"Remoaners for Democracy – Article 50 Now!"

WE LIVE IN CONFUSING TIMES. From Aleppo to Washington to London the way ahead is not always clear. Consequently, it is in times like these that we are tempted to return to our traditional redoubts, to our fore-conceptions – not to put too finer point on it – to our prejudices. So, with regard to Syria many on the left are tempted to think the secularist Assad must be better in the long run than the Islamists and the rag-tag-and-bobtail of other rebels confronting Damascus and the helpful Russians. It's the same in the Baltic States, Crimea, and Ukraine isn't it? It must surely be Nato's fault for making Mr Putin feel insecure? And, so it goes on. Returning, time and again, to our tried and tested assumptions.

Something similar appears to be happening with regard to Brexit. In response to the suggestion that Nigel Farage is organising a mass demonstration against the attempts being made in the courts to allow Parliament to delay the triggering of Article 50 the left appears to be rapidly leaping into its traditionalist 'anti-fascist' mode. Perhaps the most sophisticated example of this is a recent piece in the *Guardian* by Paul Mason:

> It's facile to call Trump and Farage "fascists". They are elite, rightwing economic nationalists who have each stumbled upon the fact that a minority of working-class people can be fooled by populism – especially when the left refuses to play the populist game. And they are moving forward fast.

So far so good you might think. But, hang on a minute, Paul then goes on to quote Walter Benjamin with regard to the failure of the European left in the thirties and finishes his article (illustrated with a picture of Blackshirts) with reference to Cable Street and the need for a 'popular front' against Nigel and his 17.4 million Brexiteers:

> I want to see an alliance of the left and the radical centre on the streets. That means bond traders from Canary Wharf, arm in arm with placard-carrying Trots. Masked-up Kurdish radicals alongside Mumsnet posters. Eighty years on from Cable Street, we don't have many dockers and miners around, to help face down rightwing intimidation. Puny as we are, it's up to us.

Eighty years on from Cable Street, it might be worth mentioning that Parliament Square, the home of the Supreme Court, is not a working class neighbourhood packed with Jewish immigrants and Irish Dockers being intimidated by Oswald Mosley's British Union of Fascists, but a rather sedate and heavily policed government quarter without a Bengali tailor or Polish plumber in sight.

The purpose of such a demonstration would be to demonstrate to the justices of the Supreme Court the degree and intensity of popular anger over the attempts being made to use the courts to frustrate and delay the implementation of the referendum result.

This seems the right moment to remind those on the left who are getting very hot under the collar about the rule of law, undermining the much vaunted independence of the judiciary, and the "intimidation" of judges, about the vast strikes and demonstrations in 1972. These compelled 'the official solicitor', Norman Turner, to overturn the actions of the courts in jailing the shop stewards, known as 'The Pentonville Five'. This was done lawfully by appeal in the courts, but not without the threat of a general strike and much turmoil

on the streets. The democratic movement in Britain has a proud tradition of fighting against reactionary and clearly partisan decisions by the courts.

People on the left used to know this.

Many others have made comparisons between Nigel Farage's proposed demonstration and Benito Mussolini's fabled 'March on Rome' in October 1922 that initiated twenty years of fascist dictatorship in Italy. The suggestion that opposition to Brexiteers should become an 'anti-fascist' *cause celebre* for the left is as dangerous as it is absurd.

It is particularly dangerous because despite cautionary references to Walter Benjamin we need to remember that the European left in the nineteen thirties, both in its hardcore form between 1928-1934, and in its Popular Front incarnation thereafter, were roundly defeated by the fascists. Fascism was subsequently defeated only by war and the uneasy alliance between bourgeois democracy and Stalinist dictatorship. Between 1922 and 1940 the fascists routed the left throughout Europe – of course Cable Street (in a stable bourgeois democracy) stands out as a rare victory. But it was small beer against the horrifying triumphs of fascism, and of nationalist and clerical reaction, throughout Europe.

Consequently, we should be very careful before we attempt to march down that particular corpse-strewn path again. We should not attempt to homogenise the Brexiteers into some kind of fascist bloc or refer to the supporters of Nigel Farage as Paul Mason does as "100,000 racists and xenophobes" setting out to "intimidate the court".

17.4 million people voted for Britain to leave the European Union. We can safely assume that most of them were voting for an end to free movement, for a reduction in the scale and speed of immigration, and for removing Britain from the jurisdiction of the EU's courts and other institutions.

I heartily wish they hadn't.

But I'm afraid that we lost the vote largely because of our historic failure to engage directly with

the fears and problems of very large and embattled sections of the lower middle class and the working class who have remained steadfastly beyond the reach of public sector trade unions, and the Labour Party. It is our failure, not theirs, that we did not win sufficient numbers over to the side of a more critical engagement with the European Union and with the problems arising from mass immigration.

I can think of nothing more calculated to strengthen the "racist and xenophobic right" than a campaign by the left to support moves to delay or finesse our departure from the European Union. Such a campaign will be seen for what it is, an anti-democratic movement committed to maintaining a status quo that millions find intolerable.

We must not, under any circumstances, allow the right to take possession of the idea of the popular will, or assume the mantle of democracy. It seems that according to Paul Mason marching against the Brexiteers will involve an alliance with many elements one might reasonably suppose are in other respects right wing or reactionary. Similarly, marching in defence of the decision made by 17.4 million people will undoubtedly involve many disconcerting associations and alliances. But, we must not be deterred by that.

Consequently, if this demonstration goes ahead, you will find me on it marching under a banner emblazoned with the slogan:

"Remoaners for Democracy – Article 50 Now!"