Labour Party candidates pledge to ignore Corbyn's Brexit policy and campaign for Remain

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Nearly 160 prospective Labour Party MPs have collectively defied party leader Jeremy Corbyn's Brexit policy of seeking to negotiate a new deal with the European Union before holding a second referendum, committing themselves to campaign for a Remain vote in all circumstances. This would involve opposing any deal Labour reached with the EU if elected to government.

The 159 MPs, evenly split between sitting MPs and prospective candidates, signed a General Election pledge written by the LabourRemain campaigning group that reads, "Labour is committed to a confirmatory referendum, to give you the final say on Brexit. If elected as your Labour MP, I pledge to campaign to Remain in the EU."

These events shatter Corbyn's belated attempt to push Brexit behind social issues in Labour's election campaign—disingenuous given that he has spent the past year desperately manoeuvring to maintain unity with the pro-Remain Blairites in the Parliamentary Labour Party—while not alienating a large minority of pro-Brexit Labour voters and therefore excluding any possibility of forming a government.

Corbyn's central concern was to convince Britain's ruling class that he alone could "heal the Brexit divide"—by offering a choice between a Brexit that still maintained access to the Single European Market and remaining within the EU. To reinforce this pledge to act as guardian of national unity and the "national interest" he even engaged in weeks of discussions with former prime minister Theresa May in an attempt to make her deal palatable to Parliament. This failed and Boris Johnson was the principal political beneficiary. Johnson repeatedly demanded a general election, but Corbyn refused to call a no-confidence vote that his Blairite MPs warned might risk a no-deal Brexit—earning the praise of Tony Blair himself for Corbyn's "sensible and skilful" politicking.

However, neither this pact with the Blairites, nor the noncommittal compromise agreed at Labour's conference to negotiate a new Brexit deal before deciding on a stance in a second referendum, could ever have survived the calling of an election. When he finally agreed to support a general election, Corbyn declared that he had told the party's MPs that, for now, the Brexit debate was "over" and policy had been decided. This claim did not even last the day, as 117 Labour MPs either abstained on voting for a general election or voted against—just 10 less than voted with Corbyn. Most of those MPs are now involved in the Remain Pledge campaign openly defying party policy.

On every fundamental issue confronting British imperialism, Corbyn is the leader of his party in name only—from the free vote on the bombing of Syria in 2015 just weeks after becoming leader, to supporting Remain in the 2016 Brexit referendum, instructing Labour councils to impose Tory cuts, agreeing to retain the nuclear deterrent and membership of NATO, capitulating before the anti-Semitism witch-hunt and allowing the expulsion of his closest supporters—on all these questions, it is the Blairites and their supporters in big business, the media and the state who dictate Corbyn's policy. Even close Corbyn allies—Shadow Home Secretary Diane Abbott, Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell and Shadow Foreign Secretary Emily Thornberry have publicly stated that they will campaign for Remain in any future vote.

Besides securing the UK's continued membership of the EU, this latest campaign aims to further plans for tactical voting that will put a "Remain Alliance" of Labour, the Scottish National Party, the Liberal Democrats, the Greens and Plaid Cymru in power. Prominent pro-EU Labour MP David Lammy tweeted on November 11, following the Brexit Party's announcement that it would not contest Tory-held seats, "Nigel Farage bottling it by standing down in Tory seats shows how vital it is for Remainers to cooperate."

Fellow Labour MP Peter Kyle told the *Independent*, "In these circumstances, Labour needs to do whatever it takes to ensure this election is not poisoned by Brexit. That means

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applying common sense in some constituencies where Labour don't have a hope. I think that is what the country needs and what Labour should deliver.

"I don't think we should be looking at party interests first right now. The stakes for our economy and our society are so high, we should be acting firstly in the national interest and hope that other parties do similarly."

The People's Vote and Best for Britain campaigns, along with the remainunited.org and tactical-vote.uk websites, have all established so-called tactical voting services, recommending combined votes for over 100 Labour, Liberal Democrat and Tory MPs in constituencies across the country. The Liberal Democrats, Greens and Plaid Cymru have made a Unite to Remain agreement—which Labour is being pressured to join—that will see certain candidates from each party stand aside in 60 seats others are looking to win.

An alliance between Labour and the Remain parties, and possibly some strongly pro-EU Tories, is seen as an attractive option for cancelling Brexit without handing power to a Corbyn-led Labour government.

According to *LabourList*, 10 of the 13 Labour seats selected by Unite to Remain are already being challenged by strongly pro-Remain Labour MPs. When the Liberal Democrat candidate for Canterbury, Tim Walker, announced he was giving way to the Labour MP Rosie Duffield, the Lib Dems party leadership announced it would stand another candidate. The Lib-Dems also vowed to contest the Tory-Labour marginal High Peak seat in Derbyshire, despite its own candidate's reservations about handing the seat to the Tories.

Making the position clear, Liberal Democrat leader Jo Swinson has said, "I am absolutely, categorically ruling out Liberal Democrat votes putting Jeremy Corbyn into No 10. On so many grounds, Jeremy Corbyn is not fit for the job of prime minister."

Swinson referred to Corbyn as a "threat to national security," underscoring the viciously right-wing character of the Remain faction of the British ruling class while also making clear the political costs of Corbyn's policy of appeasement and retreat. Her attack centred on allegations that Corbyn was guilty of a "total dereliction of duty" in failing to "root out anti-Semitism in his own party." Swinson was introduced by Luciana Berger, the Zionist Blairite and former Labour MP, who, Swinson claimed, had been "driven out of the Labour Party."

The list of candidate MPs pledged to campaign for Remain overlaps substantially with those who put their name to the scurrilous letter demanding the re-suspension of former Labour MP Chris Williamson in June, as part of ongoing attempts to smear left-wing Labour members as anti-Semites. Corbyn dutifully complied and later oversaw Williamson's deselection as a Labour MP. He has, however, done nothing in response to the 100-plus MPs now pledged to oppose a Labour Brexit deal with the EU or against those calling for votes for other parties—including the war criminal Blair, who still retains party membership.

In its 2016 Congress resolution, "Jeremy Corbyn and the Labour Party: The Strategic Lessons," the Socialist Equality Party wrote: "The severing of relations with the EU not only threatens vital commercial interests, particularly London's role as a centre for global financial speculation. It severely undermines Britain's value to the United States, which is the essential precondition for its ability to project its global interests. Reversing the vote is therefore considered a strategic imperative ...

"With the Tory Party committed to Brexit, any move to overturn the referendum has to involve Labour. But whether instigated by a Labour government, or with Labour in a 'progressive alliance' with sections of the Tories, Liberal Democrats, Scottish National Party and Plaid Cymru, this agenda depends on the party being solely accountable to the dictates of the ruling elite."

This prognosis has been wholly confirmed. Opposing the reactionary nationalist agenda of the Brexiteers while defeating the pro-business scheming of the Blairites, Tories, Liberal Democrats and Scottish Nationalists of the Remain camp and building a genuinely socialist and internationalist opposition to the EU requires the formation of an independent party of the working class. The Socialist Equality Party carries forward this struggle with the call for the United Socialist States of Europe.

The author also recommends:

Socialist Equality Party stands in UK general election:
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