



Brexit and the Dramatic Increase in Hate Crime

A report by the Home Office, released in October 2016, revealed an alarming rise in hate crimes had taken place in the month after voters in England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland cast their ballots in favour of Britain leaving the EU. In July 2016, a total of 5,468 hate crimes were reported to the police –41 percent higher than July 2015. More than 200 incidents were reported on the first of July alone.

The report went on to say:

There was an increase in these offences recorded in June 2016, followed by an even sharper increase in July 2016. The number of aggravated offences recorded then declined in August, but remained at a higher level than prior to the EU Referendum. These increases fit the widely reported pattern of an increase in hate crime following the EU referendum.

January to May 2016 follows a similar level of hate crime to 2015 but the number of racially or religiously aggravated offences recorded by the police in July 2016 was 41% higher than in July 2015. The sharp increase in offences is not replicated in the non-racially or religiously aggravated equivalent offences.

Much of the situation was caused by right wing politicians and in this I definitely include the leadership of UKIP and their followers. Brexit campaigners used dog whistle tactics playing to Islamophobia and xenophobia rather than "democracy" and "constitutional rights which, in my opinion, is the cause of many hate crimes.

No sooner had Nigel Farage's "Breaking Point" poster been rolled up and Vote Leave's red bus quietly parked out of sight, It was clear the country was still divided on the merits of Brexit. After the vote the Brexit fault line in our society has widened further with EU nationals, Muslims and people of colour beginning to report one common thing: an increase in hate crime.

Brexit divides Britain into two very distinct groups and there is little prospect any deal can be agreed without further alienating one or both, this according to the paper published today by campaign group Hope Not Hate.

Nick Lowles, chief executive of Hope Not Hate, said: “Despite the turbulent events of recent months, it is heartening to see that England remains, overall, a liberal and tolerant place.

“However, significant challenges remain, with Brexit likely to dominate politics in years to come and set to trigger feelings of betrayal amid a tough period of economic downturn.

There are still significant cases of race hate taking place in our region. Unfortunately, it is still stoked up by many in the right wing media, who have stifled debate on any challenge to Brexit the cry of “Re-moaner” (as if any of the 48% who voted to remain have no right to an opinion). There is and must be room for further debate. Brexit happened for many reasons.

The political arguments have been lost in a fog of rhetorical vested interest. The free movement of workers has forced wages and living standards down. Who has benefited from this? Not the workers, no matter where they originate from. The business owners and international capitalism have grown very rich on the back of free movement of labour.

Against this backdrop the role of unions in challenging racism in the workplace and in the community is more important than ever. BAME, and LGBT workers are well represented in the trade union movement and unions have a long history of fighting against racism, homophobia and the far right.

The GMB union actively seek to organise and support particular ethnic minority groups and migrant workers, as well as offering training and guidance on challenging racism in the workplace.

The GMB has a very practical role to play in tackling racist abuse, harassment and discrimination not only the world of work but in a Brexit divided future society.

Steve Jennings MICPD

Senior Organiser/Political Officer

