



(<http://www.esrc.ac.uk/>)

(<http://www.kcl.ac.uk/>)

About us (<http://ukandeu.ac.uk/about-us/>)

Brexit Research (</brexitresearch>)

Experts (<http://ukandeu.ac.uk/experts/>)

Funding (<http://ukandeu.ac.uk/funding/>)

Contact (<http://ukandeu.ac.uk/contact/>) [Newsletter Signup](#)

(<http://www.scoop.it/u/ukandeu/curated-scoops>)

(<https://soundcloud.com/uk-in-a-changing-europe>)

(https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCxFJd_NZtqiFgN8h_xnVgQ)

(<https://www.linkedin.com/company/uk-in-a-changing-europe>)

(<https://www.flickr.com/photos/142325304@N02/>)

(<https://www.facebook.com/TheUKinaChangingEurope/>)

(<https://twitter.com/ukandeu>)

Analysis (<http://ukandeu.ac.uk/analysis/>)

The facts (</fact-figures/>)

Explainers (</explainers/>)

Research papers (/research-papers/)

Events (/event/)

Video and audio (/multimedia/)

Brexit and Corbynism could lead to a crisis of UK democracy



Increasingly extremist politics are finding their way into the British mainstream and are being treated as legitimate positions on the democratic spectrum. This is not only a crisis of one major democratic party but of both and so is also a crisis of UK democracy as a whole.

The concept of ‘populism’ can help us to understand the similarities between the challenges to democratic thinking within both the Labour and the Conservative traditions.

That these radical challenges are rising on both the left and the right helps to prevent either from being defeated internally, as they might have been in what we hoped were more normal times.

Challenges to democracy come from a number of directions. What I mean by democracy here is not simply the rule of the majority, but a whole system and culture of democratic life: the democratic and secular state; the rule of law; the principle that all human beings are in a profound sense of equal value; the deepening of international co-operation, law and trade; freedom of speech and association.

Of course all of these elements are open to critique, but what is happening more and more is that the critique becomes the whole, and that which is critiqued gets completely devalued.

The populist challenge to democracy in this sense is by no means a solely British phenomenon but is gaining strength all over Europe and America. The challenge says that these principles by which we live are really 'fake news'.

They are pretences of decency which dishonestly manufacture the consent of those who are complicit with their own subordination.

Democracy and human rights, according to this view, only serve to hide the reality of illegitimate power, exploitation and alienation; they are worse than useless because they are the tools which allow oppression to persist.

More and more we are seeing antisemitism, xenophobia and racism being interpreted as passionate cries of the oppressed against faux-democratic society. And antiracism, as well as democratic thought more generally, is portrayed as a discourse of power, mobilized by the 'elites', the 'establishment', the 'cosmopolitans' and the 'one per cent'.

Antisemitism is visible in the resurgence of a post-Stalinist left, most clearly in the Corbyn faction, but also on the left in France, in the US and in a number of other countries.

Xenophobia, racism and Islamophobia, are important parts of the emotional mix within the Brexit and Trump movements, as well as the AFD in Germany, the Front National in France, the new Italian Government and the Orban Premiership in Hungary – which mixes them with antisemitism into a full-house of bigotry; as does, of course, the Islamist variant.

None of these movements proudly embrace their own antisemitism or racism; rather they angrily deny any suggestion of it and often proceed from denial straight to counter-attack against those suggesting it.

The Jew who raises the issue of antisemitism on the left for example, is accused of being part of a Zionist (read racist) conspiracy

(<https://engageonline.wordpress.com/2016/04/29/the-livingstone-formulation-david-hirsh-2/>) to silence the voice of the Palestinians and to smear their supporters as antisemitic; a disgraceful mobilization of Jewish victim-power

The 'cosmopolitan' who raises the issue of xenophobia in the Trump or Brexit movement for example, is accused of being part of an elitist disinformation campaign to silence the legitimate grievances of the so-called 'white working class'.

Of course the working class is emphatically not white, it is diverse; and while there is surely some working class support for populist resentment, these are also movements of the middle classes and the rich.

On a number of occasions recently I have had people contacting me, saying I am an 'expert' on left antisemitism and asking me whether it is time, yet, to leave the UK.

I am scandalized by the fact that this question is being asked. When my mum, a refugee from Germany, was granted British nationality, she thought she was safe forever. She was so proud of her British passport.

I answer the question with an emphatic 'no'. But it is not quite as emphatic as it used to be.

I do not know what concrete and immediate dangers might flow from having a Prime Minister who is antisemitic in the sense that Jeremy Corbyn is antisemitic: that is, one who stands in a Stalinist political tradition of antisemitism, (<https://www.jns.org/opinion/soviet-anti-semitism-in-a-british-guise/>) one who has spent decades cultivating political alliances with antisemites, one whose instinct is to jump to the defence of antisemites against Jews (<https://www.thejc.com/comment/comment/jew-hate-and-today-s-left-1.61674>), one whose tenure as leader of the Labour

Party has seen it become what Chuka Umuna called an institutionally racist party (<https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2018/sep/09/chuka-umunna-labour-is-institutionally-racist>]), a space which is not hostile to certain kinds of antisemitism.

But it is not the immediate and concrete dangers of this or that scenario that I am really afraid of. What I am really afraid of is the rise of populist movements of furious individuals which may be influential in events to come.

I am afraid of the cadres of future leaders who are currently being educated to believe that the Jews are the enemy of the left (at least those Jews who refuse to disavow what is called, with a venomous spit, ‘Zionism (<https://blogs.timesofisrael.com/corbyn-to-zionists-even-if-you-lived-here-all-your-life-you-dont-get-the-english/>)’).

I am afraid of the future leaders who are currently being educated that the ‘globalists’ and the ‘cosmopolitan elite’ are organising a coup against the ‘will of the people (<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-britain-eu-judges/branded-enemies-of-the-people-over-brexit-case-senior-uk-judges-hit-back-idUSKBN1701BA>)’.

I am afraid of those who will embrace the narrative that good British people will have been betrayed by the supra-national ‘establishment’.

Populism is a pre-totalitarian movement, in the sense described by Hannah Arendt. It is defined above all by an ultra-radical critique of all that exists and an immediate

appetite to tear it all down and start again, as though nothing which exists has any value and as though we have nothing to lose.

It seeks to create the 'new man', unsullied either by self-interest or by false consciousness and for whom nothing is to be done for its own sake; everything is subordinated to the big project, the thousand year Reich, the higher stages of Communism, the Caliphate.

Family, love and friendship and the pursuit of happiness are strictly prohibited – each individual loves only the leader. Civil Society, the sphere in which people are free to follow their own interest, is abolished.

It cultivates contempt for any politics of concrete advantage. The enemy, the Jew, the Kulak, the bourgeois, is objective; they are not hated because of something they do, but because of who they are; and they stand between "us" and the good life.

Labour antisemitism, on its own, does not pose an existential threat to British Jews or to democracy in the UK. But the rise of a left wing totalitarian movement might; and the rise of a right wing totalitarian movement might.

There is a serious risk that Britain could be heading into significant economic and political crisis, as fervent hopes for Brexit and/or in Corbynism are eventually dashed. That is when British democracy might face formidable threats.

Jews are not leaving Britain because of Corbyn. But Corbyn, and Brexit, and the rise of anti-democratic politics, are leading Jews, and not only Jews, to think about plan B and plan C, should things become more frightening.

By Dr David Hirsh

(<https://www.gold.ac.uk/sociology/staff/hirsh/>), senior lecturer in Sociology, Goldsmiths, University of London. David is author of the book ‘Contemporary Left Antisemitism (<https://www.routledge.com/Contemporary-Left-Antisemitism/Hirsh/p/book/9781138235311>)’.

Disclaimer:

The views expressed in this analysis post are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the UK in a Changing Europe initiative.

[View all analyses \(/analysis/\)](/analysis/)

Author:

David Hirsh (<http://ukandeu.ac.uk/author/davidhirsh/>)



Date:

18 September 2018

Theme:

Politics (<http://ukandeu.ac.uk/theme/the-politics-of-brexit/>)

Share:

1 Comment UK in a Changing Europe

1 Login ▾

Recommend Share

Sort by Best ▾



Join the discussion...

LOG IN WITH

OR SIGN UP WITH DISQUS ?

Name



Jams O'Donnell • 7 days ago

This is propaganda of a pretty low sort. The author seems to be unaware or more likely, chooses to ignore, the numerous anti-zionist Jewish organisations and websites, such as Jewish Voice for Peace, Mondoweiss, Norman Finkelstein, Noam Chomsky, etc. etc., and also the on-the-ground organisations in Israel which voice similar criticisms of the Israeli Government. Are these organisation anti-semitic too? It seems to me that they are merely standing up for justice for the Palestinians and respect for a fair legal regime in Israel, as is Corbyn. Undoubtedly there is a resurgence in anti-semitism in Eastern and Mid Europe, but to conflate all criticism with prejudice, although this is promoted by the Israeli government, is a dangerous practice, like that of the proverbial boy crying "Wolf".

It is a matter of record that the Israeli state was founded in practice by terrorists using acts of terrorism against both the British government of the time and the Palestinian people. Acts such as the blowing up of the King David Hotel, and the massacre of the villagers of Deir Yassin, along with numerous other atrocities, all of which are in the historical record. The Israeli government was founded in violence, and has continued this tradition up to the present day.

This article is transparently part of the campaign which has been publicly acknowledged

see more

2 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›

ALSO ON UK IN A CHANGING EUROPE

Labour's 'constructive ambiguity' is past its sell-by date. It's time to come clean

1 comment • 2 hours ago

Freeborn John — The statement "Interestingly, the same survey showed that only 47% of Leave supporters would vote

Flags on food? why the fuss?

1 comment • 2 months ago

Mrgaret Pollock — Excellent article which explains in great detail why #ScotlandtheBrand is such an important

The government's migration report: A missed opportunity for radical change

Brexit means Brexit

10 comments • 2 months ago

missed opportunity for radical change

1 comment • 5 days ago

RcJ — What's to rethink we shouldn't be importing 100,000s to come and do low wage jobs when we ready have enough

10 comments • 2 months ago

Roger_from_texas — The author is way behind: Brexit has ALREADY soured relationships for a generation. The

 Subscribe  Add Disqus to your site [Add Disqus](#) [Add](#)

Related articles



(<http://ukandeu.ac.uk/labour-and-brexit-between-a-pie-and-a-pint-and-a-quinoa-salad/>)

Labour and Brexit: between a pie and a pint, and a quinoa salad (<http://ukandeu.ac.uk/labour-and-brexit-between-a-pie-and-a-pint-and-a-quinoa-salad/>)

Robin Pettitt (<http://ukandeu.ac.uk/author/rpettitt/>)

24 September 2018

<http://ukandeu.ac.uk/theme/the-politics-of-brexit/>



(<http://ukandeu.ac.uk/why-talk-is-growing-around-blind-brexit/>)

Why talk is growing around “blind Brexit”

(<http://ukandeu.ac.uk/why-talk-is-growing-around-blind-brexit/>)

Matt Bevington (<http://ukandeu.ac.uk/author/mbevington/>)

24 September 2018

(<http://ukandeu.ac.uk/theme/the-politics-of-brexit/>)



(<http://ukandeu.ac.uk/the-eu-might-come-to-regret-weakening-theresa-may-at-this-crucial-brexit-juncture/>)

The EU might come to regret weakening Theresa May at this crucial Brexit juncture

(<http://ukandeu.ac.uk/the-eu-might-come-to-regret->

weakening-theresa-may-at-this-crucial-brex-
juncture/)

Professor Anand Menon (<http://ukandeu.ac.uk/author/anand-menon/>)

22 September 2018

<http://ukandeu.ac.uk/theme/the-politics-of-brex->

Sign up to our newsletter

First name

Last name

Organisation

Email

GO

View our latest newsletter

(<http://ukandeu.cmail19.com/t/ViewEmail/r/A9A18423B28630162540E>)

Partner sites

28 Plus (<http://www.28plus.eu/>)

Me & EU

Brexit & Environment

(<http://meandeuropa.com/>)

(<https://www.brexitenvironment.co.uk/>)

NRlabs

Brexit Brits Abroad

(<http://www.pol.ed.ac.uk/neuropoliti>

(<https://brexitbritsabroad.com/>)

Parties, Parliaments, Brexit

Brexit Law NI

(<https://parlbrexit.co.uk/>)

(<https://brexitlawni.org/>)

The Brexit Reader

Euro Child

(<http://brexitreader.weebly.com/>)

(<https://www.eurochild.org/>)

What UK thinks

(<http://whatukthinks.org/>)



(<http://ukandeu.ac.uk>)

E UKandEU@kcl.ac.uk (<mailto:UKandEU@kcl.ac.uk>) - **T** 020 7848 7174

Copyright © ukandeu • Privacy policy (<http://ukandeu.ac.uk/privacy-policy/>) •

Web Design Agency (<http://www.thewebkitchen.co.uk>) - TWK