

UK: Left Leave campaign lays out its nationalist agenda in Brexit referendum

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The launch meeting of the “Left Leave” campaign for the June 23 referendum on UK membership in the European Union (EU) exposed the political fraud being perpetrated by the pseudo-left groups supporting it.

Left Leave is backed by the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), Counterfire, the Communist Party of Britain and the Rail, Maritime and Transport (RMT) union. They claim that it provides an “internationalist” and progressive alternative to the official leave campaign, dominated by the right wing of the Conservative Party and the UK Independence Party (UKIP). Their position is shared by just two other unions, the train drivers’ union (ASLEF) and the bakers and food workers union (BFAWU), along with the Socialist Party.

On May 18, these seven organisations, together with other splinters from the SWP, assembled fewer than 150 people in the small lecture theatre at Friends Meeting House in London. Almost everyone attending was politically aligned to one of the groups, who were speaking only to each other. Clearly embarrassed, the Communist Party’s *Morning Star* claimed an audience of “hundreds”, but this lie was spiked by the SWP’s own report and the videos featured on the *Socialist Worker* web site.

Every banal utterance from the platform and from a list of largely pre-chosen speakers from the floor was greeted with rapturous applause in a desperate attempt to conceal the absence of any popular support for the campaign. Members of the SWP’s sister organisations in Greece and Ireland and someone from a Catalan nationalist grouping in Spain were brought forward in order to sugarcoat the nationalist pill offered up by the advocates of Left Leave.

The word “socialism” was as rare as hen’s teeth, while “internationalism” was invariably invoked just prior to a call for the working class to support a return to the nation state as the basis for securing democracy and social progress. In speech after speech, the national division of

the working class was portrayed as the sole means of opposing imperialism.

The SWP’s leading theoretician, Alex Callinicos, declared, “A vote to Leave is a vote against the EU, IMF and NATO axis, but it’s also a vote against our own ruling class.”

A Leave vote would, he continued, “massively disorient the European Union, the United States junior partner. ... It’s about a process of breaking up the European Union, not to retreat into little national patches but to lay the basis for a genuine series of international solutions.”

Callinicos’s “series of international solutions” has nothing to do with the programme of world socialist revolution. It is, in reality, a series of national solutions within capitalism. He made this clear when, in an attempt to explain what he meant, he referred to international agreements between states as necessary to combat global warming.

From the floor, Joseph Choonara of the SWP stated this more bluntly: “We are about beginning the process of breaking up the European Union. That’s what we stand for.” This means “countries voting to leave. *There is no other way.*”

Lindsey German of Counterfire, a splinter from the SWP, is convenor of the Stop the War Coalition but spoke “in a personal capacity.” In that capacity, she was unabashed in glorifying the supposed merits of the British state. “It’s always difficult if you live in Britain to try to talk about British democracy as *something superior to any other democracy* when you have a 90-year-old unelected monarch and a House of Lords which is larger than the House of Commons astonishingly,” she began. “But *the crucial principle about democracy in this country, imperfect as it is, is that we do have the right to elect governments and to elect governments that can change things*, and this is something we don’t have in the European Union.” [Emphasis added]

At times, the casual nationalism of participants assumed the character of satire. Quim Arrufat, international officer for the Popular Unity Candidacy (CUP), which advocates separation of Catalonia from Spain, did not blush in declaring, “We are not separating countries. They [the EU] are separating countries. We want the peoples united.”

He was for “an international alliance between cities” (!) and a “common bank of investment” for the southern periphery, which he hoped an independent UK would view favourably.

To applause, the SWP’s Gary MacFarlane, who sits on the equality council of the National Union of Journalists, stated from the floor, “I don’t go for a holiday in Europe because it is full of racists. ... You go to France and see the racism full up.”

The real perspective of Left Leave was made clear in comments by John Rees of Counterfire, again from the floor, and by Callinicos. It involves little more than a fond wish for Jeremy Corbyn to come to power at the head of a Labour government, as a result of the splits in the Conservative Party over Europe.

Our aim is “getting rid of the Tories before 2020, while Jeremy Corbyn is still leader of the Labour Party and while the left has its best ever chance to do in the Tory government and get a better replacement,” said Rees.

“A serious argument we have heard...is that a Leave vote will strengthen the right,” said Callinicos. “In fact the opposite is the case. ... The Tories are ripping themselves apart.”

“I am not scared of [Brexit supporter and Conservative MP] Boris Johnson,” he continued. “If Leave is successful this will shatter the Tory government and take out the two central figures in that government, Cameron and Osborne. ... There will be a vicious bloody faction fight that will make those under Thatcher look like a tea party. If the Leave vote wins we have a chance of breaking a vicious, oppressive enemy.”

The basic assertion of the Left Leave forces is that it does not matter that the main proponents of the break-up of the EU along national lines are the forces of the far right, such as Marine Le Pen’s National Front in France, or that the Leave campaign sows divisions in the working class. It is supposedly “objectively” progressive.

On the national soil, they argue similarly that a victory for Johnson and Nigel Farage of UKIP in the referendum does not mean a strengthening of the right wing. Instead, it supposedly provides the basis for a left turn under Corbyn—someone who has again and again shown his

refusal to fight the right wing even within his own party, who has declared in favour of EU membership and who has as little chance of surviving a Leave vote as does Cameron.

The Socialist Equality Party has warned of the political disaster of attributing a progressive outcome to political initiatives dominated by right-wing bourgeois forces. We have referred in particular to the support extended to the Nazi Party in Germany by the Stalinised Communist Party of Germany (KPD) in the 1931 “Red Referendum,” on the basis that the fall of the Social Democrats would strengthen the working class.

The KPD championed the slogan “After Hitler, our turn!” For its part, the perspective of Left Leave could be summed up as “After Boris, Jeremy!”

The break-up of the EU on the basis of an espousal of economic nationalism and anti-immigrant xenophobia and the coming to power of Boris Johnson and Michael Gove creates the basis for a rightward shift in politics, not a move to the left. Such an outcome will have consequences not just in Britain, but internationally.

The working class must oppose the EU on its own independent class perspective—not the nationalist splintering of the continent but a common offensive against the EU and its constituent governments for the United Socialist States of Europe.

It is to this end that the SEP calls for an active boycott of the June 23 referendum, in order to assert the political independence of the working class from all factions of the ruling elite and, above all, in opposition to the “left” apologists for nationalist reaction and cheerleaders for the Labour Party.



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