

Labour's Corbyn pledges to lead pro-EU referendum campaign in UK

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“The Labour Party is overwhelmingly for staying in because we believe the European Union has brought investment, jobs and protection for workers, consumers and the environment.”

This was the opening salvo of party leader Jeremy Corbyn's much-anticipated intervention in the June 23 referendum on Britain's continued membership of the European Union (EU). It was not the last and not even the worst lie he was to mouth with the aim of defending the interests of the dominant sections of Britain's ruling elite against the growing threat of a Brexit.

Corbyn's speech was peppered with hypocritical invocations of “internationalism.” Climate change, dealing with big corporations, cyber-crime, the refugee crisis, the impact of globalisation “self-evidently require international co-operation,” he said, meaning, “Collective international action through the European Union is clearly going to be vital...” He made vague allusions to his previous criticisms of the EU, but there was no mistaking that, in making what he called the case for “Remain and reform in Europe,” Corbyn was standing four square behind the EU, as he stated, “warts and all.”

His intervention is considered to be vital for the ruling elite, given the widespread hatred of the Conservative government of Prime Minister David Cameron and the deep split in its ranks over Europe. This has meant that the Remain campaign has been hobbled while the Leave campaign, led by the right-wing of the Tory Party and the UK Independence Party (UKIP), has been able to make greater headway than its rotten political pedigree would otherwise suggest.

What Corbyn offers is the possibility of mobilising voters—especially young people—who are pro-European but hostile to the pro-big business message and anti-migrant rhetoric on both sides of the Brexit debate. His

closing remarks were framed as an appeal to “everyone, especially young people,” to work “together across our continent” to “protect social and human rights, tackle climate change and clamp down on tax dodgers.”

Corbyn is still portrayed by the media as someone honest and sincere in fighting for what he believes in. Instead, as he has already done on so much else, he has reversed long-held positions in order to speak as one with the right-wing of the Labour Party and the trade unions. He explained how he has “listened closely to the views of trade unions” and “fellow MPs” who urged him to advocate “democratic reform”, “economic reform to end self-defeating austerity”, “labour market reform to strengthen and extend workers' rights” and new rights “for governments and elected authorities to support public enterprise and halt the pressure to privatise services.”

To which we are supposedly meant to reply, Amen.

Even before this wish list has been achieved, according to Corbyn the EU is still supposedly a force for good in protecting workers' rights, disabled people, human rights and tackling climate change.

Not one syllable was uttered with regard to the actual record of the EU on implementing devastating austerity on Greece and other countries.

Neither was there a word of opposition to the EU's inhuman treatment of refugees, even as the death toll mounts into the thousands, sea routes are patrolled by warships, concentration camps are set up and razor wire border fences erected to keep out the victims of wars in which the UK and other European powers have played a leading role.

Nor did he warn of the growing danger of military confrontation between the European powers and Russia, and within Europe itself—claiming instead that

his previous opposition to the EU was invalid because the Cold War was at an end.

The only time he said anything concrete about the EU was to praise it for supporting and implementing protectionist measures directed against Chinese steel. To underscore his deep political cynicism, he did so after declaring Labour to be “an internationalist party” and citing the understanding of “socialists... from the earliest days of the labour movement that workers need to make common cause across national borders.”

Why, he asked, “is it only the British Government that has failed so comprehensively to act to save steel production at home?” The European Commission had proposed higher tariffs “to stop Chinese steel dumping,” but this was blocked by the Tories. Labour would instead be a staunch advocate of protectionism within an EU framework, working “with our partners across Europe to stand up for steel production in Britain.” Waving the flag, he declared, “There is nothing remotely patriotic about selling off our country and our national assets to the highest bidder...”

Corbyn’s nationalist position will not defend jobs. It will escalate a trade war in which jobs will continue to be destroyed in Britain, Europe, China and internationally. His main political advantage is that the advocates of a Leave vote are more overtly reactionary than he is. Out of a Leave vote, he warned, would emerge a “Tory government, quite possibly led by [London Conservative Mayor] Boris Johnson and backed by [UKIP leader] Nigel Farage, that would negotiate the worst of all worlds: a free market free-for-all shorn of rights and protections.”

What he did not say is that a Remain vote would see the continuation of a Cameron government just as surely pledged to “a free market free-for-all shorn of rights and protections.”

Corbyn acknowledged that “debate about EU membership in the next couple of months will focus strongly on jobs and migration,” which is perhaps the most anodyne description imaginable of the xenophobic anti-immigrant rhetoric characteristic of both sides of the referendum debate. To this he replied by stressing the opportunities provided for Britons to live and work abroad, while declaring that Labour would carry out “government action to train enough skilled workers” to end the need for migrant labour to come into the UK.

Corbyn’s invocation of “a strong socialist case for staying in the European Union” is a fraud. It can gain traction only to the extent that he is hailed by the pseudo-left and Stalinist groups as the architect of a “socialist” renewal of the Labour Party—even by those who find themselves at odds with him over Europe. Indeed, they must now perform still more complex political gyrations to justify combining their nationalist case for a Leave vote with their fawning on Corbyn and Labour. Thus, “Anybody who supports the election of a Corbyn government with a mandate to end austerity, extend public ownership, redistribute wealth and restructure our economy in the interests of working people needs to explain how this agenda can be implemented in the framework of an EU that bans so much of it,” declared the pro-Brexit Communist Party of Britain’s *Morning Star*.

The Socialist Equality Party’s February 29 statement, “For an active boycott of the Brexit referendum,” tells the truth to the working class. It explains, “The Remain and Leave campaigns are both headed by Thatcherite forces that stand for greater austerity, brutal anti-immigrant measures and the destruction of workers’ rights. Their differences are over how best to defend the interests of British capitalism against its European and international rivals under conditions of economic slump and the escalation of militarism and war. A boycott prepares the ground for the development of an independent political struggle of the British working class against these forces. Such a movement must develop as part of a continent-wide counteroffensive by the working class, which will expose the referendum as only an episode in the deepening existential crisis of the British and European bourgeoisie.”

Nothing is changed in this analysis by Corbyn’s pro-EU apologetics. He is merely showing, once again, his true political colours.



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