

Anti-migrant propaganda dominates UK Brexit referendum

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Official campaigning for the June 23 referendum on UK membership of the European Union (EU) is plumbing the depths of anti-immigrant xenophobia.

Last Thursday, the Office for National Statistics released figures revealing that net migration to the UK had risen to 333,000 in 2015, the second highest figure on record, with EU-only net migration at 184,000, equalling its record high.

The ONS report prominently pointed out that the 20,000 rise in net migration was caused by a 22,000 drop in the number of British people moving abroad rather than a rising influx of migrants. But this was almost universally ignored as the media and leading lights in the Leave campaign denounced Prime Minister David Cameron for failing to honour his own anti-migrant pledges and to blame this failure on EU membership and the free movement accorded to its citizens.

Over the next days the anti-migrant propaganda reached fevered levels, especially after a poll for the *Guardian* reported a two point lead for Leave for the first time and a *Daily Telegraph* survey reported a four point rise in one week for a Brexit [British exit from the EU] to 46 percent, with Remain on 51 percent.

Boris Johnson, the former London mayor, and Tory cabinet members Michael Gove and Priti Patel stepped up the attack this week. In a joint statement issued Tuesday, they urged an Australian-style “points-based” system to determine eligibility for entry into the UK after a Leave vote ended the right to “free movement” within Europe.

The document makes clear that this is a challenge to Cameron’s leadership, led by his likely successor, Johnson, in the event of a Brexit. “The automatic right of all EU citizens to come to live and work in the UK will end, as will EU control over vital aspects of our social security system,” they wrote.

“For relevant jobs, we will be able to ensure that all those who come have the ability to speak good English,” the Vote Leave campaign said. “If we implement these principles, for the first time in a generation it will be possible for politicians to keep their promises on migration.”

The targeting of Cameron was underscored by Patel in the *Daily Telegraph*, where she attacked the prime minister as one of a number of socially privileged Remain backers that “fail to care for those who do not have their advantages” and are concerned only with “inexpensive domestic help, willing tradesmen and convenient, cheap travel.”

Patel is a former lobbyist for British American Tobacco and worked for Diageo, the global alcoholic drinks company. In 2012, the newly-minted friend of the British worker co-authored a book, *Brittania Unchained*, declaring, “Once they enter the workplace, the British are among the worst idlers in the world” and arguing that instead of rewarding “laziness” the UK must strive to emulate the work ethic and low-tax culture in parts of Asia.

Gisela Stuart, the Labour co-chair of the Vote Leave campaign, signed the letter, complaining, “The single market means automatic massive free movement of labour.”

The *Daily Express* was among several newspapers to endorse the plan, declaring, “We must end open-door immigration,” whereas others argued that a points-based system was too lax as evidenced by Australia allowing in far greater numbers of migrants. In the *Spectator*, Lord Green, the head of the right-wing think tank Migrant Watch, urged a “tough system of work permits confined to the highly skilled ... enforced by extending current penalties (hefty fines and possible imprisonment) to any citizens—European or otherwise—who were found to be working here without a permit.”

UK Independence Party (UKIP) leader Nigel Farage boasted on *Breitbart*, “Today’s front pages mark a genuine sea change in British politics. The two men most likely to succeed David Cameron as prime minister have both now publicly committed to an Australian-style points system for immigration. There can be no going back from these positions.”

The Remain campaign shares responsibility for fuelling anti-migrant sentiment, with Cameron not only pledging to reduce migration to less than 100,000 a year but making measures to curb the benefits available to migrants a key

platform of his argument to remain in the EU. More important still is the actual role of the EU in constructing a “Fortress Europe” to repel migrants fleeing the devastation created by the colonial wars waged by Europe and the United States in the Middle East and North Africa.

A particularly venal role is being played by the main pseudo-left groups in the UK advocating a “Left Leave” vote—the Socialist Workers Party, Socialist Party, Counterfire and the Stalinist Communist Party of Britain.

The central message they have insisted on is that nothing matters more in the referendum than that a Leave vote will precipitate a leadership challenge to Cameron. Whoever displaces Cameron, they insist, there will be civil war in the Tory party, which will speed the day for the subsequent election of a Labour government under Jeremy Corbyn.

To this end, the pseudo-left have denounced the undemocratic character of the EU, while at the same time boosting the democratic credentials of the British parliament. Above all they have had to downplay the threat posed to the working class from the rising fortunes of the right wing of the Tory Party and UKIP and the poisonous anti-migrant sentiment being whipped up.

On April 4, Chris Bamberry of *Counterfire* complained, “Many, particularly on the left, predicted this would be vile campaign dominated by racism and the presence of Nigel Farage and Ukip. But it hasn’t worked out like that. Farage and Ukip have been sidelined. ... Far from being a carnival of reaction and racism, it is fairly boring.”

The SWP’s “Six myths about the European Union” insisted, “Bosses need European migrants—and if Britain left the EU, they would not be kicked out. ... Mass deportations or even a tough visa regime would risk economic disaster. So there is immense pressure to keep the status quo.”

Tomáš Tengely-Evans of the SWP enthused this week, “Tory MPs are gunning for David Cameron—and ready to depose the prime minister after the European Union referendum,” before insisting, “This is the left’s chance to topple the Tories and push back against their austerity and racism.”

Dave Sewell, also of SWP, argues that whereas the “racist Tory right and Ukip, not the left, brought up the debate on the EU” and “They, not us, are the most visible face of ‘Brexit’. ... it doesn’t follow that they would be the ones to benefit ...”

“The biggest beneficiary so far of the Tories’ EU splits has been Jeremy Corbyn,” says Sewell. Therefore, he insists, “Telling people that the choice is between Cameron, the EU and the bosses on one hand or Farage and the racists on the other [i.e., telling the truth!] is dangerously counterproductive.”

The *Socialist Worker’s* “What we Think” column on May

24 goes so far as to claim those who “argue that the bigger enemy is ‘Fortress Britain’” fail to recognise how voting Leave will “blow a hole in the walls of Fortress Europe.”

This will supposedly undermine Cameron’s plans to use the EU “to police” the UK’s borders “because he wants to make sure refugees in Greece never reach Britain. ... Anti-racists must fight for open borders and freedom of movement.”

This is the most disgusting cynicism. Left Leave are standing in the same trench as Johnson and Farage and dragooning workers behind the reactionary bourgeois forces they speak for.

They even echo the propaganda of the Tory right that the free movement of EU citizens is a threat to the livelihoods of British workers, rather than urge a united offensive against the capitalist class.

On the Left Leave web site, CPB General Secretary Robert Griffiths states, “The ‘free movement of people principle in the Treaty of Rome (1957) has always been a cloak for the ‘free movement of labour,’ so that workers can move more easily to where business can make a bigger profit from them. ... The result has been mass migrations of capital, jobs and labour across Europe at the expense of national and regional economies, local communities and union negotiated terms and conditions of employment.”

An article by Socialist Party supporter Thomas Barker complains of EU legislation allowing “workers to float from country to country within the EU” and of this playing “a pernicious role in undermining pay and conditions for existing workforces.”

The Left Leave campaign is framed precisely as a defence of national and regional economies, i.e., British capitalism, and “existing workforces” from the impact of migrant labour. Everything else, including the cynical demand to “Open the borders!” to migrants—when the ruling elite is united in sealing borders off even more firmly—is smoke and mirrors to conceal the devil’s compact they have made with the right.



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