Yet More Brexit Nonsense: Too Sick to GET Sick of it MORE!

According to Simon Sebag Montefiore in “The Romanovs”, at least those who lived throughout the Russian Revolution period appreciated that they were living through epoch making times. Those now living through Boris Johnson's Hell for Leather Brexit will similarly be asked, “What were you doing during the indicative votes, Daddy?”

Boris Johnson is already unique, one of a kind! There has never been a UK Prime Minister more dedicated to undermining the same political system that gave him the job. He presents his antics as “people versus parliament”. But the people elected the parliamentarians too, and they didn't elect him as Prime Minister. Nor do most Britons agree with his position on Brexit, according to a string of recent polls.

But Boris is going ahead, attention getting as ever, making as much noise as he can to disguise his lack of real substance. Instead of conducting the business of government, he is turning everything into a high energy show.

But this tactic will only work if the show has an end, and everyone can catch their breath again – and so far, there seems no sign of one for a public already exhausted by the whole Brexit saga, no matter which side of the argument they are on.

The Show Can’t Go On

On Tuesday October 22nd Johnson finally achieved something he had failed to achieve even once before in three months as Prime Minister. He actually won a vote in parliament - gaining a majority of 30, thanks to Labour rebels, for a motion that his EU Withdrawal Bill should proceed to a second reading.
The Prime Minister is, by definition, the person having “The Confidence of the House of Commons”. In other words, most MPs will accept a government led by that person. That means their government will usually win parliamentary votes, even if it is in a minority. Yet Johnson had not won one single vote before then, meaning he does not have the confidence of the House, and should therefore resign, as many of his predecessors have done over much less.

But Johnson has declared open war on the parliament elected by the people. He claims that because “the people” voted for Brexit in a referendum three years ago, without being given any plan for what leaving the EU would actually mean, he can do whatever he likes to force parliament to do as he wants.

He seems incapable of understanding that the “voice of the people” is nothing more than the voice of Boris, as the present parliament, whose members were elected more recently than the referendum, and on specific manifestos, has a more valid claim to representing the people than he does.

The problem began as soon as he had kissed hands with The Queen to take office, and then revealed the content of their conversation. As a Conservative, an upholder of tradition, he knew you don't do that. But he did it anyway, because he does not feel obliged to respect any tradition, or law, or rule. Is that what Brexiteers voted for?

Then he suspended parliament and told everyone it was nothing to do with Brexit, but simply to give time to work out the next legislative programme, which The Queen would read from the throne at the reopening of parliament, as usual. By the merest coincidence, this prevented MPs scrutinising any Brexit deal or legislation he might come up with.

Following contradictory legal judgments, the Supreme Court ordered parliament reopened. Boris then complained that the Supreme Court was wrong, and that reopening parliament was a means of stopping Brexit, even though he himself had said there was no connection between the two things.

He wanted parliament to agree to leave the EU come what may on 31 October. It didn't. He was forced to send a letter to Brussels requesting an extension of the Brexit date, but only sent a photocopy of the text he was obliged by law to send, unsigned, along with another signed letter saying he didn't agree with it.

Apparently the whole UK governmental system is Boris Johnson – and neither the judiciary nor the legislature has any authority, at least according to him. Nor does he even respect his own party, kicking out over 20 of its MPs who didn't agree with him, but did agree with honouring their manifesto commitment to a "smooth and orderly" Brexit and a "deep and special relationship" with the EU. Some of these were current or former Cabinet colleagues of his, meaning there is no Executive either, only the Johnson diktat.

It is very Boris to remove everyone else from the stage and be the sole attraction. But who are his audience? The number of Brexiteers is dwindling by the week, as their refusal to countenance a second referendum testifies, after they themselves insisted that they would never accept a narrow defeat in the first one, should that have eventuated.

Boris is actually talking to Boris. He wants to convince himself that he is the sole representative of the rest of humanity, in the face of all evidence to the contrary, as all of this evidence is manufactured by “bad people” and "conspiracy theorists", like the"Remainer" neighbours who called the police when they heard him through their living room wall threatening his girlfriend.

Have we seen this before? Look at Ceaucescu's speech to the Bucharest crowd on the day they forced him to flee in a helicopter. Listen to Ferdinand Marcos defying his own people on his final day by saying he is the whole of the Philippines, and there can be no other view than his own.

Eventually people get tired of the same horse and pony show. They stop believing it is anything to do with them. Johnson will inevitably achieve the audience of one that he secretly craves, simply because people can only put up with so many shenanigans for so long.

The Never Ending Story

Johnson told his Conservative Party when it elected him leader that Conservatives have always been more the voice of the people than anyone. The remaining party members are more his cheerleaders than anyone, so if he wanted to listen to friendly voices, it would be theirs. But apparently he cannot understand what they are telling him.

The slogan of this year's Conservative Party conference was "Get Brexit Done". This is one of Johnson's own mantras - get the thing over with so we can concentrate on doing other things.
But it betrays the fact that even Boris fans don’t want to talk or think about Brexit anymore. That show should have been over by now, one way or the other ... but it is Johnson, by his refusal to obey laws or parliament, who is keeping on the front pages to the exclusion of all else.

The best way to stop people debating Brexit is to revoke Article 50 but retain a commitment to leaving the EU. Neither side will get what they want, but both sides will get something. Then the exact terms of Brexit can be worked out beforehand, as they should have been before asking people whether they wanted to leave or not.

Most of these terms would be worked out behind the scenes, as they usually are in government proposals or treaties. Then the country really can get on with discussing other issues, and addressing different problems, exactly what Boris is trying to sell his party and the UK population

But Boris not only insists on pulling stunts to keep Brexit in the news, he knows perfectly well that leaving the EU, far from "Getting Brexit Done", will only increase debate and difficulty concerning it. New systems will have to be invented from scratch, and even in areas addressed by Boris' deal new and unforeseen complications will arise, as they have already, due to the depth, length and complexity of the UK's relationship with the EU.

But this time it will be no good blaming the EU for all this, as the UK has habitually done for the last 45 years. It will be the UK which will have left, and taken the responsibility for setting up all these new structures in import/export regulation, food safety, employment rights and a thousand other areas. The UK government will get the blame, and blaming the government is what makes front page news. "Brexit Problem" will be as ubiquitous a headline as "Project Fear" once was.

Some Conservatives are afraid of "riots in the streets" if Brexit does not happen. We have heard this threat even before the referendum. Last time Farage held a march it attracted about 1,000 of his followers to London and around 30 along the route. Remain marches attract up to 1 million. So which side is getting wearier of the whole thing?

Brexit was an exercise in the richest and the poorest shaking their fists at those they thought never listened to them. Everyone should have known that very few people can shake their fists forever. They need a rest and they need a plan. Boris Johnson offers neither, and he knows it, but will never care as long as he is headlines.

**Wait and Don’t See**

Parliament has now ensured that there will be no rest from Brexit short term. It has passed the EU Withdrawal Bill, but immediately afterwards refused to endorse Boris' timetable of taking only three days to pass the whole bill – avoiding scrutiny of it, in other words

Following the passage of the Letwin Amendment at an extraordinary Saturday sitting, the Withdrawal Bill must become law before parliament even considers the divorce deal Boris managed to broker with the EU. So Brexit will wind its tortuous way, with no apparent end in sight, while

Parliament refuses to dissolve itself and call an election until No Deal is definitely off the table – if it ever is – with a result no one can predict at this time.

Nor is Boris out of the legal woods. His action in sending the letter demanded by parliament in the Benn Act alongside a signed letter from himself asking them to reject it was predictably challenged in the Scottish courts which looked favourably on the last challenge. A decision has been deferred until the court sees whether the Prime Minister has "fully complied with the Benn Act". So he hasn't yet, we can presume, and there will be a further delay in deciding whether he is in contempt of court or of parliament, and what penalty he will have to pay if he is.

All this is increasing calls for a second referendum, which will again take time. If Leave wins again, this will change nothing, as the present situation exists because the government keeps insisting it is respecting the Will of the People expressed in the first referendum. If Remain wins, Leavers will argue that the first vote should have been inviolable, whether it is still the Will of the People or not, and it will temporarily give greater force to the Leave arguments, even though they may have to acknowledge that timing and tactics were wrong.

A second referendum will also change nothing. The only thing which will have changed, possibly, is the perception of the EU. Nothing will end; nothing will go away, because the Brexit Beast is unlike any other. No other issue can capture the attention of the public, or their elected representatives, because none promises such a fundamental change to the condition of the country, or the balance of power within it.

Boris has done “domestic agendas” before as Mayor of London. He found that the only way he could get his precious
publicity was to sack lots of people, introduce Boris Bikes which were in people’s faces all day as a memorial to himself and make rude remarks at meetings.

The nuts and bolts of policy and implementation weren't interesting enough to the press, so Boris had to leave them to others. How he can pursue a domestic agenda without going on about Brexit all the time, prolonging the agony after it has theoretically been resolved, is difficult to conceive.

So the only way is more Brexit, more posturing, more of the same arguments. Brexit weariness will only disappear if Brexit is not abolished but kicked into the long grass, so the issues the misadventure has raised can be resolved.

British civil servants could work with their European counterparts to do most of this, behind the scenes but accountable to government, parliament and ultimately the public. Then

UK voters can go back to the world they know and blame the EU for it, which suits their national character far more than Brexit ever could. This will make more people happier – but Brexit will have long turned from show to nightmare before anything good comes of it.

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