

Lexit and the Left: a comradely response to Dave Bush

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Around 15,000 fascists demonstrated in support of Tommy Robinson on 9 June 2018, writes Neil Faulkner. The overwhelming majority of them are likely to have voted Leave in the EU Referendum two years ago. Around a quarter of a million people demonstrated against Trump on 13 July 2018. The overwhelming majority of them are likely to have voted Remain.

Brexit has become the central issue in British politics, a primary fracture-line in mass opinion, and the main local expression of the global split between a far-right alliance of nationalists, racists, and fascists on the one hand and a broad-left alliance of liberals, progressives, and radicals on the other.

But whole sections of the organised Left, in Britain at least, still don't get it. Dave Bush's article on Hammerhead, reposted on [Counterfire, 'Brexit and the Left: two years on'](#), repeats all the disastrous arguments that have been peddled by Lexiters for more than two years.

Moving rightwards

First, Dave denies that Brexit represents a swing to the right, arguing that a) UKIP has been eclipsed, b) the Tory Right has not taken control of the government, and c) Corbyn's Labour surged in the general election last year. None of this holds up.

UKIP has been eclipsed because its programme has been adopted by the Tory Party. You don't need an opposition Brexit party when the elected government is implementing Brexit. The Tory Right has not taken control of the government only because May is carrying out just enough of their programme to maintain her balance at the head of a deeply divided party. The whole of mainstream politics is, in fact, shifting to the right. The rump of UKIP is evolving into a fascist party and is now enjoying something of [renaissance](#). The Tory Right has become stronger, nastier, more racist because it has been emboldened by Brexit. May has been forced to tack rightwards to retain her grip on power.

As for Labour, there is a growing evidence of a Brexit-induced crisis. Instead of leading a principled defence of free movement and the rights of migrants, Labour has ducked and fudged. Instead of becoming the standard-bearer of a broad-left alliance against nationalism, racism, and creeping fascism, Labour has capitulated on Brexit and abandoned Europeanism and internationalism. In doing so, it is deflating both its existing political base and its capacity to reach deeper into a working class under austerity attack.

Either Muslim refugees are to blame or international finance-capital is to blame. Either we face a 'migration crisis' or we face a racism crisis. Either the solution is closed borders or the solution is people power and united mass struggle from below against the speculators, landlords, and privatisers. Which is it? The correct position on Brexit - the central fault-line in contemporary British politics - is an essential part of the answer.

Labour's failure on Brexit has three major consequences. First, it is demoralising its own supporters and driving many of them away. Second, it is blunting its ability to carry a clear, confident, coherent anti-racist argument into working-class communities where the Far Right is implanting itself. Third, it is making it easier for May to manage the Brexit-induced crisis in her own ranks and maintain her grip on power.

The result of the Lewisham East by-election may be a bad omen. Labour won, but with a massively reduced majority after a 20% swing to the Liberal Democrats. This looks like a split in the anti-Brexit/progressive vote. Labour speaks with forked tongue on Brexit, whereas the Liberal Democrats are unequivocally anti-Brexit. There is now a clear and present danger that Corbyn could fail to win the next general election by fudging on Brexit and splitting the anti-racist vote.

And more generally, in view of the clear implication in Dave's article that there has been a swing to the left in British politics, what are we to make of the ramping up of anti-Muslim and anti-migrant racism, of the mainstreaming of the notion that there is a 'migration crisis', and of the growing insecurity in Muslim communities and among EU citizens currently working in Britain? Minorities are under racist attack both from the state and on the streets. No-one with their feet on the ground would deny this. Are these attacks not framed by Brexit nationalism and Brexit racism? So how can socialists possibly act as 'tribunes of the oppressed' if we do not oppose the whole Brexit framework within which these attacks take place?

Society's discontents

Then Dave repeats the dismal argument that because many Leave voters had economic grievances, the Brexit vote was somehow, like the proverbial curate's egg, progressive in parts. This is the only way I can make sense of the statement, in the context of Dave's argument, that 'Brexit is contradictory'. The implication seems to be that it is part progressive, part reactionary. The curate's egg, of course, had gone off and was therefore inedible as a whole. Socialists have to judge political movements by their essential content. They are either progressive and should be supported; or they are reactionary and must be opposed. Brexit is the British expression of the wave of nationalism, racism, and creeping fascism sweeping across the world. And here, as everywhere, the Far Right is tapping into deep reservoirs of anger at the base of society.

FASCISM EXPLOITS SOCIAL DISCONTENT. What is unclear about this? What is unexpected about this? And does it not lead, logically, inevitably, to the blindingly obvious fact it is completely irrelevant to the present argument that many Leave voters are socially deprived and therefore alienated from the system and the political mainstream. Why can't Lexiters grasp this essential lesson of the historical experience of the 1930s: in a capitalist crisis, people's lives are torn apart, the centre cannot hold, and fascism and socialism engage in a direct struggle for the allegiance of the suffering masses?

The argument that socialists should support Brexit because the bulk of the British ruling class opposes it, because it has thrown the ruling class into crisis, and because the EU is a bosses' club is no better. It breaks down at so many levels. Underlying it, I suspect, is the absurd notion that, in the hyper-globalised capitalism of the early 21st Century, there might be some sort of 'British road to socialism' - presumably under a Corbyn-led Labour government implementing some sort of 'alternative economic strategy'. Is it not obvious that the state-managed welfare capitalism of the immediate post-war period broke down in crisis in the 1970s? Is it really credible to imagine some sort of social-democratic 'new deal' today, to be achieved in one country, in defiance of international finance-capital, and in isolation from the international working class?

The choice we face, Dave, is not that between a capitalist EU and a socialist Britain. It is a choice

between a capitalist EU run by a neoliberal corporate and political elite - hardwired for financialisation, privatisation, and austerity - and a low-wage sweatshop and corporate tax-haven run by flag-waving Little Englanders and Muslim-baiting bigots. That is no choice for the working class. So let us reset the question.

Another Europe or Nationalist Britain?

The basic issue for socialists is always the consciousness, confidence, and combativeness of the working class. We want our side to organise and fight. Brexit bigotry is a weapon in the hands of the ruling class. Its effect is to distract and disorient the resistance to the rule of the rich and the corporations. Our job is to unite working people against the real enemy by biting back against the nationalism, racism, and creeping fascism which threatens to divide us.

The advanced section of the working population of Britain understands this. That is why it is anti-Brexit. That is why opinion polls show that up to three-quarters or more of the following groups voted Remain: young people, BAME people, trade unionists, and Labour, Green, SNP, Plaid Cymru, and Sinn Fein supporters. Recent opinion polls also imply that anti-Brexit sentiment among these groups is hardening. Little wonder, then, that the NUS, representing a million young people, wants to reverse Brexit, and the TUC, representing six million trade unionists, wants Corbyn to stop fudging and start fighting on Brexit.

There are no prospects for the working class inside the EU, Dave argues. Quite right. Nor are there any prospects for the working class inside Brexit Britain. The way forward is European working-class unity against the bankers, bosses, and bureaucrats who control the EU and each of the member states. The way forward is a Socialist Europe - not a Nationalist Britain.

The Tory regime is in deep crisis. The anti-Trump demonstration showed the potential to turn that crisis into collapse. We won a historic victory on 13 July. The British state, hosting the most important foreign leader in the world, could not guarantee security on the streets of its own capital, so was forced to move Trump around the countryside in a helicopter. The people controlled the streets and turned what was meant to be a state visit to honour a fascist supporting US president into a carnival celebration of our diversity, tolerance, and solidarity. The British Establishment was forced to mute its customary welcome - limiting it to parades of Redcoats, tea with the Queen, holding hands with May - while the British people told the truth to the world that the man is scum. If we turned that into a mass social movement against Brexit and the Far Right, we can and will defeat them.

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