

Anders Breivik and the Guardian: Suzanne Moore's "sympathy for the devil" moment

Chris Marsden
26 April 2012

Her article is framed as a detached commentary on views supposedly held by others, but UK columnist Suzanne Moore has produced an opinion piece that again and again expresses her understanding of the xenophobic sentiments that gave rise to the mass murder committed by Anders Breivik.

Moore, a regular columnist for the *Mail on Sunday*, wrote in the April 18 *Guardian* on the Norwegian far-right terrorist who murdered 77 people in July last year, most of them teenagers. She sets out her stall very early: "It's comforting to view the killer's horror of multiculturalism as deranged", she says, "but it is just an extreme example of what many feel".

Moore promises to meet such sentiments "head on", as if what will follow is a battle cry for tolerance and equality. Instead she extends her sympathy to those who, like Breivik, suffer from the impact of "multiculturalism".

She complains that "any questioning of 'multiculturalism' as it functions produces accusations of racism. The left closes in and closes down this debate".

This is a straw man. The "left" she speaks of are of the petty-bourgeois liberal circles, and advocates of various forms of identity politics from which she emerged. For socialists, on the other hand, multiculturalism is both a legitimate and necessary target for critique. It represents a semi-official liberal ideology that supposedly celebrates difference and the equality of *cultures*, but only conceals the real social inequalities based upon *class*. In so doing, it facilitates the efforts of rightist forces to channel social discontent along racist lines.

Moore makes a nod towards such a critique, urging a discussion of "class in a globalised economy" and condemning the use of "multiculturalism" to facilitate

"special pleading". But such left feints barely conceal an opposition to multiculturalism that more than halfway meets up with the prejudices of the right.

"Get on a bus", she says, "and you will hear many a robust exchange about 'ethnicity' which polite and political conversation is afraid of. Not everyone who expresses a less than rosy view of how we all rub along is a fascist".

"The desire for a monoculture may well be nostalgic but it can be heard from Folkestone to Bradford", she says. "The flight from state schools of many middle-class parents is a flight from 'diversity', the fear that dare not speak its name".

Step forward then Suzanne Moore to give voice to these illicit sentiments!

She speaks of "communities that deliberately refuse to assimilate". In education, she continues, multiculturalism "in practice... amounts to a mush where children are told that all religions are benign".

Moore nowhere indicates opposition to religious teachings in schools. Nor does she identify which *particular* religions she views as malignant. But she makes clear her belief that it is Christianity that is being undermined by multiculturalism. "I never want to sit through another nativity play with no mention of Jesus", she says.

Claims of nativity plays being performed without Jesus is a myth favoured by the Christian right. In reality, nativity plays, complete with the infant Jesus, are either performed in schools or they are not.

"The excitement of difference. Edgy, if you are young", she intones, but "frightening sometimes, too".

"Breivik's fear of being taken over was out of all proportion, obviously, but how are people to express their fear of change?"

"Surely", she asks, "not everyone who feels unheard

or uncomfortable is an [English Defence League] headcase or will engage in a Breivik-style jihad. But we do need to listen to our fellow citizens instead of preaching this tired doctrine of cultures all fitting together in a beautiful mosaic”.

No, not everyone who feels “uncomfortable” with a multi-ethnic society is in the EDL. A good few such troubled individuals proclaim themselves to be progressive.

Moore was once the cultural critic for the now defunct Euro-Communist magazine, *Marxism Today*, which played a key role in laying down the foundations of the “New Labour” project in the 1980s. She has now joined the ever expanding number of ex-lefts and former radicals who have written on the racism supposedly endemic among working people in order to urge a political rethink on “the left”.

This layer is prominent within politics and the media, encompassing such figures as Maurice Glasman and his Blue Labour project, Labour MP Jon Cruddas and *Prospect* magazine editor David Goodhart. The concerns they express are those of an extremely privileged petty-bourgeois strata with incomes in the hundreds of thousands, employing a left vocabulary only in order to conceal their espousal of economic and social nostrums that are in fact compatible with their new-found wealth.

That is why the political and ideological reappraisal they urge almost invariably involves the adoption of right-wing policies that will supposedly placate such “popularly-held” racist sentiments—immigration controls, restrictions on access to social services and housing for non-residents, and the like.

The *Guardian* has repeatedly offered itself as a sounding board for such sentiment. Goodhart famously used its pages in 2004 to argue that an ethnically diverse society and a welfare state are incompatible because it is based on a readiness to share with those of a “common culture and values... To put it bluntly, most of us prefer our own kind”.

The attempt by Moore to dress up her disoriented musings in Marxist phraseology is a fraud. Her linking a consideration of class to the political and social impact of a “globalised world” is prefaced by the assertion that “Multiculturalism too often means a kind of sampling, both musically and gastronomically, which is lovely for the bourgeoisie but leaves behind a

huge and indeed ethnically diverse underclass who do not yearn for modernity and indeed oppose it”.

Here, wrapped up in the language of post-modernism, is simply a barely disguised disdain for those lower down the social pecking order she depicts as an underclass animated by an atavistic yearning for a bygone era. In reality the vast majority of the now truly ethnically diverse British *working class* is hostile to racism, despite the best efforts of the ruling elite to encourage its spread.

To combat racism and Islamophobia means repudiating both multicultural nostrums and those advocating assimilation into a non-existent British monoculture. It means fighting for a genuinely class-based, socialist politics that defends working people, irrespective of their ethnicity, religion or other cultural issues.

Lenin once declared, “The slogan of national culture is a bourgeois ... fraud. Our slogan is: the international culture of democracy and of the world working-class movement”.

Now that is Marxism, not the counterfeit that some of the liberal commentariat espouse—whether to advance multiculturalism or, as with Moore, to utilise its manifest failings and absurdities to justify their political prostration before the right.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact