

Decisions on the EU referendum, agreed at a national members' meeting, April 2016

rs21 and migrant solidarity

The following motion was passed with only one vote against:

We note:

- One of the key issues in the upcoming EU referendum will be the question of migration, by both EU citizens and/ or non-EU citizens into Europe. All of the main camps in this debate espouse varying degrees of xenophobia and racism.
- This anti-migrant sentiment has been a part of British political life for decades but has been ratcheted up to fever pitch in recent times, with the media and sections of the political class attempting to make it the dominant issue in British political life. This has led to UKIP receiving millions of votes, the daily demonization of and attacks against migrants in Britain and a small but worrying resurgence in ultra-violent fascist organisations.
- In the aftermath of the publication of photos of Aylan Kurdi, dead on a European beach, there was an outpouring of support for refugees around Europe, with hundreds of thousands marching in solidarity in Britain alone.
- The organisation 'London2Calais' was launched off the back of this outpouring of solidarity. It has successfully engaged huge numbers of people in building practical solidarity for refugees and migrants. It has a core support base of dozens, predominantly women and BAME people. London2Calais has not compromised in putting anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist critiques of the states and border regimes, which are responsible for the endless deaths of those fleeing for safety or a chance of a better life.
- Stand Up to Racism has also been launched as an umbrella anti-racist organisation. Whilst it is unclear what exactly its purpose or strategic goals are (its 'About' page has not been updated in over a year), it has the ability to organise large demonstrations and build meetings in support of anti-racist causes.

We resolve to:

- Mandate the full-timer to encourage members in London to support and get involved with the activities of London2Calais;
- Argue for a political and non-sectarian approach to anti-racism and migrant solidarity which includes working with Stand Up to Racism as much as possible;
- Continue to develop the anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist politics within London2Calais;
- Set up a caucus for rs21 members working within London2Calais;
- Argue that London2Calais will need to orientate towards prioritising anti-racist political work in light of the likely impact of the EU referendum on British politics and society.

Dissent in rs21

The following motion was passed with only one vote against:

- Decisions made at national meetings mostly impact rs21 publications including the website, not individual members
- rs21 membership is more about general principles than “party lines”
- It’s in the spirit of democracy for members to respect decisions of national meetings. People who express a minority view should make clear they are doing so.
- Different positions on the referendum will continue to be expressed on our website and publications. Priority will however be given to the position agreed here.

Voting in the EU referendum

Three motions were debated which supported migrants’ rights and opposed the EU but took different positions (Remain, Abstain, Leave) in relation to the referendum vote. Voting was taken in two rounds. An ‘Abstain’ motion was eliminated in the first round, in which a ‘Leave’ motion secured a narrow overall majority. In the second round the following ‘Leave’ motion was agreed by a majority of 61%.

Leave position

We believe that individuals and groups committed to the fundamental transformation of society should strongly oppose Britain’s continued membership of the EU. We should do this on the basis of our commitments to democracy, genuine egalitarianism, solidarity and anti-racist internationalism.

Against abstention: It is true that the narrative of this referendum is controlled by the reactionary forces of the establishment, and whatever the outcome it will be interpreted by them in a way which reinforces their narrative. The onus, then, is on us to intervene in spite of their rhetoric, and to set out principled, revolutionary arguments. Refusing to engage in this debate because it has, so far, been dominated by reactionary and racist positions does not, in any way, undermine the reactionaries and racists; rather it allows them to operate freely, at a time at which they should be fought for every inch of ground on the ideological and political terrain.

The EU undermines workers’ rights: The legal structures of the EU, like all legal structures, reflect the crystallisation of particular struggles and conflicts, and the key workers, migrant and consumer rights protected by the EU were won through the collective action of working people. These formal guarantees were conceded at a point in time when European capitalism could afford to commit to such rights, and European workers were strong enough to demand such rights. The current conjuncture in Europe, in contrast, is one in which capital is on the offensive, and is necessarily seeking to break down all barriers to the pursuit of profit. The last eight years of austerity have seen a dramatic acceleration in the undermining of workers’ rights and the living standards of working people. Such has been the assault on workers’ rights and living standards, that both the [Council of Europe](#) and the [European Parliament](#) have published reports documenting how the policies of the EU have led to the dramatic erosion of the entire corpus of rights. In short, given the trajectory of global capitalism, the EU is more likely to facilitate the undermining of fundamental rights, than act as a bulwark against their erosion.

Another Europe is possible: Since at least the Maastricht Treaty, the EU's constitutional arrangements have been revised to lock in the economic logic of neoliberalism and insulate the real decision making bodies with the EU from democratic control and accountability. The contemptuous treatment of the Greek people in 2015 is just the most brutal, recent example of tendencies latent within the EU. The EU is constitutionally undemocratic, and intentionally so. A Europe committed to democracy, solidarity, egalitarianism and genuine internationalism will only be brought about in spite of, not through, the EU.

Prospects for a fightback: Whatever the outcome of the referendum, the Tories and their ilk will continue to wage war on working people and migrants; the challenge is to be part of these struggles, and to trust in the capacity of people to fight to defend their interests, as the only real guarantee of the rights we have. The only alternative to the EU is the self-organisation and mobilisation of working people in Europe (in all of their variety). It is patently true that in Britain, and elsewhere around Europe, the working class and the political left are in bad shape. It is understandable that such a vista could induce a degree of melancholy, resignation and defeatism amongst socialists. But the Brexit debate is an invitation to break with this malaise. In much the same way as the referendum about Scottish independence in 2014 became a thoroughgoing debate about what sort of Scotland, and what sort of future people wanted, the Brexit debate can provide a space in which socialists advance principled, revolutionary arguments about the nature of capitalism and the EU and invite working people to become the active protagonists in the construction of a different future.

The balance of forces: We can turn away in dismay at the number of votes that went to UKIP in the last general election, or we can focus on the fact that a recent study shows that a majority of people in Britain have recently said they [prefer](#) socialism to capitalism. We can, as [Samir Amin](#) argues, approach the current conjuncture as opportunists, who understand politics as 'the art of benefiting from the balance of power, such as it is', or we approach it as principled socialists, for whom politics is 'the art of transforming the balance of power'. In a similar vein, [Marta Harnecker](#) argues that 'for revolutionaries politics is the art of making the impossible possible, not from some voluntarist urge to change things but because our efforts should be realistically focused on changing the current balance of power so that what appears to be impossible today becomes possible tomorrow'.

It may well be that this debate has its origins in Tory civil war politics, and that the mainstream debate will be dominated by racist, economistic and other misplaced narratives, but none of that absolves us of the responsibility to set out a principled socialist position on the debate. The thousands of dead men, women and children at the bottom of the Aegean and the despicable deal recently struck between the EU and Turkey are not an aberration, not a breach with mythical European values – instead they reflect Europe and the EU as it is. As such, we can and should break with the EU. If we do so there are no guarantees of what will come next: we do not get guarantees. But there are opportunities to imagine and fight for an entirely different Europe; that's our challenge and we must prove ourselves worthy of it.