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Britain: Yet again, on Lexit - Should antiracists be against the right of free movement in the EU?

Tuesday 4 October 2016, by [FAULKNER Neil](#) (Date first published: 28 September 2016).

Neil Faulkner responds to the latest attack on free movement in the *Huffington Post*.

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The Lexit argument is now beyond logic and reason. It is the mistaken argument that will not be silenced. The dog barks but the caravan moves on; only in this case, the dog digs itself deeper and deeper into its hole.

A steady stream of articles trying to justify Lexit continues to appear in the Left press. The effect of them is to deny the stark reality of the rise of the far right. To confuse and disorient left activists in the face of this clear and present danger is rank irresponsibility. So this response pulls no punches. The stakes are too high.

Farage, Gove, and Johnson waged the most racist political campaign in post-war British history and were rewarded with a narrow win in the EU Referendum. A clear majority of young people, ethnic-minority people, trade unionists, Labour voters, and Green Party supporters backed Remain. It is equally clear that the dominant arguments for Leave voters were 'take back control' and 'stop immigration'.

Consequently, the Brexit victory has legitimised racism and we face a tidal wave of racist abuse and violence.

This, moreover, is part of an international pattern. A new, populist, anti-immigrant, anti-Muslim hard right is advancing across Europe, the United States, and beyond. We are reliving the 1930s in slow motion.

What is it that Julian Jones, who has just written a truly appalling article about Brexit in the *Huffington Post* [see below], does not understand about this? Let me try and deal with the incoherent tangle of arguments he presents.

We are told that, because 'some extreme-right groups advocated an exit from the EU', we have an 'EU-infatuated left', which is 'middle class', 'elitist', and 'snobbish', branding all Brexit voters as 'closet racists'.

This is pitiful. The *entire* Brexit campaign was led by the hard right and was saturated with racist

arguments. There is nothing 'middle class' about the unionised teachers, nurses, care-workers, and junior civil servants who followed their anti-racist instincts and voted against Farage, Gove, and Johnson.

No-one has ever said that all Brexit voters were 'closet racists'. Actually, we have said the opposite: the Brexit campaign was openly racist – there was nothing 'closet' about it – and the effect of the campaign and the vote has been to increase racist sentiment and violence by legitimising it.

The fact that most Brexit voters are not hard-core racists – the fact, indeed, that many are not racist in any sense at all – is neither here nor there. Our job – as socialists trying to understand the world so that we can act more effectively to change it – is to analyse the essential nature of political movements, not to make claims about the motivation of individual voters.

Most Germans who voted for Hitler in 1932 were not in favour of putting Jews in concentration camps. But we do not judge a fascist organisation according to the motivation of individual voters: we analyse its social base, its ideology, its methods, its trajectory.

The Brexit campaign was not fascist; but it was populist-racist, and, as such, stands comparison with the movements led by Trump, Le Pen, Orban, and half a dozen other hard-right European political leaders.

But this is not the end of the argument. The logic becomes yet more tortuous when the *Huffington Post* commentator argues as follows: 'Of course, recent reports of attacks on Poles throughout the country are extremely worrying and need to be investigated urgently, but that is not to say the left should defend the EU or accept freedom of movement, much less call for reversal of Brexit.'

We are reminded that hard-right leaders like Slovakia's Robert Fico defend free movement inside the EU but are vociferously anti-Muslim. Apparently, this means that 'EU free movement acts as a convenient way of keeping Muslims out of Europe'.

Then comes a real shocker: 'The Left needs to respect the largest democratic mandate in British history and do its best to shape the outcome of the negotiations. Part of that is debating immigration policy and making the case that EU freedom of movement is fundamentally anti-people ...'

I had to read this twice, because first time I thought I must have misread it. But no. Are we, then, in denial that there is a direct relationship between recent attacks on Polish people and the Brexit argument against free movement? And by what sort of bizarre logic do we arrive at the conclusion that socialists defending Polish people against racist attacks, defending the right of free movement, and defending the idea of a united Europe are somehow helping to 'keep Muslims out of Europe'? How does that work exactly?

But the giveaway is this. We are being invited to 'respect the democratic mandate', engage in a 'debate about immigration', and reject the idea of free movement as 'anti-people'. In other words, we should capitulate to the racism promoted by Farage, Gove, and Johnson – and echoed by the rest of the neoliberal political elite – by supporting immigration controls. And the justification for this? The EU is racist against Muslim refugees.

The argument is so dreadful it could be a spoof. It boils down to this: the EU is racist against Muslim refugees; free movement is EU policy; *ergo* free movement is a cover for racism. So we should support the Tories in leaving Europe, erecting a wall at Calais, and ending free movement within Europe – because, wait for it, we support immigration from *outside* Europe.

Why is the logic so convoluted? Why are the arguments so crass?

Because the starting-point – Lexit – is wrong. And that is because the EU referendum was not a choice between the EU of austerity, privatisation, and anti-Muslim racism on the one hand, and a world of equality, democracy, and peace on the other. It was a choice between the soft right and the hard right, between a less racist brand of neoliberalism and a more racist one.

Once you grasp that, everything falls into place. You vote Remain because you stand with the more progressive workers – young, unionised, left-voting, anti-racist. You vote Remain because a retreat into Little Englander nationalism is a shift to the right. You vote Remain because the EU is a bankers’ and bosses’ club hard-wired to Hoover wealth to the 1% at the expense of the poor, the working majority, and public services – *and despite this, indeed because of this, you know that you have to fight as part of a united European working-class movement for another kind of Europe.*

We need to build a mass movement to fight the right, stem the racist tide, and win a majority of Europeans to a radical anti-austerity alternative. Julian Jones wants to lead us deeper into the darkness and irrelevance of a sectarian cul-de-sac.

Neil Faulkner, 28 September 2016

Neil Faulkner is the author of A Marxist History of the World (2013, Pluto) and A People’s History of the Russian Revolution (forthcoming in 2017, Pluto/Left Book Club).

* <http://leftunity.org/yet-again-on-lexit/>

Maybe We Aren’t All Suddenly Racist And Maybe EU Free Movement Is Racist

Brexit has become a byword for racism and chauvinism. A gross generalisation has been born out of the admittedly undeniable fact that some extreme-right groups advocated an exit from the EU.

This unfair generalisation that those who supported Brexit are closet racists has passed into the norm of social thought and may take a while to reverse.

On the EU-infatuated left, which has done much to proliferate this snobbishness, there are two main ideas at play. The first is the notion that post-Brexit Britain, compared to chic, cosmopolitan Europe, is descending into a racist state as a direct consequence of the vote. The second is that all things related to the EU – including the single market and free movement of people – need to be fought for at all costs, even if that means subverting democracy and overturning the result.

While the EU’s freedom of movement disguises itself behind a smokescreen of respectability, its cheerleaders in Britain fail to mention some of its more reactionary traits and unsavoury advocates.

For instance, one of free movement’s most vocal backers in Eastern Europe is Robert Fico, the Slovakian president and current EU Council President. During Theresa May’s July bilateral meeting with Fico, the Slovakian leader vociferously defended freedom of movement, stating that British voters view immigration ‘differently to how we perceive migration on the continent’.

Yet Fico, who once said that free movement was one of the ‘greatest accomplishments of the European Union’, should not be seen as a defender of a great progressive cause, but as a racist who has said that ‘Islam has no place in Slovakia’. Tellingly, Theresa May did not challenge Fico on his

attitudes towards Islam which, although relatively mainstream in his native Slovakia, would be intolerable for the majority of the British population.

Elsewhere, the despotic prime minister of Hungary, Viktor Orban has talked of the need to build a wall to keep out the 'poison'. Orban insists that immigration, 'especially from areas where Europe and the western world are seen as the enemy...damages Europe's security'. Mr Orban - an albeit critical integrationist who has backed calls for a EU army - sees the European project as a bastion of white and ancient values against Muslim invaders, a discourse harking back to the crusades. As the BBC recently pointed out, 'Mr Orban and Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico say Europe has to defend its "Christian" heritage.'

In Poland a similar story has developed. Racist sentiment has grown to such a worrying level that mass anti-'Islamisation' rallies have been held in Warsaw, while the Vatican even published a communiqué condemning this trend. This climate of hatred has been fostered and animated by Beata Szydlo, who not only suspended an agreement to take in 7000 asylum seekers from the Middle East in the wake of the Brussels attacks, but has even stated that she wants to 'keep Poland Polish'.

Over the course of her brief visit to Warsaw, Theresa May rightly condemned the post-Brexit spate of attacks against Poles, before proceeding to hear Szydlo's speech in defence of EU free movement. But while it might initially seem hypocritical to defend free movement and lead a hard-right party with fascistic tendencies, it actually makes perfect sense: EU free movement acts a convenient way of keeping Muslims out of Europe.

While these figures of arch-conservatism have in the past been critical of certain aspects of EU liberalism and present themselves as Eurosceptics, they are united in recognising the great role that the EU and its border agency Frontex play in enforcing national and ethnic purity, letting white people travel throughout while keeping migrants of colour out.

In Britain, the commonplace narrative goes that racism and Islamophobia will undoubtedly increase after leaving the EU. But whilst we need to remain extremely vigilant of such tendencies, they should not be explicitly linked to Brexit, as if prior to June 23rd the EU ploughed resources into an anti-racism police force.

Of course, recent reports of attacks on Poles throughout the country are extremely worrying and need to be investigated urgently, but that is not to say that the Left should defend the EU or accept freedom of movement, much less call for a reversal of Brexit.

To be clear, problems of racism are not addressed by overturning a popular decision to leave an imperialist organisation. And looking at the wider picture, defence of an organisation that enforces a barrier against North African and Middle Eastern Muslims that are victims of imperial wars could arguably be seen as more Islamophobic than anything produced by the EU referendum.

A recent Pew Survey revealed some interesting patterns about European attitudes to diversity and Islam. It found that Britain fared much better than Greece, Italy, Hungary, Poland and Holland in its acceptance of diversity, and roughly the same as Germany. As for views towards Islam, the UK had the most favourable view of Muslims in the whole continent, showing that while there may be lots of work to be done to improving race relations and inclusivity, the idea that Britain leaving the EU is symptomatic of our descent into a racist state is simply not true.

On the 24th of June many young people took to social media proclaiming that they would abandon racist Britain and claim European nationality. But these Pew statistics on diversity might throw a spanner in the works of those liberal young globetrotters wanting to move to escape the St George's

flag-wielding mob. The idea that a young person living in largely tolerant London should go into self-imposed exile in a European country where race issues are far more prevalent is simply laughable. We need to learn to recognise that the term EU or European is not tantamount to tolerance and progress, and that our positive associations with the Continent (holidays, city breaks, etc.) are not representative of the real struggles of the peoples of Europe.

The widely promoted narrative that Europe is inherently more progressive than Britain is wrong, and portrays an elitist mistrust in the capacity of British people to think in a sophisticated manner.

Instead of demonising the working class people it ought to represent, the Left needs to respect the outcome of the largest democratic mandate in British history and do its best to shape the outcome of the negotiations. Part of that is debating immigration policy and making the case that EU freedom of movement is fundamentally anti-people, enforcing a wall round Europe that keeps people of colour outside, imposes wage deflation for working class people inside its parameters and unbridled freedom for white middle class people to explore the charms of the continent for months at a time.

The racist nature of our current EU migration system is succinctly highlighted by one fact. Over the last three years some 27,000 'illegal' migrants have been thrown into jail in the UK. And all the while there are over 2 million 'legal' EU migrants in work in Britain (the ONS was found to have massively underestimated this figure). So what marks the difference between a permanent place in Britain and a safe job, or an illegal status and a prison sentence? The colour of your skin and which side of the EU border you have happened to come from. That is plainly an injustice.

One only has to look at the recent news that Jamaicans with British roots and families are being deported in their hundreds to realise that something's not right with our immigration policy.

It's time for the Left to have a debate on the merits of leaving behind EU freedom of movement and the single market.

The terms of this debate need to be shifted away from the warped liberal media agenda which has divided one set of people against another; respectables against non-respectables, educated and against non-educated, liberals against illiberals, middle class against working class.

Above all we should applaud the decision of the sovereign electorate to leave the EU and put pressure on Theresa May to trigger Article 50 immediately, articulating our own vision of Brexit and immigration.

Julian Jones

Brexiter. Activist. Translator

* Huffington Post. 12/09/2016 15:40:

http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/julian-jones/freedom-of-movement_b_11921408.html

'Free Movement' In The EU Actually Means Free Exploitation

By being so positive towards EU free movement, sectors of the left are naively, or willingly, falling into a trap of their own making, argues JULIAN JONES

IMMIGRATION has dominated the headlines over the last few weeks. While the right and extreme right have used some particularly incendiary rhetoric in the context of this EU referendum, the left needs to present its own arguments in order to tackle this issue.

It is heavily argued by sectors on the left that the free movement of people within Europe — one of the central tenets of the EU — is a practice that should be protected, and one that enriches our societies. This is not, and should not be, the position of the organised left.

The young, in particular, have been duped into thinking that free movement of people is a near-socialist principle.

Criticism of “free” movement — which in reality is anything but free — has become a no-go area in progressive thought.

The grim economic reality behind this free movement is in essence a free exploitation of a primarily young European workforce with no job security and no prospects.

It may be hard for us to recognise this grim trend in purely economic terms, away from the sentimentality that accompanies our memories of school trips to grey chateaux and first French kisses on the Continent.

The majority of European migrants in Britain are arrivals out of economic necessity. By and large they are young (the average age of EU migrants is 34), and in many cases come from countries whose economies have been decimated by EU fiscal policy and are suffering from a “brain drain” as a result of skilled labour leaving the country. For leftists and progressives in the most debilitated European economies, freedom of movement is not seen as positively as it might be here.

Recently, Alberto Garzon, the iridescent young leader of Spain’s United Left party, which has voted to formally ally itself with Podemos, bemoaned the crisis of young Spanish people flocking to other corners of Europe, saying: “If anyone wishes to leave Spain, let it be through free will, not out of necessity or due to the lack of alternatives.”

This approach should be at the very essence of the debate around EU migration.

It is not a case of whether the small percentage of entrepreneurial, free-spirited young people seeking adventure in their travels around Europe will be affected by Brexit (they most likely won’t be), but whether this mass economic migration really is free.

We must ask ourselves how many young people are being coerced — if not forced — out of their countries partly because of an economic situation largely the making of EU fiscal policy.

Without forgetting that the EU’s growth-sapping economic policy provides a fertile breeding ground for extreme right groups to foster their hatred, especially among European youth.

Alarmingly, in Greece the fascist Golden Dawn party draws the bulk of its support from the 18 to 34-year-old demographic, and 2014 exit poll data showed that 21.2 per cent of 18 to 24-year-olds voted for Golden Dawn, more than any other party except Syriza.

A UCL study showed that low-skilled workers, roughly the bottom 20 per cent of those on the wage scale, are disproportionately affected by EU immigration, while those at the top of the pile benefit from migration.

It is no surprise then that YouGov has found that the poorer you are, the more likely you are to favour Brexit.

Leafleting for the EU referendum on the weekend, many working people — bricklayers, builders, etc — commented on their experiences of EU immigration, pointing out their frustration at having their wages undercut. They were not racist, as many people would have you believe (many in fact were black and ethnic minority), and did not resent the migrants themselves but rather the lack of job opportunities available to them for a decent wage.

Quite simply, those at the bottom of this pile are more likely to have witnessed the basic principle that if a boss can use a cheaper foreign workforce, they will do so.

These rather sophisticated opinions are a far cry from the fascistic overtones of Nigel Farage's campaign.

But what may be nuanced approaches at the moment can become angry and disjointed if the left chooses to ignore these issues.

If we do not recognise migration and social dumping as issues arising from the inherent contradictions within capitalism, to be combatted through trade unionism, internationalism and solidarity, debates on immigration will quickly become the preserve of the extreme right, even more so than they are already.

Renowned historian Simon Schama, writing in the *FT* this weekend, commented that Brexit would represent the abandonment of Britain's humanitarian, "heterogeneous" past.

Britain would not be the same without the Huguenots, Russian Jews or Bengalis who have settled in the country over the centuries. A valid historical point perhaps, but not one that has anything to do with the European Union. Conveniently, Schama ignores that EU migration policy isn't one of accepting the most needy around the world, but one of driving down wages within EU borders, while doing its level best to keep desperate people out of Europe, even if that means drowning in the Mediterranean.

Would the Russian Jews who migrated at the start of the 20th century have been accepted into "fortress Europe"? Let's leave the wild historical comparisons to Schama.

In opposition to the Establishment's liberalism, the left's position is a nuanced one, away from the arrogance which has marked the recent debate.

Many sadly wish to ignore this fact, preferring snide accusations of xenophobia and racism at every available opportunity.

By being so positive towards EU migration, sectors of the left are naively, or willingly, falling into a trap of their own making — which is not merely xenophobic but actively racist too.

If we are to consider our shameful colonialist past, and form a rational immigration policy starting from that point, there are so many nations and people to whom we owe a great debt.

Many West Indians find it extremely difficult to enter Britain, even to visit families. Why is it then that any EU citizen can come indefinitely to Britain, to visit, study, work or live?

Might we assume it is because they are white, and supposedly share "European values," unlike our brothers and sisters in the Caribbean, Africa or on the Indian subcontinent?

As well as the historical legacy, there is the more recent crisis in the Middle East, largely the making of western European and British intervention in Syria, Libya, Iraq and Afghanistan.

EU member states have a debt to accept the people whose very countries we have played a part in destroying.

In fact, the EU is increasingly acting with imperialist clout, officially supporting military campaigns such as the Afghanistan war in 2001, or giving France a waiver on its economic obligations in order to carry out its ill-thought-out attacks in Syria in the aftermath of the Paris attacks.

A move towards a new migration policy which accurately reflects the damage Britain has done as a colonialist and imperialist force can only be negotiated outside the EU, with a future progressive government.

Simply put, the case needs to be made for a progressive anti-racist immigration policy that doesn't merely let white Europeans enter Britain.

Of course, it is easy to argue that, thanks to the right-wing discourse being dictated by the Establishment, a left-wing migration policy is simply not on the agenda.

The argument, however, is that it could be in the future, if we leave the toxic fortress Europe of the European Union.

Crucially, a vote for Brexit does not merely have a bearing on the next five years of government, but potentially the next few decades.

Julian Jones

* JUN 2016, Wednesday 22ND, *Morning Star*:

<https://www.morningstaronline.co.uk/a-9c1f-Free-movement-in-the-EU-actually-means-free-exploitation#.V-t9fiT3aqI>
