

UK: Corbyn threatens to block Brexit and trigger general election

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Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn has threatened to block the Conservative government from triggering Article 50, initiating two years of a negotiated UK exit from the European Union (EU), unless a series of conditions are met.

In a speech to the pro-Remain Centre for Labour and Social Studies (CLASS) and accompanying interview with the *Daily Mirror*, Corbyn outlined a number of “bottom lines”—of which securing continued access to Europe’s Single Market for British finance capital and industry is the only essential issue at stake.

Speaking in London Corbyn stated, “We will be pressing for full access to the European single market as part of the Brexit negotiations.”

In an exclusive interview with the *Sunday Mirror*, Corbyn took a much more overt stand. The newspaper reported that Corbyn “will force [Prime Minister] Theresa May to hold an election in the spring unless she caves in to his Brexit demands on trade and worker rights.”

Corbyn subsequently stated that he was not seeking to block Brexit and accepted the June 23 referendum vote—a position echoed by other Labour spokesmen throughout the weekend. But his threat was made and can be made again in the weeks leading up to May’s March target deadline.

His statement was made just days after three judges at the High Court ruled against the government and handed down a judgement that only Parliament has the right to trigger Brexit. Prime Minister Theresa May intended to trigger Article 50 through the use of Royal Prerogative powers. Gina Miller, an investment manager and the main plaintiff against the government, also said her challenge was “about process not politics.”

Corbyn’s placing of continued membership to the

Single Market at the head of his demands, as well as the insistence that parliament must trigger Article 50, confirms that he is offering his services to those seeking to reverse the referendum result. MPs support remaining in the EU by a majority of 3-1.

This was underscored by his appearance at the CLASS event alongside top Blairite policy-wonk Will Hutton and the *Guardian* journalist Owen Jones, who played a key role in legitimising right-wing moves against Corbyn that were initially centred on the charge that he was too “luke-warm” in his support for the EU.

Talk in the media is constantly of “Hard” and “Soft” Brexit—depending on whether access to the Single Market is maintained. But the Single Market is the essential basis for the EU and access to it is the fundamental concern of the majority faction of the ruling elite. Europe accounts for 44 percent of total UK exports in goods and services. Moreover, asset management firms rely on European investors for 13 percent of their assets. The UK’s financial asset management industry is worth a massive £5.7 trillion (320 percent of entire UK GDP) and is the largest in Europe by some distance. Its firms manage 37 percent of total assets managed in Europe—more than France, Germany and Italy combined.

In portraying the Single Market as progressive, Corbyn is siding with finance capital and big business interests against the working class. Tens of millions of workers and youth across the continent have seen their jobs, wages and living standards decimated by EU-dictated policies governing membership of the Single Market, which was established as the arena in which the major powers and their corporations would dominate the continent and compete globally.

On the orders of the EU, following the 2008 global financial crash, the social gains of workers were

destroyed in Greece in the space of a few years of savage austerity cuts. Similar austerity programmes have been enacted in one EU country after another, hand in hand with the EU's mandated privatisation of state assets industry and the destruction of welfare provision.

Corbyn, who in the past often denounced the EU for its treatment of Greece, has now taken up the battle cry of the City of London and Labour's right-wing coup plotters—just as he has capitulated on every other issue.

Corbyn's pro-EU/pro-big business stand has already played a dangerous role during the referendum campaign. It ensured that the right wing of the Tories was able to exploit growing anti-EU sentiment and social discontent and channel hostility in a nationalist direction. This was only a political down-payment on what is now unfolding.

Newspapers such as the *Sun*, owned by billionaire oligarch Rupert Murdoch, and other anti-working class hate sheets such as the *Daily Mail* and *Daily Express* are posing as the representatives of the “will of the people” who are fighting, in the words of the *Mail*, “out of touch” elites and “enemies of the people”—for thwarting their declared aim of eliminating all remaining checks on the City speculators and the super exploitation of the working class.

What is being created is the basis for a right-wing populist movement that has clear parallels to the United States, where Republican Presidential candidate Donald Trump is attempting to portray his campaign as one directed against the “establishment.”

On Sunday, interim UK Independence Party leader Nigel Farage told the BBC's *Andrew Marr Show*, “There is a political and wealthy ruling elite who are not prepared to accept referendums.” Asked if there was a danger of “disturbance in the streets” if Brexit is thwarted by Parliament, Farage replied, “If the people of this country think that they're going to be cheated, they're going to be betrayed, then we will see political anger, the likes of which none of us in our lifetimes have ever witnessed.”

Alongside Corbyn, Labour and the Trades Union Congress, responsibility for the ability of Farage et al. to dominate oppositional sentiment rests with Britain's pseudo-left forces, including Left Unity and Socialist Resistance, who backed Corbyn's stand in the referendum, and those such as the Socialist Workers

Party and Socialist Party, who dressed up the right-wing nationalist Brexit forces in progressive clothing by advocating a “Left Leave” vote.

The Socialist Equality Party urged an active boycott of the referendum as the only way in which the interests of the working class could be advanced. We wrote that the pseudo-left are “are wholly indifferent to the actual forces being strengthened by the Leave campaign. In reality, they are subordinating the working class to an initiative aimed at shifting political life even further along a nationalist trajectory, thereby strengthening and emboldening the far right in the UK and across Europe, while weakening the political defences of the working class. Having helped release the genie of British nationalism, they are politically responsible for its consequences.”

This warning has been confirmed. The central issue now posed is to deepen the struggle for the political independence of all the working class from all factions of the ruling elite. The demand must be for working class unity in Britain with workers throughout the continent in the struggle for the United Socialist States of Europe. Only in this way can the working class orient itself, under conditions in which demands will be made again and again to take sides in a bourgeois faction fight that will assume ever more malignant and dangerous forms.



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