

MICHAEL GOVE THE BREXIT INTELLECTUAL GURU

Acknowledging The Platters (1955) Oh Yes, I'm The Great Pretender

An advantage of using the In Draft part of my website is that as I post various editions and additions to what I am writing I discover more useful material. I am grateful to Patrick Ainley for drawing my attention to something he had published on Michael Gove in the British Journal of Educational Studies,

MICHAEL GOVE'S UNFINISHED AGENDA FOR ENGLISH SCHOOLING AND ITS COMPATIBILITY WITH TERTIARY EDUCATION UNDER BREXIT (2016).

I admit that using the words 'intellectual' and Gove' in the same sentence had not occurred to me but I forgot that the Conservative intellectual bar is set very low these days. Craig Oliver (Cameron's spin doctor) tells us that Gove had a picture of Lenin on his wall. Could it be that which persuades Tories that he is an intellectual? Harold Wilson, by the way, had a picture of Gladstone on his office wall. I can work out the connection between those two, especially as Wilson believed that by setting up the Open University he had completed Gladstone's work of 1870 and the Forster Act making school compulsory and free. And Wilson could think Gove under the table all and every day.

But Gove and Lenin? What could possibly be the intellectual link? I think that one key might be Nick Boles, a former flatmate of Gove's. In 2010 he was filmed advocating chaos as just what this country needed. David Cameron made him minister of planning, naturally. I think that Boles and Gove saw two things in Lenin. First was his determination to dismantle the existing state: no Menshivism: no lingering old ways. Second was Unity of Purpose: no debate after the decision about future action had been taken: experts stay away!

A friend was headhunted for a job working for Gove. He went, with reservations, to the preliminary interview conducted by the headhunters. They asked him (according to my memory) how he would make a presentation to Gove as Secretary of State for Education. He said that first he would assemble all the relevant evidence. They said, "Stop there, Michael Gove does not want to hear the word 'evidence'. He just wants to know how you plan to do what he wants."

In 2010 we were given David Cameron's Big Society, which, if it ever had any philosophical underpinnings, might be linked to localism. In 2011 we even acquired a Localism Act. De-centralisation of powers and governmental activity can be made to sound desirable as an encouragement of increased political participation. Combine it with a long term reduction of local government powers and resources and a national policy of austerity and it

becomes a deception: a prank played upon the people who were being asked to volunteer and replace, for example, professionally qualified librarians. Our local Carnegie Library now wears a TO LET sign.

Michael Gove is a political prankster. Let us disconnect schools from local democracy, as was done earlier with further and higher education, and, in the name of localism, create a free-for-all. Who then exercises power? The already powerful do. How much local control can there be of an academy chain? Andrew Adonis: thanks for nothing!

Patrick Ainley draws attention to a pamphlet of 2005, *DIRECT DEMOCRACY, An Agenda for a New Model Party*. It claims a number of authors but as he points out it is unmistakably Gove or Govian. In 2005 the Tory Party was lacking confidence. It sought a new narrative: a new philosophical underpinning: something that would sell well in the political market place.

So what was the old Conservative philosophy? It was no more than a belief in a socially stratified society that dealt with discontent and pressure from the lower strata by allowing a tiny bit of easement by way of, for example, admission to grammar schools for a few eugenically approved specimens. As a vote winning machine it tried and too often succeeded in persuading people who had benefited from Robin Hood to vote for the Sheriff of Nottingham.

Aping New Labour New Tory, or New Con, tried to set out a distinctive narrative of its own. And in its latest form Gove offers us a Brave New Brexit World in which we shall be free to buy health insurance, education, transport, you name it because we shall know the price of everything and the value, the public value, of nothing.

Michael Gove once tried to persuade teachers that English is a phonetic language. A problem was pointed out: GOVE does not rhyme with LOVE.

Neither does it rhyme with INTELLECTUAL.

Cliff Jones, 20th. December, 2017.