

A wake-up call from the Brexit vote

“Let us tenderly and kindly cherish, therefore, the means of knowledge. Let us dare to read, think, speak, and write.”

John Adams

The vote to leave the European Union on 23rd June and its immediate aftermath have tossed the pieces of our country's political kaleidoscope into the air. Whilst it is still too early to know where they will all eventually land, the Brexit earthquake has created an opportunity to renew our country's democracy and to show that good government is still possible. However, it has also revealed the obstacles that such a renewal would face.

Playing fast and loose

Many politicians, their sycophants and other members of the ruling establishment were (and presumably still are) prepared to throw responsibility, integrity and good judgement to the wind in pursuit of a political objective or their own narrow self-interests. No holds are barred and the end justifies the means. We suspected then and now know that 'Project Fear' was largely a work of gross exaggeration, if not of fiction. Yet such gross deception would never have happened if the individuals concerned had acted with any sense of integrity, honour, duty and professionalism. Thankfully, there were a few – but alas not many – dissenting voices on the remain side who refused, in spite of establishment pressure and groupthink, to participate in acts of deceit and manipulation of the electorate.

Boldly go where facts, knowledge and analysis are missing

We now know that many politicians, members of the ruling establishment and their fellow travellers in the mainstream media are prepared to make authoritative policy statements with only a superficial knowledge of the subject or issue – in other words, behaving like proverbial fools who ‘rush in where angels fear to tread’. Obviously, they are highly likely to get it wrong often but yet they deliberately shy away from detailed statements based on facts, knowledge and thoughtful, perceptive analysis. Mr Cameron and Mr Osborne have shown, by hamstringing the Civil Service over any sort of BREXIT plan, just how little the political establishment actually knows or understands.

Poor democrats and worse

The ruling establishment has shown itself to be willing to undermine or circumvent the democratic process. Thus we see Remainiacs (with deep pockets) involving themselves in legal action (dressed up in sophistry), while some politicians are still trying to ignore or reinterpret the Referendum result. Many also do not appear to have grasped that, whatever justification they may give for their statements, they are not entitled to ignore the democratic will of the electorate. The desire to strengthen democracy and restore the sovereignty of our own Parliament was one of the major factors in the decision of many leavers to vote for independence from the EU. In the wake of the result, these opponents of democracy talk down our country’s prospects in the media, using often spurious or selective ‘evidence’.

Out of touch ruling Élite

The ruling establishment's agenda – supported by much of the mainstream media – is not shared by many of the electorate. Consequently, many voters, particularly the socially conservative, patriotic, individualistic, financially prudent types, feel that they are no longer represented and have no voice in the 'corridors of power'.

The establishment generally comes across as having a set of common values, views and interests, including: globalism and destruction of national identities; remaking society into a sort of permissive, compliant image; intolerance of nonconforming views; pursuit of increasing statist or corporatist control. They view the electorate, who do not share these values, as wrong, ill-informed and/or misguided and in need of re-education. Furthermore, they never consider that their condescending attitudes are the root cause of the electorate's 'obstinacy', as they would call it.

Some Implications

The gap between ordinary people and this self-selecting élite is vast. The two groups have very different philosophical outlooks and interpret the world in totally different ways. The élite live in a bubble, consisting of people who largely share the same views, self-interests and questionable assumptions – especially when it comes to the electorate and the opinions of ordinary people. In their isolated world, spin (with its abandonment of precise language) and the resulting superficial depth of thought have replaced humanity, patriotism, experience, actual knowledge and careful analysis. Their objectives – pursuit of globalism and corporatism, self-interest etc. – are as likely as not to be working against the wishes, aspirations and best interests of much of the electorate. Consequently, we, the ordinary people, need some form of protection.

Traditionally, in our country, protection against abuse of power has been provided by the workings of democratic accountability and transparency and by longstanding systemic (Parliamentary and legal) checks and balances. However, this approach requires all parties concerned to 'play the game'. When a ruling élite effectively controls the apparatus of government and gains a stranglehold over economic forecasting and the media, as we are seeing, these protections can be ignored and dismantled. This process is a slippery slope which can result in our becoming playthings for their sociological experiments – reduced to nothing more than a resource to be exploited. As democracy dies, so too do its checks and balances. Like a political version of Newton's Third Law of Motion, extremism, inhumanity and intolerance rises on all sides to fill the gap.

In conclusion, democracy, like freedom, has shallow roots and must be constantly re-invigorated to remain healthy. The traditional methods of democratic renewal have been education, respect for just laws and active involvement by the electorate. If these tools are not regularly used, our ruling élite will accrue yet more power to themselves and our democracy will slowly wither away.