

Corbyn: EU running dog

Election 2019: No choice for workers

There is no party to vote for in December's election — no party is standing for even a deformed expression of the interests

of working people. Under Jeremy Corbyn's leadership, the Labour Party is attempting to throw out the June 2016 Brexit vote and force the EU bankers' and bosses' cartel on the party's working-class supporters. By abandoning his decades-long opposition to the EU, Corbyn opened the way for Tory demagogue Boris Johnson to present his chauvinist Oxford Union cronies as the "party of the people". Grotesquely, they claim to speak for Brexit voters in the former industrial strongholds in the Midlands and north of England, Scotland and Wales, which were laid waste during Thatcher's war on the unions and kept down by subsequent Labour and Tory regimes. Such is the anger at Labour's betrayal that lifelong Labour supporters are considering casting a vote for the hated Tories. Enough of Labour's betrayals — we need a different kind of party, one that will stand up for working people and the oppressed!

The EU is an inherently unstable alliance between capitalist countries, dominated by German imperialism, designed to increase the exploitation of labour across Europe and to bleed oppressed countries such

Brexit now!

as Ireland, Greece and Poland. The EU's exploitative treaties have enriched the bourgeoisies of Britain and the other

imperialist powers, including the US, by spearheading anti-union attacks, privatisations and public services cuts. For the European imperialists, the EU is a means to increase their competitiveness against their rivals, the US and Japan. At the same time the EU, together with NATO, is an integral part of the US-dominated world order. (And Corbyn's election manifesto upholds NATO too.)

The 2016 Brexit vote delivered a stinging defeat to the City of London, its senior partners in Wall Street and the capitalist exploiters across Europe. Theresa May's government failed to deliver a "Brexit in name only" deal that would allow the British imperialists continued access to the single market and the rest of the EU's spoils. Now Labour, the bourgeois SNP and an alliance of capitalist parties — the Lib Dems, Greens and Plaid Cymru — are campaigning to scrap Brexit while absurdly promoting the EU as a defender of workers and immigrants. In contrast, Boris Johnson represents a wing of the ruling class, encouraged by US president Donald Trump, willing to break with the European alliance and pursue other means of plunder.

For a multiethnic class-struggle workers party!

We of the Spartacist League, British section of the International Communist League (Fourth Internationalist), support Brexit because the break-up of the imperialist-dominated EU would advance the interests of workers and the oppressed against the capitalist exploiters. This position flows from our perspective of sweeping away the decaying capitalist system through a series of proletarian revolutions internationally. *For a Socialist United States of Europe, united on a voluntary basis!*

As we explained in advocating a leave vote in the 2016 referendum: “A British exit would deal a real blow to this imperialist-dominated conglomerate, further destabilising it and creating more favourable conditions for working-class struggle across Europe — including against a weakened and discredited Tory government in Britain” (*Workers Hammer* no 234, Spring 2016). The three years of government crisis since the Brexit vote *have* created favourable conditions for working-class struggle, which could also drive Britain out of the EU.

The union bureaucrats have spent decades isolating and containing strikes while diverting workers’ anger into illusions in the EU and the losing strategy of electing a Labour government. But union members fed up with the capitalists’ one-sided class war have shown an appetite to fight. Postal workers, rail workers, university lecturers, and nurses and hospital workers in Northern Ireland have voted for strike action. The anti-union laws have been invoked against strikes by postal workers and London Underground cleaners. Successful strike action could make the anti-union laws worthless scraps of paper.

Rebuilding the fighting strength of the unions is tied to forging a new, class-struggle union leadership, one that understands that the workers can prevail only through their own mass strength and solidarity. Working-class struggle is confronted at every turn by the capitalist government, its anti-union laws and strike-breaking cops and courts. Building a new leadership in the unions cannot be separated from building a revolutionary party that unites all the oppressed behind the social power of the multiethnic working class in a struggle to sweep away the repressive apparatus of capitalist class rule.

Labour lieutenants of the capitalist class

Brexit is the main issue in this election. But the Labour Party is frantically trying to change the

channel. Labour’s election promises are intended to speak to the felt needs of the population: rescuing the NHS; building new council housing; free university tuition; renationalising Royal Mail, rail and other infrastructure; and expanding social services. But Labour’s campaign promises are empty, contradicted by the party’s support to the EU, which was founded on the commitments to privatise nationalised industries and to reduce government spending on social services.

The Labour Party is a bourgeois workers party with a working-class base but a bourgeois programme and pro-capitalist leadership. It provides an invaluable service to Britain’s ruling class by subordinating the needs of the working class to the interests of the bourgeoisie and by diverting struggle into parliamentary channels. Because of Corbyn’s commitment to the EU, analysts at some major investment banks view him as a lesser evil than Johnson despite Labour’s campaign promises. The Labour Party’s leaders have always gone to bat for the imperialist rulers when it mattered.

The slave trade, the bloody subjugation of Asia and Africa and the genocidal expropriation of the indigenous populations in the Americas largely financed the rise of British capitalism. Racial oppression in Britain today is the product of this history, with black and Asian people treated as second-class citizens, facing discrimination in jobs and housing, deprived of social services and subjected to brutal cop repression. It is in the interests of the working class as a whole to combat the oppression of the black and Asian minorities, as well as to fight for full citizenship rights for all immigrants. No deportations! Minority and immigrant workers — who have the fewest illusions in capitalism and the most to gain from its overthrow — will play a role in the fight for socialist revolution out of proportion with their weight in the society.

The Labour Party is saturated with the prejudices of bourgeois society. During the post-World War II labour shortage — the Windrush era — workers from the Caribbean and the Indian subcontinent were recruited to do the hardest and dirtiest jobs in Britain. Harold Wilson’s Labour government subsequently extended racist legislation to slam the door on black and Asian people while encouraging white immigration. Today, with its support for the anti-Muslim “war on terror” and its calls for more cops and border guards, Labour’s commitment to increasing the

forces of state repression is bad news for the working class as a whole, and for black and Asian people in particular.

The Labour Party has always been unambiguously loyal to the “United” Kingdom, an unequal union based on the oppression of the Irish, Scottish and Welsh nations and on the reactionary institutions of the monarchy, the House of Lords and the established churches. In Scotland, formerly a Labour stronghold, the party has been on life support since campaigning together with the Tories against Scottish independence in 2014. Corbyn stands on Labour’s record of English chauvinism, demonstrated repeatedly with his arrogant proclamation: “We will not countenance an early referendum in Scotland.”

Corbyn’s Unionism and his Brexit betrayal left the nearly 40 per cent of Scottish leave voters without any working-class political representation and was a gift to the SNP, who aspire to become the capitalist rulers in Scotland. Contrary to the illusions pushed by the SNP, the EU is an enemy of oppressed nations! Just look at the EU’s participation in the vicious persecution of Catalan nationalists for the “crime” of holding an independence referendum.

The precondition for advancing the unity of the workers of England, Scotland and Wales is opposing English chauvinism. Unity requires championing the equality of nations and the democratic right of self-determination, which includes both the right to separate and the right not to, as the Scottish population chose in the 2014 referendum. In Northern Ireland, where the oppressed Irish Catholic nation is interpenetrated with the distinct Protestant population, under capitalism the self-determination of one community can only be achieved at the expense of the other. An equitable solution to the conflicting national aspirations requires overthrowing capitalist property relations.

The starting point must be the withdrawal of all British troops and bases, a demand that cuts against the Labour Party’s history of administering bloody anti-Catholic repression. Wilson’s Labour government sent troops into Northern Ireland in 1969 to crush the Catholics’ struggles for social equality. Corbyn remains a supporter of the British military occupation of Northern Ireland (despite members of the Guards Parachute Platoon using his picture for target practice). Corbyn has always supported the Good Friday “peace” deal, which is premised on the oppression of the Irish Catholics and the continued presence

of British troops — and hasn’t done Protestant workers any good, either. ***Down with the “United” Kingdom! For a voluntary federation of workers republics in the British Isles!***

Those who labour must rule!

Despite their paper position of supporting Brexit, Peter Taaffe’s Socialist Party (SP) are over the moon campaigning for a Corbyn government, which would be committed to the EU. The SP advise: “If Corbyn comes out with a fighting, socialist manifesto he could transform the situation and win the general election” (*Socialist*, 31 October). What kind of socialist manifesto upholds the EU bosses’ club? For their part, Alan Woods’s International Marxist Tendency (IMT) — who could never bring themselves to oppose the EU — fantastically claim that a Corbyn government “will need to take control of the economy out of the hands of the billionaires” (*Socialist Appeal*, 6 November). A Labour Party government can only be a capitalist government!

The pseudo-Marxists of the SP and IMT inherited the parliamentary reformist programme of their forebears in the Militant tendency, who spent decades buried inside the Labour Party and adapted to their host. Their illusory “road to socialism” is to elect a Labour government which, supposedly, would pass an act in the bourgeoisie’s Parliament nationalising what they describe as “the commanding heights of the economy”. Of course, this pipe-dream has nothing to do with the Labour Party’s real programme or practice. But it does contain the political bacillus of reformism: the lie that you can get socialism without revolution.

The SP and IMT endlessly misuse Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky — who are dead and can’t defend themselves — while rejecting the key lesson of the Paris Commune. As Marx and Engels explained in their 1872 preface to the *Communist Manifesto*: “One thing especially was proved by the Commune, viz., that ‘the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery and wield it for its own purposes’”.

The illusion that electing a Labour government could meet the needs of working people constitutes a major obstacle to the fight for socialism in Britain. The parliamentary system is a democratic facade for the dictatorship of the capitalist class, who own the means of production and make their profits from the exploitation of labour. To put the productive wealth of society at the service of the population as a whole

requires *breaking the power of the bourgeoisie*. It requires proletarian revolution to sweep away the repressive apparatus of the capitalist state and establish a workers state.

The IMT and SP often present the post-World War II Labour government of Clement Attlee as proof that it is possible to advance towards socialism through elections. In fact, the Attlee government shows the contrary: that gains for working people and the oppressed are won through hard-fought struggle, not by putting a Labour government in Westminster. When Attlee's government took office in 1945, the Soviet Red Army, having smashed Hitlerite fascism, occupied half of Europe. Despite the Stalinist degeneration of the Soviet workers state, its victory inspired working people. A wave of working-class militancy was sweeping the continent, and in Britain workers and soldiers were determined not to return to the desperate poverty that had followed World War I. As Tory MP Quintin Hogg had put it in 1943: "If you don't give the people social reform, they will give you social revolution."

This was the context for genuine gains for working people: the establishment of the NHS and the large-scale construction of council housing. It was also the context for nationalisation of British industries including coal and rail, which amounted to a gigantic bailout of their bourgeois owners. What was and is necessary is not the piecemeal nationalisation of

capitalist losers but the expropriation of the bourgeoisie as a class.

Attlee's government was a capitalist government. In 1945, it called out troops against dockers on strike — as any other capitalist government would. A willing servant of British imperialism, it helped to found NATO, sent troops to fight against the North Korean and Chinese deformed workers states, fought a brutal colonial war in Malaya and presided over the bloody partition of India. Attacks on the benefits provided by the NHS began in 1952 when charges for prescriptions and spectacles were introduced to help finance the war in Korea.

Corbyn's fealty to the EU stands in the long tradition of Labour's betrayals. Winning Labour's working-class base away from illusions in parliamentarism is strategic for building a party that can lead the working class to power. The model for such a party was provided by Lenin's Bolsheviks, who led the multinational working class to power in Russia in the October Revolution of 1917. Following in their footsteps, we are dedicated to building a combat party of the working class, part of a reformed Fourth International, committed to socialist revolutions around the world that will finally lay the basis for an egalitarian society of abundance based on an international planned economy.

— Spartacist League/Britain
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