



RECLAIMING DEMOCRACY

The Left Case for Sovereignty

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Reclaiming Democracy

The Left Case for Sovereignty

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RECLAIMING DEMOCRACY

The Left Case for Sovereignty

**“What power have you got?
Where did you get it from?
In whose interests do you use it?
To whom are you accountable?
How do we get rid of you?”**

Anyone who cannot answer the last of those questions does not live in a democratic system.”

The Rt Hon. Tony Benn (1925 – 2014)

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“The essence of totalitarian government, and perhaps the nature of every bureaucracy, is to make functionaries and mere cogs in the administrative machinery out of men, and thus to dehumanise them.”

Hannah Arendt

Contents

- 4 Foreword**
Claire Fox, Henrik Overgaard-Nielsen
- 5 Euroscepticism as an integral part of the left**
Henrik Overgaard-Nielsen
- 9 An enquiry into the Chartist roots of contemporary democratic movements**
Tom Bewick
- 13 Labour leave – the case for a left wing Brexit**
John Mills
- 16 National sovereignty and the requirements for radical reform**
Dr Peter Ramsay
- 19 What is popular sovereignty really?**
Steve Roberts
- 23 The meaning of real internationalism**
Dr Philip Cunliffe
- 26 Euroscepticism – a trade union and labour movement case**
Lord Maurice Glasman
- 29 The left case for sovereignty – a German perspective**
Sabine Beppler-Spahl
- 33 Nationalism, the nation state, racism and the Brexit vote**
Dr Alka Sehgal Cuthbert
- 36 An open letter to radical democrats**
Claire Fox

“Democracy is the solution to the riddle of all constitutions. Here the constitution is... brought back to its real basis, the real man, the real people, and set up as its own work.”

Karl Marx

Foreword

The aim of this short collection of essays is to present a variety of arguments explaining why the key issue of sovereignty – national and popular – has a firm foundation in left-wing thought. As two Brexit Party MEPs from the left, it has struck us that too often the UK electorate’s vote to leave the EU has been caricatured as right-wing populism. How can this be said when the Eurosceptic roots in Britain firmly lie on the left of the political spectrum and almost 40% of Labour Party voters voted to leave? Populism is often characterised as over-simplistic, one-dimensional sloganeering, what Cas Mudde, a political scientist at the University of Georgia, has defined as a ‘thin ideology’. How ironic, then, that many who self-define as anti-populists and pro-EU resort to simplistic soundbites and ‘thin’ attacks on those who are hostile to, or are merely sceptical about, the EU, dismissing such views as far right.

As MEPs who are pro-European, whilst anti-EU, we hope our fellow MEPs will read these essays with an open mind, and that it will kick-start a debate in the European Parliament about sovereignty. As two MEPs representing the North West of England, we hope the publication will add to the rich conversations we have had with our constituents about the political significance of the vote to leave the EU in the 2016 referendum; conversations that went beyond the traditional labels of left and right. We hope it is a contribution to a broader understanding of the historic and contemporary issues around sovereignty and that it will help those on the left have the courage to embrace the progressive case for self-determination and self-government. We welcome feedback from all readers and look forward to carrying on the conversation in the months and years ahead, when hopefully the UK will have finally left the EU, as mandated by voters.

Claire Fox & Henrik Overgaard-Nielsen

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Euroscepticism as an integral part of the left

Henrik Overgaard-Nielsen

In 1992 and 1993 I was part of the fight against the Maastricht Treaty. Denmark voted NO in 1992 and was forced to vote again in 1993. Sound familiar? The NO side was dominated by socialists, and the intellectual and artistic elites campaigned extensively for a NO vote.

So, when I moved to the UK in 1996, it was a great surprise to me that Euroscepticism was dominated by the right. The intelligentsia were predominantly Europhiles and had managed to persuade many young people of their view.

This is even more surprising as the EU is rooted in four holy 'pillars': unregulated movement of capital, goods, labour and services. The most ardent cheerleaders for these freedoms are large multinational corporations, lobbyists and the middle-class establishment.

The Labour Party and the unions

The Europhiles within the Labour Party have fabricated a historical narrative of Europhilia whereby:

a) Euroscepticism was merely an eccentric sub-section of the party, with no real ideological base. It resided in the far left, with no support from the moderate members of the party.

b) The mainstream Labour Party has been Europhile throughout its history.

This narrative is not only wholly untrue, but has contributed to the modern stereotyping which those who support Brexit are subjected to: namely that to be Eurosceptic one has to be on the right of the political spectrum. Both history, and political ideology, prove this to be untrue.

From the inception of the European Project there has been a vibrant Eurosceptic flame within the Labour Party encapsulating the left (Tony Benn and Michael Foot) and right (Peter Shore and Bryan Gould) traditions. Labour leader Hugh Gaitskell, in 1962, a mere five years after the inception of the EEC, considered entry into the organisation would be 'the end of a thousand years of history.'¹

Following the disastrous 1983 election, Neil Kinnock scapegoated issues such as Euroscepticism and nuclear disarmament in his desperate attempt to ditch socialism. The new leadership presented Euroscepticism as 'Old Labour', outdated and the cause of Labour's election catastrophe. This was factually incorrect as the policy of withdrawal from the EEC barely featured during the election campaign, with not one policy announcement on the topic.²

Arguably, Kinnock went a bit over the top with his Euro-fanaticism seeing as his whole family were later employed by the EU!

The British trades union movement mirrored Kinnock's embrace of the EU due to an inability to influence the UK government under Thatcher. One union, Unite, still parades EU propaganda claiming that benefits like health and safety, holidays, hours of work, sickness rights, equal pay for men and women and maternity pay all originate from the EU.

These rights have nothing to do with the EU, they were in place before the EU had addressed these issues. In fact, on issues like health and safety and holidays, the UK was more progressive and had legislated prior to most of our EU colleagues. In fact, holiday entitlement was first made law in the UK in 1939 and public holiday entitlement dates back to 1871. On top of that, the minimum holiday according to the EU's Working Time Directive is 20 days compared to British law, which is 28 days.

Cheap labour

The EU is seen by many on the left as a capitalist project to ensure cheap labour for large multinationals. From the outset, it was Italian workers providing cheap labour, and then in 1973 it was Irish workers, in 1981 Greek workers, in 1986 Portuguese and Spanish workers, in 2004 workers from a number of eastern European countries including Poland, in 2007 Bulgarian and Romanian workers, and in 2013 Croatian workers. The only time when an intake of new countries did not include those providing cheap labour was in 1995, when Austria, Finland and Sweden joined.

Today, private companies and employers have no obligation to look for potential workers locally before the positions are filled with labour from other EU countries. In many cases, local job banks or local unions will be able to match demand for labour with the local unemployed workforce but, instead, the positions are filled with outside labour often with poorer pay and unacceptable working conditions. This is to the detriment of both the local labour force and the imported one.

A solution to this could be to demand of companies and employers that they search for local employment first, but the UK is not allowed to implement such a proposal because this would be contrary to EU freedom of movement rules.

The nationality of workers is irrelevant, but we need to ensure that every worker has fair pay, fair treatment and that workers do not have to work for the lowest common denominator.

Stuart Rose, the head of the Remain campaign at the time, said to the House of Commons Select Committee in 2016 that wages for low-skilled workers in the UK would go up, if Brexit reduced immigration. This may be a disadvantage for big business but is an obvious advantage for workers.

The NHS is not for sale

In the discussions about a trade deal with the US, the left-wing intelligentsia have been endlessly obsessing about the need to save the NHS from being sold to American companies.

The truth is that the NHS has already been sold. The requirement to tender out NHS services is enshrined in the EU's public procurement directive, and we are already wasting millions of pounds on putting out tender for everything from hospital services to dentistry.³

In dentistry, my own field, all specialist orthodontic (braces) contracts in general practice have been put out to tender, wasting money and time, both for commissioners and dentists. From personal experience these tenders do not, in many cases, improve the service; and, in most cases, they make it more expensive for the NHS.

Anybody can bid for these contracts, whether from the EU or the USA, as long as they have a subsidiary in the EU. In 2015, the UK's public procurement market was valued at over £260 billion, which amounts to 13.6 per cent of GDP, excluding expenditure on utilities.⁴

A study by Datalab found that as many as 5.5 per cent of tenders are awarded to companies wholly or partly owned in some of the worst tax havens. Taxpayers' money, earmarked for services such as hip replacements, accident and emergency and cancer treatment, ends up in the pockets of multinational corporations who avoid paying back to the community.

A logical step would be to ask all companies who bid for public contracts to pay tax on profits in the country where they are earned. However, both competition and consumer agencies have criticised the fact that EU procurement rules makes it next to impossible for municipalities, local governments and the state to exclude companies from public procurement, even though they are located in some of the world's worst tax havens.⁵ Companies being excluded because they operate out of known tax havens would be protected by the EU's public procurement directive.

These examples demonstrate that the EU is a hindrance to many progressive policies, whether it be nationalisation of railways or utilities, preferential use of the local workforce or applying local terms and conditions for workers. This is not possible now and the direction of travel of the EU indicates it will be even less possible in the future.

As Jacques Delors, a former president of the European Commission, said: 'EU integration is like a penny farthing, either it moves forward or the whole thing falls.' Let us hope it falls before it causes any more damage.

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1. https://www.cvce.eu/obj/speech_by_hugh_gaitskell_against_uk_membership_of_the_common_market_3_october_1962-en-05f2996b-000b-4576-8b42-8069033a16f9.html

2. <http://brexithenrik.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/evolution-of-euroscpticism-in-the-labour-party-1975-1992.pdf>

3. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32014L0024>

4. <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/explainers/public-procurement>

5. <https://euobserver.com/opinion/145544>

Henrik Overgaard-Nielsen

Non-attached member of the European Parliament, The Brexit Party; former chairman, General Dental Practice Committee (GDPC); dentist; former Co-chairman, Danish “No” campaign.

Henrik Overgaard Nielsen is a member of the European Parliament elected in the North West for the Brexit Party. He is a Danish citizen who has lived in the UK since 1996, together with his British wife and two children. He has only ever worked as an NHS dentist and in 1999 he opened an NHS dental clinic in Fulham. In 2015, he became chairman of the GDPC (the General Dental Practice Committee), representing over 30,000 UK dentists. For the past 40 years, Henrik has actively campaigned against the increasing power of Brussels. Politically, Henrik describes himself as a socialist but, above all, he is a steadfast fighter for democracy. As co-chair of a Eurosceptic party, he successfully campaigned to ensure that Denmark rejected the Maastricht Treaty in 1992.

An enquiry into the Chartist roots of contemporary democratic movements and their modern significance

Tom Bewick

In August 2019, a number of British trades union leaders and left-wing commentators took to the airwaves to commemorate the bicentenary of the 'Peterloo Massacre'. One of those union leaders, Len McCluskey of Unite, pointed out that the long road to the UK's democratic freedoms could be viewed through the prism of 'our own history'. In other words, a uniquely working-class struggle for universal suffrage and parliamentary reform.

Early working-class struggles

McCluskey was referring to the fact that, two hundred years earlier, a phalanx of radicals, artisans and factory workers had gathered in St Peter's Field, Manchester. With the European continent's Napoleonic Wars within recent memory, these ordinary folk of Lancashire demanded reform of the county's 'pocket borough' franchise. At the time, they were represented by two MPs in the House of Commons, drawing most of their electoral support from exclusively male freehold landowners. Pocket or 'rotten' boroughs referred to the fact that elections in those parliamentary constituencies could be bought, literally, by just a handful of electors.

In 1817, a group of working-class Blanketeers (not to be confused with today's Brexiteers) were one of the early examples of working-class protest, but their aim was mainly economic relief for the struggling weaving industry. By 1838, the legacy of Peterloo had widened beyond economic matters to fully embrace parliamentary reform.

Britain in the 1840s

To really understand Chartism and its contemporary relevance, we have to step back into the socio-economic conditions of the first half of the nineteenth century. By the 1830s, a young Queen Victoria had ascended the throne. The great English novelist and social critic, Charles Dickens, was beginning to capture the abject poverty associated with the amended 1834 Poor Law, with its repressive workhouse system. Dickens was particularly adept at writing vividly about the plight of the industrial classes in famous literary works, such as *Oliver Twist*.

And 'in no country in the world' wrote the German historian, Friedrich von Raumer, 'is there such a striking contrast, so defined a partition, so easy and fearful a comparison between rich and poor, as in England'.¹

The key aims of Chartism

Six key aims of the movement were beautifully captured by William Lovett of the London Working Men's Association. He was the main author of the People's Charter, published in 1838. Although Britain would not achieve universal suffrage until 1928, the Chartists' main campaign had called for 'manhood suffrage' by

extending the vote to all males at the age of 21.

Secondly, the Charter called for an end to the property qualification since this criterion alone had barred 90 per cent of adult males from voting prior to 1832. Crucially, it had meant that only the upper classes or bourgeoisie could be elected MPs to the House of Commons. (The aristocratic class was already represented in the House of Lords.)

Thirdly, radical even by today's democratic standards, the Chartists campaigned for annual elected Parliaments.

Fourthly, elections were to be held by secret ballot, to avoid the kind of intimidation that was already evident, even during the days of a restricted franchise.

Fifthly, the Charter tried to tackle head on the corruption associated with pocket boroughs, by dividing the country into 300 electoral districts of equal number of residents, with no more than one MP per district sitting in the Commons (known today as the direct constituency link).

Finally, the Charter called for elected MPs to be paid for the job they did. The very act of not paying MPs had, by definition, excluded working-class people.

As contemporaries noted at the time, it was not so much that these demands of ordinary people and their upper-class supporters in Parliament, like Thomas Attwood, were particularly new; but they set off a chain reaction of activist sentiment across the whole country, led by other Chartist leaders such as Fergus O'Connor. The transcripts and polemics of Chartist meetings were available to a population growing in literacy, detailed in the many class-based periodicals and newspapers of the day.

Relevance to democratic socialism

For democratic socialists, the Chartist Movement is widely associated as being the forerunner of the British Labour Party. To go back to the words of Len McCluskey, it is considered 'our own history'. Even so, it would take half a century for the early socialists to achieve five of the six demands set out in the original People's Charter (annual elections to Parliament remains the only unrealised aim). And it would take over a century on from Peterloo, in 1945, for the Labour Party to win a general election landslide, by which time universal suffrage for both men and women had been fully achieved.

Given this history, for many on the radical and modern left of British politics, it is curious why today's Labour Party is so ambivalent about leaving the European Union. After all, under universal suffrage, a majority of British people decided to bring an end to Britain's 45 years-old membership of the European treaties. Legally and technically, the 2016 referendum was 'advisory'. But as the constitutional historian Professor Vernon Bogdanor noted soon afterwards, the British people had in effect sent an instruction to MPs to leave the EU and they had not merely recorded their opinion. Moreover, the official leaflet despatched

to every household in March 2016 recommending to voters the status quo (to Remain a member of the EU), concluded: 'This is your decision. The government will implement what you decide.'

As with John Locke's moral philosophy – the idea of a social contract legitimising state power over the individual – the central principle is one of the people who should decide in a representative democracy, the big constitutional and political questions of the day. And this principle can be found clearly at the heart of the preamble to the 1838 Charter:

'We hold it to be an axiom in politics, that self-government by representation is the only just foundation of political power – the only true basis of Constitutional Rights – the only legitimate parent of good laws:- and we hold it as an indubitable truth, that all government which is based on any other foundation, has a perpetual tendency to degenerate into anarchy or despotism, or to beget class and wealth idolatry on the one hand, poverty and misery on the other.'

Brexiteers – the descendants of Chartists

Many Brexiteers would argue that some of the manoeuvres by Remain forces in today's House of Commons actually represent an abuse of what the Chartists' had fought for.

Moreover, that there is a more fundamental democratic deficit that goes to the heart of both the EU and the way the current political class in Westminster operates. It is this growing consciousness amongst British working people – of the shortcomings of undemocratic and unaccountable power – that has given rise to new political movements like The Brexit Party.

If the Chartists were to come back to life today, they would instantly recognise the aims of Brexiteers:

- To restore the UK's full sovereignty over its own law-making powers;
- To hold elected politicians directly to account for their actions (by taking away many of their excuses that such powers have been transferred to Brussels and the European Parliament);
- To regain control over the UK's external borders and territorial fishing grounds; and
- To be an independent, self-governing, representative democracy once more.

In this very real sense, Brexiteers can trace their political genealogy back to the early radicals and working-class protestors at Peterloo and to the founders of the Chartist Movement. Because when viewed through the prism of working-class history, the democratic equivalence between the Chartist Movement and the cause of Brexit is plain for all to see.

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1. *F von Raumer, England in 1841 (London Lee, 1842) vol. 1, p. 106 quoted in M Chase, Chartism: a new history (Manchester University Press, 2007) p.21*

Tom Bewick

Chief Executive, UK Federation of Awarding Bodies; prospective parliamentary candidate, The Brexit Party.

Tom Bewick is a former Labour councillor. He was an adviser to the Labour government on education and skills policy 1997-2010. He holds an Erasmus Master's degree in European Public Policy Analysis from the University of Bath, England. He has published extensively on labour-market policy matters as they affect apprenticeships and technical education policy. In his professional life he has held several senior positions, including as chief executive of the International Skills Standards Organisation (2010-2014). He is currently the chief executive of the UK's Federation of Awarding Bodies. He resigned from the Labour Party in May 2019, and shortly after joined The Brexit Party, where he has been selected to stand as a prospective parliamentary candidate (PPC).

Labour Leave: the case for a left-wing Brexit

John Mills

On 23 June 2016, 17.4 million people in the UK voted to leave the European Union. A large number of these voters were supporters of the UK's left-of-centre Labour Party and other left-wing parties.

In fact, of the 9.3 million people who voted Labour in the 2016 general election in 2015, 37 per cent chose Leave in 2016, including large numbers of voters in key Labour marginals in Wales, the Midlands and the North of England. Nearly 70 per cent of the parliamentary seats held by Labour had Leave majorities. The Labour vote was crucial to the overall referendum result. Why did so many, including large numbers of left-leaning people, vote this way?

The most telling slogan produced by the Leave campaign, appealing to both left and right, was 'Take back control'. Millions of voters believed that their future was being run by remote people, many of them unelected, whose motives and policies they distrusted and with whom they felt little affinity. Very few people who voted Leave were against immigration on principle, but a large proportion of them thought that they had a reasonable right to determine who and how many people should be allowed to settle in the UK.

These were the emotional appeals that pulled so many Labour-leaning voters to support Leave. It was not, however, just control and immigration that got them to the polls. There were many other key issues as well. We didn't have a fair deal from the EU, or one that fundamentally suited the UK generally either culturally, legally or economically, and Labour voters knew it.

We were paying in too much to the EU budget compared to what we got back, which made little sense at a time of national austerity and cuts to local authority budgets. Too many of our laws were framed by the European Court of Justice, over which we had little influence and almost no control. Almost no one supported UK membership of either the Common Agricultural Policy or the Common Fisheries Policy.

Perhaps even more important was the direction of travel of the EU. Very few people in the UK share the aspirations of the EU ruling class to turn the EU into a federalised bloc with its own army competing with NATO and with its own economic policy built on the Euro. It was all too easy to see the misery brought to southern Europe, particularly Greece, by the way these countries were treated by the northern European states, led by Germany during the European debt crisis in the early 2010s. Falls in national income of 25 per cent in Greece's case and widespread unemployment throughout most of the EU, including youth unemployment running up to 50 per cent, were not a vision of the future that many UK Labour supporters wanted to be part of.

It was obvious, nevertheless, that more central control by the EU was required to stop the Eurozone collapsing and this was bound to lead to attempts to frame a common budget for the EU with just the sort of federal intent that most people

across the EU do not want. There were also fears that the EU would perpetuate its long-term record of slow economic growth. Did it really make sense for us to tie ourselves to one of the most sluggish markets on the planet while the rest of the world was growing two or three times as fast as the EU managed to achieve?

And these sentiments washed over into a wider critique of the whole EU project. Do we really want to be part of a protectionist bloc which keeps out food from third-world countries which can produce it much more cheaply than heavily subsidised EU farmers?

Do we really want to be part of a bloc which is locked into neoliberal ideas about controlling inflation being more important than ensuring that we have a reasonable economic growth rate? Do we think it is right for the EU economy to be run with constant high levels of unemployment and underemployment to keep inflation down to very low levels? Do we really want to be members of an organisation with such weak democratic credentials as the EU?

These characteristics cause particular problems for left-leaning people who have a very different view on how society should be run to most of the EU. To what extent should market forces be allowed free rein as competition is encouraged rather than constrained? Would it be possible for a Labour government within the EU to carry out its electoral commitments to nationalise the railways and utility companies and to pursue a comprehensive industrial strategy? To what extent should the interest of workers be protected and their interests enhanced at the expense of capital to reverse trends towards more inequality?

Of course, not everything is wrong with the EU. It has played a big part in burying French and German enmity. It brought Spain, Greece and later the East European Accession States from authoritarian rule. It has developed civilised ways of resolving differences without resorting to warfare – and free movement of labour, capital, goods and services has helped some people, although at the expense of others. On balance, however, where does this leave us?

Many people in the UK thought that these EU achievements were not sufficient to offset the downside arguments for membership and this is why the referendum result turned out the way it did.

The reality is that, despite all the difficulties there have been with Brexit over the past three years, the vast majority of those who voted Leave have not changed their minds. In their view, the UK does not really fit into the way continental Europe has developed over the past 70 years. We would be better off on our own, independent but on as friendly terms as possible with our close neighbours, working on all the many matters of common interest on an inter-governmental rather than a political integration basis. This is what we hope will happen.

John Mills

Founder and chairman, John Mills Limited (JML), author; 'A Critical History of Economics'; economist.

John Mills is an entrepreneur, economist and author, noted for his writing on Brexit, the Labour Party and the exchange rate. In the political world, he formerly served as chair of Labour Leave, Labour Future, The Pound Campaign and LESC, and co-chair of Business for Britain and Vote Leave. In the business world, he is founder and chairman of consumer goods company John Mills Limited (JML), which exports to over 70 countries around the world. His main interests as an economist are in the relatively poor performance of Western economies compared with those in the East and the UK's relationship with the EU. He has written or co-written 11 books on economics as well as large numbers of articles, bulletins and pamphlets. John was for many years a senior elected member of Camden Council.

National sovereignty and the requirements of radical reform

Dr Peter Ramsay

Many people on the left say that the EU needs to be fundamentally reformed. But truly fundamental reform is not possible without sovereignty, and the EU is a structure that exists to frustrate the sovereignty of the peoples of Europe. It is designed to institutionalise our political impotence, not to facilitate our capacity to achieve political change.

National sovereignty is often taken to mean that ultimate legal authority lies with national institutions. In this sense, the EU is an organisation made up of sovereign states, even though EU law is supreme over domestic law. Each nation state has voluntarily outsourced its law-making powers to EU institutions and there is no ultimate legal obstacle to states taking it back.

National sovereignty, however, is a political as well as a legal reality. The nation is politically sovereign when its internal political relations between the governed and the government provide the source of political authority for its institutions.¹ You can have more or less of this kind of sovereignty, and having more of it is essential if really significant political and social change is to be achieved.

Any society seeking fundamental reform of its institutions requires that its government enjoys authority over those who are subject to its powers. Fundamental reform is inevitably disruptive of longstanding ways of doing things and threatens the interests of those who benefit from the status quo. It cannot be achieved unless government's power derives from citizens' willingness to cooperate with it, which is to say that government's power derives from its authority. A condition of any fundamental reform is that most citizens regard the government as our government and its actions as our actions. Without this political sovereignty, society has no capacity to engage in serious reform to political or social structures.

It is this political sovereignty that is undermined by the basic structure of the EU. The EU puts government further away from citizens and limits the capacity of domestic political life. EU institutions give law-making power to the Commission and to the executive branches of member states acting in the various councils of ministers. They also subject both this law-making power, and those of member state governments, to the limitations in the EU treaties, not least the four economic freedoms, and these limitations are governed by the interpretations of the Court of Justice of the EU (CJEU).

These law-making bodies are much more insulated from the influence of ordinary citizens than are national legislatures. The court's powers derive from a treaty that enshrines a liberal economic model. Like all vaguely worded constitutional documents, nothing is set in stone, but its explicit protection of market freedoms provides a powerful instrument with which the beneficiaries of the economic status quo can challenge political interference in the economy. The Commission is appointed and is entirely removed from the everyday life of European citizens.

It is far more accessible to professionally organised lobbyists than it is to any electorate. And ministers in their council meetings are there to find consensus with their counterparts from other member states. If the decisions that result are not acceptable to the domestic electorate, voters can call a national government to account, but they cannot reverse the decision or call the council itself to account by re-electing a different council of ministers – because those ministers come from 28 countries with 28 different electorates.

The European Parliament may be elected, but it cannot itself legislate. Its consent to legislation coming from the Commission is required. However, it lacks real independence because it does not contain Europe-wide political parties so that it might represent a European people. It is not the creature of the European people, because there is no singular European people. As a result, the parliament is completely invested in its relationship to the Commission and Council, and to the arcane mechanisms of consensus-building behind closed doors that characterises those institutions.

In these ways, the EU limits the accountability of government to its electorates. In so doing, EU government undermines the effectiveness of domestic political relationships that are the lifeblood of sovereignty.² The EU's political architecture incentivises political organisations to look outwards and upwards, to maintain their influence with unaccountable EU institutions, rather than looking inwards and downwards, to build influential political alliances among the population, alliances that engage ordinary citizens in the life of the state. This has impoverished domestic political relationships and weakened the state's authority with the citizenry.

Those who aspire to political leadership or hope to apply their expertise to social problems look more and more to international organisations for support, for opportunity and for their legitimacy than they do to ordinary citizens. In this 'post-sovereign' worldview, the nation becomes the source of problems, not solutions – because solutions come from the deliberations of European 'civil society' and take the form of the policies and rules of supranational organisations.

An excellent example of this hollowing out of domestic political life is the horror expressed by the British trade unions and Labour Party at the possible loss of the limited protections provided by EU labour law in the event of Brexit. These organisations have effectively given up on the need to mobilise wage-earners within Britain to act politically to achieve and to protect labour-market regulation. Their scepticism about the capacity of domestic political life to change things further weakens the political authority of the state. If ordinary citizens across Europe have become disenchanted by the loss of political control that the EU seems to embody, that is because, by design, the EU relocates effective political action outside the nation-state, in opaque supranational institutions that are remote from ordinary citizens.

The EU is not the only reason for the decay of political authority in Europe. It nevertheless institutionalises this impotence of domestic political life. There can be no movement for political reform that can engage the active sympathy of millions of citizens that does not also intend to invigorate national sovereignty. This is why

when British left-wingers who insist that the UK must ‘remain and reform’ are asked what they would actually do to reform the EU, they do not have much to say.

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1. For more on the relation of legal and political sovereignty, see M Loughlin, *The Idea of Public Law* (Oxford University Press, 2003)

2. For more on the relation between the EU and domestic politics, see C Bickerton, *The European Union: A Citizen's Guide* (Pelican, 2016)

Dr Peter Ramsey

Professor of Law, London School of Economics.

Dr Peter Ramsay is a professor of law at the London School of Economics where he specialises in the areas of criminal law and penal theory. He thinks, reads and writes about the relationship between criminal law, sovereignty, democracy and civil liberties; and is currently working on a political theory of criminal law that explains the development of the state’s penal power as an aspect of the rise and fall of the political authority of the state and the accompanying transformations in the meaning of citizenship. Peter is a founding signatory of The Full Brexit – a Brexit advocacy group comprising of high-profile intellectuals, journalists and public figures.

What is popular sovereignty really?

Steve Roberts

Since the EU referendum result of June 2016, a significant debate has emerged in the UK about the meaning of democracy. Representative democracy has been pitted against direct democracy, Parliament against the people. But what is popular sovereignty, really?

At this historic moment, it is vital that we understand the sequence of events that has led us here and why. In an interview with Newsnight's Emily Maitlis, Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks was right when he said: 'Democracy is one of the most profound political ideas – ever.'¹

Our understanding of democracy needs to be more than an abstract or philosophical idea about whether democracy should take a Painean or Burkean trajectory. It needs to be rooted in the very real circumstances in which the UK finds itself – that of being faced with an almost wholesale refusal on behalf of the political class to enact a decision made by the demos.

Let's remember that Parliament voted by a huge majority to pass the question of whether to leave the EU to the citizens of the nation. On the bill's second reading, MPs voted by 544 to 53 in favour; and on its third and final reading, by 316 to 53.

And let's remember, too, that unprecedented numbers of people voted in the referendum – a massive 72.2 per cent turnout, much higher than in previous UK-wide referendums. They voted in full faith that their vote would count, that they would be heard and that they could decide the direction the nation would take. It was a vote to be the subjects of their own collective destiny.

This idea is encapsulated in the principle of universal suffrage. It is the form that popular sovereignty takes: to let the people decide. Moreover, it is the very essence of democracy itself (demos means 'the people', kratos means 'power'). As Rabbi Sacks went on to say in his Newsnight interview with Maitlis, 'because it says every one of us counts, every one of us has a voice. You lose that, you lose everything, because then it becomes a game for the rich and powerful.'

And it is with the people that the political power in a nation should reside. In a democratic society we lend our power, our kratos, to others. As members of parliament, our elected representatives are there to represent our will as expressed through the ballot box.

If the will of the people is not sovereign, if our majoritarian voting is to be ignored and discarded, then we have to accept we are entering a period where popular sovereignty no longer carries weight; it has no social or political force and we no longer vote to instruct those that represent us. Instead, we become passive objects of their will, we have a constraining social order that is hidden behind the illusion we live in a democracy.

Throughout history, many have fought and been killed to establish the right of the populace to be subjects of their own destiny, for their will to have meaning. The recent commemoration of the Peterloo Massacre in 1819 is testimony to those lives lost, as is the long history of struggle involving the Levellers, Chartists, Suffragettes and many other individuals and collectives as they have faced the tyranny of the minority across the centuries. The ability to determine the direction of society and of our own lives is the foundational block of any democratic society. Popular sovereignty means being active subjects, not merely objects of others' imposition.

Today, the tyranny of the minority resides with experts, intellectuals, unelected advisers, lords and ladies, elected representatives who ignore our will, a judiciary increasingly bent on making law of its own volition, the royal prerogative², and so on.

Professor Richard Dawkins is one example of the intellectual 'elite' who unashamedly express their complete disdain for democracy and popular sovereignty. When asked about David Cameron's decision to ask Parliament to allow the people to decide on our future, in or out of the EU, he said: 'He handed over this massively important decision to a simple majority of ill-informed voters. The fleeting opinion, on just one day, of a slender majority of an ignorant and misled public is now touted as the sacred and unchangeable word of "the British people".'

It is particularly galling for me, having worked in the mining industry for 10 years in the constituency of Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford to see democracy being trampled on in such an open and treacherous manner by our sitting MP, Labour's Yvette Cooper. She had been lent the vote of the constituents in the General Election of 2017, winning by a margin of 14,449. She promised to honour the Leave vote, which was approximately 70 per cent in her constituency.

In a lecture at Mile End Institute in January 2017, Cooper was clear that the referendum result must be respected: 'We didn't go into the referendum saying "I want you to vote remain, but to be honest no matter how you vote I'm going to ignore you." It was fought in good faith and nobody said, "Well you know what, I'm just not going to respect the result afterwards." – that's the kind of thing that Donald Trump says.' Yet since the election in 2017, Cooper has been actively involved in instigating and attempting to delay and deny Brexit by various manoeuvres in the House of Commons along with other MPs. This is simply duplicitous.

The political battle lines are now redrawn – not between left and right, as they once were, but between democrats and anti-democrats. In addition to the anti-democratic political class in the UK, we also have the supranational ones, those beyond our grasp, residing in the institutions of the EU.

On the democratic side, we have every social class, gender, sex, orientation and race. They are a disparate church, yet united in their clear demand that the referendum result be enacted. The working class, especially in the previously industrial northern heartlands, stand shoulder to shoulder with old Etonians. Their common goal is for decisions in future to be made within the geographical, social and political framework of the nation-state, where the will of the people should be sovereign.

So, there is an enormous challenge and an opportunity opening up in political life. We have clarity emerging between democrats and anti-democrats, between those 'presentists' who wish to uphold the pre-referendum status quo and those who wish to see society take on an unequivocally democratic path, who demand change and to take back control.

This is the route that radical democrats should take. They should lead a transformative progressive change. As such, they would place themselves entirely within the democratic tradition of the left, echoing all those radicals who believed in universal suffrage, majoritarian rule and the sovereign will of the people.

But, in joining this esteemed tradition, they must also be radicals in all spheres of life: social, economic, political and cultural.

This demands a search for clarity of purpose, for definition, but not dogma. We need to reassert human-centred principles: the expansion of freedoms, autonomy, responsibility for oneself and towards others. We must stand for the development of a society where the material means enable all our individualities to flourish; and we must stand up for equality of opportunity, raising standards for everyone everywhere, but especially in education. And most of all, we need to raise our collective horizon, to examine what humanity has achieved so far and how much more we can achieve. Unleashing this belief in humanity is firmly within the tradition of the left. It is a radical, democratic vision, a humanism for the twenty-first century.

We need to reassert this radical democracy against the backdrop of a British left that has lost its way, a collective of Malthusian misanthropic environmentalists, of identitarians who have all-but abandoned the concept of class, the economic naysayers and the state ideologues who promote ever-encroaching interference in our lives. These are the anti-democrats who have taken the side of the establishment and pitted themselves against the people and their majoritarian decision.

Since the establishment of universal suffrage, when it was thought that the battle for democracy and popular sovereignty had been won, questions about who rules in society, who holds power, have been contained and constrained. An illusion of democracy has been created, but this has now been exposed. Radical democrats must take this opportunity to reclaim the primacy of democracy because, if we don't, no one else will and it will be lost once more. And this is, ultimately, what popular sovereignty really is.

1. *Broadcast on Wednesday 22nd May 2019 for BBC Newsnight. Available at: <http://rabbisacks.org/todays-politicians-are-too-political-rabbi-sacks-on-newspnight/>*

2. *The Royal Prerogative is another archaic check on popular sovereignty, in the article below there is an excellent portrayal of its anti-democratic nature, it is one of a series of articles that are particularly relevant to the wider discussion around democracy that are especially pertinent for Radical Democrats. <https://www.spiked-online.com/2019/07/31/3-rip-up-the-royal-prerogative/>*

Steve Roberts

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Steve Roberts is the director of a small family-owned importing business and a contributor to Spiked. During the course of his life, he has held a variety of roles, from a theatre operating technician to working as a surface worker in the coal industry for 10 years. It was here that Steve became politically active, engaging in the 12-month strikes against the then Conservative government in 1984-85. Steve has been married for forty-three years and is a proud grandfather to three grandchildren.

The meaning of real internationalism

Dr Philip Cunliffe

One of the strongest justifications given for the European Union (EU) is that it institutionalises and deepens international cooperation on the European continent. This view is tied to a particular vision of Europe's politics and history, which sees the EU as having helped to bring peace and prosperity to a continent that was wracked by nationalism and world war twice in the twentieth century and was divided by the Cold War for half a century after that. As the EU has grown in strength – so this story goes – so Europe has become more secure and successful. The vision appeals because it aims to transcend the meanness and narrowness of nationalist politics that have brought so much destructive rivalry to Europe over the past five hundred years. By taming nationalist passions through new institutions of cooperation constructed over and above nations themselves, the EU has sought to lever us out of our parochialism. This vision seems to find ready confirmation in people's lives, in which millions of Europeans have been accustomed to easy travel, work and education across the continent with all the possibility for personal enrichment that comes with that.

Yet it is also a vision built on multiple layers of conceit. The notion that without the EU, Europe would be plunged back into global war and conflict presupposes that Europe is still the centre of the world. The reason that Europe gave rise to two world wars in the last century was not because we had not yet invented the EU, but rather because Europe's global importance made it the central theatre of geopolitical conflict. Today, however, this is no longer the case – Europe is no longer the centre of the world, and the fulcrum of global geopolitical rivalry is shifting to the Asia-Pacific. In claiming that the EU exists to ward off the threat of world war, supporters of the EU are deceiving themselves and the rest of us about Europe's global significance.

In blaming mass politics for Europe's historic conflicts, we also fall into a skewed vision of history that exonerates belligerent ruling elites, who more often than not were instrumental in precipitating conflict through their self-serving expansionist political ambitions. In saying that the European Steel and Coal Community established peace between France and Germany, by putting the industries of war beyond national control, we are also letting Franco-German industrial and political elites off the hook. By the same token, accepting that mass nationalism rather than nationalist elites was the primary cause of earlier European conflicts, we are letting our current existing elites off the hook for their misguided policies today.

That Europe could be released from being the global cockpit of geopolitical rivalry should come as a welcome discharge from a historic burden. Instead, however, the EU has stoked conflict in Europe afresh. Thus, not only is the EU's claim of bringing about continental peace bogus, but the EU has also undermined its claims with its very own actions. This is most visible in Ukraine, where the EU's reckless eastern expansionism – in lockstep with NATO – helped to precipitate civil war in that country, as well as inaugurating a new era of geopolitical rivalry with Russia throughout Eastern Europe.¹ This new imperial vision for the EU is also apparent

among those who, like the French president, Emmanuel Macron, dream of boosting the EU into a superpower and rival to Russia, China and the US. Within Europe itself, the functioning of the Eurozone has worked to exacerbate tensions between northern creditor and southern debtor nations – and such deeply rooted clashes of interest will be much more difficult to eradicate than conflicts caused by volatile national feeling. For reasons such as these, we should think again about how far we want to remain trapped in the supposedly peaceful model of international cooperation embodied in the EU – a model that has now institutionalised renewed rivalry with a nuclear-armed state, Russia, established debt colonies within the Eurozone itself, and relies on curbing mass democracy on the basis that it leads to nationalist conflict.

That structures of transnational integration established by the EU are facing new challenges, such as the rise of Eurosceptic feeling and populist insurgencies at the ballot box, should be seen not as threatening a return to the past, but rather as offering an opportunity for political renewal. The very fact that transnational governance structures are confronting such challenges shows that they have become disembedded from national politics and democratic input, stripped of any aura of popular legitimacy. This shift is indicated in the very terms we use, in which the sterile language of ‘governance’ has been substituted for that of ‘government’, indicating just how far structures of international cooperation have drifted from popular control and input.

The original notion of internationalism as devised by the British liberal philosopher Jeremy Bentham – inter-nationalism – indicated a vision of relations between peoples and nations. In place of that, today we have new forms of supra-national and trans-national authority – that is, above and across nations. These are in turn comprised of inter-elite networks whose very condition of existence is their distance from popular input and electoral accountability. The unsustainability of this model is evidenced in the electoral revolts against it. In Britain, the process of Brexit offers the opportunity to reboot our international and trading relationships, to reinfuse them with democratic legitimacy and thereby place them on a more legitimate and viable basis for the long run.

This requires a new vision of international cooperation that goes beyond the technocratic ‘governance’ system embodied in the EU. Europe should not be seen as a walled pleasure garden, a cosmopolitan haven that needs protecting behind barbed wire. It is a continent wracked by the structural austerity of the Eurozone, in which the much-vaunted ‘freedom of movement’ was not intended as a genteel vision of bourgeois tourism but rather as a market freedom, for facilitating the flow of a factor of production. Less than cafés, charming city squares and Erasmus schemes, ‘freedom of movement’ was about outsourcing dirty, dangerous and difficult work to cheap new supplies of labour in the east.

To build a new internationalism, we must start by refusing to accept the blackmail imposed by the EU, in which democracy and accountability have to be traded off against international cooperation. As the EU staggers from one crisis to the next, we see in fact the opposite – that true internationalism is only possible on the basis of democracy within nation-states themselves.

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Philip Cunliffe is senior lecturer in politics and international relations at the University of Kent, which he joined in 2009. He has written widely on a variety of political issues ranging from Balkan politics to Brexit, with a particular focus on questions of sovereignty and international politics in the twenty-first century. He helped to found The Full Brexit, a pro-Brexit campaigning network. His most recent book is 'Lenin Lives! Reimagining the Russian Revolution' (2017).

Euroscepticism – a trade union and labour movement case

Lord Maurice Glasman

The alignment of the progressive left with the EU is the main cause of the palsy that has overtaken social democrats and trade unions across Europe. It is its great delusion. The EU is profoundly opposed to the practices of democracy and association that are the basic forms of the Labour Movement. The politics of the EU is based far more on court rulings and directives. The particularity of association cuts against the unmediated movement of people and things through space. The contemporary left has plenty of policies, but no politics. And no power.

Across Europe, the tree withers. Socialist and social-democratic parties have been eviscerated in France, decimated in the Netherlands and degraded in Germany. All of these countries have very significant labour traditions. In Eastern Europe, socialists are often not even in Parliament at all. Trade unions play little role in the internal power of firms or in sectoral agreements. There has been a retreat to the public sector, leaving capitalism to plunder the gains of a mobile and disorganised workforce. If there is no popular politics of the left that can resist the domination of capital, the right will move in and that is what is happening across Europe.

I have tried to find counterexamples, but it is my considered view that the European Union is the greatest capitalist project ever devised by the human mind. It guarantees, in treaty form, the free movement of capital, labour, goods and services throughout its territory as a constitutional right. These are the ‘four freedoms’ enshrined in the Lisbon Treaty. It effectively makes resistance to capitalism illegal if it is not compliant with the Four Freedoms of unmediated movement. And when you give up on the democratic resistance to the domination of capital, the meaning of socialism becomes a bit obscure to a lot of people. You don’t need to organise workers, you just need to employ lawyers; because, ultimately, disputes are decided legally through the European Court of Justice (ECJ). Trade unions are relegated to the sphere of corporate social responsibility. The very foundations of the social-market economy are undermined by the legal form of the EU.

And when you get to the courts, ECJ rulings such as Viking and Laval favour the Four Freedoms over workers’ interests; capital over labour. The Cassis de Dijon case indicates that the uniformity of the market will subordinate regional variety. The EU has made a Hayekian turn and those on the left who argue for internal reform ignore that treaty amendment may only be affected by common accord of the member states. Most fundamentally, the entrenchment of capitalism by the EU treaties goes unmentioned, since the left now appears to wish to doom us all to a never-ending Hartz-IV reform (German rules that toughened up claims for unemployment benefits) in which the rich get richer and all change is good, unless it leads to socialism. A progressive eternity of democratic impotence. It is not very popular and hostile to the most basic interests of labour, which is to retrieve a non-fungible human form from the pressures of the market through democratic association.

Working-class people have not given up on the idea that a democratic self-

governing nation state is a better bet than the European Court of Justice. And in Britain they are not changing their minds. The stakes are high in the Brexit impasse because the working class have not been cowed by academic disapproval, editorial condemnation or progressive contempt. They think that liberty and democracy are equally important and should go together. That is now called populism.

The only reason that the Labour Party has not yet gone the way of its European comrades is that at the last election it did 'respect the result of the referendum' and advocated an industrial strategy that involved the active transfer of assets and capital to the deindustrialised areas of Britain. Things like nationalisation and state-aid are entangled in the constraints of the rigorous competition law enshrined in the Lisbon Treaty of 2007. Sixteen of Labour's core manifesto commitments could be illegal under EU Law. Brexit is a class issue and as we have noticed in recent elections, far from being a prehistoric and irrelevant relic of a previous civilisation, you can't win an election without the working class. Cheap labour and cheap kitchen extensions are definitely to be counted among the benefits of globalisation and give some insight into why it is not viewed by everyone as a moral order.

The power of democracy is subordinated to Treaty law, and the Treaties in question favour capital. The fundamental process of capitalism is to turn the status of human beings and nature into commodities that are bought and sold in fluctuating markets in the form of price. And yet human beings are not commodities to be treated in that way and the best way of resisting it is through democracy. The ability to act decisively, with the power of a democratic mandate, to resist the domination of capital and redistribute wealth and power within a democratic society is the credo of socialism. That is both illegal and impossible within the European Union and that is why the only hope for the left is to lead the opposition to it. Look what happens when we don't.

It is said by many on the left that the EU is a form of internationalism when it is its opposite, it is an enforcer of globalisation which undermines the solidarity required for concerted common action across borders. When the left cannot make the distinction between globalisation and internationalism, or democracy and populism, it loses its way in endless legalism and policy documents and loses its place in the lives of labour. The EU is a globalising institution in that it is based on the unmediated movement of the factors of production within its territory. It has no place for democracy as a means of resisting, or even mediating this, and its legal form is built around the insulation of the economy from political interference. It is vital that the labour movement discovers the solidarity of internationalism with workers and democratic movements from Sudan to Rojava, from Chile to China. This requires the primacy of democracy and resistance to the enforcement of globalisation through treaties from TTIP to Lisbon. Our internationalism should be one of solidarity and common cause with all workers, people and peoples who resist their exploitation and oppression within the globalisation system that has been built over the past 40 years. The EU is a cornerstone of that system.

It is now usual to hear the complaint that we are better than the people, that they are racist, ignorant and nasty. I am suggesting that the fault lies more within ourselves. A delusion is worse than an illness.

Lord Maurice Glasman

Labour life peer; director, the Common Good Foundation; author; 'Unnecessary Suffering: Managing Market Utopia'.

Maurice Glasman is a Labour life peer in the House of Lords. He is director of the Common Good Foundation. Prior to becoming a peer, Baron Glasman worked for 10 years for London Citizens on their Living Wage campaign. Baron Glasman is widely known for establishing 'Blue Labour', a conservative form of socialism within the Labour party, which encourages a return to community values based on trade unions, the Church and voluntary groups. He is the author of 'Unnecessary Suffering: Managing Market Utopia' (Verso, 1996), which argues that the commodification of human beings and nature is a nightmare.

The left case for sovereignty: a German perspective

Sabine Beppler-Spahl

Democratic sovereignty – the idea that government is subject to the will of the people – has come under attack in Germany.¹ In the past, it was the left, and in particular social democracy, which demanded that the voices of ordinary people be heard and respected. This has changed. Brexit has shown the limits of Willy Brandt's famous 1969 promise of *Mehr Demokratie wagen* (Daring more Democracy),² writes Holger Schmale in the left-leaning *Berliner Zeitung*.³ Putting a question as complex as the membership of the EU directly to the people had divided the country and made it difficult to govern, he claims.

This anti-democratic instinct is worrying. It places stability and the maintenance of the status quo above the right to vote. British citizens had to wait 41 years before being given the chance to leave the EU through a democratic referendum; and, yet, 61.5 million German voters have consistently been denied this right. Unlike in other European countries (Denmark, Sweden, Switzerland, Norway), there has never been a referendum on matters related to the EU and this points to a weakness in the democratic system.

The idea that citizens need to be kept away from disruptive and divisive politics has a long tradition. Much of German history – from the failed 1848/49 revolution onwards – can be read as a defeat of those progressive forces that demanded power for the people. Even the past 70 years of successful democracy were not entirely free. After the war, Germany was set up as a *wehrhafte Demokratie* (militant democracy) – a concept which gives the state the right to sanction speech, and ban associations or parties deemed threatening to democracy. Sadly, the German left never seriously opposed this concept, accepting its anti-fascist content (even though, in 1956, it was used to ban the communist KPD).

But the open disdain for the electorate, which the Brexit debate has exposed, has reached a new quality. It shows that the old German left, which previously maintained some relationship with the working class, no longer exists. The clearest example is the staunchly pro-EU SPD, which has been losing voters faster than anyone can count and has even quietly dropped its title as *Volkspartei* (People's Party). Its politicians have nothing in common with the party's postwar leader Kurt Schumacher – a courageous anti-Nazi and convinced democrat, who spent nearly 10 years in a Nazi concentration camp.

Schumacher was an outspoken opponent of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) – a forerunner of today's EU. The new postwar Europe that was being built by the conservative CDU chancellor Konrad Adenauer and the occupying Allied powers was not just 'conservative, clerical, capitalist and cartelistic', as Schumacher put it, but also undemocratic.⁴ It was a tremendous risk to grant this purely bureaucratic institution the power to define the structure of a new Europe, he wrote in 1951,⁵ whilst insisting that memories of Nazi horrors should not be the sole basis for the restructuring of Europe.⁶ Little wonder that in today's SPD, no one quotes Schumacher.

A decisive point marking the German left's demise was the reunification process in the early Nineties. This happened to coincide with the creation of the EU in its current form through the Maastricht Agreements. In 1990, the SPD candidate for the chancellorship cautioned against reunification. Instead of embracing the courage and quest for freedom of East Germans, he deplored their supposed backward consumerism and latent nationalism. He lost the election.⁷

It is hardly surprising then, that the Maastricht Agreements, which were negotiated behind closed doors, found little opposition. In 1993, the German constitutional court rejected a legal challenge against Maastricht led by the prominent Green politician Christian Ströbele, who correctly argued that the treaty violated Germany's basic law and was inherently undemocratic.⁸ But this opposition was quickly dropped. The majority within the Green Party, which had won over many of the SPD's middle-class voters in the 1980s, supported the EU. In it they saw an institution that could enforce green demands. Many Greens began to present the EU as a bulwark against the aggressive nationalism Europe experienced in the early twentieth century. In doing so, they helped to spread the modern myth of the EU as a response to the war and a force for peace.

Today, many EU supporters feel vindicated by the rise of right-wing populism and Germany's AfD (Alternative für Deutschland). But this distracts from their role in creating the condition for its rise. Populism is a reaction to a policy which has consistently ignored the opinions of large sections of society. One example is the creation of the common currency as part of the Maastricht Agreement which, polls showed, was opposed by a majority. Indeed, in an interview in 2002, the former chancellor, Helmut Kohl, famously said that in the case of the Euro he himself had acted like a dictator.⁹ Other examples where public opinion was never tested, or completely ignored, include the waves of EU enlargement and the free movement of labour. In 1999, political scientist Christopher J Anderson published an essay in which he warned that many Germans felt uninformed about the specifics of the integration process.¹⁰ Everywhere – but particularly in the former East regions – support for EU-membership had dropped, he wrote. In fact, in the former East this was from almost 90 per cent in 1992 to about 35 per cent in 1996.¹¹ In many ways, it is surprising that an explicitly anti-EU party (the AfD) was formed only in 2013, when it came about as a direct response to the Greek debt crisis.

Being pro-EU has become the battle cry of the German establishment – a fact forcefully expressed during the 2019 European elections in which not just all parties (apart from the AfD) engaged in pro-EU campaigns,¹² but big industry – Volkswagen,¹³ German Rail,¹⁴ Deutsche Bank,¹⁵ the German Banking Association¹⁶ – and even the churches backed the EU.¹⁷ The anti-nationalist and anti-populist rhetoric which is used to justify the support for the EU is deeply flawed. It distorts the character of German fascism, which had nothing but contempt for democratic sovereignty. It downplays the fact that it was nations with a strong sense of national sovereignty that resisted the Nazis (and helped to save Jewish lives).¹⁸ And, most importantly, it distracts from the powerful economic and political interests that have been driving the German elite's support for the EU.

It is the failure of the German left that has allowed the AfD to pose as the only

opposition. It plays the role of a protest party, but it isn't an advocate of the interests of the majority. What Germany needs is a new opposition, one that takes voters seriously, and dares to open up a society-wide debate, including one on membership of the EU. Because that would, indeed, be Daring more Democracy.

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Sabine Beppler-Spahl is chair of the German liberal think tank Freiblickinstitut e.V., which organises the Berlin Salons, and she is the Germany correspondent for Spiked. Sabine studied economics at the University of Hamburg and went to school in Hong Kong and Germany. She is also a regular contributor to the German magazine Novo and has published articles in Die Welt, Berliner Zeitung, Frankfurter Allgemeine Sonntagszeitung, Zeitschrift Merkur and other publications. Her book 'Brexit-Demokratischer Aufbruch in Großbritannien' (Brexit – the struggle for democracy in Great Britain) was published by Parodos Verlag in March 2019.

Nationalism, the nation state, racism and the Brexit vote

Dr Alka Sehgal Cuthbert

The dominant interpretation of 17.4 million British citizens' vote to leave the EU is summarised well by D'Maris Coffman, professor in Economics and Finance of the Built Environment at University College London, who writes:

Brexit was the rejection of multiculturalism... Whether or not you call these views racist, the advent of white English (and Welsh) nationalism is, for those of us who have taught modern European history, the truly ominous consequence of Brexit.¹

In this discourse, any support for Britain's nation-state or national identity is equated with a rejection of multiculturalism; and, the argument goes, multiculturalism is the state's way of protecting minority rights. Ergo, the vote to leave is racist.

To express a positive affiliation with national identity – or any form of nationalism – over the imputed internationalism guaranteed by the EU is to support the ideology used by Britain's colonial ruling class or by the Nazis. Leave voters who may be nostalgic for the past can only be either explicit racists or useful idiots who are duped into lending their support to a racist party and/or leader. Only the culturally backward and racist sections of society would want to go back to a time, prior to postwar immigration, when British society was ethnically more homogenous. This interpretation places both the Tory shire and the white sections of the working-class in the anti-Brexiters' line of fire.

These opinions are based on unsubstantiated assertions: not facts. They are based on highly reductive interpretations that ignore historical facts and alternative, more nuanced and truthful, interpretations. Before considering this extremely one-sided view of the nation state and nationalism, it is worth looking at exactly who voted to leave the EU in order to judge whether it really was another example of a 'whitelash' which, it is claimed, won Donald Trump his presidency.²

A 'whitelash'?

It is worth noting the following about the ethnic minority vote to leave. It is true that the available data shows that the majority of ethnic minorities voted to Remain, and that London is regarded as a bastion for Remainers. However, it is not the full picture. One study, for instance, shows that in some London boroughs with a significant ethnic-minority population, there were certain wards who voted Leave. In Hounslow, for example, the Osterley and Spring Grove ward, with a large number of Indians, had a 64.4 per cent Leave vote. In another majority non-white city, Leicester, 48.9 per cent voted Leave. British Indians were the second largest group to vote Leave.³

In common with white Brexit voters, Indian Leave voters gave a variety of reasons that suggest a complex nexus of economic, political and cultural concerns.⁴ One frequently cited reason is that EU freedom of movement regulations allow citizens

from mainly white European nations to live and work more easily than citizens from former Commonwealth nations with whom Britain has longer historical and cultural links. Whereas previous generations of Indians had integrated well, new arrivals from East Europe are seen to be not only less integrated, but also less willing to integrate. Another cause of concern is the economic system of tariffs which place non-European nations in Africa at a disadvantage.

It could be reasonably inferred that from the point of view of certain black and minority ethnic (BME) Leave voters, it is the EU that is seen as racist in its treatment of non-white people: not the British nation state. Firm conclusions from this empirical data may be difficult to substantiate at present, but these findings should at least give pause for thought regarding the accuracy of the term 'whitelash' to describe the Leave vote: it was not an undifferentiated mass of working-class people; nor was the white working-class its only constituent.

Does Brexit represent a rose-tinted nostalgia for a dangerous nationalistic past?

One poll shows that 81 per cent of the overall Leave vote did indeed think that multiculturalism was 'a force for ill'.⁵ But that does not mean Coffman is correct to conclude that this is an ominous sign of incipient fascism. Such a catastrophising view is more indicative of a Remainer mindset, where 77 per cent of those wishing to stay in the EU thought the result could be disastrous. Leavers, it seems, are more sanguine: 69 per cent thought there would be little difference economically. The economic dimension was not the main motivation for the Leave vote, although it was for the Remain vote. The main reason for leaving, across party lines, was the principle of national sovereignty; the main reason for remaining, across party lines, was fear of the economic risks.

It could be that the second-most cited reason given by Leavers, to take back control, has more to do with rebalancing the political relationship between themselves and their political representatives in Parliament than with wanting more power to repatriate immigrants or stop them coming at all. The nostalgia of some Leavers could be for the social-democratic postwar political arrangement, which was underpinned by a closer alignment between the opinion of the majority, and the political and intellectual elites. The legitimacy of those holding political power was tacitly understood as resting with the public. It was this relationship between citizens and their political representatives that provided the ethical basis for a relatively high level of social cohesion. Class distinctions existed, and so did economic and social disparities between women and immigrants. But in the political realm, citizens met as equals. The vote, the outcome of historic political, ethical and intellectual struggles, remains the best guarantor of people's access to power; their means to hold their political representatives to account. It is foundational for modern democratic nation-states.

Nation-states provide boundaries that both include and exclude people – not only geographically, but politically, too. The boundaries of nation states are socio-historical, they cannot be created or dismantled at will without the risk of damaging the complex layers of the social, historical and political relationships that constitute a demos.

In attempting to morally delegitimise the nation-state, and any positive identification with it, the Remain argument has not offered a rational response to problems within the behaviour or psyche of Leavers. Rather, it is a negative narrative, which reflects the ruling class's distance from, and fear of, the majority and a constituency it simply does not understand.

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5. Ashcroft, A., (2019) *A reminder of how Britain voted in the EU referendum – and why*. *Lord Ashcroft Polls* [online] 15th March. Available from: <https://lordashcroftpolls.com/2019/03/a-reminder-of-how-britain-voted-in-the-eu-referendum-and-why/>

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An open letter to radical democrats

Claire Fox

When I decided to campaign for a vote to Leave the EU in the UK's referendum in 2016, I assumed many of my left-wing peers would do so as well. After all, there's been a long tradition of Euroscepticism on the British left, embodied by the deceased Labour MP Tony Benn and trade-union leader Bob Crow, and often well-articulated in the past by Jeremy Corbyn. Historically, there was hostility to the EU's 'neoliberal project' and 'market ideology', led by an 'exploitative transnational capitalist class'. The EU's rules-based system would most likely block any future 'socialist' government's key policies, such as state aid for industry. And there was the core issue: the anti-democratic nature of the EU.

That history of left Euroscepticism is well documented by my fellow essayists in this publication, and it was rejuvenated following the EU's ruthless ruination of Greece in 2015, even spawning its own portmanteau word: 'Lexit'. So, it was to my genuine surprise that once the public was asked to decide, most left-wingers prevaricated, eventually campaigning for, and voting to, remain in the EU.

What explained this U-turn? In a convoluted and defensive explanation, we were told that a referendum called by the Conservatives would be captured by the right and even by the far-right. But, as I argued at the time, this gave even more reason for left-wing democrats, with so much to gain from 'taking back control', to fight to lead the campaign and convince our fellow citizens of the gains of sovereignty. But it seems that appearances – what it might look like to support anti-EU Tories and UKIP – outweighed principles. While the left offered principle-light bluster, the right was able to claim they embodied Brexit's spirit of freedom and democracy.

This has set back the British left's credibility as champions of sovereignty – both popular and national, just as millions of workers have found their agency and asserted their commitment to self-determination. Instead, the left lined up with the mass ranks of the establishment: multinationals, banks,¹ all the main political parties, the House of Lords, lawyers, trade associations and their lobbyists, and so on. All united to campaign to remain within a top-down institution that has imposed austerity on millions of workers in the Eurozone, that was set up to ring-fence decision-making away from the masses in 28 different nation-states. But regardless of the threats of economic Armageddon, millions of ordinary people researched, debated, thought for themselves and 17.4 million of them voted in an incredible rebellion.

How did the left respond to the result of the largest democratic exercise in the UK's history? Were they excited at this newly politicised atmosphere? Sadly – and this is the most disgraceful part of this story of betrayal – far too many on the left did not accept the Brexit vote with good grace. Instead, they turned on the electorate for voting the 'wrong' way.

The left has even led the way in spewing conspiracy theories about why people voted for Brexit, fuelling a vicious culture war against Leave voters. They have been patronised, told they were easily duped and ill-informed. There were those

who noted their lack of formal educational qualifications, as though voting required one to pass a test. As Tom Bewick notes in his essay, this is an insult to the many campaigners for universal suffrage over the past 200 years.

We have also had a series of prominent left-leaning commentators deploying vile ageist insults against older voters. One example is the novelist Ian McEwan, who declared at an anti-Brexit convention: 'By 2019, the country could be in a receptive mood: 2.5 million over-18-year-olds, freshly franchised and mostly remainers; 1.5 million oldsters, mostly Brexiters, freshly in their graves.'² For the liberal left to anticipate the deaths of political opponents hardly seems progressive.³

Even before the vote, left-leaning broadsheet columnists thought nothing of using bestial analogies to describe those attracted to voting Leave. Nick Cohen talked of 'a know-nothing movement of loud mouths and closed minds...It is as if the sewers have burst'.⁴ The left have even coined a suitably dehumanising epithet to ridicule white, older Brexit voters as 'Gammon'.⁵

More recently, the left has created the narrative that a vote for Leave was racist. This has been used as a way of discrediting any popular concerns about immigration. While I'm personally a supporter of immigration, I appreciate any decisions must be made democratically and the prerequisite for that is a nation controlling its own borders. But the EU's freedom of movement (FoM) rule undermines our ability to debate the topic – even though many trade unionists worry that FoM has been used to drive down the wages and security of British workers, irrespective of their racial, ethnic or religious background. Raising these issues does not denote a backward-looking, xenophobic attitude.⁶

Indeed, the charge that the Leave vote is racist often amounts to no more than a slur, at odds with polling evidence, which shows that British attitudes to immigration are largely positive.⁷ Yet one prominent left-wing commentator, Paul Mason, talks of Labour-voting areas 'where working-class xenophobia is entrenched'⁸ and urges the Labour Party to build a narrative 'around resistance to Brexit as a project of the racist and xenophobic right'.⁹

Writing off predominantly working-class people as bigots is not just an insulting smear: it sets them up as an enemy of the left. This approach has now morphed into scaremongering about Brexit voter, with lurid scenarios of impending 1930s-style Nazis. Early this year, Julie Ward, a Labour MEP for North West England, tweeted that Brexit is a 'fascist, right-wing coup'.¹⁰ This delegitimises Leave voters as beyond the pale, not worth engaging with, and opens the door to side-lining millions of people for their good-faith, legitimate vote in the referendum.

This narrative also forgets that an estimated third of ethnic minorities voted Brexit, at least partly explained by the way discriminatory FOM rules, imposed by the EU, put pressure on immigration from non-EU countries. Disgracefully, the modern left, more consumed with identity politics than treating people as equal citizens with individual agency, has responded as though people of colour are an undifferentiated blob. Those from ethnic minorities who reject the EU are thus abused as 'Uncle Toms', 'coconuts' and other racial slurs.

Why has the British left made such catastrophic errors in the Brexit debate? When Margaret Thatcher famously declared 'There is no alternative' at the end of the Cold War, claiming that the market economy is the only system that works, she launched a post-ideological brand of politics that ripped the heart out of principled political opposition to the status quo. This resulted in technocratic rule in which managerialism replaced political values. If there is 'no alternative', then what is the point of the left and social democracy? Most on the left concluded that the only way to fight for workers' rights or social change was via the patronage of the British state or EU institutions.

This may even have led to the left's timidity about change per se, especially if such change disrupts institutional arrangements it feels comfortable with. It certainly has influenced its attitude to Brexit. As former Syriza MP Costas Lapavistas noted in a recent interview: 'Unfortunately, the left in this country [UK] and in Europe has become wary of the kind of radical change that Brexit entails... Too many now accept that the EU framework is somehow inevitable. All the debate is around how to fix it, tweak it or improve it.'¹¹

The technocratic, defensive turn also means that many involved in left-wing politics now focus on lobbying institutions rather than mobilising workers. As a result, they rarely encounter people beyond these rarefied professional networks, one reason why Brexit came as such a shock. As cultural historian Robert Colls has noted: 'For the first time in a hundred years, Labour faces a working-class electorate that it doesn't understand and doesn't know. Too many Labour MPs talk about the working class as if they needed social workers, not representatives.'¹²

Decades of this top-down, technocratic, social-work approach had sapped the morale of citizens. After years of being told how to live by their 'betters', the Brexit vote was a turning point when people rebelled and rediscovered their agency. The Leave campaign's defining slogan – 'take back control' – resonated. What is more, it gave life to instinctive principles of left-wing politics: support for popular sovereignty, mass democracy and self-determination.

This is a plea to those on the left throughout Europe, and many MEPs in the European Parliament, to avoid making the British mistake of confusing a popular yearning for sovereignty and freedom with a right-wing turn. European values (rather than EU values), deriving from the great Enlightenment philosophers, spawned the foundational ideas of nation-states: democracy, equality and liberty. To defame their modern emergence as inevitably leading to ethno-nationalism or nativist populism means the left will miss the chance to lead and shape this potentially exciting new political phase, in which the masses have re-entered the historical stage.

Perhaps left and right are not even worthwhile demarcations in this struggle. But for radical democrats, progressives who aim to make history and change the world for the better, Brexit – and its echoes throughout Europe – should be a clarion call to action and self-reflection. Hopefully the arguments in this pamphlet will help initiate the debate about what next.

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1. Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn may declare he will do anything to stop a ‘bankers’ Brexit’, backed by ‘super-rich donors’ and ‘billionaire hedge funders’. But this clashes with the reality of major banks donating six-figure sums to the Remain campaign, such as Citigroup and Morgan Stanley’s donation of £250,000 each to Britain Stronger in Europe, while Goldman Sachs and JP Morgan donated £500,000 each.

2. Guardian 12 May 2017 ‘Death of ‘1.5m oldsters’ could swing second Brexit vote, says Ian McEwan’.

3. For further examples, see 30 May 2018 Claire Fox Open Democracy ‘It’s time for Remainers to stop caricaturing Leave voters as stupid dupes’

4. The Observer 19 June 2016 ‘Take your country back from those who seek to destroy it’

5. Urban Dictionary: Gammon <https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=Gammon>
“The quintessential example of white fragility, gammon was a term that came into the mainstream after a sea of portly white men were spotted on BBC Question Time getting very red in the face whenever Brexit and / or immigration came up as a topic”.

6. See the essay in this collection by Alka Sehgal-Cuthbert

7. 13 March 2019 IPSOS Mori Britons are more positive about immigration’s impact on Britain

8. 12 June 2017 Guardian ‘Jeremy Corbyn has won the first battle in a long war against the ruling elite’

9. 27 May 2019 Guardian ‘Corbynism is now in crisis: the only way forward is to oppose Brexit’

10. <https://twitter.com/julie4nw/status/1139650056158662657>

11. 7th December 2018 Spiked, ‘Former Syriza MP Costas Lapavistas on the left-wing case against the EU’

12. 24 May 2019, Briefings for Brexit

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RECLAIMING DEMOCRACY

The Left Case for Sovereignty

“Some party hack decreed that the people had lost the government’s confidence and could only regain it with redoubled effort. If that is the case, would it not be simpler, if the government simply dissolved the people and elected another?”

Bertold Brecht (1898 – 1956)

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