

Cross party campaign holds pro-EU march in London

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On Saturday, around 100,000 people marched to demand a second referendum on any terms reached by the government with the European Union over the UK's withdrawal in March 2019.

Designated as the "People's Vote" protest, the London demonstration was organised by the cross-party organisation, Open Britain, and other well-funded anti-Brexit groups.

Open Britain is the successor organisation to the official Remain camp in the 2016 referendum on EU membership. It is led by rebel Tories, right-wing Blairites, the Liberal Democrats, and the Green Party. It is backed by prominent sections of the media, especially the *Guardian*.

Its website states that it supports Britain remaining in the EU's Single Market and Customs Union, despite the narrow pro-Leave vote. It vows to "fight against the hard, destructive and potentially chaotic Brexit path the Government has chosen."

With the withdrawal deadline less than nine months away, the march was aimed at corralling real fears, particularly amongst young people, of a Tory negotiated Brexit being used to impose reactionary policies, especially on immigration and attacks on the democratic rights of EU citizens living in Britain.

Speakers included Conservative MP Anna Soubry, Labour MP David Lammy, Liberal Democrat leader, Sir Vince Cable, and Green leader Caroline Lucas. Labour MP Chukka Umunna, a Blairite opponent of leader Jeremy Corbyn, attended, while a succession of Blairites tweeted their support for the demonstration including Owen Smith, Chris Leslie and Stephen Doughty. Alistair Campbell, Tony Blair's former spin doctor, was also present.

The £100,000 cost to stage the protest was raised by People's Vote organisation in less than a week. Among Open Britain's funders is multi-millionaire entrepreneur,

Richard Reed.

Other groups supporting the protest were the European Movement UK (which shares the same offices as Open Britain in Millbank, central London), Britain for Europe and Best for Britain.

Best for Britain was launched in April 2017, with backing from billionaire George Soros, also in support of a second referendum. It reportedly has a £2.4 million "war chest", which includes £800,000 donated by Soros, including £400,000 this year through his pro-EU Open Society Foundation. One of Best for Britain's founding members is Gina Miller, who also spoke at the People's Vote rally. She is a multi-millionaire investment manager who took legal action against the government's attempts to trigger Brexit without a new parliamentary vote.

Soros has also donated more than £300,000 to two other groups backing the "People's Vote" campaign—European Movement UK and Scientists for EU.

Amidst a sea of EU flags, Cable said, "Brexit can be stopped. Parliament is fiddling at the margins while the country slowly burns." Attacking threats by hard Brexiteers within the Conservatives to leave the EU with no deal, Cable complained such action "is deeply, deeply irresponsible."

Lucas said Brexit would be "a disaster for this country", while Open Britain organiser James McGrory said there should be "a choice between leaving with the deal that the government negotiates or staying in the European Union".

The efforts to portray the EU as a bulwark against nationalist and anti-immigrant reaction are a lie.

This same weekend, the heads of 16 EU nations held an informal summit to discuss imposing further measures to strengthen their Fortress Europe policy.

The proposals are every bit as reactionary as those pursued by US President Donald Trump. They include holding migrants arriving in Europe in "closed centres" and further strengthening EU border controls.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President Emmanuel Macron hope to co-ordinate their plans with far-right forces in the Italian and Austrian governments. Under Italy's new populist right-wing government of the League and the Five Star Movement, Rome has refused to allow rescued boat refugees to dock and is pledging to expel hundreds of thousands of immigrants—paving the way for mass round-ups on a scale unseen in Western Europe since World War Two.

Even so, the right-wing governments in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia, say this is not harsh enough and boycotted the mini summit.

As capitalism plunges further into protectionism, trade war and military conflict, the EU is developing trade war measures against its major rivals internationally and is pledged to an enormous expansion of militarism.

The real aim of the pro-Remain march was to facilitate the interests of powerful sections of big business in Britain in the face of such competition. This was made clear in the statements issued by manufacturing conglomerates, Airbus and BMW, timed to coincide with the march.

On Friday, Airbus warned that if Britain were to leave the EU without a deal it would be forced to reconsider remaining in the UK, with thousands of jobs at risk. BMW said the government must make clear its position on the UK's future customs and trading relationship with the EU or it would “start making... contingency plans... which means making the UK less competitive than it is in a very competitive world right now.”

Central to the People's Vote campaign is shifting the position of the Labour Party under leader Jeremy Corbyn to support a second referendum. To this end, a chant of “Where's Jeremy Corbyn?” rang out during the march and was widely circulated on anti-Brexit social media.

Corbyn has so far ruled out a second referendum, while proclaiming in support of some form of continued customs union with the EU.

Open Britain has endorsed the petition campaign by members of the pro-Corbyn Momentum group aimed at pressuring the Labour leader to adopt a more anti-Brexit stance. The petition calls for a discussion on a “campaign for Labour to hold a vote at Annual Conference in September on giving the people the final say on the Brexit deal.”

The cross-party group also gave prominence in a tweet to an article in the pseudo-left Workers Liberty newspaper, *Solidarity*, giving support to a series of meetings being held this summer by the Left Against

Brexit initiative, led by the pro-EU Another Europe Is Possible group.

Pro-EU journalist Will Hutton, who attended Saturday's march while holding a “Stop Brexit” banner, summarised the aims of the campaign in his column for the *Guardian's* Sunday sister, the *Observer*.

Companies such as Airbus, he wrote, “must strain for maximum production efficiency, fighting for every last order against Boeing; parts cannot be delayed for days, even hours, subject to time-consuming customs checks.”

He denounced “Corbynites” who “control the Labour party, ruining the economy no less effectively by fantasising about bespoke deals that it claims it can negotiate better than the Tories, according to which Britain can share the benefits of being part of our continent's trade and regulatory system while being independent.” The only way forward was the “increasing number of MPs on both sides, trooping through the lobbies, voting for policies they know are either impossible or against the national interest, [who] believe the only way of breaking the logjam is a second people's vote.”

The Socialist Equality Party opposes all factions of the ruling elite. In the 2016 referendum, it called for an active boycott of the EU referendum, warning that both the Remain and Leave campaigns were equally reactionary and that their “differences are over how best to defend the interests of British capitalism against its European and international rivals under conditions of economic slump and the escalation of militarism and war.”

“[O]nly through the creation of the United Socialist States of Europe, established as an integral component of a world federation of socialist states, [can] the vast productive forces of the continent can be utilised for the benefit of all,” it explained.

The eruption of trade war and economic nationalism confirms the necessity for such a unified struggle of the European and international working class.



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