

Progressive Alliance rally in London calls for support for “globalist” elite

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Last week, 600 people attended the launch meeting in London of the Progressive Alliance. This is an attempt by the pro-Labour Compass think-tank to form a cross party alliance between the Labour Party, Liberal Democrats, Green Party, Women’s Equality Party and other groups.

Convened under the slogan, “We need to do things differently,” it claimed to be about preventing a Conservative landslide in the June 8 general election and to “create a new kind of politics” based on proportional representation.

The meeting was held in an upmarket venue in the City of London, a convenient location for the Progressive Alliance’s support base among the affluent middle class.

Speakers included Labour MP Clive Lewis, author and journalist Paul Mason, Sophie Walker from the Women’s Equality Party, representatives of the Green Party, Compass and Spain’s Podemos, the *Guardian* journalist Zoe Williams and Clare Sandberg from the Bernie Sanders campaign team in the US.

Yanis Varoufakis, the former finance minister in Greece’s Syriza government, addressed the meeting via a pre-recorded video-link. Three comedians were on hand to amuse the audience with expletive-laden routines against the Tories.

Neal Lawson, Compass Group chair opened the meeting, explaining that without an alliance, Labour faced electoral annihilation. He made much of a handful of local deals where candidates had agreed to “stand aside” so as not to split the anti-Tory vote. He urged people to abandon party loyalties, vote tactically against the Tories and campaign for a tactical vote.

Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn has rejected calls for such an alliance. This is because not only would it be mainly at Labour’s expense, but because the call is

made by his opponents within the Parliamentary Labour Party, who hope for a bad result on June 8 so they can try again to unseat him. Labour has been forced to take action against three members who were backing a rival candidate in a bid to unseat Jeremy Hunt, the Health Secretary, as several speakers from the Green Party, the NHS Action Party and Compass complained later.

However, for the most part the readiness to stand aside to help elect “Progressive”—i.e., pro-European Union membership—candidates is confined to the Greens. Of the 40 examples hailed by Compass, just two involve Liberal Democrats and Women’s Equality Party candidates. The party’s readiness to commit political hari-kari is perhaps made less noble by the fact that it secured under three percent of the 2015 general election vote and has just one MP, Caroline Lucas.

Compass’ agenda goes far beyond the June 8 election. It is aimed at building an alliance between Labour’s right wing, the Liberal Democrats and sections of the Conservative Party. Despite the name, there is nothing progressive about it. It seeks a political realignment around opposition to Britain leaving the EU, critical for the majority of the British bourgeoisie, which opposed a Leave vote.

The banks and corporations now face exclusion from the European Single Market, while British imperialism faces the diminution of its global role. For decades, it had acted as Washington’s voice within the EU and the mainstay of NATO in Europe.

In the last years, it had played the key role in preventing the emergence of a European Army that could develop separate from and in competition with NATO. Since Brexit, Germany has led the way in pressing for such a formation. Just days ago, plans were announced by the EU for a Cooperative Financial

Mechanism to help fund joint military projects. It is a significant step in Franco-German efforts to lay the basis for an EU army.

The Progressive Alliance has little popular support, particularly after the unindicted war criminal Tony Blair emerged as its main advocate.

Significantly, the first speaker at the launch rally was the Labour MP Clive Lewis, who is considered a frontrunner to replace Corbyn after June 8. That is, if the right wing decides not to go for a split within the party.

A former infantry officer graduate from the elite Sandhurst Military Academy, Lewis became an MP in 2015, declaring at his victory speech that New Labour was “dead and buried.” He was one of 36 Labour MPs to nominate Corbyn for the Labour leadership election in 2015, and was soon brought onto Labour’s front bench. He left the shadow cabinet earlier this year over Corbyn’s insistence that MPs should vote to trigger Article 50 to start Brexit negotiations. In April, he was one of 13 MPs that voted against calling the general election.

Lewis argued that the vote to leave the EU demonstrated the collapse of the traditional Tory/Labour electoral set-up, and that if Labour is to have any hope of regaining power, it must be part of a “progressive alliance” with the Liberal Democrats based on agreeing to an electoral system based on proportional representation.

Mason, a former member of Workers’ Power and a prominent advocate of overturning or limiting Brexit, called for a “progressive alliance” to develop a “distinct, new radical Labour identity.” This would be a coalition between the mainly young urban middle class that voted to Remain and the “impoverished small-town working class,” blamed for supporting Leave, who could be rallied behind what he refers to as the “globalist section of the elite.”

Other than verbal denunciations of racism and anti-immigrant xenophobia (which is invariably blamed on the “white working class”), Mason had little to say directly about the programmatic basis of the Progressive Alliance. “We need an alliance even if we don’t all want the same thing,” he stressed.

He went so far as to call on the churches—in a country where only 1.4 percent attends Sunday services—to warn against xenophobia from the pulpit!

Mason ended his remarks praising former Tory Prime Minister David Cameron—the man responsible for calling the referendum on EU membership in a bid to out-manoeuvre the Euro sceptics within his own party—for leading the progressive wing of the Tories against the right wing. For this so-called left, and presumably the other leaders of the Progressive Alliance, the “progressive elite” encompasses the Church as well as Cameron and his coterie of millionaires and bankers.

Lewis, Mason and Compass were all supporters of Another Europe is Possible—the pro-EU grouping led by Varoufakis. The models for the Progressive Alliance are Syriza in Greece and Podemos in Spain. These are both bourgeois organisations, formed as the result of manoeuvres between the Stalinists and various pseudo-left groups that have proved a disaster for the working class.

Syriza, in alliance with the right-wing Independent Greeks, has betrayed its election promises and is imposing draconian austerity measures and anti-refugee policies on behalf of the EU. In Spain, Podemos’ unprincipled manoeuvrings with the Socialist Party (PSOE) enabled the right-wing Popular Party to retain power after two indecisive elections.

This disastrous record is of no interest to the petty bourgeois layers that made up the Progressive Alliance’s audience. Their sole concern is to effect a fairer redistribution of wealth—but only among the top 10 percent of society to which they belong. This in turn requires defending the access of British capital to the European Single Market and upholding its position as a military power. That is why none of the speakers could address openly the foreign and domestic policy agenda they subscribe to.



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