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Britain and the differences between cats and dogs: looking back at the million strong People's Vote demonstration

Saturday 30 March 2019, by [Socialist Resistance \(Britain\)](#) (Date first published: 29 March 2019).

Cats and dogs are pretty similar to the inexperienced eye writes Andy Stowe. Both have four legs, a tail, hairy bodies and can ruin the furniture. But every cat owner has had a jealous twinge when they see dogs happily running after a stick in the park and dog owners will secretly admit that there is something deeply comforting about the purring of a cat. Cat owners don't have to scoop steaming excrement into a plastic bag. The superficial similarities mask an almost infinite variety of differences.

It's a similar thing with proto-fascist demonstrations and leftish-liberal protests. Yes, both are comprised of people wearing shoes and coats, carrying flags or placards with slogans and making speeches, but while no one has ever got beaten up for confusing a Jack Russell for a tabby cat, not being able to tell the difference between neo-fascists and someone carrying a placard supporting immigrants' rights is pretty risky.

As our report on last weekend's million strong People's Vote demonstration noted [\[1\]](#):

"Saturday's demonstrators were almost all potential and actual Labour voters. They were socially liberal, pro-freedom of movement and anti-racist".

This was the opinion of virtually everyone who attended it.

A notable dissenter from this view is John Rees [\[2\]](#) of Counterfire, the Stop the War Coalition and the People's Assembly.

He saw a proto-fascist mob composed of hundreds of thousands of people ignorantly following the leaders of the British counter-revolution, and explained his reasoning in a widely shared Facebook post [\[3\]](#):

"The left in England has rarely faced a mass fascist or populist right wing movement before, with the exception of the short lived Countryside alliance. We've not had something that is routine in Latin America, an angry middle class mobilised for its own purposes by sections of the elite.

Some confusion is therefore likely to arise over yesterday's 2nd referendum march which was a mild (as yet) variant."

He goes on to argue that the people on the streets were mostly "middle class" with a "vanishingly small component from the *organised* working class, bar the white collar TSSA."

Rees doesn't define "middle class" so we don't know if he'd include the junior doctors who took industrial action and about whom Counterfire carried a number of supportive articles. They'll all have degrees and can expect to go on to demanding but well-paid careers. There was no sneering at

their white collars. A more accurate description of the demonstrators would be to say that they were the better educated, generally more affluent sectors of the working class, many of whom are in professional jobs such as the university staff referred to in this Counterfire report.

When these people roll up at every other demonstration they are not subject to the forensic examination of their working class credentials, they are proof what a brilliant job they organisers have done in getting out 5000 protesters.

Respectful and engaged?

And it's simply untrue to say that the organised working class wasn't there. Left Labour MPs Kate Osamor, Clive Lewis, Marsha de Cordova, Rachel Gaskell, Lloyd Russell-Moyle and Chi Onwurah spoke at the Left Bloc event and there was a significant number of Labour Party banners. And the uncomfortable figure that Rees doesn't mention is that almost three quarters of Labour members want a second referendum and a majority of Labour voters support staying in the EU.

The London boroughs of Lambeth, Hackney and Haringey all polled over 75% to stay in the European Union. The thing they have in common is that they have large, poor, multi-ethnic communities who may have been under-represented at the demonstration but can spot a migrant bashing project when they see one.

Rees makes a correct point about the leadership of People's Vote campaign. It's got serious money behind it and it includes Tories like Heseltine and Soubry along with the most extreme anti-Corbyn people in Labour. He seems oblivious to the leadership of the pro-Brexit campaign. Farage, Rees-Mogg, Johnson, the DUP - the hard right of British politics are baying for Brexit because they want to keep migrants out. And it is simply absurd to think that the cluster of small far left organisations supporting Lexit have the social or political weight to make an impact on the discussion.

The major Lexit event of recent weeks wasn't tens of thousands on the streets. Two days after the demonstration a couple of hundred met in central London in a union office at which the audience were told by Eddie Dempsey that fascists are right to hate the liberal left:

"Whatever you think of people that turn up for those Tommy Robinson demos or any other march like that, the one thing that unites those people, whatever other bigotry is going on, is their hatred of the liberal left, and they are right to hate them."

Rees concludes that you need to be nice to people who are duped by the emerging fascist leadership in Britain and calls "a respectful and engaged approach to some of the ordinary demonstrators". In that he has utterly failed.

More significantly, he has willfully chosen to turn a blind eye to the glaringly obvious fact that all the pressure from Brexit came from the racist, anti-migrant, anti-working class right of the political spectrum. Clinging onto a position that might have made sense in 1974 doesn't take account of that changed reality. That is the fundamental sectarian, dogmatic weakness of the Lexiteers.

Oh, and you don't generally change the minds of people who disagree with you by asserting that they are fascists or paving the fascist road to power.

Socialist Resistance

P.S.

- “The differences between cats and dogs”. Socialist Resistance, 29th March 2019:
<http://socialistresistance.org/the-differences-between-cats-and-dogs/16659>

Footnotes

[1] ESSF (article 48179), [Britain – March 23rd People’s Vote demonstration on Brexit: A million on the streets of London](#).

[2] <https://www.counterfire.org/authors/3:john-rees>

[3] <https://www.facebook.com/john.rees.372/posts/10157365287674073>