

Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition make nationalist case for Brexit

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Britain's main pseudo-left groups, the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) and Socialist Party (SP), are calling for a Leave vote in today's referendum. In doing so, they are allied with the faction of the British ruling elite headed by Conservative former mayor of London Boris Johnson and the right-wing UK Independence Party (UKIP).

The referendum is the outcome of a faction fight between two right-wing camps within the bourgeoisie, both of which are committed to the destruction of the past gains and conditions of the working class.

The campaign by the Socialist Party for a Leave vote has been conducted through its front organisation, the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC), founded as an electoral coalition with the Stalinist-led Rail, Maritime and Transport (RMT) union, with token representation of the SWP.

From the beginning, TUSC sought to legitimise the referendum by applying to be designated as the official Leave campaign. It claimed that only a campaign that was "anti-austerity, anti-racist and socialist" could secure a Leave vote, as it would reach many more people than the Tory and UKIP-dominated Vote Leave and Grassroots Out campaigns. Its bid was duly rejected by the Electoral Commission because the entire purpose of the binary referendum is to line workers up behind one or another faction of the ruling elite.

With the Trades Union Congress and Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn playing critical roles in support of a Remain vote on behalf of Conservative Prime Minister David Cameron, TUSC has found itself out on a limb while trying to justify its support for Leave.

A TUSC meeting was held in Sheffield, South Yorkshire on Tuesday, just six days after the killing of Labour Party MP Jo Cox in Birstall, West Yorkshire by a fascist sympathiser and supporter of the Leave campaign, Thomas Mair. Her murder graphically underscores the far-

right forces mobilised by the referendum.

Chairing the meeting, SP member Alistair Tice mournfully set out TUSC's rejection as the official Leave designate, while acknowledging that the referendum was a "narrative that has seen... putting it bluntly, one set of right-wing, racist Tory bastards arguing against another set of right-wing, Tory racist bastards. The voice of the working class, of the left and socialists, has not been heard in this debate."

His statement is a damning indictment of TUSC's campaign. If both camps in the referendum are equally reactionary, how could endorsing one side over the other express the "voice of the working class?"

One of the speakers, Maxine Bowler, a member of the SWP, said that "the whole debate around the question of Europe has unleashed an absolute cesspit of racism." She noted that only weeks prior to Cox's murder, UKIP leader Nigel Farage said that if immigration is not controlled, "violence is the next step."

But Bowler made clear that the opposition of a section of the pseudo-left to the EU is based not on socialism, but on the attempt by a section of the middle class and trade union bureaucracy to extract some minimal social concessions on a nationalist basis. The EU had to be opposed, she said, because the "whole European project was about making sure that Keynesian economics and those kind of policies that were around in 1945 that built the welfare state could never, ever be used again."

The promotion of Keynesian economics is directly bound up with TUSC's promotion of Corbyn. Its attitude to the referendum is determined by narrow, nationalist and self-serving tactical opportunism—namely, the claim that a split in the Tory party caused by the referendum will open the way for a Corbyn Labour government. On this basis, TUSC seeks to blind the working class to the dangers posed by the strengthening of the most right-wing sections of the bourgeoisie through the referendum

campaign and create illusions in the Corbyn leadership, which is allied with Cameron in the referendum and has no intention of launching a struggle against capitalism.

In the period allotted for discussion, Socialist Equality Party (SEP) member Tony Robson explained, “We are the only political tendency in this referendum that is calling for an active boycott as the only principled standpoint.”

He continued: “None of the speakers on the platform have really addressed the context in which this referendum is taking place. This is not simply a British question. What is developing is a global economic crises, the growth of social inequality, and the promotion of economic nationalism. It is not just a question here in Britain, but we can see it with Donald Trump in America and throughout Europe.”

The SEP had insisted that “the only principled position socialists can take in this referendum is to oppose both warring factions of the bourgeoisie. They are essentially fighting over what is the best strategy for defending the interests of British imperialism. We are calling for that boycott to create the preconditions for unifying the working class throughout Europe and internationally.”

Noting the chair’s description of the referendum as a dispute between “two sets of right-wing, racist Tory bastards” spewing out racist filth, he said, “So on what basis do you advocate siding with a wing of the bourgeoisie on a Leave vote? How can you possibly claim that a vote to leave will provide the basis for a leftward movement of the working class?

“Everything you’ve raised from the platform has been predicated on blurring the distinction between socialism and nationalism. You have counterposed UK law on workers’ rights and health and safety to that of Brussels. You put forward the position that leaving the EU will create a new lease on life for the national state. What you are identifying the working class with is a national perspective. We completely reject that. People have to take a serious warning from this referendum because what we are seeing is a line-up of supposedly left forces with the most right-wing and nationalist parties.”

Robson noted that George Galloway, former Respect MP, had appeared alongside Farage at the launch of UKIP’s Grassroots Out, solidarising himself with the promotion of nationalism and xenophobia. Now Galloway was appearing on platforms of the pseudo-left-backed Left Leave campaign in Wales and alongside some of its key figures in Chesterfield the previous evening.

When the SEP opposed Galloway’s alliance with Thatcherite Tories and UKIP, it was denounced as

“sectarians.” Robson said, “There is a real attempt here to chloroform the working class. The only means to oppose this is by initiating a struggle of the international working class. We are fighting for the United Socialist States of Europe, not a return to the national hearth.”

In concluding the meeting, Tice called for all those present to do their all to elect a Corbyn Labour government, while Bowler said it would be necessary to oppose racism after June 23. “The difference in this country, unlike in France, is that people have opposed the fascists every time they’ve turned up,” Bowler stated.

This slander against the French working class is aimed at concealing the role played by TUSC and the pseudo-left in politically strengthening the right. At the TUSC meeting in Liverpool the previous week, Roger Bannister, a leader of the SP and member of the national executive of the Unison trade union, attacked the free movement of labour within the EU because it “discriminates against local labour.”

He added, “We should demand legislation that says every job has to be advertised locally, as is appropriate, in local newspapers, and rates of pay and conditions of service, and you select your labour force from the applications that you get.” Such reactionary nationalist positions explain why TUSC has the support of a layer of union bureaucrats who are increasingly strident in their opposition, from a nationalist standpoint, to the free movement of labour within the EU.



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