Blimey, it Could be Brexit!

Anthony Barnett

A PDF of the on-line chapters

From 22 March to 29 June

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Anglo-British politics makes it very difficult for anyone outside of the ruling circles and their media to make arguments that have any impact on the way the country is run. This does not mean the British state has not changed and reformed with deliberation and energy if also trial and error. It has a skilled political elite despite all its greed and stupidities. Nor does it mean there is any lack of brilliant contributions setting out what ought to be. It is simply that discussion of the fundamental principles of our democracy is stifled by the status quo. Decade after decade, shelves bend with the weight of new and 'urgent' calls for change. To no avail, if they touch the central complex of a regime of privilege. This is partly thanks to elite complicity in keeping it this way. It is partly thanks to a mix of deference and defiance that marks out the English public and makes it reluctant to engage with anything where the practical outcome is not evident. And in part the Labour movement is responsible – it should be the source of thinking about society as a whole and is far too focused on the parliamentary game. Whatever the causes, our society is pretty closed to such debate.

The irony is that people hunger for change, yet there is little appetite for arguments that set out the need for change. When it was clear that David Cameron was intent on holding the referendum he didn't really want, I wondered if this might open up a possibility for serious public engagement of the far-reaching kind we badly need. The idea stirred of writing a book that took advantage of any such opening. But my guess was that there would be no opportunity. It was clear that the Prime Minister and his hench-strategist, Chancellor George Osborne, had decided to get their commitment to a referendum 'out the way' as quickly as possible and never considered that it might be lost. Their plan was to call it fast, pull off a deal that would bring the Cabinet behind them (if necessary with offers of high office) and turn it into a dispute between the government and Nigel Farage of UKIP, with every single one of the UK's institutions in support of the official view. Such a referendum with its foregone conclusion would simply have reinforced the closure and intellectual nullity of the official British political scene.

But when Cameron came back from Brussels with his deal on Friday 20 February, his close friend, colleague, advisor and the Lord Chancellor, Michael Gove declared his opposition to it. Cameron's popular competitor, the then Mayor of London Boris Johnson, followed. Together Gove and Johnson decided to lead a campaign against remaining in the EU.

It has always been clear that the EU presents a huge challenge for the UK. To grossly simplify matters into single word –it is an incompatibly different kind of political project to Britain. Like the ruling establishment of the 1970s, what has now become our ruling caste (a significant transition I discuss below) has been united in its commitment to membership of the EU, despite high profile outliers. Indeed, it used the country's rejection of the euro to shield it from effective discussion of the principles and purpose of its membership, in case this brought out the fundamental differences between the British and EU forms of government. Suddenly the ruling Tory party split over the issue. This meant that

it could be Brexit, as I show in the Introduction. It remained unlikely. What changed was that it was no longer impossible. "Blimey!" I thought - if such a reaction can be called a thought. Will this create a moment when we can wake up the public to the need for Britain to become a modern democracy?

It meant drafting an initial exploration chapter by chapter, through the campaign. I hesitated, but I was encouraged to do so by openDemocracy's Editor-in-Chief, Mary Fitzgerald, who said immediately, "Of course, you must do it". openDemocracy's main site editor Rosemary Bechler and its UK editor Adam Ramsay also agreed immediately. Tony Tabatznik provided some very fast essential support especially for the videos that give the chapters some contemporary visual outreach. What is now the preface and introduction were published as a single post on 22 March.

This PDF is a very lightly edited version of all the published chapters. You can find the originals on line as they appeared here. You can see the date on which each chapter first appeared on the contents page.

I had originally intended to reshape these draft chapters and add a further ones on immigration and the constitutional implications, based on the assumption that *Leave* would loose having given the country a fright. Now *Remain* have lost, and while Brexit has yet to actually happen, the Brexiteers have sacrificed each other for their cause, Labour is in meltdown and the EU leaders have started to quarrel. My argument that a period of British history was ending has proved truer than I thought, faster than I believed possible and all eyes now are on what will follow. I have therefore decided that *Blimey, it Could be Brexit!* has completed its journey. This eBook is its final destination. A new one will, I hope, arise out of its efforts as the historic nature of the referendum outcome becomes clear. Then and there I will thank all those who made this effort possible.

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Preface

On 23 June the British could take leave of their traditional rulers whose self-interested wisdom they have deferred to for so long, and vote to exit the European Union. Or at least the English could do so. Two weeks after the Prime Minister David Cameron announced a June date for a referendum on staying in the EU or leaving, a [poll of six polls](#) held between 24 February and 6 March had *Remain* on 51 per cent and *Leave* on 49 per cent, while the Financial Times running poll had *Remain* on 45 per cent and *Leave* on 40 per cent with 15 per cent undecided. The result is too close to call, especially as turn-out by the anti-EU voters is likely to be higher.

A decision to *Leave* would be a colossal upset for the country's government and civil service, the interests they represent and their international and corporate allies. From the start their hope and presumption was that any referendum would be a foregone conclusion. However, against the backdrop of trans-Atlantic discontent with the global elite, and our European continent's chronic financial insecurity and unprecedented influx of refugees, something quite extraordinary and surprising is taking place in the UK. The Westminster ruling order has splintered and the political system is going into a nosedive from which it may not emerge intact.

The likelihood is that the lucky country will pull round at the last minute with only a few bits and pieces of its governing machinery breaking away. Since Wellington declared that winning the battle of Waterloo in 1815 was "a damned nice thing — the nearest run thing you ever saw in your life", there has been a dramatic lineage of narrow escapes. The British expeditionary army evacuated Dunkirk in 1940 because the Germans failed for three crucial days to press their advantage. The Argentinians surrendered the Falklands just one day

before 100 mile an hour winter storm would have made the British attack unsustainable, and anyway there were almost no shells left. When, tired of a relentlessly negative and patronising official campaign, Scottish opinion swung towards voting 'Yes' to independence and leaving the Union in their referendum less than two years ago, a last minute 'Vow' by the leaders of the three main London parties to give more powers to the Scottish parliament was scrambled together. It made sure there was a 'No' to the break up of Britain. As an escape artist the British regime is up there with Houdini; putting itself into situations it should never have been in and then, through cunning and fortitude as well as luck, finding a way out.

Yet it is far better than Houdini, being no mere act of entertainment even if it is that as well. For in the process of dodging death it also transforms itself, sometimes profoundly, discarding its own past like a moth leaving its chrysalis. It was an Empire that declared war on Germany in 1939; it was a country that emerged victorious in 1945. It was a dispirited, nostalgic, social democratic, Churchillist country that dispatched an expeditionary force to recapture the Falklands in 1982; it was a priapic, nostalgic Thatcherite state that returned from the re-conquest determined to turn its guns on the trade unions. It was still a British union that negotiated the holding of a Scottish referendum in Edinburgh in 2012; it was a permanently fractured one that emerged in 2014, with Labour's hegemony north of the border broken forever - and with it any prospect of a once united Kingdom enjoying rule by a single party with majorities across its two main nations.

The 2016 EU referendum will be another watershed. It was conceived (in so far as those who thought it up thought it might happen) in complacency, as a way of "putting the issue to bed" as if it was a noisy child, and dealing with the "fruitcakes" of the UK Independence Party and Tory backbenchers who believe what they say. Instead, the referendum is proving to be an earthquake not a pacifier.

What is very interesting indeed about this referendum is that it for real. Unexpectedly it is not a foregone conclusion. A momentous question of the country's future is being put to the British people when majority opinion has not been stitched up! This is both a welcome step towards becoming an authentic democracy and signals the coming breakdown of the traditional regime.

The quality of British rule was always to seek with every sinew of its skill the consent of the unwashed (preferably through deference rather than enthusiasm as the latter was dangerous and might not be contained), while at the same time *never* letting go or permitting its fate to be decided by them. To give an example, when the expansion of the franchise in the second-half of the nineteenth century threatened the merest whiff of the possibility of a working class government, the device of a permanent civil service was created to put the administration of state power 'beyond' politics.

The first UK referendum on membership of what was then The Common Market in 1975 remained within this framework. Although an unfortunate precedent, the actual risk of a negative outcome was so minimised as to make the result inevitable. It gave a patina of democratic legitimacy to a decision already taken by the cross-party governing Establishment and the unanimous support of big business, ('"a levee-en-masse by Britain's commercial sector, of a kind never before seen at a British election."... Sainsbury's and BP's donation alone were three times that of the entire "No" campaign, the [BBC reports](#)). They had no intention whatsoever of allowing the 1972 Treaty to be reversed. All the referendum did was permit the then Labour Prime Minister Harold Wilson a means to frustrate the left wing of his party led by Tony Benn and emboldened by working class militancy. Cameron hoped to repeat precisely this exercise. His aim was to host a tournament that looked like a battle. Instead we have a genuine clash.

Whatever the outcome on the referendum battlefield the country will not be same. Little will remain unchanged if voters embrace Brexit. That is unarguable. But what if England votes *Leave* but the UK as a whole does not, thanks to *Remain* majorities in Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland? This will unleash a fight for democracy in Shakespeare's land and a federal Britain will materialise, if the union lasts at all.

What if a *Remain* vote is in the end decisive, as everyone once expected? Will all default back to 'normal'? Can we carry on with 'carry on' when a decision to *Remain* will finally bust the myth of the 'absolute sovereignty' of parliament.

The question of sovereignty should have been tackled in 1972 when the UK passed the [European Communities Act](#) that subordinated our government to the Treaties of what was to become the European Union,

All such rights, powers, liabilities, obligations and restrictions from time to time created or arising by or under the Treaties, and all such remedies and procedures from time to time provided for by or under the Treaties, as in accordance with the Treaties are without further enactment to be given legal effect or used in the United Kingdom shall be recognised and available in law, and be enforced, allowed and followed accordingly…

Which means, 'That's that'. The legal reality of 'Parliamentary Sovereignty' evaporated at the hands of Parliament itself. However, in life collective self-belief is the reality that counts. Myths do not need to be true to be effective; often the opposite is the case. And the myth of the sovereignty of parliament lived on. But it is hardly likely that this can continue if the British consciously vote *Remain* when warned that it terminates the historic form of parliamentary self-government in both principle and in detail. How does a proud country move forward after it has torpedoed what it regards as the ark of the covenant of its constitution?

So change is coming - significant change suddenly accelerated by the before-and-after nature of the Referendum; change that will set the UK's direction for years to come.

Why is it happening in this way? What are the forces causing and shaping it? Who will determine the consequences and how? And, a question that matters for me, is it possible to organise a progressive, egalitarian outcome… eventually.

Which leads on to deeper issues coming into focus thanks to the referendum.

1. A country's constitution is a shaping force. The most famous book about the UK's is called "The English Constitution". Written by Walter Bagehot in 1865 it was a eulogy to arrangements then getting into their stride. A century and a half later it is arthritic to the point of being crippled.
2. One consequence is the chilling rise of surveillance powers to compensate for the loss of legitimacy.
3. Britain's national question also is tied up in the referendum, which has been driven by English not British opinion.
4. Can and should this be the opportunity to confront it honestly?
5. Suppose the EU had been growing economically faster than the UK, thanks to a financial system based on solidarity, and this had laid the foundation for a shared, well-governed response to the refugee crisis, would *Leave* be so popular or its case at all compelling? The indisputable failures of the EU have shattered its claim to be a home for British ambitions while provoking dangerous authoritarianism.
6. Are the EU's failures a mere function of its structure, or part of an 'end of an era' for the Washington system? Is the possibility of Brexit a signal of an economic fracturing of globalisation already under way?

There is another question especially pertinent but not confined to those of us on the left as we observe the Conservative government battle it out and puzzle

and fear the consequences. There is a story about a warm summer night when Sherlock Holmes and Dr Watson decided to sleep rough on the Moors rather than head for the local inn still some miles away. In the middle of the night Holmes shook Dr Watson by the shoulder and woke him. "Look up there, Watson", he said, pointing to the stars, "what do you make of the significance of *that*?" "I'm not sure", said the sleepy Watson, "it shows the night sky of the northern hemisphere". "No, no, my dear Watson, what *else*?" "Well, Holmes, it is a dark, clear moonless summer night and Orion is in the ascendant." "No, no, something more important than that, Watson." "Oh I don't know, Holmes", Dr. Watson replied now wide awake, "what *does* it show?" Nothing stirred across the bleak, windless moors. After a short silence Sherlock Holmes replied, "It means, my dear Watson, that someone has stolen our tent".

What does it mean that we can see the strange movement of the planets of the UK's Conservative party so clearly? It means that something has stolen away the British left. The Conservatives have no need to hide their differences as they sense no serious threat to their heavenly supremacy. Just as the absence of a thrusting, profitable European Union has made *Leave* a credible option, so the absence of a viable, threatening, popular Labour Party, confident of winning the next election, means the Tories feel no need to stick together to preserve their current advantage. More significant, the Labour Party has almost nothing to say of any vitality or interest about the future of Europe and why the UK should, or should not, be involved. I'm not blaming Labour's new leader Jeremy Corbyn as if it's his fault. None of the many who are ambitious for his job have uttered any credible arguments worthy of the stakes in play.

On returning from his negotiations in Brussels, the Prime Minister stood outside 10 Downing Street and addressed the people:

We are approaching one of the biggest decisions this country will face in our lifetimes. Whether to remain in a reformed European Union – or to leave. This choice goes to the heart of the kind of country we want to be.

And the Labour leader dismisses Cameron's negotiations as a "theatrical sideshow", as if it doesn't really matter what the referendum outcome is.

Should this abdication continue over the next three months, another generation of Conservative hegemony may be assured. It is not passivity without consequence, for if Labour supporters are demotivated from voting thanks to the party's lethargic evacuation from the referendum debate, *Remain* could lose. In addition, such abstentionism also risks Labour's own electoral collapse. Once a great party withdraws from history how can it ever regain a role in shaping it? The left will be condemning itself to marginal status in the articulation of who rules, how they do so and the country's self-perceived nature and international standing, if this embarrassed shuffling and paralysis of brain synapses continues. If I can achieve anything writing this, it is to lay down some foundations for a revival of the left in England after the referendum.

So I am going to draft a book, publishing a chapter a week if I can, through to the referendum itself; whereupon, if I survive, I will go through it and turn it into a publishable stand-alone account. My personal starting point is that I am privileged to feel European while being a vigorous critic of the oligarch-nature of the EU. I want to engage with efforts to change it and am for *Remain* so as to transform the EU into a democratic association of free countries. That's different from the free-market plus corporate power arrangement that Tory Brexiteers want to see. I'll happily 'share sovereignty' to secure liberty, indeed it's essential. However, my position is no more interesting than that of anyone else. Possibly less so as it is not 'on offer' so far as the wider public is concerned, despite the efforts of the Green Party backed Another Europe is Possible.

In an essay in the [New Humanist](#) on the responsibilities of a writer, Philip Pullman describes how he does not set out to create a fictional story with the cause decided, knowing in advance what he thinks about the characters and events. Writing is a journey that explores and resolves these things. Something similar attracts me to the lesser investigation of writing about the present. I enjoy the tension of trying to keep my judgment while retaining an open-mind. It demands listening to those I frankly regard as enemies of the good, who all too often have a cunning grip on reality from which we must learn, even if they use it to play on the fears of those who are anxious for their jobs and their children. Already, in sketching out the initial issues thrown up by the referendum I have had to ask questions I'd not done before and sketch out answers that I'm not sure will fly. What better way to test this than to publish draft chapters – I say "draft" to give myself the privilege of re-formulation – in openDemocracy.

Introduction

I start this investigation with the noteworthy fact that the UK's traditional governing party is split from top to bottom. You might regard this as a sign of its weakness. The playwright David Hare [has just argued](#) that the "Tory project is bust" and its "engine has died", not least because Margaret Thatcher's "grafting of foreign ideas onto the British economy has failed". Somehow he implies that their immigrant status contributed to the problem. Should we embrace Keynes because he was a Brit? Thatcher's interest in ideas was a virtue (even if most of the ideas were not) as was her indifference to their country of origin. To be sure she signalled the abandonment of traditional post-war 'consensus' conservatism. That project is indeed long bust. But the English ruling classes famously embraced 'flexibility' camouflaged by tradition, since James II was sent packing in 1688 in what its historian Steven Pincus calls "The First Modern Revolution". Today, flexibility goes by the term 'modernisation'. It can be more or less successful or it can indeed fail. The conflict, which has broken out at the very top of the Conservative Party, is about how best to embrace the power of change. With which forces should it bend? What is the direction of the winds in the howling financial gales of the early 21st century? Tory England has begun a battle over how to reposition for the post-crash, post-Iraq and probably post-Euro world. Fortunate is any party that has the vitality and striving for renewal to be 'bust' like them - even if the vital fluids of their life-support is oodles of dosh from hedge-fund managers while the party membership withers.

There were two weeks between the publication, on 2 February, of the draft agreement over the Prime Minister's deal to renegotiate the UK's terms of membership of the EU, in the form of [the letter](#) (along with accompanying statements and declarations) from the President of the European Council,

Donald Tusk, and the final agreement issued on the 19th by Europe's Council of Ministers. During that time British *Leave* campaigners fell out. Two organisations, Leave.EU supported by the far-right UKIP leader Nigel Farage and Vote Leave supported by UKIP's only MP Douglas Carswell, a techno-democrat, vied with each other to become the group that would be designated as their side's official campaign. The dispute was over substance and money. According to law, the Electoral Commission that regulates referendums designates the official campaign if there is more than one organisation seeking this role. It then alone is authorised to raise and spend money and publish the literature that goes through every front door. As much as £6 million is at stake. The substantial disagreement between Leave.EU and Vote Leave is over strategy: should migration and fear of the costs of continued membership of the EU lead the case for Brexit, or should the emphasis be on the positive prospects of a Britain freed from overbearing EU regulation?

Some of the bitter rows between the two campaigns and their personal vitriol was leaked to the press. How perfectly auspicious, the Government must have thought. As Cameron and his Chancellor George Osborne lined up their Cabinet colleagues to back their renegotiation and support *Remain*, the "fruitcakes" were falling out attacking each other. The Prime Minister looked forward to storming into a confident lead in the opinion polls as the referendum was declared. The game plan was that by the end of the first week, the 'Outers' would be reduced to a melange of the marginal led by UKIP's Nigel Farage. The only exception was going to be the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, Iain Duncan Smith, the one time Tory party leader from 2001 to 2003. But his weirdness would if anything be confirmed by his holding hands with Farage. An alliance of the Government, the civil service, the BBC, the CBI and the TUC, not to speak of Labour and the Lib Dems would be more than sufficient. An unassailable 15 to 20 point lead would be established from the get-go and the *Leave* campaign would be marginalised as a protest movement with perhaps 30-35 per cent support.

After the usual drawn-out European summit, the other 27 European countries unanimously agreed to tweak the UK's terms of membership. I will analyse the deal they concluded in a later chapter. Cameron then announced there would be a referendum on 23rd of June. The days that followed did not go as the Prime Minister had hoped. Instead, and surely in part due to the pressure, encouragement, arguments and influence of the right-wing press, some key celebrity-politicians with a patina of gravity sufficient for them to be considered 'heavyweight' in today's Westminster, gave all-important credibility to *Leave*. Their arguments appeared to be cogent; their demand for self-government and sovereignty seemed democratic; the refugees storming Europe gave their call to control the borders urgency; they turned the tables on what they scorned as *Remain's* 'project fear'. More important, they positioned the EU as a backward, dis-functioning dinosaur from the past, whereas theirs is a vision of Britain getting back its mojo as the world's fifth biggest economy. The country is, in their view, a British Gulliver tied down by a web of Lilliputian Brussels regulations and restraints. It can break free and rise up to its full height, if only the people have the courage to snap the petty bonds - for they have the strength.

First, Michael Gove, the strangely intelligent 'Lord Chancellor' (in charge of the justice system) although sitting in the House of Commons. He is an ex-Murdoch columnist and long-time family friend of David Cameron. On Saturday 20 February, the day after Cameron returned from Brussels with his deal, Gove published a cogently argued 1,500 word statement. It set out a democratic case for leaving that I'll return to and also argued:

> *The EU is an institution rooted in the past and is proving incapable of reforming to meet the big technological, demographic and economic challenges of our time. It was developed in the 1950s and 1960s and like other institutions which seemed modern then, from tower blocks to*

telexes, it is now hopelessly out of date. The EU tries to standardise and regulate rather than encourage diversity and innovation. It is an analogue union in a digital age.

There was a personal twist to this neat, epochal condemnation. It repeated a taunt that Cameron had made to Gordon Brown ten years ago, attacking the then Labour leader's budget, "He is an analogue politician in a digital age. He is the past." [Apparently](#) the journalist Sarah Vine who is Gove's wife scripted it for Cameron. So when the Prime Minister read these words he would have known the taunt he had borrowed was now turned on him.

On Sunday 21st, Gove was followed by Boris Johnson, an MP and the Mayor of London. A media favourite, whose delightful, learned and unpredictable personality is as fat as his principles are withered, and who turns a cunning column in the Telegraph, 'Boris' is that rare thing, a genuine European Tory unlike the Prime Minister. His leadership ambitions, however, ensured his allegiance to his party's Europhobia (a majority of members and about half its MPs favouring Brexit). And why not, isn't this what political parties are for, to find leaders who will express their wishes?

The combination of Johnson's stout pragmatism and Gove's willowy principle might in other times has looked like Laurel and Hardy. Not now. The valency of Iain Duncan Smith was transformed by his attachment to these two senior colleagues. Whereas in bed with Farage the peculiarity of Duncan Smith would have come to the fore, joining forces with G & J brought out his unmatched consistency. He had always been hostile to the EU. It was this that ensured the support of Margaret Thatcher and his elevation into the role of Conservative Party leader in 2001 despite his obvious lack of qualification for the top job. For someone had to stop Ken Clarke, who obviously *was* made for a leadership role, but was a pro-European patriarch through and through (and had joined

those telling Thatcher her time was up in 1990). Duncan Smith's brief two-year tenure as Conservative leader before a no-confidence motion by his own backbenchers forced him out, led him to witness the state of Britain. He came face to face with the millions of long-term unemployed. Ironically, Thatcher's destruction of British industry and her squandering of the state's share of the North Sea Oil bonanza on unemployment benefits, had created a situation where Iain Duncan Smith concluded, "A system that was originally designed to support the poorest in society is now trapping them in the very condition it was supposed to alleviate". He dedicated his political life thereafter to reversing this legacy.

With Tim Montgomerie he created the Centre for Social Justice and developed the concept of a universal credit system that would integrate the range of different payments going to those out of work and their families so as to ensure that 'work always pays'. The simple narrative had huge appeal to British conservatives: everyone should be obliged to aspire for their own good and find work; the genuinely poor are properly helped to ensure their dignity; dependency was to be abjured – combining the tough, the compassionate and the cost-effective. It became a project of such influence that Cameron was obliged to make him Secretary of State for Work and Pensions in 2010 when the coalition that preceded the present Tory administration came to office. There he remained because there was nothing else he wanted to do or be.

Under conditions of economic growth and supremely good administration Duncan Smith's approach might have worked, because it needs funds in the short term, care of application and consistency. Instead, appalling implementation making it "years behind schedule", combined with the cruel folly of austerity and its increasingly arbitrary targets, undermined it. Polly Toynbee has set out a coruscating overview of the consequences. The Chancellor and Prime Minister had held back on high-turnout, largely Tory voting pensioners. The public welfare bill for pensions rose by 25 per cent from

2010 to over £90 billion. Instead it was the disabled who were singled out for punishment in the pre-referendum March budget. At the same time there was a tax sweetener for the wealthier. The Treasury told Duncan Smith that even if they rolled back the controversial cuts for the disabled he would still have to find extra billions from his welfare budget. He resigned. Penning at remarkable speed a devastating [two-page letter](#) to the Prime Minister observing that the cuts are now "distinctly political rather than in the national economic interest", he said not enough is being done to ensure "we are all in this together" (Cameron's own catch phrase).

Duncan Smith's explosive resignation had nothing to do with the referendum, ostensibly. He was already taking full advantage of the lifting of collective omerta and official permission that Cabinet members were free to speak their minds. And he was speaking his without any apparent restraint. But his resignation could not have been better designed to strengthen *Leave.* It was a well-aimed, well-timed arrow that broke through the Chancellor's armour plating. It wounded his integrity by exposing his deceitful manoeuvring and punctured the government's claim to be acting for the people as a whole. On the morning of Sunday 20 March, on the BBC's flagship interview programme, the Andrew Marr show, Duncan Smith went further. He said Cameron and Osborne deprived the poor and needy since they are not Tory voters, rather than govern as "one nation" and this had broken the "narrative" of helping everyone get the chance they deserved. He achieved three things in one blow. He reached out to working class voters tempted by Brexit but hostile to the Tories' welfare measures. He positioned the Prime Minister and his Chancellor as deceitful, self-interested and unpatriotic. He put himself forward as a man without ambition who compromised, of course, when necessary but was fundamentally decent and straight. Provided he is not destroyed by the counter-attack this will lift the perception of Duncan Smith's stature in the crucial weeks to come, as a man of integrity whose arguments can be trusted.

If Gove represented an intellectual judgment about the need for Brexit, and Boris the opportunistic one, Duncan Smith personified an unwavering belief now justified by events. He had suffered no inner turmoil or need to wrestle with his decision to support *Leave*. This apparently moral stature allows him to propagate the dark side, and he lit the touch paper to a theme we will hear more of: that it is sticking with the EU is the 'leap in the dark', full of the risk of uncontrolled mass migration threatening everyone's security and well-being.

Over the course of a historic weekend Michael Gove and Boris Johnson joined Ian Duncan Smith: the Lord High Chancellor, the Mayor of London and the then Secretary of State for Work and Pensions became The Three Brexiteers. Together they created a strike force of a different calibre to the outriders of UKIP. Four more Cabinet colleagues joined them. Not many out of 23 but enough to ensure they were not visibly isolated. The cause of Brexit was transformed. As [The Times](#) noted: Brexit was no longer in disarray and is no longer led by "fringe figures" but enjoys the "intellectual ballast" of Gove, the government's most "energetic reformer", and the "political viagra" of Johnson, the country's "most popular politician". What Cameron and his Chancellor and strategist, George Osborne, had hoped would be a protest movement had become an alternative direction of government.

I want to stress this point. A country can't take a new direction without credible replacement leaders if the old ones are committed to staying on the existing course. If a vote for Brexit meant giving power to the beer swigging, UKIP populist Nigel Farage, it would be lost already in the vapours of an unfashionable saloon. But Nigel now is noises off. The argument is no longer about the 'case' for leaving the EU but the choice of doing so, thanks to this distinguished breakaway group, at the top of the governing Conservative Party.

And to prove the point, should they win a Brexit, Gove and Johnson will have support within the Cabinet far more extensive than the six who have declared

openly against membership of the EU. [The Economist](#) reports that Oliver Letwin who runs the Cabinet office "actually supports Brexit but thinks now is the wrong time". Sajid Javid, Secretary of State for Business, a close ally of George Osborne (already tagged as his future Chancellor if Osborne becomes Prime Minister), [said in November](#) that the costs of staying in the EU outweigh its benefits. He infuriated the *Remain* campaign by declaring his support for Cameron's deal in the [Daily Mail](#) like this,

> *It's clear now that the United Kingdom should never have joined the European Union. In many ways, it's a failing project, an overblown bureaucracy in need of wide-ranging and urgent reform.*
>
> *Had we never taken the fateful decision to sign up, the UK would still, of course, be a successful country with a strong economy. We would be an independent trading nation like the US, Japan, or Canada. Over the years, we would have developed trade agreements with the EU and with others, all without surrendering control over immigration or our economic independence.*
>
> *If this year's referendum were a vote on whether to join in the first place, I wouldn't hesitate to stand up and say Britain would be better off staying out.*
>
> *But the question we're faced with is not about what we should have done 43 years ago. It's about what we should do now, in 2016. That's why, with a heavy heart and no enthusiasm, I shall be voting for the UK to remain a member of the European Union.*

With this kind of support, the *Remain* camp is doomed. Javid was promptly instructed to keep a zero profile henceforth. But his views demonstrate how easy it will be for a Brexit administration to assemble an experienced team in the unlikely outcome that they win. More ominous is his phrase, "with a heavy heart and no enthusiasm". For if as expected a majority opt in the end for *Remain* this is likely to be the depressing mood of England's acquiescence.

Who will be the fourth Brexiteer? There is some healthy competition. David Owen could emerge as a striking, white-haired d'Artagnan. Now too old to be a contender, none could doubt that Owen proved himself to be his own man: the youngest Foreign Secretary in Callaghan's Labour government of 1976-9, an international figure in global affairs, leader of the momentarily influential SDP as it sought to displace Labour in the early 1980s. Seen as right-wing by Labour traditionalists, Owen is a hard-working advocate of replacing the folly of Trident nuclear weapon system with a modest nuclear capacity as a contribution to negotiated disarmament. He has also used his position in the House of Lords as a life peer to advance by far the most principled defence of the NHS. No one in recent British politics did more. His analysis of how the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) between the USA and the EU would marketise the NHS in a way that puts reversing this beyond the powers of any new British government was exemplary. It became one of the factors turning him from being a leading British Europhile (though never a federalist) into an opponent of *Remain*. He added the credibility of experience to *Leave* and updated his book, *Europe Restructured* to provide a historically based first-hand account justifying Brexit.

A younger candidate for the d'Artagnan role is Daniel Hannan, an MEP of wit and eloquence and a relentless opponent of the EU and its follies. Or perhaps it should be Gisela Stewart, the Labour MP from Birmingham who has just become the Chair of Vote Leave and will coordinate its campaign with Michael Gove. Born in Germany, Stewart participated in the failed process of drawing up a

European constitution in 2005, so she can hardly be accused of Europhobia. It could make her a brilliant choice in a debate bereft of influential women.

Because they are from the same party the Conservatives will seek to deny the depth of their differences. The press will trivialise the clashes as 'blue on blue' disarray. Those who despise the Tories will be enticed into seeing the arguments as a squabble between right-wingers who advocate the free market, embrace corporate power and are 'as bad as each other'. But there are different ways of being reactionary. Behind all the blather about Cameron carrying on should he lose the referendum, the reality is that on 23 June Britain is being presented not just with a decision to *Remain* or *Leave* the European Union, but with a momentous choice of how the country will be led as well as by whom. A clash of orientation if not ideology is shaping up in the arguments between contending parties of a hegemonic conservatism. Early twenty-first century Toryism is splitting. How should the two sides be described and in what direction does each point? I intend to set out an answer next week.

Chapter 1

Thatcher's legacy: the terrible twins of Brexit

In memory of Stuart Hall

With England evenly divided over Brexit we have to look at the worldviews of the two camps. "*What!*", I hear you laugh, "*Worldviews!*", "What pretentious nonsense they are just out for themselves!"

I can quite see how many are tempted to dismiss the contention between the leaders of *Remain* and *Leave* as a fight between Tweedledum and Dummer. A clash of ambitions not ideas. Soon after Gove published his [devastating memo](#) setting out the case for Brexit he and his wife drove off to Dorneywood, the country residence of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, where they enjoyed dinner with George Osborne and family. Meanwhile, everyone in the Westminster village has heard that Boris Johnson wrote two columns that fateful weekend after Cameron returned from Brussels. The one that he published in the [Telegraph](#) saying why we all had to support *Leave* and another, apparently better, setting out why we had to *Remain*. If the leading contenders are so close to each other personally and their judgments of the issue so fine, how significant can the differences be? Surely not enough to bestow them with the glory of having competing ideologies or worldviews!

Scorn can be justified. But it runs the danger of the narcissism of the scornful: being too much in love with your own cleverness. It could just be a surface

reflection. In this case something deeper is happening, however shallow the participants.

Shallowness

There is shallowness. In 1972 the original European Community Act was debated in parliament for six days. Twenty years later, before he set off to Maastricht for the treaty negotiations that led to the creation of the Euro, the Commons debated for two days – before giving John Major a 100-vote majority for his negotiating position. This year, as even the [Telegraph](#) complains, no House of Commons debate on Cameron's deal is taking place at all, even though it provides the basis for the referendum. Do our MPs as a whole propose that the country supports or rejects the terms? As both sides spend so much time assuring us of their concern for parliamentary sovereignty, could they tell us what parliament recommends even while granting voters the final call in the referendum? That way we could learn the assessment our MPs themselves have about what is happening to Europe and our country's place in it. There will be no clash of giants debating the country's future in this way. Instead members of parliament accepted a Prime Minister's statement delivered on [Monday 22nd February](#) along with Jeremy Corbyn's response to it, whereupon there were two hours of short questions to the PM, with no follow up or response allowed as he evaded them. Shallow may be too generous a word for this exercise, slithery is more appropriate.

Yet the future of the country is genuinely at stake! So my question can be reframed: what are the forces and mentalities that have driven the future of Britain into these shallows? Here, and in next week's chapter, I want to untangle the origins of the peculiarly narrow nature of the referendum.

It's a fight between Tory-Blairism (Blairism for short) and Maggyism. The Prime Minister, David Cameron, and his Chancellor of the Exchequer, George

Osborne, who lead *Remain* are today's Blairites, talking regularly with the ex-Prime Minister whom they used to refer to as 'The Master', and openly with his henchperson Peter Mandelson. The Lord Chancellor Michael Gove and the Mayor of London, Boris Johnson, who head *Leave* represent a counter strategy for Britain for which the most suitable name is 'Maggyism'. Both groups are descendants of Thatcherism energised and distorted by her legacy. We need our own reasons to come to any decision, for the choice between the Blairites and the Maggyites is like having to decide between the corrupted and the crazy. I will spell out what I mean by each in more detail in a later chapter.

Of the two, 'Maggyism' is currently the more interesting. It has always been assertive but is now moving from being the outlier to claim the beating heart of Britain. Should it win the vote for Brexit it will, for sure, govern England – until the left shakes off its Blairism and reconfigures itself. The election of Corbyn suggests it may be able to, although how long, one asks, how long will this take. Meanwhile, Tory-Blairism is turning to clay in the hands of Cameron and Osborne, even though it remains the favourite to win on 23 June.

The Tory boys divided only recently. At the end of March 2016 we can still say, "But look how close they were only a month ago!" Yet what matters is the separate directions in which the different paths take them. To see what the declining forces of Blairism and the energised alternative of Maggyism hold in store, we have first to look to their joint origins in the mothership itself whence they have come: Thatcherism.

This will take us away from the immediate issues of the referendum but we need some grasp of the history behind it to prepare ourselves for what Gramscians call the present conjuncture. When better to do this than now, in the pause before the official campaign is launched? As those who study the Italian Marxist will tell you, and the most sensitive and acerbic of them all was the late [Stuart Hall](), you can't make sense of a conjuncture without taking a

measure of the long cultural influences that modify it. Just as astrophysicists can now hear the gravity waves of the immense concussion of two black holes colliding a billion light years away, so we need to decipher the noise of the referendum campaign as the tremors of a clash that occurred many decades ago. This means going back beyond even Thatcherism itself to the post-war period.

We can feel its pressure in the present. The two-sided nature of the Thatcherite coin that was struck in the 80s presents a challenge for the whole electorate. Both *Leave* and *Remain* draw on Thatcher's legacy to peddle arguments about 'our money' and the economic losses and gains of EU membership. Cameron calculates that Britain gets "the best of both worlds" with his deal for staying in. He warns of severe economic losses if we *Leave*. Against him, *Leavers* want to rid the country of "regulatory burdens" that hold back trade and prevent the country from maximising moneymaking opportunities it could achieve around the world. Both *Remain* and *Leave* use the cost-benefit language of the market place, urging the public to decide what is "best" for the country in material terms. This is the grocer's daughter angle of Thatcherism. Yet at the same time turning Brexit into a shopkeeper wrangle does not satisfy anyone's soul. People want to decide with their heart not their pocket. So the air is also filled with appeals to voters' inner Francis Drake. *Leave* emphasises the Falklands, spare-no-expense-to-do-what-is-right, character of Maggyism, as in "we British are as we have always been – competent, courageous and resolute". The Remainers will not be outdone in this respect claiming it will be 'Little Britain' if the country leaves but 'Great Britain' if we stay. Cameron told the Independent on Sunday:

> *"the world I want my children to grow up in is [one] where there's a big, bold, brave Britain at the heart of these institutions trying to deliver a world based on the values we care about – democracy, freedom,*

> *rights... That's the kind of country I want my little ones to grow up and inherit.... a swashbuckling, trading, successful, buccaneer nation of the 21st century' within the EU".*

Alongside some serious arguments both sides are emitting a rhetorical mishmash of steaming nostalgia and malodourous money-grubbing, the pure scent of Thatcherism.

Substance

Behind the ordure is the heavy lifting. Stuart Hall described the birth of "Thatcherism" in January 1979, before she won the election of that year, as representing the rise of an "authoritarian populism" which sought to destroy the "consensus politics" of the period within which, "social democracy was the principle tendency". "Of course", he added, "it aims for a construction of a national consensus of its own". It was only three years into her unpopular first term of office that the fluke of a mis-timed invasion of the Falklands by Argentina allowed Thatcher to gather up the inheritance of [Churchillism](). This, as I show in [*Iron Britannia*](), was the specific cross-class form taken by "consensus politics" after 1945. In the years that followed her South Atlantic triumph, Thatcher's governments detonated Churchillism into pieces to replace it with her own consensus. Its defining phrase is: 'There is no Alternative'. The contrast is stark, whereas 'consensus politics' recognises an on-going conscious process, Thatcherism presents itself as fate.

In 2016, what the left has to work out is how the pernicious, suffocating authority of the Thatcherite consensus can be effectively challenged. Meanwhile the right will seek to refresh itself under conditions of economic stress and the delegitimising likelihood of another financial crash. The threat of *Leave* winning the conflict over Brexit is that it will replenish the hegemony of the

authoritarian national-populism Thatcher began, in the duumvirate of Gove and Johnson. While the threat of *Remain* is that Cameron and Osborne will complete a renewal of the corporate populism of Blairism. Such is the resilience of Thatcher's disbursement.

From the start the seeds of what I am calling Tory-Blairism and Maggyism began to sprout buried within Thatcher's accomplishment. She was lucky to have been voted into the Conservative leadership in 1975. She held onto it and won the 1979 election thanks to her capacity to hold together the two fissiparous tendencies. Political organisers who stand out from the crowd, as Thatcher did and Cameron does not, achieve their influence through a capacity to sustain alliances of political tribes that otherwise compete against, and even hate, each other. This creates, as the phrase goes, something greater than the sum of the parts. With time and inevitable frustrations the novelty and energy of the alliance frays and narrows. Where once a successful leader opened up opportunities for influence, she or he starts to block the hopes of supporters with different agendas. This was the story of Thatcher too. For many years, though, she was able to hold together antagonistic wings of Toryism that date right back to different experiences of the Second World War.

The two black holes

They were personified by two men neither of whom were ever in Thatcher's own cabinet: the pro-European moderniser Edward Heath, who became Tory party leader in 1965 and then Prime Minister from 1970-74, and who took the country into what became the EU in 1972; and Enoch Powell, four years older than Heath who became his nemesis. Theirs was the collision of the two black holes of post-war Britain, its vibrations have distorted the space-time continuum of the country's politics ever since. Today, their ghosts fight on across the battlement of Ukania's divided Elsinore, in the shapes of *Remain* and *Leave.*

Both were grammar school boys, both served in the war: Heath in Northern Europe fighting for his continent, Powell in the Far East fighting for India. Both were elected to the Commons in 1950 in their thirties, each marked as an exceptionally able recruit into the Conservative party. It was the February 1950 General Election, which Labour won narrowly to form a government that only lasted a year. The young Powell gave his maiden speech to the Commons in March 1950, the young Heath rose to address the House for the first time in June 1950. Each used the moment to set out the cause that was to mark their lives. "Unless", Powell concluded his speech, in a debate on the country's military resources, "we summon to the defence of this worldwide Empire all its resources, be they European or non-European, we shall fall under the load which we are attempting to bear". Three months later, Heath in his peroration, called on the Labour government to join the first step then being taken towards the European Union, "I appeal tonight to the Government to follow that dictum, and to go into the Schuman Plan to develop Europe and to co-ordinate it in the way suggested". The contrast, one hungry to preserve achievements of the past the other keen to support a construction of the future haunts us still, 66 years on.

Fast forward: Heath was recruited into the Whips office and after the Suez fiasco of 1956 helped Harold Macmillan become Prime Minister. Powell later said of Macmillan, in words that could be used today to describe David Cameron, that he,

> *was a Whig, not a Tory... he had no use for the Conservative loyalties and affections; they interfered too much with the Whig's true vocation of detecting trends in events and riding them skilfully so as to preserve the privileges, property and interests of his class.*

Powell resigned from Macmillan's government in 1958 in an early public call for monetarism, a blow to Heath who was then Chief Whip. Macmillan made Heath the chief negotiator of his effort to join the Common Market that was vetoed by de Gaulle in 1963. Heath then became his party's leader of the opposition in 1965. He appointed Powell as his shadow Minister of Defence. In 1968 he sacked him after Powell gave his 'Rivers of Blood' speech that incited racial hatred. Nothing moved Powell more, however, than opposition to any membership of what was then called the Common Market. He saw in it the destruction of Britain's sovereignty – something that Heath was as utterly dedicated to sharing as Powell was to preserving intact.

In 1967, the Labour government headed by Harold Wilson also applied to join and was also rebuffed by de Gaulle. After Heath won the 1970 election narrowly, and perhaps thanks to the impact of three election addresses by Powell, he went on to successfully negotiate an agreement on the UK's entry in 1972. Now in opposition, Harold Wilson committed his party to a referendum on continued membership should it win the next election. He did this as a device to ensure Labour unity. For he had to handle growing opposition to the EU from the left and within the Trade Unions while managing the adamantine pro-Europe modernisers headed by Roy Jenkins – the Labour arm of the Establishment who later became the European Commissioner. Despite his studied duplicity at the time, Wilson was as dedicated as anyone to staying in.

Unlike David Cameron, Wilson was not Prime Minister when he committed his Party to holding a referendum, nor did he fear an anti-European competitor like UKIP eating into his vote in crucial marginals. He had no desire to make it a key election issue. But Enoch Powell did. He had voted against every clause of Heath's European Community Act in 1972 and plotted his revenge coldly. In February 1974 Heath called a snap general election to ask the country to renew his authority in an effort to defeat a miners strike that his own administrative incompetence had permitted. Powell seized his opportunity. His first sensation

was to refuse to stand as a Conservative candidate, he cited his party's policy on Europe. Then, just five days before the election, he delivered a major speech in Birmingham calling on voters everywhere to back Labour because it would give the country a referendum, saying

> *This is the first and last election at which the British people will be given the opportunity to decide whether their country is to remain a democratic nation, governed by the will of its own electorate expressed in its own Parliament, or whether it will become one province in a new European superstate.*

In the election, the Conservatives got 225,000 more votes overall than Labour but four fewer MPs. The swing to Labour, which was notably at its greatest across Powell's home territory of the Midlands, was just enough to hang Heath. Powell lost the election for him – his anti-European call to vote for a referendum meant the election went Labour's way.

In 1975 a tired Wilson sought only to give the country a quieter life with less industrial strife and found himself in 10 Downing Street thanks to Powell's studied ambush of his Tory rival. Had Heath called the election just three weeks earlier he would probably [have won](). There would have been no referendum and no premiership for Margaret Thatcher. Instead, by edging Edward Heath out of Downing Street, Enoch Powell's dramatic call ensured that membership of Europe is something the public to this day feels it is legitimately theirs to decide. You could conclude that the whole business of having referendums is merely the result of chance, thanks to the mis-management of careless British leaders. Such a view points to the heart of Britain's European problem. Namely, that membership was and still is seen by most of the elite as a matter of top-down management, rather than an issue that demands being straight with the public about what it means for democracy. The referendums may have come

about, then and today, as a result of short-term fixes – made in bad-faith and implemented thanks to a string of errors. But the force that pushed them to plebiscite is a democratic energy in British politics that has never been and still is not respected by those who run the country.

Thatcherism sets the scene

In February 1975 Thatcher won the leadership of her party from Heath thanks to his bungling the succession, just as he bungled the 1974 election. In our sensationalist times Thatcherism is demarcated by two episodes: when she gained her unrivalled predominance by winning the Falklands War in 1982 and when she was prematurely tossed out of office by her colleagues after saying "No, No. No" to Europe in 1990. She herself thus appears to be defined by two key moments of Maggyism. However, Thatcher was also a serious alliance builder and a product of the broader realism of conservative politics, as Charles Moore's careful official biography sets out. For example Geoffrey Howe who became her Chancellor of the Exchequer and fellow architect of her 'dry' economic policies voted for Edward Heath as leader not Thatcher (and in the end delivered the fatal, destruction of her premiership).

Thatcher reports in her memoirs, "The first major political challenge I faced on becoming Leader was the referendum on Britain's membership of the European Economic Community" in the form of the referendum on 5 June 1975. At the launch of the pro-market campaign in April Thatcher graciously ceded the leadership of the Conservative campaign to stay in to Edward Heath saying she was, "the pupil speaking before the master". She admits but she had "not grasped" the constitutional issues at the time. She saw Europe "as a framework within which Britain could prosper rather than a crusade". By backing entry without inflaming the bitterness of those opposed to it she held in balance those who wanted the United Kingdom to participate in the European project wholeheartedly and those who preferred merely to seek advantage from it. She

congratulates herself on emerging from the campaign "as a unifying figure for the party".

Instead of seeking to overcome the division she preserved it, perhaps originally as a form of divide and rule. Britain's political framework was transformed in the furnace of Thatcherism. Across a decade her premiership destroyed and created on a scale none thought possible. Her ability to manage the tension over Europe worked to her advantage at the start. She never confronted it but rather inflamed it. When Europe went through a profound, unexpected transformation with the collapse of Communism she did not seek to dismantle the soft wall that threaded through her party as the hard wall across Germany came down. Instead by preserving the division she crippled her achievement.

I want to look at three aspects of the Thatcher years that shape the present argument over Brexit and help explain its shallowness. First, how the destruction of traditional manufacturing and trade unions depleted Britain of significant economic institutions that would today have embedded it Europe. Second, how the most revolutionary of her policies, the destruction of the financial closed shop run by the ruling class in the City of London with the 'Big Bang', alongside privatisation of nationalised industries and an assault on the civil service, shattered the 'Establishment' which had taken the UK into the European Community; Britain no longer has an assured governing class capable of guaranteeing the country stays in the EU. Third, how Thatcher failed to support the historic opportunity created by the end of the Cold War, through her opposition to the unification of Germany. This arguably permitted the creation of the Euro and created the antagonistic marginalisation of the UK in the EU, which, even though it led to her personal downfall, continues to this day.

None of the three, which I will now look at more closely, can be understood without bearing in mind the North Sea bonanza, which came on stream as

Thatcher's premiership began, when Britain moved from being an oil importer to becoming a de facto member of OPEC. In 1978, as North Sea oil came on stream, the government already received in oil and gas revenues £230 million. In 1980, the first full year of her premiership, the British state received £2.3 billion. This rose to £8.7 billion in 1984, an extraordinary £12 billion in 1985, £11 billion in 1986 and then to a healthy average of £3 billion a year in added government revenues for the rest of Thatcher's time. These enormous windfalls helped bankroll the forceful domestic reforms of the Thatcher years. Famously she battled against lethargy and resistance. But her determination was extremely well lubricated. If only to judge her by her own restricted standards, any verdict of the legacy of her three achievements has to decide whether it was an investment well spent.

A lightweight economy

Source: *Balance of Payments Q4 2012 dataset, ONS*

Chart 2: UK Balance of Trade in Goods
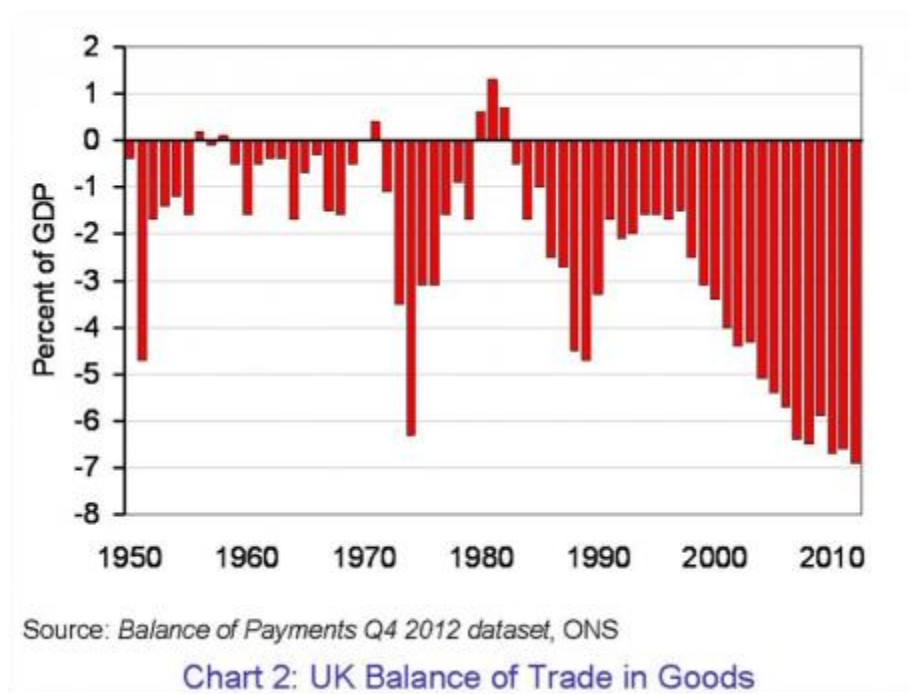
The early Thatcher period tore the heart out of both UK manufacturing and its industrial trade unions. Two great bodies of interest that would have deepened

the UK's integration with the EU were thereby marginalised. A graph tells more than any paragraph can. It shows the balance of trade with the rest of the world in manufactured goods. The last ever UK manufacturing trade surplus was generated in 1982, the year of the Falklands War. Thereafter it has moved steadily into the negative as a percentage of gross domestic product. This has been only partially counterbalanced by a surplus in service industries. Thatcher attempted to restore 'Victorian values' but failed utterly with the best of these, namely that Britain was a workshop for the world. This is not to 'blame' her exclusively, as there were chronic issues with British industry. But a pitiless destruction rather than a creative one was pursued when the resources for renewal were available. One measure of the consequence is a list of the current top 25 manufacturing companies in Europe. Eight are German, four are French and one, Airbus, is Franco-German. None are British. The Union Jack flies only from Unilever, which is also Dutch, and Rio Tinto which is largely Australian.

A similar picture of exceptional losses applies to the organised working class. Trade Union membership rose to over 13 million in 1979 when Thatcher took office. It fell sharply and steadily to less than half that number under her impact. Six million is still considerable, but her destruction of the miners, the praetorian guard of the UK's proletariat, eviscerated trade union influence, and the bedrock of social democracy was driven to the margins of British life and with it the possibility of organised sections of British society experiencing cross-European solidarity (of course this would also have needed an active social democratic movement on mainland Europe, whose weakness I'll discuss in a later chapter).

The Thatcher government's supporters argue that the economy grew at over 3.7% from 1984 to 1987 in one of its strongest spurts of the century: productivity rose, competitiveness increased and a reversal of fortunes took place. A concise defence on these lines can be found in the conclusion of Nigel Lawson's memoir *The View From Number 11*. The release of energy and

purpose including purposive opposition is undeniable. Thatcherism was de facto the country's way out of the stifling crisis of the 1970s. Charles Moore agrees that it encouraged a culture of 'get rich quick' and notes dryly that this is better than 'getting poor slowly'. These were not the only alternatives. But this is an argument for another time and place. What we need to take a measure of here is the way Thatcherism separated the UK from the possibility of growing within a more European framework and created a philistine economic culture hostile to government and solidarity.

Bang goes the Establishment

The pioneering programme of privatisation of the UK's nationalised industries was part of a wider marketisation of British society. It also generated the growth of a parasitic, political-media class to displace the gentlemanly 'consensus' that was Thatcher's true 'enemy within'. A decisive moment was the 'Big Bang' of 1986, the deregulation of the City of London ending its public school restrictive practices. Charles Moore writes, "Mrs Thatcher's innovations of privatisation and financial reform changed the world. The City 'club' really did disappear, and London really did become a centre for international markets and for banks, as it had not been since before the First World War." (Vol II, p 218) At the same time her governments initiated experiments in contracting out public services, by establishing a battery of market style contracts to ensure delivery,

> *The result was the introduction into government of tools drawn from the arcane world of management consultancy. They included re-engineering, internal pricing, outsourcing and virtual markets, for everything from defence supplies to government hospitality.*

The quote is from *Thatcher and Sons*, a forensic examination of British government from Thatcher, through Major, to Blair and Brown, by Simon

Jenkins. He demonstrates the continuity of her influence and asks how, "this warrior for liberty and a retreating state, could leave behind her the most potent and centralised government in the free world?"(153) His answer is a chilling account of the unstoppable momentum of Prime Ministerial centralisation and Treasury regulation unleashed by Thatcher, "She might espouse freedom in theory, but in practice she craved control" (106). It has proved unstoppable ever since: John Major was a hapless premier privatising parts that Thatcher had the better sense not to touch, such as the railways, while centralising the response to traffic cones. Tony Blair "concentrated power to a new degree". Gordon Brown "derided the public service ethos" while seeking to control the outcome of everything. Today, Cameron and Osborne's slogan could be, 'You ain't seen nothing yet".

This concentration of executive power across thirty years is like a wrecking ball demolishing the heart of the old regime while leaving the chipped façade. In a later section of *Blimey, it could be Brexit!* I'll return to its implications for the constitution, when I look at sovereignty and the state, to test the presumption of the *Leave* camp that we enjoy, or at least could enjoy, a self-governing democracy if only it can be rescued from Euro-power.

Here, in order to understand the shallowness of today's debate over Brexit, I want to take a look at the degrading and shameful consequences for Britain's, or rather Westminster's, political culture. Thatcher's reforms generated a momentum of lasting consequence: the devastation of manufacturing industry, privatisation, Big Bang, the marketisation of the public sector, smashing the unions, contempt for the ethos of public service, undermining the independence of the civil service, the rise of celebrity politics, a fetishisation of victory as all that matters. All this broke the grip, morale, spirit, self-belief and financial controls of the old ruling Establishment.

Its class-ridden routines had to be replaced. The circles of its overlapping clubs of influence mapped by Anthony Sampson in his 1960 *Anatomy of Britain* were a busted flush. They needed to be replaced with a new constitutional settlement. Instead it was usurped by a narrower, professional and far more venal political-media complex.

The transition deserves a chapter of its own but this is unnecessary thanks to the work of Peter Oborne, whose triptych does the work. It begins with *Alistair Campbell, New Labour and the Rise of the Media Class*, continues with *The Rise of Political Lying* and culminates in his magisterial *The Triumph of the Political Class*. I won't attempt a development of his analysis but I will tweak the concept. Because it is not an economic formation but rather a parasitical entourage that lives off its control of parliament, state, regulatory bodies created by the state, the corporate media and PR companies, it is more accurate to call it a 'caste' rather than a 'class'.

The political and media caste grew from Thatcher's dismantling of the old order, her media-professional approach to politics, and a permissive attitude towards corruption that was good for British business (for example, with respect to her son; to the Pergau Dam which the civil servant involved, Tim Lancaster, refused to sign off; and to the sale of arms to Middle East dictators, with Thatcher and Howe giving the wink to rearming Saddam Hussein's Iraq even after he gassed the Kurds at Halabja). It struggled to find its way through the years of sleaze under John Major. Then, in Tony Blair, it found its true progenitor.

The four Tory leaders now fighting over Brexit are all pure products of the political media caste and its manipulative, celebrity politics. In the 1975 referendum even though it was contrived, 'big beasts' of both parties led great interests into battle. As we have seen, on the Tory side Edward Heath really was a believer in the European project as such, while Enoch Powell wanted nothing

to do with it on principle. Soldiers both, whatever you think of what they said and did, their patriotism, disinterest in commerce and sense of duty is hard to fault. The contrast with today could hardly be more disheartening. From all accounts Cameron believes in nothing, Osborne can't add up, Johnson believes only in himself and Gove in Rupert Murdoch.

Thatcher's German disaster

The final legacy of the Thatcher years does not concern the sorry interior of the UK's degraded politics but helps explain the way it excludes itself from Europe. In a heartfelt, clear, well documented self-criticism that describes a reassessment many have gone through, Shaun Lawson describes how he was an unthinking leftist pro-European who shared the scorn of Thatcher's infamous words, when she told parliament,

> *The President of the Commission, Mr. Delors, said at a press conference the other day that he wanted the European Parliament to be the democratic body of the Community, he wanted the Commission to be the Executive and he wanted the Council of Ministers to be the Senate. No. No. No.*

Now he concludes she was all too prescient, "Thatcher and the Eurosceptics were right all along". My response is, hindsight can give a false sense of clarity. Thatcher spoke on 30 October 1990. It caused Geoffrey Howe to resign from her government. On 1 November he explained why, "None of us wants the imposition of a single currency, but more than one form of EMU is possible... We should be in the business, not of isolating ourselves unduly, but of offering positive alternatives that can enable us to be seriously engaged."

Two weeks later Howe made his resignation speech to the Commons which in effect called on Michael Heseltine, who had resigned from Thatcher's Cabinet and was the favourite to succeed her, to precipitate a leadership contest. It is a famous speech for being extraordinarily effective in driving her from office, although she stopped Heseltine by backing John Major. It laid out a case for a different attitude to Europe and is worth quoting at length, not least because little of such quality and understanding of the EU's process is being said today,

> *We have done best when we have seen the Community not as a static entity to be resisted and contained, but as an active process which we can shape, often decisively, provided that we allow ourselves to be fully engaged in it, with confidence, with enthusiasm and in good faith. We must at all costs avoid presenting ourselves yet again with an over-simplified choice, a false antithesis, a bogus dilemma, between one alternative, starkly labelled "co-operation between independent sovereign states" and a second, equally crudely labelled alternative, "centralised, federal super-state", as if there were no middle way in between.*
>
> *We commit a serious error if we think always in terms of "surrendering" sovereignty and seek to stand pat for all time on a given deal by proclaiming, as my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister did two weeks ago, that we have "surrendered enough".*
>
> *The European enterprise is not and should not be seen like that as some kind of zero sum game. Sir Winston Churchill put it much more positively 40 years ago, when he said: "It is also possible and not less agreeable to regard this sacrifice or merger of national sovereignty as the gradual assumption by all the nations concerned of that larger*

sovereignty which can alone protect their diverse and distinctive customs and characteristics and their national traditions."

I have to say that I find Winston Churchill's perception a good deal more convincing, and more encouraging for the interests of our nation, than the nightmare image sometimes conjured up by my right hon. Friend, who seems sometimes to look out upon a continent that is positively teeming with ill-intentioned people, scheming, in her words, to "extinguish democracy", to "dissolve our national identities" and to lead us "through the back-door into a federal Europe".

What kind of vision is that for our business people, who trade there each day, for our financiers, who seek to make London the money capital of Europe or for all the young people of today?

These concerns are especially important as we approach the crucial topic of economic and monetary union. We must be positively and centrally involved in this debate and not fearfully and negatively detached. The costs of disengagement here could be very serious indeed.

There is talk, of course, of a single currency for Europe. I agree that there are many difficulties about the concept both economic and political. Of course, as I said in my letter of resignation, none of us wants the imposition of a single currency. But that is not the real risk. The 11 others cannot impose their solution on the 12th country against its will, but they can go ahead without us. The risk is not imposition but isolation...

The tragedy is, and it is for me personally, for my party, for our whole people and for my right hon. Friend herself, a very real tragedy – that the Prime Minister's perceived attitude towards Europe is running increasingly serious risks for the future of our nation. It risks minimising our influence and maximising our chances of being once again shut out. We have paid heavily in the past for late starts and squandered opportunities in Europe. We dare not let that happen again. If we detach ourselves completely, as a party or a nation, from the middle ground of Europe, the effects will be incalculable and very hard ever to correct.

Between 1 November when Howe resigned and this speech on the 13th, the Berlin wall came down on 9 November. When Howe warns his leader against isolation from Europe he was speaking in a context of the greatest changes across the continent since 1945. Thatcher believed herself to be an architect of a Cold War victory, put herself forward as the creator of a Magna Carta for the whole of Europe and went to a Paris summit to lay this egg. Her overconfidence took her away from Westminster and may have cost her the critical votes that led to her losing the premiership (even if it gave me [my one chance](#) to confront her). Behind her vainglorious attempt was another agenda, to stop the reunification of Germany.

But this was the pivotal issue for the future of the continent. She regarded it as a recreation of the wartime threat! Her blinkered, backward looking self-righteousness excluded the UK from the most important development in contemporary European history, one which for obvious reasons Britain had every reason to claim full involvement. Instead, the issue fell to France alone to negotiate with Germany as a major European power. Both the German Chancellor Kohl and France's President Mitterand wanted to bind the expanded

Germany irrevocably into Europe. Fatally, they pushed ahead with a single currency as the means of achieving this.

Of course, it is a counter-factual. But imagine that the Falklands War had not taken place and that Michael Heseltine or even David Owen had been Britain's Prime Minister in 1989. Both were pro-Europeans unlike Thatcher but neither federalists. They would have welcomed the unification of Germany as a triumph yet fought the idea of a single currency – tooth and nail in Owen's case. Another means of doubly securing Germany's role without the Euro would have been found through the active collaboration of the big three: Britain, France and Germany. When Howe complains about the Prime Minister's intolerable lecturing of Europe and exclusion from its development he was expressing a maddening fury at the opportunity being lost as he spoke. Through her regressive anti-Germanism Thatcher helped to create the dark side of the European project that she condemned. For at an exceptional moment when Britain could have shifted the political course of the EU because the place of Germany itself was being negotiated she absented the UK from having a creative influence.

She was not right. There may be an argument now, a quarter century later, about whether to *Leave* the EU because it is beyond reform. It was not about this then. The Delors' plan for a federal replacement of the nation states was no foregone conclusion, not least because it won't work anyway. Thatcher's actions only made it more likely that the plan would be attempted not less. She turned Britain into an outrider, when by actively helping Germany reunify it could have claimed and not surrendered the place at the centre of EU policy that, if I may be excused the Churchillist note, its wartime role fully justified.

Next

Shortly I will assess Tory-Blairism, the current inheritor of Thatcher's legacy and how Maggyism, which once seemed irrelevant, has grown in confidence to become its challenger. Then I will turn to the larger context with a chapter on the disintegration of the political order across the continent, the rise of populism since the financial crash.

Only then will I be in a position to consider what has happened to the Labour party and the left in Britain with respect to Europe. But I will just say this now. The right-wing monopoly of the arguments helps explain why Labour and the left more generally find it so hard to get any traction in the debates. Brexit or not is taking place, as I hope I have shown, within the fatalistic national-popular consensus constructed by Thatcherism, which now imbricates the media-political class through and through, blinding it to the possibility of seeing that there can be an alternative. Outside it the Greens have the clearest pro-*Remain* perspective of their own, but for this very reason are struggling to get it heard. The surge of support that propelled Jeremy Corbyn into the Labour leadership last year was the expression of an unstoppable demand to rid the Labour party of New Labour's embrace of Thatcherism via Blair. However no wing of the Labour movement, or indeed any of its feathers, claws or beak, knows how to do this. For it means developing a clear vision of the way Britain should be governed with respect to becoming a modern democracy; with respect to Scotland; to the English question; and to being part of the EU – all of which are connected as a single arc of issues. The English left does not want a market-led, Thatcherite set of answers to the failures of our democracy but is as yet unable to put a believable replacement on the table.

Except (this is very important for those who live there) in Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland, where another view of Europe as a progressive form of

international cooperation has credibility, not least because rule from Brussels for them is at least as democratic as rule from Westminster.

Chapter 2

Brexit or not, the left looks skewered

I'm for *Remain* as I am a European and want to fight for the future of my continent. But unless things change over the next three months, what we are witnessing in real time is the collapse of any impact by the British left on the referendum over Brexit, whose outcome will decide the future of the country. Should this continue the UK will be in the hands of the right for another generation. I will now define what I mean by 'left', by 'impact' and 'country'.

Before I do so, a word of explanation. This week, I am breaking the first rule of performance: 'Show, don't tell!'. I've found people are not sure if I am writing articles or not, and don't see why a book about the referendum is needed. Unsure of the nature of the project they do not know what to tell friends or colleagues or, indeed, the author... which means they are uncertain about what I am attempting over the next three months. *Blimey!* is not 'about' the referendum or reporting its ups and downs week by week. My aim is to explain its 'meta-politics': what to make of why it is occurring, where it comes from, what forces are contained within this strange event, what the consequences may be for all of us in the UK and in Europe over the longer term. So this week I'll be clearer and will share the map of what I intend.

By the left I mean an arc of those who oppose corporate power and its corruptions. It includes some who support *Leave* (like [Labour](#) [Leave](#)) and does not include some who support *Remain* (like Peter Mandelson). It stretches from Greens, Lib Dems and liberals (at least those who prefer democracy and liberty to the pure market place) the SNP and Plaid Cymru (see John Osmond comment

below the article), through varieties of socialism, labourism and social democrats to Carswell-type ultra-democrats in UKIP, who embrace feminism and see a place for political correctness. Looked at from the conventional, received point of view this is a heteroclite hodgepodge. This is because the received point of view is in the pocket of the system's vested interests. Looked at from the perspective of a democrat outside the system, seeking to upend the framework of interests that determines policy, now is not the moment to be choosey about allies.

At the moment most voters are barely aware that Labour has a view of whether to *Remain* or *Leave*. So far, not one of its major figures young enough to have a future in active politics has made an intervention of any originality, impact or eloquence, whether pro- or anti-Brexit. If the Labour party continues to absent itself from the capacious democratic canvas of what I'm calling 'the left', then a different, more generous, much less tribal left has to be created and organised. I'd like such an outcome. But I am not going to subordinate my writing to its interests. I'm writing *Blimey!* because in an attempt to penetrate the waffle. If this means identifying the validity of insights that are uncomfortable for those, like myself, who want to *Remain*, so be it. If this is a polemic, my target is not 'the other side' in the referendum debate but the lamentable state of official Anglo-British politics and political culture as a whole, the way it got us into this mess, and the delightful if so far incoherent and welcome rebellions against it, which run the danger of being expropriated by the radicalism of Michael Gove and Boris Johnson.

Which brings me to impact, by which I mean the ability of the left to stake a democratic claim to the outcome of the referendum whatever happens. Staking a claim is different from arguing for the result. The Conservatives are divided. It is idiotic to be cheerful about this and believe that Labour can sit back, inherit the ruins and then build a progressive outcome upon them. The opposite is

true: by monopolising both sides of the clash over how to shape Britain's future, so-called free-market, pro-corporate Tories are occupying the high ground whoever wins. Left-wing supporters of *Remain* and *Leave* are mere decoration to the right-wing voices that currently define the meaning of the vote on their respective sides. As I pointed out last week, this has led us into incredibly shallow sets of arguments. In these shallows the left dies and the right thrives.

To those who say the referendum outcome is all that matters at this point, I say we must be prepared for the aftermath either way. At present, success for *Remain* will be a crushing victory for corporate continuity. We need to set out a call now to secure democracy within the EU, England, Britain and Brussels if we stay in the EU as I hope. At the same time we must be primed for the success of *Leave.* We need to prepare a programme for democracy in England-Britain outside the EU, or we will find that our 'self-government' is being articulated by Michael Gove who in his statement has had the coolness - so far unchallenged - to put himself at the head of the country's historic tradition of the "radicals and liberals who took power from unaccountable elites and placed it in the hands of the people".

Now for "country". The forces that drove the Prime Minister to conceive and call the referendum are English. The English left and 'progressive' opinion squirms when faced with this fact. But it is undeniable that the other nations of the United Kingdom are at home in the EU in a way that England-Britain is not. For reasons that I will look at in lurid detail in later chapters, the multi-national but uncodified British union cannot but be put at risk politically within a larger, richer multi-national codified entity, such as the EU. This British problem is an English one, generated by bottling up English sentiment in a Westminster system which prevents it from even the mildest of national expression. So when I write, "the future of the country", I am referring to Britain in the grip of

England, as the referendum its really an expression of English dissatisfaction dragging the other nations of the Union reluctantly into the showdown.

This is not complicated, it is just difficult to see if you are trapped within it. The event of the referendum is an expression of two huge unresolved processes that grip post-war Anglo-British politics. First, the national question, especially the failure to permit the English our own parliament or distinct civic institutions within Britain. Second, the decomposition of the historic, informal constitution and the failure to replace it with a new settlement, relying instead on globalisation to legitimate the political order. The national and the constitutional questions are separate yet linked. Together they feed the sense the English have that their democracy is threatened. This anxiety, profound and justified, has been displaced onto Europe. There is indeed a threat, its source is at home. We are the problem with our democracy, not them.

Displacement is a form of denial, blaming others so as to protect oneself from change. You can see it at work in the disagreement between the high profile Tories fighting over the referendum. The government says that the EU was a threat to us but the deal it has obtained has resolved this and Britain can be "great again" as a member of the EU. The Brexiteers say on the contrary that the EU is still a threat and the only way Britain can be "great again" is by freeing ourselves of its shackles. Both share the same presumption: that there is nothing wrong with us! Both share the same prejudice, that the EU in no way improves Britain, how could it, what a scandalous idea! We are not the problem, the EU is. The government says it has solved the problem by having less EU while giving us access to its markets. The Brexiteers say the problem will be solved only with no EU and we will still have access to its markets. Both say, 'Don't blame us, blame them'. It is often the case that a particularly vicious argument takes place when each side shares the same mistaken premise. So it is in this case.

The national and the constitutional questions are both part of the weird and wonderful obsession with 'sovereignty' that preoccupies Westminster. One group hyperventilates about it, the other very deliberately buries it ("We don't talk about sovereignty" a British ex-ambassador told me once very emphatically, transmitting a foreign office edict that is almost certainly not committed to writing and is all the more unchallengeable because of this). The fixation with sovereignty stems from Britain being an old imperial country with great pride in its capacity to govern - others, yes, but also itself. Today its ruling institutions are still those of the Empire state. Meanwhile a quite different society has replaced the social order at home, a society full of energy, disintegrative and positive, disbelieving and impatient for renewal.

It was a very effective Empire State. The will to dominate and make money out of others still commands the ruling machinery. Its senior employees are more aware of the potentially explosive consequences of the gap between their legal order and the real country than a great majority of the population. The rise of a security state is designed to prepare for this threat, which is why it shields itself from democratic oversight.

The referendum offers a chance to write about these issues in a way that might – just might – be effective and have some traction. Try writing about liberty, democracy, Englishness or surveillance as many of us have. Each theme gathers around it worthy and passionate advocates. Yet Britain's philistine official culture makes them seem marginal. It once did the same to arguments against the EU. "Swivel-eyed" was the Prime Minister's term for UKIP supporters but in effect it is his description for all people who believe what they say. It is the rebuke of a man who does not regard it as necessary to believe in anything he says (as I will show next week).

Liberty, democracy, nationalism in Britain are being brought boiling to the surface by the heat of the referendum. Suddenly there is an opportunity to address them in a condition of their larger inter-connected relevance. The closed, official culture so adept at marginalising and closing down issues that matter if they challenge its dominance, has been opened up by the referendum campaign – in a way that most definitely is not the case in general elections, which operate as a way of disciplining any argument that 'rocks the boat'.

So *Blimey!* is an attempt at boat rocking: not to write a book 'about' the referendum but to engage with the energy, negative as well as positive, destructive as well as striving for something better, that is being released as the regime cracks, to set out what democrats must call for. If we stay, we must be able to challenge the Tory-Blairites' instrumental, market exploitation of what it means to be in the EU. If we go, we must be on stand-by to defy a Maggyite market-popular exploitation of popular defiance expressed through Westminster exceptionalism.

Chapter 3

Dodgy Dave's referendum deal

"I've never tried to pretend to be anything I'm not."
David Cameron *talking to ITV* about his relationship to the Panama revelations

David Cameron hangs over the referendum like one of Don DeLillo's airborne toxic events. It is his idea. It was his decision in 2013 to put the country's future in play with an EU referendum should he win the next election. He decreed that the EU's status quo was not acceptable for the UK to *Remain.* He set out how the EU would have to change for Britain to stay in (or at least he seemed to). He also set a deadline for a referendum on any renegotiation as the end of 2017. He said that if he failed to get the changes he set out, he'd call on voters to *Leave.* He made the referendum a priority after he won the May 2015 general election. He led the renegotiation. He made the call that he had achieved a deal he wanted. He fixed the actual date of the referendum, June 23, an awkward one just a month after national elections in Wales and Scotland and local elections across the UK.

After all this, as the referendum campaign begins, the deal negotiated with so much effort and fanfare appears to have disappeared. Cameron decided against a full debate on its terms in parliament. He may well decide not to debate it himself, face-to-face, with the other side. His own arguments for *Remain* no longer mention the success of his renegotiation. The *Remain* campaign itself hardly mentions it.

But it is a mistake to think it is therefore unimportant. On the contrary it seems to be a terrible agreement for the UK. By keeping the UK out of the common currency and in the single market, Cameron claims he has achieved "the best of both worlds". To which Margaret Thatcher's biographer Charles Moore writing in the [Sunday Telegraph](#) responded,

> *As for "the best of both worlds", the phrase comes from a proverb, which needs remembering in full: "You can't have the best of both worlds."*

There is no phrase in popular wisdom suggesting it is impossible to have the worst of both worlds. This is what the deal seems to offer.

In this chapter I'm going to look at why Cameron felt obliged to take the risk of calling a referendum, what he said he wanted to achieve by it and what he came back with. It is essential to take seriously both the process and the result, as together they are splitting the country, even if few talk about the deal itself. But this poses a problem. Has Cameron been acting in good faith? I set about assessing his integrity as a politician. It is not hard to uncover a pattern of systematic dissimulation and I drafted my account of this before the leak of the Panama Papers confirmed the way Cameron operates in a smokescreen of spin. This will affect the outcome whatever happens: most important it may loose him the referendum, but if he wins the country will be right if it feels that the whole *Remain* saga was brought to us by a sad entertainer past his sell by date.

Before all this: a preliminary flare to signal the disaster that may be in making. In a fascinating account [Jeremy Fox](#) sets out the difference between England's common law and Europe's civil law traditions. The contrast helps explain "the weirdness of the British attitude to EU regulation". One aspect of this is that while Brit commentators go on and on about the daftness of EU regulation,

there is hardly any popular account of what membership means in constitutional terms. This is not because Britain has an uncodified constitution; it is because its once formidable constitutional culture has withered into ignorance and philistinism equally convenient for Labour and Conservative traditions. I'm going to confront this mind-numbing legacy that enslaves the politics of the English left to the British regime later. But I want to start here by reading the actual deal, if briefly, focusing on the paradox that it binds the UK into a subordinate but *supporting* role in the political unification of the EU – as the price of self-exclusion from it.

The point being that Cameron's deal is a constitutional document for Europe. Because we Brits have been misled into believing that we 'do not have' a constitution we have lost the art of understanding constitutional language. If, after the fiasco of the Brexit referendum, democrats are to mount any sort of recovery this will have to be done by addressing the rules of the game. Without this any policies to redress egregious inequalities of wealth, capacity and opportunity will prove worthless. I understand that saying this goes against earnest Marxist hopes, shared in many socialist and Labourist variations, that treaties and legal codes are mere embellishments of economic fundamentals and as such are unworthy of the proletarian intelligence. But after a hundred years of failure, it is time for the left – certainly for the British left – to think about the rules themselves and how they should be understood on their own terms. Starting now.

What a deal

When he presented his deal making EU membership suitable for Britain, the prime minister made much of his removing the UK from the ukase of "ever closer union' written into the founding treaty of the EU. This achievement is spelt out in the Sovereignty section of the Brussels treaty of 19 February

reached with the unanimous agreement the heads of government of all the 28 members of the EU.

> *SECTION C SOVEREIGNTY*
>
> *It is recognised that the United Kingdom, in the light of the specific situation it has under the Treaties, is not committed to further political integration into the European Union. The substance of this will be incorporated into the Treaties at the time of their next revision in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Treaties and the respective constitutional requirements of the Member States, so as to make it clear that the references to ever closer union do not apply to the United Kingdom.*

But this is not the only section of the treaty that relates to the UK's relationship with the deepening of ever closer union. In SECTION A ECONOMIC GOVERNANCE the treaty sets out agreements also pertinent to sovereignty:

> *In order to fulfil the Treaties' objective to establish an economic and monetary union whose currency is the euro, further deepening is needed.*

By signing up to this the British solemnly *agree* to the need for the further deepening of economic and monetary union for those who share the euro. Such measures,

> *the purpose of which is to further deepen economic and monetary union, will be voluntary for Member States whose currency is not the euro and will be open to their participation wherever feasible.*

Which means the UK need not participate in such deepening measures unless it wishes to. However,

> *It is acknowledged that Member States not participating in the further deepening of the economic and monetary union will not create obstacles to but facilitate such further deepening*

"Further deepening" means at the very least political-economic sharing and therefore regulation of financial burdens, mutualisation of risk, banking union, all of which involve the political regulation of economic measures. To ensure this can happen, the UK agrees that,

> *Member States whose currency is not the euro shall not impede the implementation of legal acts directly linked to the functioning of the euro area and shall refrain from measures which could jeopardise the attainment of the objectives of economic and monetary union.*

It follows that if the country votes *Remain* the UK is bound by treaty to "facilitate" the "further deepening" of the economic and monetary union, is obliged not to "impede" it and must "refrain from measures which could jeopardise" any deepening of the union. It has thereby abandoned its right to veto measures the rest of the EU may propose to secure the trans-national

realisation of the further deepening of their unity that assists economic and monetary union.

Assisted by Angela Merkel, David Cameron has signed Britain up to a new sexual posture, a form of disarticulated *interruptus* not even dreamt of in the Karma Sutra: the facilitation of the attainment of deepening without participation.

Or perhaps it is only new for those of us unfamiliar with the cloisters of Eton:

"Cameron, boy, *what* are you lot doing to Johnson?"

"Dash it, master, we're further deepening his union!'

"But the rules state you, Cameron, *cannot participate* in such activities. Any more of this disgusting behaviour and you will be expelled!"

"But sir, I am not *participating* in the deepening of his union! The rules state I must *refrain from measures that jeopardise its attainment*, and must *facilitate* it. Feel that, Johnson!"

Consider what this posture might mean if British voters endorse it. There are rumours that the core members of the EU are considering the creation of a directly elected presidency of the European Council to create legitimacy for the heavy costs of the austerity associated with the euro. The UK's political leaders, certainly if they are Conservative, will be horrified to have such a directly elected European president 'over' British heads. Previously they'd have vetoed the idea. Now they will not be able stand in its way, instead they are legally bound to facilitate it.

"So what", you might say, "if the EU wants to have an elected president, let them have one!" But consider the role of three groups of EU citizens in such circumstances.

- The nearly 3 million EU nationals from other countries living in Britain. They can't be deprived of their vote for a continental presidency and many may not have homes in their country of origin. If the EU wanted to create its own register of its non-UK citizens living in Britain to enable them to vote, the British government could not stand in its way.

- There are at least 2 million Brits living in the rest of Europe. The EU may want them to have a vote, as they are also EU citizens. The British government cannot prevent this.

- We Britons living in Britain are also EU citizens. The UK as a *state* can refuse to participate in this act of deepening the union by the election of an EU president. But Cameron's sleepy negotiators did not ensure that whatever the UK state decides applies to its citizens.

Let's say the election of an EU president came down to a choice between Viktor Orban from Hungary, a right-wing religious conservative, and Ada Colau, the movement-based Mayor of Barcelona. Well, I for one would certainly want to demand the right to vote. The British state is entitled to refuse to participate. It can refuse to make its electoral rolls available for an EU presidential election. But it is legally bound to facilitate such deepening and not to place an obstacle in its way, it could not prevent Brits from voting in EU polling stations across the UK. A humiliating state of affairs for Westminster would ensue – especially if Scottish and Welsh parliaments embrace and encourage an EU presidential exercise, if, that is, they have not already broken away. The English public would be visibly divided. The government would look ridiculous. It will be farcical.

What Cameron said he wanted and what he got

What led the Prime Minister of Britain to agree to anything that might result in such a ridiculous outcome? In last week's chapter I looked at how Margaret

Thatcher inherited a conflict over Europe personified by two exceptionally able, determined and ambitious Tory politicians: Edward Heath who as prime minister took the UK into what is now the EU in 1972, and Enoch Powell, who sought to prevent this and then dedicated his political life to its reversal. The current division over Brexit has its roots in their division. Initially Thatcher used it to her advantage in a form of internal divide and rule over a party whose loyalty to herself she distrusted. With the fall of Communism in 1989 she had an opportunity to overcome it. German unification was a moment of redefinition for the European Union as a whole and potentially Britain's place in it, ending its marginalisation. Alas, Thatcher's regressive mind-set made her fear a unified Germany would mean fighting the Hun all over again. She excluded herself and British influence from resolving how to bind a *Deutschland,* now rightly about to become the largest EU state, irrevocably into Europe. At the moment that the 'peace project' of the European process achieved its major goal and a creative re-set was possible Britain removed itself. Left to each other the Franco-German answer was the Euro. As the capital of Germany moved eastwards from Bonn to Berlin it agreed to lock itself into an irrevocable monetary union with Paris. The two determined to take the rest of the EU with them to drink the hemlock of a single currency unsupported by a single government.

British practical wisdom led it to decline the offer under the premiership of John Major who replaced her in 1990, when he secured an opt-out from it at the Maastricht Treaty. If monetary union was all that the EU had committed itself to, Major would have taken the UK out. But Europe was on a roll. The EU was expanding eastwards to incorporate former Soviet satellites while growing economically with early globalisation. Thus, in a way that paralleled the original creation of the Common Market, as it was known in the 1950s, the UK excluded itself from the core political process of the continent but tethered itself to its financial growth. The consequence of this ambiguous, unresolved external relationship to the EU was the renewal in an even more toxic form of the historic internal division over membership within Conservative ranks.

Determined Tories embracing the tradition of Enoch Powell set themselves the task of saving their country from the hegemony of a Eurozone that is proof incarnate of a desire to conquer the UK and subordinate it to a federal super-state.

The Eurosceptics wracked the premiership of John Major through to 1997. Thereafter they took over the leadership, only to provide three successive figures, William Hague, Ian Duncan Smith and Michael Howard, all of whom proved unelectable nationally. At last, hunger for power proved greater than principle and the membership selected David Cameron to rebrand the party and make it electable in the era of New Labour. In his [warm up address](to his first party conference on Sunday 1 October 2006, Cameron told delegates they should and stop "banging on" about Europe and "let sunshine win the day". Three days later, in his first main conference [speech](setting out his priorities he did not mention the EU and European policy at all.

Cameron held his anti-Europeans in Blairite contempt. He thought he could reposition the party and they would disappear under the wheels of history. It was a fatal arrogance. That which he despised grew stronger. Today, for many, especially in the wider world, the eruption of the Brexiteers from the stomach of the Tory party seems like a version of the Alien hurtling out of John Hurt, only this time to terrorise spaceship UK. But the Brexiteer demand for 'self-government' is not a weird growth from the seeds of a demented foreign planet. It is a persistent, rooted argument in British politics that has been refreshed and rethought, not least thanks to the EU's creation of the Euro and its failures.

No mere argument, however, can break through to being taken seriously in Britain. It took an irresistible, explosive force, to upturn Team Cameron's foundational decision to marginalise the European issue: the uncontainable

pressure of a winner-takes-all electoral system under conditions of the breakdown of traditional political allegiances.

Cameron did not want a referendum and was warned of the dangers. Experienced Conservatives were "horrified" at the idea when he told them he was considering one. Two months before he committed, in what is known as his Bloomberg speech, he discussed his thinking with Nick Clegg, his Lib Dem coalition partner who told him it was "hugely risky and could easily backfire". To which Cameron replied (Laws p 237), "what else can I do? My backbenchers are unbelievably Eurosceptic, and UKIP are breathing down my neck".

The electoral challenge of the UK Independence Party has to be understood in this context. Britain's first-past-the-post electoral system is designed to deliver 'strong government'. The winning party governs outright with much less than 50 per cent of the popular vote; in 2005 a mere 35 per cent gave the Blair government a comfortable majority of MPs. The same blunt edge decapitates minority parties, the outstanding example being when the newly formed pro-European Social Democratic Party in alliance with the Lib Dems won over 25 per cent of the vote in 1983 yet was doomed to insignificance with only 23 MPs out of 650. This outrageously undemocratic system has one signal if negative advantage: it allows voters to decisively "kick the buggers out". This only works well, however, when there are only two main parties across the kingdom. Under these conditions, the challenge of third parties with their support spread across the country is easily rebuffed.

The system is breaking down territorially and thanks to party fragmentation. In Scotland the force has flipped. In a delicious irony it now operates to wipe out the main Westminster parties themselves. In the 2015 general election the SNP won exactly half the popular vote in Scotland but 53 of Scotland's 56 seats in Westminster, a staggering disproportion, Labour with a quarter of the votes and the Tories with 15 per cent were both rewarded with just one MP each. It was

their turn to be crushed by first-past-the-post. They had lived by its historic system; now, in Scotland, it terminated them.

The Scottish National Party is one of a number of new challengers to the Westminster duumvirate, in its case with the advantage of geographical concentration. But the Greens and above all UKIP are eating into the hold of the old main players. Their rise is part of a international process, which I'll discuss in a later chapter, of the narrowing of historic parties of left and right under the aegis of market led globalisation, and the emergence of anti-systemic movements. In the UK after the financial crash of 2008 the combination of the parliamentary expenses scandals and austerity lent growing popularity to UKIP's anti-EU, anti-immigrant, anti 'liberal elite' mobilisation. It started to gain over 10 per cent support in opinion polls. Indeed after Cameron's Bloomberg speech it overtook the Tory party to win the low-turn-out elections to the European parliament in 2014 with more votes (24 per cent) than the Tories themselves. Many Conservative MPs faced the danger of their support splitting in the election scheduled for 2015, with UKIP voters letting the Labour candidate win. It is one thing to do what is necessary to save your political career; it's another to do your patriotic duty. Often, these loyalties conflict. This time they coincided. By demanding the prime minister throw down a gauntlet to Brussels many Tory MPs felt they could save their seats *and* their country! The resulting clamour overwhelmed Cameron. To save his electoral skin he had to bang the drum.

Calling for a referendum after the coming 2015 election was a device to take the wind out of UKIP's sails and win in the polls, a decision taken with all due opinion research. But what would be the content of the referendum? He could not afford a single principled stay-in or get-out division, for what would his own party's position be? As leader he wanted 'In' but if this became the party's line a good number of his MPs would defect to UKIP on the spot, as they could not have gone to their voters with such a pledge. The option of allowing his MPs a

free vote to say whether they were for In or Out would simply divide them before the public eye, and no divided party wins at the polls. Therefore, Cameron *had* to propose a renegotiation after the election. To be sure of party unity going into it, he needed to claim he would challenge the threat to the UK of the juridical, social, legislative and political encroachment of the EU's "ever closer union".

Thus he was driven to take a stand he did not relish. According to the semi-official *Cameron at 10, The Inside Story,* by Anthony Seldon and Peter Snowden, the decision in principle was taken in May 2012. In June the Prime Minister prevented unified supervision of the EU banking system at an EU summit, annoying the Eurozone countries. At the press conference after he was questioned about those in his party who wanted an in/out referendum and he told them to get lost,

> *I completely understand why some people want an in/out referendum, why they wanted it yesterday, why they want it today. Some people just want to get out; they literally, you know, 'Stop the bus, I want to get off.' I completely understand that, but I do not share that view. I do not think that is the right thing to do.*
>
> *I think the problem with an in/out referendum is it actually only gives people those two choices: you can either stay in with all the status quo, or you can get out. Most people in Britain, I think, want a government that stands up and fights for them in Europe, and gets the things we want in Europe, that changes some of the relationship we have in Europe.*

Asked a follow up about why it was so difficult for him to convince his MPs, he replied,

> *I am confident that Britain fighting and standing up for itself in Europe can secure good deals in Europe, as I think this European summit has shown. So a practical Eurosceptic, but one who is optimistic that we can get what we want in Europe… But we need to safeguard what we do want in Europe, and I am confident we can do that.*

Perhaps Cameron hoped that by exercising his veto powers as he had and defying the other EU governments he would gain support for this position. Instead he fed the sentiment of the anti-Europeans. Back home 100 MPs had signed a letter demanding a commitment to a referendum in the next parliament. Inflamed, hardliners kept up the pressure. The promise of a referendum had to be made.

Ed Llewellyn, Cameron's chief of staff, was put in charge of the speech. "Speechwriting begins in great secrecy in early November", according to Seldon and Snowden. The speech itself is postponed until the Bloomberg venue becomes free on 23 January. In an odd passage, we are told that Cameron approached the speech with one thing in mind, "If I am ever to persuade the public of remaining in, how do I convince them?" The authors then continue without a break, in their own voice, "Merkel is the key. Without her support, the announcement could be a fiasco." Apparently the route to persuading the British lay via Berlin.

Their account of the crucial a private meeting Cameron had with the German Chancellor in number 10 on November 7 is fascinating. She stares at him intently trying to get inside his head to decide whether he is serious and questions him thoroughly. He tells her the single currency "changed everything". That he has a problem with his party. That it goes deeper, "to the very heart of the British understanding of democracy". She tells him Europe needs Britain, "Without you, I don't know what is going to happen" and asks him

not to rush into saying, "I'm leaving the ship". "No," Cameron replies, "this is our EU as much as anyone's. Therefore I have to be pushy for our interests; but I don't want Britain to leave ". He has told her that he is passionate about single market and foreign policy cooperation. The danger is that, "if I don't listen to British public opinion, Britain will depart from Europe… what I want are changes that will make it possible for Britain to stay in." She knows he wants to deal, "I do get it" and says she will try to help but there are limits given Germany's obligations to her other European partners.

According to his own official historians at one point in the long conversation, Cameron "using his full emotional force with her", also explains, "I need to make a pitch to the country. If there is no acceptable deal, it's not the end of the world; I'll walk away from the EU".

This seems to me to be an extraordinarily important moment. The prime minister has spent hours persuading the chancellor in private that his mind is made up and he is as determined as her to keep the UK in the EU. She emphasises that she "gets" this. But, then, in addition, he adds that she should understand he will tell his countrymen and women the opposite of what he has convinced her of. In his "pitch" to the British public, he will say that the UK *can* leave the EU relatively painlessly if he can't get a deal!

The only interpretation of this that makes sense is that Cameron feels he must make sure the Germans are not alarmed when he tells the British public leaving is a practical option. They should know he does not mean it. He has to pretend that his mind is not made up, so as to present the process as an open one. Under the banner of such falsehood a negotiated outcome that allows the UK to stay can be presented as a joint success.

Does this remind you of anything? For example, when Tony Blair privately told President Bush that the UK would back his invasion of Iraq without question and later went on to explain to the White House that processes had to be gone

through to convince Parliament of a direct threat, to make the war appear 'legal', but this should not be taken in any way as meaning a weakening of Blair's resolve or reversal of the actual decision. The Labour prime minister's deception of the British public over going to war with Iraq was worse than Cameron's because the decision was completely wrong, murderous and strategically catastrophic. Whereas Cameron's policy of staying in the EU by means of a dodgy referendum is mitigated by the fact that his objective is arguably sane. Yet there is a line of descent from the one to the other: contempt for the public, an entitlement of dishonesty, a narrow casuistry, a leader desiring to be strong on the 'world stage' crawling into the pocket of a major power, a Britain that has lost its way.

It's not what you say it's the way that you say it

In one sense David Cameron is not 'a liar'. He has always been a Eurosceptic, which is English for someone who does not believe in Europe 'sharing sovereignty', and wants instead European collaboration of self-governing nations. He told Merkel this is what he wanted. He seems to have believed that he could get Europe to convert to his vision thanks to her power, as she was clearly sensible, practical and said she understood him. If he deluded himself about her support he was an idiot. But something had shifted in his own view. After he became prime minister, he and George Osborne learnt the importance of being part of the European process, its decision-making and influence. Not wanting to be excluded from this, Cameron came to view that it was essential to stay in the EU. Realising this, Merkel helped him as much as she could but was never going to abandon her Eurozone partners for the British model. The result is that the deal is Merkel's deal. From Cameron's point of view, it being better than nothing, he decided to sell it as the best of both worlds.

The soul of a prime minister

He will now fight to win the referendum at all costs. In 2005, David Davis was Cameron's opponent for the leadership of his party and then became a critic on issues of security and surveillance as well as Europe. I heard him on the radio being interviewed about an aspect of government policy. He was being as diplomatic as possible. Suddenly the interviewer asked him whether he thought Cameron was a good prime minister. Caught off guard, David paused, then said, "He is very good at *being* prime minister". This form of words was not disloyal. But the slight emphasis made the point brilliantly. He is outstanding at appearing to be prime minister.

To play the role as well as Cameron does you need the coldness that comes from a heart-extraction operation. Eton can do this to you. It need not, I know Etonians with wonderful sensitivity. But it generates a ruling class mentality that regards humans in the same way as horses. Even one's wife and children are estimated in terms of their staying power and form. Working closely for seven years as the head of PR and corporate relations can do this too, especially if it was for the "vile" self-made billionaire head of Carlton TV, Michael Green; where Cameron gained his training in how to be [“misleading…dissembling and [in] doling out disinformation”](). Also how to 'hold his nature in a vice'. In his account of how to be prime minister, which Cameron and Osborne regard as masterly, Tony Blair spelt what it means to play the role like him,

> *"In public, you are always on show, so always be under control. The trick, actually, is to appear to be natural, while gripping your nature in a vice of care and caution. Don't let the mask slip… don't betray excesses of emotion of any kind; do it all with the ease and character of someone talking to old friends while knowing they are, in fact, new acquaintances."*

Cameron's capacity is being put the test with the Panama revelations. "I've never tried to pretend to be anything I'm not", he told Robert Peston of ITV, claiming he had never hidden the fact that he is very lucky to have wealthy parents. Really? Before he was Tory leader he holidayed in Cape Town in South Africa; after, it was the pretence of preferring inexpensive vacations in Spain.

Philip Cowley and Dennis Kavanagh uncovered a very revealing moment in their study of the 2015 election. The prime minister got a memo on voter reactions to him. Only one in three thought he was in touch with ordinary people. Only 40 per cent thought he was trying to do anything about it. He needs "language that met less resistance and had more resonance". Women believed spending cuts were particularly unfair to them and his ratings for "being in touch and listening are awful and getting worse". Cameron's response was to write at the top of the memo,

> *"Well, let's do something about it!! Please, operational grid, give me the right language and speaking and physically attack me with the right words before an interview. I will do whatever I am told "*

The Mail, from which I'm quoting, reproduced it. You can see it for yourself.
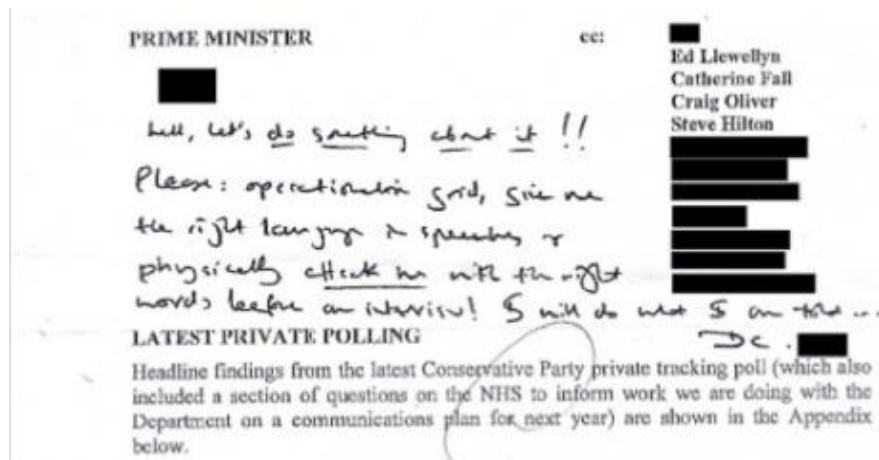
It's not a request for the right thing to say, or a better way of expressing policies that meet people's concerns about the future of the NHS. It's a demand for language only. He must be fed, even attacked with, the "right words" for any interview. He will do as he told and say them. He does not regard this as in any way shameful, he regards it as professional. This is his normal.

We have just witnessed the result in action: last week he spoke to his party's spring conference about the attempt to cover up his relationship to the tax avoiding off-shore fund his father ran, Cameron generously admitted that it was his fault because "I could have handled this better." In other words the wrongdoing is caused by poor representation, not what has been revealed. "I love my dad. I miss him every day," he added. "He was a wonderful father and I'm very proud of everything he did." Blair could not have done it better.

Cameron's politics of dissimulation may be connected to the fact that he is a very rich man who has been told to appear a normal guy. He was born as he himself put it, with [two silver spoons](#) in his mouth, given the wealth of both his parents. His wife too. Cameron once told The Times when asked about their wealth, "Samantha owns a field in Scunthorpe". It is 3,000 acres of arable land worth millions.

Being economical with the truth is one thing, ignoring what you have said altogether is another. In October 2009, in the run up to the general election, Cameron said "the third runway at Heathrow is not going ahead; no ifs, no buts". In 2012 he set up a commission to look again at the question. Now you might say, anyone is entitled to change his or her mind. But this unequivocal statement was said in an election to win support. London voters were swayed by what was a pledge, not just an opinion; a pledge that carries a democratic force if you believe at all in democracy.

The same cardinal principle was breached in another of Cameron's pledges made to win the 2010 election, one that might even have clinched it for him as it laid to rest suspicions on a matter with the highest salience for voters, the NHS. "There will be no more of those pointless re-organisations that aim for change but instead bring chaos", Cameron promised in 2009. I asked a member of the subsequent coalition government, an expert in health policy, if Cameron was aware of the Lansley reforms, a massive top-down reorganization, when he said this. He assured me he definitely was.

Seldon and Snowden are fascinating on the episode, while skirting the cardinal issue. They describe Lansley's NHS reforms as "the biggest cock-up" of the prime minister's first five years. In 2006, his first major speech as leader, he said, "the NHS needs no more pointless organisational upheaval". Note the giveaway word "pointless" also used in the 2009 speech cited above. But later that year he told the Royal College of Pathologists, "There will be no more of the tiresome, meddlesome, top-down restructures that have dominated the last decade of the NHS". The same definitive commitment was made in the coalition agreement with the Liberal Democrats, that supposedly defined the government's agenda: "We will stop the top-down reorganisations of the NHS that have got in the way of patient care."

In his memoir, David Laws, at that point the Lib Dem Secretary to the Treasury, attacks the Lansley reorganisation as "completely daft… massive changes… designed to radically alter the organisation of the NHS across the whole country…" – ideas floated by Laws himself in the infamous Orange Book, a 2004 manifesto of neoliberalism. He quotes the chief executive of the NHS who admits the reorganisation is "so big you can see it from space". He blames "a complete failure of oversight from David Cameron and George Osborne in particular" (but not his leader, the deputy prime minister Nick Clegg). A series of full-scale rows took place as Lansley pressed ahead giving Cameron opportunities to abandon a reorganisation which "pointless", "meddlesome",

"top-down" and "getting in the way of patient care" only begin to describe. What is striking in the graphic description of Selden and Snowdon, as well as Laws, is that at *no time* in the many months of rows and arguments that follow does the prime minister say, "we can't do this, I pledged to the voters that we wouldn't". His forceful, "passionate", vivid and repeated promise to the electorate that a vote for him and his party means there will be no such top down reorganisation is disregarded by everyone and is apparently completely irrelevant.

Something beyond lying takes place when there is a serial pattern of misleading statements with no apology or explanation and no clear strategy or purpose behind them. Part of the problem here is the culture of the House of Commons, which is so lauded by tradition. When the wider, informal culture of what it means to keep one's word has evaporated, all that matters is 'getting away with it' in the House of Commons. If the opposition has been shady and misleading when in power, any attempt by them to attack a minister for being misleading will get the embarrassing response, 'look who is calling the kettle black!' – in effect, so what if my pants are on fire, your arse is showing through a singed backside. Fearing the charge of hypocrisy they permit the government to get away with it. Blair did it, now it is Cameron's turn.

- In January 2010, Cameron remarked confidently: "We've looked at educational maintenance allowances and we haven't announced any plan to get rid of them. We don't have any plans to get rid of them" – only for the EMA to be scrapped five months after the election.

- In March 2010, Cameron made a promise: "I wouldn't change child benefit, I wouldn't means-test it, I don't think that is a good idea" – reforms that were introduced three years later.

- In April 2010, on the eve of the election, Cameron said: "We have absolutely no plans to raise VAT". Two months later, it was raised from 17.5% to 20%.

The previous year, presenting himself as the campaigning face of 'compassionate conservatism', Cameron had argued that VAT is "very regressive, it hits the poorest hardest". As prime minister, it was no longer his concern.

Sometimes the presumption that he is entitled to mislead is casual, as when in March this year Caroline Lucas asked him in Prime Minister's Questions how he could support "localism" while making all schools academies, tearing them away from local people. Cameron replied,

> *I would argue that academy schools represent true devolution, because the parents, the governors and the head teacher end up having full control of the school and are able to make decisions about its future.*

At the *very same time* his government is finalising a White Paper that proposed to abolish parent governors!

Sometimes it is humorous. After the recent floods in Yorkshire, Cameron said he would do "whatever is needed" to help the victims. The Yorkshire Post sent him a letter about what was needed and got no reply. Then his press officer Jonathan Bennett telephoned the paper to offer a "very personal" piece. It began, "I love Yorkshire & the Humber" and said nothing about the floods. Smelling a rat the paper's editors decided not to run the prime minister's missive to its readers. Then they discovered that he had written an identical article for the Plymouth *Herald* which began with the words "I love Cornwall and Isles of Scilly"; and the Newcastle *Chronicle* starting, "I love Northumberland"; and the Lincolnshire *Echo* beginning, "I love Lincolnshire". They concluded Cameron had "duped newspapers across the country" with his love.

For me this is small change compared to two aspects of Cameron's challenged relationship to truth. He repositioned the Tory party after he became leader in

2006 in part by making it environmentalist and an opponent of climate change, even re-branding the party's logo to a tree and adopting the election slogan, 'Vote Blue, Go Green'. In 2013, he reportedly told aides working on energy legislation "get rid of all the green crap". Green levies were duly cut in a subsequent budget. This suggests a carelessness about himself, a dishonesty about the way he presents who he is, which means his entire public persona is an exercise in dissimulation. No wonder Angela Merkel stared long and hard.

In a 2014 conference speech, Cameron described Britain as "a country that is paying down its debts", prompting a rebuke from UK Statistics Authority. No penalty was paid apart from this. Yet it followed an astonishing attack on exactly this issue. In a party political broadcast in 2013, Cameron claimed, "We're paying down Britain's debts." This prompted a brilliant, focused, display of fury from Andreas Whittam Smith, the founder of The Independent. Everyone knows that while the size of the deficit, meaning the amount the government has to borrow, is coming down, nonetheless it is still borrowing and the total national debt is rising. Indeed, Cameron made Britain's indebtedness the centrepiece of his attack on Labour in government. He *must* have been aware that at the time of the broadcast, since he became prime minister "public sector net debt has expanded from £811.3bn (55.3 per cent of GDP) to £1,111.4bn at the end of December 2012 (70.7 per cent of GDP)". Whittam Smith concludes,

A party political broadcast is a deliberate act, not something said on the spur of the moment. Every word and every image is carefully considered. The deceit about paying down the debt will have been in the script for days or even weeks. The Prime Minister, too, is better placed than almost anyone to know what the truth actually is... Has it really come to this? Has the Prime Minister of the day solemnly addressed the British people and deliberately, coldly, with aforethought, told them a downright lie? If so, what scorn for the electorate that implies. What

> *insufferable arrogance. What a debauchery of the poor old country's*
> *political system.*

Whittam Smith is right to emphasise the rigor of the process involved. The prime minister is a professional. In a Media Masters podcast on how people are persuaded by emotions not arguments, Lynton Crosby talks about working with him as the head of his 2005 election campaign and he tells us that Cameron is "calm, hard-working, good at taking decisions".

Even if you regard it as normal to mislead your own people, who can take the responsibility for re-electing you, it is harder to accept for the head of the executive to play games with the lives of other peoples and countries. When the prime minister justified sending British bombers into Syria, he said they would be supporting the fighting forces of "70,000 moderates." Senior defence staff described this as "misleading", as you can see from Roy Greenslade's [round up](#) of the coverage across the media. Even papers that supported military action were having none of Cameron's creation of "bogus battalions". They at least had learnt their lesson of the Iraq war "dodgy dossier". Parliament, it seems, has not. Cameron blatantly misled members of parliament – a fundamental breach of ethics for a prime minister. Nothing happened – no apology, no withdrawal, just a shrug.

Mendacity implies an understood relationship between word and reality turned into one of falsehood. This is not what is happening with Cameron. To accuse him of lying is a category mistake. For him cognitive dissonance is not the contradiction between what he says his government will do and what it then does; it is the idea that what he promises has any intrinsic relationship with how he then must act.

For me the worst example of all concerns Libya. In 2011 Britain joined France in attacking the Libyan dictator Gaddafi after he threatened to wipe out street by

street the opposition to him in Benghazi. The UK and French air forces went in and successfully supported the opposition after the US had eliminated Gaddafi's air defences. Britain spent £320 million on the bombing. It was a significant victory in a country with less than 10 million people, considerable resource and no hostile neighbours (i.e. quite the opposite of Syria). A chance therefore to prove that western military action could lead to constructive outcome for local people. The British prime minister flew into Benghazi for a moment of triumph. He pledged to the crowd in Liberty Square that Britain "will stand with you as you build your country and build your democracy for the future." To hear his words, recently re-broadcast by the BBC is to feel the commitment! Instead, he sent in a mere £25 million in aid. The country fell apart while the UK shamefully did nothing. An enraged president Obama broke all diplomatic rules to publicly rebuke the UK's criminally lackadaisical premier, telling Jeffrey Goldberg of Atlantic magazine,

> *"When I go back and I ask myself what went wrong," Obama said, "there's room for criticism, because I had more faith in the Europeans, given Libya's proximity… And he said that British Prime Minister David Cameron soon stopped paying attention, becoming "distracted by a range of other things".*

President Obama recognises that something went wrong. He goes back to assess the nature of the mistakes. He takes responsibility for his contribution to them. Whatever you think about his record, there is something exemplary about his manner; it gives him the right to share the blame for the disaster he and his allies visited upon the people of Libya after they liberated it from Gaddafi. He points the presidential finger at Cameron above all, as President Sarkozy of France was voted out of office. With what appeared to be passion and commitment the British prime minister pledged his country's support to the

people of Libya in a time of extreme vulnerability after he had bombed away its dictator. There can be no greater moment of genuine responsibility. Lives would be lost if the UK abandoned them. Having promised to help them rebuild he walked away. It's pitiless. His words In Benghazi meant as much to him as his promises on VAT, commitment to the environment, lies about the public debt, estimates of Syrian fighters, or "a field in Scunthorpe". Only this time he helped create a killing field for terrorism.

In 2016, if those of us who wish to vote *Remain* manage to secure Britain a place within the EU we will give David Cameron a victory in the referendum despite all his dishonesty. If he loses it will be in large part thanks to it.

Bloomberg

On 23 January 2013 David Cameron delivered [his Bloomberg speech](#) that laid the basis for his re-election two years later. In some ways it reads like a letter to Chancellor Merkel. It certainly is not addressed to the French or the Italians let alone the Spanish. Cameron says he has five principles: competitiveness, a flexible union, power to flow back to member states, democratic accountability and fairness (by which he means the Euro group not blocking the UK's access to its financial markets). "This vision of flexibility and co-operation", he states, "is not the same as those who want to build an ever closer political union – but it is just as valid". He wants the EU to become, "a family of democratic nations, all members of one European Union, whose essential foundation is the single market rather than the single currency".

His main call is for,

> *A new settlement subject to the democratic legitimacy and accountability of national parliaments where Member States combine in*

> *flexible cooperation, respecting national differences not always trying to eliminate them and in which we have proved that some powers can in fact be returned to Member States.*

He sees Britain as playing a leading role shaping the single market and foreign policy of this new settlement. He adds,

> *I believe the best way to do this will be in a new treaty so I add my voice to those who are already calling for this. My strong preference is to enact these changes for the entire EU, not just for Britain.*

But if there is no appetite for a new treaty for us all then of course Britain should be ready to address the changes we need in a negotiation with our European partners.

Cameron asks the British to support his desire to see this outcome and to stay in Europe, notes emphatically that it will be their decision and adds, "of course Britain could make her own way in the world, outside the EU, if we chose to do so". There is nothing in his vision about a social Europe or solidarity.

The primary objective of the speech was to rally his party behind his sweeping "new settlement" for the EU. There is no denying Cameron's professionalism. His task was to bring his party behind him, and therefore a vision of Europe was necessary that would satisfy the Eurosceptics. They might doubt that he could achieve it, but they would have to give him the benefit of the doubt because the prize as he set it out was wholehearted. They did so, with one important exception.

The prime minister knew from all his background papers that the other EU states were not going to relinquish economic and monetary union for his new

settlement. From what I can work out the British did very little to try and organise any allies so hopeless was the prospect. The aim was to improve the UK's position sufficiently to ensure it stayed in – while managing domestic opposition up to the 2015 election.

A year and half later, when he realised this, the Conservative MP Douglas Carswell, author of *The End of Politics and the Birth of iDemocracy*, was enraged, resigned from the party, joined UKIP and forced a by-election which he won handsomely. He said in his statement,

> *No one cheered David Cameron more loudly at the time of his Bloomberg speech, when he finally accepted the case for a referendum. He would, he claimed, negotiate a fundamentally new relationship with the EU, and put it to the people in 2017; In or Out. But there's been no detail since. That's because there isn't any.*
>
> *His advisers have made it clear that they seek a new deal that gives them just enough to persuade enough voters to vote to stay in. It's not about change in our national interest. It's all about not changing things. Once I realised that, my position in the Conservative party became untenable.*

Carswell had spoken with three of Cameron's advisors, one at the Anglo-German Konigswinter conference. In a TV interview he described his revulsion at their cynicism. Cameron's claim that there would be renegotiation was "smoke and mirrors".

It worked, the promise of a referendum helped win the 2015 election. Cameron had to enter the hall of smoke and mirrors so as to emerge victorious, combing the soot from his hair. Politico sets out a helpful 'scorecard' of the process and

results. [Charles Grant](#) of the Centre for Economic Reform provides a short account of what was negotiated from the EU's. Cameron got a small reform to reduce the welfare pull of the UK for immigrants from poorer EU countries but no controls over the freedom of movement. He got a commitment that the City would not be discriminated against by the Eurozone. It had sought more than that and lost, Charles Grant's description of what happened:

> "One part… was bitterly fought over. The British wanted the right to have financial regulations that differed from those of the Eurozone. The French, backed by Germany, many Eurozone governments and the European Central Bank, feared that such differentiation could lead to laxly-regulated UK firms undercutting continental ones, or to financial instability."

An early version of the decision pleased the British by saying that "different sets of Union rules may have to be adopted in secondary law"… The wording of the final compromise maintains the status quo, leaving open for future battles the degree to which UK regulation may diverge from that of the Eurozone.

As we have seen, Cameron also obtained a UK opt out from ever closer union, a decision that recognised the realities of a Europe of variable speeds. But Merkel, who seems to have got a complete measure of the man, retained the UK in the EU, assuming he delivers a vote for *Remain* as he promises. Germany wants the UK to *Remain* as it adds to the weight of the EU in global negotiations, secures a huge market for its goods and provides a counter-balance to France. At the same time Merkel has prevented the interfering, negative, vetoing British state from disrupting the negotiations over the future collaboration and deepening of the EU that Germany desires.

Overall, it makes little difference. The UK was not in the Euro or the Schengen agreements. There already was in effect a differentiated Europe. The UK winning recognition of this is no great shakes. The overall argument over staying or going is the same as it was before the deal. David Cameron's phrase is that Britain is "Stronger, safer, better off" inside the EU. Michael Gove's riposte for *Leave* is that Britain is "freer, fairer and better off outside the EU". Both were as true as arguments before the deal as now. Similarly, when the prime minister emphasises how important the EU is for British trade and business, how difficult it will be to *Leave*, and the costs and uncertainty of doing so, all was just as true before he opened his negotiations.

In an earlier chapter I quoted Cameron's [attempt](#) to justify *Remain* in gung-ho Thatcherite language, as he sought to protect his patriotic flank from the Brexiteers,

> *… the world I want my children to grow up in is [one] where there's a big, bold, brave Britain at the heart of these institutions trying to deliver a world based on the values we care about – democracy, freedom, rights… That's the kind of country I want my little ones to grow up and inherit.*

The "little ones" here are not his children - they are us, the British people. This is how he and his class regard the populace – when they are feeling in a good mood, that is, or as here, are on their best behaviour. Well, my answer is that the battle for democracy, freedom and rights are shared values not just 'British ones'. That the battle for them has to be fought on a continental scale and the last way of securing them is by the Brits declaring themselves to be "big, bold and brave". But I have to admit that being treated in this fashion does generate a flash of childish anger. I can quite understand why many of my fellow little ones feel like throwing Cameron out of the nursery and telling both him and

Brussels to bugger off. If there is one good reason to vote *Leave* it is to reject the sordid deal Cameron struck, its hostility to any European project or solidarity, its national egoism, its market fundamentalism, its greedy attempt to grab "the best of both worlds" and its pitiful self-exclusion from the heart of the European process.

Chapter 4

Would you believe it, Boris and Gove defy corporate fatalism

When a country is forced to take a decision as consequential as leaving or remaining in the union of its continent, an immense cast of players will have their moment. But just four characters who have known each other intimately over decades of friendship, rivalry and entitlement, dominate the battle over Britain. At stake is their place in what passes for history in today's United Kingdom. But so far, rather then offering the country a great debate their clash is closer to a pantomime: We are stronger in! Oh no we're not! Oh yes we are! We are stronger out! Oh no we're not! Oh yes we are!

As the spectacle is forced upon them, members of the public are asking themselves why they pay their leaders to behave like this. Meanwhile, it seems their homes are being robbed via their back doors. I [showed last week](#) how David Cameron's decision to hold the referendum was forced on him by circumstances and how this led him to commit the outrage of telling voters he thought it would be viable for Britain to *Leave* while telling Chancellor Merkel he did not mean this. But if the referendum is contingent and poorly spun it may also prove convenient as a distraction. As the campaign got underway [it was announced](#) that Britain's quarterly balance of payments deficit with the rest of the world crashed, going down from £20.1 billion to £32.7 billion in the last three months of 2015, equal to 7.0% of gross domestic product, "the largest proportion since quarterly records began".

BoP Current Account Balance SA £m

Source: Office for National Statistics
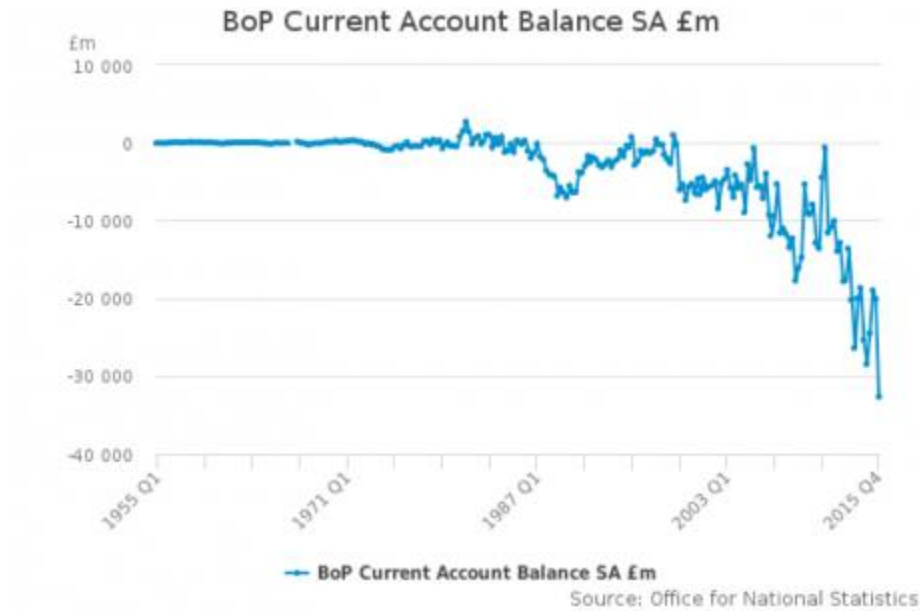
At the same time the Office for National Statistics reported that overall productivity in the UK *fell* by 1.2 per cent; output per hour in the service sector had grown modestly while "manufacturing output per hour… was lower in 2015 than in 2010". In response, the Office for Budget Responsibility noted the marked worsening of its forecasts since November and helpfully illustrated how much it did not know by providing a 'fan' of what might now happen:

Chart 1.3: Real GDP growth fan chart

Source: ONS, OBR
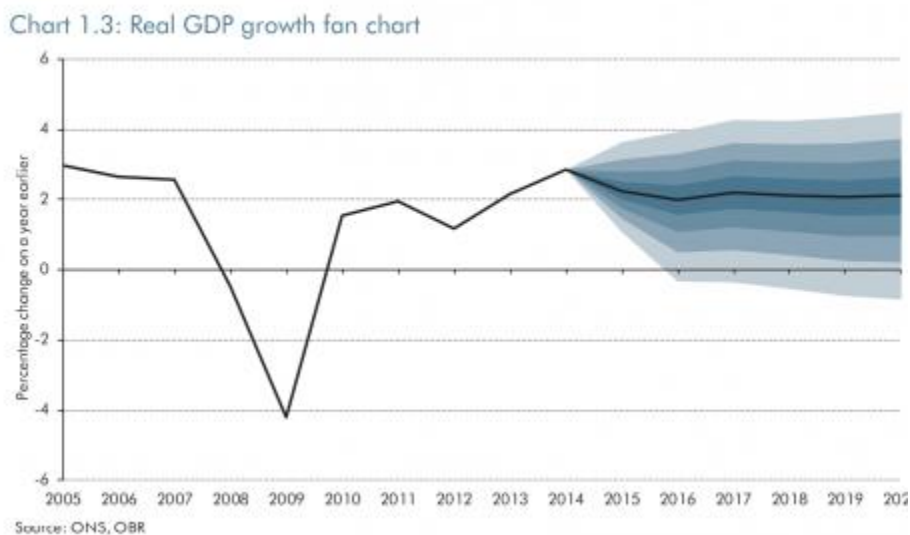
Just as the British economy might be, well, hitting the fan, its chief policy makers hold a plebiscite on membership of the EU. What a glorious distraction.

When Britain was on the verge of first joining what was then the European Economic Community in 1971 there was a 'Great Debate'. Whatever its limitations, everyone understood that Britain suffered a chronic problem of relative decline. The ruling Establishment decided that throwing in its lot with the growing European economy was the way to stop the rot. Those opposed demanded loyalty to the Commonwealth and an independent world role. All argued about the need to find a new way forward. In 2016 there is no serious concern expressed by leading politicians about the chronic problem of the British economy, dramatically illustrated by the trade figures graph. Far from seeking a new way forward, the Tory four are of one mind in believing that Britain is a success story.

For sure, the indisputable failures of the Eurozone system give our Tory entertainers a cover for revelling in the supposed achievement of their management of Britain's economic performance. The fearsome four share a mystifying belief in the UK's wellbeing as "the fifth largest economy in the world" with its rising employment, even if poorly paid, precarious and under-productive. The pantomime horse of Cameron and Osborne warn us that this success, which they have overseen, will be put 'at risk' by leaving the huge marketplace of the EU. But the main point is that they hold success has been achieved. As Cameron said [when he presented](#) the deal in Brussels,

> As I have said, I'm not saying that Britain couldn't survive outside Europe.
>
> But after nearly 6 long years of difficult decisions and hard work by the British people, our economy has turned a corner.

> *In an uncertain world, is this really the time to add a new huge risk to our national and economic security?*

The pantomime dames, Gove and Johnson, assure us that our island's success will be redoubled when freed to make the world our oyster. Neither side suggests there is anything intrinsically unbalanced, inadequate or unsound about the UK's situation. British decline is over; there is nothing wrong with our fundamentals that the Tory exercise of power cannot deal with.

Their *shared* view is summed up by this week's CapX email roundup by Tim Montgomerie, an 'Outer':

> *Whereas Britain joined the EEC in the 1970s when it was plagued by destructively powerful unions, industrial decline, the Troubles in Northern Ireland and, in the words of the Wall Street Journal, a sense that it was closing for business, the boot is on the other foot today. Britain is the fastest growing major economy in Europe, London can claim to be the world's capital, our creative industries are booming. Europe - with devastating levels of youth unemployment across its southern periphery because of the euro project, unable to agree a common refugees policy and losing its share of world trade at an accelerating rate - looks like the past.*

Their joint complacency over British success is overlaid by a shared delusion – that in so far as Europe is pressing for common standards and policies this is inherently suspect if not entirely negative. They all agree that the last thing the UK needs is better regulation, planning or long-term investment of a continental kind. Such nannying represents a threat to the well being of Anglo-Saxons (certainly those fortunate enough to benefit from tax havens). All four share the

profoundly un-conservative aspect of Thatcherism: that the vigour of market freedom in itself delivers the goods and the good life – provided its magic is replenished every so often by war dances around "parliamentary sovereignty".

They also share, this time in their favour, a disapproval of overt racism. They desire more control over immigration but they are upper-class liberals when it comes to foreigners, tolerating their welcome energy and contribution, knowing that their class needs cheap labour, loathing vulgar UKIP style dog-whistling – with Boris Johnson indeed boasting of his Turkish heritage.

In short, they are all Eurosceptics, culturally the prime minister perhaps most of all. A shared rejection of European solidarity unites them. Indeed it stretches across the Conservative party from libertarians like David Davis, who rightly fear the authoritarian state, to hardliners like Theresa May.

What then, divides the four?

The Brexit debate as they define it is a conflict between two forms of anti-Europeanism. The referendum is not a choice between being in or out of Europe, taking Europe to mean sharing government in order to secure a place in a globalising world. It is a disagreement over how to have as little as possible to do with it. Far from being a clash of principle between pro-Europeans and Commonwealth nationalists as in 1971, the argument is between the Cameron-Osborne camp who want an arms-length membership, allowing the UK to use the EU as a platform to serve Britain's self-interest, and Gove-Johnson who argue Britain will do better without the hand of Europe on its shoulder. It is a narrow argument about how to best secure the least influence of the EU while maximizing the UK's economic advantage.

Yet however narrow, the difference between them will define the country's direction. Asked how they rated the forthcoming decision, rightly, "79 per cent of the public thinks [it] is the most important Britain will take in decades" (as

[Olivia Bailey](#) reports in a masterful survey). All four have put their political lives on the line. The dispute will be ruthless and unforgiving. However close they might have been, the two couples are pointing the UK in different directions. How should we map the different routes they want Britain to take?

Tory Blairism: the corporate populism of our time

Cameron and Osborne are seeking to renew the 'corporate populism' that has shaped British government this century – I will define my terms in a moment. We can call it Tory Blairism. Gove and Johnson are urging its replacement by what I'm calling Maggyism, until a better word comes along. It is a form of national populism, in their case *British* populism in contrast to the English national-patriotism of Farage and UKIP. If you are as alert to these things as you should be, you will immediately object that Britain is not a nation. True, but this does not prevent it from generating its own nationalism, an important paradox. The particular characteristic of British nationalism is its ambition for a world role. While Cameron and Osborne might want to deny the label to their opponents, by chaining themselves to the EU they have conceded the flag of what [Andrew Sparrow](#) has dubbed 'patriotic globalism' to the Brexiteers. For corporate populism regards national boundaries as impediments to trade.

I first found myself up against manipulative corporate populism, and then came up with the term for it, at the end of the last century. Any discussion of its strengths and weakness today needs to be situated in the context of the past quarter-century. I'm going to ask the readers' patience by including some stories about my own experience of British politics over this time span. My hope is that you will be rewarded by an insight into how the present government's corporate populism came about, its attachment to the EU as an aspect of its embrace of the global power system, and its failure to institutionalise significant pro-European interests within England. My aim the whole time is to share an understanding of how a sophisticated political system got itself into

the situation of holding a referendum in the first place, and dividing the country in such a weird way. Understanding is a human process not a mathematical one. It involves moments of saying, 'ah, I see', or, 'now I know where you are coming from'. Sharing bits of my own bumpy voyage may help achieve this.

It is not surprising that well-off conservatives such as our current prime minister and Chancellor of the Exchequer, both from elite families, should embrace the interests of financial and media corporate power and then be trained in the market research and public relations essential for commercial popularity. What could be more natural, then, than to apply these methods and values to politics so as to win elections which furthers their interests? In old English language: whiggery meets globalization.

What is more puzzling is that it took the Labour party to pioneer such a development and show the Tories how to adapt conservatism to 'New Times'. The Blairism of 'New Labour' that achieved this was not such a stupid choice for social democrats at the time. On the contrary, it offered supporters who were not corrupt a way of funding badly needed reform of public services. Furthermore its capacity for innovation, openness and delivery broke from the lethargic corporate culture of Labourism and led to the Labour party's longest period of office.

I had a walk-on role in the creation of New Labour. From the late '80s as the coordinator of Charter 88 I campaigned vigorously and lobbied adroitly to make Britain a constitutional democracy, and I understood this to mean the internal Europeanisation of the U.K. With others I helped convince the Labour leadership, starting decisively with John Smith who headed the party from 1992-94, that the left had to include reform of the system alongside its policies for fairness and improvement. Smith gave a Charter 88 lecture in January 1993 that set out his embrace of such a programme. He started with the need for a

Human Rights Act and connected it to a call for a "new constitutional settlement".

Smith had made Blair his shadow Home Secretary and we both sat in on a preparatory drafting session. After the lecture, in reply to a question, Smith told the audience, "Parliament is weak in this country… we do have an elective dictatorship. I've come to realise that. I used to myself believe in the sort of mysteries of the British Constitution. My experience… has caused me to change my mind quite fundamentally". A convinced European, John Smith began Labour's abandonment of its defensive trade union politics and its profoundly conservative relationship to the British state.

When Smith was struck down by a heart attack, Tony Blair took over the leadership of the Labour party in partnership with Gordon Brown and they created New Labour. Blair embraced Smith's reform programme as one of his calling cards. By committing to a Human Rights Act, Scottish and Welsh parliaments, a mayor for London, a referendum on PR, and replacing the House of Lords, New Labour expanded its support, attracted Lib Dems as partners in a progressive alliance and if necessary a coalition, pushed back trade union collectivism, and confronted the withered routines of the old regime. It also, and this might have been the greatest attraction for a group obsessed with winning, assisted the creation of a 'radical narrative' that was not too frightening and reinforced a sense of momentum against the stasis of a sleaze-wracked Conservative government.

I was delighted. But from the beginning Blair and colleagues dropped John Smith's commitment to a "new settlement". Even this formulation first drafted, as with so much of New Labour's phraseology, by Gordon Brown, pulled back from the promise of a written constitution. Peter Mandelson played a part in this, the most Machiavellian of the power-mongering Blair clique. At a private House of Commons seminar called by Blair when still Shadow Home Secretary,

to consider how best to 'sell' the new commitment to human rights, Mandelson proposed the slogan "Human Rights means better government". I suggested "Human Rights mean a better system of government" would be more attractive. Mandelson responded, "System, system, that reminds me of Grosvenor Square". A reference to the 1968 riots against the Vietnam War outside the then US Embassy in which I participated and he did not.

It was an early warning. At the time, I felt that such was the unity of the inherited informal system of British rule any one significant reform would assist another – and three or four would surely create a chain reaction that could not be stopped until a new settlement had to be confronted. In this I was wrong. After winning the 1997 general election what Blair and company did with respect to the constitution was extraordinary. They immediately set in motion the most far-reaching programme of reforms, implemented by Derry Irvine – a no-nonsense Scottish barrister, who Blair appointed as Lord Chancellor. The constitutional 'experts' shook their heads and said it was all very complicated and would take decades. Irvine drove the whole package through with a bracing vigour and contempt for precedent in two years. An assembly for Wales, a parliament for Scotland, a mayor for London all based on the outcomes of referendums, Scotland also voting on giving its parliament token tax-raising powers; the ejection of hereditary peers, freedom of information, a Human Rights Act; this was a transformative package to which they added independence of the Bank of England in setting interest rates.

Thatcher had shown that if you turned your guns on the old establishment it would crumble. The Blair crew took her example and ran with it. Westminster's convention-ridden old regime had a moth-eaten coherence: a single parliament, not many; its upper chamber one of privilege not patronage; legitimacy bestowed by Westminster not by referendums; the top judges as law lords sitting in parliament, not a Supreme Court with its own building; a culture of

liberty not foreign rights; a secret, gentlemanly exercise of executive power, not freedom of information.

Twenty years before and these would have been shattering changes, impossible without strong motivation. But the disintegration of self-belief in the established institutions of the British state, reinforced by Thatcher's neo-liberal marketization of the public realm, meant they were lamely accepted as mere 'modernisations'.

This was also how the perpetrator-in-chief saw them. Blair did not believe in the transformation these changes could have prefigured. Graphite was poured between them to ensure no chain-reaction took place. He refused to give a speech addressing the reforms as a whole (one was drafted for him by baffled civil servants). He compared the Scottish parliament's tax raising powers to a "parish council". His team had freedom of information re-drafted and delayed. They made the Human Rights Act a minimal incorporation of the European Convention rather than a British Bill of Rights that could attract public popularity. They turfed out the 800 odd hereditary peers in exchange for granting them, weirdly enough, the right to elect 92 of their number back into the second chamber, which they then left unelected and therefore stuffed with life cronies. The coup de grace was Blair's out-manoeuvring the Lib Dems who had hoped to negotiate a proportional electoral system. He crushed Paddy Ashdown with a ruthlessness that foreshadowed Cameron and Osborne's destruction of Ashdown's chosen successor Nick Clegg.

I found the process unnerving. Blair and his team had used a programme of democratic reform to plough up a pre-democratic order only to reward themselves with even more central power! Whereas previously the winner-takes-all system created a government that was checked by a range of informal but powerful restraints, these were now annihilated. The result left Blair with even more unchecked, dictatorial command than Thatcher.

Yet the reforms Blair presided over, far from being negligible would prove explosive in the absence of any overall new democratic settlement. The modernization he was setting in train used the flag of reform I advocated. But it would spell destruction not democracy. Appalled, I wrote Blair a blunt letter of warning. His chief-of-staff, Jonathan Powell, telephoned me to say the prime minister thought it a "good letter" and summed up my argument to me saying, "after us the deluge". I was asked to meet with the Lord Chancellor Derry Irvine. A strange encounter followed in the chambers Irvine had decorated with scandalously expensive wallpaper. He agreed, "The genie is out the bottle". This was not Blair's view. He told his party conference, "To those who say devolution has let the genie out of the bottle, I say, look at the Tories. They clung to the status quo; they do not have a single seat in Scotland or Wales to show for it. The enemies of the Union are the advocates of the status quo and the separatists alike. We have defeated the one and we will defeat the other". It was an argument for the continuation of the status quo in its Blairite guise.

As the way was cleared for the new Scottish parliament a special Newsnight programme was hosted from Edinburgh. Its main protagonist was Donald Dewar, the Secretary of State for Scotland, who like Irvine had been a colleague and supporter of John Smith. A rare, decent man he was to leave the government to stand for the Scottish parliament, to become his country's first First Minister. I was one of the chorus of commentators on the Newsnight programme and attacked the way the new parliament was being created without connection to any larger programme democratising the United Kingdom as a whole.

Afterwards, a pained Dewar reprimanded me, "you should not have said that, not when we have the opportunity of a programme going out to the whole country". He was clearly hurt. I felt abashed and tried to defend myself, he interrupted, "I am your strongest supporter in the Cabinet". It was a decent thing to say and perhaps meant to flatter. My heart sank: at that moment in

Edinburgh I knew for sure the cause was lost. There would be no new democratic settlement in Britain.

From my point of view a catastrophe was taking place. I had allied myself with politicians impatient with the old regime, eager for power and ambitious to make progress. I was right to appreciate their ability, drive and alertness to a changing world. What had gone wrong? My analysis in [Prospect in February 1999](#) was – is – that Blair's corporate populism had become the determining framework of politics, the successor to Thatcher's conviction politics that had usurped post-war consensus politics.

Gordon Brown and Tony Blair had embraced globalization rather than democracy, as the best replacement of traditional labourism whose proletarian form had clearly failed. They saw in globalization not what we now call the marketization of everything, or, to give it its technical name, neo-liberalism; at least not at first. As social democrats their ambition was always to improve, not replace, capitalism and here was a form of capitalism that was international, productive, socially emancipating and seeking regulation as well as de-regulation.

How would such an approach best be run? Blair's answer was to apply the model of corporate power to government, with market research leading back to a central board and chief executive, who then sell services back to the public who are treated as consumers not citizens. The manipulative populism of corporate capitalism managing public assent in a growing global marketplace became his model for the conduct of power. It explained the refreshing "can do" nature of his government in contrast to the aimless drift of the Wilson and Callaghan Labour administrations. It also meant it abjured the creation of any public institutions of a new kind. This applied to the EU also. It did not build on the French commissioner Jacques Delors's notions of social union that had inspired Labour in the 1980s. Instead, after 13 years of centre left government,

Blair's embrace of the market economy left Britain, as [Nick Pearce notes](), "without deeply embedded structural and political interests in the European project beyond those of the single market".

I got two things broadly right and one completely wrong.

In 1999 the Blair group was determined to limit the effect of its reforms. Jack Straw, the then Home Secretary and ever labile at expressing the agreed line, said "the more powers are devolved to parts of Britain and to citizens, the greater the need for a strong, small centre." A concerted effort was planned to ensure there would be a unified civil service across the devolved administration in Scotland and Wales and 'concordats' were proposed to agree administrative policies in advance while politically every effort was being made to control who was to become Labour's leader in each country – notably, at first, in Wales.

I predicted that, "if not in 1999, then before 2009, there will be first ministers and powerful mayors who are not the placemen of No.10 and that 'the system' which governs the United Kingdom will be changed". The strong, small, centralised world of Westminster power that Blair sought to renew is indeed now challenged by autonomous power centres elsewhere. No one has experienced this more painfully than Cameron. Obviously, his first experience of the new reality came from Scotland. And now it comes from Johnson who would never have been able to mount his challenge without being Mayor.

Second, I was also right to discern the corporate model as Blair's ideal. A decade later, writing his memoir, he told his readers the problem with government was not policy ideas but implementation.

> *Take the way a large company works today and compare it to a government department. In the company there would be a continuous reassessment, from first principles, of what the company is trying to do*

> *and how it is doing it. In particular there would be a relentless focus on system improvement through use of technology, perpetual analysis of the customer base and how its habits and wishes were changing; and a comparative study of what the competition is up to.*

"The point is", Blair continues, "that the way the world around us is changing means we can't afford to stay still. We have to stride out; and our method of politics is holding us back."

It's essential to my argument that the full implications of this high-energy aimlessness is seen for what it is – authoritarian capitalism. From the beginning Blair positioned himself as neither left nor right but as a moderniser; an approach Cameron and Osborne internalised. Stride where? Where does "modernisation" lead? Blair does not question the way the world is going by asking if it is just; that would make him a reformer of the left. He does not question if such striding might knock down valuable aspects of the past; to do so would make him a conservative of the right.

The aim of corporate populism is change that 'works'. The measure of success being the method of the restless, ever-accumulating global corporation (and Blair tells readers that 40 of the largest 100 economies are companies not countries). Applying his approach to Europe, Blair perceives the problem of the EU as being the need to project power, not express concern over its parliament and institutions. "For Europe the challenge is strength". The danger, "weakness". In an openly right-wing figure, such naked worship of strength would trigger immediate alarm bells. It doesn't with Blair because of his Labour origins. But the classic New Labour contrast of 'realism' against idealism goes back to a long trade union and Stalinist tradition of hostility to liberty, asphyxiating emancipation in the name of leader-centric discipline, only in Blair's case having freed itself from any loyalty to tradition.

Which meant I was wrong to assert Labour's continued embrace of corporate populism would fail. Blair's manipulative populism was closer to Thatcher's market-fundamentalist 'conviction politics' than to Keynesian 'consensus politics'. He was laying the foundation for the revival of a conservative government that would embrace his reorientation of the British state.

While most of the Tory party was thrashing around with impotent anti-European spasms and homophobic nostalgia for the era of Thatcherite sado-masochism, two of its ambitious MPs grasped that the Labour premier was showing the way out of their impasse. His manipulative, corporate populism offered a path for the right: socially tolerant, at ease with the world of money, confidently dismissive of the restraints of convention and ruthlessly focused on the exercise of power. It was an approach they could adopt without any of his residual loyalties to public welfare: Thatcherism with a human mask. In October 2005 on the eve of his election as the new leader of the Tory party, David Cameron had a dinner with a group of newspaper executives. He told them, "I am the heir to Blair". According to [Andrew Pierce of the Times](#), "if his hosts were in any doubt about what they had heard, Mr Cameron repeated the mantra". George Osborne was also at the dinner, "Mr Osborne, defending the heir to Blair boast, said: 'we have nothing to be ashamed of in saying it'".

It is well documented that Cameron and Osborne referred to Blair as 'The Master' and regarded him as their compass as they set out for Downing Street. They were bestowed with two gifts, one fortuitous the other eventually lethal. Gordon Brown finally wrestled the premiership he deserved from the comrade-in-arms who had deprived him of the prize. But Brown retained a sense of moral purpose and was an easy target for the Tory upstarts, unlike the predecessor they admired. Then came the 2008 financial crash. Brown had the judgement to limit the disaster nationally and internationally. He approved coordinated action to save the banking system from catastrophic meltdown. The combined result of the need to save the banks, provide an immediate fiscal stimulus plus the

loss of tax revenues, created a devastating deficit (the amount the government has to borrow more than it spends). As [Nick Pearce](#) eloquently puts it, Labour's biggest mistake,

> *was to overestimate consistently the growth in tax revenues during this period. It mistook the buoyancy of revenues from the housing market and the City for a secure, sustainable tax base. When the accumulated asset and debt bubbles finally burst, revenues from these sectors collapsed. Fully a quarter of all corporation tax derived from financial services before the crash, and this revenue fell from £10.3bn in 2007/2008 to £4.6bn in 2009/2010. Stamp and share duties fell from £14.1bn to £7.9bn... The UK's volatile tax base explains the size of its deficit relative to other countries that experienced a similar loss of economic output in the first phase of the financial crisis. In Germany, the general government deficit reached just 4.3 per cent of GDP, whereas in Britain it rose to nearly 12 per cent at its peak, even though Germany's fiscal stimulus was larger than the UK's.*

The young Tory leaders had urged on Brown's deregulation that led to the financial sector's meltdown. But they were able to turn the resulting deficit against him and did so with élan, positioning Labour as a "tax and over-spend" administration – a party that had not changed over the past fifty years. This made them appear to be a break from Labour and camouflaged Cameron and Osborne's embrace of Blair's corporate populism. But they were New Labour now.

In the longer run the financial crash will turn them into its victims too. The regime of austerity they embarked upon will not provide the growth needed to eliminate the deficit, something they have made the measure of their success. More important, 2008 has fatally undermined the premise of their economic

philosophy, that the market should be freed as much as possible from the restraint of government and regulation. Everyone now knows that, when push comes to shove, the government is relied upon to support a financial system generating unparalleled inequality and low rates of growth. To use an expression that was a favourite of Philip Gould, a back-room architect of New Labour's aspirational programme: today corporate populism feels like a busted flush.

By 'busted flush' I don't mean that *Remain* will lose. A full scale operation is being mounted to ensure the British population accepts currently existing reality and recognizes that whatever may not be good about the present circumstances, trying to alter them by "taking control" will make them worse, perhaps considerably worse. But the capacity to persuade the public to *believe* in the ways of corporate populism and lend it positive consent belongs to the past. A measure of this is the way that the magical ideologues of that era now seem like shady salesmen of low grade pornography flitting in their raincoats past the tables of our lives.

Tony Blair, having proved disastrously counter-productive in his efforts to stop Labour supporters making Corbyn leader, has been buried. The *Leave* campaign must be praying for him to break his silence. Peter Mandelson gave early confident interviews to the BBC to ensure the country came to its senses and when asked about his support for joining the Euro replied that never advocated joining, only that the UK "retain the option" to do so when, in reality, he had said it would be a "disaster" not to. [The Daily Mail](#) promptly exposed him. His once fabled ability to re-write history was shredded.

David Miliband, who the Blairites still hope will be called back to save the project, flew in from his exile in New York. His ability to strike a smart, colourful phrase has always distinguished him from the ranks of his grey colleagues. Applying himself to the Brexiteers [he accused them](#) of being

"arsonists" of the world order, risking the world's equilibrium at a time of danger.

Arsonists! From a creator (however junior at the time) of a system that has left the Middle East in flames. His pitch was about strength in a way that echoes his old boss. To *Leave* the EU would be to threaten "the international world order", staying "multiplies" the UK's power; leaving would be "unilateral political disarmament". Miliband told the [Evening Standard](#) "in politics it's really important to know the difference between what you think exists and what is reality. The best politicians can see where the world is going and apply their values to it, not start with their values and then apply the facts." This is essence of Tony Blair. Get real and stay real. As for applying "values", well, the key value *is* to get real and stay real. But what if that reality is not acceptable? What if it is inhuman? What if 'reality' is not acceptable, not just for those at the bottom of the heap but also for those who want to exercise self-government – even if what they want to do with it is right wing? The referendum has become an opportunity for the most serious challenge yet to the hegemony of corporate populism as a major country decides should it accept the existing terms of membership of the "international world order" as fate.

Maggyism

A short book by Mark Fisher, barely more than pamphlet length and ignored in the mainstream press, has considerable influence on the left in England especially among those involved in modern culture. Published in 2009, it nails the mental environment we live in as [Capitalist Realism](#). Fisher writes about how the young people he knows are "resigned to their fate… not [out of] apathy, nor of cynicism, but of *reflexive impotence*. They know things are bad, but more than that they know they can't do anything about it". He describes some of the pathologies and illnesses this can create and the way that social media can

stimulate but not resolve the longing for a way out that it is assumed the system will never allow to exist.

Those growing up through the naughties experienced the ubiquity of corporate populism summed up in Margaret Thatcher's original slogan 'there is no alternative' not as a matter of the wilful choosing of a policy direction by a political leader but as a description of the totality of their life chances. Condemned to a fate of insecurity they have become members of a new kind of class, that Guy Standing calls the precariat. The first humans of the digital age are less empowered not more, full of debt not hope. The solipsism of social media turns an entire generation into a networked Narcissus, paralysed by its collective self-obsessions. In the name of the 'free market' they are condemned to lives without effective agency. In a world where everything is turned into profit and loss in the name of enterprise and 'social mobility', actual self-determination becomes a long lost ideal, like the primordial freedom of hunter-gatherers that still haunts our genes.

To resist, Fisher calls for the creation of a public, general will – this was before the occupy movement. After publishing The Precariat in 2011, Standing drafted the Precariat Charter to offer direction to the generation whose economic fate he had named. In next week's chapter I aim to consider how the hollowing out of choice and the rebellions against this on both left and right shape the Brexit debate as a whole. Here I just want to focus on the politics of Michael Gove and Boris Johnson as they emerge as the leaders of the call to *Leave.* In different ways each decided there had to be a response to the crisis and found themselves, perhaps to their surprise, lined up against corporate populism.

There were already three right-wing lines of resistance on offer. The first was UKIP's dog-whistle racism, axing rejection of the EU on opposition to immigration as such. The second was the celebration of the 'Anglosphere' as an alternative 'imaginary horizon' to trading with the European Union. The third, an

embrace of Douglas Carswell's direct democracy, Carswell being UKIP's rogue MP and early defector from the Conservative party. All these alternatives risked marginalization if not ridicule or worse. The choice they took was a straightforward appeal to preserve Britain's historic democracy, the home of the 'national popular'.

When the official referendum campaign began on Friday 16 April, Boris Johnson made a keynote speech in Manchester under the shrewdly chosen banner of 'Take Control'. He turned on his opponents and especially, while without mentioning him by name, the self-proclaimed eurosceptic David Cameron, saying,

> *You know the most depressing thing about the campaign to 'Bremain'. It is that there is not a shred of idealism... they keep saying that they are eurosceptics, but we have no choice.*
>
> *We agree with you about the democratic problem, they say – but it's the price we have to pay. My friends they are the Gerald Ratners of modern politics. The EU, they say – it's crap but we have no alternative.*

Ratner ran a countrywide down-market chain of jewellers and infamously told the Institute of Directors in 1991 that he sold products so cheaply because they are "total crap". The share price collapsed as customers fled. Johnson is being unfair to Ratner, who did not want an alternative and was simply being honest. Cameron by contrast does regret association with the EU but argues we cannot afford to "quit". With respect to the Prime Minister, Johnson is spot on. In effect, he accuses him and his colleagues of *reflexive impotence. They know it is bad but they can't do anything about it.*

Johnson continued, "we do have an alternative, and it is a glorious alternative". This alternative is to carry on being what we have always been. Glorious or not, before we think about it let's look at what he and Gove have achieved. Simply by asserting there is an alternative to membership of the EU, that the way out is via the door, they have broken the spell of fatalism vital to the reproduction of the dominant order in which they have been notable players. What distinguishes them from their Cabinet colleagues is not euroscepticism, which is indeed shared, but their decision to act on it. The referendum has allowed them to take a pitch for self-government to the whole country: calling on British voters to take responsibility for our political future. It does not matter if you think their vision of how this can be done is incredible, or simply another way of reviving market domination over everyday life. The crucial point is that they have punctured capitalist realism in the UK and torn a Boris-shaped hole in its Truman Show hemisphere.

I say Gove and Johnson have done this. Nigel Farage and UKIP may have tried. The Greens want to try. The SNP has done it in Scotland. The English left is still in its Erehwon. What Gove and Johnson have done is make *Leave* a credible choice to millions of voters. By closing the gap between it and support for *Remain,* they have also made it possible for millions more to consider the possibility of voting with their heart not their head, to defy the realism of saying we can't afford the price.

Before the two of them turned the referendum into a close fight, the Anglo-British system was noisy but closed. The elites of all parties agreed that we had to be in the EU's regulated space. Those arguing against this were marginalized. For all practical purposes, there was a single reality. Now there is not. From the point of view of neo-liberal capitalism this is dangerous, for it retains its hold by obfuscating its origins as an ideology and making itself appear inevitable. The danger is lessened if the threat comes from a good pair of capitalist hands, but still.

For what Gove and Johnson have done is to demand democracy. Their kind of democracy to be sure, the crude English kind where winner takes all and accountability is the threat of being chucked out of power over-night; the democracy of elected dictatorship mitigated by the assurance that at some point the dictator will be peacefully unelected.

As Gove put it in his statement, and it deserves quoting at length,

> *My starting point is simple. I believe that the decisions which govern all our lives, the laws we must all obey and the taxes we must all pay should be decided by people we choose and who we can throw out if we want change. If power is to be used wisely, if we are to avoid corruption and complacency in high office, then the public must have the right to change laws and governments at election time.*
>
> *But our membership of the European Union prevents us being able to change huge swathes of law and stops us being able to choose who makes critical decisions which affect all our lives. Laws which govern citizens in this country are decided by politicians from other nations who we never elected and can't throw out. We can take out our anger on elected representatives in Westminster but whoever is in government in London cannot remove or reduce VAT, cannot support a steel plant through troubled times, cannot build the houses we need where they're needed and cannot deport all the individuals who shouldn't be in this country. I believe that needs to change. And I believe that both the lessons of our past and the shape of the future make the case for change compelling....*
>
> *Our democracy stood the test of time. We showed the world what a free people could achieve if they were allowed to govern themselves.....*

> *by leaving the EU we can take control. Indeed we can show the rest of Europe the way to flourish. Instead of grumbling and complaining about the things we can't change and growing resentful and bitter, we can shape an optimistic, forward-looking and genuinely internationalist alternative to the path the EU is going down. We can show leadership. Like the Americans who declared their independence and never looked back, we can become an exemplar of what an inclusive, open and innovative democracy can achieve.*

For Johnson, much more cosmopolitan and naturally European, the issue was less clear-cut at first. On 7 February, after the letter from the EU's Donald Tusk to David Cameron was published that set out the framework for deal, Johnson wrote in his [Telegraph column](#) that on sovereignty the prime minister had done better than many expected, "but how bankable is this?" he asked. Questioned on the [Andrew Marr show](#) after he declared for *Leave,* he explained,

> *in the days leading up to that summit and indeed while the summit was going on there was a huge effort, which I was actually involved in, to try to make sense of the so-called sovereignty clauses. And a huge intellectual effort went into creating this language by which we could somehow ensure that our courts, our Supreme Court, our House of Commons, could overturn judgements of the European Court of Justice, if we felt, if Britain felt, that they were in some way capricious, or were going beyond the treaty*
>
> *Marr: Exceeding their powers?*
>
> *Exceeding their powers, exactly. So finally we had some language that seemed to have some bite and seemed to work. I was very pleased with*

> *it. We went back to the government lawyers and the government lawyers said... they blew up. They said this basically voids our obligations under the 1972 European Communities Act. It doesn't work. We can't do it. That I'm afraid is the reality. You cannot express the sovereignty of parliament and accept the 1972 European Communities Act. There is no way of doing both at the same time.*
>
> *Marr: This is the moment when you decided which way you were going to go? When you saw that that sovereignty matter could not be resolved?*
>
> *We were told that we were going to receive fundamental..*
>
> *Marr: It's a specific question.*
>
> *Yes. The answer is specifically yes. We were told there was going to be fundamental reform, he didn't achieve that and I think that the lesson of the whole business has been that reform is not achievable.*

Writing later about the threat to steel production he said, "people sighed when I was going on about sovereignty but now you can see why, it is a matter of being able to take control". And when interviewed in the Times,

> *Johnson sums up what is at stake: "This is a moment of destiny for this country, it won't come round again, it's now or never. The fundamental issue is who runs this country."*

I am not saying that Gove and Johnson made their stand for intellectual reasons. They are politicians seeking influence, office and that nebulous 'place in history'. But both are surely able enough to know that you can't play the national card for purely instrumental reasons or for personal ambition alone. It is too explosive. 'Who is in control' and 'who runs this country' are about 'who we are' as a people, and 'what we are capable of' as a country, quasi religious forces that shape the point of being in politics in the first place. Loyalties conflict, and an intense mixture of motives, emotions and doubts swirl around – like a "shopping trolley" as Boris Johnson put it with his knack for vernacular. Then you nail your conclusion to the old oak door. After that, it's war. And while you might not have meant it so personally, once you have to fight for it you find yourself engaged in what is politically the fight of your life.

Among the first to enter the ring against them all daggers drawn was the Times columnist Matthew Parris, a personification of Britain's narrow political-media caste. Once a Tory MP, he became an exceptionally gifted chief political columnist for the Times in the 90s while, without declaring it to his readers, helping the then prime minister John Major find a suitable form of words. Major was at the time battling the eurosceptics.

Today, Parris is married to Julian Glover who was recently Cameron's speechwriter. He writes a Times Saturday indulgence in what was once the voice of the Establishment. His column [of 26 March] was a vituperative character assassination of Johnson for being homophobic, untrustworthy and superficial, "under-prepared, jolly, sly, dishonest", etc., etc. It had little effect. His column [on 16 April] gave the game away. Major, Cameron and their fellow Remainers always assumed that the *Leavers* would be a Farage-dominated coalition of nutters that could be crushed by the alliance of the powers they headed. They did not expect Gove and Johnson to be their opponents. Parris attempts to argue that indeed, really they are not. The two are naïve cover for the "pit bull terriers" of the far-right ("spittle-flecked zealots who want their-

country-back"); noble fools will find themselves consumed by the revolution they have called into being should they win the referendum.

> *Michael Gove has a humane fastidiousness that will in the end cause him to be cast aside — as in the end intellectuals always are — by the revolution. Boris Johnson is a cosmopolitan liberal: those knuckleheads are not his people and he knows it, which makes his collaboration with them the betrayal that it is. They will find him out, and he too will be cast aside.*

This is a political version of 'Project Fear', an attempt to terrify Conservative supporters of a liberal turn of mind that *Leave* can only mean a retreat to a xenophobic nationalism and that a vote for Gove and Johnson will not end up as a vote for Gove and Johnson. Need it be so? The power and patronage of 10 Downing Street will remain in place the day after the referendum. Should the Brexiteers triumph it will not be a storming of the Bastille.

It is not hard to imagine an uncontested Boris Johnson replacing David Cameron and immediately declaring a government of 'national unity' with German-born Gisela Stuart as Foreign Secretary and Frank Field in charge of welfare (both *Labour for Leave*); with Robert Salisbury deployed to pass his newly minted 'Act of Union' creating an English parliament and legislating for all four national parts to hold their own referendums on membership of a federal United Kingdom; and David Owen in the Ministry of Defence to replace Trident with his plan for a modest, technologically future-proof nuclear deterrent, thus saving the odd £100 billion and pleasing the generals at the same time. With the prospect of both full, federal rights and a Trident-free Scotland gaining the support of Nicola Sturgeon and Michael Gove, now deputy prime minister, continuing his historic overhaul of the judicial and legal system, what's not to like about this prospect for a liberal conservative?

In contrast to such refreshing right-wing possibilities, the potential of manipulative corporate populism seems struck down by lethargy. Its manipulations no longer convince. It no longer commands the terrain as a 'natural' force striding towards success since failing to deliver the growth necessary to proclaim its own legitimacy while being unable to restrain the greed and inequality of its 0.1 per cent. The financial crash has exposed its reliance on state support and blown up its ideological dissimulation that the market makes us free and all government a needless burden and exposed the hypocrisy of its attack on state 'dependency'. The European Union has its own, naturally more bureaucratised form of corporate populism, depoliticising decision making into a technocratic, professionalized process beyond the reach of elections. Democratic rebellion against this has to draw on the claims of the people to decide their own interests. Such claims are now being made across Europe in a wide variety of forms. In England, to everyone's surprise, perhaps not least their own, at the head of this movement in 2016 are Michael Gove and Boris Johnson.

Twenty-five years ago I helped launch an assault on the top-down, undemocratic nature of the British state, alongside campaigns such as Freedom of Information, Liberty and above all the Scottish Constitutional Convention. Considerable advances were made, Britain is now a country where people believe they have rights and seek to claim them; the national question and its democratic restlessness is here to stay; freedom of information was used to expose the expenses racket of politicians and the example is now spreading to the holy of holies, financial services and tax avoidance.

At the same time, to compensate for this disintegration a centralisation of power is taking place in the name of security. The second section of *Blimey, it could be Brexit!* will look at how the referendum is also lodged in the emergency reshaping of the UK state, whatever the outcome on 23 June. Across the turn of the century, however, New Labour could have drawn on the energy

for renewal to build the institutions of a European democracy in Britain. Instead, tragically, it embraced neo-liberal globalisation, the Bush White House and went to war in Iraq, separating itself from France and Germany.

When Labour left office in 2010 it had the chance with a new leader to confront the undemocratic nature of British politics, as the SNP and UKIP made it painfully obvious that the old order was on its knees. Although pressed by his advisors to do so, Ed Miliband spurned the opportunity and met his Valhalla. Now, finally, after more than a quarter century, leaders from one of the two main Westminster parties have raised the banner of democracy as a central matter of concern over the way we are governed. Thanks to the disastrous abnegation of the left, they are able to do so by calling for the preservation of the antique system of first-past-the-post and the absolute sovereignty of parliament! The absurdity almost defies belief. But while Boris Johnson and Michael Gove need not fear the tumbrels of UKIP, they are banging the drum for democracy in Britain.

The left will rue the day if it ignores or dismisses this development. Owen Jones had flirted with the idea of Lexit, a left-wing form of Brexit, then thankfully understood that the left wing movement of his own generation across Europe, the true opponents of Eurozone austerity, were aghast that anyone would want to 'leave Europe' when solidarity was at such a premium.

He can't accept however that the right have defined the terms of the referendum and they are having an argument for the soul of Britain driven by their own sincerity and experience, "we have no dog in this pathetic fight", he writes in his [Guardian column](), "Let's stick with those – like Britain's Another Europe Is Possible and Yanis Varoufakis's Democracy in Europe Movement – who have a positive, compelling vision". I am a supporter of these initiatives. But they do not exist in a parallel universe unpolluted by the actuality of the referendum taking place. To think that those on the left can walk away

untainted and choose its own Europe, without a word of recognition that the Brexiteers and millions who vote for them are genuinely engaged with "regaining democratic control of their country" as Gove wishes, is to walk away from the English left's own failure to engage with the state of democracy in Britain, and by so walking leaves its in the hands of the right.

Chapter 5

It's a bad referendum, as Obama discovers

Image: Whitehouse.gov

If you ever find yourself invited to have tea in the House of Lords you should accept. Without having to go on an odyssey you will share the experience of crossing the Styx. As you look up, figures from long lost newspapers flit past, wasted and barely recognizable, whose obituaries you assumed you had forgotten. "Is that… still alive.. "?

Perhaps the shades of the past are especially attracted to the United Kingdom; maybe a zombie legislator had the idea, in the belief that the country attends to geriatric opinion like his own. At any rate if you opened a copy of the Times on Wednesday 20 April, you would have found yourself addressed by a special letter from George P Shultz, who was US treasury secretary under president

Nixon from 1972-74, before most of the world's existing population was alive. Michael Blumenthal, treasury secretary under Jimmy Carter, and six slightly less antiquated one-time US treasury secretaries joined him. Their eight-fold ex-wisdom mobilized to inform the British public of the need to keep the UK in the EU, as a springboard for American interests and all-round world stability.

Also, "Europe has more work to do to complete its economic and financial union". This, they tell us, "is more likely to be successful with Britain inside rather than out". Ha! Supporting *Remain* to complete the union of the Eurozone is not a reason we hear about on this side of the pond. "A strong and resilient Europe, with Britain at the core...", they continue, apparently unaware that the [prime minister's deal](#) made sure the core is the last place the UK will be if we vote to stay. Their full, final paragraph reads:

> *"The interdependence and interconnectedness of nations has increased greatly and will continue to grow as we face hugely consequential transnational issues that no country, however powerful, can effectively address alone. These challenges include a paucity of global demand, financial crises when they occur, nuclear proliferation, pandemics, climate change and other environmental issues. A strong and resilient Europe, with Britain at the core, in our view would be an important force in addressing these challenges together."*

Thus do the undead of the Washington consensus, their bedtime bourbon shaking in their hands, rise as one to warn living Brits to be at the "core" of the EU – to help shield the world from the challenges of pestilence and "financial crises when they occur".

The letter is macabre, not because the grammar is strained, the presumption plain wrong that the referendum offers a place at the EU's core, or because it is

written in Skroth, but thanks to its ghoulish complacency. It is a chilling absence that freezes the brain. The challenges they fear do not stem from the architecture of world affairs, that the eight played a leading role in creating over the past forty years. Some of the threats they list are genuine. All are external to their system. None originate with the hollowing out of democracy, the loss of legitimacy, or the grotesque growth of inequality they helped orchestrate since the start of the seventies. It would be another matter had their letter begun, "We apologize for the failures we have overseen but appeal to the British people not to make them worse".

Some chance! There has been a tsunami of official warnings and authoritative overviews against Brexit at the launch of this week's official start of the referendum campaign, headed by two assessments from the IMF and the British treasury. All are designed to convince the British public to submit to the realism of the actually existing world: to embrace not resist, let alone vote to *Leave,* the ineluctable processes of the status quo.

Barack Obama reads Boris Johnson

This was the argument of President Obama, made with his elegant cool. Pull out if you want to, but you'll go to "the end of the queue". He might have added, "make my day". His use of "queue" rather than the US "end of the line", signals a prepared answer. Naturally, there was no note of contrition from the young Barack. But there was a note of distinction. Watching the press conference live-streamed, I felt a pleasure in listening to him for one particular reason apart from his compelling style. In so far as an outsider could, he actually engages with the argument.

He preceded his arrival in the UK with an op-ed in [the Telegraph](#) in which he breaches the Fawlty Towers fatwa and mentions the war: how we had fought it together, etc. This was met with a counter-blast from Boris Johnson [in the Sun](#)

who opened by admonishing the US president for removing Churchill from the Oval Office, at least by implication:

> *"It was a bust of Winston Churchill – the great British war time leader. It was a fine goggle-eyed object, done by the brilliant sculptor Jacob Epstein, and it had sat there for almost ten years. But on day one of the Obama administration it was returned, without ceremony, to the British embassy in Washington. No one was sure whether the President had himself been involved in the decision."*

The passage is typical of Johnson's skill: vulgar art criticism ("goggle-eyed") to pretend he has the aesthetics of the common man; cultivation –knowing who the sculptor is (something Cameron is probably devoid of); insider's information, that it is part of the government art collection; a journalist's care not to point the finger directly when he does not know for certain; flashing an ankle, suggesting he does.

Johnson's article then deploys two themes. First, that the US would never dream of sharing its sovereignty, let alone pooling, neigh nearly dissolving it, as Obama is asking the UK to do. Johnson lists elementary international conventions; from the law of the sea to the rights of the child that Washington refuses to sign as they offend its self-regard. He then points up the deeply undemocratic nature of the EU, its command over law making and the consequential British impotence:

> *"can we have "influence" in the Brussels commission, when only 3.6 per cent of Commission officials come from this country?*
>
> *Can you imagine the Americans entrusting their trade negotiations to a body that comprised only 3.6% Americans? The idea is laughable.*

He concludes by calling on the spirit of Obama himself:

> *"I think it is time to channel the spirit of the early Obama, and believe in Britain again.*
>
> *Can we take back control of our borders and our money and our system of government? Yes we can.*
>
> *Can we stand on our own two feet? Yes we can.*
>
> *Can we build a new and prosperous relationship with the rest of the EU, based on free trade and intergovernmental cooperation? Yes we can.*

Can we speak up for the hundreds of millions around the continent who also feel estranged from the Brussels project? Can we once again be the champions of democracy? Yes we can.

And by doing all those we can thrive as never before – and therefore be even better and more valuable allies of the United States."

In some personal responses I received to last week's section of Blimey, on Gove and Johnson, I've been told I've been too generous to them. All I did was allow them a hearing. Doubtless, President Obama had as little time for Boris Johnson as I had. But an exceptionally popular politician, a Tory mayor of London for eight years who avoided any major scandals (unless you count his permissive vandalism of the entire city), an ambitious man with the nerve to spurn the offer of a high office of state, has now thrown down a challenge to the entire world order. He might even win. What does Obama do? He deploys what Paul Hirst called *American seriousness* – something George W "I don't do nuance" Bush catastrophically lacked. Obama actually reads the Johnson article.

What a relief! None of the parties to the UK debate so far have extended this respect to the other. Many on the left are justified in complaining about 'the media'. Reporters often do not read a speech but ask 'what is the talking point', tweet that and then report the coverage; getting high off the froth of the media torrent. But today, the full texts, often quite short, are available at two clicks of a search. Reading is not a matter of believing, it need not stop you sneering, but it is essential to measuring what is going on. At any rate, Barack Obama teaches the English left a lesson in this respect. He takes the Mayor seriously.

In his press conference, Obama went out of his way to reassure everyone about Winston Churchill. How he had a bust of him outside his private office that he looked at "every day", how he "loved the guy". A likely story, the point being he

would not concede the shibboleth to the Brexiteers. He responded to Johnson's main point: "All of us cherish our sovereignty – my country is pretty vocal about that". It was not a formulation that David Cameron, standing next to him, wanted to repeat.

But America too, Obama argued, felt constrained by the rule-bound arrangements it entered:

> *"after World War II, we built out the international institutions that, yes, occasionally constrained us, but we willingly allowed those constraints because we understood that by doing so, we were able to institutionalize and internationalize the basic values of rule of law, and freedom, and democracy, that would benefit our citizens as well as people around the world.*

And later in reply to a question:

> *"And what I'm trying to describe is a broader principle, which is, in our own ways – I mean, we don't have a common market in the Americas – but in all sorts of ways, the United States constrains itself in order to bind everyone under a common set of norms and rules that makes everybody more prosperous…. It meant that on occasion we have to persuade other countries, and we don't get 100 per cent of what we want in each case. But we knew that by doing so, everybody was going to be better off – partly because the norms and rules that were put in place were reflective of what we believe."*

Being smart and focused, the president is aware this only appears to answer Boris Johnson's case; which is not that the UK shouldn't enter into sovereign

agreements that constrain it, but that the US would never subordinate itself to a legislative system that shackles it. A different order of magnitude is involved. So Barack Obama advises – no, instructs – the Brits to abandon any such way of thinking:

> *"if I'm a citizen of UK, I'm thinking about it solely in terms of how is this helping me, how is this helping the UK economy, how is it helping create jobs here in the UK – that's the right way to think about it".*

Which is very generous of him. The British must approach membership of the EU instrumentally and not as a matter of principle. He also adds, endorsing the prime minister's corporate populism, "as David said, this magnifies the power of the UK. It doesn't diminish it". Nonetheless, while Johnson's central argument is skilfully stepped around, the mayor was listened to and got a dignified answer from POTUS himself.

There was an immediate, lavish hallelujah from the [Guardian's Jonathan Freedland](), at the arrival of a surrogate leader of the left (in British terms) able to embrace *Remain* wholeheartedly. Obama, Freedland claims, shows that Johnson's argument that the US would never accept the same loss of sovereignty, as Britain is "silly", for we are small and they are huge. Also, "as Obama explained in Downing Street, the US does trim its sovereignty when it suits its purposes". As Johnson points out, the UK is not so small. Also he is clearly not opposed to making sovereign agreements, which necessarily limit the country thereafter. It isn't him who is being silly; he just wants the authority to make such agreements in the first place, not have them imposed by the EU.

I'm for *Remain* as a European, but there is a hugely important democratic case for *Leave* that must be addressed, not denigrated. Otherwise the left will be unable to revive political life in England after June. Freedman's conclusion

signals why. He states that the Brits have to do what the American president says: "we need to stay in the marriage we're in, even if sometimes it feels a little loveless".

What a way to advocate remaining in the EU, as a loveless but necessary marriage! It's handy as a way of sidestepping sovereignty and democracy and typical of mainstream advocacy of *Remain*. I recall arguing with Freedland back in the nineties when he persuaded the Guardian to endorse republicanism and the abolition of the monarchy. It was tilting at symbols, I argued, to focus on the crown; the U.K. needs a written constitution to which the head of state swears allegiance. Whether or not that person is hereditary is secondary. The core constitutional argument has to be that Britain becomes a modern democracy in which all citizens can participate, and therefore believe in. To take the argument on, this is the precondition for sharing sovereignty successfully; which is why it is the only way out of the impasse the referendum represents. As a republican Freedland spoke out for a British solution, and that was great. What is depressing, doubtless for him too, is that on this occasion apparently only a foreign leader can make the case against Brexit effectively. Isn't this a shameful sign of desperation, especially for the left?

Obama lavished the Queen with praise calling her a jewel. Freedland ignores this and instead, spends paragraphs attacking Johnson for being a racist rather than on the issue of democracy. This was over the Mayor's reference to Obama's ancestral Kenyan father. Johnson lauds his own Turkish ancestry and plays with racism but seems less prejudiced than many Tories. The serious point of his barb was to suggest that Obama had inherited anti-British sentiment from his family's colonial experience – as if this was unjustified. Within less than ten years of liberating Belsen, British forces were building concentration camps in Kenya. Even if their victims were mainly from the majority Kikuyu, not Luo (like Obama's grandfather, although he was apparently imprisoned and tortured), Obama has every right to feel animus towards the

British Empire and regard Britain as lacking the moral fibre to face up to its past.

What we need is a prime minister who takes the opportunity to apologize for what the country did in its former colonies. When it was revealed just this month that Cameron's family had benefitted from using Panama as a tax haven, he went on television and said he loved his Dad. So let's be personal. He should have said that he apologises for what his father's generation did to the land of the US president's Dad. And what Boris Johnson should really have been called out for is the imperial nostalgia of playing the Churchill card. There was no excuse of any kind for the British Empire after 1945 – and it is outrageous to advocate the fine principles of self-government and democracy and then wrap them in its flag, as the recent Brexit video does shamelessly.

The Treasury

Obama's intervention was the lightening that accompanied the thunder at the start of the *Remain* campaign. The government has now laid down how it intends to fight the referendum. Forget Cameron's deal; don't talk about democracy; preferably don't talk about Europe either – make it clear that *Leave* is a high risk, high cost, dead end. The case is set out in the Treasury Analysis of the long-term impacts of leaving the EU. An analysis of the short term impacts is promised as well, it's timing doubtless to be determined to ensure maximum impact. The 200 page detailed analysis of the U.K. economy long-term, projects a cost of leaving the EU to be £4,300 a year for every household - in fifteen years time. Given the un-measurable uncertainties of the present global economy, this is daft. It feels as if someone, somewhere said, "whatever it is, double it".

In terms of the *Remain* strategy, it will work if it gets across to the public that they will be poorer if they vote *Leave.* This is not a dishonest conclusion. But

the Treasury document stinks of *Remain's* bad faith. The Chancellor himself introduces the document in a signed foreword. He tells us he has an obligation to lay the facts before the economic public, as part of his "duty" is to deliver economic security and higher living standards. He agrees,

> *Of course, there are many factors to weigh – not just the economic ones. Does Britain want to continue to be a country that faces out to the world? Do we want to be promoting our case at the top table of the world's institutions? Is our national security best served by retreating from the world?*

Apart from the economic costs, apparently that's it. In three short, loaded questions George Osborne disappears the factors of democracy, sovereignty, and influence over decision-making that are at the heart of the principled demand for leaving the EU, not to speak of border control over immigration. Osborne is always reported as being highly political and calculating. His decision is to eliminate these "factors" from the ones the government recognizes as relevant for the public to weigh. In a sly way the non-factors are addressed in the document, which reports, "the UK has significant influence over EU decision-making and the rules associated with the Single Market". It is a blatant decision in a government report to redefine the battleground.

The Treasury quotes with approval the IMF and the Bank of England. Its summary of their views can stand for the official case:

> *"In the April 2016 World Economic Outlook, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) highlighted that a UK exit from the EU would do severe regional and global damage by disrupting established trading relationships." The IMF also said, "A British exit from the European Union could pose major challenges for both the United Kingdom and the*

> *rest of Europe. Negotiations on post-exit arrangements would likely be protracted, resulting in an extended period of uncertainty that could weigh heavily on confidence and investment, all the while increasing financial market volatility."*
>
> *In discussing the implications of a vote to leave, the Bank of England's Monetary Policy Committee noted that "Such a vote might result in an extended period of uncertainty about the economic outlook, including about the prospects for export growth. This uncertainty would be likely to push down on demand in the short run."*

A Jurassic referendum

If we pull back from the Brexit debate as it has been launched and is likely to play out for the next two months, it's seems strangely archaic. It is as if Westminster politics has created a Jurassic Park in which natural extinction has been genetically upended. On one side, the great machinery of 1990s corporate power – the IMF, the Treasury, the EU and the White House – acting with arrogant entitlement. On the other, leaders of Brexit calling for the reconstitution of national sovereignty and the democratic liberation of Europe as if it was 1940s all over again. The former, like all oligarchs, do not believe their power should be democratically accountable and refuse to even answer demands that it should be. The latter, call on us British to "stand on our own two feet" as if these were not bound by ludicrous institutions like the House of Lords and first-past-the-post elections that horrify democrats across the continent.

How can such a choice energise the majority of the British public? Those who feel that, like it or not, the UK must stick with its unhappy marriage, will assent to the institutions of the world order. Those who have the hooligan spirit to say

"up yours" to the institutions (and any immigrants who come to hand) will do so defiantly. But those generally disenchanted with politics, or who are pro-European and not 'pragmatic eurosceptics' like Osborne and Cameron, or are young at heart and in mind and looking for change, are they going to be inspired by Jurassic replicants?

A comparison with Scotland reveals how out of sorts Anglo-Britain is. Not for the London media, which is part of the malady, but for those who lived in Scotland, its 2014 independence referendum was a blessing. In an article on [Corbyn's Golden Opportunity,](#) I set out how there are good crises of growth and development and bad crises of decline and entrapment. The Labour party might be going through a bad crisis but the forces seeking democracy across Britain were having a good crisis, I argued, and the two had met in the Labour leadership election. The golden opportunity for Corbyn and his supporters was the chance to face outwards to the democratic opportunity rather than inwards to the bad crisis of Labour in Westminster. In a similar way there are good referendums and bad referendums. Good ones that release a positive, transformative force, as a country assesses its place in the world; bad ones that lock in the forces that need to be released or, worse, give another twist to an integument of loss, leaving everyone dissatisfied. Scotland had a good referendum. So far, Anglo-Britain is having a bad one.

In Scotland in 2014 there was a genuine engagement across the public. Turnout is only one measure of how profound it was: at 84% the greatest since universal suffrage in the UK. I'm not saying there was not pain, or hurt, or division in Scotland. But it was the pain of living, not the misery of witnessing a receding tide of self-belief. The country visibly grew during the experience, and afterwards as a result of it. The nation rejected independence yet in doing so it became less 'British' and more itself. I am told this is being confirmed by the current Brexit referendum. In part because Scottish parliament elections are

taking place in May, the EU referendum seems like the US presidential race, important for Scotland but not belonging to or taking place there.

One account from an outsider provides a witness of the impact of the 2014 north of the border. Niki Seth Smith is a young Englishwoman who was living in Edinburgh at the time. In an essay in [Resist!](#) edited by Ray Filar, Seth Smith recalls:

> *"the 2014 Scottish independence referendum was the most important political event yet for my generation of young people in Britain. Not only that: it was a harbinger of the kind of politics we can expect for the future, not only in the UK but also Europe-wide."*

She writes about how it restored public spirit, how the country would have said YES to independence were it not for its pensioners, who voted 77% for NO. She describes the striking absence of nationalism among the young as they mobilized,

> *"young people have pushed hard to rejuvenate civil society and democracy in their nation, seeking independence in order to ensure greater solidarity with those living in Scotland and beyond its borders…"*

There is little likelihood any young person will recall the Brexit referendum in these terms. I went to Scotland for the vote itself and experienced the moment. What was striking was the relative lack of cynicism. There were those longing for a YES. There were others who set their face against this. Among them, many who felt that Scotland is distinct and will become independent but not yet. 'The Vow' reinforced their incremental instinct. As voters were put off by the

complacency of the pro-British campaign and swung towards embracing independence, all three main Westminster party leaders, including David Cameron, put their signatures to a 'Vow' published in [the Daily Record](). The London leaders solemnly asserted that the Scottish parliament "is permanent" (thus blowing a hole below the water line of the absolute sovereignty of the Westminster parliament) and pledged more home rule for the Scots. It swung the day. This was a serious country considering how far to take its future into its own hands, being made a serious counter-offer to full separation.

Proof of the renewal was the boost in membership enjoyed by the SNP, its capacity to recover after losing the referendum, including making the most difficult of all transitions: from a charismatic founding leader to an even more popular and equally hardheaded successor. Further proof is likely to come in the shape of Labour losses in next month's May elections of the Holyrood parliament, as Labour is the old establishment. Today the country is experiencing a cultural and political revival.

If the first week of the official referendum campaign is the predictor, a similar rejuvenation seems unlikely in England after the referendum. It *could* happen, as opinion is volatile. Both sides of the campaign are seeking out the kind of support that will snowball and galvanise the public. Why isn't it likely given what is at stake?

In the last chapter I pointed out that Gove and Johnson are defying "reflexive impotence" and seeking to lead what is in effect an anti-systemic movement. Yet they do not apply their eloquent arguments against the oligarchic nature of the unelected inhabitants of the European Commission to the upper chamber of Britain's own parliament. They are improbably mobilisers of democratic opinion, as both men appear to support even more competitive and antisocial capitalism in the UK. It makes the job of supporting Brexit from the left, which is essential if there is to be a take off of popular energy, er, difficult. As those

who try are finding. John Mills makes an [honourable, practical case](#). Aaron Bastani does his best in his Novara video, [Why the left should vote to leave the EU](#). Both make the point that the EU is not an inter-governmental body; it's a supra-national one that makes its own laws. For Bastani it is an un-reformable, undemocratic, corporate capitalist cabal. What should the left in Britain do about this? Well, "we are washed up" so we had better "pull our socks up". As there is no prospect of a socialist Germany, without which reform of the EU is impossible from within, the English left has no alternative but to create socialism from without, here in the UK. No, it does not fill me with confidence either.

Arguments should be judged on their merits rather than their friends. But take this blast at the *Remain* campaign by another supporter of *Leave*. He attacks it for being backed by "large corporations and big boys of the CBI, the big banks and the oil companies, funded by Goldman Sachs and supported by the European bureaucracy". Enough, surely, to set the leftist heart racing and heading for the streets. But hold on, I'm quoting [Liam Fox](#), who goes on to praise the example of Donald Trump similar appeal to all those who feel "let down".

Now UKIP's Nigel Farage is looking leftwards too, not to Trump but, ironically perhaps, to Europe. His [Sky interview](#) with Dermot Murnaghan shows how he is already thinking beyond the referendum, calling for the transformation of UKIP into a party modelled on the 5 Star movement in Italy, abandoning its old fashioned methods of membership for modern organising through the internet, and appealing to young people. Like almost everyone I have underestimated Farage. Here, he is speaking as a man gaining more Labour voters than Tories and seeking to expand his inter-generational appeal. It may be that he already regards the referendum as lost, with Boris unable to win Labour and UKIP voters, and aims to build on the *Leave* vote to challenge the conservative establishment. The problem UKIP will face reaching out to Bastani's generation

is that, just like the 5 Star movement, younger activists do not want to 'Leave Europe' even when fiercely opposed to the Euro as the denomination of austerity. At least, not yet. There is potential for an inventive, high-energy anti-Brussels politics in the UK, but it can't be won to leaving the Union altogether in the next few weeks because, as the Scottish example shows, most young people want democracy but are not nationalist.

Because they want democracy they are not rallying to the cause of Cameron either, and his manipulative, corporate politics. An effort is being mounted to create a separate movement for staying in: Crowdpac UK want to enthuse people about being in Europe; Another Europe is Possible is campaigning for a British *Remain* in a reformed Europe of social justice and democracy. DiEM 25, which I support, wants a radical, democratic transformation of the EU (a case set out by Yanis Varoufakis). But can any of these fine efforts get around the fact that a vote to *Remain* is a vote in favour of Cameron, Osborne and the Treasury – not to speak of Washington, Berlin and Brussels itself?

The referendum is less a choice less about how to move forward than how to keep the lid on. From a democratic point of view, Brexit "would return the UK to its pre-modern constitution" as Simon Deakin points out, while *Remain* would subordinate the UK to European oligarchs intent on austerity. Meanwhile, the lid is shaking, the pot below is heating up, and the stove itself is in need of fundamental repair. Next week I will look at the larger context of disenchantment with politics through the nineties and the early years of this century followed by the rebellions in the wake of the financial crash. Developments in Scotland are part of this as is the fact of the Brexit option being put to the vote. Both the good and the bad referendums have to be situated within the rebellions against the political caste and their vested interests now taking all kinds of forms. After sketching this context it will be possible to turn to Europe itself: what is wrong with it, and can it be put right? Then, finally, I'll be ready to ask what Labour and the English left generally

should do to emerge smelling of the future from the noxious putrefaction of choosing between 2016's *Leave* or *Remain*.

Chapter 6

Maddening times

The Financial Times columnist Martin Wolf is a clear-eyed analyst of economic affairs and a critic of the way they are regulated. When it became clear that the British might vote *Leave*, he concluded that to do so would be "mad". His judgement has echoes of the prime minister's description of UKIP as "fruitcakes, loonies and closet racists", shortly after he became Tory leader, and Cameron's close ally describing the Tories who wanted a referendum on Europe as "mad, swivel-eyed loons". The two diagnoses of craziness are different. David Cameron was making a personal attack on those who "bang on" about Europe and sovereignty. Wolf was assessing the potentially imminent consequences of Brexit in terms of the UK's economy and its role in international affairs. Cameron condemned people; Wolf, a policy.

Cameron joined the more sober approach when he co-authored an article in the Guardian with Brendan Barber, until recently head of Britain's Trade Union Congress, to proclaim, "For the sake of every worker in Britain, we urge you: vote to remain". Although he is an unlikely workers' friend, the Prime Minister used his new proletarian alliance to point out, as does Wolf, that all the main institutions and authorities of the global order share a similar sober view:

> *"independent experts, trustworthy organisations and friends of Britain from around the world. Whether it is the Bank of England, our universities, the trade unions, employers large and small in every part*

> *of our economy, the IMF, President Obama, our allies in Nato or the Commonwealth, the message is the same: Britain is better off in Europe."*

They couldn't, however, resist a dig at their opponents being nutty,

> *"Of course, the leavers say this must be some sort of conspiracy masterminded by shadowy international elites. All we have to say is: to have been able to bring even the two of us together today, these evil geniuses must be very good."*

How pathetic an insult to the intelligence of workers – and even Guardian readers.

Two things are going on here. The first is a refusal on the part of those arguing for Remain to take seriously and confront the core argument made by the Brexiteers about democracy and self-government, summed up in the phrase "taking back control". I have looked at this in previous chapters and will return to it later.

The second is about not rhetoric but what is really going on. Something is taking place that 'should' be implausible, if not inconceivable. How is it *possible* that a great conservative country, conscious of its role in the West and deferential to authority of all kinds, might say "up yours" to all official, received and expert opinion – economic, diplomatic, and political.

From the elite point of view, that up to 25% of the English, mainly the older, feeling defeated, often living in retirement clusters along low-grade seaside resorts should want the UK to 'leave the world' is not surprising. That they should have some political voice and be able to make a loud noise is part of the

'faux frais', the incidental costs, of ruling - if you are a member of the elite. But that Brexit is holding at around 45% support according to the polls; that it has two ruling party politicians: the cabinet's most able thinker and one time confidant of the prime minister, and the Tory's most popular star, as its leaders; that they are supported by around half of the party's MPs and a clear majority of Conservative voters; that they might even win! This should not be remotely credible.

Something is taking place that cannot be dismissed as "mad" or conspiratorial, as if the person asserting this is part of a healthy body of opinion with all parts in order. For there is a greater madness in the air. Multiple layers of dissociation crack Britain apart (and not just Britain). At the moment, the most significant fissure runs right through the country's historic ruling coalition: the 180-year-old Conservative and Unionist party of the Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, is *gespalten*. I use German to signal that a deep process is unfolding. I'm going to try and assess it.

The referendum is part of a worldwide rebellion against elites, establishments and political castes. The most striking way of visually capturing the political impact of these forces here in Britain is by bookending my assessment with two graphs: the first shows the dramatic collapse in party memberships since 1950, the second a surge in new affiliations since 2010. They are coming up shortly. But I discovered that presenting them opens a can of many delightful worms and other creatures, called the sociology of modern politics, on which there is a vast literature. Here I want to step back from the narrowness of which side of the referendum debate accused who of what, to situating it in the larger ocean of today's political sociology.

This concerns the relationship of at least five things: *civil society,* meaning the public of different classes and interests and their social organisation; *political parties*, how they organise and recruit and represent; *governing elites*, being

the leading figures in the parties, the governing administration, the political media, and key policy think tanks and organisations; *corporate power*, meaning the leading figures running the great financial, service and industrial interests; and *the state*, meaning both the civil and legal servants but also the weight of the relatively immense interests of the forces of order, education and welfare tax-raising, and the capacity to regulate.

Across the west there has been a double-movement dissolving the relationship between the elites of the post-Second World War era and their public following. First, the 1970s saw the beginning of a de-politicisation that accelerated for a full generation. It witnessed the end of mass parties embedded in their different classes and control of political parties being sucked upwards into a political-media caste which then sought to manipulate support from above. The impacts of this four-decade transformation, from 1968 to 2008 to give it symbolic years, are still making themselves felt. Since the financial crash a second, explicitly 'anti-systemic' set of movements, on both the left and the right, is growing which is challenging rule from above.

The long disenchantment that hollowed out the major parties was integral to the new form of domination. It looks at first sight as if the sense of impotence and powerlessness it generated and the weakening of loyalty was a consequence of failure. In one sense, it was. It measured the decline of an epoch. But it was also functional for the rise of corporate power and a measure of its success. For a transformation of the elites, a revolution in a way, took place. In Britain this saw the replacement of the old Establishment by a professional political-media caste that embraced internationalised corporate power. Tony Blair and David Cameron are both members of this slick caste. One whose loyalty is to globalisation and its revenues at least as much as to the people of its own country. Their supremacy is eased by people staying home rather than voting; their capacity to make policy from above assisted if their own political parties are weak and hollowed out.

By contrast, the surges of protest now bringing people into party memberships defy the fatalism and challenge the hollow legitimacy of the corporate order. They can take the form of rapid, active withdrawal of support for old parties, or the rise of new parties, or transformative insurgencies within traditional ones. A very early example of this double-movement of the long collapse of traditional loyalty and then the rapid rise of an 'anti-system' replacement, has been the takeover of Scotland's devolved parliament by the Scottish Nationalist Party (SNP) from Labour. So early, that the SNP is now in danger of becoming a centralising party of the traditional kind (some would argue it already is) in Scotland itself, even while remaining the most threatening anti-Westminster force in the UK.

What happened in Scotland was distinct – the consequence of a new parliament. In Austria, a fascist and a green have just eliminated all the other candidates to become the choice for Austrian voters in the final round of their presidential election. This is the first example of the complete elimination of all the traditional parties by external insurgencies from left and right. The phenomenon is not confined to small countries. Were Bernie Sanders and Donald Trump to have become the presidential candidates in this year's American election, it would be thanks to internal insurgencies overthrowing traditional elite party supervision on both sides. The fact that it seems to have actually happened on the Republican side is astonishing enough - and means that 'mad' is threatening to become the new sanity. But organisationally, the Sanders insurgency is less reliant on a demagogue and may prove the more lasting threat to 'the system'.

The decoupling of the public from the public realm over forty years, followed by revolts, protests and mobilizations against the old order since the financial crash, is the double backdrop to both the existence of the referendum in the UK and to the crisis of legitimacy of the Brussels system across Europe that is feeding back into the British decision. No analysis of the possibility of Brexit, no

debate about whether the UK should *Leave* or *Remain,* no decision as to which way to vote if you are a UK elector, no understanding of the range of issues in play or what is potentially at stake, is worth its salt without taking a measure of this double process. On the one hand, the extensive erosion of loyalty to, membership of, support for and participation in the traditional parties, their associations and unions; which permitted the new elites to be free of old-fashioned obligations and ties that bind. On the other, the sudden challenges to elite legitimacy as economic growth slows, which finds the governing classes surprised by their own helplessness due to their having discarded the machinery of loyalty that protected them. This is the environment at once poisoning and stimulating early 21st century public life. It is the context of the "madness". It is the breakdown.

1968-2008 The long rise of the neo-liberal cartels

We are now living in the aftermath of the failure of neoliberal, market fundamentalism that found its most naked government advocates in the UK, and its most complete institutionalisation in the European Union. That the two should be at loggerheads is one of the paradoxes of the referendum.

Today's failure comes after remarkable achievement. At the turn of the century neoliberalism was triumphant in Europe, after winning the Cold War, breaking the Russian economy and integrating Eastern Europe into the European Union. I stumbled on a handy way to illustrate the difference between then and now in America, in a comparison of 1999 with 2016. As a homage to Prince and his track 1999, [Isaiah J. Poole](#) writing on [Campaign for America's Freedom](#), looks at the year 1999 in the USA. He glimpses a golden moment. It was before the election of George W Bush, and the collapse of the dot.com bubble. (It was also the year, just to throw in a couple of factoids, when openDemocracy was conceived and massive protest against globalisation took place in Seattle, for the masters of the WTO still thought they could meet in convenient, urban

locations.) Poole notes that America "succeeded in creating a near-full-employment economy, wages were rising in a way that was not dramatically out of line with their productivity, and we did it without giving huge tax breaks to corporations and the wealthy". The contrast with today is striking. In 1999, the economy was growing at over 5%, unemployment was falling below 4% (3.5% among whites, 7.8% for African Americans), and median family income had risen 6% since 1995 with productivity up by 8.7%. Today, unemployment in the US is over 5%, median income has *fallen* to $66,632 (by $1,939 in 2015 dollars), a massive increase in top incomes has occurred, while the number of very poor has increased significantly.

Similar contrasts can be devised for the UK and the EU as a whole. We are all uneasily aware of the way such figures in the West register the story of this century's first fifteen years: the absolute impoverishment of many in some countries most; an exceptional increase in insecurity, especially for the young, along with indebtedness; a considerable increase in wealth of the well off; and a stupendous increase for the very wealthy. What is less generally recognised is that this represents an extraordinary *failure of government*. It is one thing for a market society to have slumps, downturns and crises, which will be met with stoicism by working people if they affect everyone. It is different when it extends impunity to owners, speculators and financiers so they can milk the downturn as well as profit from the previous boom. People talk of the current failure of the liberal elites. There is just as much a failure of the conservative right for allowing itself to be suborned by greed.

A young person growing up in a western economy in the 1990s may have seen no alternative to capitalism. But the ruling democratic system preened with apparently justified vindication over its embrace of human rights as Communism fell; the good had prevailed in a re-run of the war against the Axis powers, and now standards of living would rise thanks to market democracy. China was growing fast after its embrace of capitalism; Clinton's 'triangulation'

seemed less a lasso of hopes than an opening towards a new digital economy; the European Union was growing and deepening with a new, shared currency in preparation. There may have been only one future on offer but it was a future loaded with promise.

Compare this snapshot to the experience of growing up after 2010. Washington and London had lied about their reasons for invading Iraq. Nor had they lied in a good cause, but in the name of a 'war on terror' that continues to provoke rather than vanquish terrorism. Paris and Berlin collaborated passively. After throwing away its moral ascendency, the West's economic growth model crumpled with the financial system. The damage was limited by printing money, but you can't print credibility. And then there is climate change – as the planet burns, the rich tan themselves in the glow of unparalleled inequality.

Where did such a flawed governing processes come from, that led downwards from such a vantage point? Why did governments across the west, including social democratic and Christian democratic ones, act in concert to protect elite inequality at the cost of the public? The late Peter Mair has set out a devastating account in "*Ruling the Void, the hollowing out of Western democracy*". His analysis stretches back into the seventies. He shows, with a wealth of comparative information, how the last decades of the 20th twentieth century had witnessed "a gradual but also inexorable withdrawal of the parties from the realm of civil society towards the realm of government and the state". Mair emphasizes that the "withdrawal of the elites" was paralleled by citizen disengagement, with steady falls in average turnout, decade by decade. He describes the "passing of popular involvement" in political life. With [Richard Katz](), Mair identifies this as a shift from the original mass parties who represented 'their people' and mediated between civil society and the state, to catch-all-parties who seek to represent the 'whole people' not just their class and try to combine some of this with concern for the interests of the state as such, by becoming, finally, what Mair calls "cartel parties". These are in effect

extensions of the state itself and use its resources to help fund their reproduction. The process involved a downgrading of "the party on the ground" in favour of the party in parliament or government, whose leaders – this is a process he documents taking place across Europe – opted for "responsibility" at the expense of "responsiveness".

As parties drew farther away from their voters, they moved closer to each other: "What remains is a governing class". The process is supervised by the corporate media. Press and television that corrode belief in the kind of solidarity and social action parties depend on, thus intensifying the separation of political leaders from while sucking the life out of political parties. Their sensationalist coverage does more than undermine political loyalties. Its increases the dependency of leaders on the media. The process of pillorying them for their weakness does not function to weaken leaders, it functions to strengthen the hold of the strange dance of leaders and media. The mainstream media enhances its own role, generating a negative feedback loop so far as democracy is concerned. As party leaderships gain a premium through their disciplined relationship with the media, a political caste is created that becomes a symbiotic part of the state itself. Combined with PR systems that make it hard to remove minority parties from coalitions and you have a process that creates a self-serving cartel. This then finds its most complete expression in the appointments to the European Union, in roles untouchable by elections. Fatally, "publics and elites disengage from each other".

Mair and his colleagues were researching their far-sighted analysis in the mid-1990s. What I had diagnosed in 1999 as Blair's "manipulative, corporate populism", they had already seen as an international condition. A crucial expansion of the argument was set out by Colin Crouch in a 2004 Fabian pamphlet, *Post-Democracy,* which he turned into a book. He observes that although many more countries have become formal democracies benefiting from the rule of law, with elections that can change the governing party and a

relatively free media, increasingly politics becomes a branch of a superficial entertainment industry, proffering only small differences of techno-policy between the parties. Thanks to the penetration of market fundamentalism, the decline of trade unions and shrinkage of the organised working class, a hollowed-out politics is incapable of providing any significant alternative to the domination of organized capitalism,

> *"While elections certainly exist and can change governments, public electoral debate is a tightly controlled spectacle, managed by rival teams of professionals expert in the techniques of persuasion, and considering a small range of issues selected by those teams. The mass of citizens plays a passive, quiescent, even apathetic part, responding only to the signals given them. Behind this spectacle of the electoral game politics is really shaped in private by interaction between elected governments and elites which overwhelmingly represent business interests.*

He summed it up as "You can always vote but you have no choice". That was in 2004. Ten years later an issue of [Political Quarterly](#) tested Crouch's argument in the wake of the financial crash of 2008. Its authors found the process had intensified generating, as Adrian Pabst says, a "democratic despotism that maintains the illusion of free choice while instilling a sense of 'voluntary servitude'". Voluntary servitude, indeed. But to what? When market fundamentalism succeeded economically it could retain a legitimacy if not loyalty in this way. There is a passage in David Marquand's passionate philippic against the domination of the market state, [Mammon's Kingdom](#), where he discusses the dystopian nightmare of regular, quiet servitude without civic energy as a fear that goes back to De Tocqueville.

The decisive importance of Crouch's work was to see the rise of cartel politics as a consequence of neo-liberal marketisation. Free-market ideology explicitly repudiates the positive role of government in the creation of wealth, sees redistribution as a 'burden', persuades the public that tax is a form of robbery and regards state expenditure as a resource to privatise, whereupon the state can be charged rent. This permits an assault on collectivist norms and behaviour such that politics itself needs to be repudiated as an activity orchestrating the public good. In his study of neo-liberalism William Davies calls this "the disenchantment of politics by economics". It seeks to actively generate quiet servitude.

The strength of this system is also its weakness. Neo-liberalism of course valorises a strong small state for keeping order but it seeks to hide itself as a politics. Its ideology of the market presents itself as not being a political ideology at all. George Monbiot describes how he struggled with "the anonymity of neo-liberalism", trying to resist its systemic influence when it camouflages its existence. An entertaining example of its culture was the far-right Hollywood network, Friends of Abe: "The group, named after Abraham Lincoln, swore members to secrecy by adopting a line from the film Fight Club: the first rule of the Friends of Abe is you do not talk about the Friends of Abe". And in a network of trade agreements and above all the rules of the European Union, the predominance of the market was inscribed into 'the rule of law' so that it would be situated beyond politics. The flaw in technocratic power stems directly from the effectiveness of this approach – its denial of politics means it is unable to defend itself politically. Committed to an undemocratic corporate or cartel authority, it cannot advocate itself in its own name. This would require in effect taunting people with their servitude and the passivity that it demands. You can see a version of this weakness in the inability of the official *Remain* campaign to engage with arguments about democracy in the referendum.

British corporate populists, having lost their popularity, now find their dominance exposed to radical political challenge. What will happen after, as seems likely, they succeed in securing a vote to *Remain?* The shameless record of Blair, Mandelson, Brown, Cameron and Osborne, from their disastrous grand strategy and deliberate deceit of the Iraq war, to the financial crash, to the imposition of growth-sapping austerity, not to speak of Cameron's [lack of honesty](#), is laced through by fraud and greed. In the largest sense of the word, a corruption of the political system. Which is why even if they see off the challenge of the Brexiteers their Emperor's clothing will be draughty, exposed by their own side. As Michael Gove wrote in the [Telegraph](#),

> *"I can understand why there's cynicism about politics and the political class – there have been broken promises and dodgy dealing from some politicians in my lifetime which would make the Borgias blush. Insulation from the electors can breed arrogance and a sense of entitlement. Indeed one of the reasons why I'm campaigning for Britain to leave the European Union is to strengthen confidence in our democracy by making those in power more accountable."*

The Borgias live on; only today, unlike at the beginning of the century, we know about in some detail. A key moment for this was the [parliamentary expenses scandal](#), exposed thanks to the persistence of Heather Brooke, just before the elections for the European Parliament in May 2009, as the financial crash was underway. (It led Norman Tebbit, who had been Margaret Thatcher's campaign manager, to call for people to vote UKIP). In the UK, the historic, gentlemanly establishment, for all its old-boy privileges, prided itself in being lawful, punctilious and not greedy. Its replacement by a venal political caste that started in the 1970s triggered an overt toleration of abuse. Nicholas Shaxson's path breaking exposé of tax havens [Treasure Islands](#) was published in 2010;

and his ongoing work with the tax justice network is now vindicated by the Panama Papers. It was reinforced by The Great Tax Robbery, in which Richard Brooks exposes how the UK itself became a tax haven. David Whyte's How Corrupt is Britain? answers that it is systemic, from LIBOR rate fixing to appointments to the House of Lords. Above all, Owen Jones, in The Establishment: And How they Get Away with It (his title's present tense is exact), presents a sweeping account of the way British society is ruled for profit; while a more detailed account of one aspect of this, set out by Tamsin Cave and Andy Rowell of Spinwatch, provides a well documented (80 pages of footnotes) account, published last year, on the UK's £200 million a year lobbying industry (A Quiet Word: Lobbying, Crony Capitalism and Broken Politics in Britain). The disenchantment, fatalism and alienation encouraged by the marketization of politics can be lazy, superficial and cynical. The basis for it - 'that the system is fixed' - it also now justified by a growing body of careful research building a launching pad for active resistance rather than passive detachment.

This was the terrain of politics that witnessed the understandable collapse of party membership. The Conservative party now has little more than 100,000 active members whereas it enjoyed 2 million in the early 1950s, illustrated in a dramatic graph drawn up last year in a research paper by the House of Commons library:

Figure 1: Membership of the Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat* party 1928-2014
Membership, thousands

Labour touched a million at mid-century with a growing trade union movement attached to it. It fell from half a million at the end of the 1970s to around a quarter million, the Tories followed with a parallel collapse after the expulsion of Thatcher from No 10.

The graph is not a picture of failure but of success: the triumph of depoliticisation and the replacement of party membership by corporate methods. The Conservative Club headquarters in Knutsford, Cheshire stands as a symbol of this process; of the ebbing of the party along with the commercial renewal of the English right. It's a splendid listed building at the heart of the very affluent Tatton constituency south of Manchester, where George Osborne is MP. Four years ago it closed. A spokesman told the Knutsford Guardian, "It is sad, but to be honest the number of people who used it didn't make it viable... In the olden days these clubs were at the centre of the community". After standing empty, it has been taken over by OKA, which is about to open a showroom in it.

OKA is a high-end, global furnishing company co-founded by David Cameron's mother-in-law Lady Astor. An able businesswoman she and her two partners have built a very profitable business since founding it in 1999. There was a

moment of consternation when OKA hoisted its company flag where the Conservative Club's tattered Union Jack used to fly. For some locals it might just as well have been the skull and crossbones. They will probably be voting *Leave*. OKA is growing fast, selling its reactionary-chic interior range to the top of the world's housing bubble. Lady Astor is now worth many millions more than her son-in-law the Prime Minister – and will probably be voting *Remain*. In a previous, quite recent time, the landed nobility gained allegiance in every strata of British society through their place in the hierarchy of imperial loyalty, their Christianity, their military experience and then their shared war-time effort and sacrifice. Today, [Vanity Fair](#) reports she and her colleagues scour South-East Asia for well-made tables, chairs and textiles to sell to people buying holiday homes in Florida; and few equivalent loyalties are being created to bridge the growing divide.

Risings against the elites

After the 2008 financial crash it was a cliché among the commentariat to observe that left-wing parties were not gaining from the 'crisis of capitalism'. But this was because social democracy was fully implicated in it. Not least in the UK where, shortly before he became prime minister, Gordon Brown had celebrated his role in rejecting regulation of the banks and predicting the coming "golden age" of capitalism, just weeks before the first bank run in the UK for 150 years.

Instead, a series of risings in opposition to 'the system' started to lay a new basis for political opposition. These anti-systemic movements began in the Arab spring, ironically as an attempt to become like the Western democracies. Cairo's Tahrir Square inspired the Spanish *indignados* whose May 15 movement swept Spain's cities in 2011. Here for the first time a new form of mass opposition to the austerity and facelessness of 'Brussels' took to the streets, for example in the striking, vast anti-EU banner draped from one of the buildings in

Madrid's Puerta del Sol when it was occupied by the *indignados*. I have [described](#) previously the inspiration of going there. The Spanish example stimulated Occupy Wall Street, which achieved a crucial success from its tiny encampment of Zuccotti Park. Although it was on nothing like the scale of Spain's 15 May movement that saw cities occupied across the Iberian peninsular, Occupy's slogan "we are the 99%" broke the silence that neo-liberalism had woven. It named and politicised the grotesque inequality of the American system, which hitherto had seemed 'natural'.

It was also a response from the US left to the rise of the populist Tea Party that had began life in 2009 opposing Barack Obama's modest efforts to help those who lost their homes in the crash and to introduce public health care. Doing so under the banner of hating government, the Tea Party became an outspoken, anti-elitist, anti-systemic movement on the right. Without Occupy Wall Street there would not now be Bernie Sanders and without the Tea Party there would not be Donald Trump. Within five years, the early risings against the system have led to challenges to the US political system all the way to the edge of the presidential nomination. That this could happen so fast has been due to the American version of the corporate hollowing out of the party system that we have witnessed in Britain.

The UK had only a small and isolated simulacrum of the Occupy movement and the *indignados*. But a range of parties experienced a transformative surge after 2008. UKIP's came early and was a 'revolt on the right' that became an attraction for Labour working class voters with its attack on corporate power, as [Damian Hockney](#) predicted. The Greens grew from 10,000 in 2010 to over 60,000 members. The SNP expanded exponentially in Scotland after the referendum; it now has over 100,000 members in a country of 5 million is far and away the largest party in the UK relative to population, and may even equal the Tory party in total active membership fit enough to canvass. Labour then witnessed the extraordinary surge in members that swept Corbyn to the

leadership, for an explanation as to why, see *What hope for Labour and the Left?* by [Jeremy Gilbert](#), written early in the leadership contest. There is also the new [Women's Equality Party](#) with over 40,000 members joining in its first year.

There have been previous 'third party' experiments in British politics. (For example, the Liberal Democrats, who after growing to over 50 MPs thanks to their leader Charles Kennedy's opposition the Iraq War then threw it all away with the decision to become a European style neo-liberal, cartel party in the 2010 coalition). The transformative potential of the new wave of 'risings', suggests they will be different. This is signalled by the existence of the referendum.

First, it was directly precipitated by UKIP's challenge, which began to make significant strides around the same time as the Tea Party. In the context of the financial crash and the MPs expenses scandal of May 2009, UKIP gained over 16% of the vote in the elections to the European parliament in June and gained 13 MEPs. They then garnered nearly a million votes in the 2010 elections. As support rose again before the 2013 local elections, Cameron made his pivotal speech promising an EU referendum to stop Conservative support bleeding in their direction. (This fed the beast; in the European elections of 2014 the BBC gave UKIP major party status and with 27% of votes they beat both Tories and Labour).

Second, there was the indirect impact of the SNP. In the 2015 election it became clear to English voters that the SNP could determine whether or not Labour formed the government. The outstanding performance of the SNP's leader, Nicola Sturgeon, First Minister of Scotland, in the leaders debates, filled a significant number of English voters with fear that a foreigner would hold Labour's less decisive leader in her grip. The Tories discovered this on doorsteps and cashed in with gratitude. While UKIP voters ate into Labour seats thanks to Labour's refusal to offer them a referendum on EU membership,
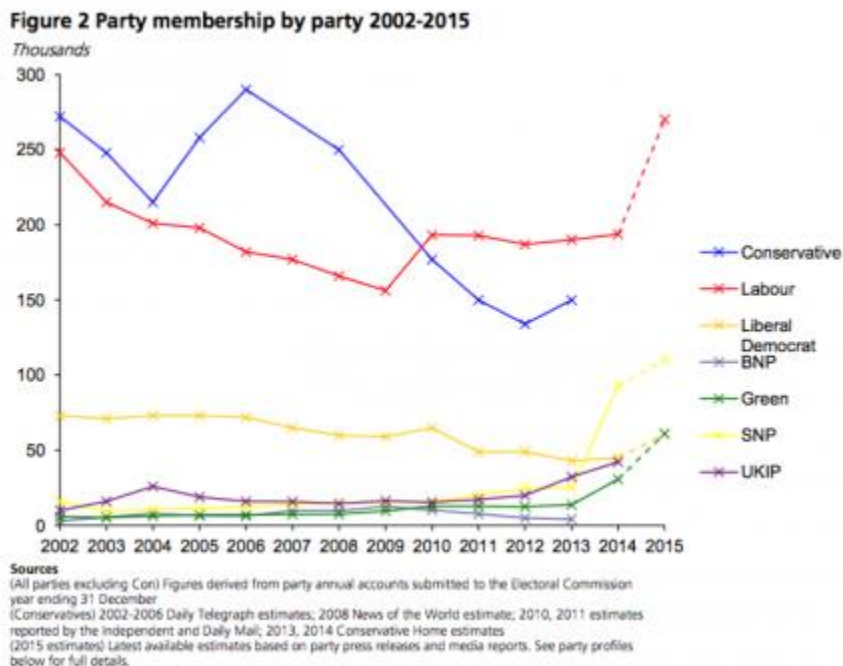
many of its supporters voted Conservatives tactically to keep out a Labour government 'in hock to Sturgeon'. Thus the SNP was critical to Cameron's narrow outright win.

Finally, after the election, Labour had to select a new leader. A rush of old Labour members keen to exorcise the New Labour era inspired young people to join as well. Instead of a dedicated pro-EU leader it got a long-time Left Euro-sceptic who united most of the Labour party behind *Remain* in such a low-key fashion that it could prove fatal for the government.

This triple impact suggests the referendum and its politics straddle the old political system and today's search for a replacement. Through UKIP and disappointment with what the Conservative party has become, it is rooted in the pre-corporate world of the mass party and its representation. At the same time it was instigated by Cameron, a corporate politician, as a device to squelch discontent through a classic caste operation, from above . Finally, it is taking place at a time of rebellion and influential risings against a failing neo-liberal system. The Blairite corporate view of opposition to the EU was that it represented the voices of those dispossessed by globalisation and 'the future', people who would have to give way to progress. But since there have been only pockets of progress since the crash, mainly in the form of unstable bubbles, and considerable flat-lining and frustration, the call for Brexit takes on a modern form as well.

How will the political risings that spell the end of the era of disenchantment with politics impact on the referendum itself? The first thing to note is the shallowness of Conservative support. When David Cameron won the election with an outright majority of 17 MPs in the Commons, after five years of a hung parliament and coalition, the dominant commentary hailed the return of stable government. But his support was built on just 37% of voters and declining party

membership. A good way to measure the Tory problem is by looking at a second graph of recent party affiliations.

Figure 2 Party membership by party 2002-2015

Thousands

Sources
(All parties excluding Con) Figures derived from party annual accounts submitted to the Electoral Commission year ending 31 December
(Conservatives) 2002-2006 Daily Telegraph estimates; 2008 News of the World estimate; 2010, 2011 estimates reported by the Independent and Daily Mail; 2013, 2014 Conservative Home estimates
(2015 estimates) Latest available estimates based on party press releases and media reports. See party profiles below for full details.

It seems that the Tory line went down not up after 2013, or stayed flat. It is difficult to make out the light yellow line of the SNP rising steeply and now neck and neck with the Conservatives. Before looking at the rise in support for other parties consider how can it be that the Conservatives managed to win at the ballot box with such a weakened membership.

The answer is that they won by deploying corporate techniques. One in particular: UK electoral law has very strict controls over how much can be spent per constituency to ensure candidates can't buy their election. But there is a loophole around expenditure on party propaganda that does not use any of the candidates' names. This allows for national billboards, for example, to be used without their costs being registered as part of the expenditure of the constituency they are in. The Tories exploited the loophole with a vengeance using millions donated to them by hedge funds. They mapped and market-

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researched 80 or so marginal constituencies street-by-street and then house-by-house. They identified each household that was likely to swing and categorised it by the kind of concerns its occupants were likely to have. The constituencies were then "blitzed" to use the word of a government minister with seemingly generic but actually highly focussed messages. Blitzed, that is, with laser-guided, political smart bombs. Or to put it another way, the Conservative party compensated for the decomposition of its membership base through buying the election by means of capital-intensive, focussed marketing. Ed Miliband's team thought Labour would win 'the ground war' thanks to its more numerous, youthful membership. They didn't realise the Tories had modernised aerial warfare so profoundly it had become a form of canvassing.

This helps explain the shallowness of support for the Tory leadership in its political battle over Europe; it does not have a motivated political party behind it. A danger for Cameron is that the referendum campaign cannot be influenced by the same kind of targeted aerial techniques as the election. But he does not have ground forces and Labour is not about to lend him theirs. The desperate use of government money to send a booklet to every household advocating *Remain* seems to have been an attempt to compensate. I say desperate, as the publication is so feeble, almost all meaningless pictures accompanied by weasel wording.

So the first thing to note is that while the Tory leadership and the *Remain* campaign have a coherent, corporate message opposition to which seems 'mad' from their point of view, they are lacking two things. First, the economic growth that should be accruing if they knew how to govern, from which to draw popularity and momentum, especially in the EU itself that they wish to remain part of. Second, the pick up and energy that comes from the internet insurgencies and networked politics that are marking out the future of politics.

A generational change is underway that is the opposite of high cost personalised mailing shots. A good description of what this is like is Adam Ramsay's account in [Precarious Europe](). He describes how his generation of political activists now turning 30 have, after ten years of not joining parties, started to do so. Indeed, some have become serial members of more than one. This is part of an international shift that will grow as ways of sharing experience are developed, especially from the Bernie Sanders movement in America. In their recent book [Inventing the Future](), Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams criticise the anti-systemic Occupy movement for being too focussed on the emancipatory experience of the 'struggle', creating a "folk-politics" unable to escape its limitations and challenge the system it opposes. They call for a much more ambitious left that can take on the modern world and its technological opportunities. This is already happening in Spain and now in the United States.

In 1980 Raymond Williams recognised the energy and self-confidence of what was not yet called neo-liberalism and observed that the left had "lost the future". For the first time since then, the right may be losing hope in the future while the left is gaining a forward-looking self-belief. A crucial way of understanding this is in terms of Mair's typology of what has happened to political parties. The cartel party is clearly failing as it has lost its capacity to manipulate populist support since the financial crash and subsequent economic stasis. The young people flocking to join parties are not seeking to participate in a top-down cartel run as part of the state. This must mean that a new type of party is being created; certainly being attempted. I'll call it the "networked party". It has leadership but is not hierarchical in the old way. More important the internet allows a wide variety of variable participation and does not entail the same loss of voice to discipline or collectivism that the mass party once did, while it does enable accountable representation. The boundaries of its membership are porous, with people flowing in and out at different times. It picks up the experience of Avaaz and 38 Degrees and other online campaigns

now honing focussing and messaging around specific issues with considerable effect, and combines this ongoing organisation and participation in elections with all the tactical issues that follow. They are the organisations of Castell's Networks of Outrage and Hopes, seeking to achieve gains within capitalist society without being reformist in the old, pre-utopian way, pitting, as Paul Mason has advocated, network against hierarchy. In the UK the development of networked parties of the left should be able to look to a highly feminised trade union movement for support. This will prove the major challenge that both the Corbyn and the Blairite anti-Corbyn wings of the Labour will face, one that at present neither seem capable of rising to.

A networked politics will not carry the same deadening predictability or sense of fate as the old two-party system and is likely to thrive off the marked rise of swingers, switching parties from election to election, as Jon Mellon of the British Election Study reports (hat tip Andrew Sparrow) and you can see from his graph:
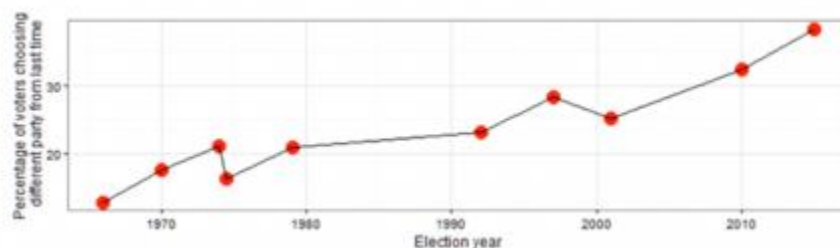
> *"swing voters are no longer a small section of the electorate who are being pulled back and forth by the parties, but a substantial chunk of all voters. This helps to explain why politicians have been so surprised by the sudden rise of new parties competing for groups previously thought to be reliable supporters."*

In the UK's general election last year, nearly 40% of voters switched their choice.

This graph too is a measure of the multiple revolts against the system that is the backdrop the referendum. Perhaps it suggests why leading politicians who are in power at the pinnacle of a traditional party of government feel obliged to put themselves at the head of a form of anti-system sentiment. Gove and Johnson may have made their decision thanks to Cameron's failure to achieve the deal they all desired. But in addition they are feeling consent slipping away. By 'consent', I don't just mean support, as in public support for their party. The ups and down of such popularity are part of the everyday life of electoral politics. Nor do I mean systemic disenchantment of the kind, which I have tried to show, the system they are part of benefited from, as it secured it through passivity. I mean they felt positive consent ebbing from the system, *their* system: from parliament itself, from the Tory party as such, from the House of Lords where they fancy retiring. They sensed the rise of a new tide and decided they would be stranded unless they picked up their surfboards and waded in.

I have heard Gove and Johnson being dismissed as "hacks". It maybe that we should see being a journalist as comparable to having been in the army in earlier times (think of both Churchill and Attlee). It was not so much that the military was a way of getting to know the Empire but that you internalised the spirit and judgment of fellow officers. Today, newspapers may be dreadful but they are also a profession and a way of getting to know 'the country'. It's a business necessity to train journalists to have a sense of what the public wants and how it moves. Without this a paper loses touch and will go under. Professional politicians without such a hinterland mostly towed the government line. But Gove and Johnson were formed in the experience of a more lively reality than parliamentary routine. There is a single media-political caste. But with it they are exceptional in that they straddle both as leading practitioners:

columnists and editors as well as ministers and mayor. They decided to stay closer to the way the public is moving, against 'systemic power'.

It may look incongruous to think of Gove and Boris Johnson as anti-elitists. It won't be if they win the referendum. Should they lose, as expected, the arguments they are making will live on refreshed even after a Brexit defeat. This will then pose a challenge for the left, and certainly the Labour party, if it finds that the most colourful and articulate figures on the right have parked themselves all over the issues of democracy, voice, accountability and self-government, while a fading Cameron government that carries on remaining in the EU, in the words of its Business Secretary, "with a heavy heart and no enthusiasm".

Chapter 7

The curse of Brexit: the referendum claims its first scalp, Scottish Labour

Scottish Labour leader Kezia Dugdale.
Credit: David Cheskin/PA Wire/Press
Association Images. All rights reserved.

The UK's 23 June referendum on membership of the EU is a European event and will have ramifications across the continent. Already it has had one clear consequence. The Labour party in Scotland has become the first victim of the Brexit referendum.

In a situation where centrifugal forces are at work, as is usually the case in Britain, being in the middle can be an advantage as forces press towards the centre. In normal times, last week's elections to the Scottish parliament in Holyrood would have seen Scottish Labour calling on everyone to 'pull together'

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(the classic phrase of a centrifugal system) after the country's independence referendum of 2014; and put the nationalist versus unionist conflict into its history box. But the times are not normal, they are [maddening](). The Brexit referendum acted as a centripetal shock in Scotland. In a situation where centripetal forces are at work, being in the middle means you get torn apart. The impact on the main party of the British Union, Labour, already reeling from the Westminster wipeout, was another body blow that may prove fatal.

I am going to interrupt the intended flow of *Blimey, it could be Brexit!* to look at this impact briefly. It's important enough in itself for the future of the UK, which is my major theme, but also it demonstrates the systemic significance the referendum is going to have.

Labour was driven into third place in last Thursday's elections to the Scottish Parliament in Holyrood – behind the Scottish Conservatives. Labour fell by 13 seats from 37 to 24. The Conservatives rose from 15 to 31. The SNP remained dominant with 63 seats, down 6 from 2011. For the foreseeable future, Labour will remain a marginal party in Scotland unless it merges with another force in an imaginative fashion. So far as Westminster is concerned, Scottish Labour is over and done with unless PR is introduced for elections to the House of Commons. Labour in Britain is now an Anglo-Welsh affair.

The Brexit referendum on its own did not cause this outcome and the interesting consequences that will follow. It was already likely and may even have been inevitable. The impact of the referendum was to accelerated it decisively.

It seems impossible to communicate to English people who have not visited Scotland recently how different the country is from the rest of the UK. It has different parties, a different political culture, a different parliament, and different energies and priorities. (One of these differences is that although

attitude surveys do not suggest Scots like the EU any more than the English, they are significantly less likely to vote *Leave*.)

The divergence became irreversible after the Scottish National Party became the majority governing party in 2011, and the British prime minister then agreed that they could hold a referendum on independence. Alex Salmond, the SNP's leader, and his team, however, were convinced that it was the "settled view" of the Scottish people to support devo-max within the Union, not full independence. Although the SNP itself desired independence, their judgment was that the Scottish voters did not, at least not yet. They were governing with this in mind. So when Salmond pushed for a referendum he sought a third option on the ballot… for devo-max.

David Cameron, doubtless informed on every detail by the intelligence services, sought to exploit the situation with the aim of crushing independence. He agreed to lower the voting age to 16 but absolutely refused to give Salmond the third option of devo-max. The idea was to force Salmond to accept inevitable defeat in a binary yes/no showdown – and thus secure the future of the Union.

As the Tories were very weak in Scotland, the 'No' Campaign had to be run by Scotland's Labour politicians, with Tory money. After furious campaigning, famously, the polls swung towards a 'Yes'. Then, orchestrated by Gordon Brown, the three main party leaders (Miliband, Clegg, and Cameron himself), signed a vow that promised Scotland its parliament is now "permanent" and that the country could have devo-max if it voted to stay. This meant that in the final week of the referendum campaign, the 'No' side could send leaflets into people's homes offering devo-max without the risk of independence.

Ironically, if Cameron had permitted a third option on the ballot, the SNP's opportunist calculations of playing both sides of the street could have rebounded on them. Labour might have supported devo-max, putting distance between itself and the Westminster Tories, thus gaining equal if not more credit

for the outcome than the SNP. Instead, by siding with the Tories in support of the Union, Labour lost the allegiance of its Scottish working class support. In last year's Westminster elections in the wake of the independence referendum, Labour was wiped out thanks to the winner-takes-all effect of the archaic, House of Commons, first-past-the-post elections. Now, in last week's election for the Scottish parliament, Labour lost every constituency seat in Glasgow, ending an era. As significantly, the Scottish Conservatives have become the official opposition to the SNP. Labour in Scotland no longer has an official role at all; it has joined the ranks of the smaller parties.

There has been an exaggerated celebration of the Scottish Conservative triumph in leading her party to a mere 22% of the vote, well mocked by Mike Small. The media have made their new leader, the charismatic Ruth Davidson, their latest darling thanks to her displacing Labour to become the main opposition to the SNP. She shrewdly played to her advantage her gay feminism, encouraging the media to project her as authentic rather than posh and therefore less cruel and entitled.

But it was the Brexit referendum not Ruth Davidson that twisted the knife into Labour's hopes.

Suppose it had not been called. Any argument about holding another referendum on independence would have been confined to *within* the SNP. Thanks to the experience of 2014, devo-max has ceased to be the settled will of the Scottish people and became the unsettled outcome. The process of the referendum created a situation, as I noted in Chapter 5, where a clear majority of young people are for independence, but found their votes overwhelmed by a geriatric endorsement for staying within the Union. The call for independence still has a lively future, therefore. However, the referendum's clear result is fresh and barely 18 months old. The larger public will not thank anyone for disrespecting the outcome. Its new powers have anyway not yet been

transferred in full to the Scottish parliament. Nicola Sturgeon and her team now leading the SNP are more than justified in holding back. Independence would not have been an issue at all in this year's Holyrood election except for one thing: the threat of Brexit thanks to David Cameron's own British referendum.

If there were to be a vote in favour of Brexit it would create a new situation. Scotland is in two unions. Should the outcome of the referendum be a vote to *Leave,* Scotland has to choose between the two. The whole of the SNP agrees that provided Scotland votes *Remain,* as is likely, should the UK as a whole vote *Leave,* then it should be up to the Scottish people to decide whether they want to be taken out of the EU by England against the country's will, or declare independence from Westminster and retain the status quo by remaining within the European Union. For them the Brexit scenario means another Scottish referendum and voting 'Yes' to independence in Europe.

The Scottish Conservatives and Ruth Davidson, are quite clear on the matter. Their one overwhelming message is 'No' to another referendum under any circumstances and 'No' to independence were one to be held. They want the UK to *Remain* in the EU but for them, England is far more important and the British Union is the one that matters most of all. Davidson states that the EU represents 16% of Scotland's trade; the rest of the UK 60%. That this may not make sense (as trade is not an either/or choice) does not matter, as it is an effective way of communicating her judgment.

What choice should Scottish Labour make? It found itself in the traditional constitutional centre, where life was once safe. Culturally it was always a conservative Unionist party with a philistine, 'practical' approach to power; personified, say, by John Reid (now Lord Reid of G4S). But it is no longer beholden to Westminster's monarchist cloth and bigger boys are to be found in Brussels. Where should an ambitious Labour Scot look for advancement? Those in Scottish Labour who are less hidebound and more internationalist are

naturally attracted to Europe; indeed, Scotland is historically a more European society than England. That Scottish Labour wants both Britain and the EU is now natural, so much so that the last thing it wants is to chose between them. Labour's new young leader Kezia Dugdale was pressed sympathetically and skilfully by Mary Riddell to confront the painful consequence of the Brexit Scenario, in an interview with the Fabian Review. You can see the fatal influence of the referendum at work:

> *As Nicola Sturgeon has made clear, if Scotland were to back EU membership – an outcome which looks certain – while the UK as whole voted for Brexit, then another independence referendum might be inevitable. Were that to happen, then would Dugdale do all she could to hold the Union together, or might she campaign to stay in the EU and so protect the advantages that membership brings to Scotland?*
>
> *"I just don't see an issue with that. You can argue for two unions at the same time." But not, I suggest, if the referendum is lost and Scotland wishes independently to rejoin the EU. "Yes … complicated. I see tremendous benefits from the EU to Scotland, so I would do whatever I could to preserve and promote that. The same argument applies to the UK. I would very much like both those unions to stay." But would her first loyalty be keeping the UK together?*
>
> *"I've never contemplated that. I really wouldn't like to choose, because what I want to do is the best possible thing for Scotland. [I would be] putting Scotland first," she says, pointing out that some have argued that a solo Scottish re-entry to the EU might prove too difficult. But if such claims (decried by Sturgeon as "nonsense") proved unfounded, might Dugdale argue, for Scotland's sake, against the UK Union?*

> *"Possibly. It's not inconceivable," she says, so offering an unprecedented hint that the Union might not long survive a vote for Brexit.*

Ah, honesty in politics! The prize for keeping an open mind was humiliation. Dugdale was immediately set upon by the Labour hierarchy and forced to [backtrack](), as the BBC reported, "she later insisted she would vote to stay in the UK in any future referendum". But the reality was revealed. Meanwhile, in the spirit of Corbyn, Dugdale had Scottish Labour propose a modest increase in taxation to improve social spending. You can only proclaim your intention to raise taxes in advance if voters are wedded to your overall project and believe you capable of its delivery. Labour support fled in both directions, to the right and the left. Those who, for whatever reason, are wedded to the United Kingdom and had got the most terrible fright in the independence referendum, shifted to the non-toxic Conservatives. Those who favoured keeping Scotland in Europe at all costs saw no reason not to vote SNP.

Anas Sarwar, Scottish Labour's former deputy leader, who lost his Glasgow seat in the Westminster parliament last year and was selected from the list vote for a Labour seat in Holyrood on 6 May, said the party had come third behind the Tories chiefly because of "hundreds of thousands of former Labour voters who were still focused on the country's future in the UK". It was the Brexit scenario that made this such a live issue. The [Guardian reports]() that Sarwar said finding a middle way between nationalism and unionism was the "fundamental challenge" still facing the party,

> *We tried perhaps too early to move past the referendum. [I] don't think the electorate is there yet. People are still thinking about the yes or no question…. Up against the binary situation where we have unionism versus nationalism, that's a really difficult question for the Labour*

> *party... The reality is we are not comfortable nationalists and we are not comfortable unionists.*

Unless all the nations of the UK are offered some form of fully federal government, in which people can be comfortable nationalists while being comfortably in the Union, Scotland will vote to *Leave* when the next independence referendum comes around in twenty years or so - or if there is Brexit.

I'll risk repeating myself, as with so much noise of falling edifices it's hard to get a feel of the way the ground is shifting. If there had not been a referendum on membership of the EU, then the Scottish Conservatives going on about the union would have made them seem obsessive and fighting old battles, while the SNP arguing about another referendum would have demonstrated an inability to accept the people's verdict and made them appear divided. In these circumstances, Scottish Labour would have appeared cool and even progressive and would have retained its place as the main alternative to the SNP as Scotland's 'party of the union'. The Brexit scenario upended this. It justified the SNP saying if it happened they would call on the Scottish people to claim their independent right to stay in the EU. It therefore presented a real threat to the union for the Conservatives to rally people against. In these circumstances, with many of its voters having voted Yes to independence and many having voted No, Labour was in an impossible position. It was torn apart, unable to define itself under the pressure of the Brexit scenario.

A moving description of the pain can be found in [Chris Creegan's blog](). He concludes that Labour in Scotland, "needs a new national narrative". Meaning? He suggests, "a position based on a new federal settlement which offers some Yes and some No voters a different place to regroup... It's a tricky and slippery landscape for sure...".

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As Sartre said, even if it is untranslatable, *"Glissez, mortels, n'appuyez pas,"*

Outside Scotland, the rest of the UK (now becoming known as rUK thanks to twitter's love of compression) is also a slippery landscape for Westminster Labour. It too needs a new national narrative. Only what country is its nation? When he fought his campaign for the leadership Jeremy Corbyn was a hit with Labour supporters north of the border and it looked as if he was the man who could bring Scotland back to the Labour fold. [The Daily Record](), reported that his "rallies in Scotland last week were breathtaking. In Dundee, Aberdeen, Edinburgh and Glasgow, there was a sense of optimism that would have been unimaginable when Labour suffered its general election disaster in May". The Record became the only newspaper in the UK to back him apart from the Morning Star (for which Corbyn was a contributor).

> *TODAY the Daily Record backs Jeremy Corbyn to be the next Labour leader – for the sake of our nation.*
>
> *We believe he best represents the core Labour values needed to build a fairer country and improve the lives of ordinary Scots.*
>
> *Corbyn's anti-austerity message inspires people and restores their faith that a better way is possible.*

Any Labour member serious about power knows that without Scotland they may never govern again, certainly not on their own. If Scotland is less New Labour than rUK, maybe Corbyn is the man to bring back its voters to Labour, so essential to restoring its strength in Westminster. But when he returned this spring for the election campaign to Scotland's parliament, he did not set voters alight in the way the Record had hoped. With little empathy for the rise of civic nationalism and so far incapable of offering a federal solution, Corbyn found it

impossible to win Scotland 'back' to Labour. The curse of Brexit also deprived Labour's new Westminster leader of the prize that was probably essential for him to secure his position.

Chapter 8

The European project is ours: let's roll up our sleeves for remain

Anthony Barnett, speaking at Occupy Democracy, letmelooktv

I don't know about you, but I am in bad company – the company of everybody else. I have [scorned](#) Britain's self-described "Eurosceptic" prime minister and his *Remain* camp for being self-contradictory. He claims his deal delivers an unbelievable "best of both worlds" when by solemn treaty it means the UK commits itself to "facilitate" an ever-closer political union that he abhors. I have scorned the self-described "liberal-cosmopolitan" ex-mayor of London and the cohorts for *Leave,* as being self-contradictory for heralding an unbelievable economic renaissance to be brought about by independence from the EU thanks to returning democracy to Britain, meaning elective dictatorship. In a coming chapter I will scorn the leader of the Labour party for being self-contradictory if he wants to install the most left-wing government ever in the UK (which I applaud) while saying sweet Fanny Adam about the democratic challenge the EU

presents (that the *Leave* campaigners are so right to pose), for to be left-wing and not constitutionally democratic is not to be left-wing at all. For this week's example of being self-contradictory see [Paul Mason's scorching assault](#) on the EU as the authoritarian host of "rentier monopoly corporations, tax-dodging elites and organised crime", which we must nonetheless remain in to "bide our time".

And now for mine. Hopefully it is only a mote and not a beam in my own eye but I support [DiEM 25](#), the Democracy in Europe Movement, with its call to "Democratise Europe, or it will disintegrate!" I think this makes sense, as a way needs to be found for the EU to become a democratic process for Europeans or it can't survive. But it must seem contradictory to call for membership of something that has to be dismantled if not overthrown! Just like everyone else, in this strange referendum, I am arguing against myself while trying to appear completely convinced of the coherence of my position.

Why this set of tensions? The answer lies in the EU. I'm a war baby, I first hollered in the months that German and Soviet armies battled through the winter for Stalingrad, to determine the European outcome of the second world war. In my lifetime the European Union is the most successful, progressive project of political transformation and human improvement bar none. Yet today it is an engine of division and reaction. The sequence that led it from its incredible benefits to its current disastrous influence is buried in the genome of its conception. But so too is the energy and life force that has helped lift a continent from a nightmare of war, genocide and destruction to freedom, wealth and collaboration. To be for it, is to be against it. While the most interesting of the Brexiteers, Boris Johnson, is against it to be for it.

Even to talk about the EU like this, however, creates a distance that I reject. I seem to move through the same countries and cities as those most engaged in the Brexit debate, but mine have a quite different colour and sense of

belonging. It is as if I exist in a parallel universe of the kind that Philip Pullman makes so convincing in *His Dark Materials*. If I try to make a cut between my Europe and theirs, I'm sucked into a peculiar universe, which is not mine at all. Both sides of the official *Remain* and *Leave* campaign, for example, share two false premises:

1. that we in the UK are not European

2. that Britain is politically stable and economically successful

From this dual vantage point – or rather disadvantage point – it apparently makes sense to talk about how *we* can "get the best of both worlds" from *them*, how much *they* are failing to be democratic, unlike monarchical *us*, how *we* in the UK can "lead" *them* (Gordon Brown).

The double-falsehood is no place to start a debate on the future of Britain and Europe. I want to rub this point home. For in one fundamental way I am not in the company of almost everybody else. I am part of the band who does not believe that whether or not we should be in the EU is a matter of calculation, profit or instrumentally computed advantage. The decision to have a plebiscite on whether the UK should *Remain* or *Leave* the EU has been called by a prime minister who did not want to have it, does not believe in the process, and will – [as I have shown](#) – say anything his spin doctors tell him or his teleprompt puts in front of his eyes. The result of this unprincipled exercise is a debate dominated by arguments over financial gains and losses with both sides greedy for profit at the expense of the EU. Give us our money back, say the outers. Give us "the best of both worlds", say the inners. What a crapulent, humiliating way of talking about what kind of country Britain is.

The latest example is the shocking official *Remain* flyer that has just dropped through my front door, promoted by Will Straw. The front has six quotes, every single one is about money. The back it has five curt arguments concerning:

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jobs, finances, businesses, prices and public service cuts. Not a word about our democracy or liberty. It's a serf's charter, proclaiming everyone will be even more screwed if we *Leave* than we are already. The prime minister declared the referendum to be about what kind of country we are. Well, now we know what kind of country he thinks we are. There is a story about the once famous playwright George Bernard Shaw talking with society debutants in the early twentieth century. Would you share the night with me, he asked, if I make sure you get a million pounds. They laughed with pleasure and delight. Would you sleep with me for £5 he continued. Shocked they said, "Who do you think we are?". I already know, he replied, "we are haggling about the price." Would you want to share your country, let alone the night, with those who talk the way our leaders do? Would you want to be a member a Union justified by haggling? Nor are Labour *Remain* arguments immune from this approach. Labour is the party of the screwed not the party of the screwers, so it is less cynical. But when it supports remaining in the EU because it has extended workers rights, it too treats the EU as just a means to an end.

There are other universes too: above all, the EU's own self-regarding one, which is at least as bizarre as Westminster's. The European Union's parallel universe is filled with a narcoleptic atmosphere deprived of oxygen – its institutions seem ubiquitous yet tenuous, apparently transparent yet suffocating. Show me the diagrams for the relationship between the Commission, the Parliament, the Council of Ministers, Ecofin, the Eurogroup and Coreper; show me the way to the next whisky bar, oh don't ask why… Here is the latest introduction to its legal database…

Access to and Reuse of EU Legal Information

Conference organised by the Publications Office of the European Union

Thank you for participating!

Europe does not just issue a torrent of regulations, laws, treaties, judgements and proceedings there are also scenarios, pamphlets, studies, and theories, realist, neo-functionalist and so on, that are mind-numbing not because they are necessarily badly written but thanks to the airlessness of it all.

An outstanding exception is Hans Magnus Enzensberger's *Brussels, the gentle Monster*. A slim 80 pages by the wonderful German poet and essayist published in 2011, he went to the buildings with a thousand windows to see what went on within. Dry and understated, it is impossible to read without shaking with laughter. On all those words, the poet observes that by 2005 the accumulated laws and regulations of the Union "which no soul has ever read" came to over 85,000 pages weighing "as much as a young rhinoceros". Five years later and they weighed as much as two young rhinoceros. [EUR-lex](), the database of all legal orders, records, ran to a grand 1,400,000 documents. This may be unfair as it includes multiple translations. From what I can [make out]()the EU is generating 10,000 and 20,000 documents a year since 2010.

Inspired by Enzensberger's example without hoping to emulate his poetic brevity and touch, I want to try and understand what the European Union is, knowing that it is a changing and growing process. It can't be reduced to a single, teleological project whose only objective is the creation a super-state. Nor is it just a parliament for our continent. It is not a simple 'thing' like a bus or train. So what is it that the British voters must now make up their minds about? The answer demands a necessarily difficult analysis, not least because

British policy has been bound up in the EU's current development – its not simply a creation of foreign continentals. To try and answer the question I'm going to set out some of the stages of my efforts to comprehend the EU on my journey to DiEM25.

The Monnet Method, incremental transformation

The European Economic Community or EEC (also known as The Common Market) of the six original countries, France, Germany, Italy, Holland, Belgium and Luxembourg, came into existence with the Treaty of Rome in 1957. It is now the European Union. I will keep to its current name throughout. As with many Brits at that time it was for me a background noise of failed attempts to join it, conducted by humiliatingly incapable governments Conservative and Labour, until Edward Heath became premier in 1970 and negotiated entry in 1972. This was the founding moment of the Brexit debate. Then as now it was fought within and between the Tories, with Enoch Powell combining the figures of Farage, Gove and Johnson in his singular character. (He aroused a hatred of immigrants that outruns Farage, spoke with the precise intellectualism of Gove, wrote better Latin than Johnson and harboured an ambition that matched them all).

But there were differences. Most important, Heath was wholeheartedly in favour of Europe, making it a clash of principle. Second, there was no referendum. Instead there was a 'great debate', including a six-day one in the Commons (it is very revealing that, as I pointed out in the introduction, the Commons has not debated the deal negotiated by the prime minister at all, merely been allowed to ask him some questions when he presented it to the house).

75 *new left review*

THE LEFT AGAINST EUROPE?

Tom Nairn

'To be in favour of Europe . . . does not imply surrender to or alliance with the left's enemies. It means exactly the opposite. It signifies recognising and meeting them as enemies for what they are, upon the terrain of reality and the future.'

Special Issue $1.50

The 1972 debate exposed a paradox. The supposedly internationalist left, whether Labour, socialist or Marxist, was almost universally opposed to entry whereas the supposedly nationalist Tory party overwhelmingly embraced it. Tom Nairn wrote an extraordinary, sustained essay, *The Left Against Europe* exposing the forces at work. It ran to a complete issue of New Left Review. Since I was then junior member of its editorial committee and there was a rota for editing and putting issues 'to bed' in the physical process of the time, I found myself in charge of publishing one of the greatest pieces of English polemical writing of the 20th century. I put this extract on the cover:

> *"To be in favour of Europe… does not imply surrender to or alliance with the left's enemies. It means exactly the opposite. It signifies recognizing and meeting them as enemies, for what they are, upon the terrain of reality and the future."*

The experience has stayed with me. We are in a world that is profoundly right-wing, dedicated ideologically to the false idea that wealth is created and spread for the good of all by competition rather than being appropriated by power. Any effort to resist and replace this has to be where it is hardest and most decisive.

I voted 'Yes' to Europe in the referendum of 1975.

My next shaping encounter with the EU came a decade later, when I was asked to help draft and then started to run Charter 88. appeal for human and democratic rights and a written constitution was a conscious attempt to make Britain a contemporary European country. It went out of its way to say:

> *"part of British sovereignty is shared with Europe; and the extension of social rights in a modern economy is a matter of debate everywhere. We cannot foretell the choices a free people may make."*

If Charter 88 had a defining cry it was 'Citizens not Subjects!' This remains an all too relevant call in the UK. It means that sovereignty should be vested in the people thanks to a democratic constitution we can call our own, not in 'the Crown in Parliament'. But modern citizenship itself in a fast changing world of over-lapping sovereignties is a rich area for discussion and education. So I took an intense interest in the issue. (For an up to date engagement see Benjamin Ramm's [Citizens' Manifesto](#)). Keeping the Charter's campaign relevant to developments in Europe was also part of my job. So in 1992 I fell upon the EU's

new Maastricht Treaty to read it for myself as soon as it was published, doubtless one of the few people in the UK to do so. I was gobsmacked. Without any advanced warning from the media that I was aware of I read that the twelve male heads of state gathered in Holland had:

> *"RESOLVED to establish a citizenship common to nationals of their countries"*

Indeed, they had inserted a new section into the Treaty 'Citizenship of the Union' which stated that

> *"Citizenship of the Union is hereby established. Every person holding the nationality of a Member State shall be a citizen of the Union"*

To which I could only say, "Really?". Followed by, "This is unbelievable." Followed by something a great deal less polite.

Citizenship is a powerful concept. How can twelve men "Resolve to establish" it for over 370 million others without even letting them know in advance?

Something shady was taking place. Citizenship needs to be fought for, argued over and above all claimed. Now "every person" of the member states was re-branded without a by-your-leave. There can be moments in relationships when the person you love does something and part of you goes 'uh oh' and you try not to think about what it foretells. Only afterwards do you look back and realize that a ruinous flaw was revealed. I was campaigning flat out for citizenship in Britain. Suddenly, without any forewarning, my – no, our - European citizenship had been bestowed upon us like a sentence, through a secret process that I could do nothing but abhor. Here was this wonderful,

transforming organisation that I admired and respected, even if I did not love it. And it had acted with complete distrust of its own people.

When I stopped running Charter 88 in the mid-nineties I tried to think through the implications in terms of the combination of nationalism, democracy, capitalist globalisation and constitutional progress that marked the century's last decade. Two arguments stood out from the dross with respect to the EU. Alan Milward's great book, *The European Rescue of the Nation State* showed me how, country by country, the European Union grew out of the need for a profound post-war reconstruction, including full employment, welfare and education, across all the belligerents. The shared framework of the EU did not dissolve their socio-economic development into a single entity but rather provided the pattern for their collaboration as non-belligerent societies. This, then, renewed them as nations and did not dissolve them into a single entity. It gives the EU a quite different feel if you see it as enhancing its member nations as nations, rather than undermining them.

The second was a forensic analysis of the inner capacity of the EU, in generous review of Milward by Perry Anderson (reprinted in his *The New Old World*). He identifies the political process that created the European Union whose chief architect was Jean Monnet. Anderson quotes Monnet as saying, "We are starting a process of continuous reform that can shape tomorrow's world more lastingly than the principles of revolution" and he describes this as "incremental totalization". Monnet's strategy is an alternative to Leninism. It sets itself an unparalleled, ambitious objective "a democratic supra-national federation". It then goes about achieving this "enterprise of unrivalled scope" through "drab institutional steps" that relied on "narrow social supports".

In Britain I was being told that it was impossible to achieve anything as modest as a written constitution without a violent revolution or a war. Yet here was a process with far bolder aims achieving them in times of peace. It was surely an

example for anyone on the left: a process that did not bend to the winds of change but stood and generated them. Roberto Unger argues that the left must stop being conservative and become utopian while having the imagination to invent the small, immediate practical steps that can take us on the way to a goal that makes us all fully human. Monnet's method shows how this can be done. Not by the sleight of hand and denial of the [Mont Pelerin](#) gang, plotting their triumph of the market, but by an open declaration of a political goal. (That the EU too was captured by Hayekian neoliberalism is not the point: indeed you could argue that its obvious crisis is due to the incompatibility of these two forms of transformation.)

There is a profound revulsion in the British Conservative party to the EU and its entire works shared by both those wishing to *Remain* and those for *Leave*. This is because all Tories desire to minimise change to our political structures – their core project is to conserve. But the whole point of the EU is to move things on, to build new institutions and define anew how power operates and to share sovereignty. This does not necessarily mean the replacement of the nation state by a Euro-super-state but it must mean, indeed it is meant to mean, the practical, moral and psychological ending of Europe's antagonistic old regimes – of which both Hitler's empire and Britain's were examples. All Tories are agreed they cannot participate in this 'unBritish' project. Given the EU's size and influence and role in supporting corporate power, one wing of the Conservative party wishes to exploit it. In Cameron's language, to retain a "special, best of both worlds" relationship so as to lever the UK's influence in global affairs. The other wing fears that such blatant corporate sycophancy risks the loss of traditional loyalty and prefers a different wager: to rely on British skills as a global Singapore. Both wings abhor the Monnet project of shared change and want no part in it. One day an English left will be born that can grasp the opportunity that the European process offers.

But can there be such a thing as a "*democratic* supra-national federation"? As so many are slagging off the EU at the moment it is important to salute its democratising achievements. These were not just to create a zone of peace where there had been war, genocide, firestorm-bombing of civilians (especially by the allies) and forced labour on a catastrophic scale after 1945. The EU reversed fascism in Spain, Portugal and Greece in the 1970s, supported the democratisation of Eastern Europe in the 1990s, and raised human rights standards everywhere. To give an example, rarely acknowledged in self-satisfied world of Westminster and the London media, the Northern Ireland peace settlement is a product of the Europeanization of Ireland as a whole including, however grudgingly, the Catholic and especially the Protestant communities in the North and the UK itself. (This myopia continues in the Brexit debate, with neither the official *Leave* nor *Remain* camp being able to acknowledge the intrinsic value of the European Union to British democracy in this part of the United Kingdom).

The EU has always been top down and suffered a democratic dearth. But when its actions removed impediments between member countries and population and abolished restrictions it created openness. This then received popular consent from publics across the EU who appreciated the way it made life better and increased horizons. But when the EU switched from negative actions that took down barriers to positive integration, establishing institutions, legal systems, regulations and indeed "citizens", then its top down nature caused resentment and began to be experienced as an imposition not emancipation. Maastricht reinforced this. At the very moment that the end of the Cold War finally created an undivided continent ready for democracy, the leaders of Europe began to levitate themselves upwards, beyond the reach of the grubby hands of the demos.

The central issue, which demands a much fuller treatment than I can give it here, is the nature of nationalism in a multi-national and now digital world.

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Politically, the cardinal issue for the European Union is the relationship between nationalism and democracy. For some in the Brussels elite, the 'mere' nationalism of 'mere' nation states is something that their long-term aim is to marginalise, as a feudal hangover. They have set themselves against the democracy of 'narrow' nationalism, as they see it, and seek to replace it with public support for a united Europe 'fit' for global competition. In effect such members of the euro-elite are wedded to up-scaling an old regime mentality. British Tories should not alone in opposing this; indeed it is essential that such opposition is not confined to right-wing, populist nationalism.

Another, quite different process has also been released by the EU, as in its enhancement of its member nationalities. The EU's member nations have formally renounced important aspects of their sovereignty in order to enhance their national interest. Such a politics is only sustainable if their voting publics feel their lives and humanity improved by their participation in an EU that makes them feel European *as well as* and not instead of their national identity. Just as there are different levels of democracy and self-government, so nationalism is being re-imagined into a plural multi-layered form of patriotism. This has to mean, however, revitalising not replacing civic national power alongside European collaboration. Ideally, each European country would seek to protect the national interests of the others. In turn this means our concept of who we are as citizens becomes a plural rather than a singular identity.

If this sounds abstract it's because it is hard to envisage until experienced. At the end of the nineties I became friends with Reinhard Hesse who lived the spirit of what I am trying to describe. He was a speechwriter and collaborator of Gerhard Schröder, who became Germany's Social Democrat Chancellor. Reinhard was at home in French, English as well as Arabic. Profoundly a man of the left, he lived in "the terrain of reality". We discussed the creation and launch of openDemocracy with the aim of creating a space for a European debate. On 17 May 2001, Reinhard launched the brand new website's 'Europa Debate' with

a witty and perceptive [Letter for Europe](). Given Boris Johnson's recent warning of a new Hitlerian Reich, this passage from it seems up to date exactly fifteen years on, it was in response to that same trope being recycled by a Tory backbencher,

> *"They do say that a few lunatics once in a while make democracy a worthwhile experience. Thanks, for the reminder that the Achtung! Schtrumpf! Heil Hitler! crap of B-movie fame has not altogether disappeared from the public debate."*

More seriously, Reinhard argued, "But something is not happening. We are Europeans on the ground. We are Europeans in our stomachs, as a succession of food crises has shown, but we are not Europeans in our heads". His last article for openDemocracy, [Crossroads or Roundabouts, where now for Europe](), written in June 2004, just before his fatal illness was diagnosed, wrestles with this theme but under much greater stress, in the shadow of terrorism and the Iraq war. Consistently, he battled and scorned abstract Eurosclerotic language. He welcomed the British government's recent announcement that it would put any proposed European constitution to a referendum, because for him Europe needed the peoples' support.

Four months later I had the baleful task of [speaking about Reinhard]() at the memorial meeting for him in Berlin, in front of the Chancellor. Losing, our key European advisor was a great blow to openDemocracy especially as a larger strategic setback was sinking in. At the start of the century when we were planning its launch I assumed that there was nascent European public interest in debating the continent's democratic future, ready to take advantage of the new medium of the web. Not a 'demos' but enough people like Reinhard, democrats committed to the EU and wanting a public forum, to create a self-aware 'continental' readership. This was not to be. Even at a relatively elite level

of those interested in current affairs the existence of a web platform did not overcome what James Curran calls "nationalist and localist cultures" in his [Why Did the Internet Change So Little?](#)

It is well and good to call for the EU to be more democratic. But if hardly anyone wants to be a democratic European it cuts no ice. There is only one alternative to spontaneous, organic demand from below in response to the new situation, namely the conscious creation and orchestration of such demand by dedicated advocates through persuasion and example. This needs funding and support necessarily independent of the EU institutions themselves. Apart from the outstanding efforts of George Soros's Open Society Institute and Foundation, whose contribution to defending the civilisation of the continent is without parallel (and whose Institute and Foundation support the work of openDemocracy), there were few organisations willing to act. There are many wealthy ones committed to worthy public ends, such as those affiliated to the [European Foundation Centre](#) with its programme of supporting democracy and debate. But as multilingual European journals and websites designed for the intelligent public and in need of only modest support have closed this century it is clear a significant abstention is at work, which has contributed to the present democratic vacuity of the EU process.

Perhaps the best way of to see this is by comparison with the nascent bourgeoisie that initiated movements for national self-determination in 19th century Europe and recruited the public into them, whether through trade unions or churches, or warfare. Today, there is no nascent Eurogeoisie seeking the dangerous support of the unwashed or even unwashed journalists to help further its influence. Early capitalist liberalism was up against absolutist monarchs and had feudal restrictions to overcome. It needed to enlist if not 'the masses' certainly the skilled professional classes into becoming a patriotic public. This in turn needed a media. By contrast today's Eurogeoisie has no need for popular consent, indeed the less of it the better. They are already in

charge! Despite their fine sentiments real, actual democracy is seen as a potential 'anti-European' enemy, a threat to the larger project, that is to say their own monopoly of it. It was precisely the frankness, the wit, the caustic realism, a writer's sense of how things looked from below, which Reinhard's skills exemplified, that they did *not* want! When it was needed most, the seed bed of European democracy was left to wither.

Lisbon and the end of the EU's attempt at democracy

The absence of a lively, memorable trans-European debate was particularly egregious because this was the time, 2002-4, that the EU began the process of turning itself into a constitutional entity. A more robust institutional framework was needed for the Eurozone (the Euro was launched as a currency on 1 January 2002) along with rules for flexibility as ten countries (eight former communist ones plus Malta and Cyprus) were scheduled to join the EU in May 2004.

The Blair government, a keen proponent of anything that would make Europe a base for the projection of power and 'world leadership', backed the creation of a European constitution. To prove the British government's strong support it sent one of the Labour party's most pro-European MPs, Gisela Stuart, of German origin and representing Neville Chamberlain's old constituency, as one of its representatives to the [Constitutional Convention on the Future of Europe](#). Today she is the [Chair of Vote Leave](#). Her exceptionally open and honestly travelled trajectory is prefigured in a report she wrote while the Convention, with its 105 members, was still in process. It is from a Fabian pamphlet and was published [in the Guardian](#) in December 2003. It is worth quoting as length because it takes you right into the way the EU was being refashioned:

> *"I entered the process with enthusiasm… But I confess, after 16 months at the heart of the process, I am concerned about many aspects of the constitution… The most frequently cited justifications for a written*

constitution for Europe have been the need to make the treaties more understandable to European voters and the need to streamline the decision-making procedures of the European Union after enlargement. I support both of these aims. But the draft document in four parts and 335 pages in the official version, is hardly the handy accessible document to be carried around in a coat pocket which some had hoped for at the outset. From my experience at the convention it is clear that the real reason for the constitution – and its main impact – is the political deepening of the union. This objective was brought home to me when I was told on numerous occasions: "You and the British may not accept this yet, but you will in a few years' time."

The convention [has] brought together a self-selected group of the European political elite, many of whom have their eyes on a career at a European level, which is dependent on more and more integration and who see national governments and national parliaments as an obstacle. Not once in the 16 months I spent on the convention did representatives question whether deeper integration is what the people of Europe want, whether it serves their best interests or whether it provides the best basis for a sustainable structure for an expanding union. The debates focused solely on where we could do more at European Union level. None of the existing policies were questioned... This Treaty establishing a constitution... will be difficult to amend and will be subject to interpretation by the European court of justice. And if it remains in its current form, the new constitution will be able to create powers for itself. It cannot be viewed piecemeal... we have to look at the underlying spirit."

Little wonder that the official European spirit did not want websites biting at its heels. Gisela Stuart argued that any proposed constitution for Europe be put to

a referendum and in April 2004 Tony Blair was persuaded by Jack Straw, then Foreign Secretary, to promise one – otherwise they would be defeated in the House of Lords if not in the coming general election.

The British decision forced the hand of President Chirac in France. Every household in France was sent their own copy of the final constitutional document. Shortly after the UK returned Blair as prime minister in early May 2005 (on a record low of 35% of the vote), the French rejected the proposed EU Constitution by 55% to 45% on a turnout of 69%; three days later, the Dutch were even more decisive and gave the constitution a thumbs down of 61% to 39%. Already alarmed that they would be humiliated in any referendum, a relieved Jack Straw phoned Blair to tell him the early news of the French result: there would be no need for the UK to consult its voters now the French had rendered the proposed constitution otiose. "What a tart", Blair commented, when he put down the phone. (An apt one word description of the whole Blair gang).

The French and Dutch votes were the moment of truth for the European project. For the first time a full Treaty that was being proposed was put to people, to its own designated 'citizens' indeed, in their respective countries to decide. The Spanish voted enthusiastically in favour. Then the twin rejection followed in two of the original six. Obviously, a profound re-think in Brussels was called for. It had to rise to the challenge to create the public debate essential to winning support for the integration it envisaged.

By luck, in Brussels, I went to see one of the most senior members of the European Council's General Secretariat in his office shortly after the double referendum outcomes. He was shaken. The French vote against the proposed constitution was due to Chirac playing politics, he said, in effect already persuading himself that France had not *really* rejected it. But the Dutch! For Holland, the most European country of all European countries, at the centre of

its trading networks, cosmopolitan and without great power pretensions of its own, to have turned down the European process so decisively… he shook his head in disbelief.

The result for openDemocracy was the most sophisticated description I have read of the four reasons why the EU is important but is not a super-state. In late June 2005, less than two months after the Franco-Dutch rejection, What the European Union Is was published under his nom de plume of Simon Berlaymont (the name of the vast building housing the headquarters of the European Commission). Alas, the article's purpose was to set out why it should not have been called 'a constitution' in the first place, thus arousing the public and setting off demand for consultation,

> *"The fact that the treaty was drawn up by a "convention" and that it calls itself (in big print) a "constitution" does not change the reality that it is an intergovernmental document: the title begins with the word "treaty", in small print, but this is what it is. "Constitution" is a part of the excessive rhetoric of Europe that obscures rather than illuminates, and threatens when what is needed is reassurance"*

This was the approach the mandarins of Brussels adopted to persuade themselves and Europe's leaders that they could recycle the draft Constitution into a 'non-constitution' that could come about without referendums, using inter-governmental treaty change alone. If the peoples of the nations of Europe did not wish to change the way they were governed it was because they were trapped in the past; therefore the government of the continent would best be changed without consulting them. The outcome was the Treaty of Lisbon. Signed at the end of 2007 and coming into force in 2009, the constituent parts of the proposed constitution were spread out as amendments of previous treaties. Repackaged, the main change turned out to be the elimination of the

word 'constitution'. Giscard d'Estaing, the former French President who had headed the Constitutional Convention could not resist winding up the English by gloating in The Independent that, "The difference between the original Constitution and the present Lisbon Treaty is one of approach, rather than content…."

> *"In terms of content, the proposed institutional reforms – the only ones which mattered to the drafting Convention – are all to be found in the Treaty of Lisbon… There are, however, some differences. Firstly, the noun "constitution" and the adjective "constitutional" have been banished from the text… all mention of the symbols of the EU have been suppressed, including the flag (which already flies everywhere)…"*

'Simon Berlaymont' justified this disgraceful outcome in 2007 in a farewell to Tony Blair and Europe, also published in openDemocracy:

> *"The virus of referenda is contagious. Blair caught it from a weak and divided Conservative Party that needed to avoid the responsibility for taking decisions itself. Later he found himself too weak to resist when they called for a referendum on the constitutional treaty… Referenda are more associated with continental countries, and then not always with their most democratic moments. The virus then spread to France and the Netherlands; in France in particular it was always going to be difficult to resist calls for a popular vote on something calling itself a constitution…"*

There you have it, the judgment of the people is reduced to an infection, with even less life in it than vermin. Referendums are a virus.

Lisbon made the EU an independent legal entity, which it had not been before. It created a diplomatic apparatus in parallel to those of the EU's nation states. It charged the European Court in Luxembourg with the power to impose its judgments on all member governments. Whether this is 'really' a constitution is sophistry. Whatever it is, it demanded the positive assent of the EU population, based on a coherent understanding of what it proposed. Faced with the Dutch and French rejections the apparatchiks of the EU should have accepted the peoples' verdict and stood the process down until they had gained such consent. Instead, urged on by Blair, the EU abandoned democracy in favour of a capacity to project its power. Lisbon replaced all previous existing treaties, from Rome to Maastricht. Today, it *is* now the Treaty of the EU. With the decision to defy the peoples' verdict built into it, the European Union has become a flagrantly undemocratic oligarchy. There is a direct line of descent from Lisbon to the German finance minister telling his counterparts in the European Union last year, "elections cannot be allowed to change an economic programme of a member state".

In effect, the EU betrayed itself. So profoundly, it cannot survive in its present form. It was one thing, mistaken perhaps but honourable, to foresee the *replacement* of national nationalisms with a European patriotism, larger, more expansive, implicitly more civilised, in the long-term prospectus of Europe's

"ever closer union". This vision of a 'super-state' foresaw a European democracy, a power that won the active assent of the peoples of the continent, indeed without such energy and loyalty it cannot succeed if the idea is to compete with global powers such as the USA and China. This option has been foreclosed for the existing EU thanks to the way its institutions have been set up by Lisbon. A form of rule created in plain defiance of the popular will is not going to be able to recruit it, at least not without undergoing a deep transformation. If Brussels is a caterpillar intending to turn into a democratic butterfly the process of cocooning itself is going to be very painful indeed.

Some of its recruits can dream about it, though. I experienced one such idealisation when, while the process of moving towards Lisbon was underway, Margot Wallström, the EU's Vice President for Institutional Relations and Communication Strategy, launched Plan D for Democracy, Dialogue and Debate. It was about "Making your voice heard". For me it came to demonstrate the futility of worthy calls for more democracy. Six "citizen dialogue" projects were created. The King Baudouin Foundation funded a massive exercise in participative democracy. This recruited a random selected, representative sample of Europeans to participate in a reflection on what the European Union should become – making their voices heard. James Fishkin, who had developed the methodology, and whom I knew from my proposal to turn the House of Lords into a chamber selected by lot, was one of those recruited to design the whole exercise. Tony Curzon Price was openDemocracy's editor-in-chief and with his generous interest in innovation he oversaw a big effort to cover the whole process, with Jessica Reed, J Clive Matthews and many others.

I went to watch one of the sessions in Brussels. A hall of citizens from across the continent sat in small groups, each around a table, supported by phalanxes of simultaneous translators. For the first time I felt that Europe actually was in Brussels. But what came of it? A massive and doubtless still fascinating 'dLiberation Blog' on openDemocracy along with a shorter Citizens consultation

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blog and thousands more well intentioned words elsewhere. But not a dent on the EU itself, no particular advance towards democracy of any kind thanks to all the effort and expenditure, nor any measurable increase in wider public support. The exercised demonstrated a crucial fact about all attempts to make the EU as it now is more democratic. It is pointless to try and add more democracy to Europe's lack of democracy. The 'idea of Europe' sucked in energy like a black hole with results ordained to be invisible.

Among the reasons for this was the Euro, then in the background, pumping the boom; its undemocratic character waiting beneath its shroud for the crash of 2008 to scythe the young of southern Europe from employment. Wolfgang Streek, in *Buying Time, the Delayed Crisis of Democratic Capitalism* captures the cultural implications of a shared currency created without democracy:

> *"The society needed for this must have a high tolerance of economic inequality. Its surplus population must have learned to regard politics as middle-class entertainment from which it has nothing to expect. Its worldviews and identifications it must derive not from politics but from the dream factories of the global cultural industry, whose massive profits must also serve to legitimate the rapidly increasing extraction of surplus value by the stars of other sectors, especially the money industry. (p 117)*

DiEM25

What to do about an EU that has turned from a system of solidarity to one generating division and chauvinism as its dream-factories crumble? In 2012 I was asked by Neil Belton and Fintan O'Toole to contribute a chapter on Europe to the collection Faber were publishing, Up the Republic! I wrestled with the material for two months but could not resolve my own view. I found it intolerable for Europe to continue as it is doing but equally intolerable to be against Europe. I had experienced the fruitlessness of efforts at adding 'more democracy' to it and could not advocate that kind of reform. But a return to nation states outside its framework was asking for reaction not republican self-government. I abandoned the effort, unable to resolve what a 'republican' approach should be for the EU.

This year a new analysis and call to arms for a democratic Europe has solved the problem, at least of where to start, thanks to Yanis Varoufakis. Far from sitting at a desk scratching his head about a chapter, he was propelled into the lion's cauldron, the Eurogroup itself. He emerged badly gored but alive and defiant. Varoufakis personifies the rise of Syriza to power in Greece, thanks to its current prime minister Alexis Tsipras, an exceptional "political engineer"; the clarity of Syriza's objections to the imposition of self-defeating austerity programmes by the Eurogroup; and the popular defiance of the EU's conditions summed up by "Oxi", the "No" vote supported by 61% of Greeks in their 2015 referendum. Tsipras then felt obliged to capitulate, Varoufakis did not. Instead, after he resigned, as he explained to Michel Feher, he went round Europe in the wake of the debacle and found people had:

> "a sense of foreboding, and a sense of concern, about what effect the crushing of the Greek government would have on them, their societies... on the capacities of their communities to make decisions pertinent to

their own life…. soon I had this idea and scenario in mind: as Europeans we [must] harness the feeling that truly binds us together and allows us to redefine European identity on the basis of resistance… We can harness that spirit of concern for locality alongside the concern for the globality of Europe in order to create an alternative. We can stay in Europe in order to challenge head-on the highly anti-democratic processes and institutions of the European Union, and we can salvage Europe and the European Union from it."

Out of this experience came [DiEM25](#), a manifesto for a democratic Europe. I should declare a small interest: I was privileged to make suggestions to an early draft. But the basic argument of [the long version](#) had nothing to do with me and I can praise it unconditionally. After saluting the EU as a historic peace project, it nails its dark side:

"From an economic viewpoint, the EU began life as a cartel of heavy industry (later co-opting farm owners) determined to fix prices and to re-distribute oligopoly profits through its Brussels bureaucracy. The emergent cartel, and its Brussels-based administrators, feared the demos and despised the idea of government-by-the-people.

Patiently and methodically, a process of de-politicising decision-making was put in place, the result being a draining but relentless drive toward taking-the-demos-out-of-democracy and cloaking all policy-making in a pervasive pseudo-technocratic fatalism. National politicians were rewarded handsomely for their acquiescence to turning the Commission, the Council, the Ecofin, the Eurogroup and the ECB, into politics-free zones. Anyone opposing this process of de-politicisation was labelled 'un-European' and treated as a jarring dissonance."

The result, "is to prevent Europeans from exercising democratic control over their money, finance, working conditions and environment". The DiEM Manifesto adds, "the price of this deceit is not merely the end of democracy but also poor economic policies." It is an increasingly familiar argument, that neo-liberalism or market fundamentalism is stealing the language of democracy to create a disenchantment with politics, as in Wendy Brown's description of it as a "stealth revolution". But in the DiEM manifesto this critique has ceased to be an academic analysis. For it emerges from the experience of the cauldron itself. Thanks to Greek defiance we have witnessed the brutal imposition of the 'technical' on the democratic. Behind the stealth we have seen the steel; as the confrontation exposed the policies and interests behind the financial mask of neutrality. Which means in turn that the manifestos call for making the processes democratic is also a call for honesty that could become popular.

The Monnet method of incremental progress towards an extraordinarily ambitious goal of European unification turns out to have been driven by a cartel consciousness. When bringing down barriers it was experienced as opening up Europe despite its closed procedure, as it made everyone more European. When, after Maastricht, it began to erect a machinery of its own centralised government, it began to treat national objections just as a cartel would: as a virus to be patiently but clinically exterminated.

The fundamental difference between the numerous worthy, Plan-D type calls for the EU to have "more democracy", such as a better parliament, and the approach of DiEM is that DiEM 25 demands that the core institutions of the EU be replaced with a democratic heart transplant. The demand is cultural as well as institutional: the veil of technical neutrality must be pulled aside on economic decision-making to reverse the EU's depoliticisation of democracy.

Thanks to its late-modern construction in the era of market fundamentalism, the EU perhaps more than any other civic entity, seeks to put questions of the

economy and therefore of equality 'beyond' politics and democracy. It is this defining process that DiEM 25 defies and aims to dismantle. It is a call to confront the absence of democracy not a plea for democracy to be tacked onto the absence.

My own view is that any such strategy requires the abolition of the monopoly of the Euro as a single currency. It can continue to exist and be overseen by the European Central Bank, but on an agreed day all the Eurozone countries should issue their own currency to float against the Euro and restore flexibility to them. There can't be an open economic and political process while societies of over 500 million souls, all of which are already proud democracies, have to relinquish all control of their money. It will also mean abandoning the aim of creating a single political-economic power that can exercise hegemony on a world scale as an equal of the USA, and China; the wet dream of Berlaymont towers.

What kind of organization is this DiEM25 with the audacity to harbour such thoughts, even if unofficially for mine have no particular standing? It was launched at the *Volksbühne* in Berlin on 9 February by [Yanis Varoufakis and Srecko Horvat](). It is greatly to their credit they propose an experimental process in which others will create it equally. Varoufakis had told Feher it will "evolve organically".

> *"DiEM is a movement. It is not a party, a trade-union, a think-thank or a conference. It's a surge: a surge of European democrats who are moving together to seize control, to put the demos back in democracy at the European level, and to infect every nook and cranny of the EU with democracy. It is a totally utopian project, and it's very likely to fail. But it is the only alternative to the awful dystopia that we are facing if we don't do anything at all."*

The launch saw a day of three intense, crowded sessions of discussion between activists from across Europe (the third of which was chaired by oD's editor-in-chief Mary Fitzgerald). A packed evening rally followed. The discussions mixed concerns and confidence: in many countries, especially Austria and Eastern Europe, it is the right that holds "the streets"; the danger of populism with the likelihood of deflation caused alarm; immigration is generating misanthropy. Well-articulated descriptions of the decomposition of traditional organizations, social democratic and trade union, provided the backdrop. But along with the defeat in Greece there was the success of Barcelona. Its deputy mayor suggested a new International Brigade to assist it and called for more "rebel cities". This took the argument on to the commons and the potential political economy of a shared, progressive Europe.

Paradoxically, DiEM could gain more traction thanks to the bleak veracity of its vision than from any idealisation of what is possible. In Berlin, Madrid and now across France with the Nuit Debout, it draws on the unruly energy of a precariat and its 'digital natives' starting to experience themselves as a trans-European class. If DiEM can find and build an agency, to use a technical term, the as yet unknown form for organizing the surge may be found, drawing perhaps on the experience of the Sanders surge in the United States.

The *Volksbühne* launch rally in the evening brought together a unique alliance of speakers. Among many were Caroline Lucas, an English Green, and Hans-Jurgan Urban, who runs Germany's IG Metal trade union, with its 2.4 million members side by side with Anna Stiede of the Blockupy movement, a wonderfully incongruous pairing. Predictably it included some leftist ranting of the cock-sure kind I associate with a lost cause. But there was also Brian Eno in conclusion, reminding the hall carefully and emphatically that "democracy is for people who do not know what to think", keeping the whole process open.

The promise of DiEM25 lies in the puzzle as to its nature, sidestepping usual categories. What makes it potentially influential is that it is a platform rather than a traditional 'cause', a space fit for digital times – a platform with a focus of course, setting out to re-politicise policy-making, especially in their economic and financial spheres, to bring back financial and monetary strategy to the reach of democracy. Such an open cause can become a springboard for projects and experiments that combat the marketisation and de-democratisation of power while networking across the European zones. Labour's [John McDonnell](link) has just made the young generation the centre of his call for *Remain*, rightly so; the test being if his party can embrace their culture. For we will not achieve the democratisation of the EU by traditional 'party political' means for its structures are fully prepared to repulse them, as Varoufakis has argued.

The democratisation of the EU is an extraordinarily ambitious goal. The only way of achieving it is to turn the 'Monnet method' against the monolith that Monnet's project has become: to hold to the overarching ambition while creating small realities that shape the long-term outcomes that can achieve it, strengthened by the hope of a new generation. Also, we can be emboldened by the weakness of the EU. As long ago as 2012, Martin Wolf writing in the Financial concluded, "The principal economic force now keeping the system together is fear of a break-up". This is far from the strongest of foundations! It exposes both the role of the Euro and the way it is run to a potentially successful challenge.

To return to the UK's referendum from this perspective is to ask what is the next small step to take. If your concern is simply Britain then Boris and his band of Brexiteers have the better argument, indeed the only argument with any patriotic integrity and republican virtue (of course, the UK is likely to be poorer and they should not pretend otherwise). 'Republican' in the sense that Walter Bagehot, founder of the Economist and author of The English Constitution,

asserted, when he showed that behind the decoration of monarchy the Kingdom is a better-governed republic than the United States. The Brexit camp cares about how we are governed, the nature of our democracy and they scorn the undemocratic nature of the EU. On these issues Cameron, Osborne and their fellow Remainers and collaborators like Andrew Marr are silent. They know they are selling the country to the global corporate forces, which are funding their campaign and coming out openly in support of it; this being no 'conspiracy'. It applies to their corporate Labour bed-fellows too, whether Blair with his £2 million a year fee from Wall Street's J.P Morgan, or Peter Mandelson, friend of [Deripaska](#) and company. Their alarm, which is evident in the exaggerated claims of disaster as to what will happen to the UK's economy if the people vote *Leave*, is indeed for them a genuine worry about the end of the world – as they know it. Their concern is not so much with what might happen to Britain, the British people, the country's security or ability to go to war. Instead, just look at the rise of inequality they and their corporate caste have overseen since 1997 and its crippling impacts and you can see the process they are defending. If there is a sense of panic in their warnings it is over losing their place in the cocktail parties of the international power elite – to which they genuinely see 'no alternative'.

If, however, you feel in part European, if you regard yourself and your concerns for your country, whether England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland or just plain Britain, as something that also extends to our continental home with France, Italy, Spain and Germany not to speak of Holland, Norway, Poland and Greece to choose just eight examples from 30 plus in and around the EU; and if you hold such feelings as a democrat who wants a more equal, less money obsessed continent, then why would you want Britain to be run by the Brexit crowd and their hedge fund supporters, setting themselves in competition with the EU, under the vile, authoritarian conditions of British winner-takes-all politics? Especially when the failures of the EU mean it will have to change.

The coming fight for Europe is our fight. Lose it and we lose it here across the UK. Whether we *Leave* or *Remain*, if the EU turns irrevocably sour, neo-liberal, authoritarian and chauvinistic, so will the British Isles. Across our continent, an EU that regards the judgment of the people as a form of virus has lost its legitimacy. It is ripe for challenge. Think this, and DiEM 25 creates an open platform for creation of a democratic Europe of democratic nations. The EU has already been created through Monnet's method of incremental yet transformative reform. Now it is the peoples' turn to apply this peaceful but thoroughgoing approach to take back our European economy from corporate power. Think this, and roll up your sleeves for *Remain*.

Chapter 9

Labour's moribund referendum

At the start of the final month of the referendum campaign, the London newspapers are complaining about how negative, personalised and miserable the arguments have become. You would never have thought that the media bore any responsibility for the dreadful coverage, as well as the shocking failure of parliament to debate the government's EU deal, which the referendum is based on; just as I predicted, the prime minister is not going to debate it at all. At least not in a confrontation alongside anyone who knows what they are talking about, as the Daily Mail points out in a splendid rebuke.

I'm not 'blaming' the media. Rather there is a single political-media caste in the UK with a shared responsibility for the political culture and its manipulation. I found it grimly amusing to be agreeing with someone I regard as a consummate member of the caste, one time editor of the Spectator and the Telegraph, Charles Moore, in his elegant complaint about the "deeper sense in which things are fixed". He set out a convincing description of how the BBC collaborates with the government in shaping the agenda, playing down the important:

> *"Then there is the little matter of how we are governed and by whom, under what law and which judges. This is sometimes well done in feature programmes – Jeremy Paxman had quite a good go on Thursday*

> *night, for example. But it is scarcely considered news at all, though polls show it is one of the three biggest issues with voters."*

Her Majesty's official opposition also has a role in this. Had it wanted to insist on a Commons debate, it could have had one. Had it put forward with clarity and conviction the Labour party's own consideration of democracy and the European Union, this would have been heard. When Nicola Sturgeon speaks up she gets prominent coverage in the London press as well as Scotland's. Labour's leader doesn't because he has nothing distinctive to say. An astonishing example is Jeremy Corbyn's Ralph Miliband lecture at the LSE last week, on 17th May, on Rebuilding the Politics of Hope. He talks about the need to rebuild trust, quotes Harold Wilson saying the Labour party is "a moral crusade or it is nothing" and… does not mention the referendum over the future of Britain, even in passing. Is hope so evanescent it needs no country or continent?

With Tory voters apparently divided evenly, the way voters who are Labour sympathisers turn out could be decisive for the future of Europe. Disengagement could be fatal for the cause of *Remain* that Labour ostensibly supports. Worse, in a way, at least for the wider Labour and left movement, is the more likely outcome of a *Remain* vote owned by the right. If such a defining issue is handed over to the Conservatives by abstention it is likely to have dire consequences for the left thereafter, summed up by a single word: irrelevance.

Some of us intend to fight this, organised around Another Europe is Possible. This holds its London launch meeting this Saturday and brings together the Greens with Caroline Lucas, the pro-Corbyn Momentum movement, and the Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell, and the DiEM movement headed by Yanis Varoufakis. Campaigning for a *Remain* vote is one thing – understanding the

deeper impasse of the left is another; that is the central aim of this experiment of writing a book week-by-week online.

My intention from the start of *Blimey, it could be Brexit!* has been to resist the de-facto monopolising of the European question by the right. As soon as Michael Gove and Boris Johnson declared for *Leave,* Brexit became a viable option. No longer was the split between UKIP plus mavericks on the one hand against the government and a unified political caste. This meant it *could* be Brexit. It also meant that if it isn't, as everyone expects, the outcome will belong to a narrower section of the Conservative party. But meanwhile, conservatism as a whole thanks to its energy and will to contest the outcome, will have occupied the terrain that defines Britain's place and role in the world, marginalising UKIP.

Meanwhile the left won't even be barking at the caravan, it will just be scavenging for bones. For it was already clear that, despite many months of warning that a referendum was coming, no preparation of a left agenda or even vision rooted in an analysis of the forces at work had been started within the Labour party or outside. Such a failure can't be reversed by adopting 'a position' – it demands repairing the left's political culture. A left that is irritated and uncomfortable with debating its democracy, constitution, sovereignty and the principles governing our relationship to the EU, has walked away from its own country. Now it has to walk back. And, of course, it will be a different country from the one it has been used to. I'm not saying that fighting austerity is not a priority. I'm saying the way the left now uses urgent social and economic questions to freeze out wider issues such as the nature of the state is not prioritisation – it is repression: a pathological weakness, not a grasp of strategic importance.

"What the fuck is wrong with the left?" That is what I am asking in a sentence. I regret the vulgarity but we live in coarsened times. Why can't the English left

wake up to the significance of 'Europe', to the issues of how we are governed, and to their urgency now they are being taken into everyone's homes by the referendum? I've been asked why I am writing a whole book about 'the Tory referendum', as if it is a piece of soiled washing the fastidious would deal with only as a matter of hygiene. My reply is that the above question is at the centre of my enquiry. To quote from the introduction published way back on 22 March, I posed a question:

> *"… especially pertinent but not confined to those of us on the left as we observe the Conservative government battle it out and puzzle and fear the consequences. There is a story about a warm summer night when Sherlock Holmes and Dr Watson decided to sleep rough on the Moors rather than head for the local inn still some miles away. In the middle of the night Holmes shook Dr Watson by the shoulder and woke him. "Look up there, Watson", he said, pointing to the stars, "what do you make of the significance of that?" "I'm not sure", said the sleepy Watson, "it shows the night sky of the northern hemisphere". "No, no, my dear Watson, what else?" "Well, Holmes, it is a dark, clear moonless summer night and Orion is in the ascendant." "No, no, something more important than that, Watson." "Oh I don't know, Holmes", Dr Watson replied now wide awake, "what does it show?" Nothing stirred across the bleak, windless moors. After a short silence Sherlock Holmes replied, "It means, my dear Watson, that someone has stolen our tent".*
>
> *What does it mean that we can see the strange movement of the planets of the UK's Conservative party so clearly? It means that something has stolen away the British left. The Conservatives have no need to hide their differences as they sense no serious threat to their heavenly supremacy. Just as the absence of a thrusting, profitable European*

Union has made Leave a credible option, so the absence of a viable, threatening, popular Labour Party, confident of winning the next election, means the Tories feel no need to stick together to preserve their current advantage. More significant, the Labour Party has almost nothing to say of any vitality or interest about the future of Europe and why the UK should, or should not, be involved. I'm not blaming Labour's new leader Jeremy Corbyn as if it's his fault. None of the many who are ambitious for his job have uttered any credible arguments worthy of the stakes in play."

To understand how profoundly shaping an absence this is, try three quick thought experiments. The Labour party could be insisting on what was once its almost unanimous view: that the EU is a corporate, foreign threat to the great traditions of British government and we should not be in it. In which case any Tories calling for *Leave* would be playing Labour's game, because Labour's narrative of the country's role outside the EU would be stronger and more coherent than theirs. Given the partisan culture of Westminster politics this would rally most Conservative opinion and its media to *Remain*. Or imagine a strong and coherent Labour party embracing the Blairite view, which only recently was its near unanimous opinion: that Britain must lead in Europe. Cameron's deal, it would argue, is a disgrace, an abnegation of the need for us to influence the future of the continent, and as soon as Labour returns to power it will tear up its 'opt outs' and take the UK back to the centre of the EU as New Labour did when it pledged before the 1997 election to sign the Social Chapter of Maastricht that John Major's government refused.

The consequence of such a pro-European stand would force many of those who support Cameron to switch to *Leave*, because the strong and defining *Remain* narrative would have been defined by New Labour as fully participating in the European Union. Or, finally, imagine a young Labour leadership

organising platforms with like-minded Greens and left parties from across the whole continent alongside the SNP, calling for a transformed, democratic EU – a left *Remain* strategy with just as strong a narrative as the Blairite one but pitching a democratic rather than a corporate story. This too would have swung Tories into the *Leave* camp in the face of a genuine threat of popular transformation.

The fact that there wasn't a remote possibility of any of these scenarios brings you face to face with the collapse of Labour and the left as an influential or even challenging force in British politics. It remains extremely relevant: negatively. Yes, the Brexit debate is an ugly spat within the forces of conservatism and the right, and to that extent demeaning for the country as a whole. But the country has been delivered into their exclusive hands by the failure of anyone to capture the public imagination with an alternative, democratic vision of Britain in Europe.

Why is this, what has stolen away the tent? Such a failure must have causes. In the first part of *Blimey* I looked at why the UK is having an uncharacteristic referendum in the first place. This meant starting with how the Conservatives have been broken apart over Europe, from the UK's original accession in the early 1970s and through the Thatcher period. I then examined Cameron's strategy and his duplicitous deal. The peculiarity of the Tory Brexiteer opposition to it followed. It's important to pause on this for a moment as the left's scorn of 'Boris' is dangerously facile.

While the Conservatives seem supreme thanks to their small but absolute parliamentary majority, they are the party most threatened by the upstarts of the anti-establishment insurgency, in the shape of UKIP. The Brexit Tories led by Johnson and Gove are seeking to appropriate the force of populism from unwashed Kippers while further marginalising the left. Uniquely, as members of the 1 per cent, they have ventured out to meet the anti-elite on its own terms

and seek to lead it, thus renewing themselves. They will probably lose the referendum to shaken corporate colleagues, having given them the fright of their lives. This does not mean they won't have a future. Their furious struggle over staying in the EU or not demonstrates that there is life – self-belief and self-confidence – in the Tory network, along with access to funding. The referendum could leave them battered but alive, like prize-fighters, while leaving Labour seeming grumpy and irrelevant, outside the ring.

How come Labour finds itself so marginalised? There are four major reasons. First, the social democrat tradition, which seeks to reform and better capitalism for the benefit of all who work, has collapsed as a political movement across Europe since the financial crash of 2008. Its decline was already underway with the shrinking of the organised working class. Its revival through its embrace of 'third way' policies supporting globalization implicated it in neoliberalism. It became a victim of the financial forces it had embraced. Here in the UK, Gordon Brown celebrated his deregulation of the financial sector and announced that his policies as Chancellor had ended "Tory boom and bust". When the bust came, despite a valiant rear-guard action, his and Blair's New Labour went down with it. Parts of it are still going down.

Second, membership of the European Union poses profound issues of sovereignty, government and democracy; of who is accountable to whom, what role voters play, and what kind of state the UK will have in future. For the United Kingdom this is especially challenging, as it is an uncodified, multi-national union within the larger European multi-national union that is codifying itself. This is bound to be a dissolving threat to Britain's once strong but informal constitution, as the Tories have discovered. For the UK's lack of an articulated constitutional framework means it can't easily defend its particularity from the constitutional logic of Europe. The UK's supposed strength is its highly centralised government institutionalised in Westminster, whose powers are reinforced by first-past-the-post, the House of Lords, the

Treasury and the domination of the Whitehall over the regions. One of the most interesting and persuasive arguments of the *Leave* is that the EU is "obsolete" as an economic project, centralised and corporate in an era that now favours the flexible, advocated particularly clearly by [Daniel Hannan](). But as Simon Deakin argues in a [Social Europe collection](), it is the British constitution that is obsolete not the EU's.

Any critique of the absence of democracy in the EU can't avoid the pre-democratic character of Westminster. Otherwise it will be hypocritical and contradictory. This didn't matter for New Labour, which embraced the authoritarianism of the British state as well as that of the EU, as two sides of the same coin when Blair strutted in his prime. But opposing the undemocratic nature of the EU has to be matched by a call for democratic reform of Britain or it will be worthless. Yet Labour is stuffed with MPs, peers and ex-prime ministers besotted with the lure of a Labour majority government retaking the reins of Westminster's centralisation. Labour's new and inexperienced leadership has not yet been able to develop its ideas on the UK's constitution – little wonder it has not done so on Europe's.

Third, the party's paralysis on democratic and constitutional questions is multiplied by the national question, where the different energy of the EU hits the UK particularly hard. Until only last year Labour was a party of the union; since then it has been reduced to one Scottish MP. Earlier this month it was reduced to being the third party north of the border.

Like UKIP, Labour is now a party of England and Wales. But while UKIP, whose electoral pressure forced the Tories to grant a referendum and whose electoral gains stopped Labour from being the largest party in 2015, is comfortable with its English nature, Labour is not. UKIP is the thwarted voice of a captive country, but Labour still sees itself as a British beast. Advocate leaving the neoliberal monster of the EU (as many Labour activists do) and you are expressing an

English politics, even though most of them abhor any form of nationalism. Advocate *Remain* with energy and passion and you begin to sound like a distinctly 'un-British' European. This is before considering how Labour supporters in Wales and Scotland and social democrats in Northern Ireland feel. Labour especially has to sort out what it thinks about the UK's national question before it can advocate any consistent European role. The European question and the national question walk out together. Apart from Scotland, however, the national issue is a neuralgic one for most of the left. Little wonder that most Labour members stick with a passive distaste of Tory antics.

Fourth, there is the connection of all these issues to the anger against the political establishment and the blatant inequality of austerity in our maddening times. The forces at work are disintegrating and dislodging traditional governing parties and boosting those like UKIP and the SNP and the Greens, as we have seen. The Labour party accidently opened itself up to the transformative energy of this impatience with a new system for electing its leader, leaving most of its MPs and peers along with the Tory press horrified by the Corbyn surge. Can the new leadership assist the creation of a new form of politics in a democratic Labour party? The referendum on Brexit offers a chance to initiate this but it came too soon, to be taken by men and women who had hardly learnt how to work with each other and are still reeling under the impact of the party's electoral crisis. So I'm not 'blaming' the Labour party for failing to be a shaping force at this moment when British politics has opened up in new ways. I'm trying to understand its marginalisation at a moment of opportunity.

Some Labour activists suggest that Labour's passivity hides a vixen-like cunning on the part of different sections of the leadership. Among them are those who would like the UK to leave but want the Tories to take responsibility, hence preserving Labour unity by supporting *Remain* as weakly as possible. Others reckon the best thing is to step back and allow the Conservatives to chew each other to pieces over Europe, so that Labour can inherit at the next election

whatever the outcome, as if there is a legitimate system waiting for them to 'take over the reins'. But when you talk with Labour party members there is little sign of the glint of winners taking tactical advantage of their enemy's affliction. Rather there is a weary lack of interest in the referendum, even revulsion. The wider issues it poses are ones they do not want to have to think about, suggesting a pathological desire to repress reality. [Jeremy Gilbert](#) has pointed out in a careful, patient analysis that "if there is to be any hope of a progressive government in 2020, Labour and its supporters must go much further in accepting that the only sane course is to do something very different from what we have done before." Being sane, and even more so staying sane, is very hard work. Much easier to hope that one more heave, this time with a million members, will do the trick and absolve them from the need for a rethink.

Three weeks ago I explored the all-round madness of the moment, of which the referendum is a symptom. Next week I'm going to look at nationalism and especially the Anglo-British left's functionally reactionary and self-denying hang-up with nationalism, which impedes it from escaping the imperial imagination. It is one of Labour's biggest problems. Then I'll look at democracy and the prospects for pluralism in the context of the UK's broken constitution and eviscerated constitutional culture. The double, disabling inability of the English left to develop national and democratic policies feeds its resentful silence, unease and even bad-faith in the Brexit referendum campaign. All this will have to be overcome if there is to be any recovery that lasts.

In addition, there is the crisis of a social democratic tradition within which Labour's fate has to be situated.

The collapse of European solidarity

A warm summer evening in Syntagma Square, just last year. Crowds of happy young people are pouring out of the subway station where only recently

protestors had been gassed and clubbed. Greece has voted OXI. The polls said it would be narrow. Instead, with referendum papers still being counted by the extraordinarily efficient telling system, the result is clear: cities and villages, isthmuses and islands, everywhere across the country by a majority of three to two Greeks have said NO to the Troika and its punitive, self-defeating demands. It's friendly and exhilarating. A bit like a crowd celebrating a football victory, yet it is also the beginning of a confrontation. The singing just close by, my friends tell me, is a wartime anti-German partisan chorus. I realise that for the first time in my life I'm part of a crowd celebrating the equivalent of going to war. It's not belligerent or regimented or angry, and the mood isn't at all arrogant. It is happily defiant; proud that they have stood up. I think everyone is prepared for the likelihood of paying a price, perhaps a heavy one, even being defeated, but they are relieved to have a clear majority in their sails: OXI! No, to being crushed by a European Union! It is better to fight whatever the odds than choose to be a slave. I was happy to be there.

Suddenly a feeling passed through me, like a shudder. *We here are alone.* A modest square, in a small country, on a lovely peninsula, fighting for a little justice for regular folk. The country is broke – everyone knows this. Recovery must be hard, but Greeks are hard-working. They knew they bore some responsibility. Even if Germans and French corrupted the elites with bribes, the Greeks took them and gave their MPs immunity from prosecution. But the terms being proposed by the Eurozone and the so-called Troika were not just punitive, they were ridiculous. To pay back the loan being negotiated the country has to grow its economy. The Eurogroup's terms included a budget surplus of 3.5 per cent, which would make the necessary growth impossible. The country has suffered an unprecedented drop in its economic activity and standard of living, with enormously high unemployment. The terms demanded are both inhuman and counter-productive. It is clearly right to defy them. But where is the solidarity that should have been extended from Europe's trade

union and social democrat parties to their Greek brothers and sisters in such distress?

They were on the other side. The Euro Group and its central bank shut down the Greek banking system when the referendum was declared – a form of intimidation far more extreme than the alarms the UK has been subjected to with the prospect of Brexit. The man who led this was the Euro Group's president Jeroen Dijsselbloem, a leading Dutch Labour politician. He attacked the Greeks saying that their "every sentence had ideological baggage", as if his were free of any preconceptions! A perfect example of using depoliticisation to disarm disagreement. President Hollande was – and still is – the head of the French social democrats. All he was capable of by means of *fraternité* was equivocation and hand-wringing. Perhaps no one personified the consequences of sharing power for European social democrats more than Chancellor Merkel's deputy in her grand coalition, Sigmar Gabriel, who heads Germany's historic Social Democratic party. When the referendum's resounding NO was declared he made the most brutal public statement, saying that Tsipras and his government were leading the Greek people down a path of "bitter sacrifice and hopelessness", and had:

> *"torn down the last bridges over which Europe and Greece might have been able to move towards a compromise… With the rejection of the rules of the game of the eurozone, which have been expressed with the majority of NOs, it is impossible to imagine negotiations over programmes worth billions…"*

One year on from this disgusting assault and what do we read? The same Gabriel announces, "Everyone knows that this debt relief will have to come at some point. It makes no sense to shirk from that time and time again… Greece needs debt relief". Exactly what the Tsipras government had been saying and

'Oxi' demanded. Too late, perhaps, for Gabriel's once mighty party, which has just slid to below 20% support for the first time. Meanwhile, the IMF now argues "upfront, unconditional" debt relief is needed with a much lower primary surplus of 1.5%. Cruellest of all, Paul De Grauwe has shown in a careful expert policy analysis that the ECB's quantitative easing is providing effective debt relief to every Eurozone country, most of all Germany, except for… Greece.

> *"The exclusion of Greece is the result of a political decision that aims at punishing a country that has misbehaved. It is time that the discrimination against Greece stops and that a country struggling under the burden of immense debt is treated in the same way as the other Eurozone countries that have been enjoying silent debt relief organised by the ECB."*

This won't stop until there are strong voices across Europe demanding a reversal of policy towards Greece. Through this whole period the British Labour party has done nothing. No hand or eyebrow of even symbolic, moral support has been extended. Technically, the reason for this is that Syriza heads Greece's left wing government while Labour is affiliated to the Progressive Alliance, whose Greek member is PASOK, which now has only 6% support. Of course this is an excuse. Greece is challenging the consensus, and too many Labour figures have benefitted from it to extend a hand of solidarity.

What does this have to do with UK Labour's inability to generate an influential approach to the Brexit referendum? A lot. It needs a way of supporting Europe on terms that are not beholden to the Tories. This demands European allies and attractive forms of European solidarity. Labour needs a plausible framework of international cooperation to make any case at all that the sway of neo-liberal Europe can be challenged.

But just as Labour under Blair drove forward the Lisbon Treaty that expanded the EU's undemocratic powers, Europe's social democrats are co-architects of the continent's neo-liberalism. In order to be able to speak with conviction of a social Europe of solidarity, liberty and equality, the current influence of its social democratic parties has to be replaced. This is an immense task, whether it means replacing them as in the battle within the left currently underway in Spain, or renewing them as is being attempted however clumsily in the UK.

At home on the range

As a life-long non-member of any party my first experience of a Labour conference was in 1989, as the co-ordinator of Charter 88. That year I went to all three of the main parties' annual gatherings to advocate constitutional reform. While the Lib Dems were overwhelmingly boys exercising their hobby, Labour surprised me by being diverse and energetic. This was the period of Neil Kinnock's leadership as Thatcher passed her zenith. I had expected a traditional, old-left Bennite domination of the conference floor. Instead, Bennism and its "four noes" (No to the bomb, the EU, NATO and the House of Lords) had been defeated and the EU embraced. As the Charter's first priority was to see the European Convention on Human Rights incorporated into British law the larger Europeanization of Labour's political culture was hugely welcome.

A year later, Claire Short stopped the party's executive from adopting a motion supporting human rights on the grounds that they were anti-woman as they gave judges power. But it was the start of a learning curve. Jacques Delors had spoken to the TUC conference in 1988 proposing Europe as a social market and a way out of the trap of Thatcherism, strongly supported by John Monks, then head of the TUC. The conversion of Labour to a European party was all the more impressive for being informal. Discussion of policy issues, from the family to work to economic policy, was built on European models and legislation. The

horizons of its political culture had lifted from Benn's parliamentary nationalism to continental reformism. After 1992 when John Smith, a committed European, became leader of Labour, he committed the party to a Human Rights Act (in his Charter 88 lecture, indeed), firmed up its commitment to a Scottish Parliament and called for a new settlement. In policy terms, democratic reform and the national-European question often seem separate issues, but they are part of the same cultural movement against the Westminster system.

A 'soft left' emerged, strengthened by new think tanks that combined social reform to globalisation and formed the mental environment in which the generation of both Miliband brothers entered politics. It embraced Maastricht (while far-sighted warnings against the Euro, from Wynne Godley and Brian Gould, who had run against John Smith for the leadership, were ignored). When Blair came to power after 1997, he rapidly signed the UK up to [Maastricht's Social Chapter](#) providing a framework for hugely improved rights at work while announcing the arrival of the 'third way'.

Often mocked, as in Francis Wheen's delightful tagging as being between the Second Coming and the Fourth Dimension, there were (naturally) three aspects to third-wayism. One was the development of innovative, international policies that were progressive, effective and motivated, not simply collectivist or delivered from above. This fitted the European-style internationalism that became Labour's core culture. Another was the embrace of international capitalism under the rubric of globalisation, as a replacement of old-style internationalism, with the taxation of its profits used to fund improved education, welfare and social needs; backing finance capital and living off the transfers. Finally, there was the politics of the label. The most important word was neither 'third' nor 'way'. Their combination was banal, meaning only a political economy between total free market and total state control. The key word in the formulation, which delivered its bite, was the word 'The'. There could be only *one* third way! Arbitrated, naturally, by the leader. In this guise,

'The Third Way' was an old-fashioned form of control camouflaged by new-fangled sociologists, and opened the way for 'triangulation' and the development of corporate populism.

The Blair-Brown period of Labour government saw a leadership that was always Washington-centric becoming more so. While their embrace of the US was existential, their support for the EU was primarily instrumental. They saw it as a platform for the projection of 'leadership' and 'influence' elsewhere in the world, especially as an ally of the US. This distance from the EU was intensified by Gordon Brown, supported by Ed Balls and his Treasury team, making the far-sighted call to resist Blair and Mandelson's campaign for the UK to join the euro. They ensured the UK and the new currency avoided a complete catastrophe when the financial crash occurred in 2008. The paradox is that New Labour began as a 'project' with an unprecedented sense of a coherent approach: an alert, vigorous culture, and an embrace of a shared continent that broke from Labour's imperial nostalgia. Its will to power was combined with a genuine dedication to equality, innovation and at the start, even openness. But it ended its period in office in 2010 deeply unresolved as to its priorities and place in the world, suspicious of new ideas, divided between its two architects. It finally broke the old British settlement with its conservative establishment but failed to replace it with a legitimate democracy or a functioning welfare state. In the process it started to make the UK a more European country then pulled back. The Europeanising constitutional reforms only fully proceeded in Scotland, whose present confident pro-European mood demonstrates the connection between the civic, the national and the democratic that has been the best legacy of the EU to date. Its achievement will be seen as one of the most important, lasting legacies of New Labour, leading ironically to the party's elimination north of the border

Ed Miliband's legacy

It would be quite unfair to suggest that there could be any single Labour figure responsible after 2010 for this year's benighted Brexit referendum and Labour's incapacity to shape it. Putting fairness aside there is: it is Ed Miliband. His leadership blocked Labour from proposing its own referendum and this paved the way for the current collapse. The nature of his five-year leadership is coming into focus, helped by *The Labour Party Under Ed Miliband* by Eunice Goes. Miliband was underestimated when he won the leadership and almost certainly did better than his brother would have, as David would have divided the party without the patience or skill to bring it back together or the moral standing needed to rectify his support for the Iraq war given his inability to break from Blair.

While that is speculation, what is clear is that retaining the unity of the party after defeat became Ed Miliband's number one preoccupation. It was like a Ming vase, he would say, having to be carried across the five years. With amazing dedication he included, called, touched, assuaged, neutralised and listened to all the potential points of serious friction, accommodating them in his shadow cabinet and beyond. A party that had been riven by a ferocious division at the top became a singular machine, with only the odd media contrived rumours of leadership challenges, mostly concocted from disgruntled figures outside the parliamentary party itself. In 2012 Miliband rebranded Labour as the "One Nation" party at its conference in Manchester, getting rare approval from the media.

> *"Friends, I didn't become leader of the Labour Party to reinvent the world of Disraeli or Attlee. But I do believe in that spirit. That spirit of One Nation. One Nation: a country where everyone has a stake. One Nation: a country where prosperity is fairly shared. One Nation: where*

> *we have a shared destiny, a sense of shared endeavour and a common life that we lead together. That is my vision of One Nation. That is my vision of Britain. That is the Britain we must become."*

He then reached out to those who had voted for David Cameron. The press liked it. It seemed to be sincere. But even this caused some friction and was dropped. In its place Miliband talked about togetherness. In his speech to the 2014 party conference two years later One Nation had evaporated completely and he referred 41 times to what Goes generously calls "the principle" of "together".

To ensure togetherness within the party, fear of the 1980s was also pumped into the faithful and the discontented alike, warning them that any return to tearing into each other as after 1979 would mean decades in the wilderness. The incentive was the analysis that showed "a 35% strategy" of retaining just over a third of voters would return Labour to office after one parliament. It was one of the most masterful exercises of party management ever witnessed. The outcome was indeed unity – the quiet unity of a morgue.

Only one aspect of this concerns us here. Miliband presented himself as a man who wanted empowered democracy and political reform. Under the influence of Marc Stears, ideas about direct democracy and people power "peppered" some speeches and policies. In fact, Goes reports, he was "ambivalent" about democratic reform, giving few speeches devoted to it, and his comments tended to be "fairly general". She concludes: "On the whole, then, Miliband's 'power to the people' agenda was more symbolic than transformative".

Some of his advisors sought to change this, in particular pressing for him to promise an EU referendum on the principle of membership or not. On the right, Ed Balls, Miliband's shadow chancellor, although an opponent of devolution of power, thought a referendum inevitable and that Labour should own it. Others

in the shadow cabinet argued strongly in favour. Thanks to this I was encouraged to set out the argument in a private letter to him, which I did in the Autumn of 2014 and later published a version of it in the [New Statesman](#) while there was still time for its inclusion in the party's election manifesto.

I proposed a 'European and Constitutional Reform Act' to set out that if the people vote to stay in the EU, the UK would move to creating its own constitution through a convention process. The link was essential, I argued, so that being in the EU is associated with asserting and obtaining our own constitution, "with a constitutional court able to defend it in the way that the German court protects German democracy":

> *"A more popular way of putting this, is that we must ensure that staying in Europe makes us more democratic, not less. Farage's most notable phrase is that we must "take our country back". In his case, back to an unrealisable better yesterday. But he taps into a genuinely felt loss of who we are. The answer: we have to find ourselves in the future, not in the past. Put the two together - membership of Europe and a democratic constitution - and a referendum becomes a positive, winnable call for change not a defensive manoeuvre. Fail to do this and UKIP supporters, including one-time Labour ones, will reluctantly vote Tory in the vain hope this will give them a say."*

Miliband refused to budge. It was divisive and not together enough: Labour would oppose the Tory proposal to hold a referendum. The result was that enough Labour voters switched to UKIP to lose the seats Labour needed to govern.

Being committed to the possibility of a new constitution meant opening the prospect of a federal outcome, hence maybe an English parliament. But this was

precisely the point, there had to be a positive approach to the national question as well, otherwise the rise of the Scottish nationalist would prove Labour's undoing. The forces that defeated Labour in 2015 were perfectly obvious, including to Ed's frustrated advisors.

By refusing to permit any initiatives that might appear divisive, Miliband silenced Labour. The Ming vase survived intact but it was completely empty. Which is why today, when the party looks inside to see what principles its policy on Europe should be based upon, it finds nothing.

What was at first a party twitching but still lively after the trauma of defeat in 2010 became stilled, then comatose. Proof was the dazed, toothless sound-bites of the would-be leaders who put themselves forward after Miliband stepped down, as soon as his general election defeat was confirmed. Had there been any debate about why the party had lost in 2010 – apparently there was not even an internal report on the fact that it had happened – or vigorous arguments about direction, the candidates who stepped forward might have enjoyed tested and developed positions. Not least on their policy towards the EU. Instead, overnight, under the glare of publicity, they were expected to go from 'all pulling together' to declaring what they stood for differently. Some of the apparently handsome bodies that emerged from the cupboard crumpled before they could stand. Three retained enough strength in their knees to remain upright long enough to collect the necessary number of MP nominations. But their mental zombyism was so obvious and embarrassing that 35 MPs put Jeremy Corbyn up as a candidate at literally the last minute. He was someone who believed in what he said, gasp! He may have been mummified from the early-pharaohic epoch of Benn and the four Noes, it was inconceivable that *he* would become the party's Lazarus! Instead, the idea was to use the gritty authenticity of his time-machine opinions to jolt at least one of the triumvirate into life.

Instead, the mummy proved to have more life in him than the three of them put together! He said austerity had been a bad idea and should be opposed. Sheer relief that someone had said the obvious inspired trade unionists, online activists, an 'Iraq generation' of older Labour members and a surge of the young, to come together to deliver a vast collective cardiopulmonary resuscitation on the party, whacking the heart of Labour repeatedly, giving Corbyn himself the kiss of life, until the body stirred, to the astonishment of the parliamentary head not to speak of the media.

A European Labour party?

Utterly unprepared, the Corbyn team has found itself within months chucked into the referendum campaign. This is its first test of addressing the country while responding to a new issue. Every fibre of its make up resists the bellicose rhetoric of Blair and the soft version of the same from David Miliband, whose speech denounced Brexit as "fantasy" and "arson" arguing that the UK's role is to be a world firefighter:

> *"If you want arson on the international order, vote to leave, but if you want Britain to remain with the firefighters, vote to remain."*

As if the Iraq invasion had not left the Middle East in flames. Meanwhile, Gordon Brown is pursuing his own version of 'Clout not Out', writing in the FT, "We should be leading in Europe, not leaving it" – apparently unaware that the actual prime minister of the day has negotiated a deal that explicitly marginalises the UK from exercising leadership in the EU if the referendum endorses *Remain*.

How can the new Labour leadership respond in a creative way? First, it is clear that Corbyn himself for honourable reasons is quite unsuited to be prime minister and will never be elected to the role. The danger is that he comes to

believe that he has a personal mandate as the chosen one and needs only "to survive" to succeed. This will entail doing as little as possible to provoke arguments within the Labour party. Ironically, he could be heading into a repeat of the same benighted unity-first strategy as Ed Miliband: betting on a crisis, Tory divisions and the rise of UKIP, to deliver him to Downing Street provided he holds Labour together….

His shadow chancellor John McDonnell is being more creative. He has recruited thinkers from outside Labour to help him refashion the argument on the economy. It is not the full monty of an open Labour that I argued for with respect to Corbyn's golden opportunity, but it is serious start to creating imaginative and intelligent alliances essential for any significant challenge to power. He has just set out a case for a "transformative economic policy" to a New Economy Forum that he convened saying:

> *we need to make an absolute commitment to responsible financing by a future Labour government. Let me spell out what that means. The old rules meant the last Labour government relied too heavily on tax revenues from financial services, and too heavily on off-balance sheet spending through the Private Finance Initiative.*

This remarkable statement got no press attention but suggests three things. Whether deliberately or not, McDonnell is responding to the findings of the Cruddas Inquiry into why Labour lost in 2015, that while "voters are economically radical they are fiscally prudent". Second, by identifying New Labour's over-reliance on financial services he is accepting Labour's political responsibility for the debt crisis that followed the crash and initiating a fundamentally different approach to the embrace of globalisation and neoliberalism. The New Labour realists seeking to regain the party's leadership will now have to confront the failure of their own economic strategy in exactly

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the way they should have done after 2010. Third, and most important for this argument, McDonnell is also creating an opening for an economic policy distinct from both the Eurozone's and George Osborne style austerity. It can't succeed with European allies but it might start to provide a framework open to them; and there can be no alternative to globalisation as we know it that is not also an alternative globalisation.

McDonnell has also led the Labour party in arguing for a positive approach to remaining in the EU, in his recent speech at the TUC. Again this got little coverage in the media – it being quite a long and thoughtful case. It contained the usual Labour version of the transactional benefits of being in the EU in terms of improving our environment and human rights. I can understand them being made in a forthright defensive way by trade unions, like Len McCluskey's short, strong video message as the head of Unite. But they seem odd coming from a political leader as they imply Britain could not enjoy these advantages if Labour wins office. In two distinctive respects McDonnell advances the case for *Remain*. He comes out swinging in terms of the free movement of people across the EU, as a fundamental gain especially for younger people. The approach refuses to regard free movement as the commoditisation of labour and treats it as an advance in what it means to be human. Second, he argues for:

> *a reformed Europe under a Labour remain vote... when I talk about EU reform I don't mean the ridiculous deals like the one struck by the Prime Minister to undermine workers' rights in this country.*
>
> *I want to see a more open and transparent EU by ending the secrecy that happens at the European Council and Ecofin conferences. I want the clear light of day to act as a detergent that will rid the EU of some of its more anti-democratic structures. And now more than at any other*

> *time in recent years there's a growing coalition across Europe who share this desire. And who need our solidarity so we prevent the scenes we saw in Greece and across the EU.*
>
> *Rather than leaving we should instead stay to make this positive case, and those of us who truly want to strengthen our sovereignty will be passing up this huge chance by voting to leave next month.*

This is the welcome approach that will be advocated and explored by Another Europe is Possible. For Labour it comes with a health warning. The reason why the Tories struggle so hard with the EU despite its capitalist nature is that it dissolves the framework of Westminster-style sovereignty. It does the same for Labour's old dreams also. Despite all the justified criticisms of the present, lamentable, undemocratic nature of the European Union, it still forces politicians in Britain to raise their game. For Labour this means pluralism: sharing platforms with other parties, working with Scotland as another autonomous European nation, embracing proportional representation and therefore coalition politics, building human rights into our constitutional system and therefore working out how it can be codified. It means desisting from proposing that the UK "leads in Europe" and means trying instead to become... a European country. Are the Labour party's new members really up for this?

In writing this chapter I have appreciated the chance to talk with: Eunice Goes as well as Rosemary Bechler, Jon Cruddas, Jeremy Gilbert, Paul Hilder, Dan Iley-Williamson, Neal Lawson, Bruno Leipold, Mark Leonard, Nick Pearce, Benjamin Ramm, Adam Ramsay, Hilary Wainwright, Stuart White, Stewart Wood, all of whom are utterly absolved from any association with my judgements.

Chapter 10

It's England's Brexit

"Well said, old mole! Canst work i' th' earth so fast?"

(Hamlet, Act I, Scene V)

Less than a month before the vote and polls suggest the outcome of the referendum might be Brexit. Why? I want to point the finger at my own kind: the progressive, well-educated, middle class, Europe-loving, opinion makers, [91% of whom](), if you are Guardian-readers like me want to stay in the EU. Yes, my kin and kind, it is your fault that a Brexit result you so abhor is even possible. Like a bad cyclist who stares at the large, wild-looking dog they are trying to avoid and therefore steers into it, the English nation that alarms you so much is now giving you a well deserved bite up the bum. You should have befriended it.

Whatever the result of the referendum, whether it is a healthy majority for *Remain*, a narrow one, or a vote to *Leave*, the heart of the matter is that England has to have its own parliament. What the referendum reveals is that England both monopolises and is imprisoned by British Westminster and its culture of 'to the victor the spoils'. To escape from this England is embracing Brexit because no other solution is on offer. It may be intimidated into remaining in the EU through fear of the economic consequences. But England's frustrated desire for democracy has turned it against the EU rather than the real culprit, the British state.

Although a long fruitless succession of calls for England to 'awake' should warn off any further attempts, mine has three parts, each in a different tone. First, sociological, showing that England is the force behind the referendum. Second,

subjective, highlighting the nature of Englishness. Third, political, arguing that action has to be taken to represent England fairly in all its glorious polyphony.

England not Britain is driving the Referendum

A recent [ICM online poll](#) has England showing *Remain* 43% with *Leave* on 44% and undecided 12%. Telephone polls have shown a significant lead for *Remain,* which the betting says is still the likely outcome on 23rd June. The reason that I'm bothering with an uncertain statistic is that this one allows comparison with Scotland where there is certainty. North of the border the same poll shows *Remain* is on 59% and *Leave* 28%, also with 12% undecided. The majority for *Remain* in Scotland is already more than twice as large as the 'don't knows'. This is reflected in its politicians. In Edinburgh [Allan Little](#) reports for the BBC, "It is striking how little high-profile support there is for Brexit in Scotland… During a debate in the Holyrood chamber last week, [only eight of the 129 MSPs](#) voted to leave the EU". In England's Westminster there was no such debate – a significant failure of nerve.

With the *Remain* lead unassailable, the Scottish nation has made up its mind. It is England that has yet to decide. The present uncertainty is *not* a question of how 'Britain' will vote. Leave or *Remain* is an *English question*.

The English nature of the referendum does not please the political-media caste that rules the UK, or my Guardian-reading friends. There are divisions over the EU but not over the reluctance to be 'reduced' to being 'merely' English administrators, politicians, broadcasters or listeners. Thanks to devolution there is an [Arts Council England](#), [English Heritage](#) and [NHS England](#) But there is not a single major English civic organisation or think tank I know of, that seeks to represent English opinion, framing itself within the necessary national consciousness. England has no voice, no civic institutions, no parliament or even assembly.

Here in England, there is unease that if the vote is for Brexit the Scottish government might demand "another independence referendum" as Alan Little puts it. From the point of view of the British political-media caste, it is further evidence that the Scots remain uppity about the British and that Scotland might once again try to "go off on its own". It is not – at least not yet – understood that all the Scots would be doing is seeking to *Remain!* The Scots will simply aim to stay as they are, like most of Europe. It will be England's Westminster that will be the oddball - for proclaiming independence from Scotland along with the rest of the EU.

Two years ago, my openDemocracy colleague Adam Ramsay wrote a short article on the peculiarity of the Westminster system, [Scotland isn't different, it's Britain that's bizarre](). Through the debates over last year's independence referendum it was repeatedly shared until about 8% of the Scottish population read it. As yet the 'Brits in England' do not yet know how bizarre they are. Instead, the Westminster political and media caste observe the universe through Ptolemaic binoculars that make it appear that all movement revolves around them, as the fixed 'historic' centre. This applies as much to Cameron as to Johnson and Corbyn. All seem to believe that somehow Scotland has sought to '*Leave'* them and will in the end come back if not in this decade in the next. Whereas in fact England is on the move. This is the inadmissible secret of so-called British politics. They call it a Brexit referendum. Wrongly. It would be better abbreviated to Exit.

Even [Martin Kettle](), a Guardian columnist who advocates constitutional reform cannot escape the optic of "British voters". Pulling his hair out at the fearful closeness of the polls he writes (I'm quoting key phrases and emphasizing):

> *If **Brexit** wins, it will be because a majority of **British** voters have simply lost confidence in the way they are governed… why is this happening…*

> *the closeness of the polls says something new is afoot among us as **a people**... Why is it so hard to persuade **the British** electorate... if **Britain** walks away, it will be an act of immense political impulsiveness by one of the last **countries** in Europe that many would expect to behave that way. France, Spain, Italy, Greece, Hungary maybe, according to the old stereotypes. But **Britain**?*

It's wrong to write about the UK like this. Britain is no longer a single political country with a unified people. If Brexit happens it will only be because a majority of English voters have lost confidence in the way they are governed. To focus on what this means, I'll declare my interest. England is my country; I'd like it to come alive in a healthy way and don't like to see it driven by UKIP. I am very conscious of the good people I know who are English in so many ways – one being that they deny their national identity any overt expression. Not just individuals, but political parties too, in particular the Labour Party, which lost the last election because it had no English programme and will go on losing them until it creates one.

This is a very hard argument for most English readers to take, because it involves the need to untie a knot in their own identity that they fear to loosen. It has to be done. There can be no progress without it.

Eighteen months ago [a careful study](#) by Nick Vivyan and Chris Hanretty of Durham and East Anglia universities mapped support for leaving the EU, constituency by constituency across the UK. The darker the blue the higher the support for leaving.
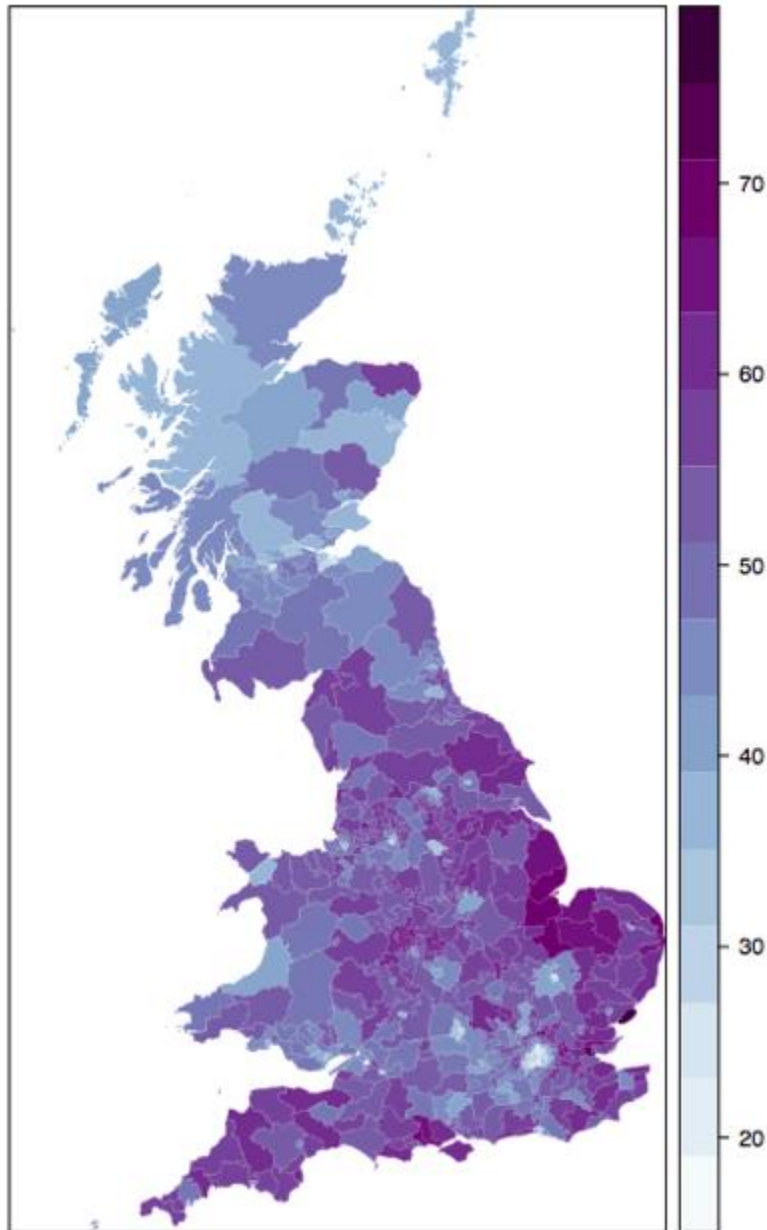
Hanretty told the Aberdeen Press and Journal, "What this analysis shows is that Scottish views on the European Union are distinct from English views. Even looking at constituencies just north of the border – areas that are by no means bedrocks of SNP support – you find a more favourable opinion of the EU than you do in the north of England."

Within England there are big variations, with London supporting *Remain.* These should not distract from the political and cultural divide between the nations. I'm not going to discuss Wales and Northern Ireland here, which appears discourteous but comes from my respect for their own specific responses. I intend to go and report from there separately.

Here is an FT image made in the final month of the referendum campaign.
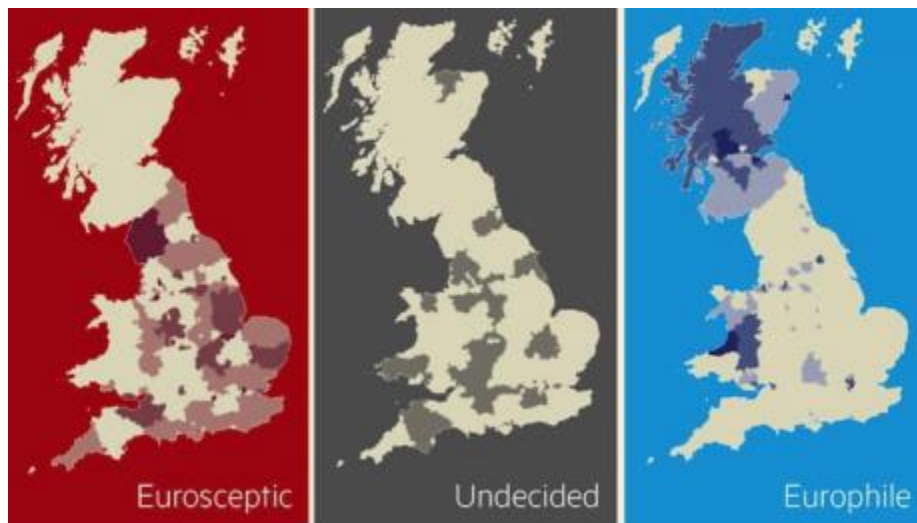
And here are the results from the polling the Fabian Society undertook at the beginning of the year for their excellent report by Olivia Bailey. It is from the background data,
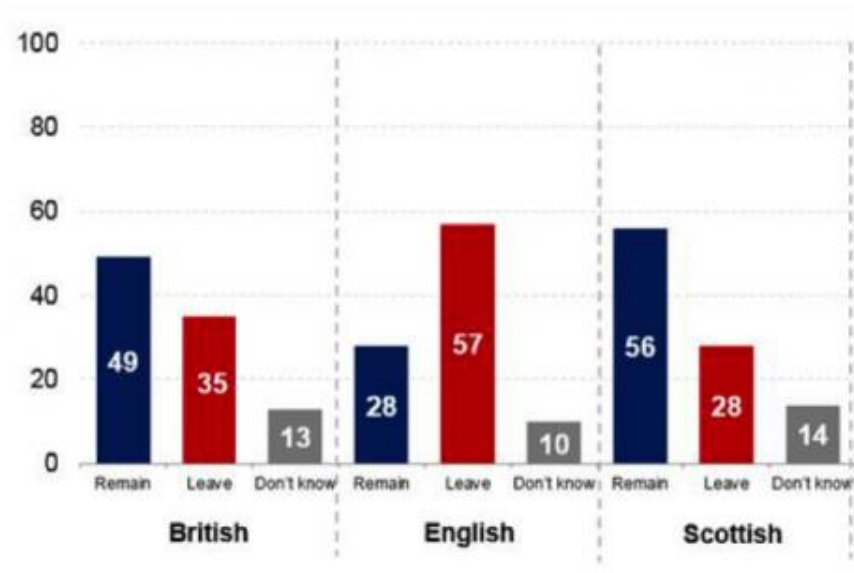
Three *Future of England* surveys in 2011, 2012 and 2014, the first two published by ippr, the third by the Centre for Constitutional Change - probe what is happening. A finding from the third report is striking. When people were asked which of several different levels of government has "most influence" over how their nation is run, 6% of respondents in Wales thought the EU had the most influence; in Scotland just 4%. But in England an astonishing 26% thought the EU has "the most influence" on the way their country is run. Of course the English could not say that their national parliament has any influence, as they don't have one. The point is simply to register that there is a huge body of opinion in England quite different in its view of Europe from anything found in Scotland or Wales. If you are Scottish or Welsh and reading this, you will find the point perfectly obvious. But if you are living in England you are more likely to think it is a British problem. It isn't. It is a frustrated Englishness.

The question is whether this a residual sentiment or an emergent one, to use terms developed by Raymond Williams. His argument was that at all times different hegemonic systems (meaning both political and cultural) co-exist: the dominant, the emergent and the residual. Englishness is certainly not dominant

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but is it coming or going? Is it a force for the future or a hangover from the past?

One way of trying to get a measure of this is by comparing today's opinion (acknowledging they are soft samples) with the hard figures of the 1975 referendum, on whether to vote Yes to stay in, or No to leave Europe.

Constituent country	Yes votes	No votes	Yes %	No %
England	14,918,009	6,812,012	68.70	31.30
Scotland	1,332,186	948,039	58.40	41.60

Forty years ago, just under 60% of Scots voted Yes to remaining. Today such support is still around 60%. Then, Scotland was about 41% for leaving, today that figure is just below 30% (with the additional 10% being undecided). The drop in support for leaving reflects the secular decline of the size of working class, who in the 1970s were largely hostile to being in Europe.

Scotland has gone through a domestic political revolution since 1975. Thanks to a mobilisation around the Campaign for a Scottish Assembly and the 1989 Claim of Right for Scotland, it gained its own parliament a decade later and then saw the elimination of all three unionist parties (Labour, Conservative and Liberal Democrat) from Westminster seats and their replacement as the domestic government by the SNP, now into its third term of office. Yet this far-reaching transformation has consolidated the country's perception of itself as a European nation. From a European perspective what has taken place is no revolution at all. Instead, the last forty years have seen the normalisation of Scotland, thanks to its sloughing off the abnormality of sub-fusc Westminster rule.

In England apparently the opposite has taken place. Despite all the constitutional changes, there has been a tightening of the traditional Westminster grip. Third party challenges – first of the Social Democrats and then, after their merger with the Liberals, the Liberal Democrats – have been decimated. Labour attempted to transform itself into New Labour to become a vehicle for neoliberal globalisation with added, if marketised, welfare - a more far-reaching revolution than anything attempted in Scotland - only for it to be reduced to dust by the financial crash. Now it has a left-wing leader mocked like Neil Kinnock while the Tories enjoy outright majority rule even more Thatcherite than Thatcher's. The Queen has her 90th birthday, Rupert Murdoch gets married in London. If someone were to step out of a time machine from 30 years ago, the internet and smart phones would amaze them, but the political scene would at first glance be similar to 1986.

At second glance he or she would be surprised to learn that whereas Thatcher had just abolished the GLC now London has a Muslim mayor; that Scotland had its own parliament, and Wales too! That there is a Supreme Court… and the divisions over the referendum would be more than puzzling. Where are "the wets", as the figures from the old establishment were called? What is this UKIP party with 4 million votes? The visitor from 1986 looking past the immediately recognisable would observe the much-diminished character of the familiar regime, perhaps noting that the House of Commons did not even debate the renegotiated terms of the deal with Europe, an unimaginable loss of authority neither Commons nor the then largely hereditary House of Lords would have tolerated in 1986.

Among the public an extraordinary alteration of opinion in England could be observed. In 1975 nearly 70% of England embraced the ruling establishment's assurance that Europe was the way to go for prosperity and influence – a significantly higher number than in Scotland. Today the current average is around 50%. Whereas forty years ago those who voted to *Leave* were 30%, today

it looks like being 45% or maybe more. Three weeks before the vote and the movement is towards *Leave.* We are witnessing a gravely reduced and weakened Westminster system whose legitimacy is bleeding away; a historic shift in temper and opinion in England; a ferocious, open battle within the governing Tory party, and an even more fundamentally divided opposition. In this concatenation the only point of influential, positive verve is coming from the Tories of the *Leave* campaign who are reaching out to hostility to elites and thereby energising it.

They are reading the energy as British, hoping what is at heart English sentiment will return to the old British exoskeleton. Like Michael Gove only more so, Boris Johnson's appeal is entirely couched in the language of British patriotism,

> *do you see Britain's future as an open, global, free trading, dynamic economy based on confidence in tried and tested British institutions? Or do you believe that in order to survive we need to remain embedded in something that fundamentally takes away our powers… We are asking the British people to be brave, to be confident in themselves and to believe in Britain.*

But as the *Leave* and *Remain* campaigns drive their battle buses along the ramparts of Britain, working beneath them is the old mole of history. Not Marx's revolution but the spirit of the country's ancestor: England is rising. And the English mole aims to snap off the cobra's head of corporate globalisation before it wraps the island in its suffocating embrace.

The 2014 Future of England survey compared those in England who self-described themselves as British or as English since 1992.

Over time, we see a gradual reduction in the proportion of people describing themselves as British. The increase in support for English identity appears to occur in waves, rising to heights in 1999 –just as the devolved legislatures held their first Elections – then 2006 and again in 2011... English and British identity both appear strong in England.

Figure 1: Exclusive National Identity, England 1992-2014
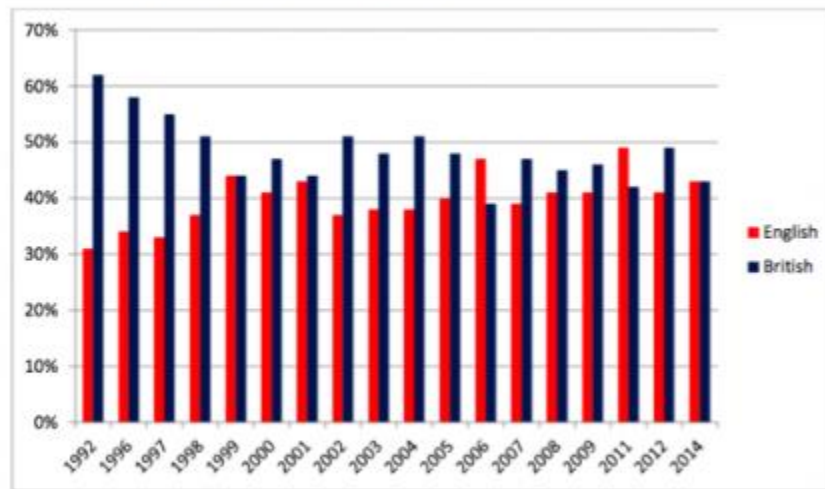
Source: 1992, 1997 British Election Study, 2011-2014 Future of England Survey, all other years British Social Attitudes Survey

This is the graph of an emergent Englishness. It is becoming numerically equal to the still dominant Britishness that occupies institutional hegemony. It's the self-identifying English who are driving hostility to the EU. Without them British Boris would be nowhere. The table below compares the attitudes to the EU of the British-in-England to those of the English-in-England.

Table 9: EU attitudes by national identity

	Total	Nat. Identity	
		English	British
Good Thing	34	23	42
Bad Thing	34	45	26
Remain	37	26	45
Leave	40	52	32
EU Most Influence	26	34	19

The Political Quarterly has just published an article co-researched by six academics including Richard Wyn Jones on England, Englishness and Brexit. They looked careful at comparative surveys of national and regional differences towards the EU across the UK. While people talk about the EU's threat to Britain and Britishness, they noted, in England, those "who felt more British than English were actually most positive in their attitudes towards the EU". While in Scotland and Wales those who identified with their distinct nations were favourable towards the EU, "England is very different". They continue,

> *The more strongly or exclusively English their sense of national identity, the more likely respondents were to think EU membership a bad thing and to want to leave the EU. The contrast between England and Scotland in these data is striking.*

Whereas the rise of Scottish nationalism consolidated allegiance to membership of the EU, what is best described as the rise of English sentiment (for it does not have an honest political expression) is associated with something very different. The authors of *The Future of England* describe their findings,

> *The 2014 survey presents further evidence that England has a distinctive politics that combines a politicisation of English national identity with an increasingly clear political prospectus, and an increasingly vocal advocate for that prospectus. The rallying point is an English desire for self-government. Some of that desire is defined by a continuing sense that Scotland has privileges that are unjustly denied to England. Some also has to do with a perceived loss of political control due to European integration, which in policy and practical terms is related to a perceived loss of control over immigration. But people in England are not just reacting against their 'others' in Scotland and the EU. They are also searching more positively for an institutional recognition of England that can express their concerns better than the current political system, which submerges the representation of England within the wider UK's institutions in Westminster and Whitehall. More by default than by design the United Kingdom Independence Party appears to have become a vessel for those concerns.*

When Cameron made his fateful decision to embrace a referendum after negotiating a reform of the EU, Clegg [warned him](#) that it was "risky and could easily backfire." Cameron just shrugged and said: "You may be right. But what else can I do? My backbenchers are unbelievably Eurosceptic and UKIP are breathing down my neck." It seems clear that he regarded the risk from UKIP in the same way you would the danger of a spill if you decided you had to move some toxic materials to the dump for disposal. Cameron shared the arrogance of the political caste that the rise of UKIP was a protest by the old and the marginal at the price they were being forced to pay for progress.

In this Cameron and his kind got UKIP wrong. They could not see the future positive nature of some of the energy it appeals to. [Gary Younge](#) has just

written that the referendum is not just "a battle between cosmopolitans and internationalists on one side and bigots and bumpkins on the other". Indeed, for any democrat the super-rich cosmopolitans of globalisation are a legitimate enemy. They have created a business-class elite who travel the world from limousine to hospitality room, to plane, hotel, conference room, office suite and back to their private apartment, without once leaving the comforts of well-controlled air-conditioning. Multi-racial and multi-national in their marriages, affairs and nannies, they observe the parochialism of those of us on the other side of the tinted windows with amusement and license us smart phones on lucrative rentals to keep us entertained.

Against their world order we need to insist on the democracy of nationalism as an open framework shaped by cities and networks. Civic nationalism that applies self-government, accountability and sharing sovereignty internationally is neither bumpkinness nor bigotry. It is the home of pluralism and an open world, a progressive opposition not regressive exclusivism.

There is a democratic force within English nationalism currently trapped in the toxic sludge carried along by UKIP (as well as seeking to escape it within UKIP itself, for example Douglas Carswell). This force is not going away, nor should it. It is oblivious to instrumental appeals about the loss of income and, if anything, is stirred into resistance by warnings about the danger of foreign disapproval. It no longer identifies with the interests of the Westminster state – indeed it feels betrayed by them with good cause.

Which is why the referendum debate is starting to feel like the prelude to a reshaping of the country's political order whatever the outcome. Rather than the result being a definitive termination of a distraction it is shaping up as the start of a deeper reckoning. For those of us for whom England is our country, nothing could be more fascinating or important. It is an indictment of the

official left that it seems to have nothing to say of any interest with respect to how England is governed. This is something that will have to change.

I'm not saying I want a neverendum. For me the ideal would be an overwhelming *Remain* majority of at least 20% so that the question of membership of the EU is definitely settled. Then everyone would have to focus on democratising both Europe and the UK, as the fetish of the sovereignty of parliament sinks beneath the Thames. Even then the question of what part England plays in any new settlement will need to be addressed as Britishness weakens in the European context. If, as seems more likely at present, the result is close, or if there is a Brexit success, the differences between national affiliations to the EU will come to the fore. If we *Leave* the EU thanks to England voting *Exit*, the national question will explode, because Scotland will have voted to stay. If a vote to stay is so narrow that Scottish and Northern Irish votes keep England in when it wanted out, it will explode in a different, equally demanding fashion. Should the outcome be a more comfortable majority for *Remain* across all the UK's nations, English nationalism will have been stirred but not satisfied.

Then, within England, UKIP will bear down on Labour's northern and the Conservative's southern seats. And the only force able to hold them back will be a democratic nationalism. This means that democrats in England, especially on the left, will have to fess up to being English.

Englishness

I first hit the problem of what is Englishness in an effort to understand the motivations behind the Falklands War. It was as if the Nazis had invaded Ambridge. The English were particularly upset by a violation that touched a national identification, one utilised by Thatcher whose premiership depended on outright victory. In *[Iron Britannia](#)* I used a chapter on 'Falkland's Pastoralism'

to investigate the popular images set in play. I questioned people about their national identities. Those who were Scottish or Welsh had no problem saying if they felt Welsh first and British second, or British first and Scottish second. They experienced two *distinct* national identities, which they could rank in terms of their own allegiance. But when you asked the English the same question: "Which comes first being English or British?" they did not understand the question. This was 1982, remember. It was not just that they were both - so too were the Scots and Welsh. The English could not separate out their experience of being both.

My explanation was that asking the English to rank their primary identification in terms of whether they were more British or English was like asking a coin if it was more obverse or reverse. Such a question genuinely does not make sense. For the Scots, Welsh and Irish, Britishness is a separate identity which they share with the English. For the English, Britishness was built into who they were. If all human life has an inside and an outside, then they were British without and English within. The outer face of the coin was British – the British navy – while the inner was English – the English countryside. The lyrical interior and the buccaneering exterior were a single fused national romance.

The two sides of the coin are now separating into different currencies. This painful process has been pushed by the creation of the separate parliaments in Scotland and Wales and by the European Union. It sits astride the country's definition of the UK in the world, and by occupying our exterior definition of who we are weakens our sense of "being British", while at the same time penetrating our domestic regulation and challenging what it means to "be English" (for while we can give up "ruling" the waves, we "never, never, never, shall be slaves"). A recent, pre-referendum Daily Mail editorial illustrated the current state of uncertainty. When it looked as if Cameron might stitch up the entire cabinet behind his deal to stay in the EU, a great lamentation broke out and the Daily Mail donated its front page to a protest headlined "Who Will Speak

[for England?”](#) Some way into its analysis the editorial added a parenthesis, “and, of course, by 'England'… we mean the whole of the United Kingdom”.

The episode exposes the tension I want to identify. It is not just that “WHO WILL SPEAK FOR THE WHOLE OF THE UNITED KINGDOM!” is longer and more ungainly. It would have provoked the obvious response: “Sorry, Daily Mail, Scotland is already spoken for!" North of the border there is a nation where clearly its leaders do speak for their country. The Daily Mail prints in Scotland. Its Scottish editors replaced the front page.

The word “England” no longer means “the whole of the United Kingdom”. There is no “of course” about it. The Daily Mail's editors know how to attend to its English readers’ inner passions and concerns. For them England is at stake. At

the same time, the moment they pause, they see that taken to its natural conclusion their call points away from the Union and therefore from the 'Great Britain' they also desire England to be. So they include the rest of the nations of the UK with a mere "of course". The quiet presumption is that they are in effect colonies bound to the mother country. Just as quietly their Scottish colleagues drop the shout into the waste bin.

The English nationalism that shouts out today from the Daily Mail is at once over-baked and half-cooked. Unable to find a proper home it feeds UKIP's appeal for self-government and control of our borders. The response needs to be what Billy Bragg calls [Progressive Patriotism](#) in his autobiographical argument for the need to prevent the right with its capacity for racism and neo-fascism from occupying the terrain of national identity – with a songwriter's sense of public need. Instead of being acclaimed, Bragg's arguments have been largely ignored, even patronized, as being the voice of an unsophisticated, working-class Essex boy. Others have called for a left-wing Englishness to be embraced, notably Mark Perryman emphasising the role of sport especially football. Today, British Future has launched [#WeAreAllEngland](#) to integrate multiculturalism into public support for England's Euro 2016 bid. A [Campaign for an English Parliament](#) continues and *The Future of England* research found that an astonishing 31% of those living in England want an English Parliament even though no major party has ever proposed it. The Anglo-British elite resist any such reform. To understand the psychological force behind this resistance I want to engage with one example.

After the Conservatives won the 2015 election with their promise to bring in English Votes for English Laws (aptly abbreviated to EVEL), Paul Mason wrote a column in the Guardian headlined [I do not want to be English](#). I'm going to write about it at length because it is a representative sentiment expressed, thanks to Mason's quality, in a trenchant and thorough way. I am not trying to

get at him – I'm largely on his side – I'm getting at a widespread attitude across the educated classes of all political persuasions.

Mason observes that it is thanks to the SNP's victory in Scotland that English institutions or laws like EVEL are coming. Nonetheless, "as an English person I would like to declare up front: I do not want to be English". It was not about any revulsion he felt at the cross of St George – he accepts that football has taken back the flag from the racists. But "If I examine my own gut feelings", he wrote, he found that he has more in common with his class and Celtic cultures than an Englishness defined for him by "public schools and the officer class". These, of course, are British institutions *par excellence*, a distinction he is not interested in pursuing. Thanks to the fact that "English institutions" are coming, "sooner or later someone is going to try and foist an English narrative on us". These will fail, Mason predicts, because "at the centre of English culture lies neither institutions, nor customs, nor sports teams, but a global language". (Unknowingly, this echoes an argument of Boris Johnson). No "English national identity" will emerge as a result of the Scottish shock, Mason predicts,

> *because of the class and cultural divides within England, and because our linguistic identity is so full of free gifts from the rest of the world. This, of course, is a legacy of empire. But the empire itself was born out of trade and sailing, two activities whose identities are central to English identity, which explains why it's so difficult to pin down.*

Mason concludes, "Please don't try to burden me with yet another layer of bogus identity politics. The only identity I need can be created by speaking and writing in the most malleable language on earth".

What is shocking about this complacent and ignorant confession is that Mason is among England's foremost political intellectuals. I'm confident that there are

many similar repudiations of their nationality by less interesting and important English figures and I pick on Mason because his *Post-Capitalism* is a contemporary masterwork by a brilliant reporter whose grasp of political economy and forthright impatience with the stultifying banalities of the media machine have provided a unique analysis of the global crisis. He's been in Wall Street where the Occupy movement flew the American flag quite naturally. He reported at length from Athens on the overtly Greek resistance to German-imposed austerity. He witnessed the invigorating mobilisation for independence during the Scottish referendum, where we met as he was filming a demonstration. All these movements demonstrated how a vivid, networked national identity was a natural part of the fight against exclusivist nationalism while expressing defiance of neoliberal globalism. Yet somehow or other, Mason regards his own country and himself as being in no need of the democratic patriotism that he has analysed so sympathetically and acutely around the rest of the world.

There is a vast literature on nationalism, none of which Mason seems to feel any need to consider. Instead he thinks an examination of his own "gut feelings" tells him what is happening, as if their spontaneous readout provides him with the truth. For someone who is a master at seeing past the manipulations of spontaneity in the market place to understand the larger forces at work in generating economic subjectivity, it is extraordinary that he should regard his personal attitude to his country as being the outcome of his own experience alone.

What the literature tells us is that nationalism is a product of the mobilisation of identity under conditions of industrialisation. The nation that led this was "God's firstborn: England", in [Liah Greenfeld's](#) term. It undertook the first modern revolution, as Steve Pincus put it, [in 1688](#), and thanks to its legal structures and naval power precipitated the industrial revolution that transformed humankind. All other societies had to mobilize their resources to

resist its impact, fighting the English to "stand up" in the industrialized world – from France and America to Germany and China – as [Ernest Geller](#) argued, while gathering together a shared culture as Ben Anderson sets out in [Imagined Communities](#).

The English, however, enjoyed the enormous advantage of being the first mover. They did not need to rebel against others or forge their different, exceptional nature. Being first it came naturally. One of Tom Nairn's earliest explorations of this process is in *The Left against Europe*, in his explanation of why the workers' movement felt it had no need to become part of Europe:

> *British imperialists were not simply the first, the biggest, and the most successful plunderers on the international scene; they were also the best at pretending that their empire was really something else. It was this 'liberal imperialism' which the British workers' movements grew up within. From the outset therefore, nationalism was to assume for them this distinctive and tenacious colouring. Their 'living community', their 'participant democracy' was not that of a mere battling nation-state: it merged into a greater, spiritual, multi-racial, inter-continental and realistically heterogeneous something-or-other. Britain's greatness—unlike French or Prussian greatness—was somehow world-wide, Sunday-suited, unselfish and open-armed. It was this imperialist false consciousness that provided one of the central vehicles for British nationalism.*

It being 1975 when he wrote this, the English nationalism at the heart of Britishness was not yet an issue. The argument is developed strongly in his later essays. All imperial nationalisms express themselves in universal terms, as America's still does. The distinction of England's British nationalism was that it

did so without an explicit French-style enlightenment ideology or nonsense about human rights.

We can shorten the argument for brevity. When Paul Mason says that he doesn't feel any need to be English, or have this identity "foisted" on him because he already is a citizen of the world with unrestricted access to its global language, it's a perfect expression of the English unselfconscious superiority to all the other poor sods of the world who have to suffer a mere attachment to a country. He is *being* an English nationalist when he reports that he has no requirement of nationalism. In their 'guts' the English feel no need to proclaim their existence as being English in order to enjoy their place in the sun. This is thanks to the specific national history of being a prime mover, not access to a wonderful, global language. Neither Americans nor Scots who are activists on the left like Mason would feel the need to deny their national identity in the way that Mason does, yet have exactly the same access to the English language as a world resource. To put it in the Marxist terms he fluently deploys, to deny that one's nationalism is nationalism is false-consciousness.

All nationalisms are special, and rightly regard themselves as such. What's special about English nationalism is that it doesn't feel a need to define its existence. This is a historic inheritance; a residual expression of imperialism that has entered our souls and can prevent us from feeling at home in what is just our own home.

Finally, Mason suggests that the creation of an English parliament will "burden me with yet another layer of bogus identity politics". I'm as opposed to identity politics as he is – that is to say a politics that defines what we are as the figuration of our inner origins. But the natural expression of being an American in Occupy Wall Street or being Greek in Syntagma Square was a forward looking defiance of an unequal world order, not a regressive attempt to identify with the signifier buried in one's personal past. Identity in the emancipating sense is

a relationship to be found in the movement outside yourself, in the wider politics you are undertaking. Here, how you carry and share your national identity matters. If the English were to embrace the truth of their existence it would be an act of modesty, equalising matters. Its denial has become a middle-class privilege.

Labour and England

Which brings us to the class element in this. The pro-UKIP, pro-Brexit, self-defining as English, are often from working class backgrounds. In the fight for their support, a strong element of social class conflict has emerged even within the Tory battle over the referendum (as Rachel Sylvester writes, in a revealing column in The Times). The educated middle-classes are much more likely to back *Remain,* as Nick Pearce shows. At the moment the left is having to relearn how to reach out to working class *Leave* supporters on terms they appreciate rather than leaving it to UKIP and now to the Tory Brexiteers.

This is not an argument for what was tagged 'blue' politics whose concern to preserve existing blighted communities from the upset of change and immigration. Imperial enthusiasm in which the working classes participated was always a future-oriented, scientifically-energised ideology. It is an argument for the creation of exactly what Mason appears to dread as the "foisted" – a civic parliament, elected proportionally, discarding winner-takes-all triumphalism, giving voice and power to Cornwell and Yorkshire and the multi-cultural cities of England, fulfilling the function of a representative legislature, namely: to be an on-going defining process of 'who we are'.

Without this, deprived of any way to self-define themselves in a shared, civic represented way, English working class communities will start to fall back on pro-UKIP, pro-Brexit, anti-immigrant attitudes. When he was faced with this as Labour leader, Ed Miliband sought to address the economic costs that

generated the discontent. This was never going to be enough. Through UKIP and Brexit a democratic protest is being articulated about the way the country is governed and in whose interests. A class-based anger expressed in patriotic themes cannot just be answered by economic policies. Indeed it is patronising and evasive. If 'C2s', a detestably dehumanising category, articulate their problem with calls for democratic, national self-government in a bigoted language, they have to be answered with arguments for better forms of democracy and national government.

John Denham and Jon Cruddas along with many others fought a long and fruitless effort in the Labour Party. Both, significantly, were MPs from the south of England where Labour could not draw on a northern regional patriotism and 'safe' seats. They tried to get Gordon Brown and then Ed Miliband to see sense on this - to "pivot" into England and not allow UKIP to appropriate working class sentiment. Back in June 2012, pushed by them and his own advisors, Miliband made a special speech on England in an upper room of the Royal Festival Hall.

> *We in the Labour Party have been too reluctant to talk about England in recent years. We've concentrated on shaping a new politics for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. And this was one of the greatest achievements of the last government. We have rightly applauded the expression of Scottish identity within the United Kingdom. But for too long people have believed that to express English identity is to undermine the United Kingdom. This does not make sense. You can be proudly Scottish and British. And you can be proudly English and British . . . We have been too nervous to talk of English pride and English character . . . Now more than ever, as we make the case for the United Kingdom throughout the United Kingdom, we must talk about England.*

Such talk is only worthwhile if it offers something. On what Labour should offer to England and the English, Miliband was Ed the Silent. It was also embarrassing: you could feel him wrestling with his inner Paul Mason:

> *But I know what I love about England. What I remember when I think about English identity. What I love is the spirit of quiet determination in the face of adversity and the sense of common decency that goes with it. My father – as so many parents did —talked about the spirit of the Blitz.*

Interviewed afterwards, he repeated this when asked what was special about English values – and had to be reminded that the Luftwaffe bombed Cardiff, Glasgow and Belfast and England has no special monopoly of the spirit of the Blitz, or indeed quiet determination…

I attempted to engage with the hopeless lack of substance a year later in 2013 as part of the [New Statesman's](#) concerted effort to persuade the Labour leader to take the initiative on England. It was already clear that UKIP supporters would swing the election and that,

> *Immigration as an 'issue' is about 'who we are' and the nature of our democracy… the dishonesty, evasiveness and hypocrisy of the Westminster 'political class', a phrase Nigel Farage uses so forcefully. UKIP's call to leave the EU is plainly an argument over constitutional sovereignty. Most important of all, linking these assertions that our political system is broken, is the way UKIP draws strength, despite its name, from its role as the English party… the opposition needs to… speak for England. It has to liberate a healthy, tolerant, pluralist Englishness from the strangulated, heartfelt rage of those who join*

> *UKIP's ranks and find themselves trapped in its deranged prejudice against the EU; its absurd concoction that the UK can take on the world single-handed as a "trading nation"; and its mobilisation of the fear of immigrants. All of these draw sustenance from a reasonable desire for England to enjoy self-determination just like any other country*

I quote this not because I was a lone voice but because so many were giving similar advice. Miliband's "timidity", the outcome of his effort to prevent division described in the last chapter, frustrated everyone. It was blindingly obvious that the SNP's displacement of Labour in Scotland meant the national question had to be addressed in England. That doing so meant taking on UKIP's gathering of an English sentiment to attack Westminster's elitism via anti-Europeanism and hostility to immigration. That Labour needed to call for its own referendum on the principle of sharing sovereignty for the common good. Many inside the party and, like me, outside, pressed for all these aims until the inevitable happened at the election and voters quite rightly concluded that the Labour Party did not know what country it stood for.

This month a booklet edited by Tristram Hunt on England and the politics of patriotism, [Labour's Identity Crisis](#) has just been published. Ten Labour MPs and candidates reflect on their experience of the 2015 election, of how Labour was seen on the doorsteps and the looming presence of UKIP. Its theme is the need for Labour to relate to England. If there can be such a thing it is a form of urban arcadianism, relating that 'inner' doorstep side of Anglo-Britishness, its fairness, humour and energy as well as its pains. But once again, what to offer? How to look outwards with a relevant English not British politics? Hunt describes in his introduction how the election felt like a "cultural collapse", how a confidence in democracy is needed, and how he supports "a more federal" United Kingdom to be put to the English people in a referendum after a

"constitutional convention" the party is committed to. This is far too cautious a gruel to warm any hearts.

No Great Escape

Also, Labour will shortly be completely outflanked. At the beginning of July Robert Salisbury's [Constitutional Reform Group](#) will present its draft Act of Union in the wake of the referendum. One of its options, carefully spelt out in detailed legislative format, will be the proposal to have an English parliament take the place of the House of Commons and an elected Union chamber replace the House of Lords, with all four nations being presented with the new act of union to decide upon in their own referendums. The aim, to encourage the expression of a UK identity within the framework of a shared union, legitimised by popular will.

Many of Salisbury's forebears have played a role in high politics since their ancestor William Cecil, the first Earl of Burghley, was advisor to Elizabeth the First. In 2015 he spotted the writing, or rather the lack of writing, on the wall. A Unionist, he wants a lasting settlement with Scotland and understands that this must mean a federal solution for the UK. He justified his approach in the Sunday Times on 1 March 2015 by cracking a joke few others could make. Normally, "we Tories believe only in necessary evolutionary change. However, once in several centuries, the true Tory must accept that the nation demands more radical solutions if it is to survive. This is one of those times."

What Salisbury has understood is that the separation of Scotland from Britain, thanks to having its own parliament with significant revenue raising powers, will eventually end the union - unless the Scots feel their new status is fully recognised and not patronised or marginalised. For this is to happen they need to be offered democratic equality as a nation *within* the UK. Which means the offer must come from England. For the union to be lasting in the century it

needs to be entered (or rather re-entered) equally by all, so that England can enter into a union *with* Scotland. Even then it might not work from Salisbury's point of view, but as someone who likes to think in centuries, he recognises it is the only long-run option. He grasped the paradox that England has to discard Anglo-Britain and become itself in order for the union to survive. Because now that Scotland is distinct it can only do so as a union of distinct nations – which means England has to follow suit.

The boldness of the Salisbury group's proposals can be measured by the response to them of the House of Lords Select Committee on the Constitution. Chaired by Ian Lang, who notoriously said that if the Scots voted for independence it would [dishonour their war dead](#), they published long report in May on [The Union and Devolution](#). Dismissing any idea of a 'bottom up' approach from the nations they firmly concluded after 100 closely argued pages for keeping the show on the road, "An English Parliament is not a viable option for the future of the governance of England".

The referendum may have accelerated Salisbury's time-scale. If there is a Brexit vote (as he argues for in a fine exchange in [CapX](#) in which he eviscerates Bruce Anderson) his Act of Union will need to be offered to the Scots very fast. If *Remain* succeeds it will be ideal timing to offer a constructive way forward. Meanwhile the Labour party will be on the sideline worrying about whether it might have a convention some time down the road or hold a debate about PR at its next conference.

Setting out from the opposite, republican tradition, David Marquand also calls for English self-rule. Writing in the [New Statesman](#), he insists that English nationalism "is now a force to be reckoned with". He puts it well,

> *At the moment two answers hold the field. The first, embodied in the Cameron Government's 'Project Fear' over EU membership, is*

> *essentially deracinated. For the globe-trotting super-rich... the answer to the English Question is that there is no such Question. The notion that the English have to decide who they are and who they want to be is a backward-looking fantasy... The second answer, implicit in Eurosceptic rhetoric, is romantically archaic. At its heart is a vision of England as a sea-girt and providential nation, cut off from the European mainland by a thousand years of history and a unique constitutional tradition... No one with progressive instincts can possibly be satisfied with either of these answers. The great question is whether there is a better one.*

Meanwhile, Labour figures are still asking what problem supporting English self-government would solve. Such a query comes from the depth of Labour's identification with Westminster, especially those who wish to retire to the House of Lords. The answer is that self-government is not a policy, or a means to an end, or the answer to a problem, it is a fundamental right.

England captured the world through its British Empire that had encompassed its immediate neighbours within its parliamentary sovereignty. The empire was lost, in the Far East to Japan and then everywhere to America, through the course of the Second World War. From it Great Britain emerged as a country, undefeated but bereft. As this century began, new parliaments within what was now the UK disunited the Kingdom domestically as membership of the European Union dissolved its uncodified sovereignty without. What had been a careless English-Britishness, happy to encompass others although preferably with white skins, became compressed and disoriented. A separated Englishness emerged by default without any means of honest expression. A nation that had captured so many has become itself a captive nation. It is trapped within a Westminster system run by the descendants of the imperial elite trained in exclusive network of its caste, their schools, universities, law-courts,

newspapers, broadcasters and banks. England now seeks to escape and claim its independence.

One apparent escape route is through Brexit. The lure of Brexit is England renewing Anglo-Britishness on a world scale, escaping the protectionist cartel of Europe. It won't work. Not because it cannot do so economically. With another crash all too likely no one can foretell, let alone forecast, what is going to happen to trade and growth. It won't work because the moment a vote for Brexit is announced the Scottish government will ask its parliament's permission to open discussion with the European Union on ways in which it can remain within the EU. From the get-go of Brexit, the Scottish people will in effect challenge the Britishness that has been crucial to Brexit's appeal across England. What will Labour or the Greens do in this situation? Hope the Scottish negotiations fail? In this circumstance only parties prepared to be English actors mobilising English support will be able to define a way forward.

Perhaps because this is such a devastating scenario for the British political class, not least the Tory Brexiteers, it may not happen The 'national card' won David Cameron and George Osborne the 2015 election and if they can play it again maybe it will win them the referendum. But the old mole is burrowing, if maybe not as fast as Hamlet's ghostly father. England will rise. If it does not do so through Brexit we need to ensure it has a healthy expression because confined it will express itself sideways, through Faragism, UKIP, loathing of Europe and hostility to immigrants. Which is why far from conserving the status quo, *Remain* also will demand political parties capable of acting on behalf of England. The way to achieve this is through the creation of an English parliament.

In a wonderful essay in Mark Perryman's collection, *Imagined Nation, England after Britain*, Paul Gilroy excoriates Enoch Powell, asking why his hateful Rivers of Blood speech, which was laced with incitement as well as false prophecy, is

still treated with reverence. Taking in the larger picture he discusses John Sturgess's 1963 movie, *The Great Escape*

> *There is something about the idea of escape itself that has become deeply pleasurable. The mythology of that thwarted wartime breakout and the peculiar mixture of failure and triumph that it articulates provides ways to make the nation's painful geo-political and economic transition psychologically bearable to many who experience its unhappy consequences without appreciating their underlying cause. There is also something else at stake. It can be interpreted as a repressed desire to be able to escape from the grip in which the invented memory of that anti-Nazi war has held us. Somewhere, against the odds and in opposition to the logic of our national melancholia, many people do want to work through the past. Half the country is desperate to move on.*

Now that Scotland has moved on, it is half of England that is desperate. This has its dangers. The rising far-right party Alternative for Germany has just adopted "Islam does not belong to Germany" as part of its official platform. This is not a time to play with nationalism or appease exclusivity and expulsion. Nor, however, is the time to try and liquidate, scorn or deny its relevance. In my previous chapter I investigated why Labour's role in such a momentous referendum choice is so feeble. Part of the reason is the collapse of social democratic politics across Europe as they have proved incapable of the obvious need for solidarity with opposition to austerity. The decisive reason for this was their embrace of globalisation as the replacement of internationalism. The need now is for an international movement of the left to recreate internationalism in a modern, networked form – as DiEM 25 is attempted, for example. There cannot be internationalism without nations.

The authors of the [England, Englishness and Brexit](#) looked back on their detailed analysis of opinion surveys in the context of the referendum campaign and foresee a further,

> *development of a politicised English national identity, institutionalising a form of politics that cuts across conventional party lines. In this context it is worth recalling that one of the central insights of the vast academic literature on nationalism is that nationalists create nations. To 'speak for England' is, in an important sense, to call England into being. There is far more at stake in the forthcoming referendum than simply the future of the UK's relationship with the European Union; at stake too is the political identity of the UK's largest component territory*

The dangers of Brexit may be wild and unpredictable but if it were to happen the need to rethink will be obvious. In the long term, great danger lies with a vote to *Remain*, if it is followed by a suffocating sigh of relief that prevents the English from resolving their democratic identity. The Labour Party will nod its head at fine booklets on the English experience, provided this is safely confined to doorsteps, while talking occasionally about how long it will take to 'win back Scotland'. Cameron will step down and everyone will gossip about the Tory leadership crisis. Scratch, scratch, the English family of moles is working towards the surface. Someone will speak for them as they break through. The question is who.

Chapter 11

Let's take control! Brexit and sovereignty

With under two weeks to go before the referendum it is now clear that the English would like to leave the EU. With the help of the Scots and Northern Irish, a majority may decide they can't afford to. The markets are showing signs of panic. A massive run on the pound might finally frighten voters who have so far brushed aside the massed warnings and alarms of the world order, global leaders and their advisors. Who cannot delight in witnessing such a collective refusal to be cowed, as a people defy elite instructions - even if media moguls who profit from divide and rule are egging them on?

Unlike those who predict that Brexit is now a certainty, I think the English have yet to decide with their heads what their hands will do on the ballot paper on 23 June. They may simply be making the government sweat before relenting in their judgment. But, in its heart, England has already made its choice. It prefers out.

The superficial reason for this is that in his heart, the prime minister also wants out. His official *Remain* campaign has not produced a good reason why we should *want* to be members of the EU apart from not being able to afford to leave – which is a way of agreeing that if we could afford to do so, we should. Cameron and Osborne say they would not trash the economy to cut down immigration from the EU. They do not say why free movement is a wonderful

thing, especially if you are young and broke. Just a small example of the absence of positivity.

Leave say why they want our democracy back. *Remain* cannot say why they want our democracy to be shared. *Remainers* such as the prime minister have arguments about why "*our* power" and "*our* influence" are increased in the EU. They never inspire us with how desirable it is for us to change and become Europeans. While advocating staying in the EU their language is not about solidarity and sharing but about how Britain will continue to be different while profiting from membership. Our "great country" will be preserved by what Cameron calls the "special relationship" he has negotiated, which keeps us at arms length from the core of the European Union. Following his lead, the whole *Remain* campaign is formed by Great British egoism and is fundamentally nationalist conservatism.

So too are the *Leave* campaign's argument for Brexit. It shares the same separatist mentality only is more unadulterated. Its leaders too call on the country to be Great Britain, in their case by freeing ourselves completely not partially from the EU and its regulation, its failed collectivism and inability to prevent us from being 'swamped' by immigrants. *Leave's* politics are also Great British egoism and are fundamentally nationalist conservatism.

Neither wants the UK to be in the European Union as such, or for Britain to become more European.

I am not saying that *Leave* are genuinely positive except in a reckless fashion. They are small minded in their appeal to save our money, divisive if not racist in their use of the immigrant card, and exploitative in their scorn for regulation. I'm saying that the official *Remain* campaign is equally money-bags in its approach to the advantages of the EU, also regards migration as a problem not a positive, and trumpets its attacks on regulation. Both are fundamentally negative in their relationship to Europe. *Leave* have the advantage of being

positively-negative, calling for trust in ourselves summed up in their slogan 'Take Back Control'; whereas there is no such lure of agency in 'Stronger, safer, better off in the EU', the call of *Remain*.

Unlike Scotland where there is a different leadership, in England voters are being asked to choose between two forms of anti-Europeanism. In effect the question on the ballot paper is asking, 'How antagonistic are you to the EU, a little or a lot?' It is not surprising that the referendum has revived anti-Europeanism and a desire to Brexit.

Despite the best efforts of the [Green Party](#) and [Another Europe is Possible](#), there is no third option that has caught the public imagination or been given significant media coverage. The main reason for this is that in their hearts too the Labour party and Labour movement also distrust the EU and do not feel European. They too support *Remain* for instrumental reasons, as a source of rights and other workers gains they feel too feeble to secure through their own strengths. Jeremy Corbyn [says](#) he is "about seven to seven and a half" out of 10 for the EU. It is an honest answer and that distinguishes him from the Prime Minister. But as well as being the opposite of inspiring, in the last fortnight of a momentous campaign it exhibits precisely a relationship of calculated balance of advantage that is anti-EU in spirit.

Gordon Brown has tried to make a positive case for *Remain* by calling on the country to "[Lead not Leave](#)" in the New Statesman and he has some gritty proposals. But his positioning suffers from two crippling weaknesses. David Cameron's EU deal which the referendum will confirm if we vote *Remain* explicitly marginalises the UK from the centre of the EU's affairs and disqualifies Britain from "leading" its development (as I show in [Chapter 3](#)). The whole point of Cameron's effort was to separate the UK from any commitment to the EU as a collective endeavour. Brown has now been moved up to head the Remain campaign with a major speech, naturally - as most of the UK media has

stopped reading for itself - no one is pointing out that the Brussels Treaty stipulates that Britain can't lead and must follow EU policy. This is in return for "ever closer union" not applying to the UK.

Second, Brown's New Labour trope echoes Tony Blair's obsession with projecting global power - and we all know what happened with that. It too is a form of Great British egoism that is fundamentally seeking to conserve the nation rather than being positive *about Europe*. Indeed, Blair and Mandelson have been advising the government's *Remain* campaign and Brown's intervention is a variant of Cameron's.

Constitutional incompatibility

Occupy Democracy

If you are pro-Europe it is a dire situation. England and English sentiment is the driver of Brexit's popularity. But why the absence of any counter vision? Especially given the actual existence of widespread pro-European feeling and affection across the land, something must be preventing its expression. Why is there no larger pro-European mobilisation supporting the appeal of Caroline

[Lucas](#)? I was going to write, "supporting the appeal of, *for example*, Caroline Lucas" but I can think of no one else with any profile. Owen Jones, who is in effect now a political leader rather than a columnist, is making an impact in his warning against the racism and xenophobia of Brexit. His arguments are not wrapped in the Union Jack or unconvincing Great Britishness. But his positive arguments, like mine, are about joining forces with a European left that at present is far too remote to have any significant public traction.

There must be a larger shaping force that disables political expression of the country's widespread, genuine pro-Europeanism that is *also* in many English hearts.

And there is. The force that shapes English-British revulsion from the European Union is *constitutional incompatibility*. This is an active field of force that frames debate. It pushes expressions of support for Europe towards saying Britain must change and as this is not on the agenda the argument falls away, understandably treated as irrelevant by the media.

The EU is more than an inter-governmental agreement like the World Trade Organisation, it is a multi-national entity seeking a whole that is more than the sum of its parts. It is a supra-governmental organisation, one that turned itself into a single legal entity with the Lisbon Treaty of 2009, and now has its own supreme court for the whole of Europe. I do not share the fatalism of the *Leave* chair Gisella Stuart, who I debated with on [The Week in Westminster](#); I do not believe the EU will become a super-state, or that the euro will last. Nonetheless, even though the Lisbon Treaty does not describe itself as a constitution, it is one. It came out of a constitutional process, and the EU will continue to frame its own constitutional integrity.

The UK has an ancient constitution that is not codified. It is organised around a supposedly sovereign parliament supported by a common law tradition. It works thanks to flexible conventions that have checked and balanced the

development of its powers over three hundred years. This inheritance has a profound impulse to preserve itself. It is now under incredible pressures. I will argue that it is broken. But it has had many blows before and has recovered: it was an aristocratic system that adopted the universal franchise to become a representative democracy; it was an imperial system that was stripped of its Empire. Today, its many internal flaws are combining in a way that in all probability puts the whole beyond repair and recovery. One thing is certain, however, whether or not the British constitution can survive the shockwaves of its internal earthquakes, it cannot long survive the external pressures of remaining within the European Union.

It is simple, and fundamental. A multi-national entity like the United Kingdom whose constitution is uncodified is bound to be fundamentally threatened by membership of a larger, multi-national entity that is dedicated to codifying itself. If its membership continues, its constitution will eventually be dissolved by it. The British state's conventions, informal procedures and lack of defined sovereignty cannot withstand being inside the consolidation of the EU's processes. Both the UK's administrative legalism (as [Jeremy Fox shows](#)) and its political informality expose it utterly to the advance of the European Union's constitutionalism.

This sounds abstract but is not. The Anglo-British have a long tradition of seeking to preserve their unique constitutional arrangements. The kingdom's tradition has been, at least until New Labour, to alter as little as possible and take as long as possible doing so. It prides itself in this combination of flexibility and tradition that has ensured an unrivalled continuity.

The European Union, soon to be ten times the size of the UK, by contrast, has a short history of changing its arrangements in as fast and purposive a way as it can, despite its now great size. These are two different constitutional projects. The term sounds odd applied to UK. But it's a mistake to see the British regime,

however ancient and pre-democratic it may be, as somehow feudal. On the contrary it emerged from the first modern revolution of 1688, after a regicidal civil war, as a cross-class, capitalist formation committed to development, improvement and money-making, without which it could never have hosted the industrial revolution. Britain remains a purposive country, with an old constitution that seeks to encompass new energies.

This historic Britain, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, cannot preserve its inherited constitutional settlement and culture within the European Union. The two are incompatible. This will be so even if the European Union discards the experiment of the Euro and seeks to become, as the phrase goes, a United Europe of States rather than a United States of Europe, which it will be well advised to do.

If Britain stays in, we face the prospect, over the coming decades, of membership of the EU dissolving the bonds that have reproduced the UK's uncodified settlement; at the level of the nations, of rights, of legal systems, of sovereignty, of parliament. The political caste are acutely aware of this as it strikes at their existing powers and influence, hence their various forms of 'Euroscepticism'. Regular folk don't have so much to lose but instinctively – and rightly – the *English* know that if they want to *stay British in the old way* they have to leave the EU.

Democratic sovereignty

A challenge follows for those of us who do not want the Brexiteers, puffed up by the energies of populism, to steer the UK into open water with a command system of parliamentary absolutism at their disposal. We need to embrace the opportunity of staying with the EU to initiate a more honest form of membership for the UK: we have to constitutionalise our own nations if we want it to be part of the constitutional space of the European Union. We will also

need a democratic constitution to protect ourselves if the Brexiteers win. In or out, a pro-European strategy needs to make the call for our own democratic constitution its starting point.

"Oh, no, not the constitution", I hear you say, it's bad enough debating Brexit! You could not be more wrong if that's your reaction. Because it is *exactly* the reaction they want. The constitution is a glorious playground for our rulers. They love it, they want to keep it, and if you have grubby hands or inquiring minds or democratic sentiments they want to keep you out. They have achieved this by surrounding it with the most effective fence in the world: a perimeter of boredom. In its way it is a far harder obstacle to overcome than electrified razor wire or even the 8 metre-high security barrier of Palestine, which needs armed guards. An impenetrable field of dullness laced with convention generates a disabling, near instantaneous lethargy. None but the privileged slip through. Many are the corpses of the well intentioned who have fallen comatose into its phantom zone. Numerous the books hurled towards it in futile effort for relevance that now moulder forgotten, never to receive a mention even for persistence let alone gallantry.

I know, I tried. Some would say with relative success, I made the effort to penetrate the glorious playground where there are no rules! When, later on, I worked with Henry Porter on creating the [Convention on Modern Liberty](#) in 2009 to secure our freedoms from surveillance and an over-mighty state, if I said to people at a dinner or gathering what we were doing, their eyes would light up. They'd whisper their concerns, or share a story of their anxiety about surveillance, this was four years before Snowden. They knew it mattered. But when, in the previous decade, I'd say I was working with Charter 88 to create a democratic written constitution, a rictus smile would shiver across their face and their eyes would deaden with that inner glaze that meant they were desperate to change the subject. Yet it is obvious that we can't protect our liberty without a democratic constitution, as the uncodified nature of the UK's is

completely permissive of executive power – hence the fun for those that play in it.

Just this month, for example, as the UK tries to concentrates on its European future in a debate as superficial as the outcome will be consequential, the House of Commons passed the Investigatory Powers Bill, whose intent the Convention on Modern Liberty had delayed but, alas, not reversed. By 444 votes to 69, thanks to the support of the Labour partly in return for an independent review and "concessions" that should never have been needed. The IP Bill legalises bulk surveillance without warrant or cause. As the Open Rights Group blog explains, just one aspect of the Bill will:

> *allow automated complex searches across the retained data from all telecommunications operators. This has the potential for population profiling… It is bulk data surveillance without the bulk label, and without any judicial authorisation at all. [Any] Agency will be able to self-authorise itself to cross reference your internet history with your mobile phone location and landline phone calls—and search and compare millions of other people's records too… Queries can be made across datasets. Location data – which pub you were in – can be compared with who you phoned, or which websites you visit. All with great convenience, through automated search. The searches will be increasingly focused on events, such as a website visited, or place people have gathered, rather than the suspects. This is the reverse of the position today, which requires the police to focus on suspects, and work outwards*

The Bill, it concludes, could lead to a federated "database of all UK citizens' communications".

This illustrates what I mean by the way a constitution regarded as 'dull and boring' permits a small number of people to do what they like, including pocketing our vital metadata for future use (e.g. in case they need to warn us off assembling to protest against them). Something, not incidentally, that also exposes us all to being [criminally hacked](#).

Once Peter Hennessey took some students to visit the then secretary of the Cabinet and head of the civil service. One of them asked him, "What is the constitution?". He answered confidently in this private context, "It is something we make up as we go along". Ask yourself, who is this 'we'? Is it you or me? Is it 'we' as in "We the people"? Are *we* in charge of our constitution? Obviously not. What he meant was, the constitution is something that *they* make up as they go along. A resource for British rulers to utilize, or make up, at their pleasure. When you hear them talking about defending our sovereignty, this needs to be borne in mind. The sovereignty of the British system does not belong to the people.

If Britain had a German style Basic Law or constitution, the IP Bill could never have got through parliament without a fierce debate about the principles of privacy, liberty, rights and the need to check the powers of an over-mighty state – because these would be entrenched. Instead, while the head of the UK's legal system, the Lord Chancellor Michael Gove, is striding town, country and TV studio demanding that "We take back control", he and his colleagues are undermining our fundamental liberties and establishing control systems over us, the public as a whole. With their patriotic warble against the threats from the undemocratic oligarchy of the EU, the Brexiteers appeal to our desire for self-government. At the same time they are undermining our capacity for self-government via their investigatory powers.

I am getting ahead of myself. There has to be a clearing out of the mental junkyard of British tropes and clichés before the public can get to grips with

sovereignty and democracy in the European context. A context that will continue to exist whatever the vote on the 23 June. The fact of the referendum is a symptom of the unresolved constitutional agony caused by the failure to overcome Britain's past. Its most acute expression subjectively is in the national question and the crisis of English-British identity, as I showed in [last week's chapter](). It is also constitutional as such.

Here in Anglo-Britain we do not have a state that is answerable to us, the people. We have governments that can be ejected in elections and to that important if blunt extent are answerable. But the state that they run when elected is the most highly centralised of the western world and its powers are not defined or limited by a constitution that places sovereignty in the hands of the people.

The defining slogan of Vote Leave was tested in focus groups that found the best way of calling for sovereignty in words that appealed to regular folk is *Take Back Control*. If you want to hear it deployed with consummate focus and repetition watch [Michael Gove on Sky](). In less than 30 minutes with Sky's Political Editor Faisal Islam he used "control" nine times of which "take back control" was five, and in the live studio audience discussion that followed in less than 30 minutes Gove used "control" 26 times of which 10 were "take back control". That's an awful lot of control. It was spun with relentless positivity. His vision was, as they say, upbeat. It was as if it the Lord Chancellor was selling the country a version of Viagra plus, to replace flaccid Euro-regulated trade with fully erect planetary relationships plus a guarantee against premature ejaculation and Gordon Brown-style busts – provided we buy his snake oil and *Take Back Control!*

But who will be in control of all this 'control'? Who is going to enjoy the power that Michael Gove and Boris Johnson promise us? In an exquisite interview for his Al Jazeera Head to Head, Mehdi Hasan challenged one-time Chancellor of the Exchequer Norman Lamont who is for *Leave*: "You say… it is about democracy [but] isn't it a little bit hypocritical when you are an unelected peer in an unelected chamber of parliament to lecture the EU on democracy and elections?" The audience laughed and applauded, Lamont cast his eyes towards the floor with apparent modesty and simpered, "I am not the designer of Britain's constitution or the designer of the situation within which I sit". It was the suppressed smile flickering across his face as he said it that I can't forget: the hypocrisy of the *Leave* campaign made flesh. Lamont is not the designer of the EU's constitution either! This hardly holds him back.

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If he had offered to give up his place in the House of Lords as a reward if the UK left the European Union, it might have made a personal point. Lamont managed to move the argument on, claiming "sovereignty is intertwined with the concept of democracy and I believe that democracy is best represented at a national level". He is right about that: it is best represented at the national level, provided we take 'best' not to mean its only arena. Lamont is plain wrong to imply that should the UK leave the EU it will enjoy democracy because it had been returned to the British level.

A similar moment occurred in [Jeremy Paxman](#)'s investigation of Brussels and sovereignty. At the end he interviewed Michael Gove, who said that "what sovereignty ultimately comes down to is the ability to go to any politician and say, 'you're fired' and we don't have that in the European Union". Paxman objected that any country can say this to its own politicians who are sent to the council of ministers in Brussels. Gove replied, "You can change the people but the laws won't change. Policies which are decided at the Brussels level determine what will happen in this country". And he detailed its forms of control. But we have voice in all this, Paxman responded. "Yes", said Gove, "there is a voice but it is continually outvoted, muffled or overruled. So, yes, we are at the table but we like children at the adults' dinner table, we are tolerated but ignored".

Instead of pointing out that this is exactly how people in Britain feel about our political elite, Paxman suggested Gove was peddling a fantasy as he didn't know what it would be like "after leaving". "I do", Gove interjected. "Oh you do?" "Yes, because Britain has been a sovereign independent nation in the past and it can be again. You don't need to take it from me, the prime minister himself has said of course we can survive and prosper outside the EU". And that was it, the programme came to an end. Look forward to an hour's examination of the undemocratic workings of the British state...

Should Lamont, Gove and the Brexit crew win, under the flag of "taking back control", Britain is going to need a mighty call to "take back our democracy". But what if they lose? George Osborne had the Faustian audacity to say he and the captain of *Remain* are fighting for ["the soul of the country"](). I hope *Remain* does win the day. But nothing can save a country whose soul is wrapped in the cling film of Osborne, Cameron and Mandelson. To rescue it we will have to storm the constitution. In either case it means overcoming the phantom zone and bringing the constitution into public discourse without irony or condescension.

The left tends to veer away from this all-important confrontation, Owen Jones does write with a democratic style. But he too struggles with the central issue of sovereignty and the constitution. In a [Guardian attack]() on the bigotry of the *Leave* campaign he writes:

> *Revealing their total abandonment of any economic case, Leave.EU even issued a poster that read: "It's not about the economy, stupid. It's about sovereignty." But this bunch of charlatans have filled their ideas vacuum with inflammatory prejudice."*

He continues to eviscerate the Brexiteers on these lines. You can see the logic. *Leave.EU* says the referendum is about "sovereignty". By this they mean "Take Back Control". By *this* they mean take back control of our borders. By this, of course, they mean stop immigrants coming in. Thus 'sovereignty' in this context is no more than a dog whistle for racism.

Doubtless this is what sovereignty means for some Brexit extremists and is laced with bigotry. But it is extraordinarily dangerous to hand sovereignty over to the far-right. For at least three other significant issues are signalled in the term.

1. Calling for sovereignty is a protest against the abuses of corporate power, the powerlessness of its victims, the way government has been stolen from people and livelihoods treated with indifference; a protest that is also a rejection of claims that we can do nothing about it and no one is answerable.

2. It is a protest against not having a government that one can call one's own, which the English feel most strongly as they have no parliament; expressed in the notion of "we want our country back". This has a strong racist and anti-foreigner significance, of course, but people rightly do not feel themselves to be represented in Westminster or Brussels and the demand for sovereignty expresses a demand to be represented.

3. It is a protest against the lack of effective democracy.

All of these elements of 'sovereignty' need to be part of any left-wing or green case about the future of our government. It will be a disaster if the term is granted to UKIP rather than taken back from them. Indeed conservatives like Michael Gove and Boris Johnson are trying to scoop back UKIP as well as Labour and ex-Labour supporters into their conservative movement, thereby protecting British rule from Farage's form of populism with their own neo-populism.

The weakness of the Brexiteer appeal that they are the guardians of our democracy is revealed in Lamont's fleshy simper. Repeatedly they define democracy and accountability as the ability to "fire" the government, or kick them out if you don't like them. A crude defence of first-past-the-post, winner-takes-all autocracy is bound up in the Brexiteer appeal for 'control', as they seek to renew outside the EU what remains the most highly authoritarian and centralised system of government of the western world: Westminster's.

And if it *is* broke?

Will the referendum settle matters and end calls for reform? Does Brexit or not decide how Britain wishes to be governed? Will the fate of the country's soul be settled? Clearly, if it is Brexit it will stir not settle demands for further change. But what if it is a close run victory for *Remain*? Will the political caste be able to default everyone back to familiar routines, as Cameron and Osborne planned after their election success in 2015?

There is clear evidence that this is unlikely. Hitherto, calls for a new constitution have been met with the classic response of British conservatism, Labour as much as Tory, "If it's not broke, don't fix it". The sense that something is broke is now widespread. On the right, Robert Salisbury's [Constitutional Reform Group](#) and their forthcoming proposal for a new Act of Union; on the centre-left, the [Bingham Centre for the Rule of Law](#) has declared that "the constitution is at a crossroads" and proposes a '[Charter of the Union](#)'. Both can be seen as searching for a way to head off a popular constitutional codification with a democratic convention that escapes political caste control, of the kind being [explored by Stuart White](#). Never have so many worked on the need for a fix - even if this includes the [House of Lords Select Committee on the Constitution](#) which argues in the firmest terms that what exists is so in danger of collapse that it must be repaired immediately.

An ear-catching moment for me was a BBC Radio programme last year with Chuka Umunna on the panel. Someone argued that the government had been elected and had the right to govern. Umunna responded that it only got 37% of the vote on a low turnout and we needed PR. I have been involved with arguing the case for a proportional system for over quarter of a century and never before have I known what happened next: the audience burst into applause. This for an electoral system no major party advocates, now that the Lib Dems have been destroyed. But think about it: 4 million voted for UKIP, 1.5 million

voted Green, all those disappointed Lib Dems are still around, and millions felt forced to vote tactically rather than for the party of their choice. PR can be popular!

If this is happening it is not because electoral reform has become a hot desire. Rather there is a growing feeling that 'the system' needs to change, which PR symbolises. Every vested interest will seek to confine demands for change so that they can act as gatekeepers. The task will be to simply admit the system is broken, and open the gates to its replacement. After 23 June I aim to set out in detail the reasons why the British constitution needs wholesale replacement; defining what a constitution is and does and examining the one we have inherited. The list of oddly functioning parts includes:

- The end of the sovereignty of parliament territorially

- The end of the sovereignty of parliament legally

- The final end of cabinet government

- The collapse of the legitimacy of the House of Commons

- The corruption of the House of Lords

- The exposure of the Privy Council

- The suborning of the Civil Service

- The re-gearing of the monarchy

- The permanent place of human rights

There is a larger, more important change in the unwritten culture that is essential to the way Britain was run. It occurred with the 2003 invasion of Iraq. The domestic political importance was not that it was illegal; or that it was a

"dumb war" as the then [Senator Obama](#) put it, setting himself on his route to the US presidency; or that it was a "predatory and dishonest war" as John le Carré wrote in [openDemocracy](#). No, it is not that the war was wrong, ill-conceived, inept, greedy, unwise and illegal. The most important consequence of the Iraq War here in Britain in terms of our own politics is that we the people, of all political persuasions, who took to the streets in unmatched numbers to oppose the war, were wiser and assessed reality with more foresight than our masters, the UK's political class, its so-called 'intelligence' services, its experienced Foreign Office, its Murdoch-inspired press, its Labour government and Tory opposition, never forgetting the majority of their Lordships. We, the unwashed, had demonstrably better *judgment* than the elite. This turned upside-down the core assumption of the UK's informal constitution: that the people cannot be trusted with the keys of sovereignty.

To this day, the media and security interests who now regret Iraq say things like, "if we had known then what we know now…". But never do they say that the popular opposition to the Iraq war was right at the time for the right reasons. In official discourse, the opponents of the war are still anti-American or knee-jerk peaceniks, or, most scurrilous of all, soft on terrorism. But the fact is, we got it right while Blair and his fellow idiots got it wrong. By fellow idiots I mean almost the totality of the entire political caste. And by 'we', I don't just mean the millions who marched, I mean the democratic intelligence of the majority of British people who pride themselves on knowing how to fight a necessary war, and knew at the time that this was not the case with Iraq. And by Blair I mean the then prime minister and his close-knit personal team who were warned they were playing al-Qaida's game and shamefully proceeded to do so.

With no one to impeach them, Blair and company held onto power and the result was an attack on our democracy; with dodgy dossiers, purging the BBC, fabrication and spin. But the crucial point is that Iraq irreparably holed the

legitimacy of Britain's current political caste below the waterline, not because they were mistaken, but because the people warned them they were mistaken. On a matter of war and peace – the highest calling of the state – the people were right and the Westminster political elite were wrong.

The fundamental assumption on which rests the unwritten basic code of the UK's operating system is that those who rule us will get it right. Or, if they get it wrong, as they did with appeasement most notably in 1938, they will provide the man and the judgment to correct their course. Can the final protracted publication of the Chilcot Inquiry achieve a similar correction? Why should we hold our breath? Peter Oborne has written a focused guide as to how to approach the Report when it is finally published next month, Not the Chilcot Report, published by Head of Zeus, reviewed here by Paul Rogers. Oborne is generous enough to suggest that it is:

> *The last chance for the British Establishment to show that it can learn the lessons of its failures – and hold those who fail to account. If Sir John Chilcot and his inquiry fail to achieve this, the Iraq Inquiry will be the final proof that our system of government is broken.*

Of course, it would be refreshing if those responsible are indeed held to account, if only many years later. But in the moral sense that really matters – in a system of government that depends on a moral code – the old order is already history. That those who rule can fail badly and get away with it is not new. That they might be reprimanded would be nice but makes little difference. What is new is that the British people proved that voters are not populists greedy for conquest but are wiser, more restrained and make the better judgments than their masters. *This* is without precedent: the people have earned the right to claim a democratic constitution.

In or out of the European Union, we need one. The referendum is like a bone thrown at us by a cynical caste of operators to distract us from what we really should be deciding, which is how we are governed. David Cameron said to a TV audience that you, the people, have sovereignty by taking this decision. To which the answer is, "Oh no we don't! Not sovereignty, not yet".

Chapter 12

Death and the referendum

With the murder of the young Labour MP Jo Cox outside her constituency surgery, a pall has fallen across the referendum campaign. She voiced support for refugees. Her assassin cried "Britain first" before he knifed her and blasted off a shortened firearm. A shudder of revulsion went across the country that the UK could become like America. The murder threatened something valuable about British political life. Just as they shout at each other in the close proximity of the House of Commons, we too want to be able to see our politicians face to face and tell them what we think, without security screens coming between us to depersonalise politics even more.

The nature of the referendum campaign itself seemed responsible for releasing the furies. Activity froze, rallies and events were cancelled in a genuine act of revulsion. The arguments had become hoarse, repetitive and alarmist. In the face of an English defiance of its aim to *Remain* the government threatened the most dire consequences, the prime minister even declared it would "put a bomb" under the economy – repulsive rhetoric in an age of terrorism. Unable to win their economic argument, free-market *Leave* settled on migration as the way to communicate a call for 'democracy' they had twisted into a psychological rather than political demand to "take control".

Above is a montage of recent Daily Express front pages. Bomb alert! Invasion! Take control! The campaign seems to have fuelled an unmarried male fascist, with a history of mental illness. He found himself represented by everything that he was not: a female married socialist MP who was "a force of nature, a five-foot bundle of Yorkshire grit and determination absolutely committed to helping other people". The gender issue is important here, as Adam Ramsay says in his post on fascist terrorism. When the man charged with her murder appeared before Westminster magistrates court, he said, "My name is death to traitors, freedom for Britain".

The prime minister and the Labour opposition leader, both *Remain* supporters, travelled together to Cox's constituency in Yorkshire to lay wreaths. They also recalled parliament to express its abhorrence, consternation and resolve. This shut down campaigning for three of the final six days before Thursday's vote and halted the momentum the Brexit side was gaining. Cameron and Corbyn acted to re-establish and reaffirm the authority of their status as the ones we rely upon and trust, as they laid their wreaths and delivered a few portentous clichés. A parliament that was prevented from debating the crucial, renegotiated relationship between the EU and the UK that defined the

referendum's start, will now reconvene in an atmosphere of togetherness that silences dissent. Does the country then go to the polls with subservience restored, or stay at home in enough numbers to assure *Remain* a majority? Is this how Britain will mourn and atone for the murder of Jo Cox?

Almost certainly it is. For, in addition, those who want a cosmopolitan Britain became increasingly enraged by the racist drum beat behind Brexit. Alex Massie, the Scotland editor of the London Spectator (which supports *Leave*) pinned the blame and delivered a rebuke that went viral, "When you present politics as a matter of life and death, as a question of national survival, don't be surprised if someone takes you at your word". In a fair world this would have been directed at the prime minister and his bomb not just the Brexiteers. It wasn't. The yellow press had been too one-sided and now they suffered their own, fully-warranted broadside. In a rap from the capital, [James O'Brien](#) of London's LBC radio delivered a monologue to that pointed towards the nature of media support for *Leave*:

> *"Is it even vaguely possible that a man living in Britain today could be pushed to the brink of murder by political debate and the political situation? I don't care where you come from, I don't care who you vote for. Can you conceive of circumstances in which somebody living in Britain today could be pushed to a point where they contemplate this sort of conduct. I'm afraid to tell you that I can.*
>
> *If I was to be reading my newspaper every single morning and be told that my very existence was under siege from people I've never met and never seen but keep getting told are coming here in their hoards. If I was to open my newspaper or turn on my radio or TV to hear that everybody who is coming here is a rapist and they've got their eyes on our women and we've got no chance whatsoever of protecting ourselves.*

> *And unless we do this or do that, or treat them like this or treat them like that, then we're all doomed, we're all going to hell in a handcart.*
>
> *If I was being told it's time to reclaim our country every time I got out of bed in the morning, I'd begin to believe it, I think, if I didn't have the knowledge and the insights and the education to know that it is not true. We want our country back from whom? We want our country back from when?"*

Helped by a large push from the IMF and further dire warnings of the costs from the Chancellor, it will be astonishing if most of the ten per cent of undecided voters the [Democratic Audit](#) have identified do not now swing to *Remain*, whose supporters will be more motivated to go to the polls. Those who favour *Leave* will pause. The dreams of Brexit and in particular those of Boris Johnson, who otherwise would have been prime minister within a week, are vaporising.

He deserves it. I don't say this with glee or hold him in the scorn and derision that many do. On the contrary, the exaggerated personal animosity directed towards 'Boris' is mostly an emanation of the bad faith of his opponents who fear his challenge. A self-declared liberal cosmopolitan, he brings conviviality into politics. From an immigrant family he favours immigration. Unlike those who intone that complaints about its scale are "a legitimate concern" and then offer nothing, he says it must be controlled in order to be protected. Unlike the Labour party especially, Johnson has consistently objected to the EU's non-democratic and oligarchic methods. It is beside the point if he does so now for reasons of ambition, a politician without ambition would be truly dangerous. It is because those who *Remain* do not have a reply to Johnson's actual arguments that they fall back on abuse.

He had a bold strategy towards the EU in which he really desires to stay. His desire is to roll back the remit of the European Court in Luxembourg while retaining membership of the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg. His approach is the opposite in both respects of the government's ridiculous prospective, set out by Home Secretary Teresa May and ruthlessly dissected by the barrister [Marina Wheeler QC](#) (who is married to Johnson). Given that both Germany and the United States are utterly opposed to UK withdrawal and that the EU as a whole needs to discard its commitment to "ever closer union", Johnson believes a Brexit vote would shock them into agreeing to the terms Cameron set out as his objectives in his 2013 Bloomberg speech. These were squared with [Johnson and his wife](#) at Chequers beforehand. The prime minister set out five principles that had to be met in order for him to support the UK staying in the EU, among them:

> *"My third principle is that power must be able to flow back to Member States, not just away from them. This was promised by European Leaders... But the promise has never really been fulfilled. We need to implement this principle properly."*

Let's not talk about *that!* The five principles have gone the way of the Good Society. I want to put in this reminder of them here because the campaign is taking place at different levels simultaneously and *one* of them is the democratic case, especially given Cameron's failure to reform it in the way he set out. It is singled out by [Charles Moore](#) writing calmly in the Telegraph, and by a compelling [Ambrose Evans-Pritchard](#) in an anguished conclusion that is magisterially unflinching about the likely economic costs. Or, on the left, by Olly Huitson who notes that "When asked about European opposition to TTIP, EU Trade Commissioner Cecilia Malmstrom [replied](#), 'I do not take my mandate from the European people'". [Huitson concludes](#):

> *"The EU is not simply undemocratic, it is actively contemptuous of democracy. Better to fight our own battles here, under our own imperfect democracy, than rely solely on the benevolence, wisdom and competence of men we can never elect, and we can never remove."*

The call to leave the EU for reasons of democracy and self-government has not swayed voters, however, for whom the Westminster system is as remote as Brussels. If the leading politicians who condemn the EU's lack of democracy had created more of it in the UK, or even expressed a desire for it, their call to "bring it back" so as to "govern ourselves" would have had more credibility. Instead the leaders of *Leave* went for "taking control", especially of "our borders" as the message that brought people to support them. Tragically, for many, democracy is too far off to feel tangible. The decision to support "Out" expresses the wish not to be powerless. It is a way of saying things cannot go on like this – things being what people earn, or rather don't as glittering towers arise that give them the finger from the City of London.

With England's cruel, prurient media there is no way to stop this then bleeding into the racism and neo-fascist populism of the Farage wing of UKIP. The morning of Cox's assassination, Nigel Farage posed before a poster of Syrian refugees crossing the Croatia-Slovenia border with its slogan screaming, BREAKING POINT. There was hardly a touch of neo to its fascism. [Steve Bell's](#) cartoon said it all.
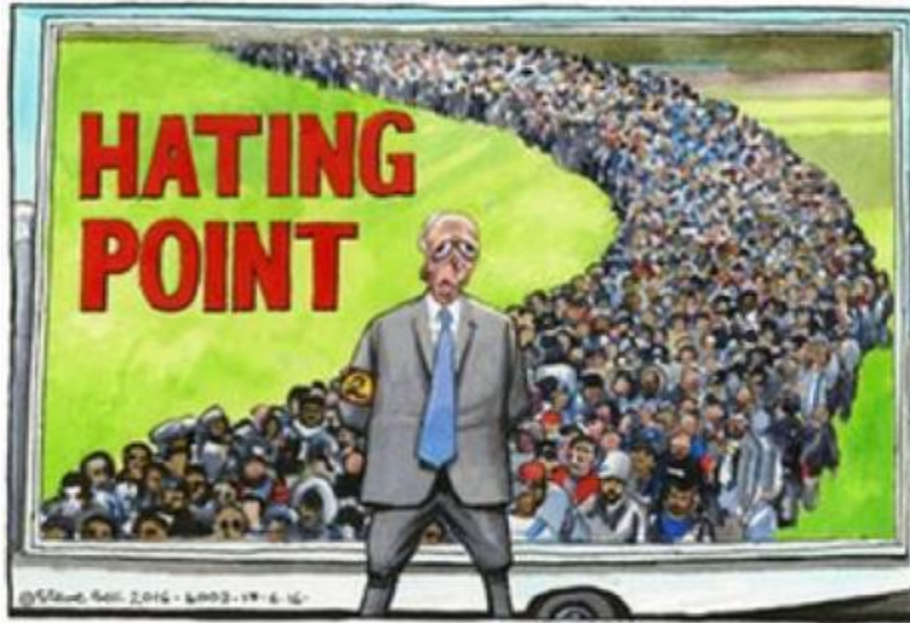
Steve Bell, The Guardian, 16/06/2016

Presented with an image of the advert Boris Johnson tried to distance himself saying:

> *"That's not my politics and that's not my campaign. My view about this is that the loss of control over immigration is one aspect of a much wider problem, which is to do with the lack of democratic control generally. I think if you take back control, you do a great deal to neutralise anti-immigrant feeling generally.*
>
> *I'm passionately pro-immigration, pro-immigrants, and have seen how my city, London, benefited from it massively and personally how my own family has benefited from it."*

It was too late. You have to disassociate yourself from vileness in advance – especially when it is clearly on the way. Not wishing to divide the *Leave* campaign, Farage's despicable attitudes were tolerated. A permissiveness of hatred and loathing in others went ahead of the Brexiteers, for all the

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civilisation of its upper class advocates and genuine lack of bigotry among many crushed economically. If *Leave* wins, many who live here will feel fear.

In September 2003 Johnson joined up with the Spectator's Italian correspondent Nick Farrell to visit and write about Silvio Berlusconi, then prime minister of Italy, in his Sardinian villa and its acres of gardens. They were not, they decided, going to bother him with small details of corruption charges or how he gained his $12 billion fortune. Instead, as he had just been denounced by Sweden's foreign minister Anna Lindh for removing Italy from the tradition of West European values, they were going to decide whether Berlusconi was "on the whole a force for good in Italy, Europe and the world."

Johnson's article must have been written just before an assassin stabbed Lindh to death on 11 September in the run-up to a referendum on whether Sweden should join the Euro. She supported it doing so. Her killing did not alter the vote and the country rejected Europe's currency. Although Johnson's book of essays, [Have I got Views for You](#), in which his article appears, was published in 2006, he does not have the courtesy to acknowledge her fate. He concludes about Berlusconi:

> *Suddenly, after decades in which Italian politics was in thrall to a procession all gloomy, portentous, jargon-laden patitocrats, there appeared this influorescence of American gung-hoery. Yes, he may have been involved in questionable business practices; he may even yet be found out and pay the price. For the time being, though, it seems reasonable to let him get on with his program. He may fail. But then, of course – and this is the point that someone should write in block capitals, fold up and stuff in the mouth of Anna Lindh, Swedish foreign minister – he can be rejected by the Italian people.*

> *She may not like it but he was democratically elected and can be removed by the very people Anna Lindh insults. If we are obliged to compare Silvio Berlusconi with Anna Lindh, and other bossy, high-taxing European politicians, I agree with Farell: as the narrator says of Jay Gatsby, a man Berlusconi to some extent resembles, he is 'better than the whole damn lot of them'.*

A revealing encounter - and a warning to us today. The permissiveness of wrongdoing in Johnson's indulgent portrait of the Italian demagogue suggests a pattern that now extends to Farage. Lindh was not a Eurocrat, she was also an elected politician. Johnson's clichés suddenly seem tired. The crudity of parading Italian voters' capacity to "reject" Berlusconi as legitimating his abuse of power has become a trope of Gove and Johnson's referendum campaign. It is a demagogic definition of accountability and democracy itself. Here, Johnson makes no mention of the fact that Berlusconi owned most of Italian television and bent its coverage to ensure elections were hardly fair.

in his eulogy to Italy's arch manipulator and populist, you can see the politics of Johnson's bid for the leadership of Britain. He wants to become Prime Minister of its politico-media-entertainment complex in order to enjoy getting away with what he can get away with. And he will deploy the fact that voters can at some point 'kick the bugger out' to justify everything in the meanwhile.

As this was about to be published, Johnson called for an amnesty for illegal immigrants from the platform of a Vote Leave rally. I witnessed his being first pressed on this issue at a glorious London Citizens rally in Westminster Central Hall in his first mayoral campaign in 2008. Illegal immigrants are hideously exploited as they have to work without papers. Of course they should be amnestied. Johnson agreed to add his support. But there was little noticeable campaigning from him, despite his having the megaphone of Mayoral office and

a weekly column in the Daily Telegraph for eight years. Positioning without force. In this case it is an attempt to separate himself from Farage without criticising him directly for fear of 'splitting' the *Leave* campaign.

Michael Gove deployed a similar exercise. Asked about the Farage poster, he told Andrew Marr that when he saw it he "shuddered". He then added that he believed in free speech, ie he did not attack Farage's right to display it. But after the shudder? Gove could have exercised his own right to robust free speech by issuing an immediate, comprehensive reprimand.

The issue here is so important it demands exactitude. The more that *Leave* is associated with bigotry and racism the less successful it will be. This is a sign of Britain's relatively successful move towards becoming a multicultural country. And is why Cameron, Osborne and *Remain* are pressing the Farage button. At the same time they are vulnerable in this area because of the complete failure of the *Remain* campaign to address issues of democracy. It means they are unable to withstand patriotic calls to run our own affairs. However, their Tory colleagues who lead the call for repatriating our democratic sovereignty, who I dubbed the Maggyites in an early chapter, have failed to deliver an inspiring democratic programme, for obvious reasons. They have fallen back on on prejudice while being unable to talk about human rights. Hence their inability to take the initiative and draw a clear line between their campaign for *Leave* and that of Farage. Not to speak of their own official Vote Leave inflammatory posters about Turkey. We have to conclude, therefore, that there is no such line separating them. It may be unfair to define Johnson's resurrection of Berlusconism, and Gove's hyper-capitalism - as it is aptly described by Pat Kane - as racist. But a soft variant of fascism is contained within it. Not of course the militant, regimented variety. Rather a good laugh at the expense of the dark-skinned other. Behind all their denials, we are right to fear that if there is a majority for Brexit it will permit people with a different

accent, or whose cheeks are not a blotchy off-white, to be asked, "Why are you still here?".

This is intolerable. Vote *Remain.*

Chapter 13

The referendum in Doncaster, and Labour's disappearing trick

Built over seams of coal and linked to the world by ancient Roman roads and the river Don, Doncaster was once prosperous. In 1980 it had ten deep mines, employing 17,000 men. They are all gone. Unlike the nearby mill towns, its population is overwhelmingly 'white English', and they have elected Labour MPs to their three constituencies at almost every opportunity since the 1930s, currently Rosie Winterton, Ed Miliband and Caroline Flint. In 2009, though, they elected an English Democrat mayor. And tomorrow, they will almost certainly vote to leave the EU.

On Monday, I went there with Adam Ramsay, who came down from Edinburgh, to talk with people about why.

It was easy to find men who wanted "Out". Women were more for *Remain* and more reticent. Plenty had still not made up their minds. Talking to people in the centre of town is random and in no way representative. For systematic reporting of what people are saying, Ashcroft's weekly focus groups are telling and funny. Our purpose was to listen to the reasons and texture of those wanting *Out* and also to meet local Labour activists to see what they thought was going on. I'd been lucky enough to join Adam in Scotland when his country had its independence referendum 19 months ago, and we found ourselves measuring what we heard against the Scottish experience.

The most striking difference was the negativity and sense of pointlessness about those wanting *Out*. This had an extreme form in the anti-immigrant view of one burly, articulate man (who blamed his conviction for racially aggravated assault after he "defended" himself on the police's need to fulfil their quotas). He was loquacious and detailed: immigrants work hard but send their money back out the country. Poles live four to a house and can afford rents that push up prices for those like him who have one child and want to rent a home. From a mining background, what's left is the family, seen as a unit to defend. He did not seem to be looking forward to taking on the world in a high-tech trading form of Britishness. Anyway, he was quite sure that *Out* would make no significant difference. I asked him about an English parliament and he replied, "we are the people of England, we are England's parliament". He was clear that he was English, rather than British, and thought Putin gets it right.

Those drinking with him, all in their 20s, seemed to shrink from his confident intransigence, and one woman who had said when we first asked that she would vote Remain disappeared back into the pub before we could ask why. One of the friends spotting us the next day, came to say hello and said he was not going to vote as nothing would change and Cameron would do whatever he wanted anyway.

For some, it felt like a vote with a shrug: it might decrease the "pressures' of migrants coming in ("don't blame them but don't want them") and this could bring down property prices and rents – a great attraction. But because they don't think it will make a real difference the threat of a crash seemed remote, and was absent from the conversation; a marked difference with Scotland.

Another kind of *Outer* was a cheerful butcher, working in the central market, where trade is down. He had been a miner, where he liked the work and now missed the solidarity. He was Labour and would continue to be Labour but he wants "change". He does not believe there will be change but that's what he'll

be casting his ballot for, with no mention of migration or foreigners. Adam used the analogy of a lever. People have only given one, and asked if they want to pull it. They suspect it isn't really attached to anything, and if it is, they aren't really sure what will happen. But if it's change you need, you may as well give it a go.

For me, as part of the greater London politically active class, Brexit is a potentially consequential decision. Because the financial system is swollen with uncertainties and has failed to recover from the crash of 2008, Britain trying to leave the EU could unravel a thread. Or, if the EU gathers its skirts and acts in a coordinated, punitive fashion, there might be a harsh collective punishment imposed on the UK for its pluck. The only economic argument I respect is Ambrose Evans-Pritchard's, that it could be awful but it is worth it for self-government.

In Doncaster, however, many who want out do not share any sense of participating in a choice that will have an important consequence. Therefore, it is not seen as a threat. Where people do see consequences, many were vague about them, like faintly remembered facts learnt for an exam many years ago, rather than key points mobilised for their own arguments every day. One young fashionably dressed chef, who was leaning towards "Remain", said that "Leave will be better for English industry… right?".

If the UK votes to *Leave* it will be poetic justice for the masters of neoliberalism in Downing Street who for a third of a century have told industrial England that there is no alternative. The assault on collective agency and with it a sense of shared, pubic responsibility will have come home with a vengeance.

The contrast with Scotland could not be greater. There, with their own parliament growing in power, there is a public sense that they can "make a difference". Yes voters were not indifferent to the 'project fear' to which they were subjected by the government but sought to measure what effects would

be real. Some voted Yes with excitement at the prospect, others voted No to independence as they concluded it did not have the strength or economic capacity yet. It was an empowering process that inspired a record turnout. This is not how the Brexit referendum felt in Doncaster days before the vote. It's reflected also in the way that UKIP are spinning the referendum. The emphasis is on the negative. They could have led with YES to independence, instead their attitude is NO to the EU.

[Simon Tilford](#) of the Centre for European Reform has condemned the leading Brexiteers as "libertarian sovereigntists who support further deregulation of the British economy. Their opposition to immigration is aimed at appealing to disenfranchised and insecure voters". This is right, but they are not appealing to their desire for security but a preference for more risk generated by fatalism and loss.

The alternative? It should have come from the Labour party. We hope to publish more about this, after interviewing Labour councillors in some depth. One of them told us that after a lifetime of active commitment she felt she could not canvass for *Remain* and she did not understand the argument. It was not tangible to her why she should be for In or Out. She wanted some reading and went online onto Facebook, and watched John Major. There is no Labour statement for its own members setting out the party's judgment. Her own family are looking towards UKIP. In 1997 when Rosie Winterton first stood as Labour candidate for Doncaster Central she got 27,000 votes, 62% of those voting, the Tories got 9,000 and UKIP 462. Last year she got 19,840 votes, the Tories 8,386 and UKIP 9,747 (up from 1,421 in 2010). The Lib Dem vote collapsed from nearly 9,000 to 1,700. In Ed Miliband's Doncaster North, where he got 20,708, UKIP also came second with 8,928. These are ominous figures.

The Labour party's membership has grown significantly thanks to the Corbyn surge. But it is still facing inwards, arguing more about Trident and how to

manage the catastrophic cuts in pubic provision that its council has to manage. If this is the Labour heartland, its pulse is dreadfully weak. We met a bearded solicitor, probably a Labour supporter. He was swift and clear. He is for staying *In*. Those for *Out* are "racists" and they have a secret agenda of destroying workers rights. This was not an opinion being advocated intransigently, in public by an organised Labour movement. More than the mines have closed in Doncaster.

Chapter 14

Blimey, it IS Brexit!

What led the English to decide to try and take the whole of the United Kingdom out of Europe?

A striking victory for what [I dubbed 'Maggyism'](#) has taken place. It seeks the "liberation" of Europe from a 'super-state', not isolation. It might even succeed, this being a time of surprise, as the EU is struggling with a dysfunctional currency and has other electorates already enflamed by its rigid policies and lack of democracy. In England for sure, under the banner of Maggyism's alluring yet chilling command to 'take back control', a new form of populist Toryism will be tested. The challenge for the left across England will go deep and it will have to discard its attachment to the ruins of Labourism if it is to recover.

The first thing to register is the scale of the outcome, then its nature. Already some Labour MPs are pointing to how narrow the outcome is. The left is brilliant at denial. Since last year's general election many on the left can be heard to say that the Tories won only 24% of the electorate – as if this means it was not a 'real' victory for Cameron and company. A more clear-eyed reading is that whereas in 2010 the parties of the left and centre (Labour, Lib Dem, SNP and Green) got 16 millions votes between them and those of the right (Tories, UKIP and BNP) only 12 million, last year the combined vote of the centre and left went down to 14.3 million while the right rose to over 15 million. In 2016, *for the first time in sixty years,* the combined parties of the right outnumbered

those of the left and centre. The referendum is a further step in this rightward trajectory.

Yet it is also an amazing democratic moment and not a right-wing one of the kind we have been used to since the rise of neoliberalism at the end of the 1970s. The popular rebuke delivered to the corporate political class is devastating. A week ago, the Financial Times spoke for the ruling system in its editorial saying a British vote to withdraw from the EU would be nothing less than "a grievous blow to the post-1945 liberal world order", one that would strike at "the coherence of the west". It went on to contrast the liberalism of those like itself who wanted to stay in Europe with the "pinched nationalism" of Brexit. This characterisation is partly correct but partly – and it is an important part – mistaken. However, the FT's call for the UK to stay could not have been weightier. It stood at the pinnacle of a staggering alliance, domestic as well as international. With the important exception of part of the London and Murdoch media, all the main parties in parliament, all living prime ministers, the financial, business, trade union and cultural establishments, mobilised all of their considerable persuasive powers for *Remain.* [See Peter Oborne in the Daily Mail]

The government used its position to the hilt. It spent £9 million sending an official booklet to every household. It issued Treasury warnings. It coordinated with the Bank of England. The age of deference may have ended but the authority of high office still commands respect. The outcome of the prime minister's renegotiation exposed the main flank of the *Remain* campaign to his failure to bring back powers from Brussels as he had promised he would. He managed to prevent any debate in parliament of the deal he negotiated, which would have revealed this and damaged him. The BBC never pressed the issue. The advantage in any election accrues to the status quo, in this case the status quo used its advantage in every way it could and not without considerable success. Many chose the path of caution that both Downing Street and the

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Labour movement advocated. In their heart, a far larger majority of the English wanted to support Brexit than actually voted for it. This makes the outcome all the more decisive.

The people of England have spoken.

But so far all they have said is that they do not want to be told that their voice is worthless or they must accept their fate as decided in 'Brussels'.

Cameron called the referendum as a tactical device to deal with the threat from UKIP, which is, in the personification of Farage, a racist movement that can speak with all the devices of prejudice. But the English are not a racist people any longer. And will not become so again. Nor are all members of UKIP racist, at least while Douglas Carswell remains a member. Nigel Farage will seek to brand the referendum outcome as his own even though it belongs to a far larger movement of sentiment than his. Perhaps the most important question then, in different ways, for the victorious Maggyites, for the crushed left, and for the defeated but still established authorities, is to ensure that Brexit and its aftermath does not belong to Farage and indeed Marine Le Pen and Geert Wilders.

How can we claim Brexit, even if, like me, you wanted to remain in Europe to take the battle for democracy to the Commission, arm-in-arm with fellow Europeans like DiEM 25? The immediate, practical way is, immediately, to start to forge a new relationship with Europe. The English are not racist but they are broadly speaking anti-European, above all thanks to a love affair with Britishness. This too may come to an end should Scotland leave the UK. If only by default we have to help create and give voice to a civic, multi-racial Englishness. This is likely to be the crucial battleground in the coming encounter with Faragism.

For it also means England becoming a normal European country. How can we prevent the referendum from poisoning this possibility? For the entire referendum campaign was marked by a transactional relationship to our continental neighbours, which has now seeped into peoples' attitudes. It was boosted by the prime minister himself. I tried to analyse this [at the start](#) of the referendum. As the campaign unfolded the clearest example was the dispute about how much the UK's membership of the EU costs. Technically, Britain pays £350 million a week into the EU and then gets a large rebate. The net figure is closer to £100 million and [the larger claim is "absurd"](#). Nonetheless, it was imprinted on the *Leave* battle bus. Much fuming about the lies and distortions followed. But never *once* in the three months of the referendum campaign to my knowledge, and I followed it as closely as I could, did any official or influential supporter of *Remain* say that whatever the amount it was a snip, a bargain, good value, exactly what "the fifth richest country in the world" should be paying to equalise and strengthen a Europe from which we drew so much mutual gain. Never did the word "solidarity" pass the prime minister's lips. No attempt was made to communicate with the country that we *are* European. Anything at all we paid them was a loss. The "lies" concerned only how much this was!

Nor did the Labour party suggest that we should embrace Europe as Europeans. The difference with Scotland and the Scottish National Party was striking in this defining respect. Just take one example of Labour in action, to see how it too embraced an entirely self-interested, calculating relationship about being "better off" in the EU. Here is Jeremy Corbyn's [brief video appeal](#), his final, official battle cry for the Labour campaign. It has all the passion of passing a turd:

> *"This is the biggest choice in a generation, whether Britain remains in the European Union or not. It's a choice that puts jobs, workers rights,*

> *its economy and the National Health Service on one ballot paper. If Britain leaves all these will be put at risk. Working people will have less protection from a Tory government, which has shown quite clearly it will not stand up for them. The European Union has its problems. Not everything about it works. But despite that Britain is undoubtedly better off by remaining in. This is a one-off choice between staying or leaving completely. Given what is at stake, I and the Labour party believe that Britain is better off in Europe. Vote Remain."*

The concepts of 'Voice' and 'Exit" may help us understand what happened. The terms were developed by Alfred Hirschman to explain behaviour in politics drawing on his analysis of markets. Crudely, if you do not like what is happening you can stay and seek to change it – which he termed Voice – or you can regard such an effort as pointless and leave – which he termed Exit. Usually 'Exit' is seen futile and the question for ending alienation in politics is to encourage Voice as positive engagement. If we apply this comparison to the referendum then the Brexiteers embraced Exit. However, it was they who claimed the vision saying they would leave the stifling, undemocratic control of the EU to give regular voters 'Voice' in the crude form 'control'. Whereas Cameron, Corbyn and all those arguing for the official *Remain* opposed Exit but instead of offering engagement proposed only a sad relative advantage. For Cameron's EU deal removed the UK from active participation in the EU's core project. He called this a win-win, a "best of both worlds" outcome where the UK gained access to the single market while being relieved of ever closer union. But it meant that UK citizens *had no say.* So Hirschman's terms were reversed in the UK's referendum: Exit from the EU was purposive, while remaining was voiceless. Little wonder that Exit won.

Yet 16 million voted to be European. And many of those who voted for Brexit are also European. It's really important not to caricature those who said *Busta!*

An anecdote. I was in a London mini-cab two days ago and asked the driver if business was better or worse than last year. "Worse", he said, and added that migrants were coming and using Uber to reduce his business. I enquired further. He was a tall Nigerian I'd guess in his 40s. He has been a driver for ten years. A naturalised Briton, his wife and two children were born in London. He is self-employed and supports competition "you have got to have it, I'm against monopolies". He was in favour of Europe and against isolation. But he was for 'Out'. Why? The uncontrolled pressure of immigrants and the usual stories; they sleep three or four to a house, drive up rents, send their money home and he had quite a detailed view as to how Germany managed its migrants and employment better.

Unlike the 'Outers' Adam Ramsay and I [met in Doncaster](#) he is not a nihilist, suffering in a town hollowed out by the impact of neoliberalism. He believed in the change he thought was needed. Indeed it would be hard to find a better poster figure for globalisation. No racist, he is hardly a little Englander, opposes isolationism and supports Europe. But he wants government. Whether he will get it is another matter. But he and many like him have delivered a historic defeat to the one-time corporate populists: Blair, Mandelson (who worked so closely with Osborne on the referendum) and Cameron the self-described "heir to Blair". Their approach has been annihilated. It began with the Corbyn surge and has now expanded to the wider UK political caste, ironically becoming part of a European wave.

One of the themes of all the weekly instalments of [Blimey, it Could be Brexit!](#) that I've been writing since March is to assess the way that market fundamentalism hollowed out politics since the UK's first European referendum in 1975, and how, after the crash of 2008, we are witnessing the return of politics in so-called populist forms of both left and right. Maggyism is an attempt by the right to scoop up this energy and make it its own, to "Take the wind out of the sails of the extremists and those who would play politics with

immigration". That wind is part of the long history of the adroit pre-emption of consent by the British governing elite. I did not expect it to succeed so dramatically so fast.

But its leaders could have a surprise in store. It is the people of England who have spoken. But Boris Johnson is a Great British Churchillist who thinks making jokes about Africans is funny and Michael Gove an intellectual Scot. Can the left grasp the opportunity this offers to link the spirit of London with its country? It will have to embrace a genuine programme for democracy as a central part of its revival. Jeremy Gilbert makes the point with brevity and panache. I have made the same argument with a focus on England in a response to a powerful confession by Owen Jones as to why he feels he can't support Jeremy Corbyn.

It is not clear that Labour is capable of hearing these arguments. In which case another form of opposition will have to replace it. This is one of the first consequences of the Brexit vote. The referendum was a heaven sent opportunity for Corbyn's Labour party. It was a platform on which to take command of defining what kind of country Britain should be and of what kind of democracy it wanted. Because its limelight was not the hideous theatrical of the House of Commons it was, to use Owen Jones' phrase, a perfect opportunity "to define oneself". Instead, the argument over Brexit was treated tactically, as a Tory fight that Labour had to keep away from. This was a catastrophic misjudgement. Corbyn gave his support for the EU as "seven or seven and a half out of ten". His defenders say this placed him close to the view of the population. But this misses the point by a galaxy. The referendum was not about Europe it was about us. It was – and is – about our country's direction, solidarity and internationalism. The referendum was a singular moment of existential commitment not a grade assessment. The demand for leadership is overdone but if it means anything the referendum called for leadership in the sense of a definition of purpose. Labour did not have it give it with respect to this vital choice. The country knows.

The referendum ends with a decision and at the same time everything to play for. I could see from the start that a *Leave* vote was possible. I thought this was extraordinary enough to be revealing about the state of the country and the potentially explosive national, generational and political forces at work within it. I didn't think that a Brexit vote would actually happen. Now it has, these forces will come into the open rather than being subdued, simmering for the next round. It is a ghastly result in that it is in the hands of right-wing forces released from constraint. But it is also one hell of a challenge. Brexit is a ruin not a fortress, [as George Monbiot argues](). Have we the capacity to start building its replacement? The consequence could be an immensely positive, which is why, despite the right-wing nature of the moment in Britain, the world order as a whole is trembling at the consequences. One can also see the unravelling of neoliberal depoliticisation in the response of young people in the UK. They had never 'taken an interest in politics'. They had assumed, as they had been encouraged to, that politics was irrelevant to life and the market place. Suddenly they discover that, no, their 'natural' right to travel and reside across Europe is a function of policy. A privilege that needs to be governed and secured and if they want to recover it they must engage politically.

Dark as well as democratic forces have been unleashed by Brexit. It will be the fight of our lives to ensure a positive, progressive outcome: one that is fully European, cosmopolitan, tolerant and pluralist. We are entering a civilizational struggle over the future of our continent and country in which the usual clichés fall away like broken leaves in the gale. To prepare ourselves for this fight we need a clear grasp of what the hell is going on. I hope that *Blimey, it Could be Brexit!* has helped to contribute towards this, with all its faults and omissions of haste. More was planned but I am now going to draw breath. A new era of British politics has begun. The simple fact that moves to secure the independence of Scotland are now conservative is evidence enough. Either the UK will break apart or a federal future awaits us. That this is now only one measure of the changes that will come in the next few years shows how far

reaching they will be and they will not be confined to the UK. The European experiment is going to undergo a parallel transformation. My hope is that it will end with us together not apart.

29 June 2016