

The Rise Of The Right... It's Not All Black & White

Ross [00:00:28] Welcome to Renegade Inc. Nobody gets up one morning and suddenly thinks I'm going to choose racism and xenophobia over unity and community. As a newly emboldened right wing movement sweeps the globe, not many people look at the economic conditions that incubate such a blinkered view. Populist politicians have used those conditions to divide, rule and appear relevant but however you split it, the rise of the right is inextricably linked to zombie economies. When those who are already economically disenfranchised become desperate, they're susceptible to populist leaders who apparently have a solution. But the scapegoating of "another" means that we lose focus on the real source of the problem. So why don't we call out the exploitative economic conditions that always foster the rise of the right?

Ross [00:01:29] Joining me to discuss the failure of mainstream politics and the rise of the far right are the director of the Institute of Race Relations, Liz Fekete and one of the authors of The Rise of the Right, Professor Simon Winlow. Welcome to you both. Simon, it doesn't take a genius to look at the British political scene now and also look at the British economy and therefore society and say that we are in a heck of a mess. How do you see it? What's your take on what's happening with mainstream politics and also the economy and therefore society?

Prof. Simon Winlow [00:02:02] Well, I think we are at a fundamental historical impasse. What happens in the future is yet to be determined. It's a very interesting moment in history because we can't really see what the future holds in a very clear sense. One of the fundamental issues is that we have both political parties who are offering similar political stories and similar stories about the problems that beset the nation...

Ross [00:02:24] Right, so a massive fight for the centre ground, basically?

Prof. Simon Winlow [00:02:27] Well, yes, I think that's probably true. We lack a fundamental, convincing alternative, a different way that we could organize the economy that was inclusive, everyone is included by right, and that's missing, I think, from the entire field of mainstream politics. It exists in some parts of the Labour Party but these are small parts.

Ross [00:02:45] Why is it missing?

Prof. Simon Winlow [00:02:46] I think for the most part the political left in Britain has abandoned the failed political economy and chosen instead to wage a war on the field of culture.

Ross [00:02:55] Just explain that, unpacks that for us.

Prof. Simon Winlow [00:02:57] Well, it used to be that the traditional Labour Party or the broad left would offer the multi-ethnic working class a story of the problems that they face. The fundamental cause of the problems faced by ordinary men and women were rooted in political economy, the economy, the capitalism, so the Labour Party, the political left and all the institutions of the left took ordinary working people's frustrations and drew upon them

and then articulated a new politics that offered promise to set things straight in the future, a promise that we would build an inclusive economy in the future. From the 1980s onwards, however, Thatcher was broadly considered to have won the economic argument. Tony Blair, of course, was identified as Thatcher's most important legacy. He agreed that Thatcher had won the economic argument and instead chose to focus on the cultural implications of the policies that he enacted. So what the Labour Party is not doing now, what it needs to do, is offer ordinary people a benefit in the future for themselves, the guarantee of a job and not just a zero hours contract, not just a meaningless, you know, really difficult economic position, but a job that means something, that gives them a chance to... a foothold in reality that allows them to feed a family, clothe their kids and look positively towards the future.

Ross [00:04:13] Political economy has been totally neglected, cultural antagonism has been stoked and what we see in the UK now is the old divide and rule. Is that a fair depiction?

Liz Fekete [00:04:23] I think that rolling back historically I would see it's slightly differently from Simon. And I think I would attach the blame for culture wars on the right, not the left. Where I share the perspective is that all the political parties from Labour, Lib Dems, Conservatives, have acquiesce to this neo liberal model...

Ross [00:04:47] Right.

Liz Fekete [00:04:47] Of advanced capitalism. So we see at this point all of that played out in the Labour Party where you have a leader who's trying to break with neo liberal model but you have local authorities that are attached, totally attached to the neo liberal model. When it comes to culture wars and if we go back to 1980s and Margaret Thatcher famously with her, "this country is being swamped by people of different cultures and different backgrounds" I think we saw that the new right was incredibly powerful at that time, accusing labour authorities of political correctness because they were trying to bring in basic anti-racist measures or measures that actually did benefit women, lesbian and gay communities. But I think... the thing is, if we don't historically contextualized this argument, we could end up with a view that actually mirrors the far right view, which is that the white working class have been left behind, that white working class are the victims of political correctness, too much anti-racism, too much concern of women. Whereas I think that is being deliberately manipulated, that... the element, of course, there is an element of truth in this, there is an element of truth, definitely. Deindustrialisation in northern towns have obliterated a working class culture but I think we have to start from the point of view that, why are people racializing the working class? Why are these people like the hard right Conservative Party, new like thinkers like Douglas Murray, Roger Scruton, they're always very, very upper middle class men who are actually starting from positions which are culturally conservative or racist using white working class as the mouthpiece for their views and their racializing the working class when they're always telling us, the anti-racist, that we're always racializing the working class, they are racializing the working class. We have to start from the starting point that our working class is multicultural and actually there are huge elements of the working class in our country who live in multicultural societies, who live happily and contentedly and well together except that the divisions are constantly stoked, I think, by the right.

Prof. Simon Winlow [00:07:00] Well, I agree with the bulk of what Liz had to say there. I think for me, the... lots of working class people are now moving towards right wing political causes because there hasn't been a left wing narrative...

Ross [00:07:12] Right.

Prof. Simon Winlow [00:07:12] That explains their socio-economic position.

Ross [00:07:14] I'm not forgiving them or vindicating them for this, but can you understand why they're doing that?

Prof. Simon Winlow [00:07:19] Absolutely. Yeah. Racism exists as a timeless narrative to explain any problem you might encounter.

Ross [00:07:25] Have the far right then use divide and rule, divide and conquer, which has then pushed these people towards those political choices?

Prof. Simon Winlow [00:07:34] I think the working class people who have drifted to the right have used, dipped into that lingua franca, that language that is offered by the far right as a means of explaining their downward mobility in socio-economic terms?

Ross [00:07:45] Has that been a cynical ploy on behalf of the right to maintain power?

Prof. Simon Winlow [00:07:50] I don't think it's been kind of orchestrated by some shadowy far right figures, I think rather in terms of a general ideology, racism always exists in the background. It can always be used, dipped into when you're frustrated with your socio-economic position, you've frustrated the dissolution of your community. You can dip into these narratives to explain any problem, but it's the absence of a more progressive account of those problems which allows these narratives to come to the fore. If you look at the Labour Party from the 1980s onwards, it's the acceptance that this is just a depoliticisation of capitalism. It's just the economy. The only thing that we can do is manipulate interest rates or perhaps tax wealth to a greater extent and that's all we've got, those are the only tools we've got. It was a myth then, it's a myth now. We need to broaden out this debate and utilise the tools of the state to try and address some of those problems which are... really quite extreme in particular communities.

Ross [00:08:45] Right. So we're going to run tomorrow, we're going to start a party and we're going to run. You going to talk about political economy. Flesh it out for us. I know you talked about housing and jobs obviously and politicians persistently talk about them, but don't seem to do anything about them. What sort of vision then do you offer that working class which starts to get rid of those tendencies to push towards the far right?

Prof. Simon Winlow [00:09:04] Well, first things first. I think the Labour Party, of course, should be unequivocally a party of the working class, the multi-ethnic working class.

Ross [00:09:11] Right.

Prof. Simon Winlow [00:09:11] It should seek to defend and advance their interests as order number one, the first thing it has to do. I think we've been losing for so long we don't know what victory looks like. And because the institutions to the left, the Labour Party and whatever else have accepted neo liberalism people generally look at the politics of the left and assume they're only interested in cultural agendas and they're very middle class. The Labour Party still is very middle class and in a very basic way they look at the Labour Party, they look at the institutions of the left and say, "well, where do I fit in? Where were my people in this story? When are people gonna talk about the issues that are important to me?"

Ross [00:09:46] Tony Blair though, and Thatcher once said, you know, her greatest achievement was New Labour, famously. He said, "we're all middle class now at one point" now I don't know what that means, I don't know if that means that your house price has gone up and you got a Dyson Hoover or whatever, but that statement, that sentiment, is that a moment where you can say which crystallises there's the problem because it just simply isn't the case?

Prof. Simon Winlow [00:10:09] No, of course. You know, statistics give us an indication that the gap between rich and poor has never been wider, never, not even in the early years, the brutal early years of capitalism has the gap been wider.

Ross [00:10:19] So inequality, neo liberalism and the far right, underlying all of this are economics.

Prof. Simon Winlow [00:10:26] Well, people need a stake in the future. You have to offer them something better in the future. This is the basis of progressive politics. This is the situation now. We can improve by enacting these policies, by following these claims, these ideas. And then you gradually absorb people from across the political spectrum into your project of social betterment where people can see a benefit for themselves, their communities. People like me will do better if I vote for this party, engage in these political debates.

Ross [00:10:55] Is it possible to make a massive jump here? Because I know you've just come back. And look at Greece as an economic project and say, actually, that is a canary in the mine for neo liberal economics and if we continue down this track there's a very real possibility that what's happened to the Greek economy could happen to the British economy, or is that too sensational?

Liz Fekete [00:11:15] I don't think it's too sensational at all. Just coming back from Greece, one of the interesting things that I found, I mean, I was in Athens for five days, part of a project to observe the trial of Golden Dawn which was a neo-Nazi electoral party which actually became the third largest political party in Greece and was extremely violent, I mean, it murdered migrants on the streets and came to power irrespective of that. There weren't the Democratic checks that there should have been but, you know, going back, one of the interesting things that I found sort of walking around Athens - and we did a lot of walking around Athens - is that in terms of the homelessness and people on the streets, it's just as bad in London. And just talking to people I got a sense that because they were obviously hit by what was in effect a structural adjustment program by the EU, you know, the hit came first and they are beginning to come out of that and find solutions but if I may just answer some of the things that Simon said because... and also look at Greece and perhaps France and other

European countries and the way that the far right have been successful in most countries actually by offering an economic program to the working class. I think there's a contradiction here because I think in unless... while I'm very, very sympathetic to the argument that class has become a marker that has been left out of the discussion, I think that if we follow a class politics that isn't linked to wider progressive politics around strengthening democracy, progressive values, human rights, we have the danger of actually following a nativist political program.

Ross [00:12:54] What does that mean?

Liz Fekete [00:12:55] Nativism means national preference, our own people first, British jobs for British workers - for instance, no healthcare for migrants, no healthcare for third country residents, that sort of thing. It's national preference in economic policies, in welfare policies, etc.. And if we look at the far right across Europe ever since the 1990s they've been calling for national preference. But what used to be a demand on the margins is increasingly part of the economic policies of social democratic parties across Europe let alone the centre right parties. But if we look at the far right in particular, take the example of Greece, Golden Dawn were absolutely outrageously violent, murderous, racist, party before their PMs and their members were arrested. They were arguing precisely for these economic policies around protecting Greek people but the argument was that the problem was immigration and migrants who were getting all the privileges. So they had blood banks for Greek people only. They had soup kitchens for Greek people only. They pursued policies, I mean, I was in one square where they burnt down the local church hall which had been welcoming refugees and they padlocked all the playgrounds so that migrant children couldn't use those playgrounds. So all I'm saying I think there is a contradiction here if we are advocating pursuing a straightforward class politics that doesn't also deal with educating and advancing a progressive politics on the field of immigration, on the field of welfare, on the field of foreign policy, on the field of human rights. So I think the gains that we made from the 80s onwards in terms of gender rights, anti racism, rights for sexual minorities, also do have to be defended.

Ross [00:14:59] Welcome back to Renegade Inc. Before we talk more about the rise of the far right with Liz Fekete and Professor Simon Winlow, let's have a look at what you've been tweeting about in this week's Renegade Inc. index. First up, we got a tweet from Anti fascism & Far right. Greece's rejuvenated anti fascist movement is rejoicing. Defeat of neo-Nazi Golden Dawn is a blow for neo fascist movements across Europe and is due to coordinated efforts of a diverse, antifascist and anti-racist movement that have also taken the streets.

Liz Fekete [00:15:31] Great tweet and absolutely true. The anti fascist movement are actually going into the old areas of Golden Dawn and establishing a presence there and setting up social autonomous centres. It's very good what's happening in Greece.

Ross [00:15:43] Wonderful. Next from Mimi. The sheer arrogance and bluster from the likes of Geoffrey Cox, Boris Johnson and Rees-Mogg is unbelievable. What is it about these self-serving elitists that the far right admire so much? What working class person in their right mind would ever trust these people?

Prof. Simon Winlow [00:16:02] I don't think they do. I think a lot of people who were voting for far right politics, they're not voting for old Etonians because they're old Etonians and they carry a degree of gravitas or something like that. In many cases they just want to see Brexit done. You know, in the next general election lots of people who would previously have voted Labour might well vote Conservative or Brexit party just to get the deed done.

Ross [00:16:21] Next from Miqdaad Versi. Amazon has refused to pull merchandise in support of Tommy Robinson after it and other online companies were accused of profiting from products promoting far right extremism. This is in sharp contrast to eBay, who have pulled his merchandise.

Liz Fekete [00:16:39] I think the media has given him a megaphone because they actually like deficit figures. He's kind of preacher of hate so it suits the sort of 24 hour sensationalist news stories to have figures like this man - also, Nigel Farage. Why haven't Amazon pulled his merchandise? I presume that they are using arguments about sort of free speech and all this.

Ross [00:17:03] And better not affect the bottom line, hey.

Liz Fekete [00:17:05] Yeah.

Ross [00:17:06] And finally, from Sharon Landry. In response to an article saying that Donald Trump told the UN that protecting religious freedom is one of his top priorities. She says, "understand that when Donald Trump says religion, he means one true far right Christian religion. What's your view on that?"

Prof. Simon Winlow [00:17:22] Well, I think it's a fundamental mistake to make... to assume that Christianity is in any way associated with the far right. It's also a mistake to say that it's fundamentalist Christian is somehow far right. The fundamentals of Christianity are about openness, it's about everybody is equal before God.

Ross [00:17:37] But it hasn't stopped a lot of European leaders using that symbolism and that religion to further their political ambitions, has it?

Liz Fekete [00:17:43] Yeah, definitely at moment what we're seeing amongst far right parties and far right electoral leaders as well, is attempt to hitch Christianity to the far right cause. If we look at someone like Matteo Savini, the former interior minister in Italy, he often uses the Virgin Mary and saying that he takes inspiration from the Virgin Mary. He's forever rubbing his rosary. He has a big crucifix and he is talking about speaking in the name of Christianity. Take someone like Viktor Orban in Hungary, the leader of Fidesz, which is a hard right party. He has this idea of a Christian national idea. And he also talks about being almost like the captain of this drowning European ship and that it's Hungarians mission to protect the borders from the advancing Muslim hordes. So this opportunistic hitching of Christianity to the far right and hard right cause is also linked to the potency of Islamophobia and political debate.

Ross [00:18:48] Our Book of the Week this week is Rise of the Right, by Simon Winlow, Steve Hall and James Treadwell. Simon, you're one of the co-authors. Pitch It to us.

Prof. Simon Winlow [00:18:56] It's a book that contains original data taken from what used to be the seedbed of democratic socialism, part of the north, part of the Midlands, part of South Wales. These places used to be unequivocally connected to the institutions of the left and now growing numbers of people in those places are drifting to the far right. The question that we address in the book is, why this is happening, why so many working class people see some utility in far right ideology and why they're disengaging from the traditional story of democratic socialism.

Ross [00:19:27] We recommend it. Liz in the first half we talk about Greece as a sort of test case, if you like, of what can happen when economic problems really arise in a country. The other aspect that we've touched on, certainly in the tweets, is the sort of revisiting, if you like, of the Crusades, the use of Christianity to say, this is a preferential religion, a better religion, if you like, especially as Islamophobia drifts across Europe. How much should we worry about using Christianity and the symbolism that goes with it now when it comes to the rise of the far right?

Liz Fekete [00:19:57] I think we should be worried about that, the use of Christian symbolism by the far right but there's a second thing that we should be worried about as well and that is that there are sections of the hierarchy of different churches that are willing, for their own reasons, perhaps opportunistic rather than ideological, for religions to so be hitched to the far right cause. And I think Greece is a case in point here. When we look at Greece, we have to remember that the Greek Orthodox Church is a state religion. When it came to the rise of Golden Dawn as a party, the hierarchy of the Greek Orthodox Church were either neutral during that process when they were murdering migrants. It only stopped after the murder of a Greek anti-fascist rapper called Pavlos Fyssas. This is when the arrest took place. The Greek Orthodox Church were either neutral or sections of the church, leading bishops, were openly supportive of Golden Dawn. We're also talking about a country where a section of the far right had a volunteer force that fought in Srebrenica and were very close to the Serbs in the Balkans. So these are the two things that I worry about in the present context.

Ross [00:21:08] So the use of Christianity, in fact, any of the levers that the state can use to create division so it averts our gaze from its failure. Is that a fair depiction of what governments have been doing?

Prof. Simon Winlow [00:21:24] No, I don't think governments are at fault. I think, you know, the whole issue about Christianity is a red herring. I think that Christianity is basically simply an emblem of the loss of traditional culture generally speaking. What people miss is not the importance of Christianity, it's rather the vitality of their own traditional culture and this is the very stuff that energizes the far right, the sense of loss that something that was valuable to them is falling out of view.

Ross [00:21:48] One of the things that you've done in your book is give space for people who you're writing about so you're not just a highfalutin talking shop. And these are some of the quotes. "I need to earn. I can't just sit waiting to get an hour here, an hour there... For Christ's sake. I'm not a kid anymore. I need a proper job." or "The whole thing is just set up to take the p*ss out of people like me." Finally, "It's just, it's gone, hasn't it, that sense of community. You've got drug addicts, you've got what, no jobs? No future for the kids? Growing up here now's not the best start, is it? What you're seeing in that frustration, understandable and

justifiable frustration, is that loss of community, so people aren't going to church, people aren't building society, people haven't got the jobs in those communities, so ultimately they will jump at anything that gives them any hope. Using Christianity or anything else to give them hope is a logical step if you're going to divide and conquer these communities.

Prof. Simon Winlow [00:22:44] Well, absolutely. What you see when you see Golden Dawn rallying or an EDL protest or something like that is an inverted mirror image of our own political failure. The left should be addressing these very issues that you mentioned in the courts. They should be addressing socio-economic... they should be addressing inequality, the failure of the jobs market, the failure of us to kind of provide a platform on which people can build a good life. These are the very issues that the left should be responding to and because they're not responding to that the political right - individuals, working class people - generally speaking, are dipping into the language of racism in order to explain their problems.

Ross [00:23:19] Because of a lack of political imagination or will, for political expediency, we've searched for scapegoats? True or false?

Liz Fekete [00:23:27] True. And I strongly identify with what Simon has just said, the idea that this is a mirror of society in general and the idea that we have to go back to universal politics and universal values. So, yes, we do have this major problem, but it comes from the top down. I mean, people like our prime minister talk about Muslim women as looking like bank robbers and whatever...

Ross [00:23:51] Letterboxes.

Liz Fekete [00:23:52] Letterboxes and bank robbers. If we have our prime minister talking about betrayal, treachery and surrender. I mean, this idea of surrender is so much in the EDL. I mean, it was in the National Front, it was in the British National Party ideology going back years, if this kind of deficit language is coming from the top down, it's not surprising that it's embedded in ordinary culture and in popular culture and in working class communities. And then we get the alternative to that where you do have sections of what I would describe as a hate crime industry that actually they spend all their time, in a sense, denouncing white working class people as uneducated and ignorant when actually the ignorance comes from people who are highly educated. But how do we end this scapegoating? Personally, I've never been one to have faith in political parties, whatever their ?. I think this has to start from the grassroots up. I think we have to rebuild community, bring people together over issues like housing, like access to welfare, like employment and when we bring people together, a community listens. Those politicians at a local level who are finding it difficult to find their powers of hearing will hear because the momentum will be so huge that they can't turn their hearing aids off.

Prof. Simon Winlow [00:25:13] I think what we have to do, especially for the various institutions of the left, is to move beyond an absolute faith that liberal multiculturalism will eventually address these problems. The language is a problem. For instance, the idea of tolerating difference. Toleration is something you actually put up with, you prefer not to, you tolerate difference. It's entirely wrong. Instead of saying, you know, we have to respect these differences. To progress is to say that the differences don't matter. It doesn't matter which

religion, which God you pray to, it doesn't matter what kind of food you eat or clothes you wear, all of that is irrelevant because we have these things in common. You build a progressive, universal politic that makes cultural identities superfluous and unimportant.

Ross [00:25:54] You see that change is going to come through politics and politics alone? You don't have much faith anymore in that political system. Where can we find common ground here?

Liz Fekete [00:26:04] I think maybe the common ground is that there has to be a politics that's rooted in community and the political parties then have to reflect the views of those communities. Maybe that's a common ground. I'd like to just say something here about the way that we've used the term narrative in this discussion. I don't think it's about changing the narrative. It's about changing the reality. We've had since Tony Blair onwards and David Cameron and Clegg and all these people, this idea that political power is won by giving us a better narrative. The narrative, the story, comes out of reality. We have to change the reality and we need to go back to the basics, which is revitalizing local democracy.

Ross [00:26:50] You'd agree with that?

Prof. Simon Winlow [00:26:51] Yes, absolutely. I mean, with you reading out those quotes people on the far right in these activist movements, on the far right, they don't talk about what, you know, Boris Johnson or whatever else, they don't care about any of that, they focus on local issues. The local issues that we've already heard about, joblessness, dissolution of communities, a sense of rootlessness that they're missing out on everything that's good about the way that we live today. We need to address those issues. This is how you make a fundamental change. As Liz said, you change the reality not the language around it.

Ross [00:27:19] Simon, Liz, thank you both very much for your time. That's it from Renegade Inc. this week. You can drop the team a mail, studio@renegadeinc.com or you can tweet us @Renegade_inc. Join us next week for more insight from those people who are thinking differently but until then, stay curious.