

Leaving the EU Was the Right Move for the Wrong Reasons

By [Eric Walberg](#)

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Region: [Europe](#)

Theme: [History](#)

Let's be clear: the EU was not set up to promote a friendly big socialist community, a Soviet-lite. The EU was created by the US, originally the European Coal and Steel Community set up in 1950 with the intent of promoting European integration, approved by Truman as a Cold War anti-domino measure. The chief method of promoting compliance with the US-sponsored post-war order was through provision of aid. The Marshall Plan (1948) was the vehicle for Europe, aid tied to the purchase of US goods and services, effectively subsidizing the US balance of payments.

The main international organs created at the time to regulate international economic matters—the World Bank, the IMF, GATT—and the Marshall Plan for European reconstruction were rejected by the Soviet Union as part of US imperial plans. Which of course they were, since it is only rational that the US as chief architect of the post-war international system would set rules which would allow it to win. The US Senate rejected US participation in the British-designed League of Nations, rightly seeing it as an infringement on US sovereignty, but voted 89-2 for membership in the clearly US-controlled UN in 1945.

A prostrate Europe was 'saved' from communist revolutions by the US Marshall Plan begun in 1948, and its ex-colonies, upon achieving independence, were drawn into the US orbit. Later US administrations came to view it and its successor the EEC and finally the EU (1993) ambivalently, fearful that an independent unified Europe could forge a separate détente with the Soviet Union, combining Europe's technology and industrial capacity with Soviet natural resources, manpower and ideology, gaining access to the Eurasian heartland and creating a continent-sized competitor able to 'threaten' North America (that is, threaten US world hegemony). Britain joined the EEC in 1975 under Labour. (After a referendum where a third of Labour ministers were opposed, and Labour members opposed membership at the Labour conference. The Tories were the gung-ho EUers at the start.)

But the US had done its homework. The ECSC/ EEC/ EU was structured from the start as a top-down bureaucracy. No constitution, its parliament having no real authority, just a pro forma body, much like parliaments in the socialist countries, which never threatened Soviet hegemony.

The EU has shown itself to be a faithful servant of the US, with only two brief moments of angst. The first, German Chancellor Willy Brandt's (1969-74) Ostpolitik, recognizing the obvious — that the GDR was a prosperous socialist version of the FRG, the best of the socialist lot. Brandt was even awarded a Nobel Peace Prize (1971), but was forced to resign for having an assistant who was foolish enough to spy for the East German Stasi.[1] (That he did no harm is shown that he was swapped in 1981 in a spy exchange and after German reunification, granted immunity. East German spymaster Markus Wolf have said that the

affair was Stasi's biggest mistake.)

Johnstone was on the inside during all this, and presents a devastating critique of that and the other momentary lapse from US hegemony: Mitterand's election as French president (1981-1995). The Socialists' Common Program (1974) 'reflected an illusion that was widespread in the left: the belief that economic unification of Europe could 'free it from the domination of Big Capital,' democratize its institutions and above all, 'preserve French freedom of action to carry out its political, economic and social program.'

Mitterrand's election would have been impossible without support from the French Communist Party, then at the peak of its electoral strength, which was rewarded by four cabinet posts. The US was catatonic, but this was nothing new. In 1936 and 1937, Communists had already taken part in the anti-fascist Popular Front government and in France's post-war government—until evicted in May 1947.

Fear not. When Mitterand finally made it to the top, Thatcher (1979) and Reagan (1980) were full-steam ahead with neoliberalism. Mitterand didn't have a chance. Capitalists voted with their capital and Mitterand soon abandoned his fuzzy socialism.

The whole episode looks like a conspiracy in retrospect. Mitterand, who was part of Petain's regime in Vichy France from 1941 to 1943, was no socialist by a long shot. His vague detente and brief flirtation with nationalization turned into a milder version of Thatcher, and the Communist Party was discredited, its 25% of the vote crashing to 3% today.

EU critique

Johnstone: The only journalists assigned to the European Parliament (she calls her chapter 'the European Non-Parliament') who showed real interest, and wrote real reports, were the Brits, because they were motivated. They were motivated, in fact, to deride the whole process of manufacturing intrusive Regulations that people didn't want or need. Coming from the Mother of Parliaments, they observed that this was no proper parliament, and they were right. It had no real powers and even the debates were not genuine debates. [2]

The Treaty on European Union, signed in 1992, was adopted by 50.7% to 49.3%. no more cheerleading, only a blurred vision of 'Europe'.

There was nothing "social" in the Maastricht Treaty. On the contrary, not only the institutions but the economic policies that Member States are obliged to follow were set out in the 600 page Kafkaesque Treaty document.

- The principle of "an open market with free competition. This canceled the right of any Member State to protect its vital utilities, infrastructure and resources from takeover by the highest bidder from some other country.
- The "primary objective" of the European Central Banks "shall be to maintain price stability." Combating inflation is all very well, but shouldn't banks be there to finance projects of public utility, such as infrastructure, energy sources, and large-scale industrial innovation? Nope. 'Overdraft facilities or any other type of credit facility with the ECB [European Central Bank] or with the central banks of the Member States in favor of Community institutions or bodies, central governments [...] or public undertakings of Member States shall be prohibited.'
- If States needed money, they must turn to commercial banks, giving vital

decision-making power on the choice of investments to private financial institutions.

- *The operation of any vital public utility, such as water, must be open to competition, international competition. In short, a Member State's essential public services could end up totally owned by foreign operators with little concern for the needs of the domestic population as a whole.[2]

While working for UNIDO in Tashkent in the 1993, I suggest to my British colleague, a gung-ho EUer, that the single currency was foolish, taking away national control of economic policy. He dismissed that as old-fashioned. But I was right, as the agony of Greece over the past decade shows. Staying out of the common currency was right.

Johnstone, like Galloway, is solidly anti-EU. Galloway put the left wing case for Brexit [at RT](#):

In our 47 years of membership, Britain lost its coal, steel, car, truck, bus, motorcycle, shipbuilding, ship repair and railway workshop industries, and much more besides. All in exchange for the fools' gold of the casino economics of the City of London, the devotion to which almost destroyed the country in 2008. Germany was to be the industrial power, France the agricultural, Britain the financial. This all led to the desertification of post-industrial Britain and the mounting anger which swept EU membership away in the Brexit referendum.

Now, abandoning the EU straitjacket is right, if the British government is trying to undo neoliberalism, but that's not BoJo's intent. Rather he and the jingoist Conservatives (the 'good' ones have abandoned the party) just wanted to eliminate a silly, extra layer of bureaucracy, to keep the US-UK 'special relationship' homefires burning, in case the EU finally gets its act together and starts to defend Europe in the face of environment and imperialist armageddon. That prospect is dim, but the toxic British nationalism from imperial days is the stuff that the Conservatives thrive on, which is easily manipulated to keep lowly Brits satisfied with an otherwise bleak existence, and to keep the 'wogs' in line.

Internationalism

That is the saving grace of the EU. It's bland eurovision is a harmless nationalism, not really a nationalism at all, rather an internationalism, based on a feeling of cooperation, trust, a safety net for the really poor. The chauvinist dissenters (Hungary, Poland) are somewhat controlled by their need to follow EU ways. This experiment is in internationalism, not globalization), which is merely imperialism in fancy dress (though that may be the goal of those now in control of the EU).

The past two decades, with the socialist countries quickly incorporated, has been rocky. They started with a betrayal of Russia, by including accession to NATO, right up to the Russian borders. Foolish, as you don't trick Russia and get away with it. Just ask Hitler. It seems the neocons dismissed post-Soviet Russia as just another satrap for the caliph in Washington. But Putin came along and put Russia back into Soviet-style superpower status. But that's another story.

Back to BoJo's vision. BoJo seems to enjoy rubbing EUers' noses in his jingoist rule. The latest idea is a Brexit Day, a bank holiday United Kingdom Day, commemorating the Brexit vote on the Friday nearest to June 23 – the date of the EU referendum in 2016. Just to soften his jab at traitors British EUers, they can celebrate, instead, the Queen's birthday and

coronation anniversary, both of which fall in June. The Scots and Irish are not impressed. It looks like they will stick to the EU. Is that what BoJo wants? Does he know what he wants, other than power, fame, schmoozing with his fan Trump?

Corbyn was torn on the EU, like Britain itself. The nice cozy Euroness, access to the entire continent, was alluring. On that basis alone, I was mostly a Euro fan. The Soviet Union was similarly a loose union across 11 time zones. When I lived in Moscow, I could jump on a train/ plane and travel freely. Soviets (excuse me, Russians) still have those 11 time zones, but 14 of the Soviet republics require visas, now holding their citizens hostage to the whims of dictators, and make job hunting in the now relatively richer Russia dangerous and prey to fraudsters.

Corbyn hoped to square the circle, to renegotiate a better Brexit and put it again to a vote, which would have left less rancor than what has happened under the Tories. But electoral politics rarely work according to 'sensible'. And the other trouble facing us all, the EU, Britain, the US, was the one that drove a stake through Corbyn's sensibleness. By which I mean the Jewish lobby and its red line of criticism of Israel. Corbyn refused to use the Israeli definition of anti-semitism meaning any word remotely critical of Israeli atrocities. If Labour had won, it would have been the only western country, EU member/ nonmember or American, that had a principled foreign policy with respect to the crucial issue of the day — apartheid Israel.

British Jewish and mainstream media (Jewish Chronicle, Jewish Press, BBC, Guardian, Times, etc) crucified Corbyn and other Labourites with slander, charging them with racism. Though the Jewish Chronicle was sued post-election by Labour activist Audrey White,[3] forcing it to fold, the damage was done. A Friends of Israel is attached to all major parties in Europe and America, a watch dog doing its best to stifle criticism of Israel. With the Tories doing Brexit, that made it acceptable by the otherwise globalist Zionists. Much easier to keep one big organization online than small, potential independent, countries, but BoJo promises 5 years of Zionism at 10 Downing St.

Let's say Corbyn had won, and took some of the above beefs to the negotiating table, asking for EU reforms which recognize the concerns of all the members to put more meaning into the parliament, allow for nationalization of key sectors, ensuring that resources stay under national control, not prey to predators from who-knows-where, whose only bottom line is profit, rather than social well being and democratic control. If it didn't work, and another referendum had confirmed that, Britain could 'brexit' and pursue a national policy in the interests of its people.

Maybe Scotland and northern Ireland wouldn't be moving towards independence, not interested in old-fashioned Tory imperial jingoism. (Galloway says 'good riddance' to northern Ireland, but as a Scot, he insists that Scotland will not opt for Bulgarian plumbers, who will come just to sneak across the hard border to get to London.) By staying out of the Euro monetary zone, Labour could use its Central Bank and its Post Office Savings Bank to fashion a monetary policy to promote regional growth in the interests of society, not bankers and the 1%. Instead, Britain is officially a Euro-pariah. BoJo promises Britons a bleak future, isolated, bankrupt, an economic basketcase, much like his friend Trump's America.

The international ethic behind the EU is flawed, yes. It was born to make a nice, big client of the US in whatever world plans it has. But it is not (yet) full scale globalization, where no local governments can effect change in the interests of their people. The coronavirus is a

salutary wake-up call to the dangers of mindless globalization.

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This article was originally published on the author's blog site, EricWalberg.com.

Notes

[1] That he did no harm, was not a 'traitor', is shown that he was swapped in 1981 in a spy exchange and after German reunification, granted immunity. East German spymaster Markus Wolf have said that the affair was Stasi's biggest mistake.

[2] Diana Johnstone, Circle in the Darkness, 2020, 276, 285, 358.

[3] White said of the libel damages that she would 'spend the money on the movement' and that she would organize a film showing in Liverpool during Labour conference in September.

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Canadian Eric Walberg is known worldwide as a journalist specializing in the Middle East, Central Asia and Russia. A graduate of University of Toronto and Cambridge in economics, he has been writing on East-West relations since the 1980s. He has lived in both the Soviet Union and Russia, and then Uzbekistan, as a UN adviser, writer, translator and lecturer. Presently a writer for the foremost Cairo newspaper, Al Ahram, he is also a regular contributor to Counterpunch, Dissident Voice, Global Research, Al-Jazeera and Turkish Weekly, and is a commentator on Voice of the Cape radio. Eric Walberg was a moderator and speaker at the Leaders for Change Summit in Istanbul in 2011.

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