

Britain: Brexit ? the Final Act Begins?

Dave Stockton Tue, 26/03/2019 - 04:04

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On Saturday, March 23, over a million people packed the streets and squares of central London in what could well have been the biggest demonstration in British history. They were demanding a People's Vote on the Tory Brexit deal, including the alternative of revoking Article 50 and abandoning Brexit altogether. They packed the streets in a continuous mass from Park Lane to Trafalgar Square, through Whitehall, ending at a speakers' platform in front of Parliament. Some people had to wait 3, or even 4, hours to start moving.

Meanwhile, an online petition for a People's Vote had reached over four million signatures. It has since risen to 5.3 million. Will parliament listen to the people? So far there is no sign of it. Clutching their 2016 "mandate", the Brexiteers insist that to consult the population again would be a breach of, would you believe it, democracy!

The march was organised and led by a coalition of Liberal, right wing Labour, Scots Nationalists and assorted celebrities and was dominated by a forest of blue EU flags. Nonetheless, the spirit of the marchers was a clear rejection of the nationalist and racist nature of the Brexit project, a welcoming of refugees and migrants. Just as everyone knows the central motive of the Brexiteers is to halt immigration (?regain control of our borders?) so anyone could see from the placards that the spirit of the march was anti-racist and internationalist.

A group of leftwing MPs, including Kate Osamor and Clive Lewis, plus union activists and constituency campaigners, came together to launch a united Left Bloc on the march. It was organised by Another Europe is Possible and Labour for a Socialist Europe, and backed by the TSSA union, and its general secretary, Manuel Cortes. Both Cortes and Clive Lewis spoke at a rally as the marchers were waiting to move off. Lewis stated: "Brexit is a Tory project. It's a racist project. It's about deregulating the economy, and attacking the rights of workers and migrant workers alike ? So we are marching together as a left bloc because we refuse to accept the idea the anti-Brexit movement is the property of just centrist politicians.?"

The demonstration was noticeable for its huge turnout of young people, most of whom were denied a vote in the referendum, and EU 27 citizens working or studying in the UK, now facing compulsory registration and potentially deportation in a climate of xenophobia and violence if Brexit is not stopped.

A notable absence was, of course, the Labour leader, Jeremy Corbyn, and, indeed, the great majority of the party's left leadership. Also missing was Momentum, the grassroots "movement" in support of Corbyn whose actual roots have withered over the last two years. Absent, too, were the forests of Socialist Worker and Socialist Party placards which usually festoon British demos to create the impression of mass influence for their declining sects.

The main forces of the British left, who fell for the illusion of a Left Brexit or "Lexit" have been unable to say or do anything of significance during the deep crisis which has gripped Britain for months. Their only

achievement has been to leave this rising progressive movement under the leadership of Labour's right wing and minor parties such as the Greens. They dare not demonstrate their utter insignificance on the streets themselves, nor can they join the real Brexiteers with their Union Jacks and anti-immigrant slogans.

Throughout the whole parliamentary farce, the great majority of Labour Party members and voters who, it should be remembered, voted Remain even in majority Leave areas, have been deceived and demobilised by the left leadership. Claiming that free movement of workers "must be ended", and that the decision of the people in 2016 "must be respected", they have obstructed and delayed any real call for a 'People's Vote', even at the eleventh hour. This has made it clear that the Liverpool Labour Conference resolution, which put such a vote 'on the table', was a cruel deception.

Meanwhile, the Corbyn leadership, and Momentum, have blocked any serious discussion of what Labour's policy on Europe should be. They have used the need to 'back Jeremy' against the right in the Parliamentary Labour Party as an excuse. This dishonest policy reveals just how shallow and temporary the democratisation of the party has turned out to be.

Now, Theresa May's blackmailing strategy of running down the clock to March 29, now extended to April 13, to force Tory and Labour MP's into backing her deal, has come unstuck, leaving the country hurtling towards the abyss of No Deal. Hundreds of thousands, nay millions, of workers and students from the continent could be left with no secure status or forced to leave. Every internationalist in Britain should rally to halt Brexit at all costs.

This will mean further mass demonstrations right across the country. Secondly, the trades unions must be drawn into opposing Brexit in action, not by joint press conferences with the employers' organisation, the CBI, as they did last week, but by calling out their members against either a May Deal, risen from the grave, or the economic and social catastrophe that will follow a No Deal.

If that threat materialises, the TUC should call a general strike to prevent it and demand a People's Vote. Local committees of action from union branches, local Labour parties, student unions, immigrant communities, antiracist groups, should be formed to launch and sustain direct action, whatever tricks the Tories play, including changing their leader.

But it is the Labour Party, the majority of whose membership has strong internationalist feelings, that remains the main battleground. Members should demand their MPs insist that the Parliamentary Labour Party moves a resolution calling for (a) the immediate and unconditional revocation of Article 50 and (b) a People's Vote on any proposed Brexit deal and including the option of No Brexit. Of course, Labour should also move a no confidence motion in May and her government.

Last, but not least, Labour and the trade unions, speaking for the millions opposed to Brexit, need to adopt a plan of action at home and in Europe as a whole, against the suffering of left-behind areas, for welcoming refugees and migrant workers and opposing the banks and neoliberal politicians, whether in the City of London or in Frankfurt and Brussels.

The Internationalist left needs to link up across Europe to fight the rise of the racist right, to fight the imposition of austerity by the EU and the Eurozone authorities on countries like Greece, to assert the right to self-determination of nationalities like the Catalans and to defend refugees and migrant workers.

An immediate step would be for anti-austerity, anti-racist trade unions, socialist parties and youth organisations to convene a European Social Forum at which they could coordinate their efforts and work out a programme of action. Otherwise, it will be left to the racist populists like Farage or Le Pen to

demagogically oppose the 'Europe of the Bankers and the neoliberals'. Against the EU as it is today, we need to raise the call, not for the socialism in one country of the Lexiteers, but for a Socialist United States of Europe.

Red Flag supporters participated in the Left bloc and handed out a leaflet which can be read at <https://www.redflagonline.org/2019/03/stop-brexit-by-any-means-necessary/> [1]

We also support Labour for a Socialist Europe <https://twitter.com/labourvsbrexit?lang=en> [2]

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Links:

[1] <https://www.redflagonline.org/2019/03/stop-brexit-by-any-means-necessary/>

[2] <https://twitter.com/labourvsbrexit?lang=en>