

Blairites and Liberal Democrats stage pro-EU demo in London

Robert Stevens
27 March 2017

Tens of thousands demonstrated in London Saturday at a Unite for Europe protest. The march was called by representatives of the ruling elite who support Britain remaining in the European Union (EU) with continuing access to the Single Market.

An anti-Brexit march, which was attended by around 1,500 and called by the pro-EU Young European Movement, was held in Edinburgh city centre. It was addressed by pro-EU figures, including Scottish National Party (SNP) MPs Tommy Sheppard and Joanna Cherry, Alex Cole-Hamilton, a Liberal Democrats Member of the Scottish Parliament and Green MSP Ross Greer.

The London March was held just five days before Conservative Prime Minister Theresa May triggers the Article 50 legislation, beginning the process of the UK exiting the EU.

The march assembled at Park Lane, before passing through Trafalgar Square and ending at Parliament Square. Those in attendance were mainly middle class layers. A large contingent carried blue and yellow EU flags, with many carrying homemade placards adorned with a wide array of pro-EU statements.

Among those addressing the rally were Liberal Democrats leader Tim Farron and his predecessor Nick Clegg; Alastair Campbell, the main spin doctor of former Labour Prime Minister Tony Blair; David Lammy, the Labour MP for the London constituency of Tottenham; several Labour Members of the European Parliament; and Jonathan Bartley, the Green Party co-leader.

The date of the march was chosen to coincide with the commemoration by EU leaders in Rome of the 60th anniversary of the 1957 Treaty of Rome that launched attempts to integrate capitalist Europe. Leaders of the other 27 member states gathered in the Italian capital,

absent any representative from the UK.

While many of those attending—including a sizable number of young people—took part based on genuine concerns over the economic and political impact of Brexit, including the danger of the growth of nationalism and xenophobia, the platform offered no progressive alternative. Indeed, the fact that the event was overseen by Alastair Campbell serves as a devastating exposure of its right-wing, pro-capitalist credentials. Campbell's master, Blair, recently launched his Institute for Global Change after calling for the pro-EU movement to “to rise up and fight Brexit at any cost.” He is reportedly sinking ?£8 million of his vast ill-gotten fortune into the campaign.

To all intents and purposes, Blair may have well been addressing the audience. Campbell played a critical role in manufacturing the lies that Blair used to launch his illegal 2003 invasion of Iraq and is himself an unindicted war criminal. In all essentials, his speech to the rally was an amalgam of all Blair's recent statements on Brexit.

The Remain camp of the ruling elite—just as much as the Leave faction—promulgates a nationalist agenda. Hence, the organisers made sure that the backdrop to the speakers' stage was a massive EU flag, with a British Union flag prominently draped over the microphone stand. Referring to the British flag, Campbell held it before the audience and said, “It's fantastic to see all these European flags but the flag I really care about is this one, and it's the direction that Britain's going in and it's the direction that we have got to change, so that's what today is about.”

He continued, “Don't let anyone tell you that what we are doing is not patriotic. There is nothing more patriotic than thinking that your country is taking a wrong turn and you're determined to do something to

stop it.”

Campbell said of Brexit, “When you see a car heading toward a cliff, you don’t keep driving. ... I know I am in a minority in thinking Brexit can be stopped, but I’m not in a minority in thinking that it should be.”

The pro-Remain Labour right wing mounted an unsuccessful coup against Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn following the Brexit vote last June, on the basis that he was not sufficiently pro-EU and was facilitating Brexit. In his speech, Campbell warned, “We’ve got to pursue Jeremy Corbyn to change his mind [over allowing Brexit to be triggered].”

This echoed Blair’s denunciation of Corbyn earlier this month, whose leadership had meant that “The Labour Party is the facilitator of Brexit.”

Britain’s right-wing media endorsed the Leave campaign, including the *Sun*, owned by billionaire oligarch Rupert Murdoch. Campbell stated, “The media in this country is a right-wing cartel of tax-dodgers and tax exiles who pretend to speak for their readers when they speak for themselves and their own vested interest.”

The brass neck required to make such a statement is staggering. Campbell has spent most of his life advocating for these same right-wing forces. With the exception of Blair himself, he is most associated with cosyng up to and winning the support of Murdoch for his and Blair’s New Labour agenda in the lead-up to their 1997 general election victory.

Last week it was announced that Campbell would become editor at large for the *New European*, a pro-Remain newspaper set up in the aftermath of the Brexit referendum and which has become a mouthpiece for Blair. The *New European* distributed 1,800 placards at the protest.

Labour MP Lammy continued the theme stating, “In democracies, people are always allowed to change their minds. Over the coming months and years we will fight. Nigel Farage [former UK Independence Party leader and co-leader of Leave campaign] wouldn’t give up. Labour needs to rediscover its mojo, and quickly.”

Farron, whose Liberal Democrats are committed to holding a second referendum on Brexit, stated that the Remain movement had “to win support for a referendum on the deal [the May government finalises with the EU], to change the direction of the debate and

to change the direction of our country.”

Because the central criteria by which they evaluate Brexit is the extent to which it damages the interests of British capitalism, the platform were unable to utter a single word of truth about the EU. Rather than a bastion of “free movement” and “progressive” values, as promoted by the platform, the leaders of the bloc have spent the last decade impoverishing millions via brutal austerity measures and imposing a “Fortress Europe,” made up of razor wire and concrete walls to keep out desperate refugees, who are forced to flee the consequences of imperialist wars waged by the US, Britain and Europe.

The demonstration was followed Sunday by the pro-EU *Observer* trailing what it described as a “major policy speech” that Labour’s Brexit spokesman, Keir Starmer, is to make today. It said Starmer “will set out six tests for May and EU leaders to meet, including a requirement that any agreement delivers the ‘exact same benefits’ as the UK enjoys from being inside the single market and customs union.”



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact