This summer’s vote for Brexit on the back of an anti-immigrant, xenophobic Leave campaign, and the election of right-wing demagogue Donald Trump in the United States, are part of a dangerous turn to the right in world politics. The rights of workers, migrants, women, ethnic minorities and LGBT communities are under threat. Donald Trump’s move to protectionism and his promise to bolster US military spending will worsen inter-state conflicts and increase the chance of war between major powers.

Following Trump’s election, major flashpoints are likely to occur in the United States as people mobilise to defend reproductive rights, Mexican and other immigrants, Muslims and the Black community. And with the rise of racism and xenophobia across Europe we are entering a new phase of major defensive struggles aimed at stopping the rise of the extreme right.

IT’S TIME TO SOUND THE ALARM!
EUROPE'S FAR-RIGHT SURGE

Across Europe the far right has the Brexit-Trump wind in its sails.

In France the Front National’s Marine Le Pen is strongly placed to win the presidency next year. As Thatcherite candidate François Fillon puts it, “France has never been so right wing.” Le Pen calls for a “Frexit” referendum, a crackdown on Muslims, and reduced benefits and health care for immigrants. Front National won 27% of the vote in regional elections in December 2015.

In the Netherlands the Party for Freedom holds 15 seats in the Dutch parliament, calls for the closing of all Islamic schools, recording the ethnicity of all citizens, and withdrawal from the EU. Their Islamophobic leader Geert Wilders is piling up support.

In Hungary Jobbik, led by Gábor Vona is opposed to free trade and immigration, wants an EU referendum, proposes criminalising gay sexuality, and argues there is an international Jewish conspiracy. Jobbik won 20% of the vote in 2014, making it the third largest party. Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, head of the national conservative Fidesz party, has much in common with Jobbik, being anti-EU, anti-immigrant, and anti-liberal.

In Austria the Freedom Party wants stronger borders, reduced benefits for immigrants, and job discrimination in favour of Austrians. We welcome the defeat of its presidential candidate Norbert Hofer but the Freedom Party is likely to make gains in next year’s parliamentary elections.

In Poland Law and Justice is anti-gay, anti-abortion, and says we are unable to accept migrants because we do not have a “place on the job market”. They won 38% of the vote in the October 2015 elections, making them the largest party, with its leader Beata Szydło becoming prime minister.

In Sweden the Sweden Democrats favours heavy restrictions on immigration, a bloc on Turkey joining the EU, and a referendum on continuing EU membership. Led by Jimmie Åkesson, Sweden Democrats won 13% of the vote in elections in 2014. In Slovakia the People’s Party – Our Slovakia led by Marian Koliba favours leaving the EU and argues that “even one immigrant is one too many.” They won 8% of the vote in March 2016.

In Germany Alternative for Germany calls for a ban on the building of mosques, says “Islam does not belong in Germany”, and threatens to shoot anyone crossing the border illegally. Led by Frauke Petry they won up to 25% of the vote in regional elections in March 2015 and look set to make further gains in the federal elections in 2017.

BRITAIN’S BREXIT VOTE

Then there is Britain’s Brexit vote, where 52% voted Leave, largely on the basis of vacuous “take back control” rhetoric and much more serious and sinister anti-immigrant racism.

Don’t be misled by the idea that the Brexit referendum represented a victory for workers or that the Trump vote is really just about economics: whatever the motives of different voters, these victories represented the triumph of xenophobia and are a major boost to the far right.

Trump’s victory and the Brexit vote show the crisis and semi-collapse of the political ‘centre’ as people rebel against those, like the US Democratic Party, the French and Spanish socialist parties, and Labour pre-Corbyn, who in power have managed neo-liberal austerity and whose claim to represent ordinary workers and oppressed minorities is now threadbare.

Austerity, especially since the financial crisis of 2007, has done major damage to the lives of millions, hammering down wages, closing social services and redistributing wealth to the elite, above all the richest one per cent. The exaggeration of millions with falling living standards and disappearing futures however is not necessarily being captured by the forces of social progress and the Left. UKIP and Trump show that right-wing damagogues who falsely claim to be against the establishment can win mass support, backed by an incoherent anti-immigrant and anti-Left media campaign.

In Britain this campaign is led by the hysterical pro-Brexit racist newspapers like the Daily Mail, The Sun and The Telegraph. And like other European television broadcasters, the BBC (and of course Sky) give endless coverage to the reactionary right, ‘mainstreaming’ racists like Le Pen and Farage. Programmes such as Newsnight and Question Time are dominated by the political right. Everywhere, backed by constant media exposure, the extreme right builds the same kind of electoral alliance, cementing together xenophobic and racist policies and voters with a minority section of working class voters, especially those in areas hit by de-industrialisation and mass poverty.

THE FAR RIGHT IN POWER

The possibility of authoritarian right-wing governments in power represents a major threat to working people and all oppressed groups. Le Pen and Trump in power would represent something way beyond Thatcherism in the 1980s. At the very least a major assault on civil liberties, working class organisation and rights, and migrant communities will occur. While existing police forces and courts could be relied on to carry out this reactionary mission, the use of right wing groups of thugs is also possible. In France the Front National has a well-trained stewarding force, the DPD, made up largely of ex-servicemen and former police officers, ready to do battle in the streets on behalf of the leader.

If the victory of far-right parties does not mean the immediate imposition of fascism, the road could be opened to it. What’s going on in Turkey shows how democratically elected governments can, at times of acute crisis, turn towards dictatorships. The government’s intention to say it couldn’t happen in Western Europe or the US, many thought Brexit was impossible and the election of Trump was impossible. Authoritarian dictatorship is possible if we don’t act to stop it.

WHAT CAN WE DO?

To throw back the reactionary right we have to face down racism and xenophobia and defeat austerity.

We must fight to defend freedom of movement – it’s an advance for the European working class. The Tories now seek to strip migrant workers of their rights as European citizens and to reduce those workers to the status of guest workers making their lives ever more precarious. They already have plans to force the three million EU nationals here to carry ID cards.

We defend democracy and the rights of parliament against the executive. In the light of the Office of Budget Responsibility report showing the stagnation of wages and predicting endless austerity which Brexit will only deepen, we need to demand: Britain needs a pay rise! This means a living wage as the national minimum and the dismantling of zero hours contracts. It means an end to cuts across the board of trade union rights. Defence of the NHS and social care, provision of affordable housing and good quality education are essential campaigns.

MIGRATION WORKS!

We need to build a movement based on opposition to Brexit and defence of migration. We must unite all those under threat from the turn to the right – migrant workers and refugees together with all who face continued austerity. It must be anti-racist to its core, opposing the Islamophobic culture being promoted in British political life and it must defend migration as a positive benefit for society as a whole. A strong anti-racist movement is needed to challenge not just the existing fascist groups, but also Islamophobia and the assault on free movement implied by Brexit. We need the broadest possible campaign, irrespective of whether people voted Remain or Leave, without giving ground to the idea that the Brexit vote was a progressive vote and an opportunity for the left. On the contrary, racism and xenophobia have been legitimised by the Brexit vote.

A wave of reaction threatens to engulf us all. The defeat of the fascist presidential candidate in Austria allows us a small breathing space – we must take advantage of it to build a European left that can rise to the challenge that we face.

The Trump presidency heralds a new reactionary period in world politics. Economic protectionism together with a massive increase in military spending and a much more belligerent attitude towards China – wrapped in a racist and xenophobic politics – makes the world a much more dangerous and unstable place. The radical socialist left must place itself at the heart of the resistance to this turn of events.

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