

Brexit : an event or a non-event ?

What are the consequences for our international union actions ?

There are numerous connections between our actions and European issues : Job Acts in Europe, inequalities, inward-looking reactions and even far-right nationalism and acute racism in many countries, French political expressions, the future of Europe...

A not so surprising result

In spite of pressure and threats from European politicians, from the “official” media, from economists and intellectuals, from the British political leaders – Conservative and Labour, the vote to leave won the majority. European immigration or 'extra' European immigration have been at the heart of most debates with an often openly racist and xenophobic connotation. The British 'leave' is a far-right wing position. Part of the vote came from the refugees' crisis in Europe and from the manipulation done by the nationalist parties ; another part came from the fear of foreigners generated by the political class – directly by the far-right parties or indirectly by European policies which stigmatise and criminalise migrants and exiles. But this vote also shows that the working class rejects European social and economical policies and especially policies led by the United Kingdom. These ultra-liberal policies keep increasing work deregulation and dismantling public services. The Brexit background was different from the French and the Dutch referendums in 2005 or the Greek one in 2014, but they all reject a Europe lead by capitalism, finance and social injustice.

In the UK

The future of the UK is being questioned with the return of nationalism. How the social movement and the unions will react to alter social policies is an important issue in order to fight against the far-right parties that will want to take advantage of their so-called victory.

In the EU

The UK has always been ahead on work deregulation, on social and fiscal dumping, tax evasion and unfriendly environmental policies. The UK has always demanded limitations from Europe concerning social decisions or deregulations, on working time legislations for instance. At the moment the UK is at the heart of the TTIP negotiations and Brexit will probably make them worse. But let's not forget Margaret Thatcher who cut social rights and working rights in a very violent manner, causing flexibility and poverty for many workers... She didn't need European recommendations to do so!

It might also be useful to recall that the EU is neither “an empire within the empire”, nor a super power ; state leaders decide together European policies. Being mistaken on this point will only serve European extreme right propaganda.

So the results of this vote should help us define what conception of Europe we are defending and what tragedies have been caused and will be caused by European financial elites :

- Austerity policies must be put to an end together with generalised free trade and inequalities linked to the reinforcement of borders. They only cause inward-looking reactions and social despair. The first decision must be to stop the TTIP, CETA and TISA negotiations.
- The dumping issue -concerning social or tax laws- remains open and shows that the Leave or Remain decisions can't solve all the problems. The European governments will try to keep all the advantages linked to the dumping policies in the negotiations which are going to happen. The outcome of these negotiations will certainly not be in capitalists' disfavour. We will have to work together with federations and unions confronted with these issues.
- It is urgent to reinforce our links with the British Unions that fight against social dismantling policies and to work together on the campaigns and actions they organise. We must also manage to work together on social issues, such as migration in order to fight the so-called solutions proposed by the extreme-right parties.

- European issues are likely to lead to nationalist debates and to decisions which will be more openly neoliberal, which will be pro-austerity and antisocial and will reinforce repression and military force. So it is absolutely essential to expand all the union networks – such as the International or European Labour Network of Solidarity and Struggles and also the European networks in the medical or financial fields or the Altersummit. It is necessary to join our forces with all the trade unions that are ready to fight for a social Europe.

It is also necessary

- to carry on having a critical view on national government policies as well as on European institutions and to focus the debate on how capitalists' interests are dominating these policies.
- to promote another Europe, made of social solidarity and thus to construct a European and international fighting network.

European fighting convergence -especially with Belgian unions fighting against “their Job Act”, the Peeters law – is a main issue.