

Liberal Author Publishes The Case against Open Borders from The Point of View of Classic Liberalism

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Angela Nagel, a self-identified liberal, wrote an article, 'The Left Case Against Open Borders', that brilliantly explains why leftists, if they truly believe what they preach, should oppose open borders. She says leftist activists have become what Soviet leaders called 'useful idiots' and tools of global corporations that profit from pools of low-wage workers. -GEG

Analysis of arguments made in Angela Nagel's article, "The Left Case Against Open Borders":

Angela Nagle, the daughter of migrants, spent most of her life in Ireland, a country known for high levels of emigration due to poverty. She is a liberal who opposes the open borders policy of the Left. She identifies the goal of open borders as a policy of importing cheap labor that benefits globalists and multinational corporations such as the Koch brothers and tech giants. She says leftist activists have become useful idiots serving the interests of globalism and that the proclaimed moralism of the Left actually defends the system of exploitation.

Mass migration pushes down the wages of low-skilled and low-paid native workers that the Left claims to support. Mass migration hurts countries, too, as there is a brain drain of the educated who get snapped up by wealthy economies. According to the Census Bureau's figures for 2017, about 45% of migrants who have arrived in the United States since 2010 are college educated.

Unfortunately, Nagel buys into the official line that says the conditions that lead to mass migration are poverty and war. In truth, the exiting mass migration that exists today would not be possible without the massive funding and organizational support of

people and institutions in wealthy countries that are far from the battle zones. Migration today is a funded and orchestrated phenomenon artificially created by global strategists to eliminate national sovereignty as a stepping stone to global government based on the model of collectivism. Nagel, however, bases her critique on the Left's myth that mass migration is caused by poverty and war, and that makes it useful because, even though the assumptions are wrong, the proposed remedies are pretty good. She urges sincere liberals to take a hard line against the corporate and financial actors who sustain poverty and war.

Nadel advocates that employers enforce limits of immigration by implementing E-Verify, which would be much less expensive than building Trump's border wall. Unfortunately, business lobbies have been blocking and sabotaging E-Verify for decades.

Nadel uses Norway as an example of a successful socialist economy with public ownership of natural resources where citizens no longer wish to emigrate, but this is a false analysis, because Norway, like countries in the Middle East, has massive revenue from oil. If Norway's oil reserves dried up or if cheaper sources of energy should be discovered, their socialist model would fail like every other collectivist economy.

Since Nagel is a self-proclaimed liberal, she was brave to criticize the leftist party line. Her laying much of the blame on globalists and their policies and calling for E-Verify as a requirement for employment is right on target.

THE LEFT CASE AGAINST OPEN BORDERS By Angela Nagel:

Before "Build the wall!" there was "Tear down this wall!" In his famous 1987 speech, Ronald Reagan demanded that the "scar" of the Berlin Wall be removed and insisted that the offending restriction of movement it represented amounted to nothing less than a "question of freedom for all mankind." He went on to say that those who "refuse to join the community of freedom" would "become obsolete" as a result of the irresistible force of the global market. And so they did. In celebration, Leonard Bernstein directed a performance of "Ode to Joy" and Roger Waters performed "The Wall." Barriers to labor and capital came down all over the world; the end of history was declared; and decades of U.S.-dominated globalization followed.

In its twenty-nine-year existence, around 140 people died attempting to cross the Berlin Wall. In the promised world of global economic freedom and prosperity, 412 people died crossing the U.S.-Mexican border last year alone, and more than three thousand died the previous year in the Mediterranean. The pop songs and Hollywood movies about freedom are nowhere to be found. What went wrong?

Of course, the Reaganite project did not end with the collapse of the Soviet Union. Reagan—and his successors from both parties—used the same triumphalist rhetoric to sell the hollowing out of trade unions, the deregulation of banks, the expansion of outsourcing, and the globalization of markets away from the deadweight of national economic interests. Central to this project was a neoliberal attack on national barriers to the flow of labor and capital. At home, Reagan also oversaw one of the most significant pro-migration reforms in American history, the 1986 "Reagan Amnesty" that expanded the labor market by allowing millions of illegal migrants to gain legal status.

Popular movements against different elements of this post-Cold War vision came initially from the Left in the form of the anti-globalization movements and later Occupy Wall Street. But, lacking the bargaining power to challenge international capital, protest movements went nowhere. The globalized and financialized economic system held firm despite all the devastation it wreaked, even through the 2008 financial crisis.

Today, by far the most visible anti-globalization movement takes the form of the anti-migrant backlash led by Donald Trump and other “populists.” The Left, meanwhile, seems to have no option but to recoil in horror at Trump’s “Muslim ban” and news stories about ICE hunting down migrant families; it can only react against whatever Trump is doing. If Trump is for immigration controls, then the Left will demand the opposite. And so today talk of “open borders” has entered mainstream liberal discourse, where once it was confined to radical free market think tanks and libertarian anarchist circles.

While no serious political party of the Left is offering concrete proposals for a truly borderless society, by embracing the moral arguments of the open-borders Left and the economic arguments of free market think tanks, the Left has painted itself into a corner. If “no human is illegal!,” as the protest chant goes, the Left is implicitly accepting the moral case for no borders or sovereign nations at all. But what implications will unlimited migration have for projects like universal public health care and education, or a federal jobs guarantee? And how will progressives convincingly explain these goals to the public?

During the 2016 Democratic primary campaign, when Vox editor Ezra Klein suggested open borders policies to Bernie Sanders, the senator famously showed his vintage when he replied, “Open borders? No. That’s a Koch brothers proposal.”¹ This momentarily confused the official narrative, and Sanders was quickly accused of “sounding like Donald Trump.” Beneath the generational differences revealed in this exchange, however, is a larger issue. The destruction and abandonment of labor politics means that, at present, immigration issues can only play out within the framework of a culture war, fought entirely on moral grounds. In the heightened emotions of America’s public debate on migration, a simple moral and political dichotomy prevails. It is “right-wing” to be “against immigration” and “left-wing” to be “for immigration.” But the economics of migration tell a different story.

Useful Idiots

The transformation of open borders into a “Left” position is a very new phenomenon and runs counter to the history of the organized Left in fundamental ways. Open borders has long been a rallying cry of the business and free market Right. Drawing from neoclassical economists, these groups have advocated for liberalizing migration on the grounds of market rationality and economic freedom. They oppose limits on migration for the same reasons that they oppose restrictions on the movement of capital. The Koch-funded Cato Institute, which also advocates lifting legal restrictions on child labor, has churned out radical open borders advocacy for decades, arguing that support for open borders is a fundamental tenet of libertarianism, and “Forget the wall already, it’s time for the U.S. to have open borders.”² The Adam Smith Institute has done much the same, arguing that “Immigration restrictions make us poorer.”³

Following Reagan and figures like Milton Friedman, George W. Bush championed

liberalizing migration before, during, and after his presidency. Grover Norquist, a zealous advocate of Trump's (and Bush's and Reagan's) tax cuts, has for years railed against the illiberalism of the trade unions, reminding us, "Hostility to immigration has traditionally been a union cause."⁴

He's not wrong. From the first law restricting immigration in 1882 to Cesar Chavez and the famously multiethnic United Farm Workers protesting against employers' use and encouragement of illegal migration in 1969, trade unions have often opposed mass migration. They saw the deliberate importation of illegal, low-wage workers as weakening labor's bargaining power and as a form of exploitation. There is no getting around the fact that the power of unions relies by definition on their ability to restrict and withdraw the supply of labor, which becomes impossible if an entire workforce can be easily and cheaply replaced. Open borders and mass immigration are a victory for the bosses.

And the bosses almost universally support it. Mark Zuckerberg's think tank and lobbying organization, Forward, which advocates for liberalizing migration policies, lists among its "founders and funders" Eric Schmidt and Bill Gates, as well as CEOs and senior executives of YouTube, Dropbox, Airbnb, Netflix, Groupon, Walmart, Yahoo, Lyft, Instagram, and many others. The cumulative personal wealth represented on this list is enough to heavily influence most governing institutions and parliaments, if not buy them outright. While often celebrated by progressives, the motivations of these "liberal" billionaires are clear. Their generosity toward dogmatically anti-labor Republicans, like Jeff Flake of the famous "Gang of Eight" bill, should come as no surprise.

Admittedly, union opposition to mass migration was sometimes intermingled with racism (which was present across American society) in previous eras. What is omitted in libertarian attempts to smear trade unions as "the real racists," however, is that in the days of strong trade unions, they were also able to use their power to mount campaigns of international solidarity with workers' movements around the world. Unions raised the wages of millions of nonwhite members, while deunionization today is estimated to cost black American men \$50 a week.⁵

During the Reagan neoliberal revolution, union power was dealt a blow from which it has never recovered, and wages have stagnated for decades. Under this pressure, the Left itself has undergone a transformation. In the absence of a powerful workers' movement, it has remained radical in the sphere of culture and individual freedom, but can offer little more than toothless protests and appeals to noblesse oblige in the sphere of economics.

With obscene images of low-wage migrants being chased down as criminals by ICE, others drowning in the Mediterranean, and the worrying growth of anti-immigrant sentiment across the world, it is easy to see why the Left wants to defend illegal migrants against being targeted and victimized. And it should. But acting on the correct moral impulse to defend the human dignity of migrants, the Left has ended up pulling the front line too far back, effectively defending the exploitative system of migration itself.

Today's well-intentioned activists have become the useful idiots of big business. With their adoption of "open borders" advocacy—and a fierce moral absolutism that regards any

limit to migration as an unspeakable evil—any criticism of the exploitative system of mass migration is effectively dismissed as blasphemy. Even solidly leftist politicians, like Bernie Sanders in the United States and Jeremy Corbyn in the United Kingdom, are accused of “nativism” by critics if they recognize the legitimacy of borders or migration restriction at any point. This open borders radicalism ultimately benefits the elites within the most powerful countries in the world, further disempowers organized labor, robs the developing world of desperately needed professionals, and turns workers against workers.

But the Left need not take my word for it. Just ask Karl Marx, whose position on immigration would get him banished from the modern Left. Although migration at today’s speed and scale would have been unthinkable in Marx’s time, he expressed a highly critical view of the effects of the migration that occurred in the nineteenth century. In a letter to two of his American fellow-travelers, Marx argued that the importation of low-paid Irish immigrants to England forced them into hostile competition with English workers. He saw it as part of a system of exploitation, which divided the working class and which represented an extension of the colonial system. He wrote:

Owing to the constantly increasing concentration of leaseholds, Ireland constantly sends her own surplus to the English labour market, and thus forces down wages and lowers the material and moral position of the English working class.

And most important of all! 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.⁶

Marx went on to say that the priority for labor organizing in England was “to make the English workers realize that for them the national emancipation of Ireland is not a question of abstract justice or humanitarian sentiment but the first condition of their own social emancipation.” Here Marx pointed the way to an approach that is scarcely found today. The importation of low-paid labor is a tool of oppression that divides workers and benefits those in power. The proper response, therefore, is not abstract moralism about welcoming all migrants as an imagined act of charity, but rather addressing the root causes of migration in the relationship between large and powerful economies and the smaller or developing economies from which people migrate.

The Human Cost of Globalization

Advocates of open borders often overlook the costs of mass migration for developing countries. Indeed, globalization often creates a vicious cycle: liberalized trade policies destroy a region's economy, which in turn leads to mass emigration from that area, further eroding the potential of the origin country while depressing wages for the lowest paid workers in the destination country. One of the major causes of labor migration from Mexico to the United States has been the economic and social devastation caused by the North American Free Trade Agreement (nafta). Nafta forced Mexican farmers to compete with U.S. agriculture, with disastrous consequences for Mexico. Mexican imports doubled, and Mexico lost thousands of pig farms and corn growers to U.S. competition. When coffee prices fell below the cost of production, nafta prohibited state intervention to keep growers afloat. Additionally, U.S. companies were allowed to buy infrastructure in Mexico, including, for example, the country's main north-south rail line. The railroad then discontinued passenger service, resulting in the decimation of the rail workforce after a wildcat strike was crushed. By 2002, Mexican wages had dropped by 22 percent, even though worker productivity increased by 45 percent.⁷ In regions like Oaxaca, emigration devastated local economies and communities, as men emigrated to work in America's farm labor force and slaughterhouses, leaving behind women, children, and the elderly.

And what about the significant skilled and white-collar migrant workforce? Despite the rhetoric about "shithole countries" or nations "not sending their best," the toll of the migration brain drain on developing economies has been enormous. According to the Census Bureau's figures for 2017, about 45 percent of migrants who have arrived in the United States since 2010 are college educated.⁸ Developing countries are struggling to retain their skilled and professional citizens, often trained at great public cost, because the largest and wealthiest economies that dominate the global market have the wealth to snap them up. Today, Mexico also ranks as one of the world's biggest exporters of educated professionals, and its economy consequently suffers from a persistent "qualified employment deficit." This developmental injustice is certainly not limited to Mexico. According to *Foreign Policy* magazine, "There are more Ethiopian physicians practicing in Chicago today than in all of Ethiopia, a country of 80 million."⁹ It is not difficult to see why the political and economic elites of the world's richest countries would want the world to "send their best," regardless of the consequences for the rest of the world. But why is the moralizing, pro-open borders Left providing a humanitarian face for this naked self-interest?

According to the best analysis of capital flows and global wealth today, globalization is enriching the wealthiest people in the wealthiest countries at the expense of the poorest, not the other way around. Some have called it "aid in reverse." Billions in debt interest payments move from Africa to the large banks in London and New York. Vast private wealth is generated in extractive commodity industries and through labor arbitrage every year, and repatriated back to the wealthy nations where the multinational corporations are based. Trillions of dollars in capital flight occurs because international corporations take advantage of tax havens and secrecy jurisdictions, made possible by the World Trade Organization's liberalization of "trade inefficient" invoicing regulations and other policies.¹⁰

Global wealth inequality is the primary push factor driving mass migration, and the globalization of capital cannot be separated from this matter. There is also the pull factor of exploitative employers in the United States who seek to profit from nonunionized, low-wage workers in sectors like agriculture as well as through the importation of a large white-collar workforce already trained in other countries. The net result is an estimated population of eleven million people living in the United States illegally.

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