

Charles Eisenstein on Brexit

Transcript of Charles Eisenstein's Talk

<https://charleseisenstein.org/video/charles-eisenstein-on-brexit/>

I have not really followed the detailed politics of Brexit. I haven't made much of a study of it. The big picture, though, is pretty much that those in charge, meaning the forces of global capital - and let me just say, I am not currently, nor have I ever been, a member of the American Communist Party - the forces of global capital are going to do their best to make sure that whatever happens, whether it's called "Brexit," whether the UK officially leaves the European Union or not, that it's not going to impede the flow of capital and the interests of corporations and banks. As long as that is the case, they're going to be pretty much OK with whatever result happens with the movement of people, with immigration, with matters of borders and security and that kind of stuff. They don't care so much about that.

And then, it's kind of ironic because I think that a lot of the impetus for the Brexit vote came from a dissatisfaction with the economic status quo. I think that just to ascribe it to xenophobia and bigotry is a very superficial level of explanation, because you have to ask, well, what made tens of millions of people all of a sudden into bigots and xenophobes? Not that there hasn't been xenophobia in the UK for a long time, but to condemn that many people and to ignore the question, what is the engine from which racist attitudes come? Why are people dissatisfied? A lot of that comes down to economics and the dwindling prospects of joining the middle class or the upper middle class, and the eroding social contract and how every year and certainly over a generation it gets harder and harder to maintain a lifestyle that was considered to be normal, and so many people are struggling. So in that situation of course you're going to look for people to blame. And yeah, immigrants are certainly an easy target.

So I'm not saying that there's no bigotry and racism and xenophobia in the United Kingdom. But I think that the Brexit vote was coming from a much deeper place. To go against the establishment - pretty much every establishment media outlet was in favor of remaining in the EU. Yet people defied the authorities and voted for Brexit anyway. And that also is a symptom of a rejection of authority, and the shrinking or the weakening of the legitimacy of the government and the elites in general. So it is ironic then - or maybe a cynical person would say, to be expected - that however Brexit plays out, it's not going to meet that deep satisfaction, but it's going to be somehow maneuvered so that the basic economic structure is maintained. To make it all about immigration and anti-immigrant sentiment conveniently avoids a lot of difficult issues that need attention.