

Trump escalates his pro-Brexit agenda during UK state visit

Robert Stevens
5 June 2019

United States President Donald Trump ratcheted up tensions with the European Union (EU) and within the British ruling elite on the second day of his state visit to the UK.

After his audience with the Queen on Monday, Trump's meeting with Prime Minister Theresa May and other senior political figures on Tuesday was met by protests of tens of thousands of people in the capital and other cities.

According to estimates, more than 6,000 police officers will be deployed across the three days of Trump's visit, with 3,200 used on the streets of London on Tuesday alone. The cost to the public purse for providing security during the state visit has been put at £40 million, making it the most expensive in British history.

Protesters were only permitted to march from Trafalgar Square halfway down Whitehall and were prevented from going near the prime ministers' residence at Downing Street—where Trump was meeting Theresa May and senior cabinet members. Police blocked off the lower half of Whitehall, forcing demonstrators to make a detour to a rally in Parliament Square.

Trump appeared on his best behaviour at the state banquet on Monday evening hosted by the Queen. But with the ceremony over, he moved on to what was the main purpose of his trip—an anti-European Union (EU) offensive based on facilitating Brexit and driving a deep wedge between Britain and Europe and between the US and EU.

Trump met Prime Minister Theresa May for a short period in Downing Street without holding formal bilateral talks. May cut a largely incidental figure as she is a dead duck who will resign as Tory leader on Friday after being driven out by MPs of her Conservative Party.

Her fate was sealed after she failed to pass in parliament the Withdrawal Deal she had agreed with the EU months ago. With a Tory leadership contest already underway, May will be replaced as prime minister by the end of July.

Even in the pro-forma press conference he held with May in Downing Street, Trump insisted that Brexit should be completed as soon as possible, to enable the US and UK to negotiate a “phenomenal” free trade deal that would be “two and even three times of what we are doing now.” He continued to denounce the EU, tweeting that a “big Trade Deal is possible once U.K. gets rid of the shackles [of the EU]. Already starting to talk!” Trump ensured he and May met with US and UK business executives at St James' Palace.

With the EU setting a deadline for Britain's exit to take place on October 31, Trump told the press “It will happen and it probably should happen, and [Britain] it wants its own identity, it wants its own borders, it wants to run its own affairs...” Further ramping up tensions, Trump said, “I would have sued [the EU], but that's OK.”

Trump envisions any trade deal with the UK as one entirely to the advantage of the US corporations as he steps up trade war measures against America's competitors everywhere. Trump declared that “the entire [British] economy” should be up for discussion in any post-Brexit talks. He added, “When you're dealing in trade everything's on the table, so NHS [state-funded National Health Service] or anything else, or a lot more than that, but everything will be on the table, absolutely.”

Sky News noted, “Every time the US has done a trade deal it has tended to insist that they are as advantageous as possible for US exporters. That means agriculture is included; it means lucrative markets are opened up to US participation. And there are few UK markets bigger or more compelling than the NHS [with an annual budget of over £120 billion]. And this is the fundamental truth about trade deals such as these.”

However, Trump is demanding such a deal in opposition to dominant pro-European sections of the British bourgeoisie, who view trade relations with the EU, which accounts for nearly 50 percent of UK trade, as far

more important than that with the US, which accounts for less than 15 percent of all UK trade.

At the joint press conference held with May, Trump further stirred the anti-EU pot. When asked if he would meet with Boris Johnson, who favours leaving the EU without any agreement, he said, “I know Boris. I like him, I’ve liked him for a long time... I think he would do a very good job [as prime minister].”

The formalities with May out of the way, Trump then spoke to and hosted several leading pro-Brexit Tory figures. He held a 20-minute phone discussion with Johnson, described as “friendly and productive.” The US President met current Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt and was due to meet Brexiteer Michael Gove, who are both also standing for the Tory leadership.

At the US ambassador’s residence, Trump met Nigel Farage, leader of the recently founded far-right Brexit Party, which won the European elections in Britain last month, pushing the Conservatives into fifth place. After the meeting, Farage said Trump “absolutely believes in Brexit, thinks it’s the right thing for the country to do... He’s obviously concerned it’s taking a very long time.”

It is an indication of how strained inter-imperialist relations are that Labour Shadow Foreign Secretary Emily Thornberry—who favours a second referendum on EU membership—described Trump as “a sexual predator” and “a racist.” Labour’s London Mayor Sadiq Khan compared Trump to a “20th century fascist” and “just one of the most egregious examples of a growing global threat” from far-right forces, saying the government should “not roll out the red carpet” for him. The overwhelmingly pro-EU Labour bureaucracy have never been as explicit in rejecting an alliance with the US in favour of relations with Europe and are loudly voicing major concerns of the faction of the ruling elite vociferously opposed to Brexit, and who see an alliance with the EU as pivotal to the geostrategic aims of British imperialism.

No attempt was made to mobilise workers and youth to attend the rally on a class basis. Rather the “Stop Trump” and “Stand Up To Racism” organisers, comprising sections of the Labour and union bureaucracy, pro-Remain Liberal Democrats and Green parties—with the backing of various pseudo-left outfits—insisted that those attending fragment into a myriad of anti-Trump groups, including Abortion Rights Women’s bloc, Handmaids against Trump, Labour against Trump, the Climate Bloc, No to Trump and the far-right bloc, etc.

For the organisers, the purpose of the rally was to

dissipate all opposition to Trump’s fascistic policies behind the tried and tested parties of the ruling elite. In the US, protesters were told to put their faith in the Sanders/Ocasio-Cortez wing of the Democratic Party. In the UK, those opposed to Trump are told to line up behind Labour’s pro-EU faction and Remain-supporting Liberal Democrats, Greens and the trade unions. Central to this was the election of a Labour government, with one of the rally’s compères declaring that “80 percent of the shadow cabinet are here today,” including Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn and Shadow Home Secretary Dianne Abbott.

Prior to Trump’s visit, much was made of Corbyn’s refusal to attend the Tuesday evening state banquet hosted for Trump by the Queen. This and Corbyn’s last minute decision to speak at the rally were based on his recognition of the need to appeal to the widespread hatred of Trump and his pro-capitalist policies among broad layers of workers and youth—in order to keep this under control and contained within the official political set-up.

However, this was intended only for public consumption. It emerged that the “statesman” Corbyn had sought a private meeting with Trump, either Tuesday or today. Asked in the press conference with May if he could do a trade deal with Corbyn, Trump replied, “I don’t know Jeremy Corbyn. Never met him. Never spoke to him. He wanted to meet today or tomorrow and I decided I would not do that. I think that he is, from where I come from, somewhat of a negative force.”

Putting aside the demagogy of Thornberry, Khan, et al., Corbyn’s office later admitted Corbyn had offered to meet Trump, saying, “Jeremy is ready to engage with the president on a range of issues, including the climate emergency, threats to peace and the refugee crisis.”

This does not even rise to a rebellion on its knees. Corbyn and the Labour leadership accept Trump in his capacity as US President but objected to him being afforded the fanfare of a state visit, in order to save the blushes of Her Majesty.



To contact the WSWP and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wswp.org/contact