

The struggle against austerity and the fight for the United Socialist States of Europe

The Socialist Equality Party (UK)
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Today's People's Assembly against Austerity demonstration in London declares that a Labour government led by Jeremy Corbyn is the only alternative to a Conservative government bent on destroying jobs, wages and vital social services.

Its central organisers include the pseudo-left groups, Counterfire, the Socialist Workers Party, Socialist Party and the Communist Party of Britain—all of which were advocates of a so-called “left Brexit,” claiming that the nationalist, neo-liberal and xenophobic agenda of the Conservative right-wing and UK Independence Party could become the starting point for a new “British Road to Socialism.”

Amid the wreckage of that perspective, with tens of thousands of jobs under threat, they now state that a Corbyn government is the means of overcoming the dangerous division they played a central role in fostering between workers and youth who voted to leave the European Union (EU) and those who voted to remain within it. “The consequences of a Corbyn victory will be far greater than any possible deal over Brexit,” insists Counterfire. “The whole labour movement therefore has every interest in uniting to ensure that from this crisis the Tories are forced to leave office and a general election is called.”

The Socialist Party adds that Corbyn should “call on the trade unions—the largest democratic organisations of the working class—to step up to the plate ...”

Such demands, even when accompanied by calls to “take to the streets,” are aimed at suppressing the class struggle by tying workers to bureaucratic institutions whose goal is to rescue British capitalism at the expense of the working class.

The Brexit crisis is only one expression of a global crisis of capitalist rule, rooted in the conflict between the rival imperialist bourgeois powers over who controls the world's market. It is this which has produced the

intractable divisions between pro-Brexit Tory advocates of a trade war alliance with the US against Europe and the pro-Remain advocates of maintaining the UK's position within the EU.

This same crisis of the capitalist system has led to an unprecedented social polarisation between the financial oligarchy and the mass of working people, whose livelihoods and essential social services are being sacrificed on the altar of global competitiveness. The capitalists' austerity offensive has led to a resurgence of the class struggle in Britain, Europe and throughout the world, which finds its most significant expression in Europe in the Yellow Vest demonstrations against French President Emmanuel Macron's pro-market labour and tax reforms.

The pseudo-left groups acknowledge this by appealing for today's protesters to don Yellow Vests, but they insist that Britain must be viewed as a separate case. “Unlike the French we have a strong left-led opposition that has the potential to smash the Tories in a General Election,” Counterfire writes. “And Jeremy Corbyn leads on a manifesto that is just about radical enough to help transform society ...”

This is a political fraud. Labour is a party of British imperialism and continues to be so under the leadership of Corbyn. He and his Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell have spent months seeking to convince the major corporations and the City of London that Labour can be trusted to uphold the “national interest,” not the interests of the working class. To this end, Corbyn has repeatedly delayed calling a vote of no confidence in the government while making securing tariff-free access for business to the Single European Market his own central concern.

This follows the pattern of his three years as party leader, in which he capitulated to the demands of the Blairite right and the media—including on Trident, NATO and his insistence that Labour councils impose Tory

austerity and that a Labour government would impose a “fiscal credibility rule” on public spending. At the same time, he has opposed all popular moves to expel the right-wing in the name of maintaining party unity.

But this is only a down-payment on what the ruling class would expect of a Labour government should it come to power. None of Corbyn’s minimal social pledges would survive demands that he make the “necessary” cuts and other attacks to ensure Britain’s ability to compete against its rivals. And neither would his personal declarations of pacifism and anti-imperialism stand in the way of the ratcheting up of military tensions with Russia and China.

Corbyn would work with the trade unions, not to defend the working class but to impose the dictates of the banks and corporations. The trade union bureaucracy has spent decades stifling industrial action to the point where last year saw a series of strikes pitting workers directly against the union leaders and prompting motions of no confidence by lecturers, nurses and railway guards. These well-paid corporate functionaries will oppose nothing—as evidenced by Unite’s latest response to 5,000 job losses at Jaguar Land Rover that it would scrutinise “the business case for these global job cuts.”

The People’s Assembly demonstration draws a veil of silence over the stance of Corbyn on Brexit, which is to advance Labour as a means of averting social conflict and re-unifying the nation—either by securing a better deal with Brussels or, if a confidence vote on the government fails, supporting a second referendum on EU membership.

This leaves workers and youth with no independent alternative to two right-wing capitalist factions—both pro-austerity and pro-war who disagree only over how best to defend the interests of British imperialism. It has now handed the political initiative back to the dominant Remain section of the imperialist bourgeoisie, including the Blairites and pseudo-left groups such as Another Europe is Possible, Socialist Resistance and Left Unity, who cite the reactionary implications of Brexit to hold out the prospect of a return to social and economic progress within the EU.

This too is a dangerous fraud. The vote against the EU was fuelled by legitimate hostility to an instrument of big capital that has imposed savage austerity against the working class, while bringing Greece and other countries to the brink of ruin. The EU and its constituent governments continue to slash living standards, abrogate democratic rights, develop plans for a European army and erect razor-wire fences around Europe while thousands of

refugees drown in the Mediterranean. Far-right forces grow stronger every day, not just in Eastern Europe, but in the core countries of Italy, Austria, France and Germany, facilitated first by the tacit support of the ruling elite and its state apparatus but also by the sheer rottenness of the so-called “left” and the trade unions.

The Socialist Equality Party insists that the answer to austerity in the UK is not the election of a pro-capitalist Labour government, but the class struggle for socialism. The stark choice faced by workers and youth is between the continued growth of right-wing reaction, austerity, militarism and war or waging the fight against the destruction of workers’ livelihoods, the National Health Service, public housing and education, and in defence of democratic rights and immigrant workers based on a revolutionary socialist, anti-imperialist and internationalist perspective.

The working class must create independent organisations of class struggle, free of the suffocating grip of the bureaucracy to mobilise against the Tory government and the corporations for a workers’ government.

In this fight, the ally of British workers is not the EU but the European and international working class that is now coming into struggle.

In every country, strike activity is building after years of suppression by the bureaucracy. Protests are erupting which, like the Yellow Vests in France, are socially and politically heterogeneous but which are fuelled above all by the devastating impact of rising social inequality that has left millions struggling to survive. Unifying this immense and powerful social force means building the political leadership of the SEP and its sister parties in the International Committee of the Fourth International to take forward the fight for the United Socialist States of Europe.



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