Thousands turn up for cancelled "Remain in EU" rallies throughout the UK

Our reporters
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Thousands of supporters of the Remain in the European Union (EU) campaign turned up to a rally in London's Trafalgar Square on Tuesday evening, despite heavy rain and the event being officially cancelled earlier in the day.

The protesters, mainly young people, later marched to the Houses of Parliament. Smaller demonstrations, despite also being cancelled, took place in other cities, including Manchester, Bristol, Brighton, Exeter, Oxford and Cambridge. Rallies planned in other cities have been rescheduled.

The London demonstration attracted the support of 50,000 people after an invitation was posted on Facebook by digital producer Jessica Rodgers on behalf of the London Stays group. However, the event was banned by the Greater London Authority, which declared, "The maximum safe capacity for an event on Trafalgar Square is 10,000 people, so given our need to ensure the wellbeing of Londoners, we were unable to grant permission on safety grounds."

Homemade banners included such statements as "EU, We Love You," "Love Not Hate," "Racists Out, Migrants In," "Brits don't quit" and "Whose Future? Our Future!"

There was no public address system set up, but out of the apparent chaos a voice suddenly sounded out—that of Donnachadh McCarthy, a former deputy chair of the Liberal Democrats. McCarthy claimed to be "a self-appointed accidental MC! It was just I wanted the event to go ahead and not let the police suppress such an important rally. So I brought along a mic-box in case it might be useful."

Amid dire warnings of economic catastrophe and the boost the referendum gave to right-wing, anti-immigrant nationalists, millions fear for the future. The aim of those addressing the rally was to exploit the concern, frustration and anger at the referendum result and its consequences and to sow further illusions in the EU—under conditions where there is serious consideration being given to overturning it within ruling circles.

McCarthy went on to introduce Green Party spokesperson, Darren Johnson and Liberal Democrat leader Tim Farron, claiming they had "come out of nowhere."

Farron declared that he accepted the result of the referendum in favour of leaving the EU but, "The Liberal Democrats will fight the next election on a clear and unequivocal promise to restore British prosperity and role in the world, with the United Kingdom in the European Union, not out."

Other, unnamed, speakers called for Parliament not to recognise the result of the referendum.

The Socialist Equality Party called on workers and youth to reject both Leave and Remain factions of the ruling elite and take an independent stance. We explained in our statement, "For an active boycott of the Brexit referendum!":

"There can be no good outcome of such a plebiscite. Whichever side wins, working people will pay the price. It is not a question of choosing the 'lesser evil'—both options are equally rotten. Any possibility of an independent voice for the working class being registered has been deliberately excluded. A Remain vote means not only endorsing the reactionary institutions of the EU. The terms negotiated by Cameron as the basis of the UK remaining in the EU sanction his government's attacks on migrants and measures to protect the criminal activities of the UK's banks and financial institutions. A Leave vote, however, would be seized on as an endorsement of demands for British 'sovereignty' and

'independence'—euphemisms for removing all obstacles to the intensified exploitation of the working class and a more ruthless clampdown on immigration."

The defeat of the campaign to remain in the EU was no accident. Over the last decade workers in the UK have witnessed the EU carrying out savage austerity programmes, via supportive government, against workers continent-wide—as in the case of the destruction of the living standards of millions of workers in Greece. Under these conditions, Leave forces led by the right wing of the Tories and the UK Independence Party were able to capitalise on anti-EU sentiment to pursue their own reactionary agenda. Now the bourgeois Remain forces are seeking to do the same by preying on the concerns of young people.

World Socialist Web Site reporters spoke to some of the demonstrators. Margaret, a school administrative assistant in her mid-fifties said, "This is the first time I have ever come to a demonstration. There are things wrong with the EU but I think we have to stay in to change them."

"I feel really disappointed for the future and the younger generation. I am frightened about what might come about with the rise of the far-right and the breakup of Europe. We've already seen attacks on the Polish community centre (in west London). I suppose the referendum was really a no-win situation."

Sean, 24, said, "I can see why many working class people voted to leave the EU because of the way large areas of the country had been forgotten. Many aspects of the European Union I don't agree with. But to press the self-destruct button is not going to stop increasing austerity."

Sean explained that after being "disenfranchised" for years, and making protest votes for the Green Party, he had joined the Labour Party when Jeremy Corbyn stood for party leader last year. Speaking about the ongoing coup against Corbyn, Sean said it was clear that the Blairites had "long plotted" to remove him and that it was wrong for him to have "given them a chance."

He added the main problem is "Labour is simply out of touch with ordinary people and the grass roots."

Marie-Claire, a 30 year old barrister, said, "The small margin in the referendum vote has divided the country in a really serious way with big economic and political consequences.

"I think the Leave people have legitimate grievances

but they have been misled to believe their grievances are all the fault of the EU when the British government is really responsible. A lot of people seem to be wishing they hadn't voted Leave now.

"Look at the promises [UK Independence Party leader] Nigel Farage and the Leave campaign made about using the £350 million given to the EU on the NHS and then turning around at the end of the campaign and saying it was a mistake. It was a serious misrepresentation that affected the way people voted. Also, it is the Tory government that made the austerity cuts in the NHS, not the EU.

"I think when people here are shouting 'We love the EU,' it really means we love being part of a wider community with our neighbours and we don't want to distinguish ourselves in the way the Leave campaign is dividing people."

Sam, a 26-year-old driver for a printing company, said he "reluctantly" voted Remain in the referendum. "I would never have voted for the Leave people. Farage talked about giving EU money to the NHS, but not so long ago UKIP was saying the NHS should be completely sold off. It's crazy to think the ordinary working man will get more control if Britain leaves the EU. Even a spineless person like Corbyn cannot be allowed by the powers-that-be. I can't see him surviving.

"I can't see any party that represents me. You've got a lot of people here who are similar to me, people who still wanted to come out and protest. But we end up with the Liberal Democrats speaking up there—the same people that raised student fees and were in a coalition with the Tories. So that's the result of supporting Remain.

"I think your idea of an active boycott was great. It would have stopped me wasting my time on all this crap. I will definitely look at your web site."

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