

UK: Corbyn launches Labour's effort to cover for right-wing Remain campaign

Chris Marsden
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Yesterday, Labour In for Britain began its campaign for the UK to remain in the European Union (EU). It did so just one day after headlines were dominated by the vicious faction fight between Conservative prime minister David Cameron and his party's anti-EU wing—led by former London mayor Boris Johnson.

Ahead of the launch, Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn was interviewed by the pro-Tory *Times* newspaper of Rupert Murdoch. He shilled for Cameron and the EU, stating, “I have many criticisms of the European Union, but I believe that we should remain and reform it. Labour is for staying in because we believe the EU has brought investment, jobs, and protection for workers, consumers and the environment.”

Yesterday, the same rhetoric was repeated—along with pledges that he would be supposedly helped in opposing the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) by EU membership.

In reality, all the EU states are presently involved in negotiations with the US on the trade deal involving in part opening Europe's public sector to private investment, and it is a major goal of both wings of the Tory Party.

No criticism of the EU was made, especially of its role in imposing austerity, as Corbyn was well and truly on message. “We want to stand up for the rights of people all across this continent on a human rights agenda,” he proclaimed.

Corbyn was joined by the head of Labour In, former home secretary Alan Johnson. “Every sinew, every muscle will be stretched, every piece of energy, every resource in the Labour Party will be put into this campaign to get a Remain vote,” Johnson pledged.

The six-week campaign, mounted from a “Battle Bus”, will set out to target students, workers and young parents and is supported by the overwhelming majority

of Labour MPs and most trade unions.

With the Conservatives deeply divided and Cameron's own message so nakedly anti-migrant and pro-business, Labour's ability to deliver its 9 million voters is considered essential for a victorious Remain vote. This has become even more fundamental given the bitterness and rancour of the Tory faction fight and its nakedly reactionary character.

Cameron gave his own keynote speech in favour of a Remain vote Monday, arguing that EU membership was the “patriotic” choice because it reinforced the unity of the European powers within the NATO alliance in combating Russia while preventing war between themselves that would result from turning the clock “back to an age of competing nationalisms”.

The speech evoked a bitter response from Boris Johnson, who delivered that same day what he termed, without apparent irony, his “liberal cosmopolitan case to Vote Leave.”

Johnson's speech was peppered with warnings of uncontrolled immigration accompanying EU membership, describing the “most basic power of a state” as the ability “to decide who has the right to live and work in your country.”

Blaming Cameron for failing to clamp down on immigration, he accused him of corroding “popular trust in democracy.” He urged voters to ask “the Prime Minister and...the Remain campaign”: “How can you possibly control EU immigration into this country”?. He also took a swipe at how the UK had been “forced—in spite of promises to the contrary—to take part in the bail-out of Greece.”

A large part of his speech was delivered as a counter to Cameron's identification of EU membership with peace and stability. “I think this grossly underestimates the way Europe has changed, and the Nato guarantee

that has really underpinned peace in Europe,” he said. “I saw the disaster when the EU was charged with sorting out former Yugoslavia, and I saw how Nato sorted it out.”

Later, in response to questions, he added that the EU’s “pretensions to running a defence policy” have caused “real trouble” in Ukraine.

Iain Duncan Smith, the former Tory Work and Pensions Secretary’ joined the fray against Cameron—telling Murdoch’s *Sun* that Germany had a “de facto veto over everything” during Cameron’s EU renegotiations and used its “ultimate power” to stymie plans for an emergency brake on migrants.

Within hours, Downing Street had issued a rebuke to Johnson stating that “Russia alone” bears responsibility for the conflict in Ukraine.

Boris Johnson’s comments on Yugoslavia and Ukraine are spurious only because they berate the EU while praising NATO (and therefore the US). NATO and the EU worked in cahoots during the wars in Yugoslavia in the 1990s and in engineering the right-wing putsch in Ukraine in 2013. His claim that NATO is the real “guarantor of peace” in Europe in fact sanctions the ongoing campaign to place its forces in all the territories and waters surrounding Russia on the basis of the provocation staged by the US, Germany and France in Ukraine.

Labour was once more swift to solidarise with Cameron.

Jack Straw, the former Labour foreign secretary at the time of the criminal 2003 Iraq War, stated that Boris Johnson had “plumbed new depths” and was a “Putin apologist.” On Tuesday, Alan Johnson described members of the Leave campaign as “extremists” who “can’t give the EU any credit at all. So when it comes to peace on our continent they say it’s all to do with NATO. We say actually NATO played a role, so did the EU.”

So dependent is the British ruling class on Labour to make the case for a Remain vote that it is suggested that Corbyn will replace Cameron in the BBC’s “Great Debate”, hosted by David Dimbleby, two days before the referendum vote, arguing the case for Remain in front of an audience of 6,000 at Wembley Arena. Cameron and Chancellor George Osborne have both refused to take part in a debate with Boris Johnson, described as a “blue-on-blue” contest. Alan Johnson

has said he would also be willing to represent the Remain camp in this and other TV debates. Former Labour prime minister Gordon Brown is lined up to make a speech in favour of Remain this week.

The role being played by Corbyn for the Remain camp can no more conceal its right-wing, militarist agenda than the motley collection of pseudo-left groups, the Stalinist Communist Party of Britain and the Rail, Maritime and Transport and ASLEF rail unions gathered in the “Left Leave” campaign can cover for the xenophobia of Boris Johnson and company. Indeed, their claim that a Leave vote is made progressive because it will enable a future Corbyn Labour government to implement reformist measures looks ever more threadbare.

In contrast, the Socialist Equality Party’s call for an active boycott of the referendum assumes ever clearer political significance with each day that passes.

A concerted effort is being made to whip up nationalism, anti-migrant chauvinism and support for military violence by both sides in the June 23 contest. The SEP provides the most farsighted workers and young people with the means to articulate a conscious opposition to this noxious political brew.

An active boycott provides an essential mechanism for politically clarifying the working class by countering the disorientation deliberately created by the Labour and trade union bureaucracy and its apologists in the pseudo-left groups. In opposition to national chauvinism and xenophobia, we urge working people to take up the fight for a socialist and internationalist programme. We stand for a unified struggle of workers throughout Europe in defence of living standards and democratic rights and the building of the United Socialist States of Europe.



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