

# Britain: The Left Debates the Case for EU Exit

Thursday 21 April 2016, by [THORNETT Alan](#) (Date first published: 25 March 2016).

**Alan Thornett reports on the London meeting on March 23 called by Counterfire and the Communist Party of BritainEU front cover (CPB) in support of an exit vote in the EU referendum.**

It generated a lively debate amongst the hundred plus people who attended.

The platform speakers were Tariq Ali, Lindsey German from Counterfire Liz Payne, chair of the CPB, Harsev Bains from the Indian Workers Association Aaron Bastani from Novara Media, Joseph Choonara from the SWP, and a speaker from the RMT. There was no sign of the Socialist Party who hold a similar vote for exit position.

The stance taken from the platform was that the EU is a reactionary anti-working class project. I suspect most in the room, including myself, agreed with that. Therefore, and this is the controversial part, the only position to have in the referendum was a vote to leave.

Given this, much of the discussion was about what exit would mean in terms of the political aftermath in Britain and where it would leave the workers' movement.

The platform was unanimous on this. They argued, incredibly in my view, that an exit vote would create a good situation for the left. It could well bring down the Tories and even bring a left wing Corbyn government to office.

This was strongly challenged by Charlie Hore from RS21 who said that all this completely misunderstood the character of the referendum and the conditions under which it was taking place. It was a Tory leadership project designed to placate the Tory xenophobic right and gather a few votes from UKIP at the election.

I spoke on similar lines and saying the idea that the left would gain from an exit vote was fantasy land. If the vote goes for exit it will be a huge victory for UKIP, the Tory right and for racism and xenophobia. The idea that such an event could push the political situation to the left is simply not credible.

It is far more likely that it would push the situation sharply to the right and could split the Tory party, bringing about a realignment of the xenophobic right which would put them in a stronger position. It would be seen as an endorsement of racism and xenophobia in a referendum and you would not want to be a migrant or an asylum seeker in Britain after such a vote had taken place.

Other floor speakers talked about the need to win back national sovereignty and others talked about how the EU had helped to precipitate war with Russia in Ukraine.

The platform was somewhat embarrassed by the first speaker from the floor. He said he was from

People Before Profit in Lewisham and that they were having joint stalls with UKIP. In fact, he said, the UKIP people preferred to hand out the PBP leaflets rather than their own!

All the platform speakers rightly disagreed with this and took the first opportunity presented to say so.

One worrying thing in all this was the complacent attitude taken by the platform regarding the precarious situation that citizens of other EU countries living in Britain would be in the event of an exit. I had raised this in my contribution saying that both of the main exit campaigns had been asked about this and neither had been prepared to say that their situation would remain the same. They have both said that it is not possible to say at this stage.

Joseph Choonara replied to this saying that he thought that it is unlikely that moves would be made against them in the event of an exit because there are a lot of Brits in other EU countries, particularly Spain. Not much comfort there.

Although there was talk at the beginning of the meeting of the need to set up a left exit campaign. At the end of the meeting nothing happened in this regard. You got the distinct feeling that no one was bursting to launch it.

**Alan Thornett**

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**P.S.**

\* Socialist Resistance. March 25, 2016:

<http://socialistresistance.org/8240/the-left-debates-the-case-for-eu-exit>