

UK parliament to vote on Brexit deal today

Chris Marsden
15 January 2019

Tonight will see Britain's parliament finally vote on Prime Minister Theresa May's proposed deal with Brussels on Britain's exit from the European Union (EU).

May is almost certain to be defeated, largely as a result of opposition in the Conservative Party and the Democratic Unionist Party to "backstop" arrangements to prevent the return of a hard-border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, an EU member state. However, whatever follows, British workers will still confront escalating attacks on their jobs, wages and essential services.

Today's "meaningful vote", as far as the pro-Brexit faction of the Tories is concerned, must not be allowed to cut across their efforts to free themselves from the restraints associated with EU membership to securing independent trade deals with the US, China, India, etc., taking advantage of Britain's role as a centre for global speculative finance and deepening its transformation into a cheap labour investment platform modelled on Singapore.

All claims by the advocates of "Remain"—in the Conservative Party, the Blairite wing of the Labour Party and the smaller opposition parties—to represent a progressive alternative are false. They are belied by their own history of defending big business and imposing cuts, and their embrace of the EU, even as it continued to impose austerity on workers throughout the continent on behalf of the major corporations, banks and its constituent governments.

What is being fought out in Westminster is a conflict over which is the best means of advancing the interests of British imperialism under conditions of a ferocious trade war for control of global markets: within the European trade bloc, or as a junior partner of the US—hopefully without losing access to the Single European Market that accounts for 40 percent of UK exports.

Such has been the exposure of the reactionary nationalist agenda of Brexit and its impact that most polls show a shift of public support back towards Remain. But whichever side wins today, the struggle to be "globally competitive", especially under the threat of a second economic crash to rival that of 2008, means a deepening offensive against working people.

Believing the claims that EU membership is a means of opposing the xenophobia and right-wing reaction that characterises Brexit demands only a wilful blindness to the EU's long record of crimes against refugees and to the growth of far-right movements such as the Alternative for Germany, France's National Rally, and their taking a governmental role in Italy, Austria, Hungary and elsewhere.

The advocates of Remain have no such illusions themselves. Their sole concern, whether the Blairites or pseudo-left groups such as Socialist Resistance and Left Unity operating under the umbrella "Another Europe is Possible," is with securing the place of British imperialism within the EU on which the privileged lifestyles of their upper-middle class constituency is based. They are even arguing against Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn's pro-forma attempts to prioritise a no confidence motion in the government and the demand for a general election over supporting a second referendum to reverse Brexit.

"A general election will not resolve Brexit," write the Pabloites of Socialist Resistance. A "general election is unlikely... The key to the situation remains the issue that Jeremy Corbyn continues to ignore the issue of a second referendum." Left Unity adds cynically that it "agrees with the socialist critiques of the EU but believes the possibility of international worker unity *together with the democracy of the European Parliament* provide the basis of seeing the EU as a 'terrain of struggle'." [Emphasis added]

The pseudo-left advocates of "left leave" in 2016

now all claim that a Corbyn-led Labour government is the only answer to continued austerity, even if this means retreating from their past support for a “workers’ Brexit.”

The Socialist Party writes, “The ‘people’s vote’ that is urgently needed is a general election—so the Tories can be ousted and a Corbyn government brought in.” After this, “Exactly what deal Corbyn’s future negotiators could extract from the EU leaders can’t be predicted in advance...”

This a priori endorsement of whatever manoeuvres Corbyn will conduct with the EU, should he come to office, is proof that the pseudo-left groups, pro-or-anti-Brexit, are all appendages of rival factions of the Labour and trade union bureaucracy and of Britain’s ruling elite.

Corbyn is not genuinely animated politically by his occasional use of anti-austerity rhetoric, but by a desire to protect British capitalism and save it from a deepening economic and social crisis by breaking “the deadlock” in Brexit.

He frames his call for a general election and promise to table a no confidence motion in the government “soon” alongside a pledge to extend Article 50 to delay Brexit and conduct “new negotiations” with the EU. His aim would be to secure, “At the very minimum, a customs arrangement with the European Union” and “if we can, to stop the danger of a no-deal exit from the EU on 29 March which would be catastrophic for industry, catastrophic for trade.”

Opposed to any struggle against big business, he has stressed, “What I’m saying is we’re campaigning for a country that is brought together by investment ... What we’re saying to the EU is: this is the political situation in Britain, where we have a country that’s divided on this issue. We want to bring them together. A trade relationship helps to bring people together.”

Corbyn and his allies have already accepted that, should his no-confidence motion fall, he will then assume a statesmanlike role in ensuring a second referendum—prioritising restoring EU membership over any defence of the working class against the attacks of the Tories and the employers.

The Blairites are either demanding Corbyn gets his no-confidence motion out of the way or accept that Labour must be committed immediately to Remain. But Corbyn will inevitably fall into line, as he has so often

before. His Shadow Foreign Secretary Emily Thornberry was only the latest to confirm Corbyn’s trajectory of travel. “The prime minister must call an election,” she told parliament. “But if she refuses, if Labour’s no confidence motion fails, and if we have to move to other options, including campaigning for a public vote, we will take no lectures from her about respecting our country’s democracy.”

The key to opposing austerity is not to place hopes in a general election and a Labour government, whether inside or outside the EU. It demands a unified struggle against the British, European and international capitalist class by the British, European and international working class.

In every country, though largely unreported by the media and deliberately ignored by Corbyn, strikes and anti-austerity protests are breaking out—always in a rebellion against the stranglehold imposed by the labour and trade union bureaucracy.

This initial upsurge will inevitably escalate as the crisis of the profit system deepens. Against the political apologists for Corbyn and Labour, the Socialist Equality Party urges workers to take up the strategy of international class struggle and socialism under its leadership.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:
wsws.org/contact