

## What Might a Post Brexit Britain Look Like?

### Brexit is an opportunity for unions to shape the future we want argues IAN SCOTT

A post Brexit Britain is not necessarily the confusing issue it is deliberately made out to be.

Much of the mess we are in today is also due to many of our MPs allowing EU legislation “on the nod” to go through our Parliament and, more often than not, without the content of directives being explained to them and, unsurprisingly, without knowing what the implications could be.

The 2016 referendum saw the largest turnout in a Britain-wide vote since 1992, the people spoke clearly for many issues of concern.

Since the referendum, there’s been much doom and gloom and much panic about the loss of trade, jobs and rights.

Yet, on workers’ rights, one such claim for EU benefits, I was incensed on reading a young electrical worker’s contract of employment which said — with reference to the EU’s working time directive (WTD) — that the employee was required to work up to 48 hours per week. In other examples, the WTD has extended the working week for many (mainly younger) workers.

All this to the negation of what our fore parents fought for. In a nutshell, we will witness younger people working longer hours on lower wages under harsher job contracts, only to retire later than 65 years of age just to receive poorer pensions than what many pensioners enjoy today.

If the above statement is not an indictment of corporate greed exacerbated by EU policy, a question arises about the type of trade union necessary to fight for change. A corporate union interested in the role of corporate business would do nothing for workers, let

alone youth who currently working on zero-hour contracts. Did the EU Commission not endorse this type of contract many years ago?

Similarly, more up-front trade unions need to wake up and learn a trick or two on contracts of employment, a powerful tool that needs to be fully researched and an area where trade unions can stand up to erroneous employers in Britain and, importantly, improve their standing with their employees to promote union membership — for job security and conditions.

Remember that 99 per cent of employees work in a workplace employing 250 people or fewer. Just 13 per cent of employees in the private sector are members of a trade union.

Here is an opportunity for trade unions to improve their standing and base of support within the “missing” 87 per cent by forwarding these policies.

A trade union call for better procurement policies to improve domestic trade will resonate with both employees and employers and the public accordingly.

Likewise, from the public perspective, how many who voted Remain would be happy to learn that the EU Commission signed off the Comprehensive Economic Trade Agreement (Ceta) on September 10 2017? This would have huge implications for the future of our NHS as well as trade deals, especially on food and other services.

The role of the EU serves corporate interest by essentially legitimising the flow of capital that contributed to the demise of manufacturing in Britain, for example HP Sauce, Peugeot, jobs that moved abroad and at lower wages. The debacle of EU regulations has led to the closure of car manufacturing at Longbridge, Birmingham, with big job losses.

It is hardly surprising that the largest Leave vote was recorded in both the East and West Midlands, with these two areas witnessing the greatest industrial losses because of EU policy. Also, nationally, with the EU being the driving force behind privatisation, this has led to inferior job contracts and lower wages for fewer people remaining in employment.

We cannot return to the EU's neoliberal failed economic model, which Italy and Greece are also thinking of leaving. Iceland voted to drop its application to join the EU some years ago and its economy is currently doing well. We need to move on.

Brexit is presenting an opportunity for trade unionists and public groups to demand what type of society and future for Britain we wish to see outside of the EU. I am concerned over any vaunted customs union, a sly manoeuvre that would keep us within EU regulations. Progressive inputs from an enlarged trade union and public base of support will also strengthen the case for a future Labour government to carry out our demands. There is no time to fail.

The Tory Cabinet is currently edging towards a settlement with the EU that will likely include an agreement to only enable services and finance to escape regulation. We cannot continue to sacrifice even more industrial jobs. We need state aid for industry, comprehensive public ownership, a state investment bank and the use of public procurement to buy local and to enforce decent wages, trade union rights and collective bargaining.

Trade unionists need to come together urgently to campaign for a progressive, pro-worker outcome and to put pressure on our political representatives to do so in Parliament.

Remember how the Lisbon EU 2020 programme in 2000 effectively called for the end of welfare state? It restricted "early exit from work" (increasing pension ages), removed "disincentives to work" (reducing benefits) and substituted "flexicurity" for existing employment contracts (casualising the workforce).

To discuss this and more, I make this open call for the biggest and broadest national post-Brexit conference to be held in Birmingham for this September and I seek your maximum support in organising for this.

**Ian Scott** is a Unite member and President of Birmingham Trades Union Council. He writes in his personal capacity

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