the basis for a sustainable socialist future.

Corbyn is pitted against a right-wing Party apparatus that is intent on sabotaging his leadership. In the most recent Conservative ministerial crisis over the negotiations with the EU (in which Minister for Brexit David Davis and Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson both resigned), leading anti-Corbyn MPs spoke against a General Election, calling for support for Prime Minister Theresa May. There are calls for a second referendum and, on the left, for a "People's Vote". The priority now is to transform this call into a General Election and a vote for Corbyn. This is what Socialist Resistance is mobilising for as part of the Labour Party in England, while operating independently in Scotland (where our comrades have consistently called for independence and the weakening of the British State).

Corbyn spoke at the demonstration in London on 13 July protesting against the visit of Donald Trump, and in this mass mobilisation which brought together 250,000 people in London and many thousands more around the country, it was clear that many participants made a direct connection between Brexit and Trump. This was a demonstration against xenophobia and for free movement of peoples. Our struggle against austerity and for democratic rights for workers to organise takes place in sectors of industry; in catering and cleaning, for example, where migrant workers from Europe and beyond its borders are a significant part of the workforce.

The fight against Trump, and for a left-Labour government under Corbyn, is inextricably bound up with the defence of workers' rights, and for links across Europe, and beyond Europe. Most of those who voted "remain" in the EU referendum voted for this spirit of international solidarity that also breaks beyond the limits placed by "Fortress Europe". It is only on that basis that the left can change the political coordinates, from xenophobia to a united struggle against austerity.

PS:

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