



## TUSC Discussion E-Bulletin

# TUSC debates Brexit negotiations stance

The February 2018 Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) conference includes a forum session entitled 'TUSC and the Brexit negotiations'.

Following discussions within the TUSC coalition, including a conference debate in September 2015, TUSC decided to campaign for a Leave vote in the June 2016 EU referendum. This included a '20-city tour' of public meetings under the heading, 'The Socialist Case Against the EU', and a campaign against the official recognition and public funding of the right-wing dominated Leave organisations.

Not every TUSC member or supporter backed a Leave position in the referendum. There was wide agreement within our coalition on the neo-liberal and anti-working class character of many EU directives and regulations but this did not necessarily mean agreement on how to vote in a 'yes or no' referendum in the specific conditions in which it was held.

### **A new debate**

But now, after the referendum, the points of debate are different. As the process towards EU exit reaches a critical juncture, the question must be: where do trade unionists and socialists stand on the various issues raised in the Brexit negotiations?

This is why the TUSC national steering committee has proposed a forum session at the February conference. To see if a consensus position can be reached – which is the way TUSC works – on issues like the so-called 'divorce payments'; the EU single market (and its rules on state aid, public sector procurement, the 'free movement of labour' etc); customs union membership, and so on.

To help prepare for the conference session and the continuing debates to come, the steering committee also agreed to produce a Discussion E-Bulletin.

This first one comprises four items: the report to the July 2016 meeting of the TUSC steering committee on the TUSC campaign during the EU referendum; two submissions explicitly for the bulletin, one from the TUSC Individual Members' elected representatives on the steering committee and the other from the Socialist Party; and lastly, a TUSC press release from February last year, supporting an approach from socialist TDs in the Irish parliament to Jeremy Corbyn to use the Brexit process to launch an international anti-austerity campaign.

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# The EU referendum Report on the TUSC campaign

The TUSC national steering committee first considered the EU referendum at its meeting in July 2015, where proposals were agreed on how to reach a TUSC position on the issue.

TUSC was established in 2010 around a platform of core policies (at <http://www.tusc.org.uk/policy>) but these did not include a specific commitment on the question of EU membership.

The steering committee acknowledged that there was unanimity within TUSC on the neo-liberal and anti-worker character of the EU. But it also recognised that there were real differences on how to vote in a binary referendum in the specific conditions in which it would be held.

Consequently, the July meeting agreed that a debate on the referendum, with speakers from the constituent organisations of TUSC, should be the main afternoon session at the TUSC conference on September 26th and that a TUSC position – Leave, Remain or Abstain – would be decided at that stage.

## **TUSC conference debate**

The debate took place – with platform speakers representing the RMT, the Socialist Party, the SWP, and the Independent Socialist Network – and the conference duly agreed the resolution below, with 5% of the conference attendees voting against:

“The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition agrees to register with the Electoral Commission as a ‘permitted participant’ in the EU referendum to enable it to conduct an independent campaign against EU membership.

“We further agree that TUSC should not participate in any officially designated exit campaign that is headed by reactionary racist and pro-austerity politicians but should campaign on the basis of its own core policy platform of opposition to austerity and support for socialist policies, while being prepared to work with other working class and socialist organisations who take a similar stance.

“TUSC recognises that there are participants within our coalition who will want to support EU membership or argue for abstention and, as a coalition, guarantees their right to present their own position publically as TUSC constituent organisations, members and candidates”.

This resolution was confirmed at the steering committee meeting following the conference, on October 7th, along with the text of a press release announcing that TUSC would register as a ‘permitted participant’ for Leave (see <http://www.tusc.org.uk/17132/08-10-2015/socialists-to-challenge-ukip-for-exit-eu-crown-says-ex-labour-mp>).

The release also included an announcement of TUSC’s intention “as part of our campaign against EU membership” to challenge “any attempt by the Electoral Commission to allocate public money, the free use of rooms, TV broadcast rights etc to any of the current ‘Out’ campaigns”.

The purpose of this campaign, it explained, was so that “working class voters who oppose the EU are not forced to line up behind the reactionary racist and pro-austerity politicians who are being promoted in the mainstream media as the only exit voices”.

## **The ‘Don’t fund UKIP and Tory outers’ petition**

To action this campaign the TUSC national steering committee, at its next meeting in November, agreed a petition to the Electoral Commission under the heading ‘Don’t give taxpayers’ money to UKIP and Tory EU campaigners’. The text approved was as follows:

“We the undersigned call on the Electoral Commission not to give taxpayers’ money and other public resources to either the Vote Leave or Leave.EU campaigns [the latter was effectively subsequently subsumed into Grassroots Out, with the same donors etc – CH], or any amalgam of them, in the forthcoming EU referendum.

“There are millions of trade unionists, young people, anti-austerity campaigners and working class voters generally, whose opposition to the big business-dominated EU would not be represented in the referendum by these organisations.

“The Electoral Commission has the power to choose who shall be the ‘official’ Remain and Exit campaigns in the referendum. These organisations will then receive substantial public funding, free postage for leaflets, the use of rooms free of charge, and TV and radio time for referendum broadcasts – potentially millions of pounds of public resources.

*“But the Electoral Commission does not have to choose an official campaign if there is not one organisation that adequately represents those supporting a particular outcome to the referendum.*

“We condemn the mainstream media for promoting UKIP, Tory and other pro-austerity and racist establishment politicians and organisations as the only exit voices. We call on the Electoral Commission not to follow their lead and instead recognise that a significant proportion of those who will vote against the EU support basic socialist policies of workers’ rights, public ownership, and opposition to austerity and racism”.

The purpose of the petition was self-explanatory. It did not commit signatories to support a leave vote but to put pressure on the Electoral Commission not to designate a right-wing dominated exit organisation as the ‘official’ leave campaign, with the political ‘legitimacy’ – and public resources and media access – that would bestow.

The meeting agreed to collect ‘founding signatories’ from trade unionists at a national officer or national executive committee level ready to launch a campaign around it in the new year.

The draft petition was circulated widely and we were able to launch the petition in the new year with the signatures of two national union presidents, two national vice-presidents, and 26 union

national or sectional executive committee members (see <http://www.tusc.org.uk/17170/04-02-2016/dont-give-taxpayers-money-to-ukip-and-tory-eu-campaigners>).

## **TUSC and the ‘official designation’ process**

Following the announcement that June 23rd would be the date of the referendum, the February meeting of the TUSC national steering committee discussed the next stage of our EU campaign.

A draft leaflet was agreed for printing under the heading, ‘Vote Against the EU – But don’t give taxpayers’ money to UKIP and Tories’ (see <http://www.tusc.org.uk/txt/367.pdf>) to help step up the collection of petition signatures.

It was agreed to review progress on this campaign and to try and arrange a formal meeting with the Electoral Commission to hand in the petition at the end of March or early in April. This would be an opportunity for TUSC to explain to the Commission the reasoning behind our request that they use their legal power not to designate any organisation to be the official Leave campaign.

It was also suggested at this point that if the Electoral Commission refused to meet TUSC it may become necessary to apply for ‘official campaign status’ ourselves, or in alliance with others who may be interested. This would enable TUSC to use the provisions to interview applicants in the designation assessment process to compel the Commission to address our arguments.

A week later the PCS civil servants’ union national executive committee agreed to write to the Electoral Commission calling on them not to give political authority and taxpayers’ money to UKIP and Tory ‘outers’, boosting the campaign.

The March meeting of the TUSC national steering committee took place on Wednesday 23rd, eight days before the deadline for applications to be received for lead campaign designation.

A draft of a letter to the Electoral Commission had been circulated before the steering committee asking for a formal meeting with the Commission before it reached its decision on designation on April 13th (see <http://www.tusc.org.uk/txt/381.pdf>). But the letter also stated that, “if it is not possible for you to guarantee that we will have a hearing for our arguments, we will submit our own application for lead campaign designation for the Leave outcome [by the March 31st deadline], to ensure that the points we wish to make are properly considered by the Commission”.

The letter was approved and sent to the Electoral Commission on March 24th, with the expectation that a meeting date with the Commission would be agreed and that steering committee members would be “informed, a delegation agreed by e-mail, and press work organised” (Minutes of the TUSC Steering Committee, March 23rd).

## **The Commission refuses meeting – so an application is submitted**

The Electoral Commission acknowledged receipt of our letter on March 24th. But it was not until the afternoon of March 29th that Tom Hawthorn, the Commission’s Head of Policy responsible for the designation process, formally replied.

The reply failed to answer any of the arguments made in the TUSC letter, on the statutory position that the Commission was not obliged to make a designation, or on the political considerations that the Commission would have to address in its designation decisions.

To our request for a meeting it stated, without explanation, that “it would not be appropriate for the Electoral Commission to meet any other individuals or organisations, including TUSC”, as part of the designation process. But it did concede, however, that “it is of course open for TUSC itself to submit an application for lead campaigner status”.

This response is in itself extraordinary. Without exaggerating what TUSC is, its constituent organisations include an 80,000-strong trade union and it includes other trade unionists in an individual capacity who represent further thousands of workers. It is a fact that TUSC has been the

sixth-biggest presence on ballot papers in elections for the last four years, polling over 350,000 votes since our formation in 2010. In Liverpool, Britain's eighth biggest city, TUSC has outpolled both the Conservatives and UKIP in the last two mayoral elections. Yet the unelected Commissioners peremptorily rejected a simple request from TUSC for a meeting.

Consequently, in accord with the decision of the March 23rd steering committee meeting, an application form for lead campaign designation was completed, the draft circulated by e-mail to the committee for approval on March 30th – with a 20-hour timeframe for objections or amendments to be received – and submitted to the Commission before the expiry of the March 31st deadline.

And so TUSC became one of three organisations, alongside the UKIP-dominated Grassroots Out campaign and the Tory-led Vote Leave, to submit applications to be the 'official' Leave campaign.

There was only one application to be the official Remain campaign, from Britain Stronger in Europe, which was headed by the Tory peer Lord Rose but organised from Downing Street. It should be noted that no attempt was made by Remain supporters in the labour movement to challenge the reactionary, cross-class leadership of the Remain campaign in the same way that TUSC challenged the reactionary Leave organisations.

### **'A blatantly political decision'**

The Electoral Commission announced on April 13th that it had chosen the Vote Leave organisation to be the designated Leave campaign without any further communication with TUSC. The meeting that agreed this was attended by five of the nine Commissioners, two of the nine having recused themselves because of clear conflict of interest. Of the five Commissioners who did participate, three made declarations of interests, including Trusteeship of an organisation receiving EU funding in one case, and a directorship of a company whose clients included European Commission staff in another. It is a moot point whether two Commissioners would have constituted a quorum.

In response to the announcement TUSC issued a press release denouncing "a blatantly political decision" by the Commission (see <http://www.tusc.org.uk/17217/19-04-2016/press-release>), which had "positively chosen to give political authority and substantial public resources to what is effectively a wing of the Tory party" when they had no legal obligation to make any designation at all.

The TUSC steering committee reviewed the outcome of the designation campaign at its next meeting on April 20th. The text of a further press release on the issue, circulated before the meeting, was agreed (see <http://www.tusc.org.uk/17219/21-04-2016/press-release>). This included comments on the "torturous" response of the Electoral Commission to the TUSC argument that Vote Leave did not pass the statutory test that it "adequately represented" leave supporters.

The Electoral Commission, the press release argued, "admitted that the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 (PPERA) does not define 'adequately represents' so they used a dictionary definition that it could mean 'sufficient, satisfactory (often with the implication of being barely so)'.

The release went on: "Given that official designation confers political authority and substantial taxpayers' resources to the chosen campaign it would be interesting to know what could have led the Commission to consider Vote Leave to less than 'barely represent' the working class constituency that will vote for exit in June!"

The official designation process holds important lessons that should be discussed in the wider labour movement, including its impact on the subsequent character of the EU campaign and what else could have been done to prevent its domination by reactionary campaigns, for both Leave and Remain.

But for TUSC, this aspect of our EU referendum campaign effectively closed at this point and the steering committee went on to discuss the priorities for the nine weeks that remained.

## **The Socialist Case Against the EU ‘20-city tour’**

The March meeting of the TUSC steering committee had agreed to organise a ‘20-city tour’ of public meetings under the heading, ‘The Socialist Case Against the EU’. These would be meetings hosted by TUSC but they would not be exclusive meetings, with platforms limited to TUSC supporters. There would be speakers from the TUSC constituent organisations, but invitations to participate in the tour would also be issued nationally to trade unions that had taken a Leave position and other left-wing Leave campaigns.

Further details were discussed at the April steering committee, including dates for the first thirteen public meetings. A draft leaflet circulated before the meeting was agreed for printing (see <http://www.tusc.org.uk/txt/378.pdf>) and it was agreed that Trade Unionists Against the EU (TUAEU) and Lexit: The Left Leave Campaign and their constituent organisations would be invited to participate in the tour with platform speakers, along with ASLEF and BFAWU.

In the event 25 meetings were organised under the ‘20-city tour’ banner, in Derby, Leicester, Gateshead, Carlisle, Bristol, London, Coventry, Peterborough, Birmingham, Leeds, Salford, Southampton, Cardiff, Aylesbury, Paisley, Dundee, Liverpool, Warrington, Glasgow, Edinburgh, Portsmouth, Stoke, Oxford, York and Sheffield.

TUAEU provided platform speakers for seven of the meetings, including the London FBU regional secretary Paul Embury and the general secretary of the General Federation of Trade Unions, Doug Nicholls, while BFAWU president Ian Hodson spoke at the Leeds meeting. But despite two invitations sent to the Communist Party of Britain (on May 3rd and May 26th) no speaker was provided to represent that organisation at any of the meetings.

There was no reported case of any speaker from a TUSC constituent organisation being denied a place on a meeting platform, which is another testament to how the federal character of TUSC fosters an open, inclusive approach.

## **Working with other campaigns**

The September 2015 conference that discussed TUSC’s position on the referendum had agreed that, while TUSC “should campaign on the basis of its own core policy platform of opposition to austerity and support for socialist policies”, it should also be “prepared to work with other working class and socialist organisations who take a similar stance”. This approach was followed by the steering committee throughout.

As explained, founding signatories were sought widely for the ‘Don’t fund UKIP and Tory outers’ petition and efforts were made to interest other left Leave campaigners to take up the campaign to block official designation being given to a reactionary Leave organisation.

The March 23rd TUSC steering committee was followed on the same evening by a meeting organised by the Communist Party of Britain (CPB) and Counterfire, which also included representatives from two of the three TUSC constituent organisations, the SWP and the RMT, who raised the issue there.

Out of this meeting a new organisation was established, Lexit: The Left Leave Campaign, which produced its first leaflet for the April 16th Peoples’ Assembly demonstration against austerity and organised its first public meeting on May 18th.

The RMT did not eventually affiliate to Lexit while the third TUSC constituent organisation, the Socialist Party, was not invited to the foundation meetings at all and, at subsequent public meetings organised by Lexit, was excluded from the platform.

Despite these difficulties it was still possible to ensure that the TUSC ‘20-city tour’ meetings, most of which had been booked before the formation of Lexit, did not clash with the meetings organised under the Lexit banner.

And, as explained above, every effort was made to ensure that working class and socialist organisations supporting a Leave position who wanted to speak at the TUSC-hosted public meetings were given the opportunity to do so.

## **Media coverage**

The TUSC campaign against the EU generated more media coverage than our election campaigns for the Scottish Parliament, the Welsh Assembly, and the English local councils, which ran concurrently until the May 5th polling day.

A letter based on the petition, 'Don't give taxpayers' money to UKIP and Tory EU campaigners', was printed in The Guardian the day after the official declaration of the EU referendum date (see <http://www.tusc.org.uk/17182/22-02-2016/tusc-letter-in-the-guardian-now-sign-the-petition>). The campaign around the designation process was picked up again when, on April 1st, the BBC website carried an item on what it called 'a surprise bid' by TUSC to be the 'official' Leave campaign (see <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-eu-referendum-35941945>), explaining not inaccurately that "TUSC's original intention was to call for neither group to be chosen" [Vote Leave or Grassroots Out] but that "it had submitted a 'serious application' after concluding its concerns would not be addressed".

When the Electoral Commission made its decision to designate Vote Leave as the official campaign, TUSC was interviewed on RT News (see <http://www.tusc.org.uk/17214/14-04-2016/tusc-on-rt-news-for-a-socialist-campaign-against-the-eu>) and also made the front page of the Financial Times (April 14th).

Other publicity included Dave Nellist appearing on Sky News, after Jeremy Corbyn's unconvincing confirmation that he was backing a Remain vote (see <http://www.tusc.org.uk/17222/23-04-2016/dave-nellist-on-sky-news-jeremy-corbyns-eu-stand-doesnt-convince>); Dave debating with Frances O'Grady on the Daily Politics programme (<http://www.tusc.org.uk/17258/19-05-2016/the-eu-is-thatcherism-on-a-continental-scale-tusc-chair-debates-tuc-general-secretary>); and Dave on Any Questions on May 20th (<http://www.tusc.org.uk/17260/24-05-2016/tusc-on-any-questions-the-highlights>), on the same panel as Andrea Leadsom.

But of course the limited media impact of TUSC's and other left wing and trade union campaigns could not cut across the narrative that the capitalist establishment was trying to create, that only racist reactionaries opposed the EU.

The press release approved by e-mail by the steering committee after the murder of Jo Cox, which pointed out that "the consequences of framing the debate in this way were all too predictable" (see <http://www.tusc.org.uk/17286/20-06-2016/press-release>) was not picked up by any media outlet outside the socialist press.

## **The post-referendum situation**

TUSC now needs to discuss the role it can play in the post-referendum situation. This must include how to approach the coup developing in the Labour Party to depose Jeremy Corbyn from the leadership, which is intrinsically linked to the capitalist establishment's attempt to regroup politically after the blow they suffered from the EU referendum result.

In the obverse of Jeremy Corbyn's call that 'negotiations on Britain's relationship with the EU cannot be left in Tory hands', the capitalist establishment is saying – and this includes their supporters in the Labour Party – 'negotiations on Britain's relationship with the EU cannot be left in Jeremy Corbyn's hands'. This is the angle from which TUSC can intervene – for a socialist, internationalist exit from the EU treaties – linked to a defence of Jeremy Corbyn and opposition to the pro-capitalist PLP majority.



The TUSC core policies can still form the basis of this approach, particularly those identified for the EU referendum campaign as incompatible with the rules, directives and laws set by the EU treaties. To re-cap, these were, in the wording agreed at the April steering committee meeting for the text of the 'The Socialist Case Against the EU' TUSC leaflet:

- Re-nationalise all rail, bus and ferry services to build an integrated, low-pollution public transport system.
- Hands off our NHS – for a high-quality, free National Health Service under democratic public ownership and control.
- Reject the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) treaty being negotiated between the EU and the US, which will significantly increase corporate power and its ability to take over our public services.
- Take Royal Mail back into public ownership to guarantee our postal services.
- Bring the privatised public utilities, including the energy companies, back into public ownership. Invest in renewable energy – publicly-owned and controlled. No fracking.
- Stop the moves towards a capitalist, militarist United States of Europe – the EU's so-called Common Security and Defence policy. No to a new generation of nuclear weapons, aircraft carriers or eurofighters – convert arms spending into socially useful products and services.
- Defend the right to asylum. Oppose all racist immigration controls.
- Tax the rich. For progressive tax on rich corporations and individuals and an end to tax avoidance.
- For a democratic socialist society run in the interests of people not millionaires. Bring the major companies and banks that dominate the economy into democratic public ownership, so that production and services can be planned to meet the needs of all and to protect the environment.
- No to racism, austerity and anti-working class policies, whether they come from politicians in the EU or Britain.

These may well need to be re-formulated and certainly added to in the new situation, with obvious examples being a guarantee of permanent residence to all citizens of EU member states currently living or working in Britain, and maintaining public funding of all EU regional and social development fund programmes.

Overall, because TUSC adopted a clear, principled Leave position and made no compromises with reactionary Leavers – while allowing constituent organisations, members and candidates to present their own position publically if they supported a Remain vote – our coalition is well positioned to participate in the debates developing on the character of post-referendum labour movement politics.

Clive Heemskerck  
TUSC National Election Agent  
July 13th 2016



# TUSC and the Brexit negotiations

Position paper submitted by Pete McLaren, one of the TUSC Individual Members' elected representatives on the national steering committee. Drafted on August 30th and revised on September 16th following discussion with independent socialists and TUSC individual members.

## SOME THOUGHTS ON BREXIT AS INDEPENDENT SOCIALISTS PAPER FOR TUSC STEERING COMMITTEE

### BACKGROUND

- The Referendum last year voted narrowly for Brexit.
- Hate crimes, in particular race hate crimes, rose dramatically immediately before and after the Brexit vote.
- Over 100,000 EU nationals have left the UK since the Referendum claiming they no longer feel welcome here.
- The Lexit part of the Referendum campaign arguably had limited impact on a Leave campaign that strongly represented anti-immigrant and patriotic sentiments which are alien to the left.
- Support for Jeremy Corbyn's Labour party in this year's general election was boosted by young people many of whom voted Remain.
- There is a further correlation between Remain supporters and Labour voters of all ages.

### CONTEXT

- Many of us have much in common with Jeremy Corbyn regarding the EU: we share concerns about the EU in terms of its undemocratic nature and its ability to impose laws on sovereign governments.
- Some of us campaigned alongside Tony Benn in 1971/2 to try and prevent Britain joining the Common Market, the forerunner of the EU, on those same issues.
- 'NoToEU-Yes to Democracy' was, in many ways, the forerunner of TUSC. Some of us stood as a 'NoToEU-YesToDemocracy' candidate in the 2009 European elections because that organisation demanded that the EU needed (needs) to reform and democratise. It was not calling for the UK to leave the EU: that role fell to UKIP.
- The world has moved on since 1972. Capital has no national borders, multi-national companies have incredible powers, and we have simply become a globalised world,

assisted by technological expansion including the opportunity to communicate world wide through the internet/social media.

- Many people, particularly young people, want the opportunity to live and/or work abroad, and are happy to have that right reciprocated in terms of immigration into Britain.
- Leaving the EU because it's a capitalist institution would only be a valid argument if it weren't to be replaced with other equally capitalist alternatives such as trade deals with the USA, Australia or whoever. At best, it's leaving one club and joining another. At worst it could lead to a greater dependency on US capitalists and its maverick president.
- A notion of a socialist Brexit simply won't happen. What would it mean? How could it be achieved?
- Any position on Brexit has to be seen in the wider context of a socialist programme that addresses a whole range of policies, including nationalisation, ending all privatisation of public services, a decent living wage for all, guaranteed work and trade union rights, quality housing for everyone.
- We are for a democratic socialist society run in the interests of the people not the millionaires. We are for democratic public ownership of the major companies and banks, so that production and services can be planned to meet the needs of all and to protect the environment.

## **IN THE CONTEXT OF BREXIT: WHAT WE, AS SOCIALISTS, MUST CAMPAIGN FOR**

### **1. FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT AND STATE PROVISION OF RESOURCES TO ACCOMPANY THAT MOVEMENT**

- Under capitalism, capital can move freely between countries. Why should people not have the same rights?
- Any law which makes a person illegal because of who they are or where they or their parents were born, what language they speak, what colour their skin is, must be vigorously opposed. Immigration controls make millions across the world illegal. We oppose that.
- People from all countries, in and outside the EU, should have the right to move from one country to another, including the UK. That, of course, includes the right of British people to migrate, as a number do.
- A campaign priority must be for the continuation of all current rights of EU nationals and their families in the UK, and for UK citizens living in the EU, on the date we leave the EU.
- We must be clear that we welcome all migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, whilst demanding adequate state funding follows with them to increase facilities as needs arise area by area.
- We must campaign to demonstrate that migration has a net economic benefit for the UK economy, and fully publicise the figures to prove it.

## **2. KEEPING WORKERS RIGHTS AND HUMAN RIGHTS GAINED UNDER EU LAWS AND STATUTES**

- Whilst acknowledging that some European laws have undermined workers' rights, those that improve existing legislation for workers must be kept and automatically enshrined into British law.
- This includes health and safety legislation and human rights legislation.

## **3. MAINTAINING EU ENVIRONMENTAL LEGISLATION GAINED UNDER EU LAWS AND STATUTES**

- We must insist that the Government makes a firm commitment that the principal measures of EU environmental law will not be changed.
- There should be no borders to tackling air pollution and climate change.
- We would want to keep EU laws which limit air pollution, climate change, and habitat loss.
- We would continue to campaign for a low carbon economy and more ambitious targets for renewable energy.

## **THE CUSTOMS UNION AND THE SINGLE MARKET**

The TUSC Steering Committee has requested views on the Customs Union and the Single Market.

- We have mixed views on staying in the Customs Union and the Single Market.
- There is some support for the view the Britain should remain in the EU's Single Market, as non-EU members Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein do.
- The Labour Party, under Jeremy Corbyn, now supports remaining in the single market.
- There are positives to the single market. It eliminates tariffs, quotas or taxes on trade, and includes the free movement of goods, services, capital and people.
- That is why there has been no limit on the number of French people who can come to the UK, or the number of British people who can live in Spain or Germany.
- Being a member of the single market also involves EU-wide regulations covering a whole host of industries and products which benefit workers, including food standards, working hours and health and safety. It is an attempt to create a level playing field and a single market; this does not happen in a free trade zone.
- Membership of the single market also normally involves making annual payments towards the EU's budget and accepting the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice.
- The Customs Union is in addition to the single market. It enables EU and non-EU countries to club together and agree to apply the same tariffs to goods from outside the union.
- Once goods have cleared customs in one country, they can be shipped to others in the union without further tariffs being imposed. Not being in the Customs Union would involve extra duties making British goods more expensive. This could cost jobs.
- The Customs Union and Single Market can adversely effect workers in non-EU countries.

- A customs union means the Ireland/N.Ireland border remains open, something most Irish workers both sides of the border are keen to maintain.

## **DIVORCE PAYMENTS**

- There will be quite a debate as to how much Britain will be expected to pay in order to leave the EU.
- We consider that British workers, like their counterparts throughout Europe, have already paid dearly through austerity measures pushed through by the EU.
- We therefore will campaign against any payments demanded by the EU.

## **OUR OVERALL POSITION ON BREXIT**

- As a 'group/collection' of independent socialists we do not have one view on Brexit or Lexit.
- Some of us voted to Remain and a number still feel that should happen, others voted and/or campaigned for Lexit and are pleased with the outcome of the Referendum.
- We accept that the British people have spoken through the Referendum, but we do feel, as internationalists, that fortress Britain must be avoided at all costs.
- We believe it is important that we campaign for freedom of movement and to maintain workers rights, environmental and human rights gained through EU legislation.
- We conclude that there is a case for a second vote by the people on the terms for Brexit that are eventually agreed between the EU and the Tory government. Workers must be given the chance to decide whether such terms are acceptable to them.



# TUSC and the Brexit negotiations

Below is a submission from the Socialist Party for inclusion in the bulletin, an editorial statement on the Brexit negotiations from the 19th October 2017 edition of its weekly paper, *The Socialist*.

## Fight for a socialist Brexit

This brutal, broken Tory government is limping. May's premiership hangs by a thread. Her party is locked in what could be the deepest crisis in its history. As workers gather outside parliament to protest against the public sector pay cap, it's clear that the time for the trade union movement to act is now.

The uprising that took place on 8 June – when millions defied the solemn warnings and sneering dismissals of the capitalist establishment by voting for an alternative to austerity – has dealt a potentially mortal blow to May, as well as the whole Tory regime.

Weakened, the prime minister now faces what is, from the point of view of Britain's capitalist class, a nightmare task. She is attempting to negotiate a deal on Brexit while simultaneously holding her party together. Achieving both aims is likely to prove impossible.

But while this situation is a disaster for the Tories and their super-rich friends, for our class it presents an opportunity. Faced with mass mobilisations of workers and young people, this government can crumble and fall.

### An opportunity for the workers' movement

This means the leadership of the Trade Union Congress (TUC) must immediately break with its current policy of 'wait and see and hope for the best', and instead seize the initiative. It should start by calling a huge national demonstration. This could be used to build up to widespread, nationally coordinated strike action to break the pay cap.

Among working class people there is clearly appetite for action. This was demonstrated over the summer in the many disputes that broke out on a local level – among the Birmingham bin workers, Barts Trust hospital staff, and BA cabin crew, for example. More recently, it has also been shown in the overwhelming vote to strike by postal workers – action currently being frustrated by an outrageous anti-union legal injunction.

If a lead was given, whether by the leadership of the trade union movement or by Jeremy Corbyn calling people to the streets, Britain could rapidly erupt in mass protest. A crisis for the Tories is a crisis for the class they represent – the super-rich 0.1%. But for working class people, it provides a fresh opportunity to build a movement to kick them out and to bring an end to the hated austerity agenda.

The malaise May's party faces is not really about the antics of Johnson or other Tory mega-egos. Its causes are far more fundamental. It is a result of the profound crisis facing the capitalist system on an international scale. But it is also a symptom of the specific crisis faced by British capitalism.

Four months ago, Theresa May stood on the steps of Downing Street to announce her intention to call a general election. In a speech brimming with hubris, she declared that through securing an (inevitably) increased majority, it would be possible to "remove the risk of uncertainty and instability [posed by Brexit] and continue to give the country the strong and stable leadership it demands".

In saying this, she unwittingly hinted at reality. May called the election because she was in an already weakened position. This was not a personal weakness as such. It was a weakened position for her party and the capitalist class who it exists to represent.

Because the revolt of 8 June 2017 was in fact the second of two major electoral revolts that took place within a short space of time. The first came just under a year earlier in the form of the vote to leave the European Union.

## **The Leave vote was a blow at the establishment**

The Leave vote was not an endorsement of Johnson, Gove or Farage, or of their divisive and racist campaign. First and foremost it was an expression of raw class anger. It was, at bottom, a protest aimed at the austerity agenda, at the capitalist establishment and at the EU as an institution which fundamentally works in the interests of the small, rich few.

May has emerged from 'unscheduled' talks with the president of the European Commission Jean-Claude Juncker on the Brexit deal looking more vulnerable than ever. There is a reason why, when asked how she would vote in an EU referendum were it held again today, she dodges the question. It is in the interests of British capitalism – of bankers, big business and the rich – that Britain remains within the EU, particularly within the single market and the customs union.

Yet May is being forced to face both ways. Every attempt she makes at a conciliatory approach to the EU can be seized upon by the so-called 'hard-Brexiteers' in the Tory party. Meanwhile, the heads of the capitalist governments around Europe, who make up the European Council and who appoint the European Commission, are anxious to ensure that there is no 'easy exit' for Britain – fearful of the potential for the project's unravelling.

Understandably, many working class people in Britain feel worried about the economic instability that could result from what's termed a 'hard Brexit' – not to mention the continued uncertainty over the future status of EU citizens living in the UK. But the reality is that Johnson, Gove, Juncker and May have no genuine concern for the lives and wellbeing of working class people, either in Britain or elsewhere.

The true face of the European Union has been shown in the last month, by their backing of Spain's right-wing government in its attempts to brutally suppress the right of the Catalan people to self-determination. It was shown in 2015 when, as working class people in Greece voted overwhelmingly for an end to punishing austerity, the EU used all its strength to impose a crushing defeat on the Syriza government, whose leadership outrageously capitulated to their demands.

## **What kind of Brexit?**

That's why the real debate must not be about a hard versus a soft Brexit, but a workers' versus a bosses' Brexit. During the election campaign, Jeremy Corbyn correctly hinted at this, and gained a

wide echo from working class people. But any attempt by the Labour leadership to correctly use the Tory divisions to hasten the end of the government must not miss the central point, that any 'deal' done by May (or any other representative of the capitalist class) will fundamentally be about protecting the interests of big business, at the expense of working class people.

The ruling class are increasingly looking to the Blairites – the representatives of the 1% within the Labour Party – to exert pressure on the Labour leadership to soften their position on various issues, particularly those surrounding the Brexit negotiations. This is a symptom of the concern among the ruling class about their lack of reliable political representation, as well as their fear of a Corbyn-led government that could further awaken the appetites of working class people for radical change.

Rather than retreating under this pressure, Jeremy Corbyn must instead stand up to the right, and outline the case for a socialist Brexit. This would be based on protecting the interests of working class people in Britain, whichever country they were born in, and on international solidarity with working class people fighting back across Europe and the rest of the world.

That would mean exiting all EU treaties that act against the interests of working class people. It would include, for example, abolishing all those rules which outlaw nationalisation and which allow for the super-exploitation of workers through agreements like the posted-workers directive.

It would mean being prepared to meet the blackmail of the capitalist class, whose threats of economic Armageddon are creating fear and confusion, with socialist measures – being prepared to nationalise not just a few selected industries but the banks and the major monopolies that dominate the British economy.

This would pave the way for working class people to democratically plan production to meet the needs of everyone. It would provide the opportunity to use the vast wealth, currently concentrated in the hands of the tiny few, to provide healthcare, education, jobs and housing to all who need them. It would provide the opportunity to build a socialist society for the many, not the few. Such an approach would be popular not just in Britain, but across Europe, and could be a first step towards a socialist confederation of the continent as a whole.

● **No 'divorce payments' for Brexit. Working class people should not pay a penny towards 'commitments' to the EU made, not by us, but by capitalist politicians.**

● **No support for the EU Single Market and Customs Union rules – like those on state aid or the posted workers' directives – that go against the interests of the working class.**

● **Fight for a socialist Brexit. For a European-wide campaign of socialists and workers' organisations to use the Brexit talks to tear up the EU bosses' club rules. For a new collaboration of the peoples of Europe on a socialist basis.**





**Press release:**

## ● **TUSC backs Irish MPs' call to Corbyn for an internationalist, anti-austerity Brexit stand**

● **'Jeremy's mistaken to try and conciliate the right', says ex-MP colleague**

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The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) today added its support to an appeal to Jeremy Corbyn by socialist members of the Irish parliament (Teachtaí Dála – TDs) to use the Brexit negotiations as an opportunity for an international anti-austerity campaign.

The TDs, members of the Anti-Austerity Alliance-People Before Profit (AAA-PBP) group in the Irish parliament (Dáil Éireann), had written to Jeremy Corbyn earlier this year.

They suggested that a proposed European conference hosted by the Labour leader should be used to discuss how to “promote the case for a fundamental recasting of European relationships, encompassing your stated opposition to EU-driven neo-liberalism and austerity and your support for public ownership” (see <http://www.tusc.org.uk/txt/396.pdf> for the full text).

Last week (February 24th) a meeting to discuss Brexit was addressed by Jeremy Corbyn in London, with invites given to the ‘Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats’ (S&D group) of European parties. Regrettably, however, the request by the Irish TDs to attend the event was not taken up.

In response, the TUSC chairperson and former Labour MP Dave Nellist, a backbench rebel colleague of Jeremy Corbyn in the 1980s, today said that it was “a mistake for Jeremy to line up with the establishment politicians who dominate the so-called European ‘Progressive Alliance’ at the expense of a dialogue with groups such as the AAA-PBP TDs”.

Dave Nellist said:

“When Jeremy announced the London conference in a speech in Prague last December he correctly said that ‘unless progressive parties and movements break with the failed economic and political establishment it is the siren voices of the populist far right that will fill the gap’.

“He also said that ‘too often the left has been seen as the accomplice to reckless, unfettered capitalism rather than a challenge to it’.

“But the reality is that the S&D group, which includes French president Francois Hollande, the German SPD, and the Italian governing party, is the living embodiment of that ‘failed political establishment’.

“It was because of the participation of the Irish Labour Party, another S&D group member, in an austerity government coalition that they were reduced from 33 TDs to seven at the 2016 elections, while the AAA-PBP won six TDs. Yet the Irish Labour Party were invited to the London conference and the AAA-PBP TDs were not.

“It is fighting socialist policies that are needed to ‘fill the gap’ and undercut the far right, not efforts to conciliate with establishment politicians.

“In the same way that Jeremy should not be concerned about alienating the pro-capitalist MPs in the parliamentary Labour Party but should seek support in the trade union, anti-austerity and socialist movements outside, so he should build links in Europe with the real anti-austerity, anti-capitalist fighters.

“This is vital if the Brexit negotiations are not to be dominated by the right, in Britain and in the other EU countries.

“Only young people, workers, and middle class people hit by austerity, have an interest in ensuring that the Brexit negotiations don’t give a new impetus to the pro-market, privatisation and anti-worker policies that have shaped the EU treaties.

“To reach them Jeremy needs to more decisively break with the failed establishment politicians, here and in Europe”.

## Information

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1. TUSC was co-founded in 2010 by the late Bob Crow, the RMT transport workers’ union leader who was well known for his opposition to the EU as an agency of anti-worker and pro-austerity policies. Along with the RMT it involves leading trade unionists from the PCS civil servants union, the National Union of Teachers, the Fire Brigades Union, and the Prison Officers Association, together with the Socialist Party, the Socialist Workers Party, and independent socialists.

2. TUSC argued for a leave vote in the EU referendum but campaigned completely separately from the reactionary leave groups led by the Tory Brexiteers and UKIP. For further information about TUSC’s principled leave campaign see our post-referendum report, available at <http://www.tusc.org.uk/txt/382.pdf>