

The Reformist Pipe Dream of a “Socialist” European Union

Is A Socialist Transformation of the Imperialist EU Possible? A Marxist Analysis on the L5I’s Latest Opportunistic Adaptation to Labour Reformism

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Introduction

“Red Flag”, the paper of the British supporters of the “League for the 5th International” (formerly known as “Workers Power”), has published an, let's put it this way, odd article.¹ Titled “The workers’ answer to Brexit”, the article polemicizes against various Stalinist and centrist proponents of Britain leaving the European Union.²

Red Flag (RF) and the League for the 5th International (L5I) rightly reject the backward illusions of sectors of the left that leaving the EU and returning to the imperialist nation-state would be a step forward for the working class. As the RCIT and its British supporters have explained in numerous documents, socialists must not lend support to any imperialist form of rule – neither the “sovereign” imperialist nation state (like Britain or other Western European countries) nor the imperialist European Union. Likewise, socialists can not support any camp in an inner-imperialist conflict – like e.g. the current Global Trade War³ or in military conflicts between such powers.⁴ And it is equally impermissible for

¹ The founding cadres of the RCIT were bureaucratically expelled in 2011 by the majority of L5I leadership for their opposition to the centrist degeneration of this erstwhile organization. Since then, there has been an acceleration of the L5I’s right-wing shift. The RCIT, founded soon after our expulsion, continues to defend the revolutionary tradition of our predecessor organization. Today the RCIT has sections and activists in 13 countries and fraternal organizations in several other countries. On the history of the RCIT as well as the L5I, see our book by Michael Pröbsting: Building the Revolutionary Party in Theory and Practice. Looking Back and Ahead after 25 Years of Organized Struggle for Bolshevism, December 2014, <http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/rcit-party-building/>. For our critique of the L5I’s centrist degeneration see in particular chapter III. In addition reader should refer to our letter to the L5I in which we critically analyze its degeneration away from revolutionary Marxism: RCIT: Where is the LFI drifting? A Letter from the RCIT to the LFI comrades, 11.5.2012, <http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/centrist-degeneration-of-lfi/>

² Red Flag: The workers’ answer to Brexit, September 25, 2018, <http://www.redflagonline.org/2018/09/the-workers-answer-to-brexit/>. All quotes, unless stated otherwise, are from this article.

³ See on this e.g. Michael Pröbsting: The Global Trade War is Escalating. Trump’s new Tariffs on about \$200bn worth of Chinese Imports Reflect the Accelerating Rivalry between the Great Powers, 19 September 2018, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/the-global-trade-war-is-escalating/>; Global Trade War: No to Great Power Jingoism in West and East! Neither Imperialist Globalization nor Imperialist Protectionism! For International Solidarity and Joint Struggle of the Working Class and Oppressed People! Joint Statement of the Revolutionary Communist International Tendency (RCIT), Marxist Group ‘Class Politics’ (Russia), Alkebulan School of Black Studies (Kenya), Pan-Afrikan Consciousness Renaissance (Nigeria), Courant des Jeunes Penseurs Congolais (Democratic Republic of Congo), and Sınıf Savaşı (Turkey), 4 July 2018, <https://www.thecommunists.net/rcit/joint-statement-on-the-looming-global-trade-war/>; Michael Pröbsting: The Global Trade War has Begun. What is its Meaning and what should be the Response of Socialists? 13 July 2018, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/the-global-trade-war-has-begun/>; Yossi Schwartz: Capitalist Trade and the Looming 3rd World War, 15 July 2018, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/capitalist-trade-and-looming-3rd-world-war/>; Michael Pröbsting: Where Do Socialists Stand in Face of the Looming Global Trade War? A Showcase of the Practical Consequences of the Assessment of the Class Character of the Chinese State, 17 June 2018, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/where-do-socialists-stand-in-face-of-the-looming-global-trade-war/>; Michael Pröbsting: World Perspectives 2018: A World Pregnant with Wars and Popular Uprisings. Theses on the World Situation, the Perspectives for Class Struggle and the Tasks of Revolutionaries, RCIT Books, Vienna 2018, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/world-perspectives-2018/>

⁴ See on this e.g. RCIT: Theses on Revolutionary Defeatism in Imperialist States, 8 September 2018, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/theses-on-revolutionary-defeatism-in-imperialist-states/>; Joint Statement: Warmongering in the Middle East: Down with all Imperialist Great Powers and Capitalist Dictatorships! 13 May 2018, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa-and-middle-east/joint-statement-warmongering-in-the-middle-east/>; Michael Pröbsting: The Great Robbery of the South. Continuity and Changes in the Super-Exploitation of the Semi-Colonial World by Monopoly Capital. Consequences for the Marxist Theory of Imperialism, RCIT Books, Vienna 2013, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/great-robbery-of-the-south/>; see

socialists to lend support to any faction of the imperialist bourgeoisie when they are competing at elections – like e.g. the Republicans vs. the Democrats in the U.S. ⁵

Consequently, RCIT and its British supporters call upon workers, socialists and revolutionaries to cast neither a YES nor a NO vote in referenda on EU membership, but to actively abstain. ⁶

While RF/L5I correctly criticize those reformists and centrists who are calling for Brexit and who are thereby adapting to the imperialist nation state (like e.g. Stalinists CPB, the CWI or the SWP/IST), they unfortunately fall into the other, no less opportunistic, extreme. They defend their revisionist position that joining an imperialist alliance like the EU would represent a progressive step forward for the working class which must be supported. Here is what the comrades say:

“The interests of the working class includes not just our pay and conditions today, but the impact of any given event on our ability to fight in the future, and in particular our ability to free ourselves from capital once and for all, by creating an international commonwealth of socialist republics in which production is planned democratically for need not greed. Viewed from this perspective, socialists should oppose Brexit 100% and use any principled means to stop it. Why? Because:

1) It imposes massive restrictions on the previous freedom of workers from EU countries to travel to and work in the UK, and vice versa. This is against the interests of the working class now and in the future

2) It imposes further barriers to capitalist trade between the UK and EU countries, which in turn mean:

a. Higher prices and job losses arising from tariff and non-tariff barriers to trade that will definitely ensue should Brexit take place on anything other than ‘Norwegian’ terms ie Single Market membership. There is and will be no tariff-free access to the single market for non-members of it

also our writings collected at a special sub-page on the RCIT’s website <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/china-russia-as-imperialist-powers/>.

⁵ See on this e.g. Yossi Schwarz: Why Not to Vote for the Democratic Party in the Forthcoming US Elections OR AT ANY OTHER TIME, 2.3.2016, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/north-america/no-vote-sanders/>; Yossi Schwartz: Once Again: Opportunism of US Left Exposed. An Analysis of the US 2016 Elections Campaign, 14 August 2016, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/north-america/left-and-us-election/>; Michael Pröbsting: The Meaning, Consequences and Lessons of Trump’s Victory. On the Lessons of the US Presidential Election Outcome and the Perspectives for the Domestic and International Class Struggle, 24.November 2016, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/meaning-of-trump/>

⁶ The RCIT has elaborated its Position on the EU in a number of articles, statements and pamphlets: RCIT: After the BREXIT Vote – Stormy times ahead for the workers and oppressed in Britain, 24.6.2016, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/europe/brexit-vote-results/>; RED*LIBERATION (Bulletin of Socialists in the Labour Party): UK: No to Cameron’s Trap: Neither YES nor NO to UK membership in the EU! For Abstention in the Referendum! We call on Momentum to create a “Third Camp” and to launch a socialist and internationalist campaign! For international Unity of the British, Migrant and European Workers! 25 February 2016, <https://redliberation.wordpress.com/2016/05/02/100/>; RCIT und RCIT Britain: Boycott Cameron’s Trap: Neither Brussels, nor Downing Street! For Abstention in Britain’s EU-Referendum! For international Unity and Struggle of the Workers and Oppressed! Fight against both British as well as European Imperialism! Forward to the United Socialist States of Europe, 2 August 2015, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/europe/eu-referendum-in-uk/>; Michael Pröbsting: The British Left and the EU-Referendum: The Many Faces of pro-UK or pro-EU Social-Imperialism. An analysis of the left’s failure to fight for an independent, internationalist and socialist stance both against British as well as European imperialism, Revolutionary Communism Nr. 40, August 2015 <http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/british-left-and-eu-referendum/>; RKOB: The European Union and the issue of the accession of semi-colonial countries, 14.10.2012, in: Revolutionary Communism No. 6, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/europe/eu-and-semi-colonies/>

b. More limited interaction and integration of the working class of Britain with the working class of Europe, weakening the development of a Pan-European fightback against capital and a pan-European movement of workers for socialism."

RF/L5I also claims, once again, that *"the principal issue [of Brexit is] a massive disruption to trade and economic life that turns countries against each other, pushes our culture backwards instead of forwards, harms working class living standards and sets back the fight for socialism."*

Adapting to EU Imperialism

All these arguments of the L5I are demonstrably wrong as we have shown in detail in several pamphlets and articles.⁷ At this point we limit ourselves to summarize our main arguments. We have demonstrated extensively on a factual as well as theoretical level that the formation of the European Union has not led to a growth of the productive forces (let alone cultural progress!). We have shown that the rise of free trade in the epoch of imperialism does not lead to the advance of the productive forces not to mention the living conditions of the working class. Likewise we have demonstrated that increase and decline of migration is basically not related to the existence of the European Union. All these phenomena – with their inner contradictions and dynamics – are a result of the fundamental laws of the political economy of capitalism and not specifically related to the EU or a free trade treaty.

Nevertheless, the RF/L5I "critically" supports the creation and advance of imperialist federations like the EU or of free trade agreements as a "lesser evil" than national states. This contrasts sharply not only with the program of the RCIT but also with the position of the Marxist classics. As we have shown in detail in past pamphlets, the leading Marxist theoreticians – from Rudolf Hilferding (in his groundbreaking work "Finance Capital") to Lenin, Luxemburg and Trotsky – repudiated support for imperialist free trade over imperialist protectionism, for imperialist federations over national states.

Consequently, they all rejected any form of support – however critically – for the imperialist unification of Europe. In the words of Lenin: *"From the standpoint of the economic conditions of imperialism—i.e., the export of capital and the division of the world by the "advanced" and "civilised" colonial*

⁷ See Michael Pröbsting: Marxism, the European Union and Brexit. The L5I and the European Union: A Right Turn away from Marxism. The recent change in the L5I's position towards the support for EU membership represents a shift away from its own tradition, of the Marxist method, and of the facts; August 2016, in: Revolutionary Communist No. 55, <http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/eu-and-brexit/>; Michael Pröbsting: Does the EU Represent "Bourgeois Democratic Progress"? Once again, on the EU and the Tactics of the Working Class – An Addendum to our Criticism of the L5I's Turn to the Right and Its Support for EU Membership, 16.09.2016, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/eu-brexit-article/>; Manfred Meier: Nachbeben des Brexit - Zur Rechtswende von L5I: das „JA“ zum Verbleib in der EU, August 2016, <http://www.thecommunists.net/home/deutsch/gam-brexit/>; Michael Pröbsting: The British Left and the EU-Referendum: The Many Faces of pro-UK or pro-EU Social-Imperialism. An analysis of the left's failure to fight for an independent, internationalist and socialist stance both against British as well as European imperialism, Revolutionary Communism Nr. 40, August 2015 <http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/british-left-and-eu-referendum/>; see also (in German language only) Michael Pröbsting: Die Frage der Vereinigung Europas im Lichte der marxistischen Theorie. Zur Frage eines supranationalen Staatsapparates des EU-Imperialismus und der marxistischen Staatstheorie. Die Diskussion zur Lösung der Vereinigten Sozialistischen Staaten von Europa bei Lenin und Trotzki und ihre Anwendung unter den heutigen Bedingungen des Klassenkampfes, in: Unter der Fahne der Revolution Nr. 2/3 (2008), <http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/marxismus-und-eu/>

*powers—a United States of Europe, under capitalism, is either impossible or reactionary. (...) A United States of Europe under capitalism is tantamount to an agreement on the partition of colonies. Under capitalism, however, no other basis and no other principle of division are possible except force. (...) Of course, temporary agreements are possible between capitalists and between states. In this sense a United States of Europe is possible as an agreement between the European capitalists . . . but to what end? Only for the purpose of jointly suppressing socialism in Europe, of jointly protecting colonial booty against Japan and America, who have been badly done out of their share by the present partition of colonies, and the increase of whose might during the last fifty years has been immeasurably more rapid than that of backward and monarchist Europe, now turning senile. Compared with the United States of America, Europe as a whole denotes economic stagnation. On the present economic basis, i.e., under capitalism, a United States of Europe would signify an organisation of reaction to retard America's more rapid development.”*⁸

It is not surprisingly that until today RF/L5I has made no effort to prove their claims about the progressive character of the EU in real life. Limiting themselves to silly polemics against the RCIT, they have not even dared to refute the numerous arguments, facts, and quotes which we have provided.⁹

Basically, the comrades of RF/L5I fail to understand that the European Union – like the British nation-state – is first and foremost a *political* project of the imperialist ruling class. It is not a project to advance the productive forces or to increase migration (see the barbaric Frontex regime at the borders of the EU). It is a project to improve the conditions for the European imperialist monopolies to exploit the working class and oppressed and to give them more leverage against other Great Powers like the U.S., Russia or China.

The key task for Marxists is to help the workers vanguard taking an *independent class position*. Hence the RCIT steadfastly defends the orthodox Marxist position – which until 2015 was also supported by the L5I itself – to reject support either for the imperialist EU or for the imperialist nation-state. We stand for an independent position of the working class and, therefore, refuse to support both the pro-EU faction and the anti-EU faction of the imperialist bourgeoisie.

Unfortunately, RF/L5I is defending and even deepening its social-imperialist adaption to the European Union.

Is “Neoliberal Globalization a Lesser Evil”?

In this article we want to limit ourselves to two new arguments, or rather, more explicitly articulated arguments which the RF/L5I comrades are advancing in defense for their pro-EU position. First, they openly state now that they consider protectionism as “worse” than neoliberal globalization:

“Neoliberal globalisation was a phase in the imperialist epoch in which its principal powers sought to create and administer a rules-based international order based on nominally free trade in which the US and its allies were dominant. That rested on the rule of a coalition of centre-right neoliberal politicians who lost their electoral base

⁸ V. I. Lenin: On the Slogan for a United States of Europe; in: LCW Vol. 21, pp. 340-342

⁹ Ben Zimmer: Nach dem Brexit: Folgen und Perspektiven, REVOLUTION Deutschland, 21. Juli 2016, <http://www.onesolutionrevolution.de/allgemein/nach-dem-brexit-folgen-und-perspektiven/>

after the effect of the 2008 crisis finally filtered through, allowing rightwing populists to win mass support around a new programme of protectionism and economic nationalism. That is Trump. And that is Brexit. What we are talking about is not a progressive challenge to neoliberal globalisation, but its decay and collapse into something even worse, into the nationalism of 'America First' and the dystopian project of a Hard Brexit complete with tariffs, price hikes, job losses, deportations and heightened rivalry between states as the ideologues of nationalism look for someone to blame for the disasters their own policies bring." (our emphasize)

This outrageous statement comes as no surprise to us. We have already warned in our past critique that the logic of their arguments forces the L5I to "critically" support all forms of transnational imperialism compared with the nation-state. *"The same opportunistic logic would then also lead the L5I to support the various free trade agreements between the EU and the US (TTIP), between the EU and Canada (CETA), between the US and several Asian and Latin American countries (TPP), or between China and a number of Asian countries (RCEP) – of course extremely "critical" support and naturally in conjunction with their call for "international class struggle."*"¹⁰

The latest article of RF/L5I proves that our warning was absolutely justified. We repeat that Marxists must not fight against imperialist protectionism and nationalism by "critically" supporting imperialist globalization and imperialist supra-national institutions like the EU, WTO, IMF, etc. Both represent reactionary forms of imperialist exploitation. How can the RF/L5I comrades ignore the fact that imperialist globalization has created the socio-economic conditions which, in turn, generated the climate for right-wing nationalists to spread their chauvinist poison?! Do they really believe that siding with the pro-EU liberal urban middle class and the majority of the big bourgeoisie supporting membership in the EU can advance the struggle and the consciousness of the working class by an single inch?!

Imperialist nationalism is only one form of the inherent drive to expansion of imperialist monopoly capital. Imperialist globalization and creating of empires (like the EU) is another form. But socialists can not lend support (not even super-critical) to any of these forms of imperialist expansionism. Supporting Brexit or Remain is equivalent to supporting one of these two forms of imperialist political rule. Both are impermissible for revolutionaries. This is why the RCIT has always advocated a revolutionary, independent, defeatist position directed against both political forms of imperialist rule.

Can a "Socialist Government" Transform the EU?

The second, to put it mildly, "unorthodox" argument of the RF/L5I comrades is that they not only "critically" prefer membership in the EU compared to leaving it. They also claim now that even a "socialist government" should have no desire to leave the imperialist European Union! It would rather, according to the new pro-EU gospel of the RF/L5I, try to transform the EU!

¹⁰ Michael Pröbsting: Marxism, the European Union and Brexit. The L5I and the European Union: A Right Turn away from Marxism. On these free trade agreements see e.g. RCIT: Advancing Counterrevolution and Acceleration of Class Contradictions Mark the Opening of a New Political Phase. Theses on the World Situation, the Perspectives for Class Struggle and the Tasks of Revolutionaries (January 2016), chapter IV.1, <http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/world-perspectives-2016/part5/>

“A socialist government would swiftly set out a programme of nationalisations, taxes on the rich and controls on capital that would enable a massive redistribution of wealth. It would immediately be attacked by capitalists at home and abroad. That would definitely include attacks from the imperialist ruling class in Britain and the imperialist ruling class in the EU.

The EU would of course rush to point to various treaties and rules against expropriations and state aid – not just EU rules, by the way, but pretty much every one of Britain’s 110 bilateral investment treaties and of course also – dun dun daaaaaa – the WTO’s rules. So, we’d have a choice. Comply or defy. We could comply like Syriza did in Greece and end up administering horrible austerity and cuts. Or we could defy.

We propose the latter course. Defy all these rules and fight. Appeal to the working class movement in the EU and every other country. Say ‘look, this is what the rules are designed to do, let’s rise up and defy them together.’ Build an international movement around an international programme of socialist measures and international defiance of the capitalists.

What could the EU do then? Well, they could sue us in the EU courts. So what, we could still defy. They could try to expel us. But guess what. There is no expulsion mechanism provision in the treaty, no Article X that says ‘Get Out’.

So they’d be left with their only weapon: renegotiate the treaty and impose trade restrictions on us. They’d need a unanimous vote of all member states, including all the Belgian regional parliaments, some of which are controlled by the left. But it’d be a real threat. Remember, trade embargos are what have impoverished Cuba, and are causing chaos in Venezuela today. Remember: the early Soviet Republic fought for years precisely to secure trade agreements with other countries against a world embargo.

*Er – so why on earth would we want to walk out of a trade bloc. Why make it easier for the bosses to embargo us? Syriza’s mistake was not that they stayed in, it’s that they *caved* in and carried out austerity.*

*We don’t propose giving in. We propose staying in and fighting. Fighting alongside the victims of austerity in France, Germany, Spain, Italy and yes Greece. Fighting not to break it up and walk out one by one into a hell of competing national capitalist blocs, nor for some milquetoast programme of ‘reforming’ the EU, but fighting together to OVERTHROW the Commission, the Council of Ministers and the institutions of the EU *and the Member States* and to replace them with a Socialist United States of Europe.”*

An Opportunist Pipe Dream!

This is certainly one of the most bizarre statements of the L5I in the last years! Basically, the comrades transform the classic Marxist conception of seizing power by the working class into a legalistic vision of wrangling inside the EU in order to abolish the EU institutions and to transform it into a Socialist United States of Europe.

As a matter of fact, a socialist government can not expropriate the bourgeoisie in a peaceful way. Marxists have always insisted that this will trigger a violent response from the ruling class and open a civil war. The imperialist bourgeoisie – both in Britain (or any other state) as well as in the EU – will resort to all political, economic and military means in order to defeat the insurrectional working class. A socialist government can not help but to closely control the border so that it knows who wants to

enter the country. It can not help but to impose a foreign trade monopoly in order to stop imperialist attempts of economic sabotage. It can not help but to mobilize its Red Army in order to fight back the imperialist invaders (or to support insurrections of the workers and oppressed abroad).

The leading Marxist theoreticians of the 20th century have been unambiguously clear on this issue as we have elaborated many times. ¹¹ Let us, at this point, give just one quote from Trotsky in which he dealt with the revolutionary strategy for Britain:

“In preparing to take state power it is thus necessary to prepare for all the consequences that flow from the inevitable resistance of the possessing classes. It must be firmly understood: if a truly workers’ government came to power in Britain even in an ultra-democratic way, civil war would become unavoidable. The workers’ government would be forced to suppress the resistance of the privileged classes. To do this by means of the old state apparatus, the old police, the old courts, the old army would be impossible. A workers’ government created by parliamentary means would be forced to construct new revolutionary organs for itself, resting upon the trade unions and working-class organizations in general. This would lead to an exceptional growth in the activity and initiative of the working masses. On the basis of a direct struggle against the exploiting classes the trade unions would actively draw closer together not only in their top layers but at the bottom levels as well, and would arrive at the necessity of creating local delegate meetings, i.e. councils (Soviets) of workers’ deputies. A truly Labour government, that is to say, a government dedicated to the end to the interests of the proletariat would find itself in this way compelled to smash the old state apparatus as the instrument of the possessing classes and oppose it with workers’ councils. That means that the democratic origin of the Labour government – even had this proved possible – would lead to the necessity of counterposing revolutionary class force to the reactionary opposition.” ¹²

Needless to say, that one can find hundreds of such statements in the writings of the revolutionary *Communist International* and later the *Fourth International*. Only stubborn right-wing centrists like the Peter Taffees’ CWI or Alan Woods’ IMT have always claimed that a peaceful road to socialism would be possible. It seems that the ex-revolutionary L5I is adapting to such revisionist nonsense. Could this be related to the fact that they are now already entrenching themselves inside the reformist Labour Party for more than three years?!

How is it possible to imagine such a silly scenario like the one outlined by RF/L5I in which a socialist state would not decisively break with the imperialist states which are waging economic or military war against it?! No, such a pacifist pipe dream is impossible in real life! It is unavoidable for a socialist Britain (or any other European state) to break with the imperialist EU!

Unfortunately, the RF/L5I is trapped in its new centrist method and “forgets” all this fundamental truth of Marxism. Instead it starts silly reformist speculations about defying the EU while remaining part of it. It claims that the EU would have basically no means to bring down a socialist government! You see, the expropriation of the capitalist class, can be a simple affair: When the EU wants to destroy the socialist government, just “defy all these rules and fight. (...) What could the EU do then? Well, they could sue us in the EU courts. So what, we could still defy. They could try to expel us. But guess what. There is no expulsion mechanism provision in the treaty, no Article X that says ‘Get Out’. So they’d be left with their only weapon: renegotiate the treaty and impose trade restrictions on us.”

¹¹ See e.g. Michael Pröbsting: Five days that shook Britain but didn’t wake up the left. The bankruptcy of the left during the August uprising of the oppressed in Britain: Its features, its roots and the way forward, 01.09.2011, Chapter: Socialist Party / Committee for a Workers International, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/britain-left-and-the-uprising/sp-and-committee-for-a-workers-international/>

¹² Leon Trotsky: Where is Britain Going? (1925), <https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/britain/wibg/ch05.htm>

How silly were we orthodox Marxists when we imagined the expropriation of the capitalist class as a violent affair! No, according to the new theory of RF/L5I, it is simply a question of putting pressure on the imperialists and entering negotiations because the EU has no legal mechanism to expel a socialist member state! Meanwhile, one could undisturbed appeal to the working class inside the EU and to help bringing one socialist government after the other into power!

At the recent UN General Assembly, Iran's Rouhani (rightly) accused Trump of a "*weakness of intellect*". Unfortunately, Trump seems not to be the only one with such a deficit!

No, this new theory is nothing but a reformist pipe dream of the RF/L5I! A socialist Britain and an imperialist EU are antagonistic entities with diametrically opposed class interests. The working class in power must immediately break with the imperialist institutions (like the EU, the WTO, the IMF, etc.) in order to cut all political, economic or military means which could be utilized by the imperialists to sabotage and defeat the working class in power! The imperialist ruling class – both in Britain as well as in the EU – will always find ways to throw its might against the insurrectional working class. They will do so irrespectively if this is legally allowed by the EU de-facto constitution (the so-called *Treaty of Lisbon*) or not.

The iron logic of opportunist adaption to the liberal pro EU middle class (inside and outside the Labour Party) pushes the RF/L5I deeper and deeper into the direction of social-imperialism. Initially, they "only" advocated a "critical vote" for Britain remaining in the EU. Later they claimed that the EU would represent "*bourgeois democratic progress*" and that it would objectively help in the "*development of productive forces and of the international consciousness of the working class.*" Now, they claim that imperialist protectionism is "worse" than imperialist neoliberal globalization, i.e. indicating that they would "critically" defend all institutions representing imperialist globalization against the threat of protectionism. And they fantasize about a socialist government in Britain which would stay inside the imperialist EU, block their counterrevolutionary attempts (as the latter supposedly lacks legal means for this) and transform it into a Socialist United States of Europe.

Would Communists have "Critically" Defended the Existence of the British Empire? Surely Not!

The idea of such a socialist transformation of imperialist institutions is not new. In 1920, Sidney and Beatrice Webb – internationally renowned proponents of revisionism at their time – wrote a whole book about "*A Constitution for the Socialist Commonwealth of Great Britain*". This famous Fabian couple outlined, in 400 pages, a detailed conception how the British Empire could be transformed towards socialism.¹³

Of course, today the British Empire exists only in the nostalgic dreams of some English aristocrats. However, instead, there exists another imperialist Empire called the European Union. The communists in the time of Lenin and Trotsky never desired to keep the British Empire and transform it towards socialism. They rather desired to smash the British Empire in order to open the road to the liberation of the working class and the oppressed people and the creation of a federation of workers

¹³ Sidney and Beatrice Webb: *A Constitution for the Socialist Commonwealth of Great Britain*, London, New York, Bombay 1920

(and peasants) republics. This view was reflected, for example, in an article by the British communists in 1923. It attacked the revisionist vision of the Webbs and called for an anti-imperialist strategy. Instead of striving to keep the Empire (today we would say European Union), the communists called to “repudiate the bonds of Empire and liberate the exploited masses“!

“What, then, is the Communist answer to the questions arising out of the existence of the Empire? If the workers come to power in this country what ought they to do? The answer is clear and definite. Repudiate the bonds of Empire and liberate the exploited masses and join in the fight to crush their enemies by helping to form workers’ and peasants’ Governments in the liberated countries. But the imperialists would attack? Then join in the defensive fight and use the situation to spread the revolution in the camp of the attackers. To hold aloof in the class war in the name of “self-determination” may be good pacifism. In our opinion, it is rank cowardice and certainly not the way to win victory for the workers.

But it may be asserted that by the act of liberation from the Empire it may not follow that the workers’ and peasants’ Government would come to power. Very well, the workers’ Government of Britain would have to use its economic, political and agitational power to ripen the conditions to secure such a consummation whilst being prepared to defend the liberated nation from the attacks of external forces. (...) The Communist alternative which can be put to that of the Imperial Conference and their understudies of the Labour Party and I.L.P. briefly stated is as follows:

(1) Support every measure to organise the workers of the countries within the Empire, that will enable them to struggle for improvements as a means to developing their forces to secure self-government by the seizure of power.

(2) To conduct strenuous agitation in this country in support of these workers and peasants with a view to exposing the ramifications and implications of imperialism and uniting the workers of this country with the exploited workers throughout the Empire.

(3) To aid by every possible means, whether in the colonies or here, in securing the liberation of these countries from the control of the Empire and assist in their struggle against all the imperialists.

These are the tasks which provide the workers in the Empire with their answer to the Imperial Conference and the special obligations which history places upon the working class in Great Britain in the revolutionary struggle against international imperialism.”¹⁴

What a gulf between the British communist politics in the time of Lenin and Trotsky and the politics of the British L5I supporters today!

Communists *always* oppose the existence of imperialist Empires – in the past as well as the present! Following the new social-imperialist logic of the L5I, Marxists would have had to view the British Empire (renamed into *British Commonwealth of Nations* in 1931) as a step forward compared with the existence of Britain as a nation state only. Consequently, they would had to “critically” defend the survival of the British Empire against its dissolution since, in the logic of the comrades, such an Empire represented a much larger entity than the British nation state alone and, hence, it would allow much better conditions for the development of the productive forces.

¹⁴ J. T. Murphy: The Empire Conference and the Workers, in: The Communist Review, November 1923, Vol. 4, No. 7, published by the Communist Party of Great Britain, https://www.marxists.org/archive/murphy-jt/1923/11/empire_conference.htm

Naturally, such a reactionary position has nothing in common with Marxism. It has rather everything in common with Labourite social-imperialism. But with the new centrist logic of the L5I such a conclusion is the only possible one! They must “critically” support all forms of imperialist expansionism – starting from free trade agreements like NAFTA, TTIP, CETA, etc. up to the existence of the EU – as they allegedly constitute “progress” in relation to the nation state.

Conclusions

As we have already warned in past works, it is only a small step from such a social-chauvinist position to the support for imperialist wars (albeit very “critically”)! Lenin often cited the famous principle of the Prussian military theorist von Clausewitz according to which the *“war is nothing but the continuation of politics by other means.”*¹⁵ If the alleged advantages of larger imperialist countries and business associations for the development of productive forces and of the international consciousness of the working class are actually so important for the L5I leadership, so much so that they are in favor of EU membership – then why not support achieving such greater political and economic state organizations by military means?

Surely, the L5I comrades currently oppose such conclusions. But the inner logic of such an approach is merciless: if one supports or defends the creation of larger imperialist entities (like the EU) why not supporting it also via military means?! We repeat: anyone who extends even a little finger to the program of social imperialism is inevitably caught in the net of its political chasms.

Communists must defend a consistent, revolutionary, internationalist and defeatist position when it comes to projects of imperialist expansionism. They must oppose imperialist free trade agreements and they must oppose the imperialist European Union. At the same time they must also oppose the imperialist nation state as it basically represents only a smaller version of the same beast: reactionary institutions of the imperialist ruling class.

Therefore, the RCIT considers the EU, like the British state, as an imperialist enemy and calls the workers vanguard not to support either of them. In the past, when the L5I was a revolutionary organization, it shared this outlook. Today, it has repudiated its own tradition and program without openly explaining why it threw its traditional position over board.

We repeat our conclusion written two years ago: *“All these examples show that the new position of the L5I on the EU and its justification inevitably drive them in the direction of social-imperialism. Despite their anti-imperialist rhetoric, they would support the concrete central projects of the EU and other imperialist powers – in the name of the “development of productive forces and of the international consciousness of the working class.” Ultimately, the group would degenerate to becoming “critical” (of course) cheerleaders for the imperialist powers and their expansionism. What a sad end for a group that once embodied a proud revolutionary tradition!”*¹⁶

¹⁵ Carl von Clausewitz: *Vom Kriege* (1832), Hamburg 1963, p. 22; in English: Carl von Clausewitz: *On War*, <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/1946/1946-h/1946-h.htm>

¹⁶ Michael Pröbsting: *Marxism, the European Union and Brexit. The L5I and the European Union: A Right Turn away from Marxism*

Authentic revolutionaries must revolt against such a pro-EU social-imperialist orientation! It is crucial break with such centrism and to unite on the basis of a consistent Marxist program. It is more urgent than ever to build an international revolutionary organization in order to fight against all forms of social-chauvinism – both pro-EU as well as pro-UK! Only a strong revolutionary force can effectively combat centrist confusion! This is the task of the RCIT and we call all authentic revolutionaries to join us!