Britain's right-wing media call for creation of new pro-European Union party

Robert Stevens
6 July 2016

In the last week, three of Britain's major right-wing publications have published articles supporting the formation of a new pro-business, pro-European Union (EU) party if the ongoing coup being organised by Labour right-wingers against party leader Jeremy Corbyn fails.

Last week, Phillip Stephens wrote in the *Financial Times* that in the aftermath of the referendum vote for the UK to leave the EU, "Many centrist Tories have more in common with their counterparts on the Labour side than with English nationalist Brexiters; and, likewise, middle-of-the-road Labourites are closer to pro-European Tories than to Mr Corbyn's brand of 1970s state socialism ... the space may be opening up for a new, pro-European, economically liberal and socially compassionate alternative to pinched nationalism and hard-left socialism."

This call has been echoed by other columnists in the *Financial Times*, the *Economist* magazine and the Rupert Murdoch-owned *Times.* All three view the founding of a new party as a means of reversing a referendum result, which was a blow to the dominant sections of British capital and its strategic partner, US imperialism.

The writers all proceed on the basis that if the right-wing Labourites who are plotting to remove Corbyn fail in their efforts, this will necessitate a split in the party—centring on the 172 Labour MPs who refused to back Corbyn last week in a vote of no confidence.

The *Economist* 's Bagehot declared that after the vote for a Brexit (British EU withdrawal), "the political landscape is transformed."

"Jeremy Corbyn and John McDonnell may be about to face a leadership challenge, but they could well win it," Bagehot continues. The referendum vote revealed "a new coalition" made up of "big-city dwellers, the Millennials, the globe-trotters, the university students, the European immigrants and their children. But they also include the millions of perfectly boring, perfectly suburban, perfectly Middle-England types who simply recognise that Britain and the rest of the world are interdependent…"

Describing these as the "48%ers" (those who voted to remain in the EU), it welcomed the move by the Liberal Democrats to stand on a pro-EU ticket at the next general election, before cautioning, "it is not clear whether [Liberal Democrats leader] Mr [Tim] Farron and his seven fellow MPs are the force needed to stand up to Britain's new, illiberal establishment."

Therefore, "The best existing hope of a strong, national voice for the 48%ers surely lies with Labour."

Speaking about the leader of a political party democratically elected just 10 months ago with the support of hundreds of thousands of Labour members and supporters, the *Economist* continued that if "Mr Corbyn can be forced out, perhaps a new, moderate, pro-European leadership can reorient the party … and, yes, if circumstances change sufficiently, floating the possibility that Britain revisit its choice of June 23rd."

However, "if … Corbyn hangs on, or is replaced by another luke-warm Remainer—and unless the Lib Dems can pull off the sort of rise that, at the moment, looks unlikely, Britain needs a new party of the cosmopolitan centre."

On Monday, *Financial Times* principal political columnist Janan Ganesh recalled the 1981 split from Labour by four right-wing MPs, who went on to form the Social Democratic Party. This later merged with the Liberal Party to form today's Liberal Democrats.

The events of 1981 should serve as an inspiration to the Blairite plotters, Ganesh wrote. "In the end, the SDP won, and won big." They were trailblazers for the

© World Socialist Web Site

"past four prime ministers—John Major, Tony Blair, Gordon Brown and David Cameron," who had sought "to blend a free economy, a substantial state, cultural looseness and EU membership." He concluded, "Last month's eruption [the Leave vote] has broken this consensus but it still commands half of Britons. A new party must speak for them."

On Tuesday, *Times* columnist Rachel Sylvester penned a column titled, "As Labour splits, a new party is emerging."

"Three months ago the idea of a fresh political grouping was seen as mad. Now the tectonic plates are beginning to move." If Corbyn "somehow stays, or is replaced by another hard-left candidate," Sylvester continued, "MPs are in no doubt about what will happen—as several told me: 'The party will split.'"

One option being discussed, revealed Sylvester, "is for the rebels to make a 'unilateral declaration of independence' in the House of Commons, setting up a separate grouping with their own leader. As they would have more MPs, they could argue that they, and not Mr Corbyn's rump, should be the official opposition. There would also be a legal fight for the Labour name, with the larger chunk of MPs pushing to retain the brand, funding and infrastructure."

Sylvester cites "one of those involved behind the scenes," who said, "If Corbyn stays then we have another organisation that isn't called the Labour Party. That gets exciting because it doesn't have all the baggage, the links to the unions; you could create a new constitution and policy programme. There's a massive opportunity for a pro-business, socially liberal party in favour of the EU."

Regarding funding a new party, the anonymous plotter said, "Money would not be a problem. You would need £8 million and you could raise that in a week."

Detailing the level of collusion involved, Sylvester notes, "Links forged across party divides in the Remain campaign have been maintained and are forming the basis of new alliances. Pro-European MPs from all parties have already met in the House of Commons to discuss co-operation as Brexit legislation goes through parliament. Lord Ashdown of Norton-sub-Hamdon, the former Liberal Democrats leader, has also been talking to Labour and Tory grandees about creating a cross-party movement for people with 'modern progressive views.'"

Sylvester, with her inside track on the plot to remove Corbyn, is married to Patrick Wintour, the former Political Editor and now Diplomatic Editor of the nominally liberal *Guardian*. The *Guardian* and its sister, the Sunday *Observer*, are playing a key role in the moves to remove Corbyn. As the coup was in full swing last week, the *Guardian* editorialised that Labour faced an "existential danger" and that the "Corbyn experiment" was "effectively over."

The same day as it called for Corbyn's resignation, the *Guardian* published an opinion piece by Robert Hunter, a high-level US state operative. The former president of the Atlantic Treaty Association, and US ambassador to NATO, Hunter insisted that the referendum vote was an example of "mob rule" that should be ignored and that parliament should overturn the result through elections for a "new leadership and a new government."

Yesterday, Unite trade union leader Len McCluskey met separately with Labour deputy leader Tom Watson (who has called on Corbyn to step down), and later with Corbyn. The talks were the first stage in Unite's declared aim of "brokering a peace" between the two factions. Unite fears a threatened split may lead to the party's demise, with incalculable consequences for the political stability of the UK.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site