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**Brexit and Free Movement in the EU**

*by*

Professor Charles Woolfson

**Date:** 6 September 2017, 3pm  
**Venue:** HSS Conference Room, HSS-05-57, 14 Nanyang Drive

**ABSTRACT**

This paper attempts to reassess the Brexit debate in the UK over immigration and free movement of labour in terms of the politics of austerity. It tries to advance a progressive case for Brexit based on regaining national sovereignty to enable the effective defence of national labour standards outside of the neoliberal European project. The issue of labour standards is one area that paradoxically the current Conservative administration has sought to champion, although on a highly contestable basis. In the UK general election of 2017, the Labour Party has significantly advanced its position on the basis of an anti-austerity program while the Conservative government has entered into a likely terminal crisis. It is argued that rejecting membership of the supranational European Union has the potential to advance labour rights further in an inclusive and nonxenophobic way. The threat remains however that a Conservative administration will use the process of Brexit to erode labour standards in a global “race to the bottom” in which Singapore may provide a dystopian model.

**ABOUT THE SPEAKER**

Charles Woolfson is Professor Emeritus of Labour Studies at the Institute for Research in Migration, Ethnicity and Society (REMESCO), Sweden. Woolfson graduated from the University of Strathclyde before joining the Department of Social and Economic Research at the University of Glasgow where he was latterly Professor of Labour Studies in the Department of Law. Prior to taking up his current appointment in 2010 at Linköping University in Sweden, he lived in the Baltic states. As a Marie Curie Chair for three years based at the University of Latvia, he conducted research on austerity and labour migration from the post-communist new EU member states during the financial crisis. His most recent book, edited with Jeffrey Sommers, is The Contradictions of Austerity: The Socio-Economic Costs of the Neoliberal Baltic Model (Routledge, 2014).

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