

Galloway and pseudo-left defend alliance with UKIP and Tory right at Brexit referendum meeting

A reporter
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An intervention by the Socialist Equality Party at a meeting supporting British withdrawal from the European Union evoked a furious defence of a political alliance between the so-called “left” and the UK Independence Party and Conservatives in particular, and right-wing nationalists in general.

The platform at Monday’s meeting in Chesterfield included two members of the Left Leave campaign: Alex Gordon of the Rail, Maritime and Transport (RMT) union, and a representative of the Indian Workers Association. Left Leave was set up by the Stalinist Communist Party of Britain and the Socialist Workers Party, among other organisations.

Gary Mathews, who said he had joined the Labour Party to support Jeremy Corbyn as leader, spoke for Labour Leave. Mark Hill represented Green Leave.

The featured speaker was George Galloway. The former Respect MP appeared at a rally last February with UK Independence Party (UKIP) leader Nigel Farage and arch-Thatcherites. He declared at the time, “Left, right, left, right, forward march” to secure a victory for Leave in the referendum on EU membership.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* explained following the event, Galloway’s endorsement of the xenophobic “Grassroots Out” campaign did not merely “muddy the class line,” it “obliterates it,” with “politically toxic” ramifications.

That warning was borne out in Chesterfield on Monday.

The meeting took place just four days after fascist Thomas Mair brutally murdered Labour MP Jo Cox while shouting “Britain First.” In court on Saturday, Mair, who described himself as a “political activist,” gave his name as “death to traitors, freedom for Britain.”

Cox’s murder exposed the far-right forces being mobilised by the nationalist and anti-immigrant agitation dominating the referendum campaign, particularly on the part of the Leave camp. While the meeting began with one minute’s silence in Cox’s memory, all of the speakers were silent on her assailant’s far-right sympathies.

Galloway set the tone. Describing Cox’s slaying as a “foul, evil murder,” he claimed he could not say anything further due to reporting restrictions! Nonetheless, he insisted, “The one

thing we cannot allow is the argument that because somebody murdered somebody else, that means our campaign for exit from the European Union is in some way tarnished by that, let alone invalidated by that.”

Just because the British National Party opposed certain things, that was not a reason for supporting them, he argued. Thursday’s vote was a “binary referendum” in which there “could be only one of two answers, Leave or Remain.”

The remainder of his remarks consisted of upholding British national sovereignty as the main issue before working people. While listing aspects of the neo-liberal agenda of the EU, he said nothing about the austerity measures of successive British Labour and Conservative governments, attributing the attack on workers’ social conditions and democratic rights entirely to the 1975 referendum vote in favour of the UK remaining in the European Common Market (precursor to the EU).

Outlining what he described as “socialist reasons” for opposing the EU, the RMT’s Alex Gordon similarly presented a picture of the UK prior to 1975 as a veritable workers’ paradise. (This at a time of major class struggles, including national miners’ strikes in 1972 and 1974, the latter of which led to the fall of the Heath Tory government).

“Now,” he declared, “everything that we were brought up to think had been secured—public ownership of the strategic industries, public services that were socially owned, such as education, health and housing, all the security that went with living in a stable society—has been taken away, and it’s been taken away by European Union institutions.”

A vote for Leave was a sign of international solidarity, he claimed, portraying the mass protests in France against the Socialist Party’s anti-labour laws as a national revolt against the EU and its reduction of the French government to “colonial” status.

Julie Hyland, SEP assistant national secretary, spoke in the brief public contribution section of the debate. While there were many socialist reasons for opposing the EU, she said, “there are no socialist reasons for supporting Nigel Farage and UKIP, which is exactly what George Galloway has been doing.”

Hyland cited Galloway's glowing tribute to Farage and his claim that left and right shared common interests, including his assertion that the issues in the referendum involved being able to decide "who can come and live and work in Britain, who we can deport from Britain."

She noted that Galloway had defended his alliance with the UKIP leader by arguing that Farage is not a "fascist." Rather, Galloway asserted, "he is a Poujadist, a populist right-winger who uses issues like immigration in the way that right-wing politicians do."

Hyland continued: "As if it matters to the immigrant or striking workers, who are, and will be, the targets for such forces, whether they are attacked by an overt fascist or *just* an extreme right-wing nationalist!"

To this point, Hyland's remarks were met with silence by the 60 or so assembled. But when she reminded the audience that Cox had been killed by a fascist just weeks after Farage said "violence is the next step" if people feel "we have lost control of our borders," she was howled at by the Green Leave spokesperson and others in the audience.

Demands for her to "shut up" became even shrill when she went on to say that the "stoking up of anti-immigrant prejudices is not a secondary, or accidental, feature" of the referendum. Its purpose is to divert from the common class issues facing workers and youth in every European country and line working people up behind one or another section of their "own" ruling class.

Galloway's alliance with the right is "politically criminal," Hyland said. "It has nothing to do with socialism or the interests of working people. It disarms working people and strengthens the far-right. What workers need is not the reassertion of 'national sovereignty,' but the reassertion of their independent class interests in opposition to all sections of the British ruling class and in a common struggle with workers across Europe against capitalism."

Hyland's denunciation of alliances with the right was condemned as "sectarianism" by both Mathews and Hill.

In his own response, Galloway said a lengthy reply to Hyland "would be unhelpful to the meeting and the cause all of us share." He continued: "We have a duty to mobilise the maximum number of people" to vote Leave on Thursday. UKIP received four million votes in the general election. "So I am not going to take this Monday night to launch a root and branch attack against four million people whose votes we need because that would not be tactical politics."

"I stand by every word that I have myself said or written," he continued. "I have a political line. I don't believe in free movement of labour because I'm a trade unionist and I know that a never-ending increase in labour supply drives down the price of labour, which is wages. I know that and every worker knows it."

He then said that his political line "coincides with all kinds of people with whom I am fundamentally in opposition," citing

Boris Johnson, the Tory leader of Vote Leave. "But this is not the time to launch a big attack on Boris Johnson because Boris Johnson represents some of the people that are going to vote the same way as me on Thursday."

Closing the meeting, Mathews said that Farage is a "nationalist and a populist who has the support of four million people who we want to join the socialist movement in the future." At this point, several audience members announced they were UKIP members "and proud of it."

Socialist Workers Party members in attendance said nothing about the political amnesty given by the platform to Farage and leading Thatcherites. The SWP previously claimed that Left Leave was a progressive alternative to Galloway's alliance with UKIP. Instead, in recent weeks Galloway was allowed to speak at Left Leave events in Wales. According to a letter in the *Socialist Worker*, this had led to the SWP removing "its speaker from meetings featuring Galloway."

This is nothing more than a face-saving exercise. The SWP's silence on Left Leave's promotion of alliances with the nationalist right denotes consent.

The direct line-up of the pseudo-left with right-wing forces is not merely a British phenomenon. In Ukraine, they embraced the Maidan protests, which were led by the fascist Right Sector in alliance with US and German imperialism. In the 2014 referendum on Scotland's independence from the UK, they lined up behind the Scottish National Party on the basis of "national self-determination."

In Greece, Syriza, the political creation of the pseudo-left and Euro-Stalinists, is imposing brutal austerity on the working class in a coalition government with the xenophobic, right-wing Independent Greeks (Anel).

The SEP previously noted discussions within Britain's pseudo-left over the Syriza/Anel coalition in which it was argued that they would conclude a similar alliance with UKIP should the need arise. The referendum campaign has served as the vehicle for this political realignment.

This underscores the political significance of the SEP's refusal to endorse either of the right-wing camps in the referendum and to fight for an active boycott as the means for establishing the political independence of the working class and advancing an international socialist program.



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