

# Call by Labour right for a “progressive alliance” in UK election falls flat

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Leading MPs on Labour’s pro-European right wing have issued an open call for a “progressive alliance” for the June 8 snap general election.

For months, the *Guardian* newspaper has been working with leading Labourites in support of such a “progressive alliance”—involving Labour, the Liberal Democrats and the Greens concluding agreements at a local level so that one pro-EU membership candidate can challenge the Tories in a marginal seat.

In a recent op-ed in the *Guardian*, the former Labour prime minister, Tony Blair, stated that opposing Britain’s exit from the European Union (Brexit) was “the dominant election issue.” He argued that voters should vote tactically and that the Labour Party had to concentrate on “rallying people to a more reasonable and open position on Brexit across the party divide.”

These moves are being coordinated with Compass, which began life as a Labour-aligned think-tank but now includes Liberal Democrats, and the progressivealliance.org.uk web site—registered just two weeks ago as part of an operation costing £30,000.

On April 30, Compass head Neal Lawson sent a letter to subscribers, insisting that “Liberal Democrats, Green, SNP, Plaid, independents and others” had “a unique opportunity to reject the old tribal politics and come together to beat the Tories.”

He described as a “breakthrough moment” the *Guardian*’s publishing an open letter from senior Labour figures including Jon Cruddas MP, Clive Lewis MP and *Guardian* journalist Polly Toynbee “in support of Progressive Alliances.”

Lawson said that Greens and Liberal Democrats had stood aside in a number of general election seats. “If we can make this happen elsewhere we can unlock the floodgates and turn the tide in this election.” He called for an online petition to be signed “as members and

supporters of progressive parties,” to “call on party leadership from Labour, Liberal Democrats, SNP, Greens, Plaid Cymru and WEP (Women’s Equality Party): Do not stand in the way of local electoral pacts that allow progressives to win.”

There is no broad support for such a “progressive alliance.”

What is taking place is an engineered campaign, concocted in the offices of the *Guardian* together with the labour right. Its aim is not only, or even mainly, to secure victories for candidates opposing a “hard Brexit” with Britain severing access to the Single Market and Customs Union. They want to lay down a marker for a possible realignment of politics after the general election that would mean either removing Jeremy Corbyn as Labour leader and replacing him with the supposed “left” Clive Lewis or someone similar, or a split to form a new party—possibly in alliance with the Liberal Democrats.

But theirs is not a strong position.

The *Guardian* letter was signed by just 18 individuals, of which only three were Labour MPs (out of 229) and two were Labour peers (out of 201). Other signatories included Lawson and no less than five *Guardian* columnists—Toynbee, John Harris, Owen Jones, Paul Mason and Zoe Williams, as well as musician and right-wing Labour apologist Billy Bragg.

Liberal Democrat leader Tim Farron has held discussions with Blair, but has rejected tactical voting in the election—as he considers this would militate against winning back votes lost to the Tories. This left the signatories to the open letter to offer as an example of how to “maximise progressive votes and campaigning in some key seats” an alliance with the Greens, who have just one MP, Caroline Lucas.

The letter makes much of the decision of the Greens

to stand down in the constituencies of Ealing Central and Brighton Kemptown to “give Labour a better chance of defeating the Tories” and calls on Labour to reciprocate by standing aside in “Brighton Pavilion (the seat held by Lucas) and the Isle of Wight—“the one seat where they [the Greens] are the best-placed party to defeat the Tories.”

In an accompanying piece, the *Guardian* writes, “Lawson... said Labour could unlock 20 seats where the Green vote was key by simply stepping aside in two: Brighton Pavilion and the Isle of Wight.”

Given that only four seats are cited, one of which is a shoe-in for Lucas, and two involve the Greens stepping aside, the arithmetic employed by Lawson is to say the least hard to fathom.

In addition, Compass and its backers were behind an attempt, over the last 18 months, to form a local alliance with the Lib Dems in the South West Surrey constituency to prevent a Labour candidate from standing. Last week, Compass member Steve Williams put a motion not to stand a Labour candidate in South West Surrey but this was ruled out by the regional Labour office. Williams told the *Independent* that the local party would still not back the Labour candidate.

Compass was also involved in talks leading to the Greens agreeing not to stand in the nearby Ealing Acton constituency, to allow more votes to go to a Labour MP with a majority of just 274 votes over the Conservatives.

Such moves are also being pushed by Gina Miller, the multi-millionaire investment manager for SCM Private, who took legal action against the government’s attempts to trigger Brexit without a new parliamentary vote. Miller, a multi-millionaire, claims to have raised £300,000 from a crowd funding appeal for her “Best for Britain” tactical voting web site.

Despite these manoeuvres, the *Guardian*/Compass “breakthrough moment” went down in flames. By Tuesday, only just over 3,000 people had signed the “progressive alliance” petition.

It is a mark of the rarefied circles behind this manoeuvre that Blair chose to declare Monday in the *Daily Mirror* his intention to re-enter politics and get his “hands dirty” in support of the initiative.

The involvement of the war criminal Blair—easily the most hated politician in Britain—is the kiss of death. Even Cruddas was forced to admit, “It is pretty

controversial within Labour—you see pushback against what Tony Blair said.”

Corbyn has repeatedly rejected calls for a “progressive alliance,” citing the pro-austerity record of the Lib Dems when they were in office from 2010-2015 with the Tories. He told the *Daily Mirror* later Monday in response to Blair, “We’re a party for the whole country and we therefore have reached the position where we campaign in all parts of the country.”

On Tuesday, Paul Mason wrote a *Guardian* column expressing his hopes for the future, noting conservative Prime Minister Theresa May’s “disastrous dinner” with EU Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker last week where sharp disagreements erupted over the terms of May’s Brexit strategy.

What was required was for Labour and the pro-EU SNP to commit “to single-market access, customs union membership and membership of the European Free Trade Association,” he urged. “If the parties of progressive Britain cannot bring themselves to present a common Brexit offer, we the citizens should do it from below. Such work will not be wasted, even if May manages to win in June—because the Juncker leak confirms her Brexit strategy will not succeed.”

But for the present, Mason was forced to accept that the pro-capitalist agenda he advocates has no traction among voters. Instead he urged, “[I]f we can’t have a progressive alliance, we can at least have a people’s Brexit plan” he suggested. This would be based primarily on urging “[s]ingle-market access, matching today’s benefits” to be made a “red line” on whether to endorse Brexit at the end of negotiations.



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