



THE BBC and BREXIT

BBC BIAS BY OMISSION - LEAVE AND
THE 'LEFT' 2002-2017

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SUMMARY

This paper examines the BBC's coverage, since 2002, of those on the left who wanted to leave the EU, including during the 2016 Referendum and the 2017 General Election. Data is from 30 individual News-watch surveys, analysing over 5,500 hours of BBC output, and 274 hours of EU-related content.

The BBC's editorial values commit it to reflect *'a breadth of diversity of opinion... so that no significant strand of thought is knowingly unreflected or under-represented.'* However, News-watch has found that **left-wing arguments for Britain to leave the EU have been scarcely considered on the BBC's flagship news programmes**, in spite of prominent MPs, trade unionists, journalists and commentators from the left supporting the policy, and polls suggesting that **up to 3.5 million Labour voters in the 2015 General Election subsequently voted Leave in the 2016 referendum.**

The paper shows that a total of 6,882 speakers contributed to this coverage, and that **only 14 (0.2%) of the total – one in 500 – were left-wing advocates of Withdrawal**; the majority of these appearances were too short to explore their views in any detail.

In total, those 14 guests contributed 1,680 words to the debate, but approximately one third of them came from a single 531-word Gisela Stuart appearance on Today, in which her actual contribution in favour of leaving the EU amounted to just 49 words. **So only 1,198 words across the entire 30 surveys came from left-wing speakers making any sort of case for withdrawal**, an average of 86 words per contributor. In comparison, during the same period, **strongly pro-EU Conservatives Ken Clarke and Michael Heseltine made between them 28 appearances** with contributions totalling 11,208 words – **over nine times the amount of space allocated to all left-wing withdrawalists** – with an average contribution length of 400 words. BBC audiences were thus made fully familiar with right-wing reasons for Remain. They were, by contrast, kept in the dark about left-wing/Labour support for leaving the EU.

Core left-wing arguments against the EU have been ignored, for example: the EU's prohibition of state aid to protect jobs, the threat to the NHS from the TTIP agreement, the EU's treatment of the Greek socialist government and people, unemployment in the eurozone, import tariffs for developing countries, and the belief that the EU has evolved into a 'neoliberal marketplace'.

Between 2002 and 2014, there were only four left-wing contributors who supported Withdrawal in the Today Programme's EU output, adding up to just 417 words. There were more than twice as many appearances on EU matters in this period by the British National Party (BNP).

In the 2015 General Election campaign, despite the proposed EU referendum being a central issue, there was only one interview with a left-leaning advocate of Withdrawal. **During the referendum itself, there were only five contributions from Labour supporters of Brexit totalling 161 words (1 minute 31 seconds) on BBC1's News at Ten, and none at all on BBC**

Radio 1's Newsbeat. In the Radio 4 collection of post-referendum programmes, The Brexit Collection, there were only two left-wing supporters of Brexit, and their contributions were minimal.

Even though Withdrawal had evident cross-party support in both Parliament and the country at large, **the BBC painted it predominantly as a right-wing policy causing problems and 'splits' within the Conservative Party**, while ignoring ideological disagreements and debate elsewhere on the political spectrum.

The absence of voices offering alternative perspectives in the BBC's coverage **led to the creation of a false dichotomy:** forward-thinking, progressive, open-minded, anti-racist pro-Europeans set against the bigoted, inward-looking, nationalist, anti-EU faction.

Despite having been alerted to this failure by News-watch over the last fifteen years, **the BBC has continued to deny a voice to millions of the electorate.** Had left-wing arguments for Brexit been properly aired, it is entirely feasible that a greater majority of the British people would have voted to Leave.

BACKGROUND

The seminal 2005 report for the then BBC Governors by Lord Wilson of Dinton into the Corporation's EU coverage warned specifically against 'over-simplification', 'bias by omission' (failure to cover the sufficiently to inform audiences about EU affairs) and making the issues involved too binary¹.

A 2007 report for the BBC Trustees, 'From Seesaw to Wagon Wheel', by television producer John Bridcut with input from a steering group that included senior BBC staff², has formed the bedrock of the Corporation's subsequent approach to impartiality. Closely echoing elements of the views of the panel in the Wilson report, the fourth of twelve 'guiding principles' of impartiality was:

Impartiality is about breadth of view, and can be breached by omission. It is not necessarily to be found on the centre ground.

This concept of 'breadth of view' has been central to subsequent BBC considerations of whether output was meeting impartiality requirements, for example in the Stuart Prebble Report (2013) 'A BBC Trust Review of the Breadth of Opinion Reflected in the BBC's Output.'³

In this context, News-watch has used its extensive database of the Corporation's EU coverage to examine whether this 'breadth of opinion' requirement in terms of exploring the left-wing's relationship with the EU – thus conveying in full the EU debate – has been met.

An opinion poll by the British Election Study found that 37% of those who had voted Labour in the 2015 General Election had voted for Britain to leave the EU in the following year's referendum.⁴ In a similar exercise in September 2016, NatCen arrived at a similar figure of 36%.⁵ On that basis, it can be deduced that as many as 3.5 million of the 9.3 million who voted Labour in 2015 subsequently rejected the party's official referendum stance of supporting Remain.⁶

At the national level, left-wing opposition to the UK's involvement in what became the European Union stretches back to the Treaty of Rome. The Labour Party formally opposed membership of the European Economic Community throughout the 1950s and 1960s, primarily because it believed that the structure was undemocratic, undermined workers' rights, hampered British industry and trade, and was a front for the advance of Corporatism. In the run-up to the 1975 Referendum on membership, the party was deeply split on the issue⁷, and in the 1983 general election, the manifesto policy was again to Leave.

¹ The Wilson report is at: http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/bbctrust/assets/files/pdf/our_work/govs/independentpanelreport.pdf

² downloads.bbc.co.uk/bbctrust/assets/files/pdf/review_report_research/impartiality_21century/a_biographies.pdf

³ downloads.bbc.co.uk/bbctrust/assets/files/pdf/our_work/breadth_opinion/breadth_opinion.pdf

⁴ http://whatukthinks.org/eu/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/NatCen_Brexplanations-report-FINAL-WEB2.pdf The sample was 30,000 voters.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid. The NatCen panel found additionally that 26% of Liberal Democrat voters (equating to 628,000 votes) and 21% of Green voters (equating to 243,000 votes) cast their ballots in favour of Brexit.

⁷ A special conference of the Party in April 1975 voted 2-1 in favour of Leave:

http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/april/26/newsid_2503000/2503155.stm

Subsequently, however, the party changed tack, as this commentary in The Guardian outlines:

Under a succession of leaders starting with Neil Kinnock, Labour warmed to Europe. In the 1980s, with Thatcherism rampant at home, the party saw Brussels as providing protection from free-market zealotry. In the 1990s, under Tony Blair, the feeling was that globalisation had made the nation state redundant.⁸

Disagreements on EU policy swirled at the heart of New Labour: Tony Blair supported British membership of the single currency, whilst his Chancellor Gordon Brown did not; but this was essentially a disagreement between two strands of pro-EU opinion on the pace and scope of integration. Opposition to membership of the EU itself was by now marginalised within the Parliamentary party, despite a clear disconnect between it and the country at large, including Labour's core vote.⁹

In 2015, with most senior party figures and the bulk of Labour MPs opposed to a Referendum on EU membership, commentator and activist Owen Jones called for the left to once again 'put Britain's withdrawal on the agenda', and noted that increasing numbers of left-leaning commentators, including environmentalist George Monbiot and journalists Caitlin Moran, Nick Cohen and Suzanne Moore, were turning against the EU, and that senior Labour figures in Westminster and Holyrood were privately moving to this position too. Mr Jones argued:

The more left-wing opponents of the EU come out, the more momentum will gather pace and gain critical mass. For those of us on the left who have always been critical of the EU, it has felt like a lonely crusade. But left support for withdrawal – 'Lexit', if you like – is not new. If anything, this new wave of left Euroscepticism represents a reawakening.¹⁰

In fact, opposition to EU membership had never dissipated fully in the Labour ranks. Current Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn and shadow chancellor John McDonnell were among 66 Labour MPs who voted against the Maastricht Treaty in 1991-2¹¹ alongside numerous Conservative party 'rebels'. Prominent MPs and trade union leaders have, over many years, been firm advocates of withdrawal – including Tony Benn, Michael Foot, Peter Shore, Dennis Skinner, George Galloway, Kate Hoey, Kelvin Hopkins, Bob Crow, Mick Whelan and Arthur Scargill. This strand of opposition to the EU is founded on ideological arguments that in key respects are separate and distinct from those of the Conservative party and UKIP.

Writing in the Guardian on 16 May 2016, the former Business Editor of BBC2's Newsnight, Paul Mason, outlined some of the core arguments forming 'the principled left-wing case for Brexit.'

The left-wing case for Brexit is strategic and clear. The EU is not – and cannot become – a democracy. Instead, it provides the most hospitable ecosystem in the developed world for rentier monopoly corporations, tax-dodging elites and organised crime. It has an executive so powerful it could crush the left-wing government of Greece; a legislature so weak that it cannot effectively determine laws or control its own civil service. A judiciary that, in the Laval and Viking judgments, subordinated workers' right to strike to an employer's right to do business freely. Its central bank is committed, by treaty, to favour deflation and stagnation over growth. State aid

⁸ <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/jul/21/capitalism-fat-cats-brexite-leaving-eu>

⁹ Rawnsley, A. (2001). *Servants of the people*. London: Penguin Books, pp.72-88

¹⁰ <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/jul/14/left-reject-eu-greece-eurosceptic>

¹¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maastricht_Rebels

to stricken industries is prohibited. The austerity we deride in Britain as a political choice is, in fact, written into the EU treaty as a non-negotiable obligation. So are the economic principles of the Thatcher era. A Corbyn-led Labour government would have to implement its manifesto in defiance of EU law. And the situation is getting worse. Europe's leaders still do not know whether they will let Greece go bankrupt in June; they still have no workable plan to distribute the refugees Germany accepted last summer, and having signed a morally bankrupt deal with Turkey to return the refugees, there is now the prospect of that deal's collapse. That means, if the reported demand by an unnamed Belgian minister to "push back or sink" migrant boats in the Aegean is activated, the hands of every citizen of the EU will be metaphorically on the tiller of the ship that does it. You may argue that Britain treats migrants just as badly. The difference is that in Britain I can replace the government, whereas in the EU, I cannot. That's the principled left-wing case for Brexit.¹²

However, Mr Mason refused to go so far as to actually advocate Brexit, adding, 'Now here's the practical reason to ignore it. In two words: Boris Johnson.' He suggested that the Tory right were seeking a mandate via the referendum for 'a return to full-blown Thatcherism' with less employment regulation, lower wages and fewer constraints on business.¹³

The former prominent Labour MP and erstwhile candidate for the No2EU party Dave Nellist strongly disagreed with Mason's conclusion. He implied that Mr Mason was 'faint-hearted' for not advocating Brexit despite the manifold points in its favour, and added additional points to Mr Mason's list: 'the EU drive for market liberalisation, or outright privatisation, of services such as rail, post, energy and water, as well as the threat to a publicly owned NHS that the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) poses'.¹⁴

In 2016 as the referendum approached, only ten Labour MPs publically advocated Brexit, but a number of them were at the forefront of the campaign. When Vote Leave received its official designation in April 2016, Labour MP Gisela Stuart took the position of chairman and co-convenor of the group's campaign committee along with Conservative Michael Gove, and substantial funding was provided by Labour-supporting businessman John Mills, with Labour MPs Frank Field and Graham Stringer serving on the board.¹⁵ Meanwhile Labour MP Kate Hoey joined the Grassroots Out campaign alongside Nigel Farage.¹⁶

It is impossible to know, of course, how strong support for withdrawal was among Labour voters before 2016, because, despite repeat promises of a referendum on the EU, their direct opinion was never asked. One indicator, however, is voting behaviour in the five-yearly elections for the European Parliament. By the 2014 poll, UKIP was the largest UK party. It commanded 26% of the UK vote at around 4.3 million – compared to around 600,000 in 1999. It is not possible to know with certainty the sources of this huge increase in votes, but in the 15 years, both the Conservatives and the Labour party lost substantial vote share, and it can thus be reasonably inferred that hundreds of thousands of Conservative *and* Labour voters switched to UKIP.

¹² <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/may/16/brexit-eu-referendum-boris-johnson-greece-tory>

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/may/17/a-closer-look-at-the-leftwing-case-for-brexit>

¹⁵ www.voteleavetakecontrol.org/campaign.html

¹⁶ <http://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/644832/Grassroots-Out-unite-UKIP-Leave-EU-cross-party-campaign-group>

The analysis which follows examines whether, against this background of continued left-wing opposition to the EU, the Labour party support for withdrawal was sufficiently included in BBC coverage. It is divided into four periods: the 14 years leading up to the EU referendum (2002-2015); the General Election in 2015; the 2016 referendum campaign period; and the year since the vote, including the 2017 General Election.

THE PRE-REFERENDUM PERIOD – NEWS-WATCH SURVEYS 2002-2015

Between September 2002 and June 2015, News-watch monitored Radio 4's Today programme for 324 weeks, amounting to 1,944 editions. There were 232 hours of EU-related feature coverage, and 5,113 guest speakers contributed to the EU debate¹⁷.

174 speakers (3.4%) were identifiable advocates of withdrawal (although they were not always given the space to make an overt case for it).¹⁸ Of this group, **only five speakers (0.1% of the total EU contributors)** were left-wing advocates of Brexit.¹⁹ Their combined contributions are detailed in full:

June 28, 2003: From September 2002 News-watch monitored 47 continuous weeks of the Today programme. The first appearance by a left-wing advocate of Brexit came ten months into the survey, in a Yesterday in Parliament report in June 2003. The speaker was Independent Labour peer Lord Stoddart of Swindon supporting a cost-benefit analysis of British membership of the EU. He said:

LORD STODDART: Whenever I, and others, have demanded a cost-benefit analysis of our membership of the EU, we have been told that the benefits are self-evident. The fact is, that they aren't self-evident, and you only have to speak to the British population, and they can't see any benefit at all. So they're not self-evident.

September 29, 2009: It was more than six years – after a further 155 weeks of monitoring Today – before another left-wing withdrawalist appeared on the programme. Presenter James Naughtie reported a meeting during the Labour Conference of the Euro Safeguards Campaign, described by Mr Naughtie as 'arguing against Brussels and all its works, as it has been doing for more than 35 years'. Naughtie interviewed the meeting's organiser, the veteran Labour MP Austin Mitchell:

JAMES NAUGHTIE: And even in such a small room, with an audience that you couldn't really call the crowd, I think it swelled to a dozen at one point, Austin Mitchell was irrepressible. So, here we are at a fringe meeting, I think it got up to twelve at one point, it was sort of eight, it sort of drifted away after you started speaking, but we'll leave that out! But you know, is there still life in the old conference?

¹⁷ Obviously, this is not the BBC output as a whole, but Today is broadcast six days a week and can be taken as broadly representative and reflective of the Corporation's news and current affairs output; it sets the daily agenda and most items it carries are an ingredient of other news programmes across all its platforms.

¹⁸ Contributors had to meet one three criteria to be counted as 'supporting withdrawal': they expressed, as part of their contribution, a support British exit from the EU; they were said to hold such views in journalistic commentary; or they belonged to a party explicitly advocating withdrawal.

¹⁹ News-watch did in the same period record a number of appearances from left-wing 'eurosceptics' who spoke primarily against British membership of the single currency or the proposed European Constitution, however these speakers did not favour outright withdrawal from the EU. Their contributions are listed and discussed in full in Appendix II.

AUSTIN MITCHELL: I wish there was. You'll see, I had to bring my wife with me to make up the numbers, but she wasn't heckling. I think the problem is that the fringe has been taken over by the pressure groups and the interest groups and the businesses, and they all want a minister to sit on stage and give its importance and to bring in the audience.

JN: And you want the weft and weave of old political argument, from the edges if you like.

AM: Yes, yes. I think the strength of the fringe, the old fringe - and it still survives in our meetings today, and there are one or two other meetings like that - is that there is a range of arguments and you get a good discussion going.

JN: Hang on, there wasn't an argument, it was the true believers. Now great for them, they come along, you give your oration about the evils of the EU and all the rest of it, that's fine, but they come along and they're reinforced. It's people going to the meetings where they will feel reassured, isn't that the difficulty?

AM: No it's not. This year, it happens that we haven't had any opponents in the meetings, but we've had them in the past and there has been quite a lively argument. And we'd like an argument, we'd like more people to come along and oppose us.

JN: Will the Euro Safeguards Campaign in the Labour Party be at the conference next year, having a meeting, even if it's gone down to eight? It may have gone up to twenty, who knows?

AM: We shall be there, I shall be 204 by that stage, but in my geriatric way, on my crutches I shall be saying 'be suspicious of this organisation, defend British democracy'

October 29, 2012: Another three years on, Today's bulletins reported that Labour MP Gisela Stuart, had said publically for the first time that the UK should eventually leave the EU:

GISELA STUART: Every time Europe had a problem, we thought the answer was 'more', it's a bit like the obese child in front of the fridge that every time it wants to lose weight it opens the fridge door and eats even more.

EDWARD STOURTON: So you think we should leave the formal structures of the European Union?

GS: I think ultimately it has to go that way, yes.

June 4, 2013: More than a year later, at 8.32am on 4 June 2013, Today carried an interview with Labour Party donor, the businessman John Mills.

SARAH MONTAGUE: It's not just the Conservatives that can't agree on Europe. Ed Miliband is facing pressure from within his own party, from those who want him to offer the British people a referendum on our membership of the EU. Labour for a Referendum is a new group being launched today, and it's being bankrolled by the businessman John Mills Gio, who is chairman of the home products company JML, and he's here in the studio with me. Good morning.

JOHN MILLS: Good morning to you.

SM: Ed Miliband hasn't ruled out a referendum has he?

JM: He did make a speech earlier on this year which indicated that he wasn't at all keen on having one. But I think the Labour Party would be unwise to rule out having a referendum before the run-up to the next general election. A lot can happen over the next two years.

SM: You're saying they would be wise not to rule out?

JM: No, I think, well I think better still, they should support having a referendum.

SM: You want a referendum and you want one soon?

JM: Yes, I think the sooner the better, I think the uncertainty about whether Britain is going to stay in the EU or not is bad for business and bad generally. I think we need to get a decision taken.

SM: And to be clear, you would vote 'no' in any referendum?

JM: I'd vote 'no' in the present circumstances, yes. But I think that the vast bulk of the population would like to see our terms of membership renegotiated to something more towards what they thought they'd gone into in 1975, a free trade area without all the rest of the Federalist superstructure that we've got. And if this could be achieved as a result of renegotiation, I think you might get a different result, I think people then may want to stay in.

SM: Okay. And how much support do you have from within the Labour Party?

JM: Well, we've got 15 MPs signed up whose names are on our website, but I think there's a much wider of more tacit support within the Labour Party, perhaps, I don't know, a third of MPs wouldn't be against at all at the moment having a referendum in the manifesto, not least because the polls very clearly show that people do want to have the opportunity to take a decision on whether we stay in the EU or not.

SM: What about David Cameron's position on this, which is that he'll go away, renegotiate and then come back and put that to a referendum?

JM: Well I think that's not an unreasonable stance at all. I mean, this is supported by one of the other organisations with which I'm involved, which is Business for Britain, that's very much the stance that we encourage should happen.

The final portion of the interview moved away from the subject of the EU and focused on Mr Mills's view of Ed Miliband's economic policies, and his fear that the UK could end up with ten years of austerity and low growth. Ms Montague asked him if he supported Ed Miliband's leadership of the Labour Party. Mr Mills replied:

JM: Yes, very strongly, very strongly.

SM: You support him very strongly, you just don't like what he's doing either on Europe or on economic policy.

JM: Well I support the Labour Party very broadly on a large proportion of the policies it wants to pursue. I do have some disagreements about putting a commitment to a referendum in the next general election, and I would like to do all I can, and work with other people, if that's going to be possible to see whether we can get a more successful prospect for the economy into Labour's next manifesto.

SM: And is it the sort of thing that you would take a decision about where you put your money?

JM: Not really, I mean, I've been a lifelong supporter of the Labour Party through thick and thin, and I'll go on doing that.

April 22, 2015: At 6.40am during the General Election campaign, Sarah Montague interviewed Ken Capstick, Party Treasurer of the Socialist Labour Party. Mr Capstick's appearance on Today was not a consequence of direct editorial choice or journalistic inquiry, but a question of compliance. The BBC's 2015 Election Guidelines stated that any party fielding a minimum of one sixth of the candidates in any one nation of Great Britain could expect coverage of their manifesto launch on a range of BBC news bulletins along with 'at least one substantial item (e.g. as part of a package or an interview)' on Radio 4's Today, World at One or PM.²⁰ The Socialist Labour Party fielded eight candidates in the 40 Welsh seats, and therefore qualified for an interview.²¹ In her introduction Ms Montague noted:

A plan to nationalise all pension funds, all transport systems, introduce a new 90% top rate of tax, and leave the EU – that is the latest manifesto published last night by the Socialist Labour Party.

However, the subsequent exchange focused primarily on the party's anti-austerity agenda and its plans for pension funds and transport. The matter of EU membership was raised only in the closing seconds, by Mr Capstick. He said:

KEN CAPSTICK: We will pull out of the European Union, where . . . that costs us something like £170 billion every year, it's a waste of money.

SARAH MONTAGUE: UKIP suggests that would save us £10 billion, rather than your £170 billion.

KC: Yes, well I think it's, I think UKIP's wrong.

SM: Right, Ken Capstick, we must leave it there, but thank you very much.

There was no attempt to investigate the Socialist Labour Party's calculations²², or to explore the specific reasons behind the party's support for withdrawal. Its manifesto argued that the EU is 'a capitalist club' that 'makes it easy for multi-national companies to exploit workers throughout its member states', criticised the EU's 'vast faceless bureaucracy', and suggested Brexit would allow the UK to move towards 'true internationalism so that we can have fair and reasonable trading links with the rest of the world.'²³ But the brevity of the discussion precluded any examination of these themes.

The five exchanges featuring the left-wing withdrawal perspective over 13 years thus amounted to just 736 words. However, the majority of the Austin Mitchell interview concerned the Labour fringe, and so only 578 words across the five appearances focused

²⁰ http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/guidelines/editorialguidelines/pdfs/2015_Election_Guidelines.pdf

²¹ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/election-2015-wales-32384397>

²² A report by UKIP economics spokesman Tim Congdon, published in September 2013 also put a cost of £170 billion on EU membership: <http://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/430571/REVEALED-How-Britain-is-170bn-worse-off-in-European-Union> indicating the Ms Montague was perhaps referring to the UK's contribution to the EU, rather than overall cost of membership on the economy.

²³ <http://www.socialist-labour-party.org.uk/SLP%20Manifesto%202015%20pdf.pdf>

directly on EU matters. This equates to under three minutes of airtime, or 0.02% of the 232 hours devoted to EU matters on Today. The programme's total available feature airtime is approximately 11 hours 5 minutes per week. These contributions amounted to only **0.0014%** of the space available to producers. Only one of the five items (the bulletin soundbite from Gisela Stuart) featured in Today's peak-time 7.00am – 8.30am slot.

Of the five sequences, only the interview with John Mills offered any sort of substantial discussion. Although Mr Mills eventually came out as a strong supporter of Brexit in 2016, in this interview he offered only conditional support for Leave. He conceded he would personally vote to leave in a referendum, but said he believed that people could support staying in the EU if strong enough reforms took place. Although he mentioned that people had voted for a free trade area rather than a federalist superstate in 1975, his focus was on whether Labour should commit to a referendum, and he advanced no sustained arguments against the EU itself.

The points made by the other four contributors about the EU were brief and insubstantial, either because of structural limitations (they appeared only in edited soundbite form), or because they were not sufficiently probed in their interviews.

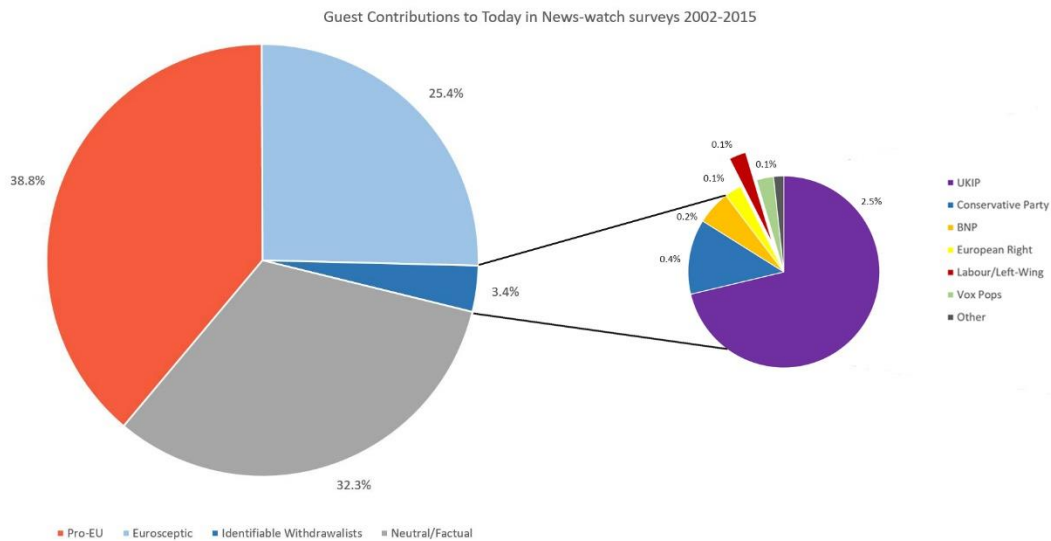
Overall, therefore, in the period before the 2016 referendum, Today virtually ignored left-wing arguments for withdrawal. Coverage was vanishingly small. Missing from the equation was exploration that a desire for Brexit was flowing not only from 'the right' but also from Labour party supporters and others on the political left.

The chart shows how small a proportion of the 5,113 speakers were identifiable withdrawalists²⁴ and how, within this small subset of speakers, the withdrawal argument was dominated by UKIP. It had 71% of all withdrawalist contributions, one third by Nigel Farage²⁵. Appearances by left-wing withdrawalists were only at the same level as continental opponents of the EU (the French National Front, the Dutch Freedom Party and the Danish People's Party), but were only *half as many as those of the British Nationalist Party (BNP)*²⁶.

²⁴ Those speakers who made specific arguments for withdrawal, or who were known to support withdrawal accounted for 3.4%. The wider Eurosceptic category, although historically featuring anti-EU comment, actually featured a large proportion of speakers who supported continued membership of the EU. This only became fully clear when the argument became binary, during the 2016 EU Referendum.

²⁵ Nigel Farage provided 56 of the 174 contributions, accounting for 32% of all withdrawalist contributions on surveyed editions of Today

²⁶ The anti-EU (and withdrawalist) BNP won two seats in the 2009 European Parliamentary elections, with 943,598 votes, 6% of the poll. Philip Johnstone, claimed in the Daily Telegraph that this was because the Labour Party leadership had not taken on board that their pro-EU stance was alienating working class support, especially in the North of England: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/eu/5479327/European-elections-2009-How-Labour-let-the-BNP-flex-its-muscles.html>



Given the reach of BBC news services, it can reasonably be inferred that this sustained bias by omission could have fundamentally skewed the debate about the EU over more than a decade. Its main consequence was that listeners during this period heard about the withdrawal case mainly through the prism of the alleged xenophobia and disorganisation of UKIP, or 'Tory splits'.

This is illustrated starkly, for example, in coverage of the 2004 European Elections. UKIP secured 2.7 million votes and 12 seats, pushing Labour to its lowest share of the vote in a national poll for 80 years. But the most prominent reaction assembled on the Today programme to the results was criticism of UKIP²⁷. Peter Osborne, who claims to be a eurosceptic, was particularly scathing. He called UKIP 'a collection of sort of convicted criminals and perjurers'.²⁸ There was another equally negative allegation: that parallels could be made 'between the UK Independence Party and the hooligans who besmirch Britain's reputation abroad.'²⁹ Jonathan Bartley, director of the Christian think-tank Ekklesia, said in an interview³⁰ that Christian orthodoxy was at odds with UKIP, given the Christian vision of a 'community of nations' with 'respect for diversity'. He added:

What's driving the arguments is Britain's self-interests, we hear repeatedly from our politicians in all the main parties that we must judge decisions over whether to go into the euro, the EU Constitution, purely – or primarily – in terms of what's best for Britain. Now, that's a very selfish approach, and that is actually typified by The UK Independence Party, who take it one stage further and say, well let's come out of the community completely.

Such negativity continued five years later in exceptionally excoriating commentary by BBC Europe Editor Mark Mardell. He compiled a list of all the negatives used against UKIP and its

²⁷ The News-watch summary of the election coverage opened: 'In the reports by BBC correspondents about UKIP, the main analysis was of its impact on the Conservatives. That on Labour was all but ignored. Of course, the party was a threat to the Tories; but a major issue of the election was the general rise in euroscepticism to the point where it captured more than 50% of the votes cast for the four main parties, along with reducing Labour to its lowest share of a national vote for 80 years. Yet the poor Labour showing was put down mainly to a protest vote against Iraq, rather than possible disenchantment with europhile policies.'

²⁸ 14 June 2004, European Elections, 8.54am

²⁹ 16 June 2004, Newspaper Review, 6.40am

³⁰ 19 June 2004, Ekklesia and UKIP, 7.22am

then leader Nigel Farage, twice said UKIP had been dubbed ‘the BNP in blazers’, were mired in corruption, and he resurrected David Cameron’s 2006 comment that UKIP were ‘fruitcakes, loonies and closet racists’. This latter description was recycled frequently on Today and on other BBC programmes over the following decade.

There was virtually no balancing coverage in terms of the withdrawal case. Support for Brexit was thus routinely painted as being synonymous with racism, xenophobia, small-mindedness, isolationism and intolerance.

This permeated the BBC presentation of EU debate. Presenters seemed oblivious of any but the ‘Tory-split’/UKIP approach. On BBC1’s Question Time (7 March 2013), an audience member asked, ‘Is it time we defied Europe and closed our borders to say ‘we are full’?’ Panellist Bob Crow, leader of the RMT Union, explained that his union’s policy was clear: ‘...to come out of the European Union’, and argued that the EU was anti-democratic. In response, David Dimbleby, appeared flustered and said, with reference to the five-person panel, ‘I didn’t realise we were, we were 3-2 in favour of pulling out. Ken Clarke, you’d better have a go.’ It seemed that Mr Dimbleby, one of the BBC’s most experienced presenters, was unaware that a leading trade unionist guest might support withdrawal. This is indicative of how little attention was given to these arguments by the BBC over the previous decade.

News-watch’s data shows that in the pre-referendum period, too, the BBC demonstrated bias by omission on a dramatic and extended scale, and this ensured the referendum debate, when it arrived, became clearly divisive.

2015 GENERAL ELECTION:

The previous analysis includes the fourteen-second contribution made by Ken Capstick during the 2015 General Election. But it is also important to analyse in more detail the BBC’s coverage during that period. The EU was by now firmly on the national agenda because the holding of an EU referendum was a central promise in the Conservative party manifesto, and Labour under leader Ed Miliband strongly opposed such a vote. It was also clear by this time – for example by the voting in the 2014 European Parliamentary elections – that despite Labour’s official stance, withdrawal from the EU was a divisive issue for the party. A substantial group of Labour MPs, together with business backers such as John Mills, outlying left-wing organisations such as the Socialist Labour Party, a significant number of trade unions such as the RMT, and millions among the electorate itself, wanted a vote on membership.

The News-watch survey into the election coverage³¹ during the formal campaign period analysed all the relevant content on Radio 4’s Today, and World at One, BBC1’s News at Ten and BBC2 Newsnight. Its executive summary opened with the following observation:

Policies and attitudes towards the EU were a central point of difference between the political parties, with their respective approaches potentially having a huge impact on the UK, but this was not reflected in coverage. . . the only advocates of withdrawal who made points on that

³¹ <http://news-watch.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/News-watch-2015-General-Election-Survey.pdf>

subject in the run up to polling day – apart from one brief sequence involving the Socialist Labour Party and a minor mention by the former leader of the BNP – were from UKIP. But the main editorial focus on the party was whether they were competent or potentially racist and this clouded the treatment of withdrawal as an issue in itself.

In effect, therefore, opposition to the EU among the left was considered only to be of very minor concern. Another relevant observation was that Labour's stance on the EU was explored briefly, but interrogation was 'superficial and limited'.³²

Overall, during a general election campaign in which membership of the EU was a major point of contention for both the electorate at large and the Labour party, the BBC again made no significant effort to explore the left-wing perspectives involved. This was major bias by omission at a seminal point in the national EU debate.

2016 EU REFERENDUM CAMPAIGN:

News-watch monitored two flagship programmes: Radio 1's Newsbeat and BBC1's News at Ten from April 15 and June 23 – the formal campaign period – when the BBC's referendum guidelines were in operation. These stipulated that there should be 'broad balance' between the Leave and Remain arguments.³³

Newsbeat

Newsbeat is BBC Radio 1's flagship news programme aimed at a young audience³⁴, The News-watch survey, covering the 10 weeks of the campaign, showed there was a major failure to meet the strict 'broad balance' requirement. There were 1.5 times more Remain than a Leave supporters, and politicians supporting Remain outnumbered those supporting Leave by 47 to 34.³⁵ Nothing in the content balanced these important numeric discrepancies. **There were no Leave contributions at all from the Labour Party or wider left.**

James Tilley, professor of politics at Oxford University, has noted a strong correlation between age and political affiliation in the UK:

In Britain, age is a strong predictor of how someone will vote in an election. Older people are more supportive of the Conservatives, while younger people more supportive of Labour, the Liberal Democrats, and more recently, the Greens. This is not a recent phenomenon.³⁶

Despite this, Newsbeat's coverage of the referendum avoided a whole range of EU-related issues such as the environment, health, education, national sovereignty, international

³² Ibid.

³³ www.bbc.co.uk/editorialguidelines/guidelines/appendix8

³⁴ The lunchtime and evening editions of Newsbeat have a combined weekly reach of approximately 3.3 million listeners and more 15 to 24-year-olds receive their news from the programme than from any other BBC outlet. Its audience is half male and half female (which means the programme has a higher proportion of female listeners than most other BBC News output) and 10% of the audience are students.

³⁵ news-watch.co.uk/radio-1s-newsbeat-october-2016/

³⁶ theconversation.com/hard-evidence-do-we-become-more-conservative-with-age-47910

development and democracy, which might have been expected to resonate with left-leaning young listeners.

Instead, the focus was firmly on Immigration and free movement (40% of the referendum-based airtime) and the economy (28%). Commentary suggested that coverage of immigration favoured the Leave side, while coverage of Business and Economic issues favoured Remain.³⁷ However, the News-watch content analysis showed that the dominance of immigration in Newsbeat's coverage was not necessarily positive for the Leave argument. It stressed the benefits of free movement, visa-free travel and of working abroad. Conversely, objections to immigration were projected as xenophobic or hypocritical.³⁸

Polling after the referendum indicated that 75% of young people had voted Remain.³⁹ Would as many have done so if left-wing arguments for Brexit had been more prominently covered by programmes such as Newsbeat?

News at Ten

This is arguably the BBC's most high profile news programme and draws daily audiences of around 5 million. There were a total of 454 guests in the EU coverage during the 10-week referendum campaign, but only five appearances from Labour Party advocates of Brexit – just 1.1% of the total.

All were short soundbites with no opportunity to explore policy in detail. This meant there was no attempt to illuminate the key differences between 'right' and 'left' in their support for Brexit.

The appearances were as follows:

June 2: A report by political editor Laura Kuenssberg featured Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn's insistence that he was getting his Remain message across. There was then a short clip from Kate Hoey, MP for Vauxhall and supporter of the Grassroots Out campaign:

LAURA KUENSSEBERG: Only a clutch of Labour MPs believe we should leave the EU, but they claim they have the ear of the party supporters.

KATE HOEY: They want to take control back to our own country, and I'm afraid the leadership of the Labour Party is very much out of touch with the rank and file Labour supporter.

June 9: This report followed Gisela Stuart's appearance for the Leave campaign on an ITV referendum debate alongside Conservatives Andrea Leadsom and Boris Johnson. News at Ten featured a short clip from her contribution:

³⁷ <https://blog.lboro.ac.uk/crcc/eu-referendum/media-coverage-eu-referendum-report-1/>

³⁸ For example on 21 June Newsbeat featured a contribution from a young man named Wade, 'I don't want to be racist or nothing, but the immigrants and that, too many foreigners in our country, more jobs for more English people, that's what I think.' His viewpoint was framed as hypocritical, given that he was employed on the island of Zante, and therefore 'taking a Greek person's job'.

³⁹ <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/jun/24/meet-the-75-young-people-who-voted-to-remain-in-eu>

GISELA STUART: Can we just stop this, as Nicola Sturgeon so rightly said, 'a miserable, negative, fear-based campaign', because people will see through this. This is not about any of us here on the panel, this is not about the current government, this is your once in a generation choice as to who you think should have control over the majority of money which we spend.

June 10: The Leave-supporting Labour MP for Bassetlaw John Mann said:

JOHN MANN: Probably a large majority of Labour voters are knowledgeably, knowingly voting to leave. And they are voting to leave because the European Union is broken. It's not working for the working classes in this country.

June 14: Laura Kuenssberg again referred briefly to Labour supporters of Brexit. A short contribution by Frank Field, the MP for Birkenhead, was sandwiched between two speakers from the left who took the opposite stance:

JEREMY CORBYN *Labour Leader*: A vote to Leave is a vote that will put the NHS in jeopardy, in the hands of those who want to break it up. (*applause, focusing on woman in nurses' uniform*)

LAURA KUENSBERG: But the handful of Labour MPs who want out believe they have the public's ear.

FRANK FIELD MP *Labour, Leave*: Labour's leadership cannot face up to the big issue, and that is about immigration. This has been wonderful, this globalisation, moves throughout the world, for the rich. But if you're at the bottom of the pile, you've paid the price.

LK: But many on the left believe exit would be the far greater cost.

MARK SERWOTKA *General Secretary PCS Union*: The morning after the referendum, if we've voted to leave, who's going to be happiest? It's going to be Nigel Farage, Boris Johnson and a resurgent Right that I think would spell disaster for the trade union members I represent and working-class communities across the UK.

June 21: News at Ten showed edited highlights from the live referendum debate at Wembley Arena, featuring three politicians from each side. The sequence included three points from Gisela Stuart. The first was used in the programme's opening montage:

GISELA STUART: As long as we're shackled to a failing eurozone, liable to bail out after bail out, we will not succeed. Many jobs would be lost.

The second, at the beginning of the main report, stressed the importance of the vote, but made no direct argument for withdrawal:

GISELA STUART: You know, sometimes voting doesn't make much difference, on Thursday it really does. You will decide who makes decisions about the future of this country.

The third soundbite made no specific argument and simply questioned the Prime Minister's policy on Turkish accession to the EU:

GISELA STUART: I would quite like the real David Cameron to step forward and tell us what the policy on Turkey is.

In total, these five Brexit-supporting Labour contributors delivered just **161 words, or 1 minute 29 seconds** of coverage in the 70 editions of News at Ten during the campaign. The appearances may have alerted viewers, in the most basic sense, that Brexit had cross-party support, but there was no attempt to contextualise their viewpoints or explore the tradition of left-wing antipathy towards the EU project and how it might differ from the viewpoints of the Conservatives or UKIP.

Although the support for Brexit was a minority opinion within the Parliamentary Labour party, the previously untested extent of support among Labour voters was one of the key issues in the referendum. News at Ten ignored the topic. One measure is that during the campaign, there were three times as many appearances by UKIP (15 contributors) and 13 times more from Conservatives (66 contributors).

Of course, space within News at Ten is always at a premium, and all contributions are relatively short. But the programme also compiled a number of special reports considering the impact of Brexit on specific policy areas: science, education, the four nations of the UK, farming, security, and undecided voters. To meet impartiality guidelines, similar reports could easily have been commissioned to explore the perspective of Labour Brexiteers, or divisions within the Labour party.

Writing in the Guardian in 2015 commentator and left-wing activist Owen Jones called for the left to ‘take ownership’ of the withdrawal issue:

Let’s just be honest about our fears. We fear that we will inadvertently line up with the xenophobes and the immigrant-bashing nationalists, and a “no” result will be seen as their vindication, unleashing a carnival of UKIPpery. Hostility to the EU is seen as the preserve of the hard right, and not the sort of thing progressives should entertain. And that is why – if indeed much of the left decides on Lexit – it must run its own separate campaign and try and win ownership of the issue.

Mr Jones’s view did not gain wider traction, and the mainstream media narrative during the campaign was, according to Loughborough University, ‘focused on the economy, immigration and the referendum itself’.⁴⁰ News-watch found very little space given to alternative arguments for withdrawal.

In the BBC’s coverage the impetus to leave the EU appeared to originate almost wholly from the ‘right’, with a focus on divisions within the Conservative party (and between the Conservatives and UKIP) and allegations that the Leave argument was based on xenophobia and intolerance. On the eve of the referendum, Mr Jones, in another article, criticised the tone of the campaign:

On Thursday Britain could choose to become the first nation to leave the European Union, the consequence of a campaign dripping in bigotry and the scapegoating of migrants.⁴¹

⁴⁰ <http://www.lboro.ac.uk/news-events/eu-referendum/>

⁴¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/jun/22/politics-spain-podemos-radical-europe-uk>

Accusations of racism were levelled at the Leave campaign throughout and featured heavily in BBC output. Examples were:

- Attacks on Boris Johnson when he loosely compared the aims of the EU to create a super-state to those of Hitler⁴²
- An advertisement by the staunchly Remain (and 'left-wing') Operation Black Vote group which featured a skinhead pointing aggressively at a woman wearing a sari⁴³
- Condemnation of the 'Breaking Point' advertisement by UKIP showing a line of migrants at the Slovenian border (aimed at illustrating the problems of excessive immigration) This was coincidentally unveiled on what turned out to be the day of the murder of Labour MP Jo Cox, and fuelled widespread condemnation of UKIP, especially from Remainers, but also from opponents in the Conservative party⁴⁴

Overall, during the referendum campaign, the BBC – on at least two of its most high-profile programmes – seriously under-reported the left-wing case for withdrawal. In both Newsbeat and News at Ten, there was a clear failure to demonstrate that support for Brexit straddled party divides and was not simply the preserve of the perceived 'extremists' of UKIP or the right-wing of the Conservative party.

POST REFERENDUM – JUNE 2016 TO MAY 2016

In the immediate aftermath of the referendum vote, News-watch monitored a raft of BBC news and current affairs programmes. The consensus among the chosen commentators, alongside BBC reporters and presenters, seemed to be that widespread fears about immigration had led to the Leave victory. On the morning after the vote, on 24 June 2016, a BBC reporter in Poland insinuated that mass deportation of migrants was an immediate possibility, despite no one from Leave suggesting this during the campaign:

KASIA MEDERA: It's a very sunny day here, but the outlook is far from it. This is a country waking up in shock. The main priority is what happens to the nearly million Polish nationals living in the United Kingdom. They make up, of course, the largest non-British national group in the UK. What happens to their status? What happens to their jobs? What happens to their freedom of movement? What happens to the ability of their children to go to school? There are so many unanswered questions at the moment that, I have to say, it's been very, very . . . strange, watching the events unfold here, because there is just a palpable state of unease.

On BBC2's Newsnight that same evening, Evan Davis's introduction stressed the narrowness of the referendum result. He first observed that if one in 50 voters had changed sides the result would have been different, and then asked whether this was the first vote ever to say, 'it's NOT the economy stupid, it's immigration?' His question contained two clear assumptions: first, that the dire economic predictions of the Remain campaign were correct and Brexit would not be beneficial to the UK economy; second, that immigration had been the primary driver of the Leave vote. This was despite a poll organised by Lord Ashcroft taken on the day

⁴² www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-eu-referendum-36295208

⁴³ www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-eu-referendum-36379934

⁴⁴ www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-eu-referendum-36570759

of the referendum which indicated that almost half of Leave voters said they had voted on issues of sovereignty, whereas only a third cited their main reason as relating to control over immigration.⁴⁵

On 26 June 2016, Victoria Derbyshire, in her eponymously titled current affairs programme, asked if there was any link between UKIP's 'Breaking Point' poster and a reported rise in racist abuse since the referendum. On 30 June on BBC1's Question Time, David Dimbleby referred to the poster as 'racist' without qualification: speaking to UKIP MP Douglas Carswell, Mr Dimbleby said:

You are the only UKIP MP in the House of Commons, how can you belong to a party led by a man that put out that racist poster that you constantly complain about? Why don't you leave UKIP? You sit with Nigel Farage, or maybe you're planning to leave UKIP, but you can't be led by a man who you object to on racist grounds and remain an MP.

An edition of BBC1's News at Six on 31 August suggested there were fears that the killing of Polish immigrant Arkadiusz Jozwik outside a fast food takeaway in Harlow may have been the subject of 'a frenzied racist attack triggered by the Brexit referendum'⁴⁶. Later that evening, BBC2's Newsnight featured reporter John Sweeney pushing a grieving friend of Mr Jozwik to 'name names'.⁴⁷

JS: In Harlow tonight people united for a vigil, but for the town's Polish community the killing of one of their own makes emotions raw.

ERIC HIND: (*fragment of word, unclear*) I don't know if I can mention names but I mean

...

JS: Mention names.

EH: But I mean, Nigel Farage, I mean, thank you for that, because you are part of this death, and you've got blood on your hands, thanks to you, thanks for all your decision, wherever you are, er . . . yeah, it's your call.

JS: Nigel Farage has always denied this allegation. As the search for clues and answers continues, the fear is that two poisons have come together to a lethal result.⁴⁸

Against this toxic backdrop, Remainers mobilised, marched on Parliament and painted their faces in the blue and gold of the EU flag. They waved baguettes, chanted, 'Fromage not Farage'⁴⁹ and a petition for a second referendum was widely publicised by the BBC.⁵⁰ These were extraordinary scenes; did the EU institutions attract such overt public support at any point over the previous two decades? It is arguable that the banners and badges were evidence that those marching were defining themselves in terms of culture and identity, and

⁴⁵ In a poll of 12,369 people on referendum day, 'Nearly half (49%) of leave voters said the biggest single reason for wanting to leave the EU was "the principle that decisions about the UK should be taken in the UK". One third (33%) said the main reason was that leaving "offered the best chance for the UK to regain control over immigration and its own borders."' lordashcroftpolls.com/2016/06/how-the-united-kingdom-voted-and-why/

⁴⁶ BBC News at Six, 31 August 2016

⁴⁷ BBC2, Newsnight, 31 August 2016

⁴⁸ For further analysis see: <http://news-watch.co.uk/bbc-trust-defends-corporations-harlow-race-hate-sensationalism/>

⁴⁹ www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-36692990

⁵⁰ www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-eu-referendum-36629324

that they had been galvanised to protest primarily against a perceived racism and intolerance evidenced in the 'out' vote.

There was no indication that they were in favour of an EU that many on the left would argue supported a financial system that had led to mass youth unemployment across the eurozone periphery, a Common Agricultural Policy which provides subsidies for the EU's biggest landowners and dumps millions of tons of heavily subsidised food into Africa each year.⁵¹

Was the polarisation in the wake of the Leave vote a consequence of the narrowness of the BBC's coverage during the campaign and the years of EU coverage that preceded it?

News-watch conducted three content surveys in the months following the referendum. The first was an analysis of 'The Brexit Collection' an online compendium of Radio 4 programmes; the second a six-month survey of every edition of Today's Business News slots; and third, a week-long assessment of the Today programme's full output during the week that the Article 50 letter was delivered to the European Commission and the process of negotiating Britain's exit from the EU began.

THE BREXIT COLLECTION

After the EU referendum, the BBC assembled The Brexit Collection⁵², a compendium of Radio 4 programmes with a Brexit theme. News-watch analysed the 31 items posted between 11 July and 23 August 2016. The programmes included debates, documentaries, comedy programmes, news features, phone-ins, and points of view. Five documentaries about the EU had been broadcast between 2009 and 2012, but the majority were from the post-referendum period, and were reactions to the vote. Full analysis of the programmes is contained in a News-watch report.⁵³ Its summary included these observations:

Overall, there were no attempts in any programme to explore the benefits of leaving the EU, but conversely, Brexit came under sustained negative attack. This was reflected in the balance of contributions and comment contained within the items.

Analysis by News-watch shows that only 23% of contributors in the programmes as a whole spoke in favour of Brexit, against 58% in favour of Remain and 19% who gave a neutral or factual commentary. Nine programmes and six features, amounting to 5 hours 20 minutes of programming, were strongly anti-Brexit, contained unchallenged predictions that civil unrest and rioting were now on the horizon and cast the 'out' vote in negative terms, inferring that the result had been a consequence of racism and xenophobia. The balance of programme guests in all of these items was strongly – and sometimes overwhelmingly – pro-Remain.

There were 212 guest speakers. How many were by supporters of Brexit from Labour or the left? Only two. Gisela Stuart appeared twice, but the first was in a documentary entitled 'Divorcing Europe,' broadcast on 16 November 2009, almost three years before she

⁵¹ www.belfercenter.org/publication/how-eu-starves-africa-submission

⁵² www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p040j6lx

⁵³ <http://news-watch.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/News-watch-Survey-of-The-Brexit-Collection-September-2016.pdf>

announced her support for Brexit.⁵⁴ Ms Stuart also appeared briefly in an edition of *More or Less*, although was introduced only as ‘Chair of the Leave campaign’, and so it was not made explicit that she was a Labour politician. Her contribution was 33 words from the campaign’s battle-bus:

GISELA STUART: Every week we send £350 million to Brussels. I’d rather have that we have control how to spend that money, and if I had that control, I would spend it on the NHS.

Front Row focused on ‘the cultural response to Brexit’. Two panellists, poet Dreda Say Mitchell and Phil Redmond, the television industry producer and businessman, had elsewhere expressed support for Brexit. Dreda Say Mitchell was coded as a left-wing withdrawal advocate⁵⁵, but her contribution to the programme was mainly about issues of access and diversity within the arts. The points she made about the EU were brief:

I think, you know, we’re so fixated on, that ‘the EU did amazing things for us’, but actually, we’ve got some big issues in this country to do with culture, and if we’re really determined to move forward, it’s about looking in on ourselves and actually moving those things forward

She also said:

...if the arts community was so shocked [by the referendum result], is the arts community out of touch?’

Phil Redmond’s contribution was more difficult to categorise. He did not say he had voted Leave, but made some general points focusing on the opportunities presented by Brexit.

As such, as already noted, the Brexit Collection had only two speakers (Stuart and Say Mitchell) – adding up to just 0.9% of the total contributors – who could be clearly identified as left-wing withdrawalists. Neither made an extended case for Brexit.

Other parts of the Brexit Collection heavily emphasised the BBC narrative that the Leave vote stemmed from intolerance. A series on PM called *Brexit Street* was based upon subsequent comment and reactions to the vote in a typical UK street. But the selected location was not typical. It was a depressed heavily urbanised area in Thornaby-on-Tees with an exceptionally high number of asylum seekers as residents. There was discussion of the impact of the referendum vote, but the main focus of the strand was on the experiences of asylum seekers – nothing overtly to do with the EU or Brexit at all – and the negative attitudes of locals towards them, including verbal and physical abuse and swastika graffiti painted onto doors. The projection by reporter Emma Jane Kirby in this skewed reporting exercise was that supporters of Brexit were bigoted and racist in their outlook.

A similar approach was adopted by presenter David Aaronovitch in an edition of *The Briefing Room*. He interviewed three Leave voters from inner-city areas of Wakefield in West Yorkshire with a narrow choice of questions designed especially to expose their concerns about immigration. The programme’s conclusions were that Leave voters were heavily worried

⁵⁴ Today’s bulletins on 29 October 2012

⁵⁵ <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/jun/22/remain-may-win-eu-referendum-but-labour-party-loser>

about immigration and globalisation and had been left behind economically. Mr Aaronovitch linked directly support for Brexit with 'traditional values' including wanting criminals to be publically whipped and support for the death penalty.

THE TODAY PROGRAMME'S BUSINESS COVERAGE 24 JUNE – 23 DECEMBER 2016

News-watch monitored all coverage in the Today programme's business slots for six months after the referendum.⁵⁶ There was 5 hours and 5 minutes of Brexit-related coverage,

Of the 366 contributors, only four were from the Labour Party.

- an archive clip of Harold Wilson's 'Pound in your pocket' speech;
- an interview with Labour candidate Christian Wolmar, who claimed that Leave voters he had encountered on the doorstep were questioning their decisions
- a discussion with Paul Watson, Labour leader of Sunderland Council who had campaigned prominently for Remain;
- an interview with Lord Carter about the fall in the value of the pound against the dollar.

There were **no were no appearances by any left-wing supporters of Brexit** (such as the businessman John Mills) and there was a striking imbalance towards those speaking negatively about the referendum result.⁵⁷

TODAY AND THE WEEK OF THE ARTICLE 50 LETTER - 29 MARCH - 4 APRIL 2017

In the week that the UK triggered Article 50, News-watch monitored six editions of Today, which contained just over five hours of material about the letter and its aftermath.⁵⁸ This amounted to 46% of the available programme airtime.

124 guest speakers contributed to the discussion, 49% of them Pro-EU/anti-Brexit, and 34% anti-EU/pro-Brexit. Labour MP Gisela Stuart was the only left-wing supporter of Brexit to appear, representing just 0.8% of the guest total.

Ms Stuart's contribution was unusual.⁵⁹ She assumed the role of correspondent and outlined the timetable for the Brexit negotiations. Her contribution was mostly factual with a neutral tone, focusing on the upcoming summit of EU heads of state, the possible priorities for the

⁵⁶ <http://news-watch.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/News-watch-Business-News-Survey-.pdf>

⁵⁷ 60 speakers (16.3%) were pro-Brexit or positive towards the prospects for Britain outside the EU. 192 speakers (52.5%) were negative towards the referendum result, or the economic outlook for Britain. 114 speakers (31.1%) gave a neutral, factual or mixed perspective.

⁵⁸ <http://news-watch.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/News-watch-Today-Programme-Article-50-Survey.pdf>

⁵⁹ Full transcript is included at Appendix III

negotiations, and the influence of possible election upsets in France and Germany. Her only positive observations on Brexit in her 531-word contribution were two statements with a combined total of 49 words. She first noted that the process would be ‘hard work, but a great opportunity if we get it right’, and in her closing statement she repeated the sentiment:

These are exciting times. It won’t be easy, or straightforward, we will have good days and bad days, but if we get it right, it will be good for the United Kingdom and good for the European Union.

Aside from these brief asides, Ms Stuart took a neutral tone, and concentrated on procedural issues rather than arguments as to any specific benefits of withdrawal from a left-wing perspective.

THE 2017 GENERAL ELECTION

Theresa May designated the 2017 General Election as, in effect, the Brexit Election.⁶⁰

The Labour Party had earlier voted in Parliament to support legislative moves towards Brexit, but it was unclear what form this approval took, especially with regard to attitudes to the Single Market. Many MPs, including senior figures (and former leadership contenders) such as Chuka Umunna and Hilary Benn, were actively campaigning to stay in the Single Market. Political opponents suggested that this amounted to an intention to renege on the referendum Brexit vote.

This ambiguity about the Labour stance, was compounded by uncertainty about the position on the EU of Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn and his shadow chancellor John McDonnell. Until at least 2015 they had been strong opponents of the EU.

Both men voted against the Maastricht Treaty in the early 1990s, and it also emerged that Mr Corbyn had voted to leave the EEC in the 1975 referendum.⁶¹ Although Mr Corbyn formally campaigned for Remain in 2016, he was widely criticised for a lack of enthusiasm. Many commentators and senior Labour figures such as Lord Mandelson believed he privately supported a Leave vote, and indeed ‘sabotaged’ the Remain vote⁶². Sarah Ditum, writing in the *New Statesman* on 26 June 2016 offered a scathing assessment (although she underplayed heavily the number of Labour voters who were *not* actually in favour of Remain). She opined:

It is neither good nor decent to lead a bad campaign for a cause you don’t believe in. I don’t think a more committed Corbyn could have swung it for Remain – Labour voters were firmly for Remain, despite his feeble efforts – but giving a serious, passionate account of what the EU has done for us would at least have established some opposition to the UKIP/Tory carve-up of the nation. Now, there is nothing. No sound, no fury and no party to speak for the half the nation that didn’t want out, or the stragglers who are belatedly realising what out is going to mean.⁶³

⁶⁰ <http://www.politico.eu/article/theresa-may-brexit-defining-issue-of-uk-election/>

⁶¹ <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/11859648/Jeremy-Corbyn-admits-he-voted-for-Britain-to-leave-Europe-in-1975.html>

⁶² ‘Jeremy Corbyn undermined and sabotaged Remain campaign, says Peter Mandelson’
<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/brexit-jeremy-corbyn-peter-mandelson-remain-campaign-eu-referendum-7176551.html>

⁶³ <http://www.newstatesman.com/2016/06/corbys-supporters-loved-his-principles-he-ditched-them-eu-campaign>

In the months that followed, Labour figures offered varied opinions on the need for a second referendum, but their manifesto for the General Election, stated:

Labour accepts the referendum result and a Labour government will put that the national interest first.⁶⁴

Labour's lack of appetite for a second referendum was almost certainly linked to election arithmetic indicating that in nearly two-thirds of the seats held by Labour (and four-four fifths of those held in the North of England and Midlands) a majority of voters had cast their ballots in favour of Leave.⁶⁵ Labour's position on the EU and the personal views of Jeremy Corbyn as prospective Prime Minister should thus have been closely explored by Today and News at Ten to illuminate fully Labour's approach to Brexit.

But this did not happen. The Today programme featured eight Labour politicians speaking on EU/Brexit topics, across six interviews and four soundbite contributions. But non made positive arguments in favour Brexit. MP Karin Smyth (114 words), claimed that Theresa May's plans would lead to the EU's environmental benefits being compromised. John McDonnell (105 words) made the point that 'hard Brexit' would cost between £40 and £52 billion and he suggested presenter Justin Webb should question the Brexit Secretary David Davis on this point. Angela Rayner, the shadow education secretary, provided the most substantial contributions, in two interviews running to a total of 1,200 words. She claimed that Labour wanted to leave the EU, but also implausibly argued that it was possible to secure an exit deal with terms equivalent to staying in the Single Market through adopting a soft negotiating stance. Her fudge was only lightly challenged in the interviews.

The other main EU-related exchanges were with Chuka Umunna and Hilary Benn, senior backbenchers. Both were ardent Remainers who wanted strongly to stay in the Single Market. Chukka Umunna outlined his position over 700 words and claimed that UK trade would be seriously damaged by leaving the Single Market and that leaving it was not on the referendum ballot paper. In his similar contribution, Hilary Benn asserted that a 'hard' Brexit must be avoided at all costs and warned that the introduction of tariff barriers would be damaging to trade.⁶⁶ A striking omission from the Labour guest list on Today was shadow Brexit Secretary Keir Starmer.

None of the eight Labour contributors had campaigned for Leave during the previous year's referendum, and nor did they make any clear arguments as to any potential benefits of Brexit. The only appearance by a left-wing Brexit supporter⁶⁷ came by way of a focus group discussion hosted by Nick Robinson in Halifax. Group member Kerry explained both that she supported Jeremy Corbyn and that she had also voted Leave. Later, however, she appeared unfamiliar with Labour's manifesto pledge to honour the 2016 vote. She stated:

⁶⁴ <http://www.labour.org.uk/index.php/manifesto2017/brexit>

⁶⁵ <http://ukandeu.ac.uk/is-labours-brexit-dilemma-being-misunderstood/>

⁶⁶ BBC Radio 4, Today, 11 May 2017, 8.43am

⁶⁷ Allison Morris, of Irish News, and therefore possibly a supporter of Irish republicanism (often regarded as a 'left-wing' cause) suggested on 22 May at 7.18am that some republicans may have changed their mind over supporting Brexit. However, her appearance was not coded as a 'left-wing' supporter of Brexit because the sequence was not long enough to be certain that this was the case. In addition she praised and she praised Theresa May's as doing a 'good job', and so casual listeners would have likely been unaware of any left-wing component to her analysis.

I think even if Labour get in and call for another referendum... the public will vote exactly the same way again.

Her appearance, therefore, was not a left-wing speaker outlining any positive arguments for withdrawal; she was merely reacting to referendum fall-out and expressing how she might vote next.

On News at Ten, there were some mentions of the ambiguities in Labour's stance to Brexit, and there were vox pops illustrating that the ambivalent Labour position was causing a dilemma for voters, but the programme included no withdrawalist contributors who were clearly from the 'left' and there were no left-wing arguments made in favour of Brexit.

Overall, across the Today programme and News at Ten, left-wing Leave opinion added up to only 0.3% of all speakers during the election campaign period.⁶⁸

On 21 July 2017, the Guardian's economics editor Larry Elliot penned an article aimed at Remain voters headed 'Why the moaning? If anything can halt capitalism's fat cats it's Brexit.'⁶⁹ He noted that Jeremy Corbyn and John McDonnell had been among those who, 'never bought the idea that being a progressive meant being positive about Europe.' He continued:

They saw nothing especially progressive about mass unemployment, the impact of the common agricultural policy on the developing world, the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership, or the bias towards austerity ingrained in the stability and growth pact. Rather, they saw neoliberalism being hardwired into the European project. As indeed it was.

Mr Elliot said that Messrs Corbyn and McDonnell saw Brexit as an opportunity to push through their economic agenda – public ownership, lower rates of VAT for those on the lowest incomes, state aid and fair trade agreements with developing countries – but this radical socialist programme would be deemed illegal under European law. He concluded:

As it is, Labour is now led by somebody who spent years in the political wilderness with a simple message: that there was something inherently rotten about modern capitalism; that there were radical solutions to that malaise; and that Europe was part of the problem, rather than part of the solution.

These arguments lie at the very essence of Labour's policies, both domestically and concerning Brexit. However, during the referendum campaign, in the two flagship BBC programmes monitored by News-watch, discussion of these issues did not figure.

⁶⁸ One from 270 speakers on Today and none of 124 on News at Ten

⁶⁹ <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/jul/21/capitalism-fat-cats-brexite-leaving-eu>

CONCLUSION

The BBC's 'Editorial Values' on the subject of impartiality are as follows:

Impartiality lies at the core of the BBC's commitment to its audiences. We will apply due impartiality to all our subject matter and will reflect a breadth and diversity of opinion across our output as a whole, over an appropriate period, so that no significant strand of thought is knowingly unreflected or under-represented. We will be fair and open-minded when examining evidence and weighing material facts.⁷⁰

The evidence presented here demonstrates that a significant strand of opinion has been seriously underrepresented in the BBC's coverage for almost two decades. Further, the Corporation *knowingly* did not properly reflect these opinions. News-watch regularly brought the exclusion of left-wing withdrawalists to the BBC's attention in its surveys⁷¹ and in oral and written submissions to the European Scrutiny Committee in the House of Commons.⁷² Former BBC journalist Robin Aitken raised the same issue in his 2007 book, *Can We Trust the BBC?* He described a meeting with the Labour peer Lord Shore, who said that he had 'never before been interviewed by the BBC about his views on Europe.'⁷³ Mr Aitken concluded, 'He hadn't been singled out by chance – all Labour Eurosceptics were routinely ignored. The BBC simply wrote left-wing Eurosceptics out of the script.'⁷⁴

The BBC cannot say they were unaware of this problem. This report lays out, for the first time, its cumulative extent. A total of 6,882 speakers contributed to coverage of the EU and Brexit in the surveys undertaken by News-watch between 2002 and 2017.

Only 14 (0.2%) of the total – **one in 500** – were left-wing (mostly Labour) advocates of Brexit, and most of their appearances were too short to explore the issues involved in any depth. These guests contributed 1,680 words to the debate, but approximately one third of the total came from the single 531-word Gisela Stuart appearance during the Article 50 survey, in which she delivered a correspondent-style overview of the Brexit timetable, and actual arguments in support of Brexit totalling just 49 words. As such, only 1,198 words across the entire 30 surveys came from left-wing speakers making the case for withdrawal, an average of 86 words per contributor.

In comparison, in the same period, just two strongly pro-Remain Conservatives, Ken Clarke and Michael Heseltine, made between them 28 appearances with contributions totalling 11,208 words – over nine times the amount of space as the left-wing withdrawalists – with an average contribution length of 400 words. Most of these exchanges allowed the two men to

⁷⁰ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/editorialguidelines/guidelines/bbc-editorial-values/editorial-values>

⁷¹ For example, in News-watch's December 2006 Survey: '[There is] evidence that support for British withdrawal – or at least for a plebiscite on the repatriation of powers to the UK parliament – transcends party allegiance and voting intentions. [In the] projects undertaken since 2002, there have been no appearances by supporters of withdrawal from the political left, from journalists, economists or academics, or from commentators from other EU member states. With this side of the argument excluded, it would be easy for audiences to perceive the withdrawal perspective as an argument that is solely the preserve of the political right. UKIP are an important part of the debate, but to achieve true balance, it is vital that their presence is augmented by a range of other contributors from across the political spectrum. On the evidence gathered, the views of those in these categories who oppose Britain's membership of the EU are virtually ignored.

⁷² <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201314/cmselect/cmleueg/109/130313.htm>

⁷³ Aitken, R. (2013). *Can We Trust the BBC?*. London: Bloomsbury Continuum, p.84.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.* p.85.

put pro-EU statements at some length. BBC audiences were thus made fully familiar with right-wing reasons for Remain; they were, by contrast, left in the dark over the left-wing/Labour perspective on Brexit.

This, with the associated transcript analysis, adds up evidence that over many years, the BBC's coverage of the EU – including the referendum and its aftermath – was seriously distorted through bias by omission. It is striking new evidence that the Corporation has not met the Charter requirement of impartiality.

At the start of the referendum campaign in 2016, News-watch developed a website to enable BBC viewers and listeners to identify programmes and individual reports they believed to be biased. A submission on 11 March from Pramita Dhar read:

As a Labour voter, I know there is a strong left wing case for leaving the EU. There is a social and moral conversation that is just as important as the economic one that the BBC completely ignores. Will continued membership prevent rail renationalisation? How safe is the NHS from TTIP? What is the effect of the CAP on developing countries? On this last question, maybe things have improved since the reform of the CAP, but how would anyone know? None of us are being given the facts.

Certainly News-watch found no evidence of such a 'social and moral conversation' and none of the important points raised by Ms Dhar were tackled in any significant detail in the BBC's mainstream output as the referendum campaign raged. Writing in the *New Statesman* in 2015, author John King noted:

The media tell us that the Tories are anti-EU while Labour and the Lib Dems are fighting their narrow-mindedness, and UKIP is dismissed as a far-right group bordering on the fascist. This is bubblegum politics. Little Europeans sneer "Little Englander" at those with a different opinion, peddling stereotypes, unwilling to consider the bigger arguments . . . A lazy acceptance of establishment propaganda and a fear of being branded "xenophobic" have silenced many liberals and left-wingers. And yet the EU is driven by big business. This is a very corporate coup.⁷⁵

The debates on EU membership are intricate and multifaceted, but the BBC's news coverage has consistently under-reported or ignored the left-wing perspective.

Even the position within Parliament has been seriously misrepresented. There were at least 10 Labour MPs who supporters of Brexit and only one UKIP MP, during the EU referendum, but the former's views were scarcely covered.⁷⁶ The Green Party's only representative in the House of Lords, Baroness Jones was a strong supporter of Leave and set up her own 'Green Leaves' campaign.⁷⁷ She stated in *The Ecologist* in 2015:

The EU is becoming a dictatorial imposer of austerity and deregulation, uncaring about its impacts on the wellbeing of people and planet, and determined to derail any elected government that dares dissent from its neoliberal ideology.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ www.newstatesman.com/politics/2015/06/john-king-left-wing-case-leaving-eu

⁷⁶ The Labour MPs supporting Leave in the referendum were: Dennis Skinner, Frank Field, Gisela Stuart, Graham Stringer, John Cryer, Kate Hoey, Kelvin Hopkins, Roger Godsiff, Ronnie Campbell and John Mann. The UKIP MP at the time of the referendum was Douglas Carswell.

⁷⁷ www.facebook.com/greenleaves2016/

⁷⁸ www.theecologist.org/blogs_and_comments/commentators/2946192/something_rotten_in_the_state_of_europe.html

Another dissenter from the formal party line was prominent former Liberal Democrat MP for Hereford (1997-2010) Paul Keetch, who subsequently became a political lobbyist. He also campaigned for a Leave vote, alongside a collection of Liberal Democrat councillors and parliamentary candidates.⁷⁹ He stated in a March 2016 article in *The Independent*:

I am a liberal, a democrat and an internationalist. And what the European Union has become, contrary to the dreams of those of us who fought for our membership in the 1970s, is none of these things.

Mr Keetch also questioned why African countries should be forced by the EU to pay 30-60% import tariffs to sell cocoa products to British chocolate factories.⁸⁰

In November 2016, the *Daily Telegraph* reported that former SNP government minister Alex Neil and up to six MSPs had secretly voted for Brexit, but were afraid that 'life would become very difficult' if they went publically against the party's leadership⁸¹. A separate article noted Mr Neil's reasons: the manner in which the EU had imposed extreme austerity measures on Portugal and Greece, and the fear that Scotland with a higher deficit than Greece could face a similar fate.⁸²

Even though Brexit had evident cross-party support in both Parliament and the country at large, the BBC narrative painted withdrawal predominantly as a right-wing policy causing problems and 'splits' within the Conservative Party, while ignoring potential ideological disagreements and debate elsewhere on the political spectrum. As Robin Aitken noted:

If the BBC's coverage had been even-handed it would have told its audience that there were divisions on the left, just as there were on the right; instead the public was fed, over a period of years, the fiction that it was only the Tories who were divided on Europe.

A vacuum was created, and the BBC's projection of the referendum divide became simplistically polarised. There was an absence of voices offering alternative perspectives. This led to a false dichotomy: forward-thinking, progressive, open-minded, anti-racist pro-Europeans set against the bigoted, inward-looking, nationalist, Brexit-supporting majority.

This divide permeated other parts of the BBC's output. On BBC2, two days before the poll, *Jack Dee's Referendum HelpDesk* closed with a question from a viewer asking, 'I do not know which way to vote, can you convince me in three words?' Comedian Nish Kumar suggested 'Don't be racist.'⁸³ After the referendum BBC Online reported on families 'divided by Brexit'⁸⁴ a discord between generations⁸⁵ and emphasised the differing voting trends of well-educated and poorly educated voters.⁸⁶

⁷⁹ www.libdemvoice.org/liberal-leave-campaign-49779.html

⁸⁰ www.independent.co.uk/voices/think-that-if-you-are-liberal-you-should-vote-to-stay-in-the-eu-think-again-a6916921.html

⁸¹ www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/11/05/up-to-six-snp-msps-who-voted-for-brexit-urged-to-go-public/

⁸² <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/11/03/former-scottish-government-minister-several-snp-msps-secretly-vo/>

⁸³ Jack Dee's Referendum Helpdesk, BBC2, 22 June 2016, 10.27pm

⁸⁴ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/uk-politics-eu-referendum-36620438/a-family-split-on-europe-considers-the-uk-s-post-brexit-future>

⁸⁵ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/magazine-36656392/brexit-the-divide-between-generations>

⁸⁶ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-38762034>

Ultimately the BBC helped to generate and perpetuate these divisions.

The Corporation remains obdurately impervious to any challenge to its coverage. In repeat appearances before the Commons European Scrutiny Committee, senior news executives and BBC Chairmen have defended flagrant, longitudinal imbalances in the numbers of contributors speaking for and against the EU. But they offered not a scrap of verifiable evidence to counter the evidence put before them,⁸⁷ and rejected formal monitoring exercises as ‘very unhelpful’ in deciding whether the Corporation is impartial.⁸⁸

The evidence presented here, however, reveals that the BBC has hugely under-represented left-wing arguments for Brexit, in direct breach of their own Editorial Values. Despite having been alerted to the problem regularly over the last fifteen years, the Corporation has skewed the withdrawal debate with its narrow approach, and has denied a voice to a section of the electorate potentially numbering in the millions.

Had left-wing arguments for Brexit been properly aired, then it is entirely feasible that an even greater majority of voters would have cast their ballots for Leave.

⁸⁷ See for example News-watch’s complaint to the BBC Trust concerning the edition of BBC2’s Newsnight broadcast on 23 January 2013, the day David Cameron announced an in/out referendum on UK membership of the EU. The BBC Trust argued that the announcement was not a ‘decisive moment’ in the EU debate, and therefore the imbalance of 18 Pro-EU speakers to one withdrawalist was acceptable and ‘provided due weight to the significant views currently prevailing in the debate about EU membership.’ news-watch.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/2.-Editorial-Standards-Committee-decision-on-Newsnight-Complaint-17-November-2013.pdf

⁸⁸ <http://parliamentlive.tv/event/index/8e2fe535-85b6-43e8-ae95-6ef77cd64d12>

APPENDIX I

Table of News-watch surveys used in the compiling of this report

		Survey Date	Weeks	Available Airtime (minutes)	EU Airtime (minutes)	Proportion of EU coverage	Speakers on EU	Left-wing Withdrawalists
1	Today	September 2002 – July 2003	47	31,255	1750	5.6%	660	1
2	Today	September – December 2003	12	7,980	455	5.7%	160	0
3	Today	March – June 2004	13	8,216	871	9.8%	292	0
4	Today	October – December 2004	10	6,650	365	5.5%	94	0
5	Today	March – June 2005	15	9,975	1082	10.8%	392	0
6	Today	October – December 2005	9	5,985	489	8.2%	165	0
7	Today	February – June 2006	16	10,640	437	4.1%	167	0
8	Today	September – December 2006	14	9,310	275	2.9%	98	0
9	Today	March – June 2007	14	9,310	326	3.5%	127	0
10	Today	September – December 2007	14	9,310	386	4.1%	178	0
11	Today	March – June 2008	12	7,980	263	3.3%	123	0
12	Today	September – December 2008	14	9,310	384	4.1%	139	0
13	Today	April – June 2009	6	4,206	228	5.4%	97	0
14	Today	September – December 2009	13	8,577	442	5.1%	198	1
15	Today	March – May 2010	6	3,961	245	6.2%	79	0
16	Today	September – December 2010	13	8,493	444	5.2%	157	0
17	Today	March – June 2011	13	8,617	532	6.2%	205	0
18	Today	October – December 2011	11	7,298	1639	22.5%	517	0
19	Today	April – June 2012	12	7,938	1112	14.0%	366	0
20	Today	September – December 2012	13	8,640	540	6.2%	231	1
21	Today	April – June 2013	12	7,929	538	6.8%	208	1
22	Today	September – December 2013	14	9,207	470	5.1%	186	0
23	Today	April – June 2014	6	3,979	412	10.3%	139	0
24	Today	March – May 2015	6	3,990	252	6.1%	135	1
25	News at Ten	April – June 2016	10	1750	n/a	n/a	454	5
26	Newsbeat	April – June 2016	10	1447	195	10.7%	238	0
27	The Brexit Collection	n/a - Online Compilation	n/a	600	600	100%	212	2
28	Today Business Slots	Jun – Dec 2016	26	2340	759	32.4%	366	0
29	Today Article 50 Week	Mar – Apr 2017	1	667	305	46%	124	1
30	Today and News at Ten	May – June 2017	5	4460	660	15.9%	375	1

APPENDIX II: LEFT-WING EUROSCEPTICS

In preparing this paper, News-watch revisited all left-wing contributions across the thirty surveys, including those speakers who were coded as 'Eurosceptic' at the time the research was originally undertaken. This generated a list of 43 appearances, representing 0.6% of the 6,882 contributors who gave their opinions on the EU in the surveyed BBC programmes.

All database entries were crosschecked against the original transcripts to ensure that no left-wing Eurosceptic contributor could – particularly in the light of their position taken during the 2016 referendum – be more fairly defined as withdrawalist.

The standard News-watch coding criteria was applied, with speakers having to meet one of the following conditions to qualify as withdrawalist: that they explicitly expressed support for British withdrawal from the EU; that they were said to hold these views in journalistic commentary, that they belonged to a party or group advocating withdrawal. In addition, speakers meeting one of these criteria had also to be 'left-wing', in terms of their party affiliation, voting intention or membership of a trades union.

The speakers identified are listed below, in order of frequency of appearance and with notes on each of their contributions.

Ian Davidson, Scottish Labour Co-operative – 11 Appearances

A Scottish Labour Co-operative politician, and Member of Parliament for successive Glasgow seats from 1992 until 2015. Mr Davidson would ultimately support Vote Leave during the 2016 referendum, but his 11 appearances on the Today programme between 2002 and 2007 focused on opposing the single currency and the European Constitution, and at no point did he advocate withdrawal from the EU. Indeed, Mr Davidson said on 23 May 2003 that if the economic conditions were to change it would be 'foolish' for the UK not to join the single currency.

Date	Time	Notes
01/10/2002	7.33am	Argued that membership of the euro isn't an important issue to ordinary people.
21/10/2002	7.09am	As chairman of Labour Against the Euro, he spoke critically about European Commission President Romano Prodi's remarks that the growth and stability pact set out for countries joining the euro was 'stupid.'
14/05/2003	7.32am	He spoke in support of Gordon Brown's opposition to the euro
23/05/2003	7.09am	He spoke against the single currency, although said, 'If the economics suddenly change and things get much, much better, and the euro changes, and it's sensible for Britain to go in on economic grounds, then it would certainly be my position that it would be foolish in those circumstances to stay out.'
08/05/2004	8.39am	He argued that rejecting the European Constitution would not mean leaving the EU: "Even if we reject the Constitution we remain within the European Union, and have all the trading advantages that flow from that."
13/04/2004	7.15am	When asked if the European Constitution referendum could be couched in terms of Britain being in and out of Europe he said, "I think that's absurd, I mean that is a distortion of the referendum process, that would be a false question... this is just something that's being floated in order to try and frighten people away from opposing the Constitution"

19/04/2004	7.09am	Spoke in support of an announced referendum on the European Constitution
24/04/2004	7.35am	He spoke in support of a referendum on the European Constitution
16/06/2005	6.45am	Yesterday in Parliament, he made a joke about Douglas Alexander, Europe Minister.
09/05/2006	6.45am	He briefly mentioned the Maastricht Treaty and the euro in a Yesterday in Parliament report.
16/10/2007	6.44am	In a sequence from Yesterday in Parliament he said, "The scale of inward migration the areas such as my own has experienced, in fact undermines the ambitions that we have to make my constituency a zero unemployment zone, because jobs that are made available as a result of government activity are overwhelmingly then filled by inward migrants, who often are better-skilled than those whom we are trying, after considerable effort, to get into jobs. Will the minister not take this into account when determining how many people should be allowed in, in future?"

Frank Field, Labour Party – 5 appearances

The Labour MP for Birkenhead since 1979, and former Minister of Welfare Reform under Tony Blair. He was one of the ten sitting Labour MPs who supported the Leave campaign during the 2016 Referendum. However, in his appearances on the Today programme between 2003 and 2014, Mr Field initially appeared to be comfortable with joining the single currency at some later stage, and also denied that the UK rejecting the European Constitution would lead to withdrawal. In his 2014 appearance on Today he suggested drawing up 'red and blue' lines in negotiations with the EU ahead of a referendum, and said he believed that if the negotiations went well, 'people will vote to stay.' As such, all his contributions aside from his appearance on BBC News at Ten on 14 June 2016 (p.17) were coded as Eurosceptic rather than withdrawalist.

Date	Time	Notes
19/05/2003	7.23am	Said that Britain should be in second group of nations joining the euro, rather than the first.
17/06/2004	7.09am	Speaks in favour of an early referendum on the European Constitution, but no mention of withdrawal
21/06/2004	7.09am	Denied that rejecting the Constitution will lead to withdrawal, makes no case for leaving the EU, but spoke of countries choosing their own associations with the Union
07/06/2005	6.46am	Speaks briefly on Constitution in a Yesterday in Parliament slot
16/11/2007	6.43am	Question in Yesterday in Parliament, "What does he estimate the numbers coming from the accession countries over the next few years?"
28/05/2014	7.14am	When asked if his path would lead to leaving the EU, Mr Field said that the country should be drawing up 'red and blue lines' ahead of the negotiation with the EU, and said he felt that if these negotiations went well, people would vote to stay in the Union.

Dennis Skinner, Labour – 5 appearances

The Labour MP for Bolsover, and another of the sitting Labour MPs who advocated Leave in the 2016 referendum. However, his five appearances on the surveyed editions of Today between 2005 and 2011 were limited to short clips in the programme's Yesterday in

Parliament sections, and although Eurosceptic in tone, none of the sequences selected by producers featured the Minister making an overt case for Britain leaving the EU.

Date	Time	Notes
12/03/2005	7.21am	He briefly mentioned Maastricht Treaty and the euro in a Yesterday in Parliament report that focused centrally on a compromise being reached on an Anti-Terror Bill
25/03/2005	6.48am	In a Yesterday in Parliament report he made a comment on predictions that the French would reject the European Constitution, "Does the prime minister agree with me that one of the reasons why Chirac has turned a bit nasty lately is because they're having a poll soon on the Constitution and it looks as if he might finish up with a headache?"
07/06/2005	6.46am	During a Yesterday in Parliament report, Mr Skinner asked the Foreign Secretary, Jack Straw, "Will he tell Chirac and Schröder we're not going down that road that they're preaching, and send a copy of Monty Python's dead parrot sketch, it's deceased, it's kaput, it's no more?"
30/03/2010	6.44am	Noted that Gordon Brown had kept Britain out of the euro, and this was 'superb leadership.'
04/11/2011	6.44am	Mr Skinner put it to a junior Treasury Minister, "'I wonder if the Minister has seen the film "Groundhog Day". Because I was here in the early '90s with another Tory Government, another euro crisis, another Prime Minister battling for his life—the same players, only this time there are about forty more Tory rebels. And It finished up with the Prime Minister being kicked out of office."

Bill Morris, Transport and General Workers Union - 4 appearances

General Secretary of the Transport and General Workers' Union from 1992 to 2003, now a Labour peer. In a debate on Article 50 in the House of Lords in February 2017, he said that some decisions taken on Brexit were 'tantamount to shooting oneself'⁸⁹ However, in the discussions surrounding the euro on the Today programme in 2002 and 2003, he took a cautious approach to the single currency which closely mirrored the perspective of then-Chancellor Gordon Brown: namely that Britain should join the single currency, 'when the economic conditions are right.'

Date	Time	Notes
03/09/2002	8.34am	Said that Tony Blair should rule out holding a referendum on the euro, and that for his union public services rather than the euro were the top priority.
28/12/2002	7.52am	Said on the euro, "My union's policy is to say when the economic conditions are right, we should in fact join."
12/05/2003	8.10am	Said that he wanted the government rule out joining euro and holding a referendum until after next parliament
09/06/2003	8.52am	Said, 'The principle is 'yes, the euro is good, we're part of the European Economic Community, we trade in Europe, we work in Europe and Europe is our backyard, so to speak. So we need to be part of that.'

⁸⁹ <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/02/21/brexit-billtheresa-may-warns-house-lords-against-blocking-eu/>

Derek Scott, Former Economic Advisor to Blair/Open Europe – 4 appearances

Derek Scott appeared four times on Today between 2004 and 2011, first as former economic advisor to Tony Blair, and then, after the launch of the Open Europe think tank in October 2005, speaking on its behalf. He spoke twice on Today against the European Constitution (although he made the specific point that being opposed to the Constitution didn't mean being opposed to the EU itself) and twice on the Eurozone debt crisis. Although certainly Eurosceptic, Mr Scott did not advocate withdrawal in any of the surveyed editions.

Date	Time	Notes
27/10/2004	7.15am	He argued against the European Constitution, but said that being opposed to the Constitution didn't mean being opposed to the EU, and argued for reform of the Union.
06/06/2005	8.46am	Spoke against the European Constitution
01/05/2010	7.14am	Focused on the Eurozone debt crisis and problems for Greece.
21/04/2011	8.35am	On eurozone debt crisis: "monetary union cannot really exist without a political union, the real problem is you can't impose that in Europe because it requires people in Germany and Italy and Spain having the same attitude towards their union as people in Massachusetts and California do to the American union, and that isn't going to happen, it's fantasy."

Graham Stringer – 2 Appearances

Member of Parliament for Blackley and Broughton, and supporter of the Leave campaign in 2016, Mr Stringer appeared twice in the same edition of the Today programme on 21 October 2011. His first appearance was a live interview, and then a soundbite taken from this discussion was used later, in the 8am bulletin. The context of his appearance was that Ed Miliband had instructed his MPs to vote against a referendum on EU membership, in a debate that had been set up in response to an e-petition.

Although Mr Stringer made some brief points against the EU which could arguably, in hindsight, be seen as arguments for withdrawal – including that Britain wouldn't be asked to fund eurozone bailouts and that leaving would mean being able to 'take decisions on our own' – these in response to devil's advocate questions by presenter Justin Webb on whether leaving the EU would create economic instability, rather than points raised himself. Mr Stringer's argument rested on having a 'fundamental debate and discussion about it' and giving 'people a choice'.

The News-watch report for this period noted that contributions on the proposed referendum were not centred around a clear in/out axis, and it did not therefore follow that all those supporting a referendum were doing so from a withdrawalist perspective.⁹⁰ Mr Stringer also added that there wasn't the same 'strength of feeling' on the EU in the Labour Party as there was in the Conservatives, and there was no sense that he was proselytising for withdrawal.

The sequence chosen for the 8am bulletin featured Mr Stringer again focusing on the public who he said were 'aching for a say on Europe', rather than including any overt arguments against the EU itself.

⁹⁰ <http://news-watch.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/News-watch-Winter-2011-Survey.pdf> pp.17-20 The survey noted, for example that Fraser Nelson from The Spectator, for example, spoke about being pro-European and supportive of British membership, but supported a referendum.

Date	Time	Notes
21/10/2011	7.14am	Raised some negative points about the EU when pushed using devil's advocate questions, but stopped short of arguing for withdrawal and focused on starting a national debate and allowing the public to decide.
21/10/2011	8am	In a soundbite attached to a news bulletin item, Mr Stringer said with reference to Labour Leader Ed Miliband's decision to tell MPs to vote against a referendum on the EU, "I don't agree with him. He's got his job to do. I think it's a mistake of all three party leaders when the public are clearly aching for a say on Europe, to say, 'no you can't have it', when all those three parties have, in the past, agreed to referenda, and they've not been held."

Tony Benn, Labour Party – 2 appearances

The late Tony Benn discussed the EU twice during the thirty surveys. In the first, on 4 June 2005, Mr Benn was interviewed on Today alongside Lord McNally, Lord Owen and filmmaker Michael Cockerell who had recently produced a documentary on the 1975 Common Market referendum. Mr Benn first focused on the Constitution that had recently been rejected by France and Holland, and noted that nine other countries had agreed to the Constitution without consulting their own people. He said that the public had been told in the 1970s that the EEC was a trading relationship, and noted that Tory MP Peter Tapsell had made a speech at the time pointing out that the idea of a European central bank was first put forward by Hitler, and that the EU was an anti-Communist federation. Later in the discussion Today presenter James Naughtie asked Mr Benn if he believed there was a 'disconnect' between the leadership 'in Europe' and the people. Mr Benn noted that Commissioners and MEPs are not elected democratically, but on a list system. He said he was 'a passionate believer in cooperation,' but that he didn't want to be 'run by people I can't elect, can't remove.'

On 12 April 2006, Mr Benn was interviewed on Today alongside Peter Facey, director of the New Politics Network, on the news that Romano Prodi, then Italy's centre left opposition leader had been declared the winner of the Italian election with a small majority. Although the majority of the interview focused on Italian domestic politics, at one point Mr Benn made criticisms of list system for electing Members of the European Parliament, noting the lack of any constituency link and that this was therefore 'a fundamentally undemocratic system.'

Although on both occasions he made compelling arguments concerning the EU's lack of democracy, he stopped short of advocating withdrawal.

Date	Time	Notes
04/06/2005	8.38am	He said he was 'a passionate believer in cooperation,' but that he didn't want to be 'run by people I can't elect, can't remove.'
12/04/2006	7.35am	Criticised the European Parliament's list system for electing MEPs as undemocratic

Gisela Stuart, Labour Party – 2 appearances

As a Chair of the Vote Leave campaign during the 2016 Referendum, Gisela Stuart accounted for five of the fourteen total left-wing withdrawalist appearances. However, as explained in the main survey (p.9), Ms Stuart first revealed herself as a withdrawalist in October 2012, and only two of her earlier appearances were coded as Eurosceptic at the time the research was undertaken.

Date	Time	Notes
08/12/2003	7.34am	Said she wanted the European Union to enlarge, but wanted a model appropriate for the 21 st Century. She said there were provisions within the European Constitution that the UK government would find unacceptable, and other EU countries had 'similar, very severe concerns'.
18/06/2004	7.09am	Discussion of next European Commission president, said the European Commission needed someone who would 'talk less' and knock the Commission into shape.

Austin Mitchell, Labour Party – 2 Appearances

Although Austin Mitchell was categorised as withdrawalist on one occasion in the main section of this survey (see p.8) two further appearances failed to meet the set criteria for inclusion. In the first, he focused solely on EU measures to cut fish quotas, and although he spoke negatively about the Common Fisheries Policy, he made no case for leaving the EU. The second was a parliamentary report in which he said he believed that Gordon Brown would concede a referendum on the European Constitution. Neither contribution saw him call explicitly for leaving the EU.

Date	Time	Notes
23/12/2002	7.22am	Focus was only on Common Fisheries policy, made no argument for withdrawal, and didn't indicate he is a withdrawalist (See transcript below)
25/09/2007	7.14am	Said in a short extract in Yesterday in Parliament that he believed Gordon Brown would concede a referendum on the European Constitution

Elliot Morley, Labour Party – 1 appearance

The Member of Parliament for Scunthorpe between 1987 and 2010 appeared on Today in December 2002, in his role as Fisheries Minister. He criticised European Commission proposals to cut fishing quotas, and said the measure would have devastating consequences for the fishing industry, but made no comments to suggest that Britain would be better outside the EU or Common Fisheries Policy.

Date	Time	Notes
11/12/2002	8.38am	Spoke against European Commission proposals to cut the limit on cod catch by 80%

Kelvin Hopkins, Labour Party – 1 appearance

Kelvin Hopkins, MP for Luton North, was one of the ten Labour MPs who came out in support of leave in the 2016 referendum. However, the 57-word extract used in Today's Yesterday in Parliament section in 2007 did not comprise enough detail to identify him as withdrawalist.

Although he spoke against a superstate, this was an argument commonly used by Eurosceptics opposing the direction of travel within the EU (Ian Davidson, for example), and so listeners would have been unable to determine Mr Hopkins’s wider views given the brevity of his statement and the lack of additional context provided in the report.

Date	Time	Notes
25/09/2007	7.14am	“I hope it won’t reflect on Gordon Brown in his honeymoon period. But we clearly want a referendum. The Conservatives want to reject the treaty, because they want the right to choose a government of their persuasion in Britain, and I want to choose a Socialist government. If we have a European superstate . . . I don’t want that.”

James Callaghan, Labour Party – 1 appearance

A posthumous tribute to James Callaghan on 28 March 2005 included a short archive recording of the former Labour leader opposing calls for French to be the dominant language of the European Community. Mr Callaghan as Foreign Secretary in 1975 had campaigned for a ‘Yes’ vote to Remain within the EEC, and the extract chosen, although Eurosceptic in tone, was not indicative of his wider position.

Date	Time	Notes
28/03/2005	8.33am	He said, “If we have to prove our Europeanism, by accepting that French is the dominant language in the Community, then my answer is quite clear, and I will say it in French, in order to prevent any misunderstanding: ‘non, merci beaucoup’”

Lord Gilbert – 1 appearance

A Yesterday in Parliament sequence in the 26 November 2011 edition of Today focused on calls by Lord Pearson of Rannoch for an independent inquiry into the costs and benefits of Britain’s membership of the EU. It featured a short soundbite from Labour peer Lord Gilbert, who made a point about Germany and the EU, but no overt call for withdrawal.

Date	Time	Notes
26/11/2011	7.21am	He said, “Nobody should take it for granted another fifty years of peace and prosperity in Europe. Not my words. Angela Merkel. Well, if she says that we cannot be assured of another 50 years of peace in Europe, I ask myself in which direction will the Bundeswehr be marching?” and when challenged by another peer added, “Well she says it not me. She said it not me.”

Zdenek, Communist Youth League, Czech Republic – 1 appearance

A report for the Today programme by correspondent William Horsely ahead of a referendum in the Czech Republic in May 2003 featured a contribution from Zdenek, an IT technician and head of the Communist Youth League. In two brief soundbites Zdenek said that he believed in ‘freedom, human justice and human beings’, and said that the country should say no to EU membership as the European leaders are ‘the heads of international capital.’ Although his contribution was strongly anti-EU in tone, his argument was against his country’s future

membership, and therefore not categorised alongside those who argued for British withdrawal.

Date	Time	Notes
28/05/2003	6.45am	Communist anti-EU, opposed his country joining the European Union rather than calling for withdrawal.

Alain Kirvine, French Communist MEP – 1 Appearance

Alain Krivine was one of the leaders of the May 1968 revolt in Paris, and served as an MEP between 1999 and 2004. In a November 2003 Today programme report which considered French opinion on the European Constitution, Monsieur Krivine said, in a short soundbite sequence, that they would try to organise a campaign in France for an anti-capitalise 'No' vote on the Constitution, as distinct from the nationalist and far right parties. He concluded that, 'It is because we are for Europe that we are against this Constitution' and so did not appear to be speaking from any sort of withdrawalist perspective.

Date	Time	Notes
26/11/2003	8.45am	"We are for Europe, but a social Europe. It is because we are for Europe that we are against this Constitution."

Although criticism from the left featured across the 30 survey periods, arguments were often limited to discussion of specific EU policies and all those listed here were ultimately Eurosceptic rather than 'withdrawalist' in nature. There were speakers who might easily have made an overt calls for Britain to leave the EU had they been pushed further, but this failed to inspire, either on account of personal reticence on the part of the interviewee, or a lack of enquiry from those conducting interviews and compiling reports.

APPENDIX III: GISELA STUART TRANSCRIPT, TODAY ARTICLE 50 SURVEY

As noted in the main analysis, Today's coverage of the triggering of Article 50 included an unusual contribution from Labour withdrawalist Gisela Stuart, in which she assumed the role of correspondent rather than interviewee and presented a timetable of upcoming 'Brexit milestones.' This sequence was, at 531 words, the longest of the 14 contributions from left-wing Leave supporters across the 30 surveys included in this report. However, Ms Stuart's contribution was primarily factual and procedural, and only 49 words (highlighted in bold below) offered any indication of her personal positivity towards Brexit.

JOHN HUMPHRYS: At last, the Brexit clock is ticking, and Britain has two years to leave the EU, so what are the milestones look out for as we approach the deadline? Well, we've asked Gisela Stuart, the Labour MP, leading Brexit campaigner, to give us a guide to the months ahead.

(ticking clock sound effect)

GISELA STUART: We've triggered Article 50, so the clock is now ticking to achieve a deal that works for the UK and the European Union. What comes next, and what are the big moments to look out for over the next two years? The first big event will be the next meeting of EU heads of state. These are often big occasions, but this will be more important than usual.

THERESA MAY: Good afternoon, this is my first European Council, and I'm here with a very clear message: the UK is leaving the EU, but we will continue to play a full role until we leave *(fades out)*

GS: These meetings will be an opportunity to firm up on priorities, defining the size of the negotiating envelope, and taking stock of where the biggest problems lie. We will also be forming an early idea of the kind of trade deals we might be able to strike with non-EU countries. Trade negotiators can only start talking to us now that Article 50 has been triggered. Back in the UK, the next big thing to look out for is the Queen's Speech, widely anticipated to happen in May. We may have primary legislation around immigration, EU citizens and customs arrangements, as well as the Great Repeal Bill.

TM: A Great Repeal Bill to get rid of European Communities Act introduced in the next parliamentary session. Our laws, made not in Brussels but in Westminster, *(applause)* our *(fades out)*

GS: This is where many of the real political battles will take place. **Hard work, but a great opportunity if we get it right.** *(ticking clock sound effect)* Perhaps the most significant thing to look out for this year are the big elections in Europe. In France, there will be two rounds of presidential election in May and June this year. President Hollande is said to be willing to negotiate until the second round of the presidential elections, which is helpful, as it allows us to make progress outlining broad principles.

MARINE LE PEN *(speaking French, untranslated)*

GS: A Marine Le Pen win would completely change the political landscape. The EU and the eurozone would face an existential crisis. The French elections are important, but the German elections in September have an even wider significance. European economic policy is . . . and has for a long time been driven by German interest.

ANGELA MERKEL *(speaking German, untranslated)*

GS: Chancellor Merkel, when she acts as a candidate in the election will be mindful of what the German voters expect to hear from her: no special deals for the United Kingdom. But a re-elected Chancellor Merkel will focus on what is in Germany and the UK is mutual interest, as well as being

mindful of not undermining the cohesion of the eurozone. We should not discount the possibility of an SPD Martin Schulz win. This would initially change the negotiating dynamics, as he'd be more likely to want to defend the institutional interests of the EU, but is unlikely to fundamentally change the underlying principles. (*ticking clock sound effect*) What happens after this is harder to predict. There are lots of issues to resolve, and a number of great unknowns, like what will happen with the Italian banks. What is certain is that we will be out by March 2019. Legally, it might be possible for the two-year negotiating period to be extended if every member state agreed, but this is impossible in reality. The whole reason for triggering Article 50 in March was to ensure the formal negotiations are complete before the next European elections, we will have agreed the main planks of the deal and any necessary transitional arrangements before we have the new European Parliament and the new Commission in 2019. If we didn't have things sorted by then, we'd have to start again. **These are exciting times. It won't be easy, or straightforward, we will have good days and bad days, but if we get it right, it will be good for the United Kingdom and good for the European Union.**

SARAH MONTAGUE: Gisela Stuart, the Labour MP there, and leading Brexit campaigner on what's next.