

Leaving the Fortresses: Between Class Internationalism and Nativist Social Democracy

Gareth Dale November 30, 2017



Sonia Boyce, Lay back, keep quiet and think of what made Britain so great (1986).

One moment in a BBC interview with Jeremy Corbyn in summer 2017 crystallized the dilemmas facing Europe's left parties on questions of migration.

Would a future government under his premiership, the Labour leader was asked, accept European Union "free movement"? In **response**, Corbyn stressed that the rights of "EU nationals" must be guaranteed and the needs of British-based companies for European skilled workers would be assessed. When pressed, he clarified: his preferred system would be approximate to the present free-movement regime, but it would outlaw "the wholesale importation of underpaid workers from central Europe." The ability of agencies to import low-paid workers to Britain to undercut or dismiss, for example, "an existing workforce in the construction industry" would be ended. To buttress this, jobs should also be advertised "in the locality first."

In these comments, Corbyn's position aligned with that of union leader Len McCluskey. For the UNITE general secretary, the EU's expansion—meaning specifically its *eastward* expansion (“central Europe” is a euphemism)—represented “a **gigantic experiment at the expense of ordinary workers**,” in that “countries with vast historical differences in wage rates and living standards have been brought together in a common labour market,” resulting in “a systematic attempt to hold down wages and cut the costs of social provision for working class people.” It's a view that blurs critical distinctions: between exploitative employers, the EU's labor-market deregulation, and immigrants themselves. McCluskey's rhetorical move of pinning blame on “unscrupulous bosses” who hire migrants is a close cousin of those who blame “people smugglers” for the migrant crisis – these bogeymen exist, but each is **a cog in a much larger machine**.

Corbyn's remarks, then, manifested what Tom Gann **calls** an act of “deliberate bad faith” whereby a critique of the EU's Posted Workers' Directive is run together with the implication that migrant workers undermine working conditions. Corbyn's stance attempted to disrupt the alliance within the Labour Party between advocates of EU-wide free movement and those who favor EU economic governance in all its forms. But his technique was misconceived. It performs a tortuous triangulation, upholding a left-liberal, anti-racist migration stance whilst offering a tentative hand to anti-immigration sentiments directed against so-called “central Europeans”; a hand that, clothed in a glove of class politics, disavows itself. It seeks to direct criticism toward the bosses but leaves loopholes for xenophobia to worm into.

Corbyn's “bad faith realpolitik” – in Gann's phrasing – on immigration represents a step back from his leadership's initial positioning. Entering office in 2015, he promised a sharp break with Labour's authoritarian and immigration-restrictive drift under Tony Blair, Gordon Brown and Ed Miliband. The Blair-Brown administrations had granted sweeping new powers to immigration officers, removed rights and entitlements from asylum seekers, launched the Islamophobic ‘Prevent’ strategy, and sought to link the grievances of working people to questions of immigration, as in Brown's notorious deployment of a far-right staple in his pledge to train “British workers for British jobs.”

In contrast, Corbyn and his closest confederates, Diane Abbott and John McDonnell, are dedicated and longstanding activists in pro-migrant and anti-racist movements. Against the legacy of Blair and Brown and the leanings of the bulk of the Parliamentary Labour Party, and despite the degree to which anti-immigration sentiment among the British public has been stirred, the new leadership has generally stood firm against racism. Upon his election to the leadership, Corbyn's first act was to attend a "Refugees Welcome" demonstration. He refused to be journalist-badgered into conceding that immigration levels are too high, or to promise to reduce them, and he appointed Diane Abbott as his shadow minister for immigration control. (It has been a while since a senior Labour politician, still less one with an immigration control brief, has felt able to declare, as Abbott did in the *foreword to Free Movement and Beyond*, that "freedom of movement is a workers' right" and where greater mobility is permitted to capital than to workers, "in practice workers' rights are severely curtailed.")

The fact that all this went largely unpunished in the polls has shifted the political climate. In turn, it altered the debate on Brexit. In the 2017 general election Corbyn's Labour Party gained ground among voters on both sides of the Brexit fence. The cliché is that it picked up support from "cosmopolitan Remainers" and "xenophobic Leavers," but this is glib and lazy. *Polls* reveal conspicuous *differences* of opinion among Remain voters on questions of immigration and the free movement of EU citizens and striking *similarities* between Remain and Leave voters on questions of public services – which both groups, on average, deemed more important than the UK's relationship with the EU. Labour's campaign strategy gambled on this, with signal success.

And yet, as we've seen, the radicalism of Labour's immigration politics has limits. Although its June 2017 election manifesto gave warm recognition to the contributions that migrants make to UK society and promised an end to *indefinite immigration detention*, it did not promise an end to immigration detention altogether, and it spoke of reducing immigrants' access to public funds. On a core issue of the UK's Brexit-defined conjuncture it stated – by sleight of hand, as if it's a truism – that "*freedom of movement will end*" when Britain leaves the EU. In fact, rather than an automatic consequence of Brexit, abandoning free (EU)

movement would be a conscious decision — and likely an unpopular one. According to **Eurobarometer**, over two-thirds of UK citizens support “the free movement of EU citizens” to “live, work, study and do business anywhere in the EU. It would represent, **warns** Michael Chessum, an organizer for the Labour Campaign for Free Movement, “the biggest expansion of border controls in decades.”

It is not enough to challenge this specific expansion. We also need to understand the complicity of leftist positions with its fundamental logic. In this essay I advance a critique of social-democratic migration policy in Europe today, and of left justifications of a “national turn.” I develop the argument by way of analysis of earlier migration regimes. But before I turn to the theoretical and historical sections, I shall briefly survey the recent record of three of Europe’s other left parties, as each are traversed by similar fault lines to those discussed above.

If the standout migration-related issue in Britain is Brexit, in Greece it is refugees. The foil, for Syriza, is “Europe” here too. For three decades, the Greek ruling class had looked to EU accession as an escape route from the periphery, an entry ticket to the “core.” Economically, that dream came to a clattering end in the crisis of 2008, and a neo-colonial relationship of Brussels/Frankfurt to Athens was imposed. Geographically, Greece’s peripheral status as the EU’s frontier-police state was forced into the limelight by the refugee crisis of 2015. On assuming office in that year, Syriza pledged to shut down migrant detention centers and to offer citizenship to second-generation migrants born in the country, but it reneged on these promises. Trapped in an abusive relationship with Brussels, Alex Tsipras’s party played along with the EU’s **dirty deal** with Turkey, which blocked routes for Europe-bound refugees. As Dimitris Christopoulos, head of the International Federation for Human Rights, **has argued**, the message sent out by the deal contaminated everyone it touched:

It contaminates us because we accustom ourselves to legitimizing xenophobia. It’s an inhumane message for the refugees and migrants who find themselves living in a buffer zone. It’s extremely problematic for the social cohesion of the buffer zone itself, which is Greece and Turkey. It’s damaging for Turkey because it buys European silence (for its leaders) as Turkey makes its authoritarian shift.

The same contamination extended to the treatment of pro-refugee movements in Greece. The EU's border was brought onto the islands and into the cities. On the former, the security forces collaborated with Frontex to prevent volunteers from providing refugees with aid and assistance. In the latter, police—many of them Golden Dawn members—have been deployed to evict refugee families and supporters from squats and shelters, with the majority transferred to pitifully underfunded detention centers. In sum, when it comes to Syriza, bad faith on migration/refugee issues takes the form of an externally-displaced capitalist realism: the EU pill has – and had to have – been swallowed, there is no alternative.

In France, the major party of the radical left is Jean-Luc Mélenchon's La France Insoumise (“Unbowed/Unsubmissive France”) – a project that, as its name suggests, represents a nationalist-republican left populism. Its stance on many migration-related issues is broadly progressive. At one of its rallies a minute's silence was held for the migrants dying in the Mediterranean. Mélenchon has condemned police racism and proposed mass regularization of undocumented workers. However, few if any of France Insoumise's proposed policies on immigration depart significantly from the current regime; indeed, the word immigration was not mentioned in any of the 83 headings of its program for the 2017 general election. On the defining migration issue of 2015, Mélenchon, a longstanding critic of EU free movement, slammed Angela Merkel for her decision to allow Syrian refugees *en masse* into Germany. At the root of this is France Insoumise's idealization of French republicanism – symbolized in its preference for the Marseillaise and *tricolore* over the Internationale and red flag. It means that while on questions of religion and race its position can in the abstract appear universal, it fixates on a particular constitutional corpus, the French nation state, as the embodiment of universalism. The upshot is myopia toward France's imperial and colonial history (and relatedly, a failure to confront its Vichy past), with a concomitant inability to take seriously questions of Islamophobia or the racialization of populations of North African descent. It even perversely extends to a portrayal of France as an oppressed nation under the thumb of a Berlin-led EU. What Mélenchon thunders against, notes, Clément Petitjean, “isn't austerity governments, neoliberal managers of capital, and the neoliberal logic of socializing the risks and privatizing the profits, but Germany. European capitalism and institutions are reduced to Germany.”

To round off this survey we turn to Germany's own democratic socialist and left populist party, Die Linke. With Die Linke the element of unreality in its migration politics does not pertain to bad faith, or to the elision of complex relations between the particular and universal. It lies instead in ut the fantasy required to perceive any connection between its maximum and minimum programs. The former, spelled out in the **2011 manifesto**, promises that a Linke-led government would “open borders for people in need!” It not only affirms that “Germany is a country of immigration” (an axiom for socialists and left liberals) but adopts a radical anti-capitalist spirit in its rejection of “a politics of migration and integration that only grants social and political rights to individuals deemed ‘useful’ for capital. We demand open borders for all.”

The “minimum program,” i.e. their politics of everyday practice, is a far cry from this. The Linke-led regional government of Thuringia, for example, has called for a new immigration law to ensure that immigrants are selected for their ability to fill skilled labor shortages. This, **it adds**, “speaks to Germany’s particular interests: that it attracts the qualified and talented skilled workers that it will certainly need in future.” The same government **participates in federal deportations**, citing as justification pragmatic imperatives and the liberal-democratic order. And *Die Linke’s* best-known leader, Sarah Wagenknecht, has gained notoriety for her ability to swerve right on matters of race and migration. She blamed a terrorist attack at a Berlin Christmas market on Merkel’s so-called “**uncontrolled border opening**” to Syrian refugees. (It also, **she added** with a wink to the law-and-order brigade, attested to funding cuts suffered by the police.)

Is it a significant biographical fact that the single most important event in Wagenknecht’s political formation was the **uncontrolled border opening** of 9 November 1989? Certainly she – GDR patriot, SED member and Honecker admirer – was traumatized that night. In this connection, given the SED roots of Die Linke, we should recall the GDR’s nexus of nation, internationalism and race politics. In many respects, the party line was impeccably internationalist and anti-racist. US black militants Paul Robeson and Angela Davis were invited for Kaffee und Kuchen with Walter Ulbricht and Erich Honecker respectively. But *Vertragsarbeiter* [contract workers] from Mozambique, Vietnam and elsewhere were

served a different menu. Their passports were withdrawn upon arrival; many were **housed in single-sex barracks**, restricted to certain zones of cities, isolated from the rest of the community, paid less than their East German peers, and faced with the “choice” of abortion or deportation if they became pregnant. While SED ideology was cast as a humanist universalism, in practice a vastly greater weight was placed on nationalism and the defense of the “socialist *Heimat*.” At the heart of that *Heimat* was that border-control monstrosity, the Berlin Wall itself, one of whose key purposes was to ratchet up the **rate of exploitation**.

An element of that nationalism was preserved, albeit in transmuted and pan-German form, through Wagenknecht’s journey from Stalinism to left social democracy. It is on display in her latest book, *Prosperity Without Greed*. In its pages, the Die Linke leader searches for the defining social cleavage today and finds that it is emphatically *not* class conflict between capital and labor. (The book contains, **one critic piquantly notes**, three mentions of “class”: a class of school students, a new class of gadgets, and a first-class airline ticket.) Rather, it is the opposition of international and national, the capricious locusts of financialized globalization versus the democratic and protective bastion of the sovereign nation state. The former is constructed to serve a neo-feudal order of monopoly capital and rentiers; the latter will enable the creation, under Die Linke, of a market society in the interests of the 99 percent.

One can trace in Wagenknecht’s program a redesign, in anti-globalization colors, of the liberal-socialist tradition—the nation state (à la Giuseppe Mazzini) as independent free republic, supervising a non-exploitative market society (the utopia of Adam Smith). But more germane to my argument is that *Prosperity Without Greed* exemplifies a contemporary trend on the left: a mapping of neoliberalism onto the international plane and of democracy and social protection onto the nation state, in justification of an embrace of ‘nation’ and “sovereignty.” It’s a trend that is perhaps most sharply etched in the work of the Paris-based critic Diana Johnstone. Through her lens, **a Europe-wide shift** is underway, “from the traditional left-right rivalry to opposition between globalization, in the form of the European Union, and national sovereignty.” This is a Manichean opposition. Globalization and the EU are framed as offensive and imperialistic, whereas national sovereignty is spoken of in folksy

Jeffersonian tones. (It is “an essentially defensive concept. It is about staying home and minding one’s own business.”) Most of the Western mainstream left, regrettably, has succumbed to the myth of globalization, allowing its visions of “human rights” and “antiracism” to lure them into the imperialist camp. Inured against such delusions are the defenders of national sovereignty. Foremost among them is Mélenchon, but all anti-globalization opinion, for Johnstone, steers naturally to the left—including even that of a Marine Le Pen (whose rhetoric of racial and religious equality she takes at face value). Of the many evils of European unification, the greatest for Johnstone is the free movement of labor, in particular the ending of immigration controls with the former communist countries, for “**it is simply a fact**” that mass immigration lowers wage levels and raises unemployment.

A cognate, if more eloquent and sophisticated, case has been advanced by the sociologist Wolfgang Streeck. For him, globalization, and European integration in particular, empower technocrats at the expense of the sovereign people and of the political sphere more broadly. They **relocate** political-economic power from the national to the global level, “into the hands of international organizations: to an institutional context, in other words, that unlike the nation state was consciously designed not to be suitable for democratization.” Streeck constructs the technocratic EU and flows of poor immigrants as a deplorable alliance. In his discussion of British ‘Leave’ voters, he sympathetically imagines their motivations thus: “When hearing about the refugee policies sold by the Merkel government to the German public as European policies, they must have feared that at some stage these would have to be adopted by their country as well.” But Streeck **conflates** their skepticism toward the “quasi-constitutional, democratically unchangeable obligations” through which the Berlin-Brussels Behemoth governs with their skepticism toward the threat of UK borders being opened to immigrants from “less prosperous EU member countries” and to whomever would “demand entry as an asylum seeker or refugee.” The immigration of poor people is seen as an anti-democratic and wage-suppressing imposition on a nation’s sovereignty. In this, as others have **pointed out**, Streeck affirms “a binary construction of citizenship where ‘migrants’ already living and working in Britain are cast as ‘outsiders.’” In predicting possible futures, he speaks in two tones: tragic Marxian and idealistic Polanyian. In the latter mood, he **proposes** that capitalism be “de-globalized,” enabling “social cohesion and solidarity and governability” to

be restituted (“re-embedded,” in Polanyian terms), and with the economy restored to its rightful place within the ambit of “democratic government.”

But why should a return to the “national” bring about a social “re-embedding”? Why would Streeck’s vision of re-democratization through a restoration of national sovereignty enable a regenerated, revitalised and inclusive capitalism? The case neglects not only the deeper factors behind European capitalism’s low growth, and the problems (notably ecological) that would be exacerbated by any return to high growth, but also what Streeck elsewhere has called capitalism’s “**specific directionality**”: its expansive tendency, such that, like incoming waves around a sandcastle, market forces tend to circumvent and subsume whatever institutional structures have been erected to keep them in check. This includes the liberal state, which was itself, *pace* Streeck, designed to **constrain democracy**.

If there is one single, or at least markedly visible, moment in which social-democratic affections shifted from nation states to the EU, it was the Mitterand government’s *tournant de la rigueur* of 1983. This appeared to signal the the dying gasp of “social democracy in one country,” and it seems of little accident that its architect was Jacques Delors, who then moved to the European Commission as a monetarist convert. There he took charge of pushing forward market and monetary integration in the EU, the aim of which was the commodification of previously protected sectors, supplemented by further rounds of privatization and the empowerment of corporations based in the northern/central “core” to expand their presence throughout the southern and (after 1989) eastern peripheries. Delors attempted to sell all this as a social democratic project, with the help of some snake oil called the “social chapter.” If Tony Blair is the most recognizable face of social liberalism, Delors surely has equal claim to its patent.

This trajectory exemplifies an aspect of Streeck’s argument that is unassailable: the ideology and policy programs of “globalization” did indeed capture the center left. In its springtime, “globalization” seemed to herald a pluralist universalism and trade-fueled growth that would uplift the poor and huddled masses. It would foster the creation of human rights regimes and would tear down walls – most spectacularly in 1989. It would stimulate migration, undermining xenophobic prejudice and consolidating multicultural norms. In the EU these

trends took a distilled form: the spirit of globalization appeared to have been neatly bottled within the EU's own perimeter, a local elixir of free movement, neoliberalism, cosmopolitanism and democracy. Across Europe, social democratic parties swigged the kool-aid. Turning "social-liberal," they embraced globalization, cosmopolitanism and intra-EU free movement.

What the liberal globalists (unsurprisingly) overlooked are the project's bleaker presuppositions and consequences: ubiquitous economic insecurity and inequality, polarisation between surplus and deficit nations, asset bubbles and generalised financial volatility, and the inevitable 'populist' (often nationalist) illiberal **blowback**. What the left nationalists miss is that the liberal-globalist framing of contemporary capitalist "progress," which they seek to shoot down, rests on false binaries. This is not without irony, in that they, who maintain that "globalization" has hijacked the left, themselves reproduce a central myth of globalization, namely, that free flows of capital and liberalized migration regimes, together with neoliberalism, democratization and cosmopolitanism, constitute an integral, world-transforming whole.

A more convincing image of the world system, surely, is that it is constituted and continually recreated through articulations of the global and the national (and in the case of the EU, the regional). The capitalist class does not cleave into two camps – globalist vs national – but is a contradictory **collectivity**, forever forced to balance between, and politically decide on, strategies that contain endemic tensions and contrary elements.

What does this mean concretely, in the case of labor migration? Consider, first, our own age. Far from enabling capital *and* labor to freely flow, it has brought a ratcheting up of constraints on the latter. Just as mid-nineteenth century liberal marketization generated **global economic instability and nationalist reaction**, neoliberal globalization has brought frequent financial crises and a *hardening* of borders and of migration control regimes. An early instance was Reagan's Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986, which may have done little to deter immigration but did ensure that newcomers were often undocumented –rightless and powerless. For the down at heel, Mark Duffield observes, "there have never been so many frontiers, checkpoints or restrictions. This unprecedented **global 'lockdown'** of the

world's poor has been accompanied by the growing surveillance and policing of all forms of international circulation." The EU is only in a limited sense an exception to the rule. Its internal borders now bristle with **more physical barriers** than when the Berlin Wall was erect. Its external border is a racist-classist lattice through which citizens and rich non-citizens stroll, while others are barred, and tens of thousands drown. Far from being merely physical or logistical, this regulated and selectively 'open' border increasingly impresses its power through the institutions of civil society.

The "global age" may be one of migration, but it offers no easy dichotomies; it is not an era, for instance, in which population movement has been *liberalized* or even significantly increased. Yes, several EU accession countries experienced substantial emigration upticks in 2000-2008. Yes, imperialist interventions and civil wars in Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq and Somalia produced large-scale refugee movements. But large-scale movements of people are, in historical perspective, normal. In the 2010s, international migrants comprise around **3.2% of the world's population**, only trivially higher than the 2.9% figure of 1990, or the 3% of 1960. Consistently, over the last six decades **just 3 percent of the world's population** have lived outside the country of their birth. Glance further back and you find that a larger proportion of the world's population in 1914 lived in a country other than that of their country of birth than do today. Emigration rates of twenty per thousand per decade were not uncommon before the First World War; nowadays even half that figure is **considered high**. With its wealth, high labor demand, ageing (and in some regions declining) population, the EU is a favored destination, but only 4.7% of total population are migrants. And the trend today is not consistently upward; far from it. Following the 2008 economic crisis, for example, inward migration into the EU **fell sharply**. As for asylum applicants, these, in the peak year of 2015, amounted to only around 0.25% of the EU's population. In short, these flows are not significantly undermining the terms and conditions of work. **Study** after **study** has shown that immigration generally has a minimal or positive effect on wages (counter to the claims of Johnstone, who misrepresents the stats she cites). Mass immigration does not undermine the prospects of labor or the left, nor – the logical converse – does mass emigration boost them, whether in 1850s Ireland or 2000s Lithuania. The nutrients required for labor and the left to flourish are cultures of solidarity and combative agency. These

emerge with changing “political opportunity structures” and social movement successes, circumstances that can obtain when immigration rates are higher, such as Western Europe in the early 1970s, or lower.

In left-nationalist interpretations, a fallacious thesis on mass immigration (that it has been unleashed by liberal globalization, driving wages down) is commonly linked to a binary that counterposes the EU to the nation state. The EU is presented as international, imperialistic, alien, and, as such, able to act as Europe’s gangmaster-in-chief, the organizer of sluices of Slavs and other Eastern (or “Central”) aliens into the erstwhile sovereign national territories of France, Britain, Germany and the like. This portrayal is then yoked to the argument – **persuasive, I think** – that the EU is constitutionally undemocratic and neoliberal in a way that nation states are not.

The two arguments should not be thus yoked, for the counterposition of *EU* and *nation state* represents a distortion. The EU is a curious hybrid, in certain respects “nation-like” while also a creature of nations, an intergovernmental federation, a continental **ultra-imperialism**, and an “empire lite,” forming a hierarchical construct with Berlin on the top rung, Athens far below. For its part, the nation-state system was globalized initially *through* empires, and capitalist nation states are inherently international and imperialist in orientation. This is seen, to take an example pertinent to our argument, in the historical construction of migration regimes, from the nineteenth century to the present day. In mid-19th century Western Europe, when nation-states were overtly imperial bodies, migration policy tended to be liberal and colonial: migration was not heavily regulated by states, but did involve large-scale interventions in colonies, through the construction of indentured labor regimes and the like. The final third of the same century saw a shift to more openly racist and nationalist control regimes, in the UK and elsewhere, during a phase of accelerated globalization, a period that also saw the consolidation of the nation as an ideological structure (a particularly robust one, riveted into the state), in relationship to which a succession of regimes of racism were shaped.

Britain’s first immigration-repressive legislation, the Aliens Act of 1905, was focused on the “threat” of incomers from Central Europe – and like its successors today, it targeted the poor.

(First-class passengers were **exempt from control**.) In Germany, to take another emblematic case, national unification was swiftly followed by the construction of a labor market that defined Slavs and others of “non-German” heritage as aliens. Polish *Gastarbeiter* were administratively pushed to the bottom of the labor market. Foreign workers, as the director of the National Employment Office **put it**, ought to be “employed specifically in the lowest level, lowest paid, unskilled jobs, because in this way the indigenous German worker simultaneously gains a noteworthy advantage: e.g., advancement up the ladder from common, low-paid jobs as day laborers to high-paid, skilled employment is rendered considerably easier for him as a consequence.” Immigrants from poorer nations were channeled into precarious work and slum housing. This could then be taken as proof of their national or “racial” backwardness or inferiority – a surefire way to cement xenophobia and nationalism in the ghettos and factories.

Across Europe, working people and social democratic organizations marched to the mantra that the nation was “theirs.” This pitted them not only against “rival” nations but against colonized and racialized “others.” In keeping within the national-racialized scaffold, Satnam Virdee has **argued**, they unmade themselves as a class; nationalism soldered social democracy to capitalism. But there were also those, often **racialized outsiders**, who kept a socialist-internationalist flame alive. For them, borders were deployed as mechanisms of offensive struggle, in the form of imperialism (the use of tariffs, exchange rates and subsidies as weapons in the struggle for world market share) and as invidious techniques of labor control. Their current was capable of temporarily winning over the mightiest of social democratic parties, the German SPD. In 1907, at its Stuttgart Congress, a resolution was passed in opposition to border controls. **It supported** the “abolition of all restrictions that prevent those of particular nations or races from residing in a country or which exclude them from, or prevent the exercise of, the social, political and economic rights of the nationals.” At the same gathering, Karl Liebknecht called for the “**Damocles sword of deportation**” to be destroyed, to prevent business interests pitting foreign workers against those with German citizenship.

The nationalist-internationalist divide in Europe's labor movement is usually recalled as the August 1914 moment: the split was over the question of war. Less well remembered is that it also coursed through the question of migration. The Stuttgart resolution was rapidly consumed by the 1914 inferno. In the deglobalizing era that began that year and stretched into the 1950s, conservative, corporatist and fascist migration regimes prevailed, all institutionally racist to the core. It was in this age that socialist movements assumed the reins of government on a significant scale. In Germany the SPD took office, and immediately faced the question of migration regulation. For instance, in March 1920, during a reform of the administration of foreign labor, Germany's Federation of Employers' associations proposed three policy measures to the SPD federal government: the principle of "primacy for nationals" (foreigners may be hired only when no domestic workers are available), equal pay scales for foreign and German workers, and that the admission of foreign workers be monitored by commissions composed equally of representatives of management and unions.

These were important reforms. The employers, defensive in the face of the 1918-19 uprising that had swept social democracy into office, had made concessions. They had relinquished their right to freely pick and choose from extranational labor markets and had acceded to the demand of the unions for equal pay rates. In exchange, however, the SPD shifted to a hard nationalist position, accepting the principle of labor-market discrimination (in terms of recruitment) against foreigners, and abandoning its prewar demand for the dismantling of state domination over foreign labor.

In the short run, the reforms appeared to have been obtained at the expense of the employing class but in the long run they undermined labor, by incorporating the unions into the machinery of nationalist discrimination and by strengthening one line of demarcation between foreign and national workers even as another line of division (differential pay rates) was softened. The construction of a state-regimented national labor market was sutured together with the principle of equal pay for equal work.

The Weimar SPD offers a textbook example of "left nationalist" migration policy. But it should not be seen as the antithesis of a pan-European approach. Indeed, the Weimar-era SPD was an important contributor to the European integration project. Upon assuming office,

its leadership was eager to endear their party to the military, and to other conservative nationalist circles, and a way to achieve this lay at hand: demand the return of the colonies that in 1918 had been wrested from Germany. In 1919, by 414 votes to 7, the elected parliament of the new republic, with the SPD at the helm, demanded the re-appropriation of Germany's colonies. Given the geopolitical frailty of Weimar Germany, however, social democrats increasingly came to favor achieving this goal by other means: Europeanization. An important presentation of this strategy can be seen in a 1926 book *Die Vereinigten Staaten von Europa* by Wladimir Woytinski, director of research at the trade union confederation (ADGB). A "United States of Europe," Woytinski proposed, was imperative if Europe's global hegemony were to be maintained. In his words, an economic unification of the states of Europe requires "a unification of their colonial policies. *The colonies of the individual members of the union must become colonies of the union as a whole.*" Through European integration, Germany would claw its way back onto its proper perch as a respected colonial power.

Because in institutional terms European integration commenced in the 1940s, its geopolitical frame is commonly thought of in relation to Franco-German peace, and to the Cold War (the US's bolstering of its West European allies). What this frame occludes is a prior history in which the idea of European integration was configured around questions of colonialism and immigration. In the 1920s the Pan-European movement, notably, envisaged European integration as a process of colonial condominium. It urged Europeans to settle in Africa and take control of its resources, for, as Hansen and Johnson put it, in the "development" of Africa "Europe would find both a large source of prosperity and a partial solution to the problem of migration posed by its increasing population." This migration regime would be strictly one-sided: Europe, the Pan-Europeanists argued in the aftermath of the First World War, must prevent immigration to the white-majority continent by "black workers and soldiers." As Hansen and Jonsson show, it is not far-fetched to see the 'defense' of Europe against Africans as the root of the movement for European unification.

The EU, then, was the vehicle of national-imperial states. The patriotism of its founding fathers blended national, colonial, and European-imperial ingredients. It replicated the

elements of the states that set it up. In some respects it is nation-like, in others imperial, both in its internal hierarchy and its preservation of colonial interests. EU free movement, for example, was institutionalized for essentially the same reasons it had been decades and centuries earlier, in nation states such as Germany: to lubricate trade and oil the gears of industrial change, and to enable businesses to dip into larger and more differentiated pools of labor, thus spurring a region-wide upscaling of competition, capital concentration, and – ultimately – the construction of a geo-economic behemoth. Throughout the national-imperial and EU phases, migration regimes were central in the management and manipulation of populations; they enable the rapid supply of labor to growing industries and the creation and enforcement of racist codes. A graphic example of both functions was the construction of the EU’s “free movement” regime at the time of the Treaty of Rome in 1957. The treaty promised a right of free movement to workers within the European Economic Community. Algeria was, as a colony of France, part of the EEC, but to enable free movement of Algerians would potentially undermine the “racial” exclusions on which the EEC was founded. Hence, the draft was rewritten to exclude **non-European Algerians** from free movement, while ensuring that the wording did not contradict France’s self-image as a benevolent colonial power, with French citizenship universally applied.

The EU’s migration regime is, from this angle, a continuation of those of the imperial nation states that set it up: Poles and Algerians to Germany and France in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; Poles and Romanians to Germany and Italy today. In the movements from Tallinn or Bucharest to core EU states in the 2010s we hear the echoes of, say, the 1840s Irish via Dublin or Belfast and across the Irish Sea. In that decade, London rigidly applied the liberal-market rulebook across blight-hit Ireland, exacerbating the famine and causing hundreds of thousands to flee to Britain where they were put to work for poverty pay, digging canals and laying rail. For London then, we might read Brussels/Frankfurt today; Ireland then, “Central” or “Southern” Europe today; canals and rail then, skinning chickens and cleaning offices today. In each case, the imperial political and economic elites seek out reserves of skilled or inexpensive and mobile labor and ‘integrate’ them into the national/EU division of labor, while coding them into national-ethnic hierarchies. In each case, that coding draws heavily on the colonial past. (Almost all movements of immigrants

into Europe have been deeply shaped by the European colonial past, as Nicholas de Genova has **put it**; our “brave new Europe” has been “busily redrawing the colonial boundary between a ‘European’ space largely reserved ‘for Europeans only’ and the postcolonial harvest of centuries of European exploitation and subjugation.”)

There is no mystery behind the commonality of the national-imperial and EU migration regimes. Both manage labor for capital. Value-producing labor doesn’t descend from the heavens, it’s manufactured. The foundation of accumulation is the reproduction of, and capital’s access to, workers. A notoriously “inelastic” commodity, the reproduction and circulation of labor power depends on all manner of administrative techniques. And this, the management of social reproduction, rubs up against a second capitalist imperative: the free mobility of labor. Immigration acts through and against other labor-reproductive processes. It is one of the institutions through which capitalist states create, mobilize, equip and **reorganize** the workforce, and the population as a whole – other institutions that perform related socially-reproductive functions include education systems, the family, and gender division (with women workers designated, in some eras, as a “reserve army”). All these institutions slice and dice the workforce into steep-sided hierarchies. If seen thus, immigration is no more “alien” than the others, and a fear of mass immigration is no less absurd than fearing the influxes of women workers that displaced the “male-breadwinner” norm.

In both cases, relating to incomers as fellow workers, fellow subjects, is axiomatic. As labor power, as “variable capital,” workers exist as objects: forced to stick with capital where it sets up shop and follow it where it flows. In this sense, immigrant workers are lined up for evaluation. They find themselves measured up and assessed for their utility to capital and for the nation (or EU). Subjectivized by institutions and norms that define them as other or lesser, “they” can be pigeonholed as low-paid threats to “our” welfare, as hard-working labor, or as beneficiaries of pious pity. “They” appear as accessories of capital, “foreign-branded” competitors on labor markets and/or essential for our harvests and industries, to “our” growth rate and global influence. “**Europe needs more migrants**,” especially skilled ones, bray the business leaders. Thanks to immigration from other EU states and beyond, the coffers of

Germany's public health insurance scheme and pension funds have **swollen prodigiously**. It is immigration that has boosted Germany's standing as the EU's pre-eminent power – even as its refugee contingent has enabled its credentials as a **humanitarian hegemon** to be burnished bright.

As subjects, immigrant workers are colleagues and comrades. Migration is a way in which **the exploited classes attempt to cope** with social and economic constraints. At the local level it affects labor markets, and can enable a raised rate of surplus value, yet it is also a rudimentary manifestation of struggle, as emigrants up sticks and quit their previous employers and state. This is, so to speak, the “liberal” moment in workers' resistance to exploitation. Deserting one's workplace or country, whether individually or socially, has always spoken of the attempt to improve one's lot. Migration develops the global interconnectedness of the working class, undermining local and national parochialisms. This is why Lenin was adamant that migration – within nations, to towns and cities, and across national borders – has a progressive edge. It brings peasants and workers into cosmopolitan intercourse, unsettling patriarchal practices, opening eyes, expanding horizons. Yet Lenin's cosmopolitanism was not rose-tinted or liberal. He, and internationalist socialists, recognized in mass migration a **bitter escape from concentrated misery**, a journey compelled by capital, to be entered more likely with trepidation than desire.

Similar contradictions relate to the immobility of labor power. In a “protective (or “communitarian”) moment of resistance, workers confront poverty and insecurity by building support systems within family and community: norms and networks that function as islands of solidarity. Unions, campaigns and left parties press for rigidities in the labor market. They seek influence over hiring and firing, and the laws pertaining to them. The forms of identification that grow on such islands may be refractory to the interests of capital, or they align with them, by cementing the segmentation and differentiation of the world's working class along lines of gender, nation and so on.

When navigating such islands, we should beware the temptation to conflate laws and policies with nations and polities. The former are an indispensable terrain for winning reforms that constrain business and protect workers, whereas polities and nations are structurally geared to

winning battles for capital, both against workers and against rival nation states. National sentiment and institutions of citizenship and democracy **sewed** the working class into the state; “the people” arose in opposition not only to dynastic or imperial rule but also **laterally**, vis-à-vis other “peoples” and “lesser races.” This is why, where socialists orient to electoral politics alone, internationalism seems to **melt away**, for – even when one thinks of the antagonist, capital, as a global force – it becomes harder to imagine collective agency in terms that reach beyond ‘our’ nation’s perimeter. But think it we must.

The idea that labor market competition can be overcome by raising borders, defending the “nation,” and excluding immigrants is a *Sozialismus der dummen Kerle* [a socialism of chumps, of numpties]. Does capitulating to xenophobia benefit the workers’ cause, or the left? Look no further than our most recent dismal decades, in which Europe’s social democratic parties bowed before anti-immigration pressure, a craven capitulation that brought no sustained electoral revival but has, on the contrary, kept the ogres and trolls on the far-right well fed and hungry for more. Or glance back to the 1940s USA, where draconian immigration policy was the gateway drug that led to binge after binge of repressive legislation, culminating in McCarthyism.

Conversely, the late-nineteenth century upsurge in American socialism occurred at a time of record-breaking immigration, and was itself **strongly based in immigrant communities**, with labor and socialist organizations often immigrant-led. And today a similar logic obtains; immigrant workers in Europe are building the above-mentioned islands of solidarity. Think of the recruitment campaign that has brought many eastern European food-factory workers into Britain’s **BFAWU**, revitalizing that union. Or the recently celebrated case of the Latin American cleaners at SOAS; they forced their outsourced firm to recognize their trade union, and built solidarity among staff and student bodies across the college, eventually leading SOAS to bring all **facilities staff back in-house** – a victory that has inspired similar successes elsewhere. In all the years she has lived in Britain one leading activist, Moreno Yusti, “has had stereotypes placed around her neck. The little woman. The ignorant foreigner. The migrant happy to undercut others’ wages.” The reality, comments journalist **Aditya**

Chakraborty, “is she fought harder and smarter than a multinational and know-all university managers. And she has levelled up pay and conditions for 120 workers.”

But the dark side of the SOAS cleaners’ story is no less instructive. Early in the campaign their employer summoned them to a meeting. Doors were blocked, and when employers’ representatives mentioned the phrase “immigration papers,” immigration officials in riot gear **stormed in**. Nine cleaning staff were bundled into lock-ups, then on to planes. Here, in one vignette, is the border, busy at work. It’s not out there invisibly hugging the coastline; it’s here, invading our communities and workplaces. (In universities, too, where it runs even in the ink of academics’ signatures.) In its design, immigration control aims to keep out the poor, and, as Bridget Anderson **points out**, “poor countries” and countries whose citizens are black are very likely to coincide. It is a racist instrument, designed to counterpose the “community” with the outsider, and to establish and maintain “racial” difference. It sorts workers into streams: the “unwanted” or “illegal” (and hence intimidated, attractive to cutthroat employers), the legally-immigrated, and the local-born (their pay packets topped up by a pitiful **psychological wage** stirred up from nation and racism). It creates **ethnically tiered workforces**: white CEOs and managers; lower-paid office workers and ‘skilled’ local-born manual workers; and unskilled manual labor, often from “Central Europe” or further afield. In some workplaces this stratification sinks into the soil of daily existence, as each category lunches in different canteens and rarely socializes outside their class-race tier, with predictably corrosive effects on solidarity and the soul. Nowhere is this starker than in Italy, where a highly racialized division of labor **separates** unemployed and young Italian citizens from hyper-exploited Romanian and African farmhands. Some of the former blame immigrants for their economic plight, and, ironically, often emigrate themselves.

Far from protecting workers’ rights, immigration control divides the workforce, driving new arrivals into insecure jobs, whipping up status anxiety, vesting employers with additional techniques of control, and subjecting everyone to intensive regulation by state bureaucracies and the police. Expanding the remit of the border police and intensifying immigration surveillance would not suppress labor-market competition; as **Richard Seymour** argues, it would only shunt “migrant workers further into the shadows where they are more susceptible

to violence and hyper-exploitation,” sharpening the racialization of rights and life-chances, compromising workplace health and safety, weakening unions’ bargaining power, and intensifying labor-market rivalry – all to the benefit of the propertied classes.

For the time being, borders are here to stay, but pushback is possible on both the fronts that matter: developing structures (both networks and norms) of solidarity in workplaces and communities, and recreating a consistent pole of anti-racist internationalism. By the latter I mean a politics that defends free movement while giving no quarter to neoliberal free-movementism (in the form, most egregiously, of the Posted Workers Directive); that refuses the purported choice of EU *or* nation; and that builds solidarity with all migrants – including the Syrian refugees who, deterred by Britain’s odious practice of indefinite detention, find work in warehouses, construction sites, and garages **for as little as £10 a day**, and those who, fleeing war, famine or poverty, seek to subvert visa policies, circumvent asylum procedures, keep afloat in rubber dinghies, or clamber over barbed wire.

Cosmopolitanisms “from below” are continually being recomposed, international networks of resistance that challenge rights violations and exploitative labor practices. In the early British Empire it was the “**revolutionary Atlantic**”; in Europe today it is polyethnic solidarity and anti-racist struggles, which resist recrudescing xenophobia while maintaining contempt for the ersatz cosmopolitanism of the globalist elite. Even in our immigration-paranoid age there is no shortage of examples. They can be seen in the SOAS struggle mentioned above, and the campaign of *ver.di*, the German services union, for the right to vote for migrants. They are found in ‘whole worker’ organizing, such as the Latin American Workers Association in London, whose educational workshops give migrant workers strength by informing them of their rights. Some are local and barely visible. They include acts of charity and support for refugees: donations of money or clothes, **providing shelter**, or other forms of practical solidarity, such as organizing to stop colleagues or neighbors being deported. Protests, such as those in Britain calling for the closure of **Yarl’s Wood** detention center, the M18 anti-racist demonstrations, the **Preventing Prevent** networks, **Calais Migrant Solidarity** and the **No Border Network**. And propaganda campaigns, such as that of the Two-Tailed Dog Party in Hungary. When the Orbán government launched a billboard campaign featuring statements –

ostensibly to refugees but written in Hungarian, strictly for domestic consumption – such as “If you come to Hungary, you have to respect our culture!” and “If you come to Hungary, you cannot take Hungarians’ jobs!,” in response **satirical billboards** appeared, mocking the government’s slogans. “Did you know there’s a war in Syria?” “Did you know a tree might fall on your head?” “Did you know one million Hungarians want to emigrate to Europe?,” and the like.

Most impressively, in Barcelona in February 2017 protestors **marched** to urge the Spanish government to take in thousands of refugees. The protest included recently-unionized African street vendors, Catalan independence supporters, and NGO activists, among tens of thousands of others. Here was unassailable proof that anti-racism and migrant solidarity can attract mass support. A momentous statement – in effect, that “Black Lives Matter” – it gave a glimpse of the potential for a pushback against the EU’s border-control regime.

That Barcelona acted as a beacon reflects, in part, politicization specifically around the Catalan question, given that the demonstration was a rebuke to central government. In part, however, it also carries a wider lesson. Over previous years a narrative had been created, around a multiplicity of campaigns, that provided “**real explanations of why people are suffering**” – for example, that high rents are the outcome of “predatory tourism, unscrupulous landlords, a lack of social housing, and property being purchased as overseas investments.” The local left party, Barcelona en Comú, had helped to create those progressive narratives, and gave its backing to the demonstration – and yet it also led the very city administration that had meted out **repression to migrant street vendors**.

The new social democratic parties discussed earlier occupy a similar terrain to Barcelona en Comú. In aspiring to govern they face relentless pressure to act in the interests of capital, and to maintain the state as a capitalist force, complete with barbed borders, policing of migrant street vendors, and the rest. They are also, however, projects that emerge from, engage with, and listen to labor and other social movements. Such movements, like the campaigns just listed, offer glimpses of the emergence of internationalist forms of collective agency that can counter the stubborn hold of the “national” on the imagination of the left. They can begin to create the shared “practices, demands, strategies, re-writings of histories, understandings of

each other, and – above all – common aspirations” which, Panagiotis Sotiris **has argued**, can overcome divisions of ethnicity, religion, and citizenship and establish practical political unity. Struggles by migrants, and in solidarity with migrants, are indispensable. They are essential to the constitution of political subjects capable of countering capital on an internationalist basis, collective subjects that orient not around nation and ethnos – the architecture of the existing order – but around networks of the present and transformative projects of the future.