

Cameron and Hollande beat anti-immigrant drum to oppose Brexit

Robert Stevens
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Prime Minister David Cameron began his campaign in favour of the June 23 referendum on the UK remaining in the European Union (EU) alongside French President Francois Hollande in Amiens, France on Thursday. He did so on an agenda of whipping up anti-immigrant prejudice.

The 34th UK-France summit was a heavily choreographed event, with Hollande siding with Cameron to state that in the event of Britain's withdrawal from the EU (Brexit), "I don't want to scare you, I just want to tell the truth. There will be consequences if Britain leaves the EU." These related to the "single market, on the circulation of goods and people, and on relations that concern people," Hollande said, threatening that a Brexit would impact on "the way we handle the situation in terms of immigration".

Hollande was responding to a question about the comments of Emmanuel Macron, the French Socialist Party economy minister, that a Brexit might end the current border agreement in place at Calais between France and the UK. Earlier that day, Macron told the *Financial Times*, "If British voters chose to exit the EU, collective energy would be spent unwinding existing links, not creating new ones. It's not scaremongering. We have to explain how those ties would be unpicked."

He added, "The day this relationship unravels, migrants will no longer be in Calais and the financial passport will work less well. Our will is not to revise the Touquet accord but it would be threatened by such a context."

The Touquet Treaty was signed in 2003 by then Labour Home Secretary David Blunkett and his French counterpart Nicolas Sarkozy. Under the bilateral treaty, French border police operate immigration checkpoints at the UK port of Dover, while the UK has immigration

checkpoints at Calais and Dunkirk.

This has left migrants stranded—unable to pass into the UK or settle in France—and has led to the establishment of the refugee camps in Calais and Dunkirk, where thousands of people fleeing war-torn countries like Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, and Pakistan, are forced to live in atrocious conditions. This week, French riot police in Calais were sent in to begin the demolition of the camp.

Last July Cameron said there was a "swarm of people coming across the Mediterranean" to seek a better life in Britain. Earlier this month, he claimed that a Brexit would lead to refugees decamping from Calais and setting up in Kent, southern England.

In France, Cameron said, "It is very important that people should know that if they come to Calais that is not a waiting room for getting into the United Kingdom, that we have strong borders, we man those borders together in Calais, and it is very important people understand that."

Cameron announced further initiatives to clamp down on refugees and asylum seekers in France, stating that the UK would invest £17 million "in priority security infrastructure in Calais to assist the work of the French police."

French Secretary of State for European Affairs Harlem Désir said the UK's financial contribution would be upped to €60 million and would see "migrants evicted from Calais" relocated to more than 100 centres across France.

The UK will also fund joint operations with France to "return migrants not in need of protection to their home countries," Cameron said.

The Leave and Remain campaigns represent equally reactionary sections of the ruling elite, with both in favour of a more ruthless clampdown on immigration,

but who differ on how closely Britain should align its trade and investment strategy with Europe.

David Davis MP, the Conservative spokesman of Grassroots Out, a right-wing cross-party alliance in favour of Leave, denounced the statements of Cameron, Hollande and Macron as “bluster”, adding, “The simple point is that if we leave the EU, we regain control of our borders and we decide who comes in and who doesn’t.”

Davis warned, “If the French start putting illegal immigrants on a train or ferry and send them to Britain, we will send them straight back to France.”

Tory MP Bernard Jenkin said the summit proved that “propaganda” was “being produced by other European governments at the request of the prime minister to try to scare people away from voting to leave.”

He was backed by Boris Johnson, mayor of London and Cameron’s main rival for leadership of the Tories, who said of the prime minister, “You have to wonder about the timing of this intervention.” Another eurosceptic Tory MP, James Cleverley, described the summit statements over Calais as “Project Fear (International Edition)”.

The summit demonstrates not just the reactionary agendas of the competing Remain and Leave factions of the British bourgeoisie, but also the headlong rush to the right of the major EU powers.

It was held as European Council President Donald Tusk said from Athens that “all potential illegal economic migrants, wherever you are from. Do not come to Europe. ... Greece, or any other European country, will no longer be a transit country.”

While Cameron, Hollande and Tusk portray refugees and asylum as an intolerable burden that society cannot afford, there are limitless amounts of cash readily available for funding further military conflicts. Utilising yet again the “terrorist threat”, Cameron announced in Amiens that a further £1.5 billion will be invested by the UK and France in “the next generation” of unmanned aerial vehicles [drones].

The summit received a bitterly divided response from the British newspapers, depending on which of the Leave/Remain camps they endorse.

The Conservative house organ, the *Daily Telegraph*, for whom Johnson is a regular columnist, editorialised that Macron’s statements were “an empty, self-defeating threat.” It said the Le Touquet treaty “is a

bilateral treaty and is not conditional upon membership of the EU,” adding that “Project Fear, which encompasses the more hysterical arguments for Britain remaining in the EU, is getting out of hand.”

The *Daily Express* denounced the French president stating, “Hollande’s threats” were “better suited to a low-rent gangster movie than a diplomatic summit”. The newspaper commented, “It cannot possibly be in our interest to continue our involvement in a political union run by leaders who exhibit such disdain for our nation.”

The *Financial Times*, on behalf of the Remain campaign, commented that Macron’s was, “A welcome intervention from France over Brexit.”

It continued, “The Out campaign has been quick to accuse Mr Macron of scaremongering. All the French minister has done is to highlight the uncertainties over migration if Britain leaves the EU.”

The author also recommends:

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[29 February 2016]



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