

Pro-European Union demonstration mobilises hundreds of thousands in London

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Hundreds of thousands demonstrated in London Saturday in a huge outpouring of concern at the economic and social impact of Brexit, with the UK set to leave the European Union (EU) on October 31. The People's Vote and the *Independent* newspaper's "Final Say" campaign claimed up to one million people participated.

Many expressed fears over their jobs, livelihoods, ability to travel and the anti-immigration measures being put in place by Boris Johnson's government in preparation to leave the EU. Despite such legitimate sentiment, the march reflected dangerous levels of political disorientation produced as a result of the Brexit crisis and the suppression of the independent interests of the working class by the Labour and trade union bureaucracy.

The protest was led by a right-wing coalition of Blairites, Liberal Democrats and pro-EU Conservatives that culminated in a joint video presentation on a giant screen in Parliament Square featuring former Tory and Labour prime ministers, John Major and Tony Blair.

Other political scoundrels spoke in person at the rally, including Tory Lord Michael Heseltine, Liberal Democrat leader Jo Swinson, Scottish National Party Westminster leader Ian Blackford, Blairite London Mayor Sadiq Khan, Tony Blair's spin doctor Alastair Campbell, Shadow Brexit Secretary Sir Keir Starmer, Blairites Hilary Benn, Jess Phillips and David Lammy, Tory MP Dominic Grieve, Independent Group (IG) leader and former Tory Anna Soubry and the IG's former Blairite MP and chief witch-hunter, Luciana Berger.

These right-wing forces were joined by Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell and Shadow Home Secretary Diane Abbott. Part of the core leadership of Labour's "Corbynite left," their role in the demonstration proved that their politics are indistinguishable from the Blairites they once claimed to oppose.

This is a movement that, though able to mobilise hundreds of thousands, is entirely an adjunct of parliamentary manoeuvring of that section of the ruling elite that sees continued membership of the EU as central to the strategic interests of British imperialism. Its central aim to hold a second referendum in order to reverse the 2016 vote in which the UK population, by a narrow margin, voted to leave the EU.

The high point of yesterday's events for many was when the amendment put by Conservative MP Sir Oliver Letwin passed in parliament—meaning that there would be a delay in approving the Brexit agreement Johnson signed with the EU just days earlier

until all the necessary legislation had been passed.

The crowd massed on Parliament Square, adjacent to the House of Commons, erupted into cheers. As Letwin left parliament after the vote, he was cheered and hailed. This was despite him making clear after his amendment passed that he will vote for Johnson's deal when it next comes to a vote.

Letwin was a member of Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's Policy Unit from 1983 to 1986 and was an advocate of the privatisation of the National Health Service. He successfully advised Thatcher to roll out the hated Poll Tax, first in Scotland as a test bed for the rest of the UK. From 2010, he held key government positions and, as Minister of State for Government Policy in David Cameron's coalition with the Liberal Democrats, played a key role in formulating the Tories' austerity agenda—devastating the lives of millions.

The march consisted of a sea of EU flags—with many people draping themselves in the EU's colours—interspersed with Union Jacks. Some of the home-made placards showed the extent to which millions have been dragooned behind the nationalist agenda of one faction of the ruling elite. One woman held a placard, "I am marching because I would rather be a bulldog in the EUROPEAN kennel not a poodle in an AMERICAN pound."

Pride of place was given to Lord Michael Heseltine who closed the rally. He had been introduced in a People's Vote video making the statement of the Remain campaign that "We are the British patriots. We are the ones who fight for Britain's national self-interest."

Heseltine warned in his speech that the "very existence of our United Kingdom now hangs by a thread." If Brexit went ahead, "Europe, our largest home market will embroil us in years of detailed negotiations ... leaving us at the mercy of every European pressure group."

Heseltine stated that the Brexiteers advocated a "rampant capitalism" in which our "poorer citizens" would "pay the price." To cheers, he added, "Certainly, no Conservative government in which I served would have contemplated policies of that sort."

Heseltine was a senior figure in the Conservative governments of Margaret Thatcher (1979-91) and John Major (1992-1997), serving as deputy prime minister under Major from 1995 to 1997. He played a central role in the de-industrialisation and decimation of working-class communities. He said of Thatcher's class war offensive during the 1984-85 miners' strike, "This issue had to be faced, and there was no nice way to do it." As Minister for Trade

and Industry under Major, Heseltine announced in 1992 the closure of 31 out of the remaining 50 deep coal mines in the UK—the death knell for the industry.

Blair and his former spin doctor, Alastair Campbell, were given an even more thorough whitewash. Both were promoted via a video presentation as the architects of the Good Friday Agreement that has maintained peace in Northern Ireland since 1997. Of course, they are more infamously known as key architects of the 2003 Iraq War which has cost over a million lives.

It should be noted that McDonnell, in a recent interview with Campbell, said that Blair wasn't a war criminal and "I'm hoping that he goes down in history for that [the Good Friday Agreement] rather than Iraq. Sealing that deal, which is now under threat a bit by the way, was just magnificent."

WSWS reporters spoke with some of those who attended the march.

Nick, a social worker said, "My fear is that our lives will be impoverished in every possible way by Brexit. Workers' rights will be threatened, environmental rights will be threatened, citizenship rights will be threatened. There are huge amounts of companies and organisations which will, if they don't go bust, reduce their turnover and people will become unemployed.

"I think that if we remain in the EU we guarantee much better workers' rights than if we leave. If we leave then we are at the whim of [Tory Brexiteer Jacob] Rees Mogg and Johnson who are multi-millionaires and care not a jot about the average working person. I don't entirely disagree that we are at the whim of capitalism under the EU, but I'm not sure it's going to be overthrown any time soon, so we are much safer in the EU than outside."

Dave, a student said, "I'm studying history, economics and chemistry at A-Level. I'm half German so I fear that I'm going to need a visa to visit my family, that I might find it hard to get a job, that I might find it hard to study across Europe.

"The influence of the banks and the powerful is a much bigger problem on the side of the Leave campaign. If you look at Rees Mogg, he's going to make millions from investing in pro-Brexit schemes. The working class has a lot more to be concerned about from Brexit, which is ironic considering that a lot of working-class people actually support Brexit, when really it's the bourgeoisie that are going to benefit the most."

Dan said, "We're here to stop Brexit. We're really worried about losing our right to live, work and travel across the European continent. We're worried about the effect that a Brexit deal will have on the NHS, on workers' right, on environmental protections and we're also worried about how the process has just been rushed through without people really having a chance to see what deal is on the table."

Sebastian, an artist said, "The EU is not a perfect organisation, but the fact is that the EU was born out of the ashes of the Second World War to ensure that this continent never went to war against itself ever again. That is a very fundamental principle and should be enough to keep it together. That is the basis of the EU and it is such a high moral principle that at any cost is worth fighting for.

"You don't just kill a person because they're sick, it's no good to chuck it out the window. You have to try and cure the person.

The EU is not dead, it's just ailing. We need to be a part of it to try and fix it."

Lucia is a librarian who works in London and is originally from Italy. She said, "I have lived here for 25 years and my children were born here and we want our children to be European. There was obviously lots of lies and I think people voted for something else, not for what we are going to get. On this basis I think we should vote again. We are definitely safer in Europe, at least we know what we can expect. The European Union is not perfect, there is a lot of space for improvement.

"I only know that Europe has been in a period of peace. I don't believe in barriers, I don't believe in wars. I think that our strength is being together. We are different countries and different cultures, only by being together we will be strong and face all the challenges ... I think that there is capitalist and there is capitalist. It's not necessarily that all the forms and shapes have to be all so extreme."

Leo Buckley, a sixth form student, said, "I live in southeast Hampshire and I've come on every march for the past three years [since the age of 14] to protest against Brexit.

"I'm here because I'm a European citizen. As it stands, I can study, travel, work, live, fall in love and get divorced in 27 other countries in the largest economic union there is. And that's been taken away by a spasmodic right-wing reaction."

Asked why he thought Brexit happened, Leo said, "I think that Brexit can be put down to the austerity government of [David] Cameron. When it comes down to it, a lot of people felt they were living in a country they didn't recognise. They didn't recognise the schools, the hospital waiting times. Then the far-right gave them the answer. They said it was immigration. What they didn't say was that local authorities had their funds cut by over 40 percent. So I think that as a direct result of Tory government, the country felt so exhausted that they wanted a scapegoat and they were given the EU. It's primarily a reaction against austerity, that's why people voted for Brexit.

"There are many flaws with the EU. Don't get any of us wrong, but it's infinitely better than the alternative which is some sort of Singapore low-tax, low-regulation haven for the rich in the Atlantic, which is what Britain will become after Brexit. And nobody wants that, except for all the rich people."

Leo feared the far-right would be galvanised by Brexit, stating, "The current 'right', not even the far-right, would make Thatcher look like a liberal. They want to pursue a Hayek/Friedman model that will have immeasurable damage on workers' rights."



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