

# Corbyn tries to unite Labour Party to solve Brexit crisis for ruling class

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The Labour Party conference beginning Saturday will be dominated by the conflict over the party's Brexit policy.

At least 81 motions have been submitted by local branches calling on the party to pledge itself to campaign for the UK's continued membership of the European Union (EU). Deputy Labour leader Tom Watson and Shadow Brexit Secretary Keir Starmer have repeatedly declared in the last weeks that "Labour is the party of remain" and demanded the leadership "unambiguously and unequivocally" come out in favour. They were recently joined by over a hundred local Labour councillors in an open letter to the party's National Executive Committee.

Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn's key allies, Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell and Shadow Home Secretary Diane Abbott, as well as Shadow Foreign Secretary Emily Thornberry have all said that they will personally support remain in any future vote.

In response, Corbyn has made a statement of his position in an article published in the *Guardian* newspaper on Tuesday. He argues for a general election in which Labour will promise, if elected, to renegotiate a deal with the EU and put that deal against the option to remain in a new public vote.

This strategy was confirmed in meetings with trade union leaders earlier this month and seeks to secure a second referendum while maintaining a leave option on the ballot paper which appears to be taken seriously. It is a deliberately vague and non-committal piece of politicking, which answers practically nothing about Labour's plans going forward.

Corbyn provides next to no details about his proposed new deal with the EU, except to say that it would include "a new customs union with the EU; a close single market relationship; and guarantees of workers'

rights and environmental protections." To go further would raise awkward questions about the EU's willingness to spend more months in negotiations, and about how such a settlement would differ from either former Prime Minister Theresa May's rejected deal or the UK's present relationship with the EU.

More problematically, such a policy runs counter to the view of a swathe of Labour branches and MPs, including close Corbyn allies, to support remain in all circumstances. Besides the unions, it is not clear whose views Corbyn represents within his own party. In recognition of this fact, Corbyn has dodged every effort to pin him down to saying what position he will fight for, implying instead that he will remain neutral in any referendum while allowing the party's MPs, activists and councillors to campaign for their preferred option—with Corbyn pledged "to carry out whatever the people decide, as a Labour prime minister."

Given the apparent strength of pro-EU forces, there is the possibility that the Labour conference instructs the party to officially back remain. And if Corbyn's position wins out, this is likely to depend on the trade union vote.

What is certain is that Corbyn's position solves none of the problems faced by the British working class.

Portrayed as an attempt to unite leave and remain-voting workers, the real thrust of Corbyn's proposal is a class-collaborationist effort to 'unite the country' - workers, corporate executives and millionaire shareholders alike. "Labour," writes Corbyn, "is the only party determined to bring people together." Labour is working against a no-deal Brexit because it is "opposed by business, industry, the trade unions and most of the public."

The class basis of Corbyn's strategy is the same as that of Labour's 2017 manifesto, which stated "Labour

understands that wealth creation is a collective endeavour—between investors, workers, public services, and government.”

The immense social crisis suffered by the working class in Britain is only alluded to in Corbyn’s *Guardian* article in one limp paragraph, written so as not to ruffle the feathers of these same “investors”:

“[An] election will be about much more than Brexit. It will be a choice between a Labour government that will put wealth and power in the hands of the many, and Johnson’s born-to-rule Conservatives who will look after the privileged few. It will be about who will truly end austerity and deliver the change Britain needs, invest in every region and nation of our country, and rebuild our public services, communities and industry.”

Corbyn gets back to business in the next paragraph, repeating, “Only a Labour government would end the Brexit crisis.” He concludes the article with the rallying cry, “Let’s stop a no-deal Brexit – and let the people decide.” There is not a hint of consideration for the independent interests of the working class. Consistent with all his actions over the past year, Corbyn’s overriding concern is to help solve the crisis of the British ruling class on their own terms.

Faced with Corbyn’s ever more transparent support for big business and with the toxic political legacy of the Brexit referendum which they helped create, Labour’s pseudo-left hangers-on have been sent spinning.

The Socialist Workers Party is so tied up in knots by the consequences of their “Left Leave” strategy and the abject failure of “the Corbyn revolution” that they have yet to publish an article on the upcoming Labour conference.

The Socialist Party is forced to channel the spirit of John Lennon and ask their audience to “imagine” a world in which Corbyn is something he is not.

“Imagine how differently the debate around the EU would have developed had Corbyn stuck to his previous position of, correctly, opposing the neoliberal character of the EU bosses’ club and its policies,” they write.

“Imagine if he spoke directly to the 100,000 Royal Mail workers, many of them Leave supporters, who are currently balloting for strike action against bullying management, that if elected he would re-nationalise Royal Mail?” Or if he pledged to nationalise threatened

steel plants, “force out the privateers” from the National Health Service and “end privatisation” and outsourcing in councils and the civil service.

The Socialist Party writes that “every one of these policies would come up against the neo-liberal rules of the EU.” It fails to mention that none are in reality advanced by Corbyn and all would be opposed by the “neo-liberal” Labour MPs he has protected from expulsion.

At the time of the 2016 Brexit referendum, the Socialist Equality Party explained that nothing progressive could come out of a vote for either option on the ballot paper. Instead, we called on workers to take a different course:

“Against the national chauvinism and xenophobia promoted by both sides in the referendum campaign, the working class must advance its own internationalist programme to unify the struggles of workers throughout Europe in defence of living standards and democratic rights. The alternative for workers to the Europe of the transnational corporations is the struggle for the United Socialist States of Europe.”

In recent weeks, airline workers have struck against British Airways in Britain, Adria in Slovenia and Ryanair and Iberia in Spain. Train guards in the UK are still in dispute with the rail companies, Scottish bus drivers have declared in favour of industrial action and French transit workers are striking against pension reforms. Ballots of hundreds of thousands of UK postal and higher education staff are ongoing. A strike mandate is active at Ford’s Bridgend plant in Wales, which threatens to link British workers with tens of thousands of striking autoworkers in America—the IG Metall union is struggling to sit on similar developments in Germany. The development of these struggles on an international basis, in a struggle for the United Socialist States of Europe, is the only genuinely socialist ‘Brexit policy’.



To contact the WSWs and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

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