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Britain

# Will Britain vote to leave the EU?

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**A referendum on whether or not to stay in the European Union will take place in Britain on June 23. The decision to hold it was a concession made by Conservative Prime Minister David Cameron to try to placate right-wing Eurosceptics in his own party. As predicted, it is resulting in a carnival of reaction.**

The referendum campaign really took off after local and regional elections on May 5, in which Jeremy Corbyn's Labour Party generally did well. Those arguing for Brexit, including former London Mayor Boris Johnson, focus on the question of migration, in a deeply xenophobic and racist way.

They made headway in the polls after a ridiculous intervention from Cameron in which he claimed "World War 3" could result from Britain leaving the EU. That sort of catastrophism, quickly followed by Christine Lagarde's comments on the economic consequences of Britain leaving, made hay for the Brexiters. An exit vote seems not impossible – what a dreadful thought.

It's not only the Conservatives who have deep divisions on this question, the left is also split.

For **Remain** there is the left-wing campaign – called [Another Europe is Possible \(AEIP\)](#) - which includes Left Unity and the Greens and some on the left of Labour including Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell. *Socialist Resistance* supports this campaign. AEIP is about to organise a major tour of public meetings across Britain to put the case. AEIP supports staying in on a totally different basis to the Cameron campaign; for a social Europe, a Europe of the people and arguing for greater democracy. The left wing Fire Brigades Union also voted through a position of 'stay in Europe to change Europe' at its national conference in May. [1]

The position being put by Jeremy Corbyn for Labour is very similar. Corbyn spoke powerfully on Saturday evening at a Labour rally in which 3 signed up members of AEIP were on the platform with him, in which he turned his fire on the Cameron government. [2]

The Scottish National Party supports an in vote but from an EU enthusiast position.

For **Exit** there is the Left Leave campaign – supported by the Communist Party of Britain, the Socialist Workers' Party and some other smaller groups – which is known as "Lexit" (Left+exit) [3] while the Committee for a Worker's International-Socialist Party has its own exit campaign.

It is probably the case that a majority of those that identify with the radical left are supporting exit at this point. Of course they attempt to separate themselves from the xenophobes but are drowned out by them.

It is deeply worrying that some campaigners for Lexit have brushed aside as being of little importance the position of EU nationals living in Britain if there were a vote to leave. In their arguments for Brexit, the SWP wrongly claim that "Almost two thirds of foreign nationals in Britain are from outside the EU and would be unaffected." In fact a majority of the non-UK citizens living in the UK are from EU countries. [4]

But beyond an argument about numbers, the whole argument here is suffused with complacency. EU nationals living in Britain certainly feel their position is in jeopardy and, given the racist dynamic behind the mainstream Brexit

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campaign, their success would make the situation worse for all migrants – and those assumed to be migrants because their appearance, name or religious practices do not conform to the reactionary myth of what it is to be “British” in the 21st century.

Another question on which some left wing campaigners for exit have focused is the question of TTIP, and particularly the impact that this reactionary treaty would have on Britain’s National Health Service. Of course it is absolutely right to oppose TTIP, although the campaign in Britain has not reached anything like the scale in has in Germany for example. But the reality is that TTIP is one of a series of free trade agreements across the globe and following Brexit, a rightwing Britain would be clamouring to be part of such agreements.

These are some of the reasons Socialist Resistance thinks that it is a big mistake to support an exit vote in this referendum and that a vote for exit would have very serious consequences in Britain and beyond.

This is not because we have any brief for the EU. In fact we agree with most of what the Lexiters say about it. It is an anti-working class construct designed to help the member states more effectively exploit their workforce and drive through the neoliberal agenda. We are unambiguous about that.

The real face of the EU is the role it has played in Greece where it impoverished the population in the name of the neoliberal agenda – and it will do the same to any other member state that steps out of line.

It fact we are in principle for exit from the EU – but that does not mean that we are for exit whatever the circumstances and whatever the consequences!

This is not an exit proposition by a left-wing government in order to break free from EU imposed austerity for example, but an exit proposition as a part of a right-wing xenophobic project which can only have right-wing xenophobic outcome.

The Lexit campaign argues that exit is a way of defeating Cameron. The problem is that standing in the wings are even more strident rightwingers like Boris Johnson.

The idea that an exit vote would be result in a Corbyn-Labour government beggars belief – but that is what they suggest. This is taking optimism to disastrous levels. When did a victory for the right result in an advance for the left?

The problem for the Lexit campaign is that there is not Lexit on offer. The only exit on offer will be led by the hard right and the consequences would be disastrous, pushing the political situation to the right. It would be seen as (and claimed as) as endorsement of racism and anti-immigration policies. It would boost the right not only here but across Europe.

An exit under the conditions of this referendum would set back working class struggle rather than advance it.

It is a very dangerous situation given the closeness of the polls. Those on the left who are thinking on voting for exit under these conditions should think again about going down a road which will strengthen the right and the racists both here in Britain and across Europe

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[1] AEIP site [Fire Brigades Union conference says, "Stay in Europe to change Europe!"](#).

[2] ITV News ["Jeremy Corbyn turns fire on Conservatives in EU speech"](#).

[3] See the viEUws website [LEXIT: UK left-wingers heading for EU exit](#).

[4] "Latest figures for year ending December 2014 show the number of UK residents who are non-British nationals was 5.3 million. This accounts for 8% of the current UK resident population as recorded by the APS and represents an increase of 2.4 million since 2004. A total of 2.4 million are nationals of countries outside of the EU, and 2.9 million are nationals of countries within the EU." See Section 4 "Immigration to the UK" in [Migration Statistics Quarterly Report: February 2016](#) published by the Office for National Statistics.