BREXIT – A PERSONAL VIEW

Brexit was sold to the British people as a means to claw back power from Europe, control its borders and strike trade deals wherever it chose.

But there are three principle reasons why successive British governments overlook the steady stream of newcomers to its shores. One is the requirement for competitive labour when many British people are not taking up the jobs available. Ask for example, any Polish trader and they will tell you how hard it is to employ assistants in the UK. The second is the need for younger employees in a fast ageing society facing a major pension crisis. Finally, as they say; 'it's the economy stupid'! Governments are still required to provide economic growth while abiding by a broken economic model and the only way they can think to do this is by increasing GDP through population growth. But GDP that includes waste as a 'product', is a catastrophic measure of success for the country's long-term economy as well as the environment.

Not only is it impossible to find governments prepared to admit to any of these factors, none of these have anything to do with the EU. It's all very well to say Britain lacks power in Europe. but if being a large economy gives you an undemocratic advantage, Britain should be wielding undue influence among the other nations. Yes, it can be argued that the EU has centralised too much power and failed as 'Empires' always do, to devolve power away from the centrifugal centre. The irony is that Westminster knows well how to redirect power when critically necessary and has a lesson for Spain in this regard. Devolving power out from Westminster to Scotland and to some extent Northern Ireland and Wales, has helped to defuse secessionary inclinations from a union that's component parts have at times felt like provinces.

Meanwhile, former major trading partners such as Australia who suffered as Britain looked to Europe in the 1970s, now cannot believe that Britain should wish to leave the world's largest and most civilised trading block. As Professor Yanis Varoufakis has stated, Europe is like the Hotel California; you can choose to join but you can never sensibly checkout. After all, leaving a trading block is unheard of and universally recognised as of questionable benefit. Proof of this is that not just Australia, but no country has encouraged Britain to leave, a tacit acknowledgement that nowhere is such a move considered wise. Much better and easier to effect change to the struggling union from the inside than perhaps have to spend many years trying to forge new trade agreements from the outside. Why should the U.S. or China take Britain seriously? We will indeed be forced to the back of the queue,

while having to compete with every other economy in a race to the bottom in products and perhaps even services. In the words of the Leader of the Opposition, Jeremy Corbyn: *"The current proposals would damage the whole UK economy, the Northern Irish economy especially and would undermine the Good Friday agreement"* and that they *"reject any form of customs union, something demanded by every business and industry body in Britain and every trade union".* He added that *"They want to ditch EU standards on workers' rights, regulations and consumer standards and engage in a race to the bottom,"*

The sad truth is that Brexit is an irrelevance that has taken up valuable time and wasted a great deal of money. As a satellite of Europe, we will still be subject to trade conditions and the trading blocs laws, not to mention the court in Strasburg, which Brexiteers have often failed to admit. Using the same broken economic model, we will still require cheap, youthful labour regardless of education levels, as this will be an irrelevance too. While parliament has been proving how broken is the political model in their pointless bickering, the country has failed to deal with many important domestic issues. The Tesla billionaire Elon Musk has said that Brexit made the firm decide to build its first European factory in Germany rather than UK; "Brexit made it too risky to put a Giga factory in the UK."

Most catastrophic of all is the failure to recognise that the world faces three huge issues that are being side-lined. One is the immediate threat of nuclear Armageddon, not a media hype but as outlined by the distinguished scientist that formulate the Doomsday Clock ticking perilously close to midnight. The second is the now all too obvious threat of climate change, which could at any stage spiral out of all control, causing seismic movement of peoples across the globe and in its wake the possibility of utter chaos. The third is the requirement to set clear parameters both scientific and ethical to our fast-changing technology. The internet and smart devises are already changing the human brain but the effects of mass unemployment in the face of artificial intelligence are hard to imagine and desperately in need of controls. Sadly, all these factors urgently require trans-global cooperation and anything but America or Britain '*First*'. Of course, there is one other overriding global issue that requires global cooperation to resolve and that is the need to control population. Individually, no state seems prepared to even mention the subject yet alone consider ways to tackle a problem that imminently threatens to make life on earth unsustainable.

In Australia, the constitution sensibly compels any government considering a referendum to set a 75% threshold in order to avoid major changes to the country that could feasibly be triggered by a single uninformed, wavering voter. 17.4 million people in the UK were hoodwinked in a referendum that failed to set any threshold, to vote to leave Europe whatever that was meant to mean. However, the vast majority (about 28 million) either voted against it, didn't support leaving

or never thought it would happen, like the prime minister who called it. The true absurdity is that just one voter, with perhaps little understanding of Britain and a limited grasp of English, could have decided on their own that Britain was to leave Europe.

To what extent are Britain's legitimate concerns about EU democracy credible when our own democracy has proven to be bankrupt? Bankrupt because we were prepared to take such a fundamental decision on the questionable vote of twenty six percent of the entire population. Bankrupt because officially identified illegality by the leave campaign has led to charges but no consequences. Bankrupt because an ill-informed electorate spun various lies, was expected to make a binary decision about an extremely complicated issue. Bankrupt because even the Ancient Athenians would have recognised that power in the hands of the wealthy - with the cash to sway public opinion - is an oligarchy or corporatocracy but definitely not a genuine democracy. According to the BBC, the Brexit advertising blitz across social media, billboards and TV is reported to have cost around £100m. The work of a corporate elite is evident simply in the fact that the billionaire Brexit backer Crispin Odey alone made £200 million from gambling on a remain result. This is while, big money funding behind the principle Brexit players have been carefully concealed.

For evidence of corporate sway, consider the 1997 resignation speech of Robert Reich, US Secretary of Labor under president Clinton. In it he said; *"My friends, we are on the way to becoming a two-tiered society, composed of a few winners and a large group of Americans left behind whose anger and whose disillusionment is easily manipulated. Once un-bottled, mass resentment can poison the very fabric of society; replacing ambition with envy; replacing tolerance with hate. Today the targets of that rage are immigrants and welfare mothers and government officials and gays and an ill-defined counterculture. Then as the middle class continues to erode, who will be the targets tomorrow."* In her revealing TED Talk this year; 'Facebook's Role in Brexit & the threat to democracy', the journalist Carole Cadwalladr, accused social media of being involved in a *"crime scene"* of illegal and unsourced cash creating a catastrophic breakdown of democracy. One hundred years of regulation had been circumvented and few have noticed or seem to care. She wondered if it would be possible to have free and fair elections ever again. In recognition of the dangers, in Twitter proposed in October 2019 to ban all political advertising worldwide, saying that the reach of such messages *"should be earned, not bought". "While internet advertising is incredibly powerful and very effective for commercial advertisers, that power brings significant risks to politics,"* company CEO Jack Dorsey tweeted.

After an 18-month investigation into digital influence in the electoral process, the UK parliament's DCMS Select Committee found that "the British election laws were not fit for purpose and vulnerable to interference by hostile foreign actors." Then

having used the undemocratic - and un-British - blunt instrument of a referendum, how could it possibly be a betrayal of a minority of 17.4 million of the nation, to go back to the people to ask whether they want a No-Deal Brexit, a Norwegian or Canadian Model or negotiate good terms for remaining in the EU? Was it not just as much a betrayal of the people for the Brexiteers to have always promised full access to the Single Market and that we would be £350 million richer per week, without mentioning Margaret Thatcher's rebate in that figure? Is it not a betrayal that no investigation has been forthcoming into the secretive funding of the leave campaign and the breaking of electoral spending limits, as decreed and referred to the police by the Electoral Commission? In the circumstances, with genuine dismay in Europe at the UK's departure, the terms for remaining would likely be generous. It strikes me as a truly bitter irony that as a country for centuries paranoid about unity against it in Europe, Britain has now actually managed to bring the other countries of the union closer together than ever and at long last talking about reform - predominantly in English! Even more ironic then, that Nigel Farage can rant on at will as an MEP in Brussels while the UK House of Commons has been silenced!

Hoodwinked is exactly what has become of many in Britain. In the 1980s, Reagan and Thatcher continued a process of deregulation which allowed the rich to get a great deal richer. This permitted some, such as The Koch Brothers and deeply divisive corporations, such as that headed by Rupert Murdock, to wield ever greater power. The fall of the Berlin Wall in the 1990s signified removal of further constraints on rampant Western-style capitalism. The Election of Trump felt like the final coming-of-age of a new generation on the far right. They took over the U.S. Republican Party and have now taken over the British Conservative Party. For evidence, just listen to the recent incredulity of the likes of Britain's longest serving MP Kenneth Clarke or the former Deputy Prime Minister Michael Heseltine or even Churchill's grandson Sir Nicholas Soames. In fact, traditional Conservatives have been called 'Wets' since their opposition to the most extreme policies of Margaret Thatcher but if you ever wonder what happened to the middle ground - to the statesmen in British politics - just look to their ranks.

And all should be alarmed by the almost hysterical zeal of this new 'Dry' faction. Mirrored in the U.S. they talk constantly about unilateral concerns against invented international enemies requiring at the very least, constant sabre-rattling from behind an ever-larger funded war machine. They have zero concern for the catastrophic environmental crisis or for that matter any of the genuine pressing needs facing the world. In fact, proof of their mania can be found in the simple fact that they are prepared to risk leaving the EU even if unpopular with the majority of the population, that it might cause social unrest and a serious economic downturn for possibly a decade or more, with many companies going to the wall

or leaving the UK. But most un-Conservative of all, in their very Anglo-centric obsession, they are prepared to risk the breakup of the United Kingdom itself. As a man who saw the union of Europe as a unique human achievement and a bulwark against future war, Sir Winston Churchill would have deplored the breakup.

But most of all, hoodwinked because too many people in Britain failed to spot the external forces at work, more powerful even than the nation states on which they prey. How they have caused a coup designed to destabilise Britain, tear it away from the world's most powerful trading block and leave us all to unfettered free-market forces. The hoodwinked have failed to see that the model now threatens us with our own wild-haired and unstable Trump. And that should worry everyone for the British Ambassador himself has noted Trump as considered; "*uniquely inept, dysfunctional and unpredictable.*" Even Boris Johnson has described Trump as; *" . . betraying a quite stupefying ignorance, that makes him quite frankly unfit to hold the office of President of the United States. "*

So why now this desperate seizure of power by ever-richer corporate elites? Getting Donald Trump into power was the next step in a now pretty overt bid for total control of international power. Europe, almost unexpectedly has become to some a champion of higher standards; in trade, environmental concern & basic ethics. Examples such as higher food quality, peace for over 70 years and the abolition of the death penalty stand as testaments to this. Brexit plans are set to remove EU rules on Environmental protection and while talking of a new 'independent watchdog' or OEP, it won't be able to fine the government if it fails to uphold its commitments. But to others, these are an annoying block to their way of doing business, where Britain has always been the weakest link in the chain. Like Hong Kong or Taiwan are for China, Britain is seen by this dangerous ideology as ripe for ripping from Europe in an attempt at bringing the entire edifice down. To this faction, most worrying of all is the EU's imminent attempt to close the tax loopholes allowing large corporations to avoid their tax obligations. The Anti-Tax Avoidance Directive (ETAD), which comes into effect in 1st January 2020 is the real reason for this unseemly rush to leave the EU at all costs.

This is why the forces behind the campaign to leave the EU don't care about the costs, now only slowly becoming fully apparent. Appreciating that the move was deeply divisive, the BBC reported that in September 2019, parliamentary tensions led 120 archbishops and bishops to warn against *"further entrenching our divisions".* Of course, these divisions run right through many families and are reminiscent of the bitter divisions in sections of Argentine society over the Falklands War or even memories of England's own Civil War nearly three hundred year ago. But these fault lines extend far beyond the shores of Britain. It doesn't take much awareness to appreciate that the UK leaving is a huge kick in the teeth

to our European partners, saying in effect; ‘we no longer want to work alongside you but in direct competition.’ Across the world as far as Australia there is disagreement about the move, where there too, family are split over the proposal. But in Australia, all agree that Brexit, like Trump’s trade war and the somewhat baffling violence in Hong Kong, are all having a negative effect on the country’s economy.

In the UK, the costs now considered acceptable seem to include lying to the Queen and breaking the law. Lord Wilson, one of the UK’s Supreme Court judges has made it clear that the Court is the guardian of parliamentary sovereignty. In their judgement of Johnson, they were unanimous: *“The effect on the fundamentals of our democracy was extreme.”* According to the BBC: *“The highest court in the land has just ruled that the serving prime minister broke the law. He gave the Queen advice that was unlawful . . . In his two months in power, Boris Johnson has lost his first six Commons votes, broken the law by suspending Parliament and misled the monarch.“* Some may wonder why deceiving the Queen isn’t classed as an act of treason. No wonder when David Dimbleby was asked by Krishnan Guru-Murthy on Channel 4’s *The Fault Line* podcast how he rated the latest Tory government, he declared: *“Oh low, very, very low. The lowest. The lowest since I was born in 1938, by far.”*

The House of Commons Speaker John Bercow has already called the government's plan *"an offence against the democratic process"* and that he will find an opportunity for the House of Commons to consider a motion of no confidence, even if the government does not provide time. A senior fellow at the Institute for Government Dr Catherine Haddon, says there are some fundamental constitutional issues that the government *"seem to be either sidestepping or potentially ignoring"*, which she says is *"very worrying and potentially very damaging for the long-term future of our constitution"*. The power to prorogue exists *‘purely for purposes that are consistent with the healthy functioning of the country's parliamentary democracy.’* Meanwhile, over one million UK voters have signed a petition against suspending Parliament. The SNP's leader Nicola Sturgeon said there was *"a gaping moral vacuum where the office of prime minister used to be"*. Even Johnson’s sister Rachel Johnson, told BBC Radio 4's World at One that her brother was using the Commons as a *"bully pulpit”* "*It's not the brother I see at home. It's a different person."*

The Conservative's own leader in Scotland, Ruth Davidson backed Remain ahead of the EU referendum and famously clashed with Mr Johnson in a BBC TV debate at Wembley ahead of the vote - when she accused the Leave side of telling "untruths". More recently, Aidan O'Neill QC, representing the Scottish parliamentarians, told judge Lord Doherty that the suspension of parliament meant a denial of *"political*

accountability" and was unconstitutional. These 'untruths' are now apparent because on 11th September the government was forced by parliament to release the previously leaked Yellowhammer report, designed to explore the possible effects of a no-deal outcome on the UK. But it proves, contrary to the Government's argument, that the effects could be very serious. This is because what the government called a 'Worst Case Scenario', has now been seen to actually have been their 'Base Case Scenario', This would suggest a case of contempt of parliament, not to say a misleading of the British people. Of course, British industry also feels mislead. The BMA is now seriously '*alarmed*' about disruption to medical supplies and other risks, while the chief executive of the British Retail Consortium has said that these findings prove what they have been claiming for the last three years. Namely that products will go up in price, be less available and provide less choice, suggesting 'Project Fear' was nothing of the sort.

John Bercow has also described proroguing parliament as a *"constitutional outrage"* from an unelected leader of a minority government. That the government is not interested in a confirmatory referendum shows they no longer believe they speak for the people. Not really surprising if they don't, as very few voted for crashing out of the EU at such cost, disruption & division. *"Mr Johnson is using constitutional chicanery to thwart a parliament that he knows has a majority against his chosen policy".* According to the Financial Times (29th August) *"the seat of British democracy is being denied a say on the most consequential decision facing the country in more than four decades."* How could leaving the EU be justified when it risks; possible economic hardship, relations with Europe, the UK itself, peace in Ireland & virtual civil war in England, while permitting at the cost of billions, the risk of failing to deal with many urgent issues from the environment & international trade wars to profound social crisis?

Churchill would probably have laughed and then likely wept reflecting on the present calibre of politician trying to negotiate this most complex and significant of issues. Eccentric and entertaining some of these buffoons might appear but international politics has never looked more serious. While the world daily risks nuclear war, environmental disasters & mass unemployment through automation, more immediately as I write, Britain faces the possibility of an executive overriding our sovereign legislature. According to Pascal Lamy, for eight years Director General of the World Trade Organisation - the organisation so loved of Brexiteers - Britain will descend from first to third division. Sad then that the former Swedish prime minister Carl Bildt tweeted recently that Britain *"used to be a nation providing leadership to the world - now, it can't even provide leadership to itself".*

No wonder then that according to a BBC report, EU Commission officials are working on a plan to classify the no-deal option as a *"major disaster"*, a category normally used to describe destructive natural events such as earthquakes or major

floods. According to the BBC, Official government papers appear to show the Northern Ireland secretary clashing with the prime minister Boris Johnson over the wisdom of suspending Parliament. Meanwhile, Seamus Mallon, a former deputy first minister of Northern Ireland told BBC NI; *"The lunacy of putting a referendum in Britain in relation to trying to unite the Tory party was a monumental mistake, and they have staggered from one mistake after another,"* Mr Mallon told BBC News NI, on the margins of the Kennedy Summer School in County Wexford. *"And this is the mother of parliaments. This is the home of democratic political process and it is falling apart before our eyes, and it is doing it in such a way that a carpetbagger like Boris Johnson is now leading it as prime minister."* When asked to define what a carpetbagger was, Mr Mallon said it was *"someone who has no principles, who will buy anybody and sell anybody for their own reasons and has only one thought in his mind and that's the furtherance of his own ambitions."*

Likewise, according to the Scottish Supreme Court, Johnson deliberately lied the Queen in order to frustrate parliament, described as the; *"improper purpose of stymieing Parliament"*. Surely logic would suggest he should now immediately resign in the absence of a suitable grounds for a charge of treason. The truth is we're desperately in need of real statesmen (or stateswomen) who think in an adult way about the bigger issues. Considering not just what they imagine could suit England but that works as much for Britain, long-term and for Wales, Scotland and Ireland. For we're all in it together, now more than ever and so solutions need to equally work for our European friends and ancient trading partners & most importantly, immediately help the environmental crisis now so obvious to anyone with an ounce of common sense. How does Brexit help with any of these? At the national conference of the party that calls itself the 'Conservative and Unionist Party', Jacob Rees-Mogg declared of other EU countries that *"If they had got any sense"* they would leave the EU. But it is quite obvious now that they are united in having a different 'sense'. In January 2018, A Scottish government assessment, published before either Theresa May's or Boris Johnson's deals, estimated that leaving the single market and customs union would mean Scotland's GDP (the value of the total output of the country) would be 6.1% lower by 2030 than it would have been if the UK had stayed in the EU. It predicted that would knock £9bn off Scottish output (in 2016 pounds).

Possibly the most alarming casualty of this whole debacle has been the truth, which then poses a threat to the trust at the heart of our democracy. A classic example of this increasingly disingenuous culture was provided by Amol Rajan of the BBC in the revelation that Facebook removed a Conservative Party advert which misrepresented a BBC News story. The ad carried a BBC logo and headline saying "£14 billion-pound cash boost for schools" - despite the story it linked to putting the figure at £7.1bn. The social media giant said the Tories had "misused" its

advertising platform and it was working to stop headlines being changed in this way.

Damian Collins MP, the chair of the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee, says the time has come for emergency legislation. *"Our electoral law is hopelessly out of date. And what that means is that people can set up dummy campaigns promoting causes that are there to support an official candidate, but hide who's doing it, hide where the money's coming from,"* he said, adding *"You can use technology to effectively launder money into political campaigns in micro donations including from overseas and our electoral law was established to make sure voters could see who's campaigning on what, who's paying for it, who it's there to promote. And yet technology allows people to sidestep all of those rules and regulations.* Then he concluded; *"I don't understand why the government is taking so long. I think we should be looking at emergency legislation to bring our electoral law up to date. At least to establish the basic principles that the same requirements that exist in a poster or a leaflet should exist in an online ad and on Facebook as well."*

The reality is the Government doesn't seem to care. Nicky Morgan is the eighth secretary of state at the DCMS in the past nine years, while Google has had just a single boss in the UK, Matt Brittin. The issues are complex & require expertise & fast. In the words of Rajan; *"The constant influence of dark ads; political donors who want to influence politics while avoiding the public scrutiny that comes from giving money directly to parties or politicians, see social media as a great opportunity. "* An unelected prime minister of a minority government during the most critical constitutional crisis for a century, when the vast majority of the electorate did not vote to leave the EU and even those that did, gave no mandate to leave without a deal, closed parliament for the longest period since the Second World War, ignoring the will of a parliament that is sovereign and this is considered legitimate and acceptable? Ruth Fox, the highly respected director of the independent Hansard Society, has called proroguing parliament an *"affront to parliamentary democracy".*

A further existential crisis for the Conservative Party was the release of the memoirs of David Cameron in the middle of September, in which he said; *"The conclusion I am left with is that Boris Johnson risked an outcome he didn't believe in because it would help his political career."* He added that his Conservative colleagues Mr Johnson, Mr Gove, Penny Mordaunt and Priti Patel had *"left the truth at home"* on the referendum campaign trail, especially when it came to immigration and behaved *"appallingly".* Of course, those who always doubted Cameron's ability as Prime Minister will feel vindicated by his half-hearted attempt to admit as much; *"I deeply regret the outcome & admit my approach failed. I*

failed." . . There are many things I would do differently I did not anticipate the strength of feeling that would be unleashed both during the referendum and afterwards." Read between the lines and you are confronted with the frightening admittance of inadequacy of yet another British politician. What other conclusion could be reached of a prime minister guilty of the ultimate royal sin of divulging the opinions of the Queen from his weekly meeting, a new low for his office. According to the former Speaker John Bercow, David Cameron has described Brexit as *"the biggest mistake of this country since the war."*

The Conservative party is obviously in deep crisis and appears prepared to sacrifice al caution in its personal agonies. The day after the referendum Britain's credit rating went from Stable to Negative. We lost Triple A under Cameron in 2013 & under Johnson according to Moody, now risk another downgrade. In her interview with the Evening Standard, Ms Rudd, the former home secretary and work and pensions secretary, said: "The sort of language I'm afraid we've seen more and more of coming out from Number 10 does incite violence. *"It's the sort of language people think legitimises a more aggressive approach and sometimes violence."* She said Mr Johnson's rhetoric was "*reminiscent*" of Donald Trump leading chants of "lock her up" in the 2016 presidential race, which referred to rival Hillary Clinton. Jacob R-M the Leader of the House admitted in October 2019 that he might have to "eat" his words & back Johnson's deal he said a year ago was *"completely cretinous, bureaucratic & a betrayal of common sense."* The great irony here is that once Johnson had made his proposal to the EU, in the words of the BBC's Laura Kuensberg (2/10/19): *"Rather than taking back control, Mr Johnson must wait for the judgement of others."* According to the BBC, to date, the government has set aside £6.3bn for Brexit planning. Businesses have also spent a huge amount of money preparing for Brexit, but it is hard to put a precise figure on how much has been spent in the private sector. Meanwhile, According to the former Secretary of State for International Development Rory Stewart, the purge of the party by Johnson which saw Stewart lose his job, could not have happened in the U.S. he found it *"constitutionally worrying",* if disagreeing with the governments means you lose even your seat in Parliament.

It is obvious to everyone in Europe that Johnson saying he wants a deal, while having no proposal to make regarding the Backstop, he has no intention of striking any kind of understanding before the end of October. Clear about this, the prime minister of Luxemburg, Xavier Bettel attacked Johnson's approach to Brexit, calling the situation a "nightmare". Bettel said the British government had failed to put forward any serious proposals for a new deal. Expecting 27 counties bound in a close union to capitulate to Brexiteer's demands is about as ludicrous as expecting China to grant the 5 demands of the disparate & disunited students of HK.

If Johnson thought without actually outlining just how he intends to *"get this done",* he might be able to break individual countries from the pack to negotiate deals, it hasn't worked. This would suggest all 27 counties believe, despite the real issues faced by the EU, their cause is best served remaining within it. What does Britain (or will that soon just be England) have as an obvious advantage over all 27 others, when you consider the EU's economy is roughly twice the size of China's?
As the world's greatest economy, the EU represents a threat to the ever more belligerent intent of the US and Russia, where the EU is the only Western counterbalance to an out of control United States. It is surely of some hope that many are finally appreciating that the nation states are outdated modes of world administration and that this all looks like their final & very dangerous lashing out.

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