

National Independence?



BREXIT PARTY – I am going to vote Brexit in the upcoming Euro-Elections. In 2016 I voted for the *status quo*, I voted Remain. Now I'm going to vote leave. The reason I'm performing this *volte face* is because the leavers won the referendum – and I think that because Parliament set up the referendum – on basis of a 'simple majority' – we must accept the result. All the arguments for moving the 'goal posts': the ignorance and racism of half the electorate, the unknown or incalculable economic consequences of leaving, are made to traduce, insult, and frighten the seventeen-and-half million who voted the 'wrong' way.

If we want people to trust the electoral system, if we want to ensure that abstentionism does not in future grip half the population, we must prevent Parliament from brazenly ignoring the decision of 52 per cent of those who voted.

Clearly, over the last two years, despite triggering Article 50, despite having stood on the leave ticket in the 2017 General Election, the majority of MPs have done everything they can to wreck, undermine, and set aside, the majority decision. They must not be allowed to get away with this. Consequently, a vote for Nigel Farage's Brexit Party is a must in the forthcoming Euro-Elections. We must make clear to the political establishment that the electorate always has the final say in how we are governed. A victory for the Brexit Party will make it abundantly clear to both Brussels and Westminster that they cannot ignore the popular will.

Having said this, neither Nigel Farage, nor the extraordinary coalition of diverse political elements he has cobbled together in his Brexit Party, represent in any sustainable sense, a political course for most of our people, or for the three countries, and six Irish counties, in the United Kingdom. The Brexit Party should be seen merely as a vehicle for preventing the establishment from overturning the right of the electorate to determine the shape and nature of our constitution.

Unfortunately, we have, over the last three years been placed in a position when none of the principle players in our national debacle have much going for them. Remainers appear strangely unconcerned with the economic fate of Greece or Italy, the brain drain suffered by Latvia, the politics of Hungary, or the corruption of the Bulgarian judiciary. They seem even less concerned about the absence of any stringent democratic oversight on the European Union which regulates and governs the lives of 513m people. Remainers like to emphasise their liberal 'world openness' while thousands of refugees drown in the Mediterranean.

Alternately, the Leavers, emphasise the importance of "getting our country back", trumpeting the virtues of sovereignty, and what might be called 'home rule', almost without regard for the profoundly undemocratic character of our constitution. Half of the legislature in

the Palace of Westminster is unelected. The judges and many other functionaries are appointed by arcane monarchical processes in the gift of the sitting prime minister without reference to public scrutiny or democratic control. The United Kingdom is governed by an oligarchy that never tires of telling us that our Parliament is not merely a model of representation, but that we are also “the envy of the world”.

These oppositions, Remain versus Leave, have done little to reveal the nature or cause of the crisis of democracy in Europe or the UK. The Remainers seek security from economic competition with the emerging giants – China, India, Indonesia, Brazil, Nigeria – by clinging together in the European club. Clearly, they are terrified by Artificial Intelligence and the introduction of new materials and technologies set radically to alter all economic and social calculation. While, on the other hand, the Leavers put the defence of the nation state and national sovereignty at the heart of the argument. The nation is, they insist, the only weapon we have against globalisation and the technocratic rule of unaccountable officials.

Leaver elements as diverse as those from renegade UKIPers, Tories, Islamists led by George Galloway, to libertarians over at Spiked Online and the Academy of Ideas, share the belief that the answer to the crisis of democracy provoked by globalisation is national sovereignty.

This too, despite a lot of ducking and weaving, lies at the heart of the Corbyn-McDonnell project. Labour believes in restoring the fortunes of British manufacturing by what Paul Mason has called “a limited withdrawal from globalisation” – insisting on building Britain’s warships and other kit at home, rather than contracting the work out. This will set Labour’s trade policy on a trajectory similar to Trump’s ‘America First’, without, of course, the weight or punch of the largest economy in the world.

The irrelevant and extraordinarily backward-looking points of view of both Leave and Remain have their origin in a failure to grasp the nature of globalisation.

Both are rooted in a failure to recognise fully the extent to which the development of capitalism since, say 1970 or thereabouts, has rendered the political arrangements, first established in the middle of the nineteenth century, more or less dysfunctional. The Europhiles evidently think that in competition with vast new economic powers it is essential to gather together the resources of Europe into a single bloc. Whereas, the Tories in the European Research Group put all their faith in the intrepid, swashbuckling powers of Britain's entrepreneurs to steer an agile course for the United Kingdom between the world's giant economies, grabbing advantage, profits, and investments, where we may.

The response of political elites to this crisis has been to withdraw into what Peter Mandelson once called the "post-democratic age" in which decision-making is withdrawn from the public realm and placed behind closed-doors, into the hands of experts, consultants, and professional decision-makers; a real establishment operating at 'arms-length' from the electorate, by a process which relies on suborning elected representatives to carry out the wishes of technocrats, rather than those of the electorate.

This world has arisen spontaneously as it has become ever more difficult for nations to insulate themselves, their taxation, trade, and investment policies, from the progressive interconnection of global economic activity. Of course, there is in truth no such thing as 'free trade'. Trade policies and arrangements are always governed by an imbalance of power and leverage; equilibrium, or mutuality, is never actually on offer. Globalisation, the coming together of relatively low-level technologies like containerisation, with the internet, with new materials, burgeoning new efficiencies, and new points of production around the world, have radically narrowed the room for manoeuvre available to nation states to set their own course with regard to investment, employment, or trade.

While national sovereignty has in truth never been absolute, it is now, under considerable stress, as investment capital flows around the world, literally, at the speed of light. Transport costs for both components and finished goods have been reduced, virtually, to zero, enabling manufacturing to be distributed and redistributed globally, almost without regard to national boundaries. This has been accompanied by vast movements of population as working people have moved in their millions from rural areas to the cities, from country to country, and continent to continent, in search of jobs, better wages, education and opportunities for their kids.

It is in these circumstances that those of us on the left have conspicuously failed to develop modes of internationalism and political responses capable of charting a course adequate to the changes being wrought by the development of capitalism. Too often the defensiveness, typical of trade unionism, have restricted our responses to a kind of atavism in which we attempt to hang on to the past rather than responding to the dynamism of capital with revolutionary energy of our own. So, resort to the 'shared' sovereignty of Europe, or to recovery of the national sovereignty of Britain, amount to much the same kind of bankruptcy – an avoidance of the way in which globalisation demands radically new modes of democratic intervention by working people regarding the distribution of investment, other resources, and the freedom of people to move around the world without 'let or hinderance'.

I have no idea of how we should proceed, but it is surely clear that we cannot rely on frustrating the introduction of new technologies, or on restricting the global flows of investment capital.

Capitalism, the domination of society and production by commerce and the private ownership of investment capital, has made and remade the texture and the nature of the class relations, and political arrangements, for the last three centuries. This has demanded extraordinary and almost perpetual

transformations in the way in which society has been governed, resulting finally, in its most highly developed form, in government by popular consent and participation. It is this that it now under threat by tyrannical forms of the system from Beijing to Moscow and Singapore, or to technocratic modes of management in Brussels, the WTO, the World Bank, or even the Bank of England.

Because, we cannot rely upon 'national' or 'shared' sovereignty we need, somehow, to begin to discuss how to chart the course of a new internationalism that is adequate to the challenges presented by globalised capitalism, and the needs of working people throughout the world.