

## Editorial

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# Everything to fight for

As we were going to press the December general election was announced. During the campaign Boris Johnson looks set to continue his impersonation as tribune of the people and embodiment of the popular will. For this reason Bill Schwarz's analysis in this issue of Johnson's role in attempting to reconfigure the Conservative Party as a party of the populist right is essential reading. As Schwarz argues, the incorporation of right-wing populism potentially marks a new period in the history of the old party. The continuously intensifying condensation of meanings into the deadly Brexit meme, which began long before the referendum took place, has offered the right an historic opportunity to link together a set of populist ideas that may be capable of re-ordering the political landscape of Britain.

The response from the left must be to form the widest possible alliance to defeat this threat and to assert the values of democracy, equality and conviviality. And that means campaigning in every constituency to support the candidate whose success is most likely to keep the Tories out of office.

Much of this issue looks at politics outside of the electoral arena, in line with our view that challenges to power are necessary everywhere that it operates. We also carry two pieces on the future of Europe, which will remain important to British politics for the foreseeable future (and for this reason we feature the first article in a new series on Europe). And we continue our analysis of conjunctural change, and the importance of intersectionality in all our activities and thinking.

As Schwarz concludes:

As new political domains arise, the field of politics itself is recast and expanded. This is a moment when the authority of the divide

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between representative and direct democracy is weakening. Spartan Conservatism stands as the antithesis of democracy, but there is an alternative. The will of the people is more generous and more plural than the Spartans could ever conceive. There's everything to fight for.

### **Antje Scharenberg introduces a new Soundings series: 'Other Europe'**

Brexit marks the first formal process of *disintegration* in the history of the political European project: until now it has known only one direction - that of further integration. And Brexit can also be seen as a specific instance of the xenophobic retreat to national borders and walls that is spreading across the continent as Fortress Europe continues to raise its fences. How might the transnational left in Europe respond to these ongoing developments?

As the prospect of Brexit looms, the question of what another Europe might look like becomes perhaps more urgent than ever. For whatever happens after Brexit - which is in itself likely to be a long-drawn out process involving continued negotiations and relationships with Europe, rather than the simple break of its authors' imagination - one thing seems already clear: Brexit will not be bringing to an end the injustices of global finance capital, the crushing power of multinational companies or the planetary climate catastrophe. Nor does it seem likely that a British government, even if headed up by a left-led Labour Party, will be able to tackle any of these and other global challenges on its own - as Niccolò Milanese and Lorenzo Marsili have recently written, socialism in one country has never been a poorer slogan.<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile Gramsci's famous note on the interregnum - that the old is dying while the new cannot yet be born - has become a recurring theme of contemporary political commentary. It therefore seems an appropriate time to take a closer look at new ideas sprouting out of the cracks in the house of Europe.

In a new series, beginning in this issue, we are offering a space for these 'Other Europes', and introducing alternatives already in the making across and beyond the continent. Through a series of articles and interviews we will be meeting public intellectuals, activists, artists, campaigners, academics, new municipalists and other actors who are re-inventing Europe from the bottom up, inside and outside of local, national and European political institutions. The first contributor to this series is Rasha Shaaban, a campaigner, feminist, DJ and storyteller based in Sweden. Our interview with her discusses the political situation in Sweden, what Europe looks

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like from the perspective of newcomers, and the role of intercultural dialogue in making other Europes visible.

The people, ideas and projects in this series often offer resources of hope, but they also raise important questions, some of which challenge the very idea of Europe itself. How exactly might it be possible to build a 'Europe for the many'? How can the left better work together across borders? How might we build a feminist Europe while tearing down the walls of Fortress Europe? Indeed, how might it be possible to think about European alternatives without reifying Europe or perpetuating Euro-centrism? Is Europe even a useful framework to think about such questions? As Stuart Hall's 1991 essay *Europe's Other Self* reminds us, the story of Europe is often falsely being told from a purely 'internalist' perspective that neglects the 'outside' on which European prosperity feeds.<sup>2</sup>

Thirty years after the end of the Cold War and the subsequent decades of neoliberal hegemony, the question of how Europe might be otherwise is one of the most urgent contemporary political challenges, not only across and beyond the European continent but also for Britain - which will remain in Europe geographically, with or without EU membership. In this sense, the end of Britain's membership of the EU could be seen as an opportunity to begin to consider the possibilities of radically different Europes to come.

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## Notes

1. Niccolò Milanese and Lorenzo Marsili, *Citizens of Nowhere - How Europe Can Be Saved from Itself*, Zed 2018 (reviewed in issue 72).
2. [http://banmarchive.org.uk/collections/mt/pdf/91\\_08\\_18.pdf](http://banmarchive.org.uk/collections/mt/pdf/91_08_18.pdf).

### In memory of Cynthia Cockburn

Cynthia Cockburn, a regular contributor to *Soundings* from the very beginning, died in September. We published a tribute to her work in *Soundings* on our website, in the belief that the best way of remembering her is to continue to think with her ideas: <https://www.lwbooks.co.uk/people/cynthia-cockburn>.