

Brexit and the Diseased Liberal Mind

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The enraged liberal reaction to the Brexit vote is in full flood. The anger is pathological – and helps to shed light on why a majority of Britons voted for leaving the European Union, just as earlier a majority of Labour party members voted for Jeremy Corbyn as leader.

A few years ago the American writer Chris Hedges wrote a book he titled the Death of the Liberal Class. His argument was not so much that liberals had disappeared, but that they had become so coopted by the right wing and its goals – from the subversion of progressive economic and social ideals by neoliberalism, to the enthusiastic embrace of neonservative doctrine in prosecuting aggressive and expansionist wars overseas in the guise of “humanitarian intervention” – that liberalism had been hollowed out of all substance.

Liberal pundits sensitively agonise over, but invariably end up backing, policies designed to benefit the bankers and arms manufacturers, and ones that wreak havoc domestically and abroad. They are the “useful idiots” of modern western societies.

Reading [this piece](#) on the fallout from Brexit by Zoe Williams, a columnist who ranks as leftwing by the current standards of the deeply diminished Guardian, one can isolate this liberal pathology in all its sordid glory.

Here is a revealing section, written by a mind so befuddled by decades of neoliberal orthodoxy that it has lost all sense of the values it claims to espouse:

There is a reason why, when Marine le Pen and Donald Trump congratulated us on our decision, it was like being punched in the face – because they are racists, authoritarian, small-minded and backward-looking. They embody the energy of hatred. The principles that underpin internationalism – cooperation, solidarity, unity, empathy, openness – these are all just elements of love.

One wonders where in the corridors of the EU bureaucracy Williams identifies that “love” she so admires. Did she see it when the Greeks were being crushed into submission after they rebelled against austerity policies that were themselves a legacy of European economic policies that had required Greece to sell off the last of its family silver?

Is she enamoured of this internationalism when the World Bank and IMF go into Africa and force developing nations into debt-slavery, typically after a dictator has trashed the country decades after being installed and propped up with arms and military advisers from the US and European nations?

What about the love-filled internationalism of Nato, which has relied on the EU to help

spread its military tentacles across Europe close to the throat of the Russian bear? Is that the kind of cooperation, solidarity and unity she was thinking of?

Williams then does what a lot of liberals are doing at the moment. She calls for subversion of the democratic will:

The anger of the progressive remain side, however, has somewhere to go: always suckers for optimism, we now have the impetus to put aside ambiguity in the service of clarity, put aside differences in the service of creativity. Out of embarrassment or ironic detachment, we've backed away from this fight for too long.

That includes seeking the ousting of Jeremy Corbyn, of course. "Progressive" Remainers, it seems, have had enough of him. His crime is that he hails from "leftwing aristocracy" – his parents were lefties too, apparently, and even had such strong internationalist principles that they first met at a committee on the Spanish civil war.

But Corbyn's greater crime, according to Williams, is that "he is not in favour of the EU". It would be too much trouble for her to try and untangle the knotty problem of how a supreme internationalist like Corbyn, or Tony Benn before him, could be so against the love-filled EU. So she doesn't bother.

We will never know from Williams how a leader who supports oppressed and under-privileged people around the world is cut from the same cloth as racists like Le Pen and Trump. That would require the kind of "agile thinking" she accuses Corbyn of being incapable of. It might hint that there is a leftwing case quite separate from the racist one – even if Corbyn was not allowed by his party to advocate it – for abandoning the EU. (You can read my arguments for Brexit [here](#) and [here](#).)

But no, Williams assures us, Labour needs someone with much more recent leftwing heritage, someone who can tailor his or her sails to the prevailing winds of orthodoxy. And what's even better, there is a Labour party stuffed full of Blairities to choose from. After all, their international credentials have been proven repeatedly, including in the killing fields of Iraq and Libya.

And here, wrapped into a single paragraph, is a golden nugget of liberal pathology from Williams. Her furious liberal plea is to rip up the foundations of democracy: get rid of the democratically elected Corbyn and find a way, any way, to block the wrong referendum outcome. No love, solidarity, unity or empathy for those who betrayed her and her class.

There hasn't been a more fertile time for a Labour leader since the 1990s. The case for a snap general election, already strong, will only intensify over the coming weeks. As the sheer mendacity of the leave argument becomes clear – it never intended to curb immigration, there will be no extra money for the NHS, there was no plan for making up EU spending in deprived areas – there will be a powerful argument for framing the general election as a rematch. Not another referendum, but a brake on article 50 and the next move determined by the new government. If you still want to leave the EU, vote Conservative. If you've realised or knew already what an act of vandalism that was, vote Labour.

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