

The British Road to Brexit

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Jeremy Corbyn's papacy of Labour's broad church has been successful in keeping together all the party's doctrinal strands and potentially schismatic sects writes Andy Stowe. MPs like Kate Hoey who give the impression of looking like they would be more at home in Ukip rub along with a selection of Marxist currents and all points of view in between. This is all the more surprising as Corbyn's most trusted cardinals are Andrew Murray and Seumas Milne, graduates from the seminary of British Stalinism, an order not renowned for its tolerance of dissent.

They were both in the Straight Left faction of the Communist Party (CP), an organisation which proudly says in its own official history that its famous British Road to Socialism programme "had been extensively discussed and agreed with Stalin". It says of the European Union's (EU) predecessor:

"In the 1975 referendum campaign, the CP fought hard as part of the broad alliance for a 'No' vote against Britain's continuing membership of the European Economic Community. The Communist position had been consistent since the 1957 Treaty of Rome: based on the free movement of capital, goods and labour, the Common Market was a 'bosses' club'."

Milne and Murray haven't changed their minds on that in forty-five years. That's fine. The EU is a bosses' club. What's different now is that the push for Brexit is coming from the right of British politics and has galvanised every racist in the country. The 2016 referendum result wasn't a rejection of a bosses' club, it was a rejection of freedom of movement within the EU. Milne and Murray are in the Labour Party now and they are very definitely in a minority on this issue. The most recent evidence for that is the report commissioned by Transport Salaried Staffs' Association which says:

"Labour would especially lose the support of people below the age of 35, which could make this issue comparable to the impact the tuition fees and involvement in the coalition had on Lib Dem support....

... "If there is an election in 2019, Labour will get a lower share of the vote in every seat in the country if it has a pro-Brexit policy than if it has an anti-Brexit position."

Corbyn knows this already and yet he is risking electoral defeat. His letter to Theresa May setting out the terms under which Labour would support a Brexit deal makes no reference to the party's conference vote calling for a new referendum. It doesn't even mention delaying the exit date until a deal which meets his conditions for a soft Brexit are negotiated.

This is a big victory for those of his advisors who want Brexit to happen because they think it might set Labour on a road to socialism in one country. And it's not just Milne and Murray. Len McCluskey of Unite is dead set against a new referendum and so is Karie Murphy, Corbyn's chief of staff who accompanied Corbyn and Milne to the recent meeting with Theresa May.

The only people this will give comfort to are those Tories who back May's plan to run down the clock to a hard Brexit and the DUP. It will not win over a single Brexit supporting voter and it will demoralise the hundreds of thousands of Labour members the party will need to win the next general election.

As we learned a couple of weeks ago during the immigration debate, the Corbyn leadership is responsive to pressure from its left. Anti-Brexit members need to be kicking up a fuss about this capitulation to the idea of socialism in a single country across social media and in their wards, GCs and CLPs. And if you haven't already done so get this resolution supporting a new referendum through your local party and affiliated unions.

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