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Britain - March 23rd People's Vote demonstration on Brexit: A million on the streets of London

Monday 25 March 2019, by [Socialist Resistance \(Britain\)](#) (Date first published: 24 March 2019).



There's no doubt that some of the most high-profile people involved in organising and speaking at the March 23rd People's Vote demonstration comprise a real rogues' gallery writes Andy Stowe. Michael Heseltine, Alastair Campbell and Anna Soubry all have a lot more in common with each other than they do with the Corbyn leadership and the overwhelming majority of Labour members. Quite how many of the million people who filled central London to reject the racist Tory /UKIP Brexit were drawn by the prospect of hearing the likes of Jess Phillips or Vince Cable is open to question. Very few is the most probable answer.

A hint that the demonstration was going to be massive had been given in the days running up to it. Millions of people had signed an online petition to parliament calling for a debate on revoking Article 50 and remaining in the European Union (EU) [1]. At the time of writing more than four and a half million have signed it.

Most of the demonstrators were there with family and groups of friends. This wasn't the typical left protest with stewards shouting out the approved slogans. As is now standard at anti-Brexit events, EU flags vastly outnumbered Union Jacks and this can only be understood as a conscious rejection of the British nationalism which drove the Tory / Ukip Brexit. We don't share this uncritical view of what the EU actually is and have said so repeatedly over many years [2], but in the given circumstances the gesture is intended as a progressive one.

Hostility to Corbyn was noticeable. The people carrying the main banner at the front of the march were happy to be filmed for TV news chanting "where's Jeremy Corbyn?" Several marchers had produced homemade placards holding him and Theresa May jointly responsible for the potential hard Brexit. They are certainly right to be frustrated. He should be loudly championing the call for a second referendum and arguing with voters who voted Leave last time to support Remain [3].

Saturday's demonstrators were almost all potential and actual Labour voters. They were socially liberal, pro-freedom of movement and anti-racist and if Corbyn had turned up on the day and announced he was going to do it he'd have put himself at the head of both the Labour Party and a progressive mass movement. Instead he's demoralising his own supporters.

It was left to Tom Watson, Labour's deputy leader to make the case for a new referendum. Under normal circumstances a deputy would be assumed to be speaking with the authority of the leader,

but everyone understood Watson was conducting a hostile factional manoeuvre and aligning himself with the Labour right.

One sign that a left group of MPs has coalesced in favour of a second referendum was the participation of Kate Osamor, Clive Lewis, Marsha de Cordova, Rachel Gaskell, Lloyd Russell-Moyle and Chi Onwurah in the left bloc co-organised by Another Europe Is Possible. They all identified themselves as Corbyn supporters who disagree with him and want him to stop equivocating. They are the voices he needs to listen to if he wants to be prime minister.

In the interests of balance, it should be pointed out that there was a march in favour of Brexit happening at the same time. Nigel Farage's tragi-comic version of the Jarrow crusade was continuing its 270 mile trudge from Sunderland to London [4]. He orated to an audience of about 200 in a pub car park and you can be damned sure no one dared mention migrants' rights or defend freedom of movement.

Under a different leadership the London demonstration could have united the struggle against the Tory government with the campaign against Brexit. But it's obvious, whatever the intentions of the organisers, that having a million people on the streets protesting against the Tories' main project weakens them. Labour needs to press home that advantage.

Socialist Resistance

P.S.

- Socialist Resistance, 24th March 2019:
<http://socialistresistance.org/a-million-on-the-streets-of-london/16605>
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Footnotes

- [1] <https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/241584>
- [2] <http://socialistresistance.org/the-capitulation-of-tsipras-leadership-and-the-role-of-left-european-ism/7741>
- [3] <http://socialistresistance.org/brexit-on-the-ropes-labour-must-back-a-second-referendum/16552>
- [4] <https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/nigel-farage-addresses-200-brexit-14176955>