

UK: Green Party stands aside for pro-European Union candidates

Steve James
31 May 2017

The centerpiece of the Green Party's campaign for the June 8 general elections is its decision to stand aside for pro-European Union (EU) candidates from Labour, the Liberal Democrats and other parties.

The Green Party's role as an instrument of the most pro-EU factions of the British ruling class could not be more exposed.

In 39 of 42 seats where local "progressive alliance" agreements have been reached, the Greens have stood aside for pro-EU candidates deemed most likely to win. However, the Greens' gesture has been largely ignored by the parties it has sought to woo. The Liberal Democrats have stood down in just two seats to assist the Greens and Labour in none at all. Caroline Lucas, the party's leader and its only MP, told the *Financial Times* that attempts to build a pro-EU, anti-Tory alliance have been "very disappointing."

After contesting a record 573 seats in 2015, the Greens are standing candidates in 457 seats in England and Wales this time around. However, they anticipate winning just two of those at best. The party won over 1 million votes in 2015—up by more than 300 percent on their 2010 vote. This was the Greens' high-water mark, as the party won support from those opposed to the Tory-lite pro-austerity program advanced by Labour leader Ed Miliband.

Much of the Greens' support, especially among young people, has since been captured by Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn. Indeed, large chunks of Labour's election manifesto recycle policies previously advanced by the Greens, including the abolition of student tuition fees and renationalisation of the railways.

The Greens expect their vote to fall sharply. "Given that we have stood down in a number of seats because we are the one party that has put narrow tribalism to one side and put the greater good of the country ahead, we don't expect to do as well as 2015," Lucas told the *International Business Times* last week.

During the referendum on British membership of the EU, the Greens called for a "remain" vote, along with the majority of the British ruling elite. Such is the crisis and division in ruling circles caused by last June's unexpected "leave" victory, that the Greens are now effectively throwing themselves on the fire in support of the EU, backing more prominent pro-EU candidates at their own expense.

Like the Liberal Democrats, the Greens' central election policy is its call for a second referendum "to vote on the final terms of the Brexit deal, including an option to stay in the EU." The Greens claim EU membership "makes our future more hopeful and secure," concealing the reality of brutal austerity, authoritarianism and war that constitutes "Fortress Europe."

The class interests promoted by the Greens are shown by Gina Miller's bankrolling of Lucas in Brighton. A prominent businesswoman in the City of London who led last year's High Court challenge to Brexit, Miller has backed Lucas along with 15 other pro-Remain candidates nationally, including former Liberal Democrat leader Nick Clegg.

The Greens are a bourgeois party. Founded by former Conservatives as the PEOPLE party in 1973 and subsequently renamed the Ecology Party, the group was based on disaffected sections of the privileged middle class who promoted half-baked Malthusian policies, blaming technology, overpopulation and "consumerism" for society's ills. Adopting its current party name in 1985, it attracted pseudo-lefts, pacifists, environmentalists and former Stalinists cut adrift by the collapse of the old national-reformist parties.

Lucas was formerly an activist with the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and an Oxfam researcher. Co-leader Jonathan Bartley was at one time a researcher for Conservative Prime Minister John Major and is the founder of religious think tank Ekklesia, which promotes

“non-conformist styles of Christianity.”

In its modern guise, the party has emphasised “green” capitalism and supposedly environmentally friendly lifestyles, along with mild social reformist demands.

The Greens’ current election manifesto, *The Green Guarantee*, has a token character, running to a mere 3,000 words. It has clearly been written with a coalition with the Labour Party in mind. Labour proposes an “economy that works for all,” while the Greens suggest “an economy that works for everyone.”

Where Labour claims, “the creation of wealth is a collective endeavour between workers, entrepreneurs, investors and government,” the Greens promote a similar defence of the profit system by insisting, “the economy is all of us: our work, our creativity, what we buy, how we spend our time.”

Like Labour, the Greens propose more public sector jobs and some minimal restrictions on the most egregious excesses of the filthy rich, including a “crackdown on tax dodging” and a “wealth tax on the top 1 percent of earners.” The document contains promises the Greens will never keep: to bring utilities such as the water supply into public ownership, to “redress” pensions and benefits injustice, support renters and build more houses.

The most detailed proposals are aimed at the Green Party’s social base in the upper middle class. For example, the party proposes quotas for women in public and private sector company boards, “people’s banks” to invest in local businesses and co-operatives, community investment, as well as a range of limited environmental controls. The manifesto calls for proportional representation for parliamentary elections along with job sharing for MPs.

Their attitude to the working class is markedly different. An indicator of what the Greens deem adequate is their minimum wage proposal of £10 an hour, the same as that of Labour—25 percent above the current rock-bottom £7.50 but still far below the level needed to support a family. The Greens also float a Basic Income scheme for all, with no indication of at what level this would be pitched.

The section “A Safer World” deals with British imperialism’s role in international affairs. Avoiding any assessment of the escalating global war danger, the Greens suggest a “confident Britain” should “use its influence wisely to build peace and protect the environment” and “tackle terrorism.” Trident will be cancelled and an “ethical foreign policy” based on “conflict resolution” implemented. There is no mention of

the party’s stated policy of taking the UK out of NATO “in the long term.”

All this means is that the Greens seek a foreign policy that is better camouflaged by humanitarian and environmental cover stories. This is in line with the Greens’ stated demand to uphold the EU power bloc in alliance with the Trident-supporting and warmongering Labour Party.

Speaking at the Royal United Services Institute, Greens defence spokesperson and former Greenham Common peace camper Dr. Rebecca Johnson elaborated on the same theme. She called for “defence resources to be focused on real threats and realistic security threat assessments” and “defence diversification” for “tackling climate, cyber and terrorist threats.” Johnson is seeking the ear of a section of the military establishment, who consider Trident wasteful and want the cash spent instead on more conventional arms to be used in current and future wars. She heads a nuclear disarmament think tank, the Acronym Institute, which includes two retired generals on its board.

In their close relations with sections of the military and leading bourgeois parties, the Greens in Britain emulate their co-thinkers in Europe. In Germany, the Green Party has played a lead role pushing forward military rearmament. Earlier this year, former Green Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer called for Europeans to “grow up and reinforce their geopolitical power and position” and “resolutely invest in the EU and NATO” as a counterweight to the United States. In Ireland, following the 2008 financial crisis, the Green Party pushed through €65 billion of cuts on behalf of the EU-led “troika.” In Britain, the Scottish Greens support an independent capitalist Scotland, propping up the minority pro-EU Scottish National Party government, a NATO supporter.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact