

No to British nationalism and the European Union!

## A socialist response to Brexit

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*The following article is being distributed at today's Unite for Europe demonstration in London.*

With Prime Minister Theresa May set to trigger Article 50 of the Lisbon Treaty on March 29, warnings as to the impact of Britain's exit from the European Union (EU) abound.

May is touring the UK promising to "deliver a deal that works" for everyone and describing Wednesday's beginning of the two year process of exiting the EU as a "historic event [that] will precipitate a shift in our role in the world and see Britain begin a bold new chapter as a prosperous, open and global nation."

But she does so amid demands for a £57 billion "divorce" settlement from the EU, threats of punishment by the 27 remaining member states, reports of economic dislocation including banks such as Goldman Sachs and HSBC leaving London that in total threatens 230,000 finance jobs, and of a 92 percent fall in EU nationals registering as nurses in England.

The announcement will, moreover, be made under conditions in which the Scottish National Party-led parliament at Holyrood has made an official demand for a second independence referendum and with Sinn Fein in Ireland raising the issue of the continued status of Northern Ireland's six counties as British territory.

It is against this background that the Unite for Europe national march to parliament has been organised.

There are clear and valid reasons for the concerns of those who will take part, including repugnance over the government's refusal to guarantee the rights of EU nationals already residing in Britain. In addition, the attacks on such protests that are centred exclusively on the insistence that they are impermissible because they seek to flout the "public will," as expressed in last year's referendum, have wholly reactionary implications.

Dissent with the result among the 48 percent who voted against Brexit is entirely legitimate and its suppression has nothing to do with a genuine concern for democracy. It merely gives carte blanche to the reactionary pro-Brexit wing of the British ruling class to complete what they describe glowingly as the "Thatcher revolution," based on slashing corporation tax and public spending while stepping up the exploitation of the working class to ensure that the UK business can go "out of Europe and into the world."

However, neither are those individuals and political tendencies leading the Unite for Europe protest and the broader opposition to Brexit the "friends" of democracy and "progressive values," or the future of the younger generation, as they claim to be. Their sole genuine and overriding concern is that alienating the UK from Europe, above all exclusion from the Single Market, is damaging to the interests of Britain's capitalists. Everything else they say, centred as it is on a politically degraded apologia for the EU, is moral effluvia and lies.

That is why, having first opposed efforts to "incite hate and divide communities," etc., the number one demand of Unite for Europe's "open conversation where the UK's civil society is consulted and where Parliament or the people have the final say on our future" is: "We want to remain a member of the Single Market."

In the Brexit referendum campaign, the Socialist Equality Party refused to support either a Remain or a Leave vote because neither represented the interest of working people. We called instead for an active boycott and dedicated our efforts above all to explaining the fundamental issues posed for workers, not just in Britain but throughout Europe.

We wrote that the EU "is not an instrument for

realising the genuine and necessary unification of Europe”, but rather “a mechanism for the subjugation of the continent to the dictates of the financial markets...”

The EU and its constituent governments have spent years imposing a social counterrevolution on Europe’s workers through unending cuts in jobs, wages and social conditions--in the process impoverishing millions and bankrupting entire countries.

As to associating the EU with “free movement,” its proper designation is that of “Fortress Europe.” It is a continent surrounded by razor wire, concrete walls and concentration camps, whose leaders have the blood of thousands of desperate refugees—forced to flee the consequences of wars waged by the US, Britain and Europe—on their hands.

It is for this reason that the xenophobia whipped up by Brexit finds its corollary throughout Europe, above all in the rise of fascistic movements such as the National Front in France.

Likewise, the claim of Unite for Europe, whose real leadership is an alliance between the Blairite right of the Labour Party and the Liberal Democrats—to be “resisting” not only “hard Brexit” but also US President Donald Trump—is equally bogus.

It is essential to distinguish between genuine popular opposition to Trump’s nationalism, militarism, racism and misogyny and the use that it is being put to by the pro-Remain forces. They view Trump’s presidency and May’s alliance with him as antithetical to the interests of British imperialism for two related reasons:

- His “America First” doctrine makes Trump an active opponent of the EU, because he sees it as a trade rival dominated by Germany that must be curbed.

- He has expressed reservations over the US commitment to NATO and the focus of the previous Obama administration on stoking up military hostilities with Russia, when China should be America’s main concern.

The response to this among Trump’s political opponents—the Democrats in the US and the European powers led by Berlin—is wholly reactionary.

On both sides of the Atlantic, the main charge levelled against Trump is that he is a stooge of Russian President Vladimir Putin for opposing NATO’s military build-up on Europe’s borders. In Europe, all talk is of building an independent military capability to

project the interests of the major powers on the world arena—combined with efforts to capitalise on US hostilities with Beijing by signing trade deals that make a clash with Washington ever more certain.

To side with the EU against Trump is therefore to tie the working class to an escalating drive towards trade war and militarism that can only mean accelerated austerity and a potentially catastrophic confrontation with Russia.

Brexit, Trump and the ongoing fracturing of the EU along national lines are all rooted in the irreconcilable contradiction of capitalism that twice in the 20th century plunged Europe and the world into war—between the integrated and global character of production and the division of the world into antagonistic nation states.

Following the Second World War, the European powers, with the support of the US, sought to stabilise the continent and regulate such hitherto disastrous national rivalries through ever-closer economic and political integration.

This project has failed and cannot be revived. Only the unified and independent political mobilisation of the working class against all factions of the bourgeoisie, in Britain, Europe and internationally, offers a way forward.

The task at hand is the struggle for a workers’ government in Britain and the United Socialist States of Europe within a world federation of socialist states.

An essential foundation for such a movement is the conscious rejection by the most thoughtful elements—above all by young people attracted to the *pro-EU* protest due to its support for “free movement” and declared hostility to xenophobia—of all efforts to divide the working class along pro- and anti-Brexit lines.



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