

UK: The political fraud of the Another Europe is Possible campaign

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In the referendum campaign on Britain's membership of the European Union (EU), one might have thought that nothing could be more cynical than the millionaire Tories and UK Independence Party (UKIP) representatives heading the Leave camp posturing as defenders of the "common folk."

Until, that is, last week's launch of the Another Europe is Possible. An adjunct of the Democracy in Europe Movement 2015 (DiEM25), it is where apologists for the EU parade as "progressives."

Led by Yanis Varoufakis, the former finance minister in Greece's Syriza government, it defends the EU under the guise of calling for it to be "democratised."

To hear the words Varoufakis and democracy in the same sentence should be enough to set alarm bells ringing. Varoufakis has admitted that Syriza called the June 2015 referendum supposedly to decide on EU austerity terms, with the intention that the Greek population—faced with threats of immediate financial Armageddon by Europe's banks and ruling elites—would vote to accept.

To Syriza's dismay, in a show of mass defiance, the EU's threat was defied overwhelmingly. At which point Syriza—like its bourgeois counterparts across Europe—trampled over this mandate, imposing EU cuts over the heads of, and in direct conflict with, the working class and youth.

Varoufakis resigned from Syriza, but only to try to preserve European capitalism by other means. Having witnessed the potentially explosive political consequences of popular alienation from Europe's ruling elite at first hand, Varoufakis' mission is to save the EU project through the bogus claim that it can be reformed.

It is fitting that Varoufakis should lend his expertise in rigged referendums to the campaign for a Remain vote on June 23. The Remain and Leave camps are headed by right-wing Conservatives—Prime Minister David Cameron and former London Mayor Boris Johnson. Both are premised on noxious anti-immigrant propaganda, warmongering and the defence of the interests of the City of London. Just as in Greece, outside of the development of an independent mass political movement against capitalism, it is big business and the banks that will determine the course of events at the expense of the working class.

Varoufakis was joined at the launch of Another Europe is Possible in London on May 28 by Labour's John McDonnell and Green Party MP Caroline Lucas. Coming from "different

backgrounds, political parties and movements", their declaration states, "We cannot leave the future of our country in the hands of regressive politicians and vested interests who do not speak for us."

While eulogising the EU for building a "lasting peace", protecting the environment, the "rights of citizens and workers" and establishing a "common ground for Europeans to live, study and work together," it acknowledges that the EU "suffers from serious flaws—a vacuum of democracy and economic policies which are unleashing a vortex of deflation and depression in several countries, yielding nationalism and xenophobia everywhere."

How is it possible that an apparently peaceful, prosperous, harmonious continent is at the same time the source of depression, nationalism and xenophobia? No attempt is made to explain this, and for good reason.

Throughout the EU, "regressive politicians" are imposing austerity, spending cuts, attacking workers conditions and joining in Washington's warmongering in the Middle East and against Russia. Foremost amongst the "vested interests" leading this assault are so-called left governments. The role of Syriza in Greece is paralleled by that of the Socialist Party government of Francois Hollande in France that is leading the assault on workers' rights through the introduction of the hated El Khomri law. It is their actions, facilitated by the trade union bureaucracy and their pseudo-left allies, that means political opposition to austerity and the assault on democratic rights is presently monopolised by right-wing forces.

Having created the conditions for the rise of the right, the social democrats, the trade unions and the pseudo-left then insist that the only way to deal with this is for workers and youth to block with more "progressive" sections of the bourgeoisie. In the UK, this means supporting the Cameron government and its campaign to remain in the EU as a "lesser evil" to Johnson and others within the Conservative Party, who favour a leave vote.

This is the role played by Jeremy Corbyn's Labour Party and its apologists in the EU referendum. With widespread mistrust for both the EU and the Cameron government, the Remain camp hopes to mobilise students and those aged below 35 years considered to be most favourable to continued EU membership. Freedom of movement is especially important to a generation dependent on travelling for study and work.

Thus the Another World is Possible road tour was rolled out in

the final week before registration for voting in the EU referendum closed. Comprising speakers from the Greens and Labour Party, especially the pro-Corbyn group Momentum, it was pitched as a struggle between internationalism and isolationism.

But while there was plenty of condemnation of the Leave campaign, no mention was made of Cameron and his government's austerity agenda that has seen millions of jobs destroyed, wages cut or frozen, welfare slashed to the bone and migrants denied entry to the UK.

At the event at Sheffield Hallam University, the key speakers were pro-Labour author and journalist Owen Jones and Natalie Bennett, current leader of the Greens.

While whitewashing the real role of the EU, the main thrust of their arguments was to utilise legitimate concerns as to who politically would be the main beneficiaries of a Leave vote to call for a Remain vote. Speakers warned that a Brexit would almost certainly see Johnson replace Cameron, who would proceed to make a "bonfire" out of migrant and workers' rights. Imagine—they dared the audience—the hellish scenario whereby, in 2017, Prime Minister Johnson meets US President Donald Trump to negotiate a new UK-US trade deal.

For all the heat, the pro- and anti-Remain "Left" represent two sides of the same coin. Their bottom line is which of the EU options presents the best possibility for a Corbyn government.

In the Q&A session, this writer introduced herself as a representative of the Socialist Equality Party and its campaign for an active boycott of the EU referendum. I reminded Owen that, on July 14, 2015 he had written in the *Guardian* under the headline, "The left must put Britain's EU withdrawal on the agenda," pointing to the "European Union's ruination of Greece."

"Syriza's experience illustrates just how forlorn" any hope was of reforming the EU, Jones wrote. Yet now he was a leading advocate of precisely that agenda. How did he account for this?

Jones responded that he had written this before Corbyn was elected leader of the Labour Party. It was because of Corbyn and the trade unions that Cameron had backed down on his plans to include scrapping workers' rights in his negotiations with the EU on the terms for his leading a Remain campaign.

His answer makes clear the duplicity and class conceit at the heart of the "progressive" Remain campaign. Even as mass class battles erupt in France against the dismantling of workers' rights, Jones' holds up a spurious agreement between Corbyn and Cameron not to directly attack legislation such as Working Time Directive as the basis for supporting the EU! This is under conditions in which most new jobs are on zero hour contracts and where, only last month, the government passed a fresh round of anti-union legislation.

Such agreements are not worth the paper they are *not* written on. Should Cameron secure a Remain vote, this will be used as proof of public support for his government and its anti-working class, anti-migrant policies while cutting a deal with Johnson and UKIP to enforce the anti-working class agenda all factions are united upon. As for Corbyn, like his counterparts in Syriza, the Labour leader will do exactly what is demanded of him. Having given his political benediction to the EU, there is nothing he will not do.

The "progressive" pro-Remain campaign draws audiences larger

than its nominal opponents in the Left Leave campaign. Nonetheless, those under the age of 35 were a minority in the audience, causing the chair, former National Union of Students president and member of the Momentum steering committee, Michael Chessum, to declare, "I am scared. The referendum is on a knife edge."

Another Europe is Possible does not represent working people, but a section of the upper middle class—personified by Varoufakis—who are significant beneficiaries of the EU. EU funding for research programmes at British universities, for example, was mentioned several times at the Sheffield debate, and is a why the NUS supports a Remain vote. According to statistics, the UK is one of the largest recipients of research funding in the EU, second only to Germany in the period 2007-2013. Adjusting for GDP, the UK came in second—to the Netherlands.

While vast areas of the UK have been laid waste over the last 30 years due to Conservative and Labour deindustrialisation and financialisation policies, European funding in politics, academia, arts, culture, science and the trade unions has produced a layer of the upper middle class whose social and financial "worth" increases in direct proportion to the economic damage inflicted in their neighbourhoods.

This accounts for one of the questions at the Sheffield meeting being how the Remain campaign could "demonstrate to those who didn't go to university that support for Europe is justified?"

The response was that pro-Remain supporters should remind young people that an EU/Sheffield University partnership was responsible for a major apprenticeship programme in the neighbouring former mining/steel town of Rotherham. No one mentioned that the minimum wage rate is just £3.30 an hour—rising to a maximum of approximately £6.50 per hour at the discretion of the employer. My best guess is that none of the Another Europe is Possible will be campaigning outside this project anytime soon.



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