Breaking a System Does Not Fix the Problems

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There are winners and losers in Brexit, but the stakes are bigger than a redistribution of power and privilege. We need to focus our attention on the alternatives in formation.

The most apparent loser today is David Cameron, the Prime Minister who resigned after losing the campaign to remain in the EU. But it was his gambit that put the EU referendum on the table in the first place. He may be remembered best in a way that Polish Senator Marek Borowski tweeted, "Cameron: the bloke who burned his house to the ground because he wanted to check if its structure was fireproof".

The most apparent winners in Brexit are its advocates, including Tory Boris Johnson and Nigel Farage of the United Kingdom Independence Party. But their victory signals more than the circulation of elites. It trumpets the triumph of a leadership style. Regaining democracy from Brussels bureaucracy expresses its advocates' most noble claim, but xenophobia and racism are the currents that charge the mobilizing affect animating this new faith.

Last fall, I named that faith *Übermensch escapism* – belief that if we could only be independent of foreign entanglements, we would be free to be rich and to be ourselves. It depends on mobilizing fear of migrants and people of color alongside resentment for those who profit from the global system. Donald Trump's celebration of Brexit today is only applause for his own style. Knowing how a system works is secondary to knowing how to make the right deal, the faith goes. In fact, sometimes the best gambit is to break the system in order to then demonstrate one's indispensability. Russia's leader, Vladimir Putin, exemplifies that style.

Putin broke the security system in Europe by invading Crimea and conducting hybrid warfare within Ukrainian territory. With that unexpected ploy, Putin not only restored his own domestic authority but changed the dynamics of international alliances. Appeasing Putin, rather than enhancing the rule of international law, becomes the new Realpolitik for Real Men.

Brexit also breaks the system, and invites others to demonstrate their leadership with similar rebellion. Anticipate more political divorces across the UK, across the EU. But appeals to disdain for others cannot fix the systemic problems that produce the pain Übermenschen promise to fix with their strength. They will, however, take advantage, and they can because the alternative is not compelling.

The campaign to remain within the EU could not be so vigorous as promising Brexit, even if it was rational. To challenge *Übermensch escapism* one needs more than competence and reason, and rather, perhaps, a political revolution based on mobilizing those marginalized by that same alienating system. Solidarity seems more important than

ever in light of the dystopian Brexit that will burn those not only within but perhaps even beyond the UK.

If only that solidarity were on the horizon. At least I see its glimmer in the words of Sadiq Khan, London's mayor

> We all have a responsibility to now seek to heal the divisions that have emerged throughout this campaign - and to focus on that which unites us, rather than that which divides us. I want to send a particular message to the almost one million Europeans living in London, who make a huge contribution to our city - working hard, paying taxes and contributing to our civic and cultural life. You are welcome here. We value the enormous contribution you make to our city and that will not change as a result of this referendum.[1]

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https://www.london.gov.uk/press-releases/mayoral/mayor-of-london-response-to-eu-referendum-result