

# The left, and Europe

**T**HE British left is still infected by nationalism. There are a number of reasons for this. Britain did not join the European Community — despite two abortive attempts to do so — until 1972, 14 years after the Treaty of Rome came into operation. Initially there was strong ruling-class opposition, and that was reflected inside the labour movement. The USSR opposed Europe, and the Stalinist party in Britain — which had much influence in the trade unions — took this line ready-made, hypocritically purveying British nationalism, the better to serve Russian foreign policy, that is, Russian nationalism. The British trade union bureaucracy was comfortable then in the close links it had with the British national state, and did not want to risk losing them. It all added up to a powerful many-streamed current in the British labour movement against Europe.

The revolutionary left was swamped by this current. Initially refusing to be tainted by the “little Englandism in the service of the USSR” of the CP or by the other more sincere little Englanders, most of the revolutionary left eventually allowed itself to join the anti-Europe chorus for fear of antagonising working-class militants influenced by the chauvinists. Throwing overboard the Marxist responsibility to orient on the basic issues according to real

working-class interests, the left became wildly demagogic, denouncing the European Union as “capitalist Europe” as if the alternative were not “capitalist Britain”, and a Britain that has become the despised cheap-labour slum of capitalist Europe.

The left let itself be smashed by Harold Wilson in 1975 when it staked everything on a chauvinist victory in the referendum on Europe held that year. It then gradually subsided into silence on the question of Europe. No left group now campaigns for “Britain out!”

Yet much of the left has now reconstructed a cutprice version of that nationalist agitation round the slogan “Down with Maastricht!” Working-class socialists have no brief for Maastricht, any more than we have for the capitalist structure of the European Union generally. Yet to identify Maastricht as the main enemy, or a main enemy, is to ignore the fact that the anti-Maastricht sections of the bourgeoisie — Thatcher and Tebbit in Britain, Le Pen and Pasqua in France, sections of German finance-capital — are as intent on cuts and union-bashing as any Maastrichter.

The Europe-wide workers’ unity shown by the Renault workers is the way to deal with European capitalist integration — not demagogic agitation against a shadowy outside force called “Maastricht” or “Brussels”.