



LIBERATION

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WORKERS AND OPPRESSED, UNITE!

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An Assessment of the 4th Policy Conference of UNITE Held in the Brighton Centre from 11th-15th July 2016

By Joseph Adams

The 4th Policy conference of UNITE was a predictable affair where the labour bureaucracy and the labour aristocracy met in a period of unparalleled uncertainty and crisis after Brexit. The ruling class faces its greatest political crisis since the Second World War.

On the Labor Bureaucracy and the Labor Aristocracy

The labour bureaucracy of UNITE, the biggest trade union with over 1.4 million members, is a crucial agent for the ruling class in the workers movement. The labour bureaucracy constitutes the most reactionary and conservative element in the working class today. It is composed of self-serving careerists whose role is to police the working class and make it safe for capitalism in order to exploit the most vulnerable and exploited sections in society. The labour aristocracy represents the top strata of workers who have a very close relationship to the bureaucracy. This conservatism and backwardness means that they also are concerned to protect capitalism's interests and continue to acquire privileges that they have worked for over many years. Their greatest fear is social revolution.

Leon Trotsky and Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, the two Bolshevik leaders of the Russian Revolution, identified

the role of this reactionary rump that plays a dominating role in the British trade union movement. They are totally reformist in character and seek to get a few crumbs from the masters table.

Lenin shows in *'Left wing Communism an Infantile disorder'* how imperialism produced and nurtured the development of this narrow conservative layer in the working class and where its interests lay.

"Modern 20th century Imperialism created a privileged monopoly position for a few advanced countries and this gave rise everywhere in the Second International to a certain type of traitor, opportunist social chauvinist leaders who champion the interests of their own craft, their own section of the labour aristocracy." [1]

Lenin points the way forward for socialists active in trade unions like UNITE.

"The victory of the revolutionary proletariat is impossible unless this evil is combated, unless the opportunist social traitor leaders are exposed, discredited and expelled." [2]

The RCIT in its *Theses on Trade Unions* clarifies the role of this labour aristocracy and how revolutionary communists should fight and orientate themselves to the middle or lower strata of the working class (including migrants).

"The trade unions have limitations not only because their focus is the economic sphere of defending the conditions of wage labor. They also have limitations for the following reasons:

- i) *They usually contain only a minority of the working class.*
- ii) *They usually are rooted amongst the upper strata of the working class (more skilled, better paid workers) and in particular the labor aristocracy.*
- iii) *They are usually controlled by the labor bureaucracy which acts as agents of the bourgeoisie in the ranks of the workers' movement, and which subordinates the unions to the bourgeois state and the capitalist class.*

These factors have important consequences for the strategy of the revolutionary organization. First, revolutionary organizations consider work in the trade unions as a central but not exclusive area for their efforts to recruit workers. Work amongst political and social movements (or parties) in which militant sectors of the working class are involved, or amongst oppressed sectors of the working class (youth, women, etc.) can be equally important areas of revolutionary work.

Revolutionaries struggle for the expulsion of the labor bureaucracy and its agents from the ranks of the workers'



movement. These forces are the biggest obstacle for the working class struggle in the ranks of the workers' movement. Naturally, this is a long-term task and involves the application of the united front tactic (calls to the rank and file, but also the reformist leaders for joint actions, etc.). But communists should state clearly that the trade unions can only become an authentic instrument of the working class if they are liberated from the bureaucracy and brought under workers control.

Revolutionaries have to regularly explain that the trade union bureaucracy and its leaders follow a reformist policy, that they must not be trusted and that they will only betray the workers. They must repeatedly remind workers that the bureaucrats sell out the workers interests to the capitalists, not because they "don't understand" what are necessary working class politics; nor because they "wrongly believe" in reformist strategies (social democratic, Stalinist, syndicalist, etc.). Rather, the ultimate and most basic reason for their repeated betrayals is their own material interests as bureaucrats. Their reformist ideology is a reflection of their petty-bourgeois social position as mediators between labor and capital ("Social being determines consciousness."). They constitute – with their numerous privileges and their connections with the bourgeois state and the capitalists – not a proletarian layer, but a petty-bourgeois caste which is bribed by the capitalists. Revolutionaries must emphasize these material roots as the cause for the bureaucrats' betrayal, and not their erroneous political and ideological convictions. Otherwise, the illusion is created amongst the rank and file workers that it may be possible to convince the leaders of the correct policy, or that one just need simply replace the leaders instead of smashing the bureaucratic caste as such." [3]

Reactionary Support for Trident

Most of the decisions reached at the Policy conference were centred on economic questions like pay, conditions and the security of full time work. Most of the delegates at this conference were steeped in this tradition. There were a few exceptions. In the debate on Trident there were some young and migrant delegates who were opposed to imperialism and war, but unfortunately it was only a handful. The labour aristocracy true to form supported Trident on a narrow craft basis to protect their member's jobs. UNITE remains committed to imperialist war in opposition to Corbyn and the Labour leadership.

The tone for the conference was set by Len McCluskey, the General Secretary of UNITE, in his address to delegates.

There was no mention of strike activities against the hated Tory government. He said nothing about the recently introduced anti-union Trade Union bill or how to fight the anti-trade union laws. In fact McCluskey insisted that UNITE would still operate within the law. His speech as usual was a set of platitudes with no direction on how to fight this government. His only concern was to hope for a 2020 General election with a Corbyn-led Labour government.

He said *"there are turbulent times ahead after the result of the EU Referendum. The movement is bitterly divided. He condemned the recent racist attacks after the result of Brexit. He called for defense of the NHS against American care providers. McCluskey insisted that Unite would operate within these restrictions in representing our members. We will use leverage against the anti-trade union laws as we have successfully done over blacklisting in the Construction Industry. He advocated partnership and Industrial agreements with the employer. Referring to the political crisis in the Labour Party after Brexit he said this is a cowardly attack by the PLP against the elected leader. The Tories get off scot free. The PLP never accepted the overwhelming support for Corbyn which marked a new kind of politics. Two thirds of Labour supporters voted for Corbyn. These plotters are conducting a wrecking a wrecking operation against the Labour Party. These instigations betrayed everyone. They are for personal sectional interests. Unite has stood by Corbyn. He is the elected leader. He stood with us on picket lines. We need a reconciliation with the PLP. We must work together. It is regrettable that these efforts have been sabotaged. I give you a warning if you keep Corbyn off the ballot this will risk a lasting division in the party. We must avert such a disaster. At the general election we must unite". [4]*

Lively debate about the Role of Labour-Controlled Councils

In debates on anti-austerity issues there was a particularly lively debate about the role of Labour controlled councils cutting the budgets of the most vulnerable groups in society with mental health problems. It was left to Ted Knight, former leader of Lambeth Council, to remind the conference how labour councils in the 1980's had fought the Tories and refused to enact their legislation. The result has been surcharges and banning councillors from holding elective office. *"A motion for labour councils to make use of their reserves and to set legal no cuts budgets using reserves to*

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RED LIBERATION is a Bulletin published by Socialists active in the Labour Party. RED LIBERATION is in political solidarity with the Revolutionary Communist International Tendency (RCIT). The RCIT has sections and activists in Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Yemen, Tunisia, Israel / Occupied Palestine, Brazil, Mexico, Venezuela, Britain, Germany, and Austria. In addition the RCIT has fraternal relations with Dördüncü Blok in Turkey.

generate resources so that no labour council need to make cuts". [5] Of course the labour aristocracy and the bureaucracy combined to defeat this motion and to accept a policy for labour councils to make cuts and continue to carry out Tory policies.

The main centrist groups in Britain, the *Socialist Workers Party* (SWP) and the *Socialist Party of England and Wales* (SPEW) as well as the *Revolutionary Socialism in the 21st Century*, provide a prop for the labour bureaucracy and the labour aristocracy. They all have members on the Executive Council of UNITE and are very well integrated into the bureaucratic apparatus. Both the *National Shop Stewards Network*, the industrial arm of the SPEW, and *Unite the Resistance*, the industrial arm of the SWP, regularly invite bureaucrats to sit and speak on their platform. Their orientation is not to migrants and the more exploited sections of the working class residing in these lower strata but to the labour aristocracy.

Many centrist groups (including the former Workers Power group, British section of the LFI) consider the labour aristocracy to be progressive and that it is crucial for socialists to recruit workers from this layer. This argument was answered by Michael Pröbsting in his book on the revolutionary party.

Referring to the Labour aristocracy Pröbsting said: "Instead they (LFI) reduced the concept of the labour aristocracy to the empirical observation that it is better paid: At the core of the concept of the 'labour aristocracy', as used by Lenin then is the simple idea that the working class is socially differentiated and stratified economically'. From this some LFI leaders concluded that the labour aristocracy represents a huge important sector of the working class in the imperialist countries- in discussions it was suggested about one third of the proletariat- and, hence it is the core sector of the working class without whom the revolution cannot succeed '. In sum while the LFI leadership opportunistically overstates the progressive character of the labour aristocracy it underestimates the importance of the middle and lower strata of the working class and the nationally oppressed layers". [6]

The RCIT in Britain calls for a pre-party organization to be built in Britain and in our trade union work for

communist fractions to be built under the discipline of the revolutionary party's leadership which should coordinate and direct the activity of the fraction in order that revolutionary communists can advance the socialist revolution.

We put forward the following demands for the work of the communist fraction in all trade unions in Britain.

* *Build rank and file organizations in opposition to the bureaucracy and whose aim should be to remove and expel the bureaucracy and install genuine rank and file militants in positions of leadership to enable them to advance towards socialism.*

* *Fighting to change the composition of Unions by recruiting the mass type of militant workers. Migrants and the most exploited should be brought into the mass organizations of the working class which means the lower and middle strata. Reduce the influence of the reformist and aristocratic type of worker with all his narrow craft prejudices.*

* *Build action committees independent of the bureaucracy fighting against the bosses' and government attacks. Workers defence guards to protect workers who are on strike. Defend occupations of factories and workplaces from attacks by fascists and the police.*

* *For an indefinite strike to be organized to bring down this hated Tory Government*

Footnotes

(1) V I Lenin: *Left Wing Communism an Infantile Disorder*, Bookmarks, pg.47

(2) V I Lenin: *Left Wing Communism an Infantile Disorder*, Bookmarks, pg.47

(3) <http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/theses-trade-union/>

(4) Speech by Len McCluskey General Secretary of Unite to Delegates at the Unite 4th Policy Conference Monday 11th July 2016.

(5) Motion No 6 Fighting Back against austerity Final Agenda Unite 4th Policy Conference, pg. 4

(6) <http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/rcit-party-building/rcit-party-building-iii/>

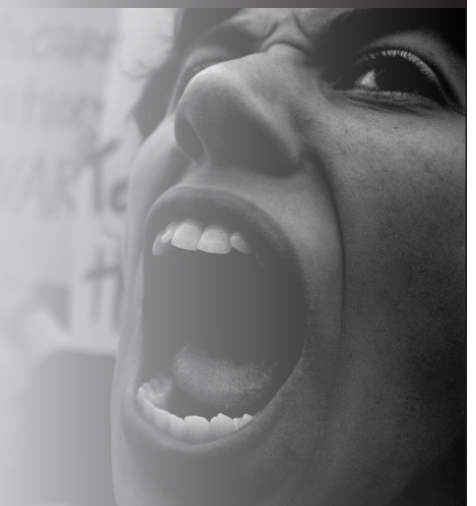
Two Pamphlets on the EU and Brexit

* **Marxism, European Union and Brexit**

* **The British Left and the EU-Referendum**

*Written by Michael Pröbsting
(International Secretary of the RCIT)*

Price for one pamphlet: 2 Pound (plus delivery charges)



After the BREXIT Vote –

Stormy times ahead for the workers and oppressed in Britain

Excerpts of the Statement of the Revolutionary Communist International Tendency (RCIT), www.thecommunists.net, 24.6.2016

1. An historic day has shattered Britain and the European Union. In the Referendum the decision remaining in or leaving the EU 51.9%, of the British people voted in favor Brexit. Since the results were announced events have developed very quickly. Prime Minister David Cameron has resigned, the British Pound is at its lowest since 1985, and The London's stock market closed with a loss of 7.5%, But London's stock market is not the only financial markets which suffered from the result. (...)

5. The outcome of the Referendum was not only interesting because of the gap between the votes from Scotland and Northern Ireland compared with the ones from England and Wales. The huge gap between the votes coming from the younger and the older people is of special interest. More than 75% of the 18 to 24 years old voters were in favor of remaining in the EU. Even the majority, i.e. 56% of the 25 to 49 years old voters were in favor of remaining in the European Union. The victory of the *UK first* campaign was based on people who were over 50 years old! (...) The RCIT called correctly for supporting neither the YES-Camp nor the NO-Camp in the referendum of the BREXIT. However, the RCIT demands the equal right of young people to vote from the age of 14. It is ridiculous to force such young people to work, to put them in jail if they are breaking the bourgeois law and to deny them basic democratic rights. In addition to this the youth have a much more progressive character which is also shown in the number of the supporters of UKIP, an emerging right-wing populist force. Young people under 21 years rarely support right wing parties like UKIP compared to all other age groups. The majority of UKIP supporters is over 45 years old and support Britain's inhuman anti-migration laws. (...)

7. The *Revolutionary-Communist International Tendency* (RCIT) in opposition to the social-imperialists of the *UK first* campaign like the Socialist Party of England and Wales (SPEW, British section of the CWI), the Socialist Workers Party (SWP, British section of the IST) and the Stalinist Communist Party of Britain (CPB) were not in favor of the exit of imperialist Britain from the EU. The RCIT has chosen neither the way of the so-called Marxist supporters of the YES-campaign who are in reality part of a Pro-EU-social-imperialist strategy like the pro-Zionist Alliance for Workers' Liberty (AWL) and the Mandeliste Socialist Resistance. Even our former comrades of the League for the Fifth International (LFI) have argued wrongly in favor of remaining in the European Union likewise Jeremy Corbyn. The RCIT chose revolutionary defeatism. Now the time has come to utilize the outcome of the referendum to strengthen the revolutionary forces in Britain and the whole of Europe!

8. The outcome of the referendum is a clear signal against the British government and has to lead in the right direction. Part of this is the formation of a new workers party on a revolutionary basis which is able to organize the working class and all oppressed who are frustrated by the politics of the existing parties. Now is the time to

fight strongly against any kind of racism that is led against migrants and refugees. We have to fight for opening the borders and, for unlimited right of residence in Britain and for full equal rights for all migrants. Now is also the time to fight strongly against the austerity politics of the British bourgeoisie. The fight against the cuts in the NHS is an important and progressive aspect which can bring the NO-Voters who are against the austerity politics of the British government together with the YES-Voters from Scotland. The fight against the privatization of the health care system and the social system as such must go hand in hand with the slogan of the expropriation of the banks and the corporations under workers control!

9. In addition to this the slogan „*British troops out of Northern Ireland!*“ is essential for a revolutionary movement in Britain as well as the demand to withdraw all British troops out of semi-colonial countries. The semi-colonial countries have to receive massive compensation for the exploitation of British imperialism and the super-rich. The super-rich have to be expropriated as soon as possible! Last but not least the fight for an alternative to the imperialist European Union is important. Such an alternative should not be the same as practiced in Switzerland but instead a Britain which is part of the United Socialist States of Europe. Only through revolutionary uprisings, and the armed revolution of the workers and oppressed of Europe can lead to the United Socialist States of Europe. Britain is facing exciting times ahead.

10. Facing these exciting times is of such high and urgent importance that authentic revolutionary forces in Britain must build a united organization by their joint efforts! Such an organization has to be truly internationalist. It means that she has to fight consequently any kind of chauvinism – may it be pro-EU or pro-UK – and that such an organization has to combine revolutionary defeatism with the perspectives of the United Socialist States of Europe. It means that such an organization has to combine the fight against austerity and privatization with the demand for full equal rights for migrants and ethnic minorities and the demand for the opening of the borders for all migrants. It means that such an organization works as a part of an international Marxist organization instead of trying to exist as a national-isolated force. Such an organization has to be based on a Marxist program and the Leninist principles of party building. It means that such an organization is not orientating towards the middle class and the intellectuals but instead towards the broad layers of the working class and the oppressed. It means that such an organization intervenes as an avant-garde organization in class struggle and fights against reformists and centrists. It means that such an organization works as a united collective on the base of united program, strategy and tactic and not as an agglomerate of individuals. To all class-conscious workers, to all oppressed and revolutionaries in Britain: Let us turn the exciting times ahead into revolutionary struggle! It's high time to organize yourselves! Join the RCIT!

International Secretariat of the RCIT