

Labour IN for Britain: the challenges Alan Johnson's campaign faces

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As the party launches its Labour IN for Britain campaign, **Pawel Swidlicki** considers the strengths and weaknesses of the campaign.

The (relatively low-key) launch of [Labour IN for Britain](#), the party's stand-alone pro-EU membership campaign, was led by former Home Secretary Alan Johnson. It is backed by 213 of the party's total 231 MPs, including party leader Jeremy Corbyn and the entire shadow cabinet.



Here are a few thoughts on the campaign and the challenges it faces:

Why run a separate campaign? This is motivated by the bitter experience of the Scottish independence referendum during which the perception of excessive closeness to the Tories was seen as leading to the party's subsequent electoral wipeout at the hands of the SNP. The party is now desperate to avoid a similar fate in its northern and Midlands heartlands where it is vulnerable to UKIP. However, the party's problems in Scotland stretch back much further than just the referendum campaign, so there is a risk the party is drawing the wrong conclusions. Similarly, the traditional Labour vote has become vulnerable for a number of reasons – including the election of Jeremy Corbyn, whose views on a number of issues are far removed from those of traditional Labour voters.

How will they differentiate themselves from the official In campaign? The decision to run a separate campaign would make more sense if Labour would have a more distinct message to the official Britain Stronger IN Europe campaign, but much of the key points from jobs, market access, security and influence are virtually identical. True, the Labour campaign is headed by Alan Johnson whose working-class background (explicitly referenced in the group's [launch video](#)) can make these arguments more appealing to traditional 'working class' voters than when they are articulated by BSIE's Lord Rose. Nonetheless, the lack of fundamentally different arguments does undermine the rationale for a stand-alone campaign and risks triggering splits in the Remain side, which has so far appeared much more united and harmonious than the Leave side.

Lack of new arguments: The arguments deployed are also the same as those that have been consistently deployed by the pro-EU side but which have failed to convincingly close down the debate, hence why the UK is having the referendum in the first place. This includes the argument that the EU is necessary to protect workers' rights, which is a red herring as David Cameron has opted against including social and employment laws in his renegotiation drive. That said, the party appears to have decided against making 'an emotional case' for membership which [we have argued could backfire](#).



Overstating the security case: Like the official campaign, Labour will go hard on the security aspects of EU membership. Although this may hold more sway in the wake of the Paris attacks, as Open Europe pointed out in our ['10 questions for each side'](#) briefing, the In camp as a whole is overstating the need to be in the EU to pursue cooperation on crime and justice issues with the rest of Europe, and in any event, most people do not want to hand over democratic control to EU institutions in these sensitive areas.

Making pro-trade arguments: On a positive note, it was good to see Labour IN for Britain making explicitly pro-trade and inward investment arguments in favour of continued membership. This contrasts with the more economically protectionist stance adopted by the party's new leadership and the Labour Leave which has run an [explicitly anti-TTIP campaign](#). That said, if tangible progress towards TTIP is made in the run-up to the vote, some Labour figures could come under pressure to tone down or reverse their pro-membership stance.

What about EU reform and renegotiation? Even allowing for the need to be succinct and not to over-complicate the message, there is no acknowledgement on the part of Labour IN for Britain that Europe is changing and that the majority of voters, including Labour voters, want to see reform. As such the campaign is reflective of the party's broader failure to articulate its vision of where it sees Britain fitting into an EU that could be set for deeper political and economic integration. If Labour thinks that should also apply to the UK it should say so; if not, it should set out its view for an alternative model for the UK within the EU.

This blogpost represents the views of the author and not those of the BrexitVote blog, nor the LSE.

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