

# Britain: The Brexit Deal - Empire II or Britannia's Last Hurrah?

Wednesday 30 December 2020, by [HEALY Joseph](#) (Date first published: 29 December 2020).

**What will Tory Brexit mean? Joseph Healy takes a critical look.**

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Hugging the podium, Boris Johnson emerged on Xmas Eve, like a latter-day Chamberlain, brandishing his trade deal with the EU and rounding things off by exclaiming 'and now for the sprouts'.

Continuing to employ the culinary analogy which he had used almost exactly one year before when he described the Withdrawal Agreement as an 'oven-ready deal', he clearly regarded it as just another deal which only needed to be put briefly in the microwave - a meeting of the House of Commons on 30 December - and the tasty dish could be fed to the nation as a New Year's offering.

However, as with all 'oven-ready' meals, some care should be taken over reading the ingredients, as it may constitute poor nutritional value. This is indeed the case with this latest deal with the EU.

## The English-nationalist narrative

The choreography of an unrelenting EU determined to deny every 'freeborn Englishman' his right to sovereignty (and to deprive him of his fish) was used consistently during the negotiations, alongside the constant briefings to the effect that the talks had broken down and there was little hope of success.

All of this was, of course, to play to the Brexiteer gallery, both in the Tory Party and beyond, and to show that 'Boris' was a British bulldog and would not give way to continental bullying!

This is all part of the English-nationalist xenophobic narrative which has played continuously since the referendum and which Johnson and the Brexiteers have used effectively; so effectively in fact that elements of the Left (the 'Lexiteers') have gone along with it, including some who have now found themselves ennobled as a result, like the former Brexit Party MEP, Claire Fox.

For these brave souls also believed that the European capitalists of the EU were responsible for holding back the English (and it was mainly English) working class, and that once released from the chains of Brussels the class would awaken to socialism and build some type of British socialist

republic. They ignored two major facts – nationalism and economic decline.

The Left in England can never be more nationalistic than the Right and the atavistic forces released by Brexit. Hatred of migrants and foreigners, racism and chauvinism, will only ever benefit the Right. It has already produced the most rightwing government in Britain since Lord Liverpool's administration in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. It has also resulted in the marginalisation and ostracisation of many EU citizens living in the UK, and many have already left, leaving huge gaps in staffing in the NHS and social care.

Brexit has also opened the possibility of a Windrush II, with the hostile environment continuing and the real danger of the deportation of EU citizens if they cannot jump through the hoops of the Settlement Scheme. For the nationalist Left, these people are collateral damage. They do not feature in their narrative of a UK unchained.

## **UK break-up?**

Johnson has also signed the death warrant of the UK state with this deal. The Northern Ireland Protocol leaves the North of Ireland effectively in the single market and the Customs Union. It has made the island of Ireland one economic unit and the Irish Government has even stepped in to subsidise the continuation of the Erasmus exchange scheme for students at universities there.

For many farmers and moderate Unionists in the North of Ireland, the UK had never seemed more distant and the Irish Republic so close, and this will bear fruit in the next decade when the referenda on Irish reunification take place.

Scotland, seething with resentment against having been pulled out of EU membership against its will, and with a fishing deal which the SNP will effectively use against the UK Government in the elections next May, is likely to slam the door to the UK state shut. The more that the English-nationalist rhetoric in London talks about a 'victory over Europe', the deeper will be the anger.

British economic decline is also at the heart of the matter. The deal itself may have ended the nightmare scenario of tariffs on exports etc, but it will effectively mean the end of several large industries here, particularly car manufacturing, with these concentrated in Leave-voting areas. Also, it is clear that EU funding for economically deprived areas will not be replaced by UK funding – Cornwall has already discovered that only 10% of the funding provided by the EU will be funded by Westminster. The end result will be – despite the promise of freeports and other Singapore-on-Thames type projects – that these areas, already devastated by deindustrialisation in the 80s, will sink further into poverty.

## **Poverty and border controls**

This increasing poverty – especially as the deal is very weak on protecting labour and environmental rights – will push many in these areas into poverty and unemployment. They will potentially become recruits for the Far Right, who will seek scapegoats to blame for the failure of Brexit.

The deal allows for both sides to review it in four years time and to decide to end it if necessary. So there is the possibility of a complete No Deal scenario then if a rightwing Tory Government decides that enough red meat has been thrown to its followers and the baying press.

Services – a huge part of the UK economy – are not even covered in the deal and will take probably

another year or more to sort out.

There will also be a serious diminution in the protection of human rights. The deal allows the EU to suspend security co-operation if there is a refusal to adhere to the European Convention on Human Rights. The fact that Pritti Patel is already saying that she may consider the reintroduction of the death penalty is an indication of further attacks on human rights by this reactionary government.

The loss of free movement to study, work, and live across our continent, especially for the younger generation, is huge; and it is typical of Lexiteer contempt that they dismiss the ending of the Erasmus programme as something of concern only to middle-class students! Many working class and BAME young people now attend university and it provided an opportunity for them to live in another country and learn its language and culture. It is typical of the nationalist English Left that any attempt at building international links for youth and students is attacked, for it does not match up to their crude 'workerist' notions of what constitutes the working class.

At the end of the day, this deal will further impoverish the UK and drive down standards while increasing costs. It will be touted by Johnson and the Brexiteers as some form of liberation. It will be fostered by such insane schemes as the 'Festival of Brexit' and other attempts to bolster English nationalism.

There will also be attempts at further trade deals with the US and others, now that the Irish situation has been addressed. On a large scale, it is all part of the Steve Bannon and other Far Right ideologues' strategy to strengthen nativism and fascism whether in Italy, France, or the UK.

The internationalist Left must continue its struggle to maintain links with the Left in the rest of Europe and to provide a real alternative to the increasingly toxic atmosphere which will prevail in post-Brexit Britain. We are likely to witness the disintegration of the UK state, the increasing pauperisation of the working class and young people, and a search for scapegoats as the promises of Brexit never materialise.

**Joseph Healy**

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## **Back John McDonnell's call - Labour must not support the Tories' Brexit deal**

Please add your name to this statement promoted by John McDonnell MP and other Labour and trade union activists using the form below. Full list of initial signatories and report on LabourList here:

<https://labourlist.org/2020/12/starmer-urged-by-labour-figures-across-factional-spectrum-not-to-back-tory-deal>

Covered in the Guardian here:

<https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2020/dec/28/starmer-high-profile-labour-rebellion-brexit-deal-vote>

- Coordinated by Labour for a Socialist Europe and Another Europe is Possible. We will use your email to contact you about campaigning against the implementation and impact of the Tories' deal, unless you indicate you do not wish to be contacted.

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After years of posturing and delay, Boris Johnson has finally announced that a trade deal with the EU has been agreed. The backdrop to the deal is a profound crisis, marked by the government's mismanagement of Covid. Recent days have witnessed panic, job losses and chaos at the border, but rather than seek any form of extension to the Brexit transition period, the government has ploughed ahead.

This deal is a substantial downgrade of the UK's relationship with the EU, and is designed to open the door to rampant economic deregulation – a loss of rights and protections for workers, the environment, food standards and many other areas of life. From January 1<sup>st</sup>, UK citizens will no longer have the right to live and work in Europe, and many European migrants who have made their home in the UK will face an uncertain future. Future trade deals could now entrench the privatisation of the NHS and other public services. We are witnessing an act of vandalism against our livelihoods, our rights and our horizons.

Given the government's majority, it is a foregone conclusion that the deal will pass in parliament, but this deal will not 'get Brexit done': negotiations over trade and regulatory frameworks will go on and on for years to come. The vital task now is opposition: proper parliamentary scrutiny of this and all future trade deals, and the setting out of an alternative future in which we not only regain the rights and jobs we have lost, but become a better and more equal society. That task gets harder if opposition parties fall into the trap of rallying around this rotten deal.

We call on Labour, the labour movement and other opposition parties not to support the Tories' Brexit deal when it is put to a vote in the House of Commons.

[Sign the statement here](#)

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## **P.S.**

- Anticapitalist Resistance. 29 December 2020:

<https://www.anticapitalistresistance.org/post/the-brexit-deal-empire-ii-or-britannia-s-last-hurrah>

- Joseph Healy is a member of the Anti\*Capitalist Resistance and is on the national committee of Another Europe is Possible.