

Brexit: Final Judgement Is Key, Comrade Corbyn

di John Palmer

4 gennaio 2017

pubblicato su socialeurope.eu

Dear Jeremy,

When I last wrote to you – courtesy of “Social Europe” – 15 months ago no one thought that, because of continuing dissent in the Parliamentary Labour Party, you would soon have to fight a second leadership election. But you emerged victorious and with an even bigger majority.

The challenges of rebuilding the Labour Party and formulating policies to help the British economy recover from years of economic stagnation, growing inequality and falling living standards have not got easier. The referendum decision to leave the European Union multiplies the problems ahead, especially if the May government’s current strategy makes a ‘hard Brexit’ inevitable.

Let’s face it, Labour is confused about how to respond to the irresponsible brinkmanship of the hard-line Tory and UK ‘Leavers.’ Quite a few Labour MPs on the right and centre of the PLP, have, in effect, abandoned any serious opposition to those who say that – whatever the terms eventually agreed in Brexit talks – Britain is quitting the EU.

Even some of your own front bench colleagues are searching merely for some softening of the edges of a hard Brexit. More worryingly too, many MPs, panicked by public support for immigration controls, have bought into the mythology that workers from other EU countries are responsible for the lack of housing, inadequate health and education provision and other domestic social ills.

That is certainly not true of your own role nor that of some of your closest colleagues. It is also not true of the hundreds of thousands of new members you have inspired into joining (or re-joining) the Labour Party and fighting for a better Britain as well as a different and better Europe.

It is particularly heartening that you are working hard to build an alliance of progressive social democrats, socialists and others across the EU to fight for a radical change in European economic, social and environmental strategies. You will also know that in Germany a similar approach is being followed by the Social Democrat Party, the Left Party and the Greens who are seeking a common strategy for government after September’s general election.

The rise in support for far right populists and nationalists (behind whom lurk thuggish practitioners of ‘street power’ such as Jobbik in Hungary and Golden Dawn in Greece) is deeply worrying. But if a united left front across Europe is built, the swing of the political pendulum to the right can be reversed.

John McDonnell and your other close colleagues are working hard on a sustainable strategy for economic and social recovery. But much will depend on the left rejecting a fatalistic acceptance of the inevitability of Brexit.

It is understandable that you and your Remain colleagues have said that the “people have spoken” following the EU referendum and that the result should not be reversed by some political sleight-of-hand. But the May government should be forced to divulge what exactly they are seeking to agree in eventual Brexit negotiations with the European Union before Parliament can ratify the triggering of Article 50.

But the decision MPs will have to take when the government eventually returns with an outline deal – around October 2018 or possibly later – is a quite different matter. They will be perfectly entitled to vote down any agreement they deem will leave the British people worse off.

I would suggest a few outline principles which might be employed in making the judgement about the eventual Brexit agreement with the rest of the EU.

1. Will the UK’s future relationship with the Single Market, the Customs Union and the EU Common Commercial Policy improve Britain’s economic prospects or complicate and threaten them?
2. Will the Conservative government pledge or refuse to commit to match any future improvements in EU social standards, workers’ rights, equal opportunities laws and better environment protection?
3. Will Britain outside the EU be given the same or an inferior status in key areas of policy cooperation with the EU including science research, education (notably the Erasmus Programme) as well as policing, security and agencies responsible for medicinal and other joint activities.

If there are grounds for suspecting that on these and other issues no credible assurances can be given that the British people will be better off outside the European Union, surely the opposition in Parliament will have no serious option but to reject the deal. That in itself would not be a decision to stay in the EU. It would be a decision to tell the government to get a better deal.

Of course, it would present Theresa May and her colleagues with a serious dilemma. They would have to buy time to do that before the two-year grace period allowed from the activation of Article 50 runs out. Otherwise the UK would be left with no agreement at all and would face tumbling over a truly terrifying precipice.

But the government know that before time runs out they have the legal right to revoke the triggering of Article 50. Legal experts acknowledge that the EU institutions and the other member state governments would have no alternative than to bite their tongue and accept the outcome.

Of course, there would be a heavy price to pay in terms of loss of political goodwill. The choice would then be either to seek to reopen the whole dreary affair of withdrawal – or focus on building political alliances to push through much more important economic, political, democratic, social and other EU wide reforms that are so urgently needed.

If the Conservatives choose to fight a general election or even call a second referendum on this choice – so be it. Jeremy: you would be in a far stronger position to demonstrate that the radically different priorities for economic, political and social change in the EU for which you stand can only be won together with our European comrades and allies – not by languishing in the mean-spirited and dark isolation sought by some on the right.

Yours in hope and solidarity for 2017,

John Palmer