BREXIT: WHY WE MUST UNITE AGAINST RACISM AND FIGHT FOR AN ALTERNATIVE TO CUTS
FOREWORD

The run up to the EU referendum was dominated by the demonisation of migrants and attempts to undermine the value of immigration to our society. The right wing campaign shamelessly played on people's fears, using lies and prejudice.

This is not an entirely new or sudden development. The government's increasingly vitriolic rhetoric on immigration over the past six years has contributed to a climate of misplaced fear and hostility. Yet while rhetoric is one reason, the breeding ground for the current climate of intolerance and hatred lies with austerity and cuts.

People are experiencing very real crises in living standards, job security, the availability of housing, school places, GPs and other vital services. Many people, echoing the myths churned out by much of the media, are blaming immigration and scapegoating minority groups.

This pamphlet explains why immigration is not to blame. And it goes further. Side by side with anti-racism campaigning we need action to stop cuts, and call for more employment rights and investment in our public services.

Waiting lists for vital public services have been caused by long term chronic underfunding by the current and last government. Cuts to public services were presented as necessary. But austerity is a political choice. Not only has it made our economic recovery harder, it has made the vast majority of people poorer, hitting public sector workers in particular, as we set out in our ‘There is an alternative’ pamphlet.

Cuts have led to overstretched and underfunded public services, forcing people into competition with others for services that should be protected and accessible to all who need them.

The key to combating the rise in racism lies in combining anti-racist action, making the positive case for immigration, with campaigning against cuts in public services, low pay and insecure work.

Mark Serwotka  
General Secretary

Janice Godrich  
President
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BREXIT AND RACISM

PCS has a strong history of campaigning against racism and fascism. We stood proudly against the racism and intolerance that dominated campaigning in the run up to the EU referendum and that has manifested in hate crimes and abuse following the announcement of the referendum result.

Racist violence, abuse and harassment are not new and did not suddenly appear during or after the EU referendum. But the official campaign to leave the EU increased the visibility of the far right, with many aspects of the campaign – such as the negative portrayal of migrants – encouraging some with racist attitudes to voice their views publicly and with confidence.

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The government’s increasingly vitriolic rhetoric on immigration over the past six years, along with the introduction of policies such as Theresa May’s “Go Home” vans, has also contributed to a climate of misplaced fear and hostility. Policies of past governments have also contributed to the problem.

Even so, race and hate crimes saw a dramatic increase in the days, weeks and months following the referendum result, and still remain higher than the previous year.

The spike in incidents peaked in June and July, with one week seeing a 58% increase on the equivalent period in 2015.

HATE CRIMES BEFORE AND AFTER BREXIT
Percentage rise in recorded hate crimes, between Jun–August 2015 and Jun–Aug 2016. England, Wales and Northern Ireland

Source: National Police Chiefs’ Council
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FALLING LIVING STANDARDS

As the TUC has rightly recognised, the EU referendum campaign gave a voice to communities who feel abandoned by globalisation, deindustrialisation and the pace of change.

While exacerbated by the financial crash, the process of deindustrialisation and the destruction of entire sectors vital to local labour markets such as manufacturing has been advanced over many years. Secure, highly trained and unionised jobs have been lost and replaced by precarious, low skilled, zero hours jobs. The average wage for workers in Britain is still £20 per week lower than it was before the crisis.

Over half of households across the working age population have seen falling or flat living standards in the last decade – equivalent to almost 11 million households. Two-thirds of the growth in average working age income has been wiped out by rising housing costs.

The Resolution Foundation highlights how income stagnation since the mid-2000s has fuelled disillusionment at the economic and political status quo.

Research following the referendum shows that areas which saw the highest levels of cuts to public services had the highest vote to leave the EU. Leave voters cited immigration as their top priority, fuelled by an official leave campaign that incited intolerance and hatred.

Trade unions say clearly that immigration is not the cause of the very real insecurity and fears many people are currently facing. And it is our job as a trade union movement to set out why our public services are struggling, why millions of people are facing a crisis in living standards, and why the economy is not working for the vast majority of people.

None of the hatred and animosity we are now seeing is coincidental. It’s what happens when intolerance is not only accepted, but encouraged by those who gain from cuts in public services, low pay and insecure work.

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BIG INCOME SQUEEZE

Earnings are predicted to be down significantly until at least 2019, with inflation soaring – the result is a big income squeeze. This decade is now set to be the weakest for wage growth since the 1900s.

Weaker earnings growth and ongoing benefit cuts mean that the poorest third of households are set to face falling household incomes over the next five years.

Analysis shows that once inflation is taken into account, average earnings are forecast to be lower in 2021 than in 2008, and £830 a year lower than expected.

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Much of the pre-Brexit debate was skewed by myths and falsehoods, particularly when it came to immigration. This deceitful misrepresentation has escalated following the referendum, contributing to a dangerous climate of fear and hatred. Yet the facts are clear.

The public often vastly overestimates the number of migrants in the UK:
- Polls show that people think there are far more immigrants in Britain than the reality.
- On average people think that immigrants make up a quarter – 24.4% – of the population when it is actually half that, at just over 12%.

The public consistently overestimate the share of asylum seekers as a percentage of migrants:
- The public believe they make up 62% but, in reality, asylum seekers only make up 4% of all immigrants.
- An estimated 323,000 people emigrated from the UK in 2014, joining the almost one in 10 British citizens that already live overseas. 5.5 million (8%) of the UK population live abroad – compared to just 0.8% of Americans.

EU migrants benefit our economy. They tend to be younger, healthier, well-educated and with fewer dependents, and less likely to use all forms of public services. New EU migrants paid in via taxes nearly 30% more than they cost public services.

New research has shown that the underlying reason for worsening health and declining living standards in the UK over the last few years was not immigration, but ever growing economic inequality and the public spending cuts of austerity.

Just 1% of migrants claim social security compared to 4% of the UK born population

The majority of new immigrants are not eligible for social housing and myths of migrants ‘jumping’ social housing waiting lists are completely untrue – on average, immigrants are less likely to be in social housing than people born in the UK.

Just 1% of migrants claim social security compared to 4% of the UK born population. Importantly, and contrary to regular inaccurate reporting, the majority of new jobs created are not taken up by immigrants. The immigrant share in new jobs is – and always has been – broadly the same as the share of immigrants in the working age population.
MIGRANTS NOT TO BLAME FOR LOW WAGES

Migrant workers from the EU (and the rest of the world) are employed in a range of industries, including highly skilled IT professionals to dedicated nurses and midwives. Without these skills, vital public services such as the NHS would not function.

This has often been overlooked in the public debate about immigration. Public concern is focused on the use of migrant workers as a source of cheap labour, particularly when it is presented as a risk to British workers and people’s pay. But migrants are not to blame for low wages.

The TUC found that between 2007 and 2015 in the UK, real wages fell by 10.4%, the joint lowest in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries. Britain has suffered a bigger fall in real wages since the financial crisis than any other advanced country apart from Greece.

Deindustrialisation and the imbalance in our economy has been decades in the making, and has only got worse since the financial crash in 2008. The average wage is still £20 per week lower than it was before the 2008 crisis and increasingly workers are being left without basic protections at work as a result of the
rise of zero-hour contracts and the growth of the ‘gig economy’.

Six million workers are being paid less than the voluntary living wage.

The real reason for low and falling pay is that too many employers have been able to get away with breaking the law, paying less than the minimum wage, and circumventing employment rights and trade unions. This has driven down conditions for all workers and forced an increased number of workers into insecure employment. Nearly two million workers are now in some form of temporary, insecure job.

At the same time, the government is cutting protections for workers. The Employment Agency Standards Inspectorate, which was set up to ensure employment rights are protected, particularly for vulnerable workers, suffered a cut to its budget of more than 50% between 2010 and 2015. The number of staff has been cut by 70% and the organisation failed to bring a single prosecution in an entire year.

The problems with our economy are not caused by immigration. Government failure to act in the economic interests of the vast majority of workers, employers engaging in a race to the bottom and failing to pay their workers a fair wage, and the undermining and weakening of trade unions are all to blame.

Our economic system has failed, working only for the very richest while millions of ordinary people pay the price.

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PUBLIC SERVICES – THE ROLE OF AUSTERITY

Too often people are faced with struggling and chronically underfunded services as a result of austerity, often creating social tensions between different public service user groups.

Local councils are facing cuts in central government funding of 6.7% between 2016 and 2020, which comes on top of an overall 30% reduction between 2010 and 2015. Northern, urban areas are suffering disproportionately more than more affluent southern local authorities.

Councils have a statutory duty to provide certain services, so cuts have disproportionately hit the provision of social services, support for vulnerable groups as well as libraries, youth groups and other non-protected budgets.

The average waiting time for GP appointments increased by 30% in a year, with the number of people having to wait at least a week to see their GP rising by 500,000 last year alone.

Underfunding and a lack of resources leads to an increase in waiting times for key services such as GPs and social care, a lack of school places, and a long wait for social housing among many other examples.

The frustration and anger many people experience as a result has been misdirected and abused by some politicians and some parts of the media seeking to hide the real reason for the problems and jump on the populist bandwagon.

**Housing**

There are currently almost a million households waiting for council housing in England and Wales, despite the...
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government’s cruel attempts to tighten the criteria for those eligible.

A lack of new social housing, along with the government’s policy of selling off older council housing, means waiting times are increasing rapidly. Shockingly, those waiting for council housing in Barking and Dagenham, one of the most deprived areas in the country, now face a 50-year wait for a council house.

The rise in house prices is important, but more important is its comparison with wages. TUC research shows real wages in the UK have fallen 10.4% in the years following the financial crisis; the gap between real wages and house prices is at its highest ever level and continuing to grow.

The cost of buying a home in England and Wales is more than 10 times the average salary in over a third of local authority areas, official figures show. Between 2002 and 2015, prices have risen by 88%, but median earnings have increased only by a quarter.

The impact of austerity and public sector cuts and the current political climate is clear. A recent report on who voted for Brexit found that the quality of public service provision was systematically related to the vote to leave the EU, with cuts in the context of austerity strongly associated with a higher leave vote share.

Austerity and government policies are to blame for overstretched and poor quality public services, not immigration.

Cuts to vital services, government failure to invest in communities and a lack of planning to protect both local and migrant workers are key reasons why many areas struggled to cope with public need.
NO TO RACISM, NO TO CUTS

We are witnessing an alarming rise in racism, hate crimes and the scourge of Islamophobia.

The trade union response must be to speak up and speak out – to refuse to allow hostile and bullying acts to go unchallenged whenever and wherever they take place. At the same time we must tackle the root causes of why some people feel neglected, insecure and fearful.

Recent governments have prioritised the interests of the elite few, but too often the perception has been encouraged by the right wing media that minorities and under-represented groups have benefited, or been advantaged in some way.

To combat this we must challenge the myths about immigration, jobs, pay and public services. And we must fight for economic justice – a rebalancing of the economy, clamping down on tax evaders and avoiders – and investment in health care, housing and other vital public services.

All the issues and challenges of globalisation, unrestrained capitalism, and government-imposed austerity are shared across all ethnic groups and the effects are felt by everyone outside the richest 1%, with black and minority ethnic and minority communities often hit hardest.

We need to build on the shared interests between different groups, promoting solidarity with migrant communities and workers through trade unions and the work of anti-racist campaigns.

We also need to be clear that no matter what the economic circumstances a vocal minority with racist views will not be tolerated, and we must step up our fight against such hatred.

Anti-austerity campaigning and an alternative economic approach accompanied by strong and clear action against racism by the whole trade union movement, working together with anti-racist, anti-fascist organisations, will drive back intolerance and hate.

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WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Get involved in our anti-austerity campaigns and events, and keep informed at our campaigns pages
- Recruit your colleagues to the union – there's never been a more important time to join PCS and the trade union movement
- Unite with and support anti-racist and anti-fascist organisations and community groups such as:
  - Unite Against Fascism (UAF) – uaf.org.uk/
  - Operation Black Vote (OBV) – obv.org.uk/
  - Hope Not Hate – hopenothate.org.uk/
- Take part in protests, occupations and direct action against racism – bit.ly/PCSAgainstFascism
- Challenge racism in the workplace and in public spaces. Read our Speak up, speak out guide – bit.ly/CampaignResources
- Phone our 24-hour racial incident helpline on 020 7801 2678 – bit.ly/CampaignResources

MORE INFORMATION

- Who voted for Brexit?
  ukandeu.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Who-voted-for-Brexit.pdf
- British Social Attitudes Survey (2013)
  bsa.natcen.ac.uk/media/38108/immigration-bsa31.pdf
- Class – Changing the debate on migration
  classonline.org.uk/pubs/item/changing-the-debate-on-migration
- TUC – Challenging racism after the EU referendum
  tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/ChallengingracismaftertheEUreferendum2.pdf
- TUC – Managing migration better for Britain
  bit.ly/ManagingmigrationbetterforBritain
- Joseph Roundtree Foundation – Brexit vote explained
  jrf.org.uk/report/brexit-vote-explained-poverty-low-skills-and-lack-opportunities
- Danny Dorling – Brexit: the decision of a divided country
  dannydorling.org/wp-content/files/dannydorling_publication_id5564.pdf