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Brexit: Leavers are out in the cold and totally misrepresented

The real reasons a majority voted to leave the EU are being ignored as a smokescreen of racism and xenophobia is thrown up by the pro corporate liberal left writes **John Tyrrell**

THE millions who voted to leave the EU are being ignored in the current debate. Brexit is now a toxic brand, associated with the names of right-wing Ukip and Tory campaigners who sought to leave the EU in the 2016 referendum.

The idea that you might vote to leave because of the EU's neoliberal agenda got buried, and with it the plight of those who suffered most from it when they took the opportunity to protest.

A variety of politicians have been at pains to point out that the vote was legitimate in reflecting the views of a majority and must be honoured. However everywhere there are campaigns to get a reversal of the outcome and demanding a second ballot, whatever the constitutional implications.

Some 17,410,742 people voted to leave the EU in the referendum on June 23 2016. Who were they? During the campaign itself air-time and column inches were dominated by one side led by Nigel Farage and Boris Johnson.

Both peddled intolerance, including views which were both racist and xenophobic. This may characterise their own supporters, but how far does this cover all who voted Leave?

Just how representative are they of many of the Leave voters? In the 2015 general election Ukip secured 4,376,635 votes (falling to just 594,068 in 2017). This leaves more than 13,000,000 whose views and motives are unknown and untested.

In an article "Why they Left" published in Jacobin, Professor Costas Lapavistas describes in more detail the characteristics of the voters on both sides in a description of two rifts, which is minor among the elite group but is major among those in society at large.

He says: “According to the Ashcroft poll, 64 per cent of the C2, D and E categories (ie class classifications) voted for Brexit; these are basically skilled and unskilled manual workers, casual workers, those who depend on the welfare state for their income and so on.”

This is followed by a detailed breakdown area by area. It articulates how the confusion arises in a description of a “minor rift” between Leavers and Remainers in the “British ruling class” contrasted by much more serious a “major rift” in the wider society.

How much members of the ruling elite have in common with the clear majority of voters is highly debatable.

In the current debate they are invisible, and it is difficult to see who is representing people deeply affected by neoliberal policies of austerity and privatisation. The widespread assumption is that as a group they are deeply racist and xenophobic. Misrepresentation is endemic.

The EU elite, closely associated with bankers, financiers and those associated with the 2008 financial crash, are using a poisoned cocktail of “suppression and mainly deception,” according to Takis Fotopoulos in his article “The Systematic Effort of the Transnational Elite to Crush the ‘Brexit Revolution’” (www.antiglobalization.org).

He states that “the apparent collapse of the ‘Brexit revolution,’ far from reflecting the feelings of the victims of globalisation, which, if anything, gets stronger all the time, [it] simply reflections the vicious attacks of the elites against any political expression that the Brexit revolution has taken ... they may have successfully temporarily succeeded in suppressing the growing anger of the victims of globalisation.”

He notes that the left, long associated with “societies’ victims, has clearly changed sides in the globalisation era....”

How can the left defect to such a right-wing cause? For me, the article that sums it up was printed in an International Monetary Fund paper in June 2016 which lays bare its inhuman origin. In the article headed “Neoliberalism Oversold?” it is stated: “Milton Friedman in 1982 hailed Chile as an ‘economic miracle.’

“Nearly a decade earlier, Chile had turned to policies that have since been widely emulated across the globe. The neoliberal agenda — a label used more by critics than by the architects of the policies — rests on two main planks.

“The first is increased competition, achieved by deregulation and the opening up of domestic markets, including financial markets, to foreign competition. The second is a smaller role for the state, achieved through privatisation and limits on the ability of governments to run fiscal deficits and accumulate debt.”

While the authors note some excesses, including “increased inequality,” they maintain: “There is much to cheer about in the neoliberal agenda.”

Maybe for the few benefiting from the finance sector and its ability to print money, but certainly not the majority who depend on producing goods and getting well-paid and dependable employment for their existence.

Back in 1975 when a referendum was at last called on going into Europe, the labour movement was very clear and united. Many campaigned around the country, including Tony Benn along with Arthur Scargill and Jeremy Corbyn.

Benn stated that “the EU has the only constitution in the world committed to capitalism. It destroys the prospects of socialism anywhere in Europe, making capitalism a constitutional requirement of that set-up.”

He repeated this at the time of the Maastricht Treaty when the so-called “four freedoms” allowed powerful companies to move goods, people (workers), services and capital around at will, never mind the consequences for people and communities losing their industries and work. Recently in the Midlands, parts of Jaguar/Landrover were the subject of a relocation to Slovakia.

No doubt this will be welcomed by workers in the Slovak Republic, but they, like their counterparts in Britain, will have no control over their employers.

Regrettably there was little resistance to this latest demonstration of power in the hands of unaccountable multinational corporations above elected governments. Corrupt lobby systems in both Brussels and Westminster ensure the compliance of both members and officers.

In the current debate the mass of voters who decided enough was enough are being wilfully ignored. At the same time the losers are making every attempt for a re-run, with campaigns being conducted by groups claiming to be on the “left.” Do they begin to understand what the EU is about? We have had the vote. Leave the EU now.

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