

Answer Brexit with the struggle for socialism throughout Europe!

The Socialist Equality Party (UK)
23 March 2019

The following statement is being distributed at today's People's Vote march in London.

Hundreds of thousands are marching in London today to demand a “people’s vote” on any deal struck on the terms of Britain leaving the European Union (EU), or before a “no-deal Brexit” is imposed by Prime Minister Theresa May.

Only deeply held fears and concerns about Brexit’s impact could animate such large numbers to protest, as well as the more than three million signatories to the petition demanding Article 50, initiating Brexit, is revoked.

A no-deal Brexit could cost £48 billion in lost income in the UK per year or an average of £750 per capita. EU citizens would lose an additional €40 billion in the event of Britain crashing out of the European Union. Behind these averages is a picture of mounting factory closures and job losses. Many demonstrating will also be deeply hostile towards the “Little Englander” nationalism and anti-immigrant sentiment whipped up by the Conservative right and xenophobes such as the UK Independence Party and Nigel Farage’s new Brexit Party.

None of this alters the fact that a political campaign based on supporting the EU has nothing genuine to offer workers and young people seeking an end to austerity and right-wing reaction.

The People’s Vote campaign is led by right-wing pro-capitalist politicians and parties with a long history of support for social cuts, anti-immigrant measures and militarism. The unindicted war criminals Tony Blair and Alastair Campbell began the anti-working-class policies that have continued under the “age of austerity” proclaimed by David Cameron and continued by Theresa May. Michael Heseltine, Oliver Letwin and other pro-Remain Tories all agree with their Brexiteer

colleagues that these attacks must be stepped up to ensure British imperialism’s ability to compete against its rivals. They only want this to be from within and not outside a European trade bloc.

Selling the lie that these scoundrels represent “sanity” and “progress” depends above all on their deliberate silence about the reality of social and political relations inside the EU itself.

The Brexit vote in 2016 was won, not because of endemic racism among workers but because the Leave campaign exploited legitimate hostility to the EU for the savage austerity it imposed in Greece, Spain, Portugal and throughout the continent. If the EU was the social paradise portrayed by its defenders, then the Brexiteers’ appeal to nationalism would have fallen on deaf ears.

Europe today is in the grip of austerity no less savage than in the UK. Officially, 118 million (23.5 percent) of the EU population are at risk of poverty or social exclusion, with 43 million unable to afford a quality meal every second day. Italy has the most people at risk of poverty in Europe (18 million), with over 4 million in absolute poverty. For children below the age of 18, a staggering 27 percent, or 26 million people across Europe face social deprivation. The Social Europe think tank states that these figures are a massive underestimation, with almost 142 million Europeans at risk of poverty based upon a poverty line of just €10,000 per year.

The anti-refugee policies of “Fortress Europe” have claimed over 34,000 lives in the Mediterranean, with EU member states building over 1,000 kilometres of border walls since 1989—equivalent to six Berlin Walls. There are only two million refugees in Europe out of a population of 500 million. Yet the EU is busy building razor wire barriers, concentration camps and deploying

an additional 10,000 armed-guards to keep out or deport anyone who makes it to the continent.

Everywhere, the far-right is the political beneficiary of the pro-austerity and anti-immigrant agenda championed by Europe's mainstream parties. The far-right is either in government or a major opposition tendency in Austria, Italy, Hungary, Poland, Switzerland, Sweden and Finland. In Germany, neo-Nazis sit in the Bundestag—as the main opposition party—for the first time since 1945. A recent poll suggest that far-right parties will likely double their representation in the European elections.

The answer of the EU to rising social and political discontent is to double down on austerity while stepping up state repression. Many on today's demonstration will know of the government's intention to implement "Operation Yellowhammer" on Monday, including the deployment of thousands of troops to deal with social unrest and strikes in the event of a no-deal Brexit. But events across the Channel prove that the turn to police state measures is not conditional on Brexit but is bound up with the acute social polarisation between a super-rich oligarchy and the mass of working people. Today, President Macron is deploying the army on the streets of France against "Yellow Vest" anti-austerity protests, for the first time in half a century. An Interior Ministry source told *Le Parisien* that everyone should "get used to the idea of the security forces wounding people, or worse," even if there "end up being some quadriplegics."

Brexit is the product of the descent of British, European and world capitalism ever deeper into crisis. As in the first half of the 20th century, the conflict between the major imperialist powers can no longer be contained by international agreements—heralding a sharp descent into trade war and raising the danger of armed conflict. It is this global shift that has brought an end to the project of the peaceful integration of the European continent, raising tensions between Europe and the US and the UK, Germany, France, Italy and other major European powers to the breaking point.

The greatest political danger is that Brexit is being deliberately used by the ruling class and its media to drive a wedge deep into the working class, subordinating workers to contending right-wing capitalist factions and preventing the necessary unified struggle against the common class enemy.

The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) calls for a conscious political rejection of such well-practiced attempts to divide-and-conquer. But this can only be done by repudiating any and all perspectives based upon capitalism and taking up the struggle for socialism.

Workers and young people must adopt the methods of class struggle against all factions of the British ruling elite and all its parties. Far from trusting their fate to Merkel, Macron, Juncker and Tusk, they must ally themselves with the European working class now waging political and social battles against the EU and its member state governments. The perspective must be: Neither Leave nor Remain, but the struggle to replace a capitalist Europe of austerity, militarism and war with a United Socialist States of Europe based on production for social need and not private profit.

Such a unified class offensive cannot be mounted under the leadership of the Labour Party and the trade unions. Indeed, the only constant feature of Jeremy Corbyn's gyrations on Brexit is his refusal to fight for the independent interests of the working class.

Corbyn refuses to break with Blair, Tom Watson and their right-wing ilk, offering by turns an alternative "soft-Brexit" plan, with possible backing for a second referendum, depending on what big business and the City of London ultimately determines is the best course of action. Should the present crisis bring Labour to power, Corbyn would continue to heed the voice of his political masters.

A party of a new type is required, a socialist and internationalist party that conducts the struggle against globally organised capital by mobilising the most powerful social force on the planet—the international working class. The SEP, British section of the International Committee of the Fourth International, and our sister parties in Germany, France and throughout the world offer a new road of revolutionary struggle for the most politically thoughtful workers and youth.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact