

BROWN ON BREXIT

Or

GENTLEMEN VERSUS PLAYERS

English cricket used to be socially divided into Gentlemen who were so well off that they did not need to be paid and Players whose social position was such that they needed a wage to live on. Another way of putting this is that some were amateurs and some professionals. They had separate changing rooms. When Michael Gove disparaged educational experts I detected more than just a whiff of the attitudes of that time.

Reading Craig Oliver's account from inside the innermost EU Referendum Remain Bubble it was impossible to avoid the conclusion that the factional fight was a Conservative domestic dispute; that Cameron and Osborne were amateurs; and that despite Cameron's experience in public relations (his previous job) their understanding of the electorate was limited. They were really playing a match between the gentlemen. They seemed not to have a clue about the extent to which their policies had hurt people: the players. They were still in a separate changing room.

The book is called *UNLEASHING DEMONS, The Inside Story Of Brexit* (2016). Craig, knighted for services to calamitous government, was Cameron's spin-doctor. I called my review *More Students Union than European Union* and structured it as ten questions on the book. At one point in the book we have Cameron self-deprecatingly asking whose idea it was to call a referendum. It had the tone of a captain making fun of himself to teammates for choosing to bat first on a 'bumping pitch and a blinding light'.

Here are the ten questions I asked when reading the book plus my own views.

<http://www.criticalprofessionallearning.co.uk/assets/UnleashingDemons.pdf>

On the same subject Gordon Brown, out of power, detached from the levers of government but, on this issue, not only involved but courted by Remain, makes similar points in his book with lots of detail. Brown can be seen as a sorter out of problems. Get him committed to a project and you get such a lot from him. Perhaps projects were his greatest strength: throw him a problem and his sleeves rolled themselves up.

His very believable account of his various engagements with Cameron and Osborne over the referendum reveals, to me at least, a huge contrast between a professional and a couple of amateurs. According to him he

repeatedly told them that they were neglecting Labour voters in the North of England. They were speaking to a comfortable constituency. They were forgetting the disadvantaged and unaware of how they were perceived to be 'them' and not 'us'.

It is not unusual for people recently out of power to regain not only energy but perspective; also a renewal of values. Brown regards the result of the referendum as a disaster for Britain. It very definitely was. Even if it is reversed it has already done such a lot of damage. But far worse for me is that we had to have a really stupid self-harming referendum because the Tory Party was riven with disputatious factions that included unrealistic imperial nostalgia freaks such as Jacob Rees-Mogg, a character created by P.G. Wodehouse, and Liam Fox with his eagerness to sell the NHS to American health companies. The interests and obsessions of the Tory Party outweighed national interest.

Thirty seven percent of the electorate voted Leave in an advisory, not binding, referendum. So why are we in this mess? I believe that since 1979 we have done more and more government and less and less politics. Politics means participation but, as Anthony King points out in *Who Governs Britain?* (2015), our governments have a tendency to hoard power. Conservatives often accuse Labour of centralising power. Not only do the Tories centralise power but they also locate it firmly where most of their support can be found.

Hearing people call the result of that referendum democratic reveals a depressing level of national political illiteracy. I also hear lots of moans about the Royal Family but they are a tiny part of the problem. It is government exercising monarchical powers that is the problem. Who is aware of this? I found it astonishing to read journalists who had discovered 'Henry VIII powers'. It was as though they had been blissfully unaware of the Royal Prerogative, Orders in Council, delegated legislation and enabling acts. Voting Leave was to vote to become more monarchical, especially as we have to repatriate several Everests of legislation. There is no way that the Commons is equipped to scrutinise that mountain of laws. Have you ever filled a hot water bottle too quickly or guzzled your food too fast? What happens when you do?

Gordon Brown served as Chancellor under a very monarchical prime minister. When he became prime minister he attempted to restore cabinet government. Cameron and Osborne were, however, dedicated Blairites. They called Blair 'the master'. During the referendum campaign they found it easy to connect with Blair. It seemed not to occur them that his level of toxicity was so high that he could only help them lose. We learn from Brown that a proposal to have all current and former leaders of the parties together speaking in favour of Remain was scuppered because Jeremy Corbyn refused to stand on a stage with Blair.

Craig Oliver concludes in his book that over the years little was done to explain the EU to the electorate. As the second biggest member we have had enormous influence upon its policies. It is not some foreign body doing

horrible things to us. Of all the members of the EU we have the largest number of our people living throughout it, outside those borders Leavers are so keen to control.

Since 1979 we have suffered from central government. Those with power want more of it. The Conservatives claim to want less regulation and more freedom. They have created chaos (freedom they call it) and Brexit will create far more of it. But in that freedom we shall have more government by diktat. When Michael Gove fracked the school system in England he effectively replaced protective regulation by increased inspectorial powers. Instead of supportive school advisors working for an elected local authority we now increasingly have a commercial free-for-all kept in check by an army of inspectors accountable to central government.

In *THE PRIVATE ABUSE of the PUBLIC INTEREST, MARKET MYTHS and POLICY MUDDLES* (2008) by Brown and Jacobs they show that when George W Bush set about creating small government he actually increased its size and ended up with more regulations and more regulators.

Here is my review of their book.

<http://www.criticalprofessionallearning.co.uk/assets/SEARReviewBrownJacobs.pdf>

John Crace, reflecting in the Guardian on Theresa May confusing by explaining the current state of Brexit negotiations, uses the term 'post modern' to describe the political approach of our government. It was how he saw her performance at Prime Minister's Questions. Perhaps I might offer my definition of postmodernism.

You went to bed without sorting out what to wear in the morning. You get up before your partner who you do not wish to disturb so the light stays off. Opening cupboards and pulling out drawers you assemble a motley collection of clothes and shove them on. You are late for work so no time to look in a mirror. Walk into work and everybody stops what they are doing to stare at your ensemble. Realising that odd socks and shoes are the least of your sartorial transgressions you deal with their amazement by adopting a look of knowing irony that seeks to convey the impression that only you know what is the latest style and that it is they that are out of date.

Translate that into politics in order to understand Theresa May's Brexit negotiations. And who on earth has a clue what David Davis is on about?

Brexit challenges us in so many ways and in so much depth. The opportunities to make fun of the politicians that brought it about are unlimited. However, while we are laughing politics, democracy, culture, welfare and human interaction with others are all being damaged.

No, I do not believe Brown to have been perfect but had he been prime minister we would not have been in this mess, not never no how.

Cliff Jones, 13th December 2017