

SUBVERSION

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LET COLSTON FALL!

The League of Communists in Britain condemns the racist murder of George Floyd by police in the American city of Minneapolis, Minnesota, and those that have followed. The tragic killing is the latest in a long series of killings by the police forces in the United States, events which have seen victims and their families denied justice by the institutionally racist state institutions in the US.

It is clear the influence of the far right on American political life, and in particular the ruling Republican party and President Donald Trump, has allowed a climate of racist violence to pervade American

society. The hypocrisy allows heavily-armed white anti-lockdown protestors to occupy public buildings with impunity, but which punishes black presence in society with indiscriminate violence, clearly demonstrates how ingrained racist practices are in American society.

Furthermore, the League notes that both the disproportionate use of lockdown powers against black and minority ethnic people in the UK, and the disproportionate number of deaths by Covid-19 amongst BAME patients, shows that neither is Britain a society without engrained racism.

We call upon emphatic justice for George Floyd and for urgent measures to reform the police system in the States, and express our solidarity with those protestors fighting for action.

We further congratulate the initiative of those activists who dumped the statue of Tory slavedriver Edward Colston to the bottom of the Bristol docks, where he belongs. It is only through these and other direct actions can the movement for black liberation demonstrate the hypocrisy of the modern Tory party and the racism of the British state.



The League of Communists in Britain calls for the removal of all statues in Britain which commemorate the racist history of the slave trade and British imperialism, starting with the renowned engineer of apartheid Cecil Rhodes, and for the protection from prosecution of all those who deliver Colston into a watery grave. Black lives matter!



LEXIT:

THE GRAND DELUSION

As Britain prepares to leave the mechanisms of the European Union in full at the end of 2020, and with every effort to extend the transition period being rebuffed, it is clear to most observers what the next few years have in prospect: deregulation of the labour market, extensive privatisation, and a low tax economy, all with a heavily pro-American and Trans-Atlanticist political agenda. In fact, as the Johnson government continues to press ahead with laughably one-sided talks with the United States on a free trade deal it is clear that this was the entire objective of the Brexit project. It is surely no surprise then that the social forces that drove and supported Brexit, from the right of the Conservative Party to UKIP to the BNP to Rupert Murdoch, are those that have been behind the rightward drift in British politics for the past 45 years. What is a surprise, however, is that a section of the British left has been along for the ride in supporting that project. So, what drove the miniscule proponents of Lexit to be the statist wingman for Brexit?

State Socialism & National Sovereignty

The first thing to explain about the Lexit project is that those who propose it – namely, the Communist movement and the traditional Labour left, amongst others – are wedded to the nation-state as the primary unit for economic and political activity. Since the policy of ‘socialism in one country’ in the Soviet Union in the late 1920s these groups have accepted the unity of the national economy, the political territory of the state, and the role of national parliaments in directing their work to be sacrosanct, and the basic aim of political activity by the state socialist left has always been to remove any barriers that prevent economic activity from being directed by a national parliament on a national basis. Popular control of the economy, in these terms, purely means the control of economic activity by the masses through Parliament.

Practically, this entails many techniques – nationalisation, for sure, but also import tariffs, price controls, export restrictions, immigration controls, wage councils, and protectionism – all of which have long since ceased to be political currency amongst the British left since the emergence of the ‘new left’ in the 1960s. This is certainly one of the reasons why the goals of Lexit proved to be unpalatable to the modern left, as they would at least appear to be remarkably conservative by modern political standards. Nonetheless, ‘popular sovereignty’ requires a directed and planned economy under the direction of Parliament, with no international or legal barriers to the expression of the ‘popular’ political will – that, at least, is the idea. ‘Nationalism’ and especially economic nationalism, on these terms, is not necessarily considered to be a bad thing in the language of Lexit.

Nazis, the CIA, and a 'Trojan Horse'

Bearing this in mind, we need to go back to the start of the European project to see the beginnings of leftist antipathy towards it. The European Coal & Steel Community, the forerunner to the EEC and EU that was formerly launched at the Treaty of Paris in 1951, came into being at a time where the political division of Europe between NATO and the Warsaw Pact was still being keenly felt across the continent. To Communists, the ECSC was an attempt to give the USA economic & military influence over Western Europe and to undermine the Comecon/Warsaw Pact nations – effectively, it was simply another arm of US-NATO social imperialism. Furthermore, it involved West Germany, a state considered by the Communist-affiliated left to be nothing more than a US client state and Nazi refuge, as opposed to its strictly ‘anti-fascist’ eastern comparator (the DDR).

In this way, the EEC and its forerunner organisations were a *bête noire* for the British far left long before the possibility of British participation ever became an issue. Anne Scargill would later recall that her first date with her husband-to-be Arthur in the late 1950s was to a protest against the EEC; and as the prospect of joining the common market became gradually more attractive to successive British governments the issue became even more pressing politically. As the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) put it in 1961:

“The real alternative to the Common Market is the carrying out by Britain of a truly independent political and economic line. By breaking free from the NATO alliance, by smashing down the barriers to trade with the most rapidly advancing sections of

the world, by opening up trade with the Commonwealth on a much bigger scale, this country could stride forward. It has the skilled workers, the know-how and the basic equipment. What holds it back is the nineteenth century imperialist outlook of its ruling class, which is not interested in Britain's economic development but only in its own profit. Their surrender to the Common Market marks the ultimate bankruptcy of their policy."



Birch: "The European bourgeoisie, the neo Nazis, and the USA agents in Europe."

Another factor in far-left opposition to the EEC and EU was that, as opposed to abstentionism in Parliamentary or trade union work which was strictly condemned by Lenin in *Left-Wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder* as ultra-leftist and politically immature, these new European bodies were not considered legitimate popular institutions in a Leninist sense. Therefore, Communists were free to be as vituperative and ultra-leftist in their criticisms as they wished. Perhaps it was best expressed by the Communist Party of Britain Marxist-Leninist (CPB-ML)'s Reg Birch, who described the position in typically hysterical terms:

"We in Britain are being urged to put into cold storage our revolutionary task and to join in an alliance with our employing ruling class, the bourgeoisie, to strengthen NATO and its economic arm the EEC, so embracing the European bourgeoisie, the neo Nazis, and the USA agents in Europe, to crush the aspirations of the European working class for freedom, national independence and revolution."

'Balance of Social Forces'

As British society left the '60s and entered the '70s, it was clear that a growing economic crisis was arising.

For the Macmillan, Wilson, and Heath governments the solution to the economic challenges caused by the loss of Britain's colonies was to join the EEC, a new & growing market for British goods; whereas for the left the battle to defend worker's interests and install a Labour government committed to radical socialist policies was paramount. Such a struggle was reaching its height, industrial militancy in the UK nearing its most successful period, with the UCS lock-in and the miner's strikes of 1972 and 1974 being key examples of a strategy that seemed to be working, especially as the latter led to the election of a Labour government which promised '*a fundamental and irreversible shift in the balance of wealth and power in favour of working people and their families*'.

The mid-70s was also an exciting time internationally for the left. The final defeat of the US in Vietnam, the fall of fascist or military regimes in Spain, Portugal, and Greece, and the *compresso storico* of the Italian Communists in 1976, all led the left to conclude that the 'balance of social forces' (as Suslov put it) was tilting towards them worldwide. Was a revolutionary situation in Britain now possible? If it appeared that way for the left in 1974-76 then it certainly appeared that way for the industrial bosses, military elites and conservative political figures of Britain too, some of whom were preparing to launch a coup in the event of a socialist government. MI5 were, after all, convinced that Harold Wilson was a KGB agent. Joining the EU was therefore the last thing on the minds of the working-class militants of the '70s.

The referendum on EEC membership took place 1 1975, at Wilson's hand-wringing behest, in heady days of political confusion and opportunity. The 'No' campaign would feature many political forces – SNP, Sinn Féin (both official and Provisional), Plaid Cymru – that would reassess their position 41 years later, and others (notably the Communist Party) who would not; and it was Tony Benn who led the left-wing opposition to membership from within Labour itself, leading to a long tradition of Bennite Euroscepticism within the party.

The Yes campaign would crucially win that campaign, and soon the perceived opportunities that the mid-70s presented for the left would fade away. Spain, Portugal, and Greece would not yield any breakthrough for the left, and all three would join the EEC in 1986. The election of the Thatcher government in 1979 would lead to a full-scale retreat for the left throughout Europe, where even

the Mitterrand government of 1981 would soon reverse its socialist programme in face of the forces of globalisation, and in 1989 Labour would formally drop its opposition to the EEC. With many of the social-democratic forces in Europe following suit (the Italian, French, and Spanish communists all adopting more nuanced attitudes during the '80s), the opposition of the state socialist left in Britain began to take on a more anachronistic hue.

Even during the Miners' Strike of '84-'85, when the ability of the Thatcher government to import coal from other EEC states underlined the merits of their political position, it was still the French workers in the CGT trade union that undertook solidarity action to limit the movement of coal – whereas the Communist authorities of Poland continued to export coal to Britain throughout the strike.

Maastricht & After

The political basis of support for and opposition to the EEC – now the European Union – changed entirely after the 1992 Maastricht Treaty. The provisions in the Treaty for political & monetary union, and for the basic standards of trade & employment practice that entailed, were anathema to the right-wing of the Conservative Party, and throughout the Major government and afterwards the issue dominated political debate within the Tories. This directly led to the formation of the Referendum Party, and eventually to UKIP, and the modern political forces behind Brexit.



Delors addresses the TUC in 1988

For the left, however, chastened by the collapse of state socialist regimes in eastern Europe and by four consecutive Conservative victories, Maastricht was an opportunity. European Commission President Jacques Delors had successfully sold the benefits of the Social Charter to the labour movement with his speech to the TUC in 1988, and as a result the labour movement came to accept the legal protections of the Treaty to be vital. At a time when Britain already

had the worst trade union laws in Europe, and the Major government were privatising more state assets than Thatcher ever did, it was clear to a movement dealing with the realities of organising in the post-militancy era that the provisions of the Social Charter were a protection from the worst excesses of Thatcherism. The TUC, and with it most major unions, were convinced of the necessity of European employment protections, a position that has remained unchanged ever since.

For left-wing opponents of the EU, however, these developments would leave them unreconciled. The accession of a whole raft of post-Communist states to the EU in 2004 and 2007 rankled, and as the free movement of labour posed challenges to organising in low-skilled and casualised sectors their opposition became more entrenched. Concerns about the privatisation of transport & health services (in the Services Directive), the limits of strike action (the Viking and Laval ECJ judgements) and the use of overseas labour on 'home' terms & conditions (the Lindsey dispute) were all seized as cause celebre of workers' opposition to the EU during the 2000s, led primarily by the RMT union, the Communist Party of Britain (CPB) and many other groups on the far left.

However, it is still difficult to see how the higher echelons of the EU political machinery were primarily to blame for these developments, rather domestic political issues – such as principally trade union organisation, and privatisation. Britain's key weaknesses – its poor employment rights, and reliance on financial & other services – were unique to Britain, due to both the legacy of 40 years of neoliberalism and (it has to be said) the weakness of the left in opposing it, yet the Eurosceptics of the left nonetheless continued to blame the EU for British political weaknesses. The EU became to be the ultimate 'big bad' of British left in the late '2000s and into the new decade.

Workers of All Lands?

In fact, opposition to the EU soon became the 'primary contradiction' for Britain's left, even above Britain's ruling class. This took the Lexit movement to some incredibly weird – and dark – places: the Communist Party of Britain joined the 'People's Pledge' campaign alongside many Eurosceptics including members of the Conservative Party's ultra-Brexit European Research Group (ERG); and later the Morning Star would carry an article stating that the EU 'Empire' should not be dictating to the British state about a border with Ireland – "*Brussels dominates Dublin and now wants to dominate*

Belfast. Its imposition of a hard border would be a new form of colonialism in itself." Such sentiments, where the single market is considered more imperialist than the actually-imperialist British border in Ireland, shows how far from their principles Lexiteers had strayed in their opposition to a free trade area.

However, it was free movement of labour that would prove to provide the 'red pill' for British communism. Unable to organise the thousands of newly arrived migrant workers, and seemingly unable to blame themselves, economic nationalism turned into something much nastier. The Campaign Against Euro-Federalism would state *"Economic refugees are largely men who should stay in their own country to fight and struggle for their rights and conditions, and, in support of their legitimate government. They should not be encouraged in any way, as Germany did, to come to EU Member States"*, whilst the CPB-ML argued that *"In the EU freedom of movement just means freedom for employers to lower pay and avoid training"*, and Trade Unionists Against the EU argued that *"No nation has ever prospered by allowing its workforce to become nomads and slaves to suit the short term needs of others. A central right of any worker is to be able to prosper and grow in the land of their birth and to have meaningful, gainful and enjoyable employment. Getting on your bike to look for work once caused a furore when Norman Tebbit encouraged unemployed workers to move home for jobs elsewhere. Then somehow it became the accepted norm and even now it is a demand for some on the 'left', and those ironically in unions troubled by low pay and zero hours contracts."*

The political challenge to organise migrant workers suitably ducked, EU migrant workers became the dog-whistle with which Lexit could find new political friends. The Lindsey dispute of February 2009 galvanised this new alliance, and at the 2009 European Elections the RMT and CPB assembled a broad alliance of Lexit-backing organisations called 'No2EU – Yes To Democracy'. It polled 1%, well behind UKIP on 16% and even Scargill's anti-EU Socialist Labour Party.

Living Edgelordism

It would be unfair at this point to leave out the former Trotskyist left from the equation. The Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP), a far-left group whose unpopularity amongst the movement was remarkable even by Trotskyist standards, distinguished themselves mainly through provocative and gimmicky pronouncements in their magazine *Living Marxism*.

Although their other political activity against deportations and for Irish unity were worthy, it would be growing antipathy before all forms of state intervention and mainstream political thinking which became their unique selling point throughout the late '80s and early '90s, to the extent where they claimed that the Srebrenica massacre was faked – the subsequent defamation lawsuit by ITN bankrupted the party and the magazine, leading both to fold. However, these 'edgelords of the left' continued their activity around an libertarian, anti-statist agenda that led them into opposition to everything from 'political correctness' to human rights. As they explained in 1996:

"There is a more pressing need to criticise the fatalistic critics, to counter the doom-mongers and put a positive case for human action in pursuit of social liberation...dealing with...unconventional questions, and puncturing the anti-human prejudices which surround them, is the precondition for making political action possible in our time."

Opposition to the EU became part of this anti-modernist crusade, and continues today through their new organisations such as Spiked! and The Manifesto Club. Former RCP members Claire Fox, James Heartfield and Dr Alka Sehgal Cuthbert all stood as Brexit Party candidates in the 2019 European Elections, whereas fellow RCP alumni Brendan O'Neill has made a career for himself as the 'anti-elitist' rightwing rent-a-quote for the Brexit era.

Through The Looking Glass

It was here, at odds with the movement they claimed to represent, that the forces of Lexit would become the cheering mini-me of the right wing following the EU referendum result in 2016. To portray the referendum result as a ringing endorsement of their 'left' analysis of the EU, as all the parties of Lexit did, rather than an endorsement of the xenophobia of the official Brexit campaign, was delusion of the highest order – especially as those mass organisations of the working class to which they are committed, not just the TUC and the Labour Party but UNITE, UNISON, the GMB, the FBU, TSSA, amongst others – had organised for Remain. This was 'magic eye' politics of the worst order: to claim the victories of the worst sections of your class enemy as your own, simply because it fits your own delusional agenda.

Is there a future for Lexit? Post-Corbyn, post-Coronavirus, there most certainly is not. Those groups that still advocate Lexit are far from any

position to influence what happens next, which for them is a blessing. If leaving the European Union opens up 'new avenues of struggle', then we can all look forward to fighting for what we have – all over again.



' MODERATION '

The recent election of Keir Starmer as leader of the Labour party was seen by many of the political commentariat as a victory for the forces of political 'moderation', and all the qualities that entails: compromise, centrism, and 'common sense'. This was regarded as a good thing, after the period of 'extremism' apparently represented by the Corbyn leadership.

Setting aside the fact that considering Jeremy Corbyn a firebrand is in itself rather pathetic (is nationalising the railways, or opposing the Iraq war, 'extreme'?), this might be a good time to ask the question – what is 'moderation', and why is it deemed by many to be a satisfactory quality?

The concept of 'moderation' in political matters is linked to the concepts with which people see themselves. People (or rather, most people) like to consider themselves 'reasonable'; to consider themselves pragmatic, level-headed. No one likes to consider themselves irrational, or a fanatic. This demarcation between a reasonable 'us' and an extreme 'them' needs a comparator to have any currency, which is why people who define themselves as moderate need 'extremists' to define themselves against. In relation to the above example, self-defined Labour 'moderates' wished to distinguish themselves from the perceived political failings of the Corbyn leadership by calling him and his supporters 'extremist' – in a way, saying 'it's not us, it's him'.

Although the general appeal of political moderation appears to be widely accepted amongst the political mainstream (or at least those who comment upon it), it creates severe practical problems in moments that require political action. Anyone who has been involved in political or trade union struggles knows that although the membership of mass organisations may purport to cherish pragmatism and moderation, it is in times of crisis – jobs cuts, disaster, war, austerity – that the same membership demand action, and place great pressure upon their leadership to act accordingly. At these times, a bold clarity of action – an intensity – is required, of the

kind that would have been previously denounced as militancy.

Yet, as anyone in these situations will testify, less reliable activists will immediately try and distance themselves from any proposals for action and criticise them to anyone who'll listen as 'extreme'. In industrial disputes, such elements will also be approached and picked off by management to undermine the unity of the agreed approach. In these situations, 'moderation' merely works to undermine unity of action in times of extremis – when things are important.

But what if the continuing political reality is actually extreme, and important? Movements which are materially impacted by oppression – occupation, poverty, racism – keenly feel a sense of urgency that imbues their work with a sense of intensity. Daily political activity becomes an immediately engaging struggle, rather than an occasionally erupting routine. It is these activists, acting out of the urgent personal expression of their experiences, that are routinely condemned as 'extremist'. Conversely, it is those elements of society that are not immediately impacted by these issues that will condemn them for the boldness of their actions, and instead call for a 'moderation' of approach. Those who are not effected by oppression on a daily basis will invariably fail to see the need for radical social change, and it is this group who not only prevent the struggles of the oppressed from gaining greater support, but also that directly or indirectly benefit from their failure.

For example: I remember commenting on the nature of the placards and slogans at an anti-Brexit rally – puns, pop culture references, in-jokes - the exact opposite of the anger and intensity of a political rally. When I pointed out that the smug, privileged nature of these slogans belied the middle class nature of the protest itself, an acquaintance (a white, middle aged, middle class male) said that was how he liked it, and that he liked 'witty' protests that 'didn't take themselves too seriously'. A protest without the protest, then – a protest with nothing at stake. The contrast to the anger around the Windrush scandal and the anger that created could not have been more marked.

Furthermore, 'moderation' relates itself to the politics of compromise – but not obtaining compromise from those with power, but a Solomon compromise of mutually shared blame. With this, all resistance to oppression is automatically morally equated to that of the oppressor – hence anti-fascism being considered 'as bad as' fascism itself. The fact that

compromise cannot be reached with genocide is in that analysis irrelevant - the real purpose of this approach is to make its proponents feel more attractive in the eyes of those who have power. It suddenly becomes just as lucrative to attack progressives as it is to attack Nazis.

Yet another ingenious way moderates undermine activists is by subsuming all forms of historical protest into their (non-existent) tradition of moderation. Here, Martin Luther King, Cesar Chavez, Stonewall, and other successful liberation movements become examples of 'moderate' social protests – in complete denial of their methods, roots, and political analysis.

If politics is not engaged with the experiences of oppression, then it loses the urgency to resolve them. In fact, without this experience it begins to lose the ability to even relate to the need for social change. The political moderates of today would doubtless have condemned the Spartacus and Boedica uprisings as extremist actions that 'risked alienating moderate Romans', and would have doubted the need for every major social upheaval in history. If you're not directly impacted by oppression, then you don't want liberation – you want management. Or, probably more accurately, to *be* management.

So, we need to recognise the push for 'moderation' as what it is: the closing down of avenues for social change and struggles against oppression, because their very existence embarrasses or undermines the privileged. But, when the next moment of crisis happens – like Coronavirus, and the current Black Lives Matter protests – that moderation becomes useless. It is in these moments that opportunity arises for real change. However, what is important for activists is not to lose the intensity that the purveyors of moderation would have us lose.



ABOUT

THE LEAGUE

The League of Communists in Britain was formed on 30th November 2011, and is a non-party, political organisation dedicated to grassroots political activity and practical solidarity. We are an inclusive, broad and non-sectarian platform for the non-authoritarian Left, and we include anarchists, communists, socialists and environmentalists in our affiliates. We believe that we are working in a post-Leninist politics, where the issue is not the establishment of another 'revolutionary vanguard' but that of developing political consciousness, supporting struggles against oppression and exploitation, and to work towards building a mass movement.

Communism in the 21st century is not a struggle for state power, but the engagement in a radical, decentralised politics which manifests itself as a challenge and resistance to exploitation and oppression on the basis of class, gender, sexuality, disability, nationality, immigration status, species and religion. Resistance and practical solidarity is the basis for all of the League's political work. We work to defend human rights and political autonomy, provide humanitarian assistance and support those in struggle. We publish a regular newspaper, 'Subversion', which acts as a focus for politics and organising. Our members are active in trade unions, campaigning groups, refugee support organisations, and the anti-cuts movement.

We believe in a radical politics which is decentralised and broad; we do not have a structure of committees or branches, we have no conditions of affiliation or payment of dues, and we do not work on the basis of an agreed political 'line'. Instead our emphasis is on practical political work, and not on party building. Affiliation is open to anyone, regardless of membership of other organisations, who agrees with our core mission statement and signs our equalities disclaimer. Affiliation costs £1 per month.