

Europe: the Stalinist roots of the “left-exit” myth

By Paul Hampton

The revolutionary left once had reputable politics towards Europe, an inheritance from Trotsky that was not finally dispensed with until the early 1970s. The story of how the British revolutionary left went from an independent working class stance to accommodation with chauvinism and Stalinist “socialist-in-one-country” deserves to be better known.

Throughout the twenty five years between the beginnings of European bourgeois union in 1950 and the UK referendum of 1975, there were umpteen vicissitudes across the left. The one constant was the outright opposition to European integration from the Stalinists, organised domestically in the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB). The specific crystallisation of oppositionism that swallowed most of the revolutionary left took hold in the summer of 1971. Almost all the “left” arguments de-

ployed today stem from these two sources.

The Schuman Plan for a European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) and the Plevin Plan for a European Defence Community (EDC) were launched in 1950. Although the EDC was rejected, steps towards bourgeois economic and political integration made progress. On 25 March 1957 the Treaty of Rome was signed by the governments of West Germany, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxemburg, creating the European Economic Community (EEC), known as the Common Market, forerunner of today’s EU. British governments in the 1950s stayed out of these developments, largely on the grounds of trade with the Commonwealth states that had previously been colonies and part of the British Empire.

On 10 August 1961, the Tory government applied to join the EEC. In a speech to Labour Party conference in October 1962, Labour leader Hugh Gaitskell claimed that

Britain’s participation in the EEC would mean “the end of Britain as an independent European state, the end of a thousand years of history”. Britain’s application was vetoed by French president Charles De Gaulle in January 1963. The Labour government (1964-70) headed by Harold Wilson applied for membership and was denied again by De Gaulle in November 1967. De Gaulle would resign the French presidency in April 1969.

When the Tories unexpected won the general election in June 1970, prime minister Edward Heath took up the issue of EEC membership once more. In June 1971 the Heath government published a white paper advocating membership. On 1 January 1973 the UK joined the EEC. To steer his course through labour movement objections, Wilson promised a referendum on EEC membership. When he became prime minister in October 1974, he agreed to hold the referendum, which took place on 6 June 1975. Just

over 67% of voters supported the Labour government’s campaign to stay in the EEC, despite opposition from most trade unions, the CPGB and most of the revolutionary left.

Under pressure from wider bourgeois politics, and from the Labour left, the Communist Party and forces in the unions, the revolutionary left flipped over to opposition to the EEC, mostly in the summer of 1971. Most would-be Marxists opposed entry in 1973 and campaigned to get out in 1975. They were criminally wrong, conceding ground to the nationalists and Stalinists – effectively cutting their own throats.

The EEC debate played a key role in the unravelling of the revolutionary left as a serious Marxist force in the British labour movement. Reviewing the arguments of the main protagonists from the earlier period will help to orientate the healthy elements of the revolutionary left after the referendum on UK membership of the EU.

How the Stalinists shaped the debate on Europe

The hostile attitude towards European unity on the ostensibly revolutionary left derived ultimately from the poisoned well of Stalinism.

Internationally, the USSR under Stalin embraced the nationalistic “socialism in one country” doctrine in the mid-1920s, as it sidelined the perspective of international socialist revolution and workers’ democracy. After the bureaucratic ruling class had established itself as the sole master of the surplus product by 1928 and expelled the Trotskyist opposition, Russian foreign policy dictated visceral opposition both to bourgeois efforts to unify Europe (whether by consent or by force) and hostility to pan-European labour movement unity.

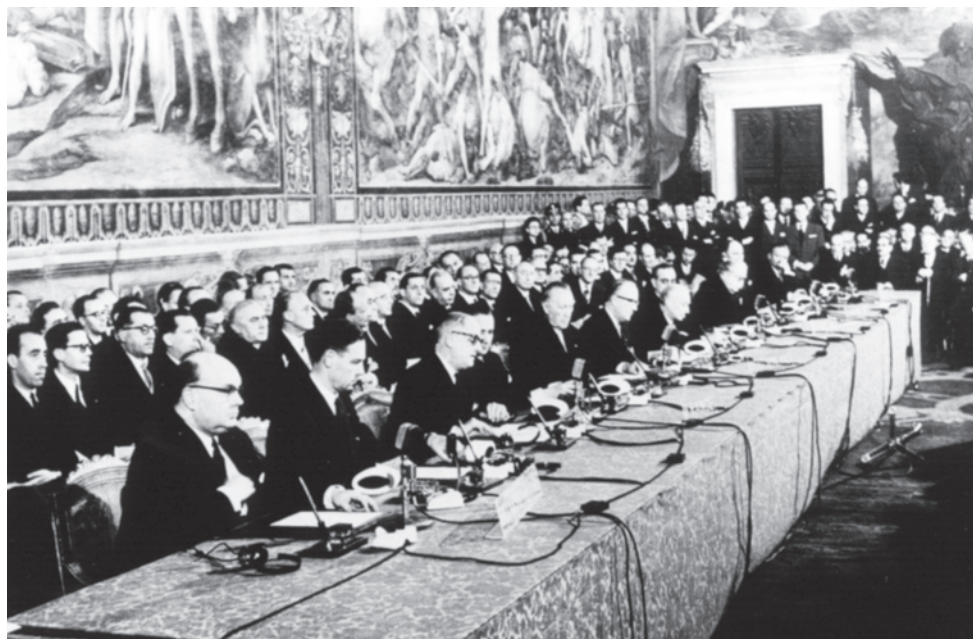
This was well summed up on the cusp of World War Two in April 1940, when the Stalinist Comintern issued a May Day manifesto. It stated: “Under the flag of ‘Federated Europe’ and ‘A new organisation of the world’, the imperialists are preparing to dismember big states and annex small countries, still further to intensify colonial oppression and to enslave the peoples of Europe.” (Jane Degras, *The Communist International 1919-1943, Volume III*).

Months earlier, the Stalinist functionary Georgi Dimitrov recorded noted in his private journal: “On 7 November 1939 Stalin said: The slogan of ‘the United States of Europe’ was mistaken. Lenin caught himself in time and struck that slogan” (*The Diary of Georgi Dimitrov, 1933-1949*).

This attitude persisted even as Russian foreign policy turned from the defeat of Nazi Germany towards the shape of post-war Europe. Moscow wanted to re-establish weak states so Russia would be the single dominating power on the continent. A memorandum by the Stalinist functionaries Maisky and Litvinov in January 1944 argued that “it is not in the interests of the USSR, at least in the first period after the war, to foster the creation of various kinds of federations — a Danubian, Balkan, Central-European, Scandinavian, etc.” (Vladislav Zubok, “The Soviet Union and European Integration from Stalin to Gorbachev”, *Journal of European Integration History*, 1996).

It was Stalin’s opposition to the US’s Marshall Plan from June 1947 that fully crystallised Russian hostility to European integration. The USSR set out to persecute and “purge” any trace of the all-European idea, calling it a “manifestation of bourgeois cosmopolitanism”, as well as to denounce West European integrationists as “lackeys of US colonialism”. Soviet Cold-War propaganda denounced West European integration as imperialistic, reactionary, doomed to failure, and a harbinger of the final crisis of capitalism (Wolfgang Mueller, “The Soviet Union and Early West European Integration, 1947-1957: From the Brussels Treaty to the ECSC and the EEC”, *Journal of European Integration History*, 2009).

Three common elements — “US control over Western Europe”, “remilitarisation of West Germany” and “preparation of a new war” — remained the leitmotifs of the Stalinist assessment of the early integration process. The birth of the Council of Europe in 1949 was greeted by Pravda as “an auxiliary tool of the aggressive North Atlantic Pact” [i.e. NATO] and its pan-European agenda regarded as “demagoguery”. The true aim of the Council of Europe was “camouflaging the imperialist colonisation of Western Europe by the United States and the destruction of national sovereignty among independent European states in order to implement their plans of global domination”.



Signing of the Treaty of Rome (1957)

The Schuman and Plevin plans (1950) were perceived by the Soviet Foreign ministry as ploys to legalise, “under the cloak of ‘European integration’, the creation of a US-controlled military force and arsenal in Europe”. In 1951, the planned coal and steel community was denounced as a “hyper-monopolistic association”, created by US monopolies in order to “revive the military industry of West Germany, to exploit the economies of the participating countries for carrying out their aggressive plans for a third World War, and to create an economic basis for the aggressive North Atlantic Bloc in Western Europe under American hegemony” (Mueller, 2009).

This attitude, laid down under Stalin’s tutelage, persisted after his death. The Russian assessment of the founding of the EEC in 1957 regarded the Treaty of Rome as a “temporary” alliance being used to temper the competition between capitalist states that had come under pressure as a consequence of the successes of socialism and the independence movements in the Third World. In view of “massive contradictions” between, on the one hand, “revisionist” West Germany and “protectionist” France, and, on the other, between the EEC, Britain, and the United States, the USSR government predicted the failure of the Economic Community.

The USSR juxtaposed the Comecon bloc of Stalinist states as the alternative to the EEC. *Pravda* (11 March 1957) denounced the Common Market as a “ploy of US leading circles for deepening the division of Europe and Germany and for subjecting Western Europe to the rule of West German monopolies and militarists”. On 13 March 1957 the CPSU Presidium approved a note to all EEC member states condemning the Rome Treaties as a “threat” to all-European cooperation and peace (Mueller, 2009).

The overarching aim of Russian policy towards West European integration was to hamper the process or obstruct it altogether, through propagandistic demonisation and diplomatic pressure. As well as the considerable apparatus of the Russian state itself, the Stalinists also had at their disposal large and often mass western European Communist parties able to articulate this hostility towards bourgeois political and economic integration. From the early 1950s these Communist parties pumped out propaganda with the tropes originating in Moscow. European integration was:

- Imperialist – designed to strengthen US

control over Western Europe

- Preparation for an aggressive war against the Soviet Union
- An instrument of capital
- Designed to curtail national sovereignty

Although under the impact of EEC membership, some leaders of the two largest Western European parties, the Partito Comunista Italiano (PCI) and Parti Communiste Français (PCF) began to soften their approach in the 1960s, these influences were barely discernible in Britain. The CPGB for its part put out a steady stream of propaganda opposing the EEC, every time the issue became prominent nationally.

The party published a series of pamphlets: *The Alternative to the Common Market* (1961) by Dave Bowman; *Say “No” to the Common Market* (1962) by Ted Ainley; *Common Market: The Truth* (1962); *The Common Market: Why Britain Should Not Join* (1969) by John Gollan; *Common Market: The Tory White Paper Exposed* (1971) by Ron Bellamy; *Common Market: For And Against* (1971); *The Common Market Fraud* (1975) by Gerry Pocock and *Out of the Common Market* (1975). Other organisations influenced by the CPGB, such as the Trade Unions against the Common Market, the British Peace Committee and the Labour Research Department, also published prolifically.

Ted Ainley’s pamphlet *Say “No” to the Common Market* (1962) sets out the Stalinist case in simple but well contrived terms. It is also of interest because it was published at the beginning of the UK government’s efforts to join, but at a time when many of the trade union militants had yet to come down on the side of chauvinism and the revolutionary left largely retained its internationalist position. He argued that “the people of Britain” should reject membership of the Common Market for the following reasons:

1. It would have a disastrous effect on our wage prospects and living standards by making British workers compete with lower paid continental workers both in the home and overseas markets.
2. It would undermine British independence. The British Government and Parliament would be bound by political and military decisions made by a European majority.
3. It would hit hard at Britain’s trade with its biggest and oldest markets in the Commonwealth.
4. British agriculture would have to adapt itself to Common Market methods...
5. The Common Market has refused to ac-

cept full employment as one of its objectives.

6. Common Market rules would hamper a British Government in dealing with the balance of payments crises to which the economy is particularly prone.

7. The British Government and Parliament would be compelled to accept the decisions of the Common Market bodies as to how our social services should be “harmonised” with those of the continent. (Ainley, 1962)

The first reason was explicitly chauvinist and hostile to migrant workers, while the second defended spurious British independence on nationalist grounds. The third championed post-Empire imperialism, while the remaining reasons repeat objections by the most backward bourgeois defenders of the British state. The whole narrative used the pronoun “our” to mean British people, not workers — either in Britain or across Europe. The chauvinism is most pronounced through its anti-Germanism, arguing that because “the Germany of Adenauer and Krupp” was at the centre of the Common Market, the scheme looked “very much like an attempt on the part of the German ruling class to achieve by subtlety what both the Kaiser and Hitler failed to achieve by their two world wars — German domination of Europe” (ibid 1962: 7).

However elsewhere in the text, Ainley spelt out the deeper reasons for the CPGB’s hostility, namely: the opposition of the USSR. The aim of the Common Market was “to bring about political unification of the member states”. This political union aimed to strengthen “the hold of the monopolists, to frustrate the advance of Socialism in Europe and to consolidate the military power of the so-called Western Alliance against the Socialist countries”.

The US government was interested in Britain joining the Common Market because it aimed to lead “a solid bloc of capitalist states throughout the world in its war on communism, to prevent the rise of socialism anywhere and provide an even more profitable field for the investment of American dollars”. To the CPGB, the Common Market was “the political counterpart of NATO”. The “socialism” the Stalinists were taking about was the USSR and its bloc. They recognised that it was not enough to say “No” to the Common Market; an alternative had to be offered. And Ainley spelt out that the alternative was “the socialist countries, the newly independent nations and the old Dominions”. In particular, the “socialist countries will, for many years to come, want the products of British industries, if the political barriers to trade are lifted, in exchange for their own products” (ibid, 1962).

Ainley also articulated an argument, slightly circular given the prominence of the CPGB in the unions, which would be used again and again when the crunch came in the early 1970s — namely the attitude of others on the left. He noted that “many prominent Labour men and women trade union leaders are strongly opposed to Britain’s entry into the Market; but the top right-wing leaders, though they continue to say they have not made up their minds, are clearly looking for an excuse to come out in favour and dragoon the Labour movement behind them”.

The CPGB set itself the task in 1962 that it would largely fulfil a decade later, for “every trade union” to “record its opposition to Britain’s entry into the Common Market”. They recognised that “the result of such action would be rejection of the Tory proposal by both the TUC and Labour Party conferences” (ibid, 1962).



Ernest Mandel

The revolutionary left before 1970

The attitude of the revolutionary left in Britain towards Europe before 1970 was almost unanimously internationalist, a legacy of Trotsky's consistent support for a United States of Europe. The revolutionary left began the post-war period mostly united within the Revolutionary Communist Party, formed in 1944. It was part of the orthodox Fourth International, led by Ernest Mandel and took much of its politics from that source.

By the early 1950s the RCP had split into three main constituents that would dominate for the next two generations. The Club, led by Gerry Healy, would become the Socialist Labour League (SLL) and later the Workers' Revolutionary Party (WRP); it would be the biggest force until the mid-70s, but shatter and collapse in 1985. A group that would become the Revolutionary Socialist League and later Militant, led by Ted Grant, was the forerunner of today's Socialist Party and Socialist Appeal. The Socialist Review group, later the International Socialists (IS) and after that the Socialist Workers' Party (SWP), was led by Tony Cliff. Whatever their differences over capitalism, Stalinism, imperialism, the Labour Party and other secondary matters, over Europe their stance was much the same and largely coherent. It was not until 1971 that they lurched towards chauvinism.

Much of the left in Britain was influenced by the politics of the Fourth International, as reconstituted after World War Two and led

by Ernest Mandel. Often writing under the pseudonym "Ernest Germain", Mandel formulated the dominant political line on Europe. During 1950 Mandel wrote a column in the American SWP paper *The Militant*, entitled 'European Notebook'. These articles were mostly straight reportage and were rather thin on analysis. Mandel noted that "authoritative spokesmen of the European capitalist class" had "started publishing articles expressing an equal distaste toward the USSR and the USA" ('European Capitalists and the American Empire', *The Militant*, 26 June 1950: 2). He rejected the prominent notion of "neutrality" as the "passive withdrawal from world politics" Instead he put forward the almost Third Camp formulation: "To this conservative idea of neutrality, based on the status quo and class collaboration, the Fourth International counterposes the revolutionary idea of working class politics independent from Wall Street and the Kremlin" ('The Demand for "Neutrality" in Europe', *The Militant*, 3 July 1950).

This rejection of both Washington and Moscow appeared to extend to the Western European working class movement. Mandel noted that European workers had "given the Stalinist peace campaign a much cooler response" ('The Stalinist "Peace" Campaign in Europe', *The Militant*, 10 July 1950). At the same time European Trotskyists had the task of "struggling against the deceit and hypocrisy of the Social Democratic pro-

American propaganda" ('The European Working Class and America', *The Militant*, 17 July 1950: 2).

The most specific article on early European integration was entitled, 'Our Alternative to the Schuman Plan' (*The Militant*, 24 July 1950). Mandel noted that in the wider European labour movement there had been "no real working class answer to the Schuman Plan, defending the common interests of the European workers against the conspiracy of the European industrialists". The Schuman Plan, he said, was "based on a 'cartel' of European industry under capitalist ownership and capitalist management". To this he counterposed, "the central slogan of all European Fourth Internationalists — the Socialist United States of Europe". This was the programme of "collective ownership and working class management of European industry".

Mandel's stance was adequate, if somewhat abstract. He did not oppose bourgeois European integration in principle, but criticised the form it took with the Schuman Plan. Mandel understood that both the major imperialist powers of the USA and the USSR had their own designs for Europe, but rather than embrace a bourgeois "third force" he looked to a united European working class, fighting around demands for public ownership and workers' control, to find a way out. This was a core position that would persist into the 1960s.

Mandel's most significant analysis of European integration up to that point, 'Crisis in the Common Market', was published in the American SWP's theoretical journal *International Socialist Review*, Spring 1963. He conceived of bourgeois economic integration as part of a plan by the European bourgeoisies to form their own bloc, opposed to both the USSR and the USA. Mandel argued that the US government had initially supported European integration through the Marshall Plan "for political and military purposes: to create a counter-weight to the power of the Soviet Union and the other workers' states on the European continent".

Responding to the creation of the EEC in 1957, "Washington's reply to the purely economic challenge to American imperialism posed by the Common Market consists in advocating the dilution, as quickly as possible, of the Common Market into an 'Atlantic Zone of free exchange', embracing the United States and Canada, in addition to Western Europe. Britain's application for entry into the Common Market, followed by Denmark, Norway, Portugal and perhaps Austria and Switzerland "would have been the first step in the realisation of this American plan" (Mandel 1963). Although in retrospect this claim looks dubious — although perhaps there is an insight into the current TTIP discussion — he was clear that the working class had no interest in supporting either camp.

Mandel wrote: "For revolutionary Marxists, this, conflict is a typical inter-imperialist competitive struggle in which the working class has no reason for supporting one side against the other. To the policies of both sides, they must counterpose the struggle for a Socialist United States of Europe, for a really unified Europe which could effectively surmount the antagonisms bred by capitalist competition; that could only be a Europe which has abolished both capitalist property and the bourgeois state..."

It would be pure suicide for the working class to solidarise itself, either with its own bourgeoisie or with that of the opposing camp. Its only effective reply can be to affirm its basic class solidarity: "Workers of all European countries unite against the Europe of the monopolies, whether it raises the slogans of the Europe of 'fatherlands,' the 'open' Europe, or the European 'community.'" This should be the line of action for the working

class movement of Europe." ('Crisis in the Common Market', 1963)

Mandel recognised that the European working class could not "limit itself to a strictly defensive posture before European big business" and that it should "counterpose its plans for a socialist Europe to the imperialist plans". However he soiled this stance by suggesting that "the Soviet Union and the other workers' states would be able to play a very positive role in this respect". He proposed that they "convoke a congress of all the unions and parties of Western Europe" and "could place at its disposal the experience, technical personnel and offices of their planning commissions, charge them with drafting the outline of a plan for the economic, social and cultural development of a Europe unified on a socialist basis". Puffing up the "brilliant perspectives of such a plan", he omitted the fact that such an arrangement under USSR control would have been the death of the European working class movement as an independent force. It was indicative of how the mistaken analysis of Stalinism would begin to infect the stance towards Europe.

In June 1965, Mandel's "United Secretariat of the Fourth International" held its 8th World Congress. The conference debated a resolution on 'The Evolution of Capitalism in Western Europe', later published in *International Socialist Review*, Spring 1966. The assessment was consistent with Mandel's 1963 position, suggesting that although European integration was unfinished and may collapse into protectionism, it could also lead to a "strengthened European executive and a European currency", which would "constitute a decisive stage in reaching the point of no return for the Common Market".

The Fourth International resolved to struggle "against the imperialist and capitalist fusion that is being effected in the present stage both inside and outside the Common Market" by agitating for "a united front of all the trade-union organisations within the Common Market without excluding anyone" and fighting for "the convocation of a big European Congress of Labour". As against a capitalist United States, which could be born in part of Europe, it is necessary to stress propaganda favouring a socialist United States of Europe. Significantly, although the resolution did call for "withdrawal from NATO and from all imperialist military pacts", it did not call for withdrawal from the EEC.

Mandel's last substantial contribution to the European integration debate was his book, *Europe versus America*, written in 1968 and published in English by New Left Books in 1970. While much of the book consisted of rehashed economic statistics on trade, the most interesting passages concern the impact of possible future integration on the fight for socialism. Although this is speculative, it is also revealing, suggesting an internationalist, permanent revolutionary perspective that is highly relevant to today's conditions.

Mandel argued that strategically, with the formation of the EEC and the stage it had reached — namely that it was not a super-state — there was "no reason why the working class should abandon the classic political goal it has sought for so long, the seizure of power nationally, for the chimerical seizure of power in all member states of the Community at once, or, even more utopian, for the 'socialisation' of Europe by the votes of a European parliament elected by universal suffrage". A successful socialist revolution in one member state "could not live cheek in jowl with a capitalist economy in the rest of the EEC". But equally "the conquest of power by the proletariat of one state would fan the flames of revolution in neighbouring states". Mandel speculated that "once the interpenetration of capital between the members of the Six leads to their actual economic integration, or to a European Community with more

member states, once the supranational institutions evolve an adequately powerful form of state power", then "the chances of the proletariat taking power at a national level will probably be insurmountably blocked" (Mandel, 1970).

In the circumstances of 1970, Mandel was clear about the orientation of the labour movement across Europe. He argued that "the reader should not deduce from all this that it is in the interests of the European working class to put a brake on the interpenetration of European capital on the grounds that the gradual disappearance of the possibility of political power being conquered by the working class on a national level". In the first place, "it would anyway be utopian to attempt to prevent economic changes which themselves correspond to a given development of the forces of production; the working class, after all, was never intended to prop up small-scale capitalism or to prevent capital concentration". In the second place, "the historical role of the labour movement in late capitalism and in highly industrialised countries can never consist in allowing itself to be reduced to the status of auxiliary to one or other interest group of the bourgeoisie – either in support of the international interpenetration of capital or to uphold the bourgeois forces clinging to the nation state". The role of the labour movement is "to place its own socialist aims on the agenda. The alternative to the interpenetration of European capital must be a united socialist Europe, not a return to bourgeois economic nationalism". In short, "the only successful defence of the working class confronted by growing internationalisation of capital is to resort to its own action and organisation" (Mandel, 1970).

This was the right starting point to orientate the workers' movement across Europe, not only in Britain. It had no truck with the nationalist chauvinism of the Stalinists and the reformists in the British labour movement. It did not turn the labour movement into the tail of one or other faction of the bourgeoisie. This was mostly independent working class politics in answer to the bourgeois camps.

Militant

The attitude taken by Militant was a pale reflection of Mandel.

Until 1965, the RSL led by Grant was a section of the USFI and on Europe its position was a bland version of the same politics. Ted Grant published a position piece, 'Common Market — No answer to the problems: Labour must press for United Socialist States of Europe', in *Militant*, No. 22, December 1966-January 1967.

Grant pointed out that when the EEC was raised by the Conservatives in the early 1960s to promote the interests of the giant monopolies, "Wilson and the other Labour leaders offered vehement opposition". The Labour leadership pointed out that it would "raise the cost of living enormously, crush the agricultural industry and lead to a lowering of the standards of living of the working class". In short, "they opposed it from a 'nationalist' and 'commonwealth' point of view".

Grant wrongly dismissed Britain's prospects of joining the EEC and speculated erroneously that the Common Market showed "signs of disintegrating at any severe economic difficulties". However he did grasp the essential stance for the British labour movement in the situation. He wrote: "for the working class neither entry nor non-entry would solve their problems or lead to an increased standard of living." The first task for the British workers "would be to achieve a socialist Britain and then launch an appeal to the workers of Europe and the world" ('Com-

mon Market — No answer to the problems...').

Six months later Grant returned to the issues. He condemned the arguments of the anti-marketisers in the labour movement, which he said "have had no more substance than those of the pro-marketisers themselves". They had "adopted a narrow nationalistic outlook, appealing against the loss of British 'sovereignty'". He also captured the essence of an independent approach when he wrote: "Neither entry nor non-entry can solve the problems of British capitalism. Neither nationalism nor pseudo-Europeanism is a solution in the interests of the working class" ('Common Market — impasse of British imperialism', *Militant*, No. 27, June 1967).

Grant correctly paraphrased Trotsky, arguing that the EEC represented "the groping attempts to expand beyond the frontiers of European and world trade are expressions of the outmoded character of the nation state and of private ownership of the means of producing wealth". However added his own peculiar reformist twist, arguing for taking over the top 380 monopolies through an 'Enabling Act' in the Westminster parliament with the mobilisation of the trade unions. This underplayed the likely resistance from the bourgeois state, whether on a national or international level.

Socialist Labour League

If Militant provided a pale shadow of Mandel's arguments, then the Socialist Labour League (SLL), for all its windy rhetoric, provided a mostly abstract, arid reprint.

The Healy organisation had split from the orthodox Fourth International, along with the American SWP and French OCI, in 1953. However it retained most of the premises of the Mandelite version, despite shrill denunciations of Mandel himself. The American SWP would reunite with Mandel's organisation in 1963 and the OCI depart the rump Fourth International in the late 1960s, leaving the SLL to its own brand of unthinking conformity.

Tom Kemp wrote a basic position piece, 'Socialism and the European Common Market', published in *The Newsletter*, 24 June 1961. He argued that it was "scarcely necessary for the labour movement to get involved in a detailed and necessarily inconclusive discussion about the pros and cons of the Common Market", which could not "inspire the rank and file or build its strength". Consistent socialists "should be unequivocally in favour of breaking down national barriers, not under the auspices of the trusts seeking to exploit labour power more methodically and play one section off against another more successfully, but by working for a workers' government which alone can do the job in a genuinely internationalist way". In short, "taking sides for or against the Tories joining the Common Market means arguing about just how Europe's workers should be exploited. Instead, the working class movement must unite around a programme for the socialist planning of European industry".

A similar line was taken by the SLL until at least 1967. For example Geoff Pilling, writing as Peter Jeffries in higher education student magazine *Marxist*, argued that capitalists all over Europe faced "the threat of a united and powerful working class". The European labour movement, in unity with the powerful British working class movement, was "the force which instils fear into the European bourgeoisie". For socialists the main task was "to turn to this force". He argued "We have nothing to gain from a futile debate about the merits or demerits of entry. Merits and advantages for whom? These are questions which the capitalist class can decide, as they

conceive of their best interests in their struggle against the working class" ('British Capital and the Common Market', *Marxist*, 5, 2, 1967: 26-27).

International Socialists (IS)

The other revolutionary left group influenced by Trotskyism during the 1960s was the International Socialists, led by Tony Cliff.

It would have its own debates on Europe, often openly in the pages of its magazine *International Socialism*. The majority held itself broadly within the same internationalist arguments as the rest of the Trotskyist left.

In 1961, an editorial entitled 'Britain and Europe' adopted a critical approach to the EEC, but one at pains to distance itself from opposition on the grounds of nationalism or reformism. In fact the magazine was cautiously optimistic about European integration. The editorial stated: "If, in the long run, Europeanisation hastens this process, as it surely will, cartel Europe will have laid, as surely, the basis for the United States of Socialist Europe. For revolutionary socialists in Britain there is no greater aim. We should be the first to clasp hands across La Manche". It added: "For us the move to Europe extends the scope of class struggle in which we are directly involved; it worsens its conditions for the present. But it makes ultimate victory more secure" ('Britain and Europe', *International Socialism*, No.6, Autumn 1961: 3).

The first visible sign of dissent came from John Fairhead in a subsequent issue of the magazine. He denounced the majority position as the manifestation of Kautsky's ultra-imperialism, which Lenin had polemicised against during World War One. He also argued that "if the struggle against the European Common Market is waged only by *Tribune* and the Communist Party within the working-class movement, the most backward chauvinist trends will receive encouragement". Instead, he argued for the chimera of an "internationalist" campaign against the EEC ('Polemic: The Common Market', *International Socialism*, No.7, Winter 1961).

The next issue responded with the right internationalist argument: to push through bourgeois economic and political integration by seeking to unite workers across borders. The editorial stated: "Only a sustained campaign carried out throughout the labour movement by socialists will increase consciousness sufficiently for the initiative to be taken in exposing 'Europeanist' capitalism, in establishing direct links with European workers for coordinated action and in building a Socialist Europe". In short, "what business is doing now, the leaders of the labour movement should be doing for the European working-class" ('Labour and the Common Market', *International Socialism*, No.8, Spring 1962). By the end of the year, the magazine published a letter of dissent from Peter Sedgwick arguing for opposition to Britain's entry to the Common Market and another from John Fairhead resigning over the matter ('Letter to Readers', *International Socialism*, No.11, Winter 1962). The response — rightly — was to open the journal to debate.

The best contribution was written by John Palmer, who argued that "In or out of the Common Market, the problems facing the British Labour movement are likely to be very much the same. Indeed the point is that the issues facing us are more similar to those facing European and American workers than at any time in the past 40 years". Instead of opposition he argued for a common programme of trade union demands across Europe ('The Common Market', *International Socialism*, No.12, Spring 1963).

Around the same time, IS member Alasdair MacIntyre published a short piece called 'Going into Europe', in the anti-communist

magazine *Encounter*. It was most recently reprinted in a collection of his articles edited by Blackledge and Davidson (2008). MacIntyre denounced the Labour Party stance as "the party of the English-speaking Empire", and that "Socialism in One Country" was "a sad slogan for a Gaitskell to inherit from a Stalin". He criticised "those socialists who are against Franco-German capitalism, but somehow prefer British capitalism" and said he detested "the anti-German chauvinism of the anti-Common Marketisers". Although the "last intention of the founders of the Common Market" was "to pave the way for a United Socialist States of Europe", MacIntyre said he was for taking them by the hand as a preliminary to taking them by the throat. ('Going into Europe', *Encounter* 22, 2, February 1963).

Ian Birchall wrote a detailed, critical assessment of the debate at the end of 1966. He noted that "in the period 1961-62, when the entry of Britain into the European Common Market was last on the agenda, this journal adopted a position of neither 'for' nor 'against', a position denounced by social democrats of both a chauvinist and "internationalist" bias. He argued that there was "still a long way to go before we can speak of a working-class strategy for Europe". The two main questions that had to be answered were: "first, what sort of demands can be made on a European scale and, second, how can workers' organisations achieve a greater degree of co-ordination and unity?" He observed that some European trade unions had argued for such an approach since the 1950s, raised the issue of migrant workers and criticised the approach of the Communist Parties. In the circumstances, he suggesting "a united Left in the present situation cannot be a revolutionary Left; but a non-revolutionary united left serves only to obscure the issues" ('The Common Market and the Working Class: An Introduction', *International Socialism*, No.27, Winter 1966-67).

When Wilson once more proposed British membership of the EEC, dissent within IS was once more visible. An editorial once again denounced on the one hand the "phoney internationalist chorus" of business and on the other the chauvinist, Stalinist "left", who presented "a common illusory British road to socialism, or, more accurately, the road to British state capitalism" (Editorial Board Majority, 'Europe', *International Socialism*, No.28, Spring 1967). The minority around Sedgwick argued that "opposition to the Common Market (which in this country implies opposition to British entry) remains the only possible stance for socialists" (Editorial Board Minority, 'A Note of Dissent', *International Socialism*, No.28, Spring 1967).

As late as the beginning of 1971, Ian Birchall could write that "the Common Market has probably caused more confusion in the British Labour movement than any other question. For the most part, the discussion now is little more advanced than it was ten years ago". The argument still centred around the wrong question — whether we should be for or against British entry. The real question, that of a revolutionary strategy, was still largely neglected. Reviewing a number of books including Mandel's *Europe versus America*, Birchall argued that "strategy cannot precede analysis" and "as yet we have no adequate analysis of what the Common Market is, of how the social, political and economic factors interact on each other".

He mocked Mandel for unfurling "the old banner of the 'United Socialist States of Europe'", observing that while British entry to the Common Market was not inevitable, "none of the alternatives have anything better to offer the working class" ('The Common Market', *International Socialism*, No.46, February-March 1971).

How the left fell in behind the Stalinists in 1971

The SLL had the doubtful honour of pioneering the stampede of the so-called revolutionary left towards the camp of the chauvinists. In an orgy of general high-pitched denunciation of Labour, in 1967, it denounced EEC entry by way of denouncing the Labour Government's attempt to join.

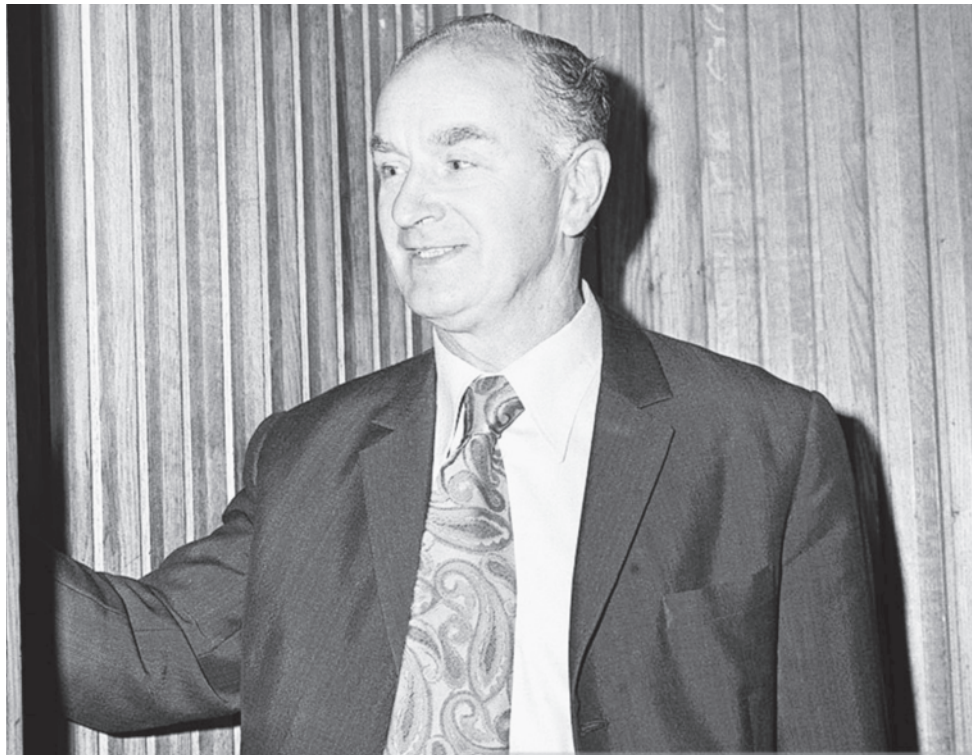
Yet at the beginning of 1971, most of the revolutionary left still had a rudimentary political economy of the EEC and basically adequate internationalist orientation. Despite the nuances and contradictions, this was a stance shared across the revolutionary left on the back of longstanding assessment and political theory. But soon this left came to abandon that position and accommodate to chauvinism.

Before 1971 almost the entire revolutionary left held an abstentionist position on the Common Market: in or out, it was about capitalist integration and not a matter for workers to choose a side to support. Although this left several key questions begging, it at least had the virtue of maintaining a consistent internationalist position, having no truck with chauvinism and championing cross-Europe worker solidarity in the face of bourgeois integration. Why in the space of a year did so much of the left flip over into a hardened opposition to the EEC, one that saw this left add its voice to the chorus of Labour lefts, Tory rightists and far-right fascists calling for Britain to remain outside of the Common Market?

The simple explanation is that the revolutionary collapsed into the "common sense" that began to dominate the labour movement and the wider public. Within the labour movement there was a growing nationalist-chauvinist response, fuelled by Stalinist socialism-in-one-country which began to grip many of the best industrial militants. In the political context of the time, where an unpopular Labour government promoted EEC membership just as it promoted efforts to curb the power of trade unions; followed by a Tory government elected in 1970 committed to the same agenda of Common Market membership and the Industrial Relations Act, the labour movement lurched towards opposition and the revolutionary left simply capitulated to the dominant mood around them.

The wider context of British politics helps to explain why the revolutionary left accommodated itself to this option. At the time the Treaty of Rome was signed, around two-thirds (64%) of the British population was in favour of efforts towards West European unity, with 12% opposed and almost a quarter (24%) undecided. At the time of the British government's first application to join, nearly half (47%) was in favour of West European unity, with the rest evenly split between those opposed and those undecided. Gallup polls asking specifically about EEC membership throughout 1965, 1966 and the early part of 1967 found a clear majority (ranging from 43% to 71%) in favour of entry. However, in the late 1960s, public support began to decline and by November 1970 it stood at 16%, with 66% against (Andy Mullen, *The British Left's 'Great Debate' on Europe*, 2005).

When the Tories unexpectedly got back into government after the general election on 18 June 1970, they immediately set about continuing the Wilson government's efforts. The Tory manifesto for that election was more cautious about Europe than Labour's, committing solely "to negotiate, no more, no less". In May 1971 Heath met with the French



A shift in the unions — towards hostility to the EEC — was key. The election of former Communist Party member Hugh Scanlon as President of the engineers' union, AUEW, was part of that shift.

President Pompidou, who signalled that the veto would be lifted and that a third application would be successful. But Heath had a bigger problem, to win a parliamentary majority. Although the Tories had a majority of 30 MPs, some fifteen led by Enoch Powell would vote against Europe whatever the circumstances. With only six Liberals, Heath would need the support of the Labour Party.

But Labour was also divided over Europe. After fleeting opposition to entry in 1961, Labour had switched to conditional support in 1962, allowing Wilson to seek entry in government. However within the labour movement, alongside the disappointment with the Labour government and with its unexpected defeat in 1970, the tide was turning against entry.

In January 1971, Labour MP John Silkin put down an early day motion on behalf of the soft-left *Tribune* newspaper, stating that the Tories' entry terms were not in the national interest. This motion obtained the support of 103 Labour MPs (Mullen 2005). In May 1971, James Callaghan, pitching for the leadership of the Labour Party, made a speech in Manchester attacking the Tories' approach to Europe. He said it would mean a complete rupture of British identity and that monetary union would lead to unemployment. He also responded to Pompidou's comment that French was the language of Europe (not English), by stating: "Non, merci beaucoup". Callaghan caught the mood: in July 1971 Labour's special conference debated entry, with opinion mostly against. In August the Labour NEC pushed for opposition to the Tory terms of entry and the October 1971 Labour conference voted for opposition to Tory plans.

If the mood among Labour MPs was plainly changing, then it was in the unions that the most significant shift was occurring. In the late 1940s and early 50s, the TUC Congress supported demands for a united Europe, backing both the Schuman plan and the EDC. After the first application to join the EEC in 1962, its position was "wait and see". However in 1971 Congress voted for opposition to Britain's entry to the Common Market

on Conservative terms, in 1972 for opposition to entry in principle and in 1973 opposition to membership plus support for a boycott of EU institutions (Mullen, 2005).

The TGWU was Britain's biggest union in 1971 with around two million members. In 1961 its biennial delegate conference voted to oppose the Treaty of Rome. During the 1960s it was opposed to Britain's entry without safeguards, a position it moved from 1967 within the Labour Party and the TUC. The election of Jack Jones as general secretary in 1969 hardened this position of opposition. The TGWU unsuccessfully promoted its policy at the 1970 Labour Conference, one of the closest votes in Labour Party history. Its 1971 biennial delegate conference carried a motion declaring that the Tories' entry terms were economically and politically damaging.

The AUEW engineers' union was Britain's second biggest union, around one million members in 1970. Until 1968, the union supported Labour's applications for entry. The election of Hugh Scanlon as President saw the union become more sceptical towards the EEC. At the 1970 Labour Conference, the AUEW voted to support the TGWU-sponsored resolution that was opposed to entry. Similarly, the NUM, another of the largest unions with around half a million members, voted at its 1971 conference for the withdrawal of Britain's application on the basis that it posed a threat to living standards and national sovereignty (Mullen, 2005).

A key catalyst for transmitting opposition to the EU through the major unions were the militants and union bureaucrats associated with the Communist Party. Around the time of Britain's first application for membership, the CPGB had 34,000 members and 265 workplace branches. It organised a cross-union rank and file organisation, the Liaison Committee for the Defence of the Trade Unions, which in 1969 could organise a conference of 1,700 delegates from many of the most militant workplaces across the UK. It could get over 100 members as delegates to the annual TUC Congress. It was represented by half a dozen members and as many sympathisers on the executive of the TGWU, with

substantial representation at the highest levels of the AUEW and NUM, with members among prominent general secretaries such as Ken Gill (John McLroy, *Notes on the Communist Party and Industrial Politics*, 1999).

The shift of the unions towards opposition to British entry — propelled by the trade union bureaucracy and backed by the CPGB — was the backdrop against which the revolutionary left's lurch in the summer of 1971 took place.

The revolutionary left on the cusp of the 1970s was significantly larger than it had been since the mid-1920s, when the CPGB was a real revolutionary force with around 10,000 members. In 1964 the SLL had an estimated 500 members, IS around 200 members and Militant about 40 members. After 1968 all groups grew, and so by the time of these Common Market debates the SLL had around 2,000, IS a similar number, the IMG around 400 and Militant maybe 250 members (John McLroy, *'Always Outnumbered, Always Outgunned': the Trotskyists and the Trade Unions*, 1999).

The lurch in 1971 was almost simultaneous across the biggest groups on the revolutionary left. The SLL had already made its switch earlier, but the IMG, Militant and IS would follow suit rapidly by the end of 1971. They fell in behind the reformist and Stalinist left, who espoused narrow British nationalism. Most of the revolutionary left bent under its pressure and the fear of isolation from the workers influenced by the nationalist left. They used slogans like "the Socialist United States of Europe" as a deodorant to cover the nationalist smell. This would carry on right through the referendum in 1975 and remained frozen comatose in most cases to this day.

Socialist Labour League

The SLL pioneered the left's shift to opposing EEC entry some years before the rest, denouncing the Labour government's attempt to join the Common Market from 1967.

In the June 1970 general election, it made "No to the European Common Market! For the Socialist United States of Europe!" one of its key slogans. Other literature argued that not to vote Labour was "to betray not only the British workers but the European workers and the entire struggle against the Common Market and for the Socialist United States of Europe" (*Fourth International*, 1970-71). This arid mangling of the issues reflected the growing political insanity of the SLL, which would fully flower as it became the WRP in 1973.

The SLL claimed that the European Common Market was "a counter-revolutionary coalition aimed at the working class and intended to create conditions in which European capitalism can find a basis for survival in conflict with the United States and Japan". Revolutionary socialists should oppose "the sinister 'new order' represented by the European Common Market, which constitutes the main counter-revolutionary strategy of European capital against the working class, aiming to destroy its conquests" ('Manifesto from the 4th Congress of the ICFI, *Fourth International*, Summer 1972).

The SLL dressed its apocalyptic scenario-mongering in the perspective of the United Socialist States of Europe. In 1973, it would reprint Lenin's conjunctural article from 1915 and a Trotsky article from 1929, claiming that "any 'unity' proposed by the capitalist governments would be a fraud, a desperate act by the weakest capitalist systems of Europe

to protect themselves from the rigours of American competition and an alliance of the big monopolies against the working class".

In chauvinist anti-German terms, they claimed "such a 'unity' came to pass with the Third Reich. Now the capitalist nations of Europe are embarked on yet another attempt to find a concorde" (*Fourth International*, Spring 1973). It would continue to fantasise about Common Market plans for dictatorship into the 1975 referendum, as it became more and more out of touch with reality.

Militant

The Militant made the most rapid public conversion to the anti-EEC campaign.

Militant supporter Ray Apps (Brighton Kemptown) spoke at the Labour Party's Special Conference on the Common Market on 17 July 1971, calling for the rejection of the EEC and in favour of a United Socialist States of Europe. It was also Militant supporter Don Hughes (Liverpool Walton) who moved a resolution calling for a Socialist United States of Europe, which was lost on a card vote, at Labour Party conference, 4 October 1971.

Their arguments were derived from a Militant special pamphlet by Ted Grant, 'Socialist answer to the EEC', first published in 1971 and reprinted in 1975. The pamphlet is remarkable because the political economy is scarcely any different from the arguments Grant made in the 1960s, when supporting an abstentionist position. The Common Market, he said, was "a glorified customs union", although the formation of the EEC was "intended to be a political, diplomatic and economic counterweight to the crushing preponderance in all these fields of American imperialism". The British ruling class's support for entry was explained by the changing pattern of trade, away from the Commonwealth and towards Europe.

Grant argued that the attitude towards the EEC of the Labour movement "must be governed by the same class principles as their attitude towards all the so-called 'international' institutions. Nature of EEC is the issue—not the terms of entry". But he deduced from this a third camp conclusion: "As against the blind alley of negative pro or anti-Marketism, there must be placed the class internationalism of the working class. The workers of Britain have interests in common with the workers of the Common Market and of all countries. Their interests are opposed to the capitalist class of all countries including Britain."

The only substantial reason offered by Grant against entry was tailism: get behind the Labour and trade union 'left' against the right wing. He wrote that it was "significant" that "the overwhelming majority of the supporter of entry in the Parliamentary Labour Party and the unions belong to the right wing". By contrast, "the attitude of the left wing of the movement is more in tune with the deep felt hatred and misgivings of the workers towards the Tory government". The active rank and file of the Labour and trade union movement especially felt "a natural class mistrust of the government of big business". This rationalisation, jumping on the bandwagon behind the rest of the 'left', was a miserable capitulation to the dominant, nationalist and reformist consciousness of the British labour movement at the time.

International Marxist Group

The IMG made the most dramatic shift. This was the group of the closest supporters in Britain of Ernest Mandel; it grew to some size in the 1970s, before splitting into three fragments (all much diminished since then) in 1985.

In November 1970, some of its members had attended a "Conference for a Red Eu-

rope", organised by the Fourth International in Brussels. Just weeks before it began to change its position, its members had attended a demonstration organised in Paris by the Fourth International on 15/16 May 1971 to commemorate the one hundredth anniversary of the Paris Commune. Reports from this mobilisation had no hint of the change to come.

The volte-face was announced on the cover of the IMG's paper *Red Mole*, 1 June 1971, under the heading 'The Common Market: Capitalist Solution to Capitalist Problem: Forward to a Red Europe' and by an article inside by Ben Joseph, 'British Capitalism and Europe'. Joseph made four key arguments, somewhat elliptically and with a fair amount of hedging his bets, as to why the revolutionary left should oppose Britain's entry to the EEC, which he said was "radically opposed to the immediate material and the class interests of the labour movement".

First, Joseph argued that entry was in the urgent interests of the British ruling class: "The British ruling class is in a hurry: as far as it is concerned entry in the Common Market is a make or break business." In grandiose terms he stated that "the specific features of the present stage of inter-imperialist competition leave British capital no choice but to seek a solution in the EEC if it hopes to remain as an independent competitor in world capitalism".

Second, Joseph stated that "the EEC is a capitalist solution to capitalist problems". It was "a response to the intensification of the concentration and centralisation of capital under the rapid capitalist expansion since 1945, and the increased level of capitalist penetration of US capital in Europe". These were abstract truisms were not sufficient to determine the tactical line on British entry.

The most crucial argument received only one line in Joseph's article, and a negative one at that. He stated that the alignment within the labour movement put most of the right-wing Labour politicians in favour: "The pro-Common Market MPs include the most powerful right wing members of the shadow cabinet led by Jenkins, Crosland and Healey." The implication – for this was not spelt out – was that the rest of the left were against and therefore the role of revolutionaries was to go with them. This would become a familiar trope.

Joseph warned of the dangers of nationalistic flagwaving with its talk of the interests of the country, and of "economism" i.e. making opposition solely about the cost of living. However he then appeared to define the role of the revolutionaries as entering the nationalist movement in order to compete with the nationalists for working class support and to divert the anger into progressive channels.

He wrote: "If the only alternative posed against the EEC is the purely nationalist solution offered by the labour left national prejudices could be reinforced rather than weakened. A struggle to democratise the organised labour movement in the spirit of socialist internationalism must in the end be the answer to equipping the working class to combat the supernatural corporations."

Exactly how a small group of revolutionaries could affect such a transformation was never spelt out, largely because such an operation was impossible and without precedent.

Joseph's first article is notable for its equivocation. Having nudged towards opposition he drew back almost immediately, stating that "we neither support the bankrupt petty bourgeois who fear entry – that would be a utopian protest against the nature of capital itself – nor do we back the big bourgeoisie in the entry attempts". The job of revolutionaries was to fight "to raise the consciousness of the working class by advancing positions

based on its independent interests". He went on to outline a range of laudable practical proposals for building international working class cooperation, including an "international congress of workers' delegates" to work out a strategy. Of course the revolutionaries would still have to attend such a gathering with a line to argue. And this was the problem: Joseph had made the breach – and worse was to follow.

The IMG returned to the issue in the aftermath of Labour's special conference in July 1971. *The Red Mole* (August 1971) contained an editorial, 'Labour and the Common Market' and a further article by Ben Joseph, 'Labour and the Common Market'. It also contained an article by Ernest Mandel, 'Britain Enters the Common Market' that barely registered as opposition to British entry. The editorial warned against chauvinism and the "capitalist internationalism" of the Labour right-wing. However its key message was to welcome the ferment of discussion on entry to the Common Market among workers. The IMG argued that revolutionaries could "insert" two arguments into these discussions: "for working class unity against capitalist unity; and for the strategy of a red Europe against the capitalist EEC".

This was a mealy-mouthed way of reiterating the general and unassailable truth that the EEC like every other dominant institution on modern society was capitalist, which could in itself could not determine the line to take on British entry. More perniciously, it implied that in the face of a strong capitalist class push for entry, the only stance for working class "unity" had to be opposition. Of course this would be unity of kind, but a unity of British workers against other European workers — in other words around dreadful politics and for a reactionary cause.

Joseph's article was another master class in the art of political confusion. He denounced the Labour Party conference as a "fiasco" and its outcome (a strong feeling of opposition to British entry, but no vote on it) was "far from a being a victory for the 'anti-Common Market' forces", but "a defeat for the working class". It was undoubtedly a defeat of the working class in both Britain and across Europe, for it signalled that wide sections of the labour movement would oppose entry on Tory terms and many on principle in the name of little-Englander chauvinism.

But Joseph gave succour to these arguments. The EEC was about "building a West European superpower both to match the challenge of US and Japanese imperialism on the one hand, and on the other to present a united capitalist front to the workers' states of Eastern Europe". From the point of view of European capitalists British entry would strengthen this project. Domestically, "entry into the EEC emerges as the centrepiece of Tory strategy". The conclusion about opposition to British entry was left hanging. It was assumed, with qualified support, but not explicitly and convincingly stated.

There was little further coverage in the *Red Mole* in the following period, as first the Labour NEC, then the TUC and finally the Labour conference voted for opposition to entry. Soon after Heath would garner a majority for entry in the House of Commons with significant Labour support. For a year the IMG barely spoke of the issue in its paper, with entry more or less a fait accompli.

A front page article entitled 'Labour, Europe and the Class Struggle', (*Red Mole*, 2 October 1972) lamented that throughout the previous year "the main political preoccupation of the Labour left was the reactionary and chauvinist campaign against British entry to the Common Market". Instead of seeking ways to develop an autonomous political mobilisation of the working class, "much energy and rhetoric was expended on

rallying to the defence of the sovereignty of the British bourgeois state". Now Britain's entry was more or less an accomplished fact, "the campaign to take Britain out of the EEC looks as if it will continue along the same lines to distract and divert the Labour left and the Communist Party from the real issues of the class struggle. Such a campaign would be deeply reactionary – reactionary in the most literal sense of the term. A return to capitalism in one country has no advantages for the working class. The real alternative to capitalist unity in the EEC is the struggle for a Red Europe". It concluded that if entry weakened the traditional political instruments of class rule then "this will be an unmitigated advantage in the task of creating an independent working class politics – independent, that is to say, of bourgeois politics, above all of bourgeois politics in their parliamentarist and chauvinist guise".

This third campist stance was reinforced by an article by Andrew Jenkins, 'Labour Party in Perspective', in the next issue of the paper (18 October 1972). It denounced Gaitskell a decade earlier for playing "the lowest common denominator of Labourism – nationalism". The 'populist' ideology and patriotic ranting of many of the Labour leaders such as Foot, Jay and Shore brought them close to Enoch Powell. Jenkins argued that while the central debate was clearly whether or not to withdraw from the EEC, "it was equally clear that this is not the central issue for the working class". Socialists "must be opposed to the capitalist Common Market, but this can only be answered by a socialist Europe and not by the twilight fantasies of chauvinism".

The IMG appears to have been stung by arguments on the left from those such as Workers' Fight (a forerunner of the AWL) for an abstentionist position, and from Marxist intellectuals such as Tom Nairn who favoured British entry as an antidote to chauvinism. Quintin Hoare reviewed Nairn's essay, 'The Left against Europe', published in *New Left Review* in September-October 1972 (and later as a book). In *Red Mole*, (11 December 1972), Hoare accepts Nairn's critique of chauvinism but denounces his support for British entry to the EEC as a reversion to the determinism of Second International Marxism. This was a poor response. It was a virtue of the Marxism of pre-1914 that it sought understand the tendencies of capitalism and how these improved the terrain for the fight for socialism. Where the SPD and other erred was to collapse behind one or other ruling bourgeois faction. The revolutionary left committed a comparable error by opposing entry, implicitly backing the most reactionary sections of the British bourgeoisie against its more far-sighted sections.

International Socialists

The most theatrical if belated volte-face over the EEC was the lurch taken by the International Socialists (IS).

It voted overwhelmingly at its 1970 conference against a proposal to oppose Common Market entry. At Easter 1971 a poorly-worded motion putting the same position was again overwhelmingly carried. By June 1971, IS leaders began to adapt to the dominant mood among the vocal militants in the labour movement hostile to the Common Market. Tony Cliff and Chris Harman wrote *Theses on the Common Market* to sway the IS National Committee to reverse the Easter conference decision.

In a strict reading, the Theses did not challenge the abstentionist position in principle, but only made a tactical proposal to vote with the left in some circumstances. Cliff and Harman wrote: "Our aim in union conferences and the like should be... making clear both our opposition to the Common Market, and our separation from the confused chauvinism

of the Tribunites, CP etc. However, if we are defeated on such a stand, we should then vote with the Tribune-Stalinists in opposition to entry." A substantial minority of the National Committee opposed the Theses, but they were accepted.

The slide towards plain-and-simple anti-EECism began almost immediately. Duncan Hallas, the IS national secretary began making propaganda in *Socialist Worker* (229) against the group's traditional abstentionist position, caricaturing it as remaining neutral in the class struggle. He argued for "No to the Common Market" on the grounds that it would be a defeat for the Tories, the party of big business. The position was challenged by Workers' Fight, (the Trotskyist tendency within IS): Sean Matgamna and Phil Semp published a document, *IS and the Common Market* (24 July 1971), which set out the critique in depth (*Permanent Revolution* No.3, 1975).

Chris Harman provided the detailed rationalisation in a long article, 'The Common

Market', *International Socialism* (Autumn 1971). He offered three reasons for opposition:

"1. Entry is being used, alongside other measures, to hit at working class living standards and conditions... 2. Entry is aimed to rationalise and strengthen capitalism. It is an attempt to solve certain of capitalism's problems by capitalist methods... 3. The rationalisation of capitalism [is] no longer progressive in any sense, it also speeds up the development of intrinsically destructive forces..."

Politically, this was exceptionally weak. In or out of the EEC, working class living standards were under attack. Capitalist rationalisation had gone on since the dawn of capitalism, but revolutionaries had not rejected technological change, or defended small business against capitalist concentration. A further claim that the EEC was "really" about a military alliance was tenuous at best.

In fact Harman fell back on the negative ar-

gument. He wrote: "The defeat of the Tory government, in the present context of growing working class opposition to its policies, would give a new confidence and militancy to workers". He added that "revolutionaries in the labour movement have to make it absolutely clear that they do not abstain on such a question. We are for the defeat of the Tories..."

Allied to the negative "defeat the Tories" was the prelude to the real justification: adaptation to the milieu. Harman argued that "those trade unionists who oppose government policies on the Industrial Relations Bill, productivity deals, etc., also tend to be opposed to the Market". Underlying this alignment was that "many rank-and-file militants instinctively distrust the government's entry policy. They feel that it will be used to weaken their position".

Opposition also involved traditional IS loyalists. Nagliatti, Foot, Higgins, Pritchard, Edwards, and Carlsson. all prominent IS leaders, wrote a document, 'The Common

Market and the IS Group'. Loyalist Ian Birchall challenged Harman's position in a "Rejoinder" published in the same issue of *International Socialism*. He restated IS's traditional position, unpicking Harman's rationalisation. Birchall identified the real reason, responding acridly: "We have to relate to these forms of distorted class consciousness; we certainly do not adapt to them."

Within IS, the "Trotskyist Tendency" (Workers' Fight, forerunner of the AWL) challenged the leadership, demanding a special conference. This required support from one-fifth of the IS branches to get a recall conference — 23 branches. Although the minority got sufficient support, there was still no conference. The IS national committee put an arbitrary deadline beyond which branches could not declare for the recall conference.

The IS executive committee admitted to 22 branches, but denied receiving notification for the final one. Instead, the Trotskyist Tendency was expelled ("defused") in December 1971.

1975 and all that

The revolutionary left grew significantly between its volte-face over the Common Market in 1971, Britain's accession to the EEC on 1 January 1972, and the Labour government's referendum on membership on 6 June 1975.

However this growth was not accompanied by greater political clarity, but rather characterised by chasing after legitimacy on the industrial front. This accommodation was disastrous for the internationalist consciousness among working class militants in Britain and ultimately for the fate of the revolutionary left itself.

International Marxist Group

The IMG had leapt early though tentatively in 1971, only to move back toward abstentionism in 1972 when Britain's entry was a fait accompli.

Its self-doubt did not last. When the EEC referendum was announced at the beginning of 1975, the IMG's paper *Red Weekly* devoted itself to opposing entry. The front-page article ("No" to the Capitalists' Common Market', 30 January 1975) stated that staying in the Common Market was "a life-and-death question for Britain's capitalists" and for that reason "the working class should be opposed to the Common Market". The EEC was "a capitalist institution, designed to strengthen the power of the ruling classes of the different countries within it". The opposition was unequivocal: "No to the capitalists' Common Market — on any terms." The article accepted that British capitalism would be "worse off" out of the EEC. However the point was "there is no solution to the problems of the working class under capitalism".

A double-page article in the same issue by Mick Gosling and Steve Kennedy, 'A Most Uncommon Market' (30 January 1975) boiled the reason for advocating a Britain out position in the forthcoming referendum to a curious sort of lesser evilism: "anything which weakens it [the Common Market] tilts the relation of class forces in favour of the working class on both an international and national level". They promised that in any campaign against the EEC that involved common activity with the Labour left and CP, they would "struggle against all such nationalist and chauvinist positions".

Gosling and Kennedy explained why the IMG could not support an abstentionist position. Firstly, they argued that "the EEC is not simply a weapon of European capitalists against their American counterparts; it is above all an institution of imperialism on a

world scale". Why this meant outright opposition to the EEC was never articulated. The most important objection was that "the fight for a United Socialist States of Europe in the abstract leaves any campaign against the Common Market in the hands of the chauvinists". In an explicit re-run of the point made in 1971, the IMG argued that "the job of revolutionaries is to intervene to transform the actual struggle against British membership into a fight against the EEC itself, and in this way lay the basis for a real campaign for a United Socialist States of Europe". This was fantasy: the United Socialist States of Europe was not on the referendum ballot paper, nor was it explained how a "No" vote might galvanise the struggle for it among British workers, never mind the wider force of workers across Europe.

Gosling and Kennedy dismissed concerns about chauvinism, claiming that "the fact that the extreme right has much to gain from a campaign against British membership of the EEC is no reason for revolutionaries to abstain on the issue". The rest of the piece was pure puff about building a united front of workers' organisations against the EEC, calling a Congress of European Labour to decide an alternative to the Common Market and, with an added spice of poison, taking up the call by *Tribune* "for increased trade with COMECON (the 'Soviet bloc' trading organisation)".

These arguments were repeated in the months leading to the vote in June 1975. James Duckworth argued in 'How not to Fight the EEC', (*Red Weekly*, 30 January 1975) that "the collapse of the Common Market would considerably weaken world imperialism, and it is on this basis alone that socialists campaign for Britain's withdrawal".

A rather tragic intervention came from Ernest Mandel, whose political economy had largely spoken against opposition to the EEC. In an article 'Against the Europe of the Bosses! Towards a Socialist Europe!' (*Red Weekly* No.102, 22 May 1975: 6), he repeated the general points about capitalist concentration, the trend towards international interpenetration of capital on a European scale and inter-imperialist rivalry. But instead of drawing from these assessments the logic of an abstentionist or "Yes" vote, Mandel toed the line with bandwagonist and tailist arguments.

Mandel argued that the basic question was "not 'what are the long term economic trends of development of capitalism if it survives', but 'what are the trends of the class struggle

today in Britain and in Europe and how, by basing ourselves on these trends of the class struggle, can we intervene in the Common Market debate and referendum in such a way as to help and further struggles to overthrow capitalism". In a classic case of adapting to the milieu, he argued "all the big organisations of the employing class in Britain and Europe ask you to vote 'Yes' in this referendum... [and] practically without exception practically all the militant sectors of the British working class are against Britain staying inside the Common Market, and express in however confused and wrong a way a class opposition to this capitalist outfit". He added that if "the 'No' were to win, it would be a political disaster for the bourgeoisie".

Much of the reporting in *Red Weekly* exposed the reactionary nature of the "Get Britain Out Campaign". *Red Weekly* reported that at Folkstone, Clive Jenkins of ASTMS union shared a platform with Tory racist Enoch Powell. At Bristol, the speakers included both Tribunit MP Ron Thomas and far right Monday Club Tory MP Richard Body. As for the audiences, "they have generally consisted of Communist Party members, Tory backwoodsmen, National Front supporters, and the odd, rather bewildered trade unionist" ('Croydon Co-op members fight for socialist campaign', 20 February 1975).

A photo caption the following month stated that "rank-and-file pressure may have forced Broad Left member of the AUEW executive Bob Wright to back down from appearing on the same platform with Enoch Powell, but that did not stop him from appearing alongside such enemies of the working class movement as businessman James Towler and Monday Club MP Richard Body at a Get Britain Out Campaign (GBOC) rally in Manchester last Sunday" (*Red Weekly*, 6 March 1975).

Andrew Jenkins explained that the joint chair of the Get Britain Out Campaign was Richard Body, while a full time worker for this campaign was Peter Clarke, previously personal secretary to Powell. The vice-chair of the GBOC was Sir Ian MacTaggart, a member of the rightist Society for Individual Freedom. The Anti-Common Market League (ACML) and the Common Market Safeguards Campaign had fused, bringing together figures like Tory MP Neil Marten and Labour MP Douglas Jay ('Fascists have a field day', *Red Weekly* No.94, 27 March 1975: 2). Another photo the following month showed banners on a workers' demonstration proclaiming "British textiles IN; Foreign textiles OUT; Bolton District Weavers" and "Cut Imports to Save Textile Industry. Bolton District Weavers" (*Red Weekly* No.95, 3 April 1975: 3).

Yet the IMG did not change course during the referendum campaign. Its final paper before the vote was headlined: 'No to the Bosses' Europe. No to Wilson's Tory Policies' (*Red Weekly*, 29 May 1975). The front page advertised an anti-EEC demonstration on Saturday 31 May 1975, assembling at Hyde Park Corner. The demo was called by the Militant Labour Party Young Socialists, with speakers including Labour MPs Joan Lester and Eddie Loyden from Merseyside, as well as *Militant* editor Peter Taaffe.

A double-page spread inside set out the IMG's case for supporting British withdrawal from the EEC. The article, 'The EEC Referendum: 1. Why "No"' (29 May 1975) expressed a number of key reasons: first, the Common Market represented "an attempt by the capitalist class to solve their political and economic problems at the expense of the working class"; second, the aim of the EEC was "to try to create a supranational European state in order to swing the balance of forces in favour of capitalism". Third, along with NATO, the Common Market was "an integral part of imperialism's military and political alliance against the workers' states"; fourth, it strengthened the capitalist class in each of the EEC countries against its own working class; and fifth a 'No' vote in the referendum was "just one of the practical and concrete steps necessary to oppose a central strategy for survival of the capitalist class".

However the critical reason was given in another article, 'The EEC Referendum: 2. What are the Labour leaders up to?' (29 May 1975). It stated: "Every single important body in the labour movement is on record against the EEC." In short, because the bulk of the Labour and trade union bureaucracy, as well as a visible section of the industrial militants, who had never been offered a principled alternative, appeared to back withdrawal, the IMG believed it should go along with them. Although the IMG criticised the 'left' for its nationalism, it nevertheless agreed to tail the bureaucracy, to support its conclusions and to provide a 'Marxian' rationalisation.

The IMG failed to reassess and was unrepentant in the face the two-to-one yes vote in June 1975. The editorial of the first *Red Weekly* after the vote, 'Common Market "debate — Not over yet' (12 June 1975) stated that the EEC vote was "a defeat for the working class", even though it accepted that "a majority of the working class is in favour or indifferent to the EEC". Its logic was that "a 'No' vote would have threatened the economic strategy of the ruling class" and the EEC was "a central instrument of world imperialism". It wished Britain had come out of the EEC because "the whole economy would have been thrown into a most convulsive and

shattering crisis”.

The IMG accepted that in the short term, “both the British and European working class get a few crumbs by staying in Europe, compared to any capitalist alternative outside”. It recognised that “hardly anyone” believed that British capitalism could go it alone: “Arguments about ‘national sovereignty’ appears increasingly archaic and unreal. They were in fact the kiss of death to the anti-EEC campaign.” It therefore explained the result by recourse to the old cod “Leninist” argument, namely that “the attachment of certain privileged layers of the working class to the imperialist state reflects the fact that the working class has received material benefits from the imperialist policies of its own ruling class”. The IMG never bothered to explain how support for “No” would help break these “privileged” workers from the hold of imperialism.

Far from advocating participation in the institutions of the EEC, the IMG’s solution was the working class movement was to maintain “an attitude of complete hostility to the Market, refusing to cooperate with or participate in any of its institutions, and seeking to reverse the referendum at the earliest possible moment”. This was necessary, otherwise “the campaign against the Market will in future fall into the hands of the Powellites and other extreme rightists who this time round were pushed well to the sidelines”. This was a recipe for further capitulation to nationalism and a further weakening of internationalism within the British labour movement.

Militant

Militant carried the same plodding attitude into the 1975 referendum.

Grant, noted in ‘Capitalist Common Market — No! For a Socialist United States of Europe’, (*Militant* special, May 1975) that “all enemies of the Labour movement and the working class are vociferously and hysterically striving to ensure a ‘Yes’ vote”. By contrast, “the instinctive rejection of the capitalist Common Market by all the basic forces of the Labour movement was an enormous step forward”. He wrote “the overwhelming majority of the active rank and file of the trade unions, Co-ops, and Constituency Labour Parties are against for class reasons. Most of the shop stewards, the activists in the trade union branches and ward Labour Parties are decisively against. They distrust a policy endorsed by the bosses and their stooges”.

Grant went through the motions of condemning the chauvinism of the Labour and trade union “left”, while promising “we do not align ourselves with the ‘anti-foreign’ ranters like Powell and Frere-Smith”. However for all the puff about an independent working class campaign, the most prominent event was a demonstration on 31 May 1975, which involved “2,000 working class internationalists who marched through the centre of London last Saturday calling for an ongoing campaign to build a socialist Europe” (*Militant*, 6 June 1975). Speakers at the Trafalgar Square rally demonstration included Militant supporter Nick Bradley, who sat on Labour’s National Executive as the representative of the Young Socialists and *Militant* editor Peter Taaffe.

Despite the two-to-one majority in favour of staying in the EEC, Militant did not reassess. In its history, the *Rise of Militant* (1995), Taaffe plays up its warnings about chauvinism but still justifies the approach.

International Socialists

By the time of the referendum in 1975, the International Socialists had grown substantially, probably doubling its membership since the nationalist turn over the Common Market in 1971.

It had not reassessed on the EEC after two



Mainstream “In” campaign in 1975 and in 2016

years of entry and in January 1975, the IS national committee unanimously decided “to campaign for a NO vote around the slogans No to the Common Market, No to national chauvinism, Yes to the United Socialist States of Europe” (Chris Harman, *Socialist Worker*, 1 March 1975).

The line and the arguments for it were a pale repetition of those first aired in 1971. Hallas, the editor of *International Socialism* magazine, stated in the ‘Notes of the Month’ for February 1975 that the group’s stance was determined by the alignment of forces: “FOR: virtually the whole of big business, the Tory party, the right and centre of the Labour Party, the trade union right wing and the whole ‘establishment’ network; AGAINST: The Labour lefts, the CP, the trade union lefts and some of the centre plus the ‘populist’ right (including the NF) and a smallish number of Tory dissidents and, probably, the various nationalists”.

Hallas argued that “essentially, in the referendum campaign all those with an ‘establishment’ outlook and perspective will be lined up against all the ‘dissident’ trends including the far right”. However, “the heart and muscle of the anti camp will be the left of the labour movement”. Just as in the German re-armament debate (1954), “a muddled, opportunistic and semi-nationalist left will find itself aligned with out and out chauvinists and racists against the main political forces of British capitalism”.

After garnishing the poison with apple-pie slogans in favour of the Socialist United State of Europe, socialist internationalism and working class unity (presumably in Britain, rather than across Europe), and salutary warnings against British chauvinism and ‘popular fronts’ with Tories, Powellites or Fascists, Hallas finished with a flourish. The Common Market referendum, he wrote, “is a possible source of a ‘Bevanite’ type of left-wing movement led by left-reformist MPs and their trade union allies”. Out of a reactionary movement might come progress — hence revolutionaries had to be there to jump on the bandwagon. It would not take long for

Socialist Worker (1 February 1975) to lament that the no campaign had meant in practice: “unions forking out money to pay for meetings for an open racist like Powell, and left wingers giving the National Front and other extreme right wing groups an air of respectability by working with them”.

Still the IS leadership stuck with the line Chris Harman argued in *Socialist Worker* (1 March 1975) that for IS to abstain “would be to line up with the extreme right wing within the working class movement”. This would apparently “play into the hands of the Communist Party leaders, who would be able pretend that their own disgusting chauvinism and alliances with Powell were the only alternative to the Jenkinsites and the Market”. Exactly how the far smaller IS would distinguish itself from the CPGW when it agreed with its essential political conclusion was never explained. Instead *Socialist Worker*, (8 March 1975) lapsed back on negativism: “A NO vote, that is to say a defeat for big business, Tory, Liberal, and right wing Labour coalition on than in last year’s elections. The arena for our internationalist message is inside the NO camp. That is this issue is in our interest. We are part of the left. We can no more abstain in this confrontation where the vast majority of class-conscious workers are. That is where we belong”.

This line was repeated in another Notes of the Month, ‘The Common Market’, *International Socialism* (April 1975). The anti-EEC camp consisted “very largely of the Labour left and the trade union left and centre. Its opposition is based on muddled nationalistic and reformist arguments, although only the Communist Party has descended to the cruder forms of nationalist demagoguery”.

The place of socialists was, “of course, firmly and unequivocally in the NO camp, alongside the great majority of class-conscious workers. But, equally, it is the duty of socialists to argue the internationalist case within that camp”. The rest of the coverage rehearsed the political economy of recent European capitalism and even found a place of some figures on migrant workers. None of it

was remotely adequate to repair the damage caused by abandoning an independent working class perspective.

Conclusions

The basic Marxist assessment of capitalist European integration, based around capitalist concentration, the interpenetration of capital and its states, pointed towards at least a position of not opposing the process but building working class international solidarity out of it.

This meant at least abstention in any vote; it might have meant critical support for it, depending on the precise forms. This classic Trotskyist position, consistent with the attitudes and traditions of revolutionary Marxism over decades, was coherently held by most of the British revolutionary left until the late 1960s or early 1970s.

Instead, the bulk of the revolutionary left at the time collapsed politically into the “No” camp, dominated by Labour reformists and Stalinists, behind which stood the reactionary sections of the British bourgeoisie. Tailism behind these forces, garnished with abstract and irrelevant fig-leaves such as “Socialist United States of Europe” was tagged onto the “No” message. This was welded together with a negativist “defeat the Tories/business/Labour government” position equating “getting out of the EEC” with the interests of the (British) working class. It was a collapse into chauvinism, disregarding relations with other European workers in the name of apparently giving British capital a bloody nose.

Workers’ Fight — a forerunner of the AWL — fought this at the time and has fought it since. In the forthcoming referendum the revolutionary left could be a voice of sanity, rallying the labour movement to oppose the Tory backwoods, while fighting for democracy and social welfare across Europe.

But to play this role, it needs to learn from the past, understand the mistakes and chart a course consistent with the historic and material interests of the working class across Europe and the globe.