

Labour Internationalist

Monthly publication of the British supporters of the Organising Committee
for the Reconstitution of the Fourth International (OCRFI)

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Who we are, What we stand for

We believe that the working class needs to rely on its own efforts, both at home and around the world, to defend its interests against a capitalist system that is determined to extract maximum profit regardless of the human and environmental cost.

We believe that the capitalist system, based on private ownership of the means of production, cannot be reformed and has to be abolished by means of a proletarian revolution that will introduce socialism.

We stand on the founding programme of the Fourth International, the *Transitional Programme*, which says in particular: "It is necessary to help the masses, in the process of their daily struggles, to find the bridge between their current demands and the programme of the socialist revolution. This bridge should include a system of transitional demands which stem from today's conditions and from today's consciousness of wide layers of the working class, and invariably lead to the same conclusion: the conquest of power by the proletariat."

The working class's struggle against the capitalist system – on its own account as well as on behalf of all of the oppressed – needs to be united and based on class independence from capital and its national and international institutions.

This means defending the organisations which the workers have built, and helping the workers themselves to build new forms of organisation to carry out their struggle in ways which they decide on freely and which they control.

Often, this also means opposing those in the labour movement who ignore the mandate of their membership and co-operate with capitalism's plans, at the workplace, institutional or State level.

Labour Internationalist aims to be part of the fight against that process of integrating the working-class organisations into capitalism's plans.

Labour Internationalist therefore focuses on helping to advance the struggle by the working class in its own interests – locally, nationally and internationally.

Consistent with this view, *Labour Internationalist* defines itself as a forum of class struggle that is open to all individuals, groups and currents in the labour movement that are committed to political independence of the working class and to internationalism.

**For class
independence
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Editorial Statement

The comrades in Britain associated with the Organising Committee for the Reconstitution of the Fourth International (OCRFI) have decided to publish a monthly bulletin under the title *Labour Internationalist*.

The OCRFI represents the continuity between today's struggles against capitalist exploitation and the fight begun almost a century ago by Leon Trotsky to defend Marxism against the destructive politics of Stalinism as well as against all forms of class collaboration promoted by the reformist leaders of social democracy.

The perspective that determines the orientation and the positions taken by both the OCRFI and its British group is that the capitalist system of exploitation can only lead humankind to the worst of disasters, and so destroying that system is necessary for a progressive future. Only the working class can lead this fight. Therefore, on all questions, the OCRFI takes a stand that is determined by the class interests of the exploited.

We have taken the decision to publish a monthly bulletin in a period when the working class of Britain and the whole labour movement face serious challenges and are in a difficult situation.

Why?

The ruling class in Britain and its various political expressions are in total disarray. The confusion that exists at the top of the political representation of the British imperialist ruling class is of course linked to the general and deepening crisis of the world capitalist system. But in the case of Britain, it is also linked specifically to the continuous crisis created by the result of the 2016 referendum: the decision taken by the majority of the electorate, including a majority of the working class, to leave the European Union. That result was brought about by the British working class mobilising in its own interests through demonstrations and strikes against the ruling class and its destructive policy of austerity, which led to a clear Leave majority. It was as a political result of that class movement that the Corbyn leadership gained a majority within the Labour Party.

So, the fact that the situation today, more than three years later, seems to be stuck in deadlock is not because of any inability by the working class to fight back.

The main factor which explains the present situation is that the Labour Party leadership and the top leadership of the TUC have refused to act in line with the mandate which had been given to them. As we all know, because of the policy of its leadership, today the Labour Party is regarded as the Remain party.

These days, we often hear about "fake news". It can be said that the whole debate on Brexit has taken place in a deep fog of fake propaganda. But the basic reason for the uncertainty and confusion among the working class's ranks is the fact that the main vehicle for that fake propaganda has been the leaderships of the Labour Party and the TUC.

For instance, a hoax was built up around the notion of "No deal". It was repeated again and again that to leave the EU without a deal would bring about apocalyptic disaster, as if the British economy would suddenly lose its world position, and as if no trade deal with any country would be possible without the approval of the EU authorities. The British people decided to leave; any agreement with the EU and any of its components should have proceeded from that fact. Any other way of raising the question left it up to the

European Union to decide what was meant and not meant by Leave.

Another theme of the fake propaganda was to present the Leave vote as an expression of petty British nationalism opposed to internationalism, with the European Union being labelled as an expression of co-operation between different nations, and even as a defender of workers' rights.

Let's not forget that from the very beginning, the left-wing forces within the labour movement were opposed to the "European project" because they rightly saw it as a weapon to be used by capitalist forces, both internationally and in every European country.



For example, in the 1975 referendum on UK membership of the European Communities, Jeremy Corbyn opposed Britain's membership of the EEC. He also opposed ratification of the Maastricht Treaty in 1993, saying: *"The whole basis of the Maastricht Treaty is the establishment of a European Central Bank which is staffed by bankers, independent of national governments and national economic policies, and whose sole policy is the maintenance of price stability. (...) That will undermine any social objective that any Labour Government in the United Kingdom – or any other Government – would wish to carry out. (...)"*

The Maastricht treaty does not take us in the direction of the checks and balances contained in the American federal constitution. It takes us in the opposite direction of an unelected legislative body – the [European] Commission – and, in the case of foreign policy, a policy Commission that will be, in effect, imposing foreign policy on nation states that have fought for their own democratic accountability."

In 2008, Jeremy Corbyn opposed the Lisbon Treaty, in 2011 he backed a proposed referendum on British withdrawal from the EU, and he rightly explained that in the 2015 crisis in Greece the EU allowed financiers to destroy the Greek economy.

We are now hearing talk of "remain and reform", based on the spurious logic that if, for example, we want to improve a situation where the EU's framework and directives allows employers to hire workers on zero-hour, fixed-term and temporary contracts instead of permanent contracts, before we do anything in the UK, we have to convince 27 other EU member states to repeal the directives which make insecure work easier to impose. How likely is that to happen? When did the EU ever volunteer to grant genuine labour rights, rather than making exploitation easier? The fact is that every one of the working class's gains has been the result of class struggle – in the UK, the rest of Europe and around the world.

Internationalism lies in the struggle against the European Union by the workers of all the countries of Europe, opening the way through that struggle to a United Socialist States of Europe.

Experience has vindicated this stand. The EU has permanently acted against the gains and rights of the labour movement and has been the framework for devastating austerity plans.

Internationalism does not lie in the EU but in the struggle against it.

It has been stated repeatedly that the main division is not between those who voted Leave and those who voted Remain, but between “the few” and “the many”, between the exploiters and the exploited. This is indeed a fact. But does this change anything regarding the question: is it in the interest of “the few” or “the many” to support the European Union?

Finally, another argument as part of the fake propaganda was that the question of Brexit was divisive, and that therefore it should be put aside until a Labour Party government comes to power.

Facts have answered that argument. By trampling on the democratic decision taken in 2016, the Labour Party has largely ruined its chances of winning a majority today.

The coming elections

The Labour Party leadership has finally agreed to support the decision to hold a general election on 12 December. Whilst claiming that the Johnson government had no legitimacy, the Labour Party leadership stubbornly opposed holding a general election until the EU gave it the green light.

What is our position on the election?

In no case should anyone vote for the parties of the ruling class: the Conservatives, the Liberal Democrats or the far-right candidates who are pretending to be the genuine defenders of Brexit.

We understand and support those in the labour movement who will vote and call for a vote in favour of the Labour Party. They will give a class content to that vote, in contradiction with the wishes of the Labour Party leadership: it will be a vote against the rule of the capitalist class and all its representatives, it will be a vote against the European Union.

If the Labour Party wins the election despite the policy of its leadership, not only would that increase the disarray in the ruling class, it would also strengthen the struggle for a Labour government implementing Brexit in the interests of the working class.

We will not condemn those who will abstain. It is the leaders of the Labour Party and the trade unions who bear responsibility for this, because of their commitment to the EU and therefore to the stabilisation of capitalist rule.

What are the immediate aims of the struggle of the British working class?

After the 2016 referendum, the activists who had fought within the Labour Party and the trade unions to vote Leave stated: “The democratic decision taken by the people of this country on 23 June to leave the EU was a victory for the nurses, for manual workers, for railworkers, for the millions of low-paid workers, for the two million workers and youth on zero-hour contracts and all those who wanted to protect their rights.”

These words remain true.

The workers voted in favour of Brexit because they were demanding:

➤ Renationalisation of the railways and of privatised public utilities

➤ **Stop all privatisations**

➤ **Scrap zero-hour contracts**

➤ **Repeal all the anti-trade union laws**

➤ **Defend and save the NHS from creeping privatisation**

➤ **Massive public investment in the education sector**

➤ **Free movement of labour to suit the workers, not the bosses**

➤ **Stop military interventions! Britain out of NATO.**

Elections are important, they are one of the battlefields of the class struggle. But by themselves they are not decisive. For genuine measures in favour of the working class to be implemented, the independent and organised force of the working class must come into play at all levels.

The latest experiences and the Brexit crisis have proved once again that no solution can be found within the present structure of the leadership of the labour movement.

As was stated in the founding programme of the Fourth International, the working class takes the road towards revolution again and again, “but each time, they are blocked by their own conservative bureaucratic apparatuses”. That is why “of all the parties and organisations which base themselves on the workers and peasants and speak in their name, we demand that they break politically with the bourgeoisie and enter the path of struggle for the workers’ and peasants’ government.” The first step on that road today is a clear break with the EU and all its reactionary institutions.

It is up to the working class, starting at the grassroots – at the level of the workplace, the trade union branch and the CLP – that the fight must be organised to reclaim our organisations.

This bulletin will of course present the views of the OCRFI and its British supporters. But the part it wishes to play is not limited to this.

This bulletin intends to help in co-ordinating all the forces that share the goal of reclaiming our organisations and want to express it in the forthcoming struggles. It will act as a forum for all those who are committed to working-class political independence and to internationalism.

Subscription (1 year, 12 issues): £10

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International European Committee

We support the ELC

The European Liaison Committee Against Privatisation, Deregulation and Insecure Work was set up on 11 May 2019 in Strasbourg (France), the seat of the European “Parliament”, during an international rally in which labour activists from Belgium, Britain, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Portugal, Romania, Switzerland and Turkey came together to declare: *“This Europe is not our Europe! This Europe is the Europe of big capital and war. It is the Europe of privatisation, of insecure work, of the witch-hunting of immigrants and of repression! It is a tool for serving the interests of the powerful, of the big multinationals, of the US administration and its military arm, NATO!”* The Committee, which we invite you to join, has the ambition to prepare in each country the indictment of the policy of privatisation, and to circulate in a newsletter – under the responsibility of the comrades from Germany – information and news on the resistance by the workers and youth in each country.

The statement reproduced below was approved by the European Liaison Committee, including: Doreen MacNally, Unite Community Branch, Liverpool; Tony Rimmer, Merseyside Pensioners Association, Unite Branch 567, Liverpool; Sheila Coleman, Liverpool, Unite Regional Community Coordinator; and Stefan Cholewka, Secretary, Greater Manchester Association of Trades Union Councils (GMATUC) – all four in a personal capacity.

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European Liaison Committee Against Privatisation, Deregulation and Insecure Work STATEMENT

The 23 June 2016 mandate to leave the EU must be respected

When a referendum takes place in a country, and the overwhelming majority of the people and the working class vote in favour of this or that position, the workers have a right to expect the organisations that speak in their name to defend the mandate which they overwhelmingly voted for.

So, the workers of Europe were astonished to hear the leaders of the Labour Party in Britain (beginning with Jeremy Corbyn) and the TUC resolutely declare themselves against any implementation of what the workers and people of the United Kingdom voted for on 23 June 2016: leaving the European Union.

We even heard the main leader of the Labour Party speak in favour of an alliance government between the Labour Party and the traditional parties of the bourgeoisie, based solely on agreeing to keep the UK in the European Union!

They are being supported in calling the vote of 23 June 2016 into question by all the advocates of reaction in Europe, the European Commissioners, governments and others, all of them daring to shout about a “denial of democracy” when the British Parliament is suspended...but who have had nothing to say when the supposedly sovereign vote by a people was called into question over the course of three years, just like the vote by the people of Greece in July 2015, the vote by the peoples of France and The Netherlands in 2005, the vote by the people of Denmark in 1992, etc.

It is an absolutely indisputable fact that Boris Johnson and his many and varied “sovereignist” acolytes are implacable enemies of the working class, and the fact that they called for a “Leave” vote for their own reasons in June 2016 does not change their nature.

But it is just as indisputable that by refusing to defend the most elementary principle of democracy, namely that the will of the people must be respected, and by working furiously to chain the British workers to the chariot of the European Union when they want to break with it, the leaders of the Labour Party and the TUC are violating the mandate that was given to them.

On 23 June 2016, millions of workers, unemployed people, pensioners and trade unionists in the United Kingdom, who had been hit hard by the privatisations, deregulation and job insecurity imposed in their country – like the whole of Europe – by the European Commission, voted “Leave” in order to put an end to that capitalist policy.

We, labour activists of all political tendencies, having formed the European Liaison Committee Against Privatisation, Deregulation and Insecure Work in Strasbourg on 11 May 2019,

- once again express our solidarity with the British workers;
- declare that the mandate of 23 June 2016 must be respected; and
- reaffirm our commitment to fighting back together throughout Europe, in order to put an end to the European Union of privatisation, deregulation and insecure work, and for a Europe of the workers and democracy.