

# BREXIT AND TRUMP

# SOUND THE ALARM

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.

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## 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 Islamophobe leader Geert Wilders is piling up support.

**In Greece** *Golden Dawn* is opposed to the EU, warns of the 'Islamisation of Greece', and organises anti-migrant marches near refugee camps. Led by Nikos Michaloliakos, they hold 18 seats in the Greek parliament making it the third largest party.

**In Hungary** *Jobbik*, led by Gabor 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 Victor Orban, 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 Szydlo becoming prime minister.

**In Sweden** the *Sweden Democrats* favours heavy restrictions on immigration, a block on Turkey joining the EU, and a referendum on continuing EU membership. Led by Jimmie Akesson,

*Sweden Democrats* won 13% of the vote in elections in 2014.

**In Slovakia** the *People's Party – Our Slovakia* led by Marian Kotleba 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 2016 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, crushing social services and redistributing wealth to the elite, above all the richest one per cent. The exasperation 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 demagogues who falsely claim to be against 'the establishment' can win mass support, backed by an incessant 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



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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 reactionary middle class 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 *DPS*, 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 dictatorship. It is utter complacency 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 these 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 also a living wage as the national minimum and the outlawing of zero hours contracts. It means an end to cuts across the board and especially it means the restoration 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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