The EU referendum and the murder of British MP Jo Cox

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The murder of Jo Cox, Labour MP for Batley and Spen, West Yorkshire, has shocked and saddened millions of people in Britain and internationally. The brutal slaying of the 41-year-old mother of two outside her constituency surgery is the first murder of an MP in Britain for more than a quarter of a century. Cox was repeatedly stabbed with a hunting knife and shot three times.

A distinction must be made between the revulsion of ordinary people at this terrible act and the hypocrisy of the political establishment and media. The orchestrated professions of horror from the latter are aimed at concealing their own complicity in creating the noxious political atmosphere out of which this tragedy emerged.

Cox's assailant has been named as 52-year-old Tommy Mair. The perpetrator, described as a quiet "loner," has been identified as a former psychiatric patient, but his mental problems are clearly connected to extreme right-wing and chauvinist views.

Eyewitnesses say that Mair shouted "Britain First" several times during the attack, a slogan that indicates support for the Leave camp in this week's vote on Britain's membership of the European Union. Cox was not only a prominent supporter of a Remain vote in the June 23 referendum. As an Oxfam member she had campaigned publicly in defence of Syrian refugees being admitted to the UK. In January, she denounced, via Twitter, a demonstration in support of a vote to leave the EU held near her constituency by the neo-fascist and anti-immigrant organization, Britain First.

Yesterday, police recovered Nazi regalia and far-right literature from Mair's home, while sources close to the investigation said they believed the perpetrator had deliberately lain in wait for Cox to make his attack.

Mair is known to have purchased books from the US-based neo-Nazi group National Alliance, founded by William Pierce, author of the notorious racist tract *Turner Diaries*. These included guides on how to build homemade explosives, guns and a copy of *Ich Kampfe*, a handbook for members of Hitler's Nazi Party. He had also subscribed to the South African white supremacist *S.A. Patriot*.

The murder of Cox took place amidst a tide of nationalist and xenophobic filth cultivated especially by the Leave campaign in the run-up to the referendum. Just hours before Cox was slain, Nigel Farage, leader of the far-right anti-immigrant UK Independence Party and spokesman for the Leave camp, unveiled the latest poster for a Leave vote, depicting a long line of refugees and the slogan "Breaking Point. The EU has failed us all."

For its part, the official Remain campaign, headed by Conservative Prime Minister David Cameron and Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn, has in recent days sought to retake the initiative in the face of polls showing a majority vote for leaving the EU by stepping up its own anti-immigrant demagogy. Leading members of the Labour Party such as Alan Johnson, Ed Balls and Tom Watson have taken to the air to insist that a Fortress Europe is the best means of stopping migration, and to call for restrictions on the right of free movement.

All the more cynical is the response of the political and media establishment to the murder of Cox. They shut down all campaigning and public discussion on the referendum through Monday, when parliament will be recalled for tributes to Cox. On Friday, Corbyn appeared with Cameron in Cox's Birstall constituency, where they issued platitudes about "tolerance" and "democracy."

The Conservatives and Liberal Democrats agreed not to contest a future by-election in Cox's former seat as a

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show of unity and to supposedly heal divisions over the referendum.

The orchestrated official response to the killing is above all aimed at obscuring the connection between this crime and the far-right forces that dominate the Leave camp, which includes a large section of the Conservative Party and the Murdoch press. The referendum is itself the outcome of a manoeuvre by Cameron to prevent his party losing support to Farage while utilising UKIP's anti-immigrant xenophobia to push official politics further to the right.

The Remain camp's support for continued UK membership of the EU is itself predicated on a dirty deal struck by Cameron with European leaders to restrict EU immigrants' rights in the UK.

Whatever the outcome of the vote, the net effect will be to strengthen the most right-wing factions within the ruling elite in order to intensify the attacks on the social conditions and democratic rights of workers and youth and step up the drive to war, particularly against Russia and China.

The working class confronts fundamental class issues. The growth of far-right, chauvinist and racist forces, encouraged by the established parties, nominally "left" as well as right, is not a purely British phenomenon. Across Europe and globally, the ruling elite is stoking up nationalist and fascistic forces in response to the deepening economic crisis and geo-political tensions that are preparing the way for a new world war.

From Austria's Freedom Party, France's National Front and Germany's AfD, to Donald Trump's presidential candidacy in the United States and Rodrigo Duterte's authoritarian regime in the Philippines, the bourgeoisie is responding to the growth of anti-capitalist sentiment and working class resistance by turning to police state methods and seeking to divert popular discontent along reactionary channels.

The murder of Jo Cox has underscored the critical importance of the campaign by the SEP in Britain for an active boycott of the EU referendum. It is the only genuine and progressive alternative to the reactionary nationalist politics of both official camps. It alone articulates an independent strategy for the working class—the vast majority of the people in both Britain and across Europe—against the bankers' dictatorship of austerity and war that is the European Union.

It does so by rejecting all forms of nationalism, chauvinism and racism and advancing the struggle to unite the working people of all countries in defence of their common interests on the only viable basis—the revolutionary struggle for socialism. This strategy is summed up in the perspective of the United Socialist States of Europe.

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