

Migration, Racism and Class Struggle in Post-Brexit Britain

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Discussing Migration in Brexit Britain

- Liberal: They're good for GDP; they are victims
 - Social-Democrats: social dumping; undercutting wages; good for GDP
 - Conservative: benefit scroungers; stealing jobs; "swarm"
 - Right/Far-right: Criminals
- **Migrants as a bargaining chip**



Structure of the Talk

- Theorizing the relationship between migration and class struggle
- Trade unions, labour and migration
- Im/migrant self-organization in Britain
- We can discuss what changes Brexit might change and ho

Migration and Class Struggle

- Labour movement and trade union renewal literature views migrants as a potential source of renewal (Alberti, Holgate & Tapia 2013; Munck 2011; Ness 2010)
- “Autonomy of migration”-literature (Bojadžijev 2008, Mezzadra 2010, Papadopoulos & Tsianos 2013) as critique of economic explanations of migration (push-pull factors) theorises migrants’ and refugees’ agency and subjectivities and posits it as a social movement
- Class struggle needs to be thought beyond the point of production, struggles over how societal surpluses are distributed (i.e. Harvey’s “right to the city”) and how capital reproduces itself in society (i.e. post-operaismo)

How do we then make the leap to think migration as class struggle?

- Social movements as an arena of class struggle and “mediated expression of class struggle (Barker 2013:47)
→ heterogenous, networked, different social classes, in opposition to status quo and seek to change something collectively
- Class struggle from below and from above (Miliband 1989)

“A spectre haunts the world and it is the spectre of migration. All the powers of the **old world** are allies in a merciless operation against it, but the movement is irresistible.”

(Hardt & Negri, 2000:213)

Class Struggle from Above

Is there such a thing as a monolithic “old world”?

- Days of managed migration vis-à-vis guestworker programmes are over (cost, resources etc.)
- manufacturing and agriculture require workers willing to work for sub-standard wages – pre-emptive strategy by capital?
- EU enlargement, Schengen and work visas for Balkan states
- Posted Worker Directive allows foreign companies to hire employees at sub-standard wages; one way to circumvent labour regulation
- Finance capital (hegemonic) seeks to profit from the financial processes involved in migration (i.e. remittances) (Canterbury 2012:238)
- The refugee industry (i.e. Italy)

“Every industrial and commercial centre in England now possesses a working class divided into two *hostile* camps, English proletarians and Irish proletarians. The ordinary English worker hates the Irish worker as a competitor who lowers his standard of life. In relation to the Irish worker he regards himself as a member of the *ruling* nation and consequently he becomes a tool of the English aristocrats and capitalists against Ireland, thus strengthening their domination *over himself*. He cherishes religious, social, and national prejudices against the Irish worker. His attitude towards him is much the same as that of the “poor whites” to the Negroes in the former slave states of the U.S.A.. The Irishman pays him back with interest in his own money. He sees in the English worker both the accomplice and the stupid tool of the *English rulers in Ireland*.

This antagonism is artificially kept alive and intensified by the press, the pulpit, the comic papers, in short, by all the means at the disposal of the ruling classes. *This antagonism* is the secret of the *impotence of the English working class*, despite its organisation. It is the secret by which the capitalist class maintains its power. And the latter is quite aware of this.”

- Karl Marx to Sigfrid Meyer and August Vogt in New York, London, April 9, 1870

Trade Unions, Labour and Migration

- Only in 1976 the TUC moved toward an anti-racist position which did not blame Black immigrants for their unwillingness to integrate
- In 2004, unions accepted the A8 accession and labour market liberalisation
- The Labour government created a Union Modernisation Fund which financed unions' attempts to integrate migrant workers from Eastern Europe into the unions under the banner of "community cohesion" – Initiatives included union learning, etc.
- Gordon Brown and the demand for British Jobs for British Workers in 2009 was taken up by strikers at the Lindsey Oil Refinery
- During the 2015 general elections the Labour Party produced tea mugs calling for "immigration controls"



“Unions understand that workers have always done best when the labour supply is controlled and communities are stable. While we must reject any form of racism, and help refugees fleeing war, we must also listen to the concerns of working people. (...). **They understand that the free movement of labour means downward pressure on wages, in some sectors at least.** (...). That’s why I have called for **new safeguards** that would ensure any employer recruiting from abroad must be covered by a proper union or collective bargaining agreement, stopping companies cutting costs by slashing workers’ wages and transforming a race-to-the-bottom culture into a rate-for-the-job society.”

Len McLuskey, Unite the Union writing in Huffington Post, http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/len-mccluskey/i-am-standing-on-my-recor_b_13659322.html?utm_hp_ref=uk-politics&ir=UK+Politics

Unite the Union & Hotel Workers Branch

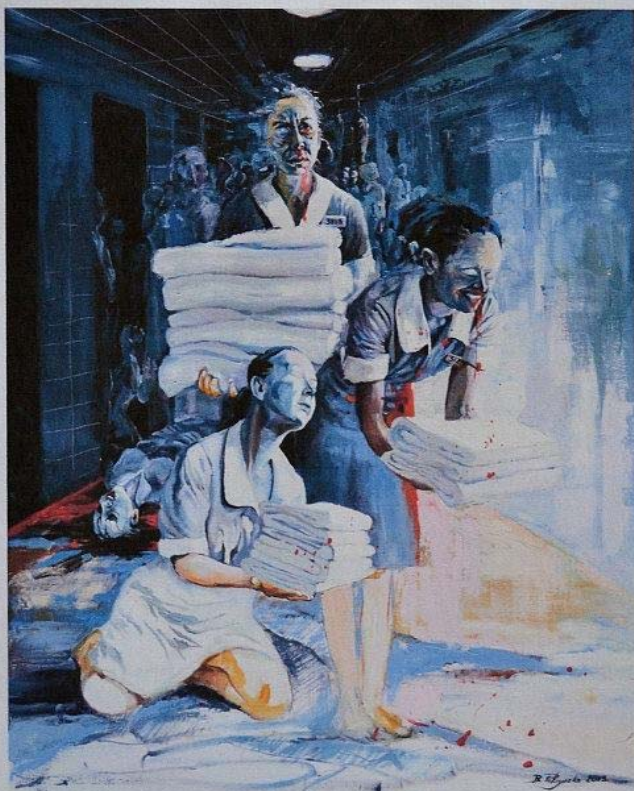
- employs a Polish-speaking organizer
- Advisory sessions in Polish every Monday
- Holds theatre workshops with a renown arts institute based on Boal's 'Theatre of the Oppressed'
- Published a bilingual graphic novel about organizing in London's hotel sector



Barbara Pokryszka

Opowieść o dwóch miastach

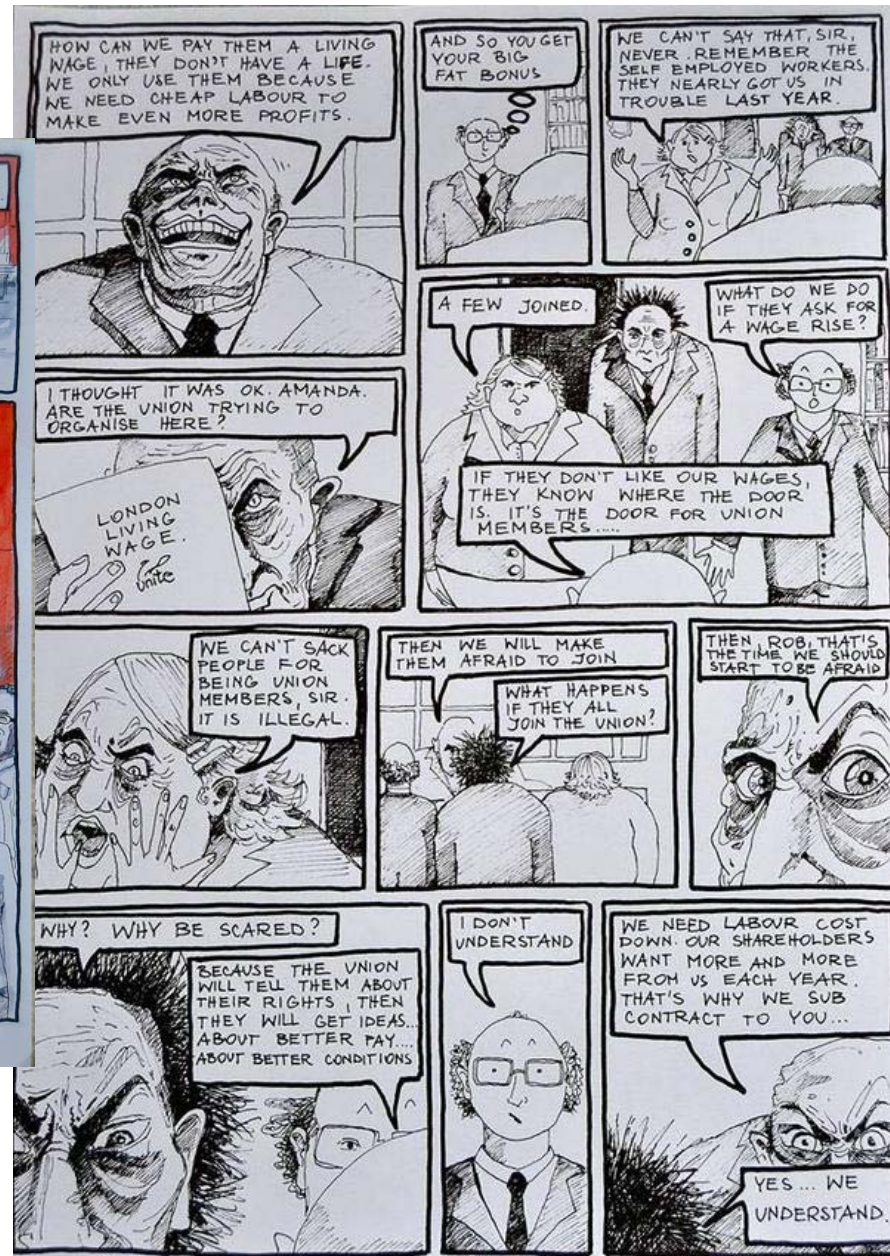
Unite the Union



The Hotel Workers Branch



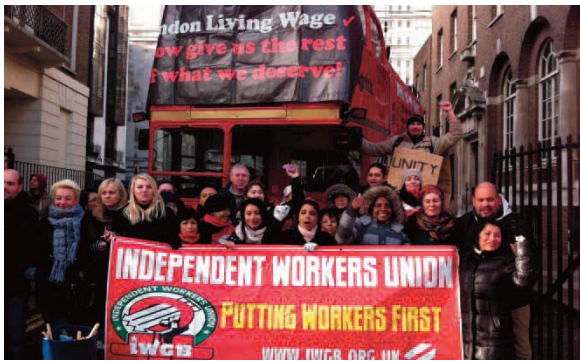
Source:
<https://twitter.com/hwunite/status/643418276400361472>



Migrant self-organization

- Immigrant self-organization represents “two ideal streams” with one directed toward the home country and another one directed toward circumstances in new country
- Castles and Davidson distinguish between different forms of migrant self-organization. Castles emphasises the dual nature of ethnic mobilizations when he writes: “Ethnic mobilization is often a reaction to the social, cultural and political exclusion experienced by immigrants, indigenous peoples and other minorities” (Castles & Davidson 2000:129).

- Self-organization can provide immigrants with a refuge from the pressures of their new host society, a path to integrate into the host society or even foster anti-solidaristic practices (xenophobia, racism).
- The forms of self-organization chosen by different immigrant groups reflect:
 - the nature of their migration
 - discrimination, marginalization and racialization (or the lack thereof) migrant groups face off and on the job
 - the political traditions which they transport from their home country



Source: IWGB website



Source: Asamblea Mujeres



www.alamy.com - HGAR51



Source: Twitter "Migrantes Unidos"



Source: Solidarity with the Greek Resistance Facebook Page

ANGRY WORKERS OF THE WORLD

Precarious and Unruly

Source: angry workers of the world
wordpress blog



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Polish workers in UK consider strike over anti-immigrant rhetoric

Campaign urges immigrant workers to stage unprecedented one-day walkout to demonstrate importance to UK economy

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Daily Telegraph 04 Aug 2015: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/immigration/11783297/Polish-workers-in-UK-consider-strike-over-anti-immigrant-rhetoric.html>

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Polish blood campaign: Poles donating to NHS

20 August 2015 | UK



(From left) Jerzy Majchrzycki, Angelica Kobylinska and Michal Wojcik donated blood in London

Polish people living in the UK have been donating blood to highlight their importance to British life.

Conclusion

- Migrants as a bargaining chip (benefit cuts, freedom of movement etc., second-class citizens)
- Sections of the Labour Party and wider left believe it is necessary to make concessions on freedom of movement in order to win “the white working class”-vote
- Highly questionable whether return to controlled immigration regime is even possible and that this consequently would ensure labour rights.