

# Nationalism and ‘Brexit’

Chris Marsden  
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George Galloway’s appearance at the *Grassroots Out* campaign in support of Britain leaving the European Union does not merely muddy the class line. It obliterates it.

Galloway, a former Labour Party and Respect MP, was introduced as the surprise guest speaker at the QE II Centre in Westminster, London on Friday by Nigel Farage, the leader of the right-wing xenophobic UK Independence Party. He took the stage alongside representatives of the arch-Thatcherite wing of the Tory Party such as Bill Cash MP, Peter Bone MP and former Shadow Home Secretary David Davies.

Farage introduced Galloway as a “towering figure on the left of British politics.” His presence was held up as proof that differences between the “left” and “right” were inconsequential when matched against the common goal of preserving the “sovereignty” of parliament from the dictatorship of Brussels.

Galloway’s speech was a shameless endorsement of the political bona fides of Farage and the Tory right. “But for Nigel Farage we would not be having a referendum on this question,” he declared.

Worse still, his remarks centred throughout on the claim that divisions between left and right and between the working class and the British ruling class counted for little when compared with the shared necessity to defend British sovereignty.

Though he stated that he had little in common with Farage’s programme for Britain, Galloway in fact wholly embraced the right’s central argument that the “leave” camp is seeking to prevent unelected EU bureaucrats from holding sway over the British parliament.

At several points, Galloway’s more overt nationalist statements won him wild applause from an overwhelmingly Tory and UKIP audience—such as when he asserted that “the right to decide who can come and live and work in Britain, who we can deport

from Britain, what level of deficit we can run in Britain, or what our Foreign Policy in Britain should be” had been “subcontracted to the Romanian government.”

He described opposition to the EU as “internationalist,” a term he then defined in explicitly capitalist terms as the UK being free to trade “with the Commonwealth” and “with Brazil, with Russia, with India, with China, with South Africa, with Iran where the sun is rising, not setting, and where most of the customers in the world actually live. ... Now that is internationalism.”

Galloway went on to describe David Davies as a “man I greatly love and respect,” whose speech and his own had supposedly prevented the UK from going to war against Syria in 2014—thus proving the merits of the “parliamentary sovereignty... we can have if we leave this European Union.” He naturally turned a blind eye to the fact that Britain is now active militarily in Syria thanks to that same parliament and the votes of Cash, Bone and others.

The claim that Farage and the Tory right are protecting democracy is false to the core.

The EU must be resolutely opposed by working people as a reactionary instrument for the subjugation of the continent to the dictates of the financial markets and a forum in which competing European states fight between themselves and conspire against the working class. It pursues policies of savage austerity and has become a mechanism for remilitarising the continent for war against Russia.

However, to suggest that the British parliament and its parties are any less an instrument for imposing the wishes of finance capital is a transparent fraud. The opposition of the Tory right and UKIP to the EU is wholly reactionary in character. It is based on demands that the City of London be freed from even minimal regulation, that all restrictions on the exploitation of the

working class be removed and that migrants be kept out of the UK at all costs.

Galloway will no doubt on occasion continue to state his profound disagreements with his newfound allies, many of whom have previously condemned him for his opposition to war in Iraq, Libya and Syria and other public stands for which the *World Socialist Web Site* has had occasion to defend him. But this only makes his position worse. He is offering up whatever political credibility he has and placing it at the service of Farage and company. Moreover, his insistence on the primacy of national sovereignty over class and political divisions has the most dangerous implications that go far beyond the June 23 referendum.

This was underscored by his equation of the EU referendum with the Second World War, which he declared “was as Mr. Churchill said, our finest hour. When we all went forward together—Mr. Churchill and Mr. Atlee and Mr. Bevan... That’s what we are doing here tonight. Mr. Farage and me. Miss Hoey and Mr. Davies. Left, right, left, right, forward march.”

On Twitter, he later said of Farage, “we are not pals. We are allies in one cause. Like Churchill and Stalin...”

To invoke Stalin as a role model speaks for itself as to Galloway’s politics. But given who he is speaking of forging an alliance with, a more appropriate comparison would be the Hitler-Stalin pact.

In any event, the implications of Galloway’s statements are politically toxic. Such an analogy invoking war and wartime sacrifice, made in the UK, is invariably an appeal to anti-European and particularly anti-German, rather than anti-fascist sentiment. Churchill’s image and the Union flag are a feature of every far-right gathering, including the recent Pegida UK anti-migrant demonstrations led by a former UKIP election candidate Paul Weston.

More broadly, Galloway’s actions bring into sharp focus the political implications of the stand taken by various Labourites, pseudo-left groups, the Rail Maritime and Transport union and the train drivers union Aslef. All seek to dress up the “leave” campaign for the June 23 referendum as the basis for articulating a supposedly “democratic,” “progressive” and even “socialist” opposition to the EU—irrespective of the referendum’s actual origins and the character of its leadership. All of them in reality adopt the position that the EU must be opposed on the basis of a reassertion of

national sovereignty.

The first responsibility of a socialist is to oppose the mixing of class banners. In the referendum, this means rejecting all appeals for working people to fall in behind one or another faction of the bourgeoisie who are fighting between themselves solely over which strategy best upholds the interests of British imperialism.

To do otherwise and to in any way endorse the nationalist and pro-capitalist agendas espoused by both the “remain” and “leave” campaigns sows dangerous political confusion, weakening the political defences of the working class at a time when the noxious fumes of nationalism, anti-migrant xenophobia and militarism are polluting the UK, Europe and the entire world.

To overcome the threat posed by austerity and war and the ongoing destruction of democratic rights requires that workers in Britain wage a unified struggle with the workers of Europe against the capitalist elites and for the construction of the United Socialist States of Europe.

*The Socialist Equality Party will be publishing a comprehensive statement on the British referendum on Monday.*



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