The only way people like Boris Johnson can communicate with others is to laugh and joke and mess around all the time, no matter what else they may have to offer. This affliction does come with some advantages – people like him can be popular, until their jokes offend the wrong people, and seen as clever. Johnson is also not short of girlfriends.

But eventually others say the dreaded word “and?” They want to know what comes next. When there isn’t anything, approval gives way to disappointment and then to open hostility. No one wants to be associated with someone they think has less substance than they.

That is why the rest of the world is watching with dismay as BoJo the Clown goes on and on without anyone being able to stop him. Everyone has friends and enemies both domestically and internationally, and the louder you are, the more you have of each. But BoJo, unique amongst British Prime Ministers, doesn’t make sense.

There are other entertainers in world politics, such as Beppe Grillo in Italy and Volodymyr Zelensky in Ukraine. They should see the populist anti-politician Johnson as a kindred spirit, but they want nothing to do with him. Other leaders considered unpopular or beyond the pale, such as Hugo Chavez in Venezuela, develop cult followings amongst the disaffected in other countries, but BoJo hasn’t done that either, even in places where they might laugh at his jokes.
So with him in charge, and rapidly turning the UK into the untouchable vacuum he himself will become, you would expect a lot of people to already be saying “and?” They are. But not enough people are listening, because they don’t know how to make people think there should be an “and?”, just like drug addicts can’t understand what life free from their addiction can be.

Everything BoJo is fighting against is still showing itself worth fighting against. His jokes only stops being funny when people start respecting the victims more than they respect the mocker. In principle, people do, but as yet there is no sign of what comes next, and how the UK can recover from where electing Johnson would always inevitably have led it.

**Stating the Too Obvious**

The quickest way to recover UK’s standing, and moves beyond electing the likes of BoJo, is to rejoin the EU. It would put food back on the shelves, and petrol in the pumps, and make the UK an attractive destination for those who want to invest and create jobs.

Those who disagree can claim that the UK’s problems are the result of other factors, such as a global supply chain crisis, the pandemic and even bad weather. These factors are not affecting other countries, either in the same way or to the same degree. Brexit is ultimately responsible for UK’s current problems, as the government has tacitly admitted by trying to give special visas to EU national lorry drivers and poultry workers.

When even the Daily Express, a staunchly pro-Brexit newspaper, calls its own Brexit predictions lies the cat is out of the bag. The Brexit outcomes are not what they were supposed to be, and if other countries aren’t experiencing them, Brexit is to blame.

But how is the UK going to rejoin the EU? The EU will have to approve any application, and that is not a foregone conclusion. No one will want the UK, large as it is, upping and leaving at the slightest provocation, as it threatened to do many times before it actually did.

Nor has anyone addressed the fact that the lies at the heart of the anti-EU campaign have become part of the British culture. It is accepted routinely, even by Europhiles, that immigration is making people homeless and unemployed, and the UK was having laws imposed on it by the EU.

People can see the practical consequences of leaving the EU, but the political objections to being part of it remain. It will take a lot longer for the UK to return to its post-World War Two spirit of welcoming everyone who wants to contribute, no matter where they are from, and treating them as partners in that process.

At present, getting rid of the shortages isn’t a good enough reason to return to the EU, if these other problems will allegedly return. Only a concerted effort to change the culture will enable the UK to stomach the EU, and vice versa. But this will require leadership, not waiting for the wind to change, and there isn’t any.

The Labour Party is always saying “and?” to Boris Johnson. But it would, wouldn’t it? We’ve seen and heard it before, its time has gone.

Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer has repeatedly said that he won’t try and get the UK back into the EU. He is only offering refining the deals which the UK government negotiated and signed, and has then complained about ever since.

He is behaving like a sensible politician, leading a party whose natural supporters are often Brexiteers. But that makes him anachronism in the post-Johnson world, and explains why, after an encouragingly strong start, he has disappeared from view.

Starmer is offering a return to a past which has led us to the present. Whatever its virtues, it can’t be repeated. We are in the Portugal of 1926 – welcoming a military coup which brings back the values of the monarchy, but with no intention of bringing back the monarchy which led people to that place.

The EU is part of that discredited past. It can also be part of a new future, but needs to be sold as such by someone the public feels is equally new. BoJo the Clown is still the new broom, however, for all the wrong reasons. Until someone else comes along to sweep him away, people will still take the new broom over the wrong reasons, however obvious those may be.

**They All Look Alike**
Who else is there to stand up to BoJo, and put themselves on the side of the people? There used to be the Liberal Party, then the SDP, then the alliance of the two, then the merged Liberal Democrats.

But you hear even less from this party now, because it also became respectable. Its MPs were no longer exotic figures, largely reliant on personal votes rather than political position.

Success at local government level, and small but significant inroads at national level, meant the LibDems were no longer a party of protest, and were obliged to do things themselves instead of just complain about what the others were doing. They then found out the hard way that they had got to this position because they were still the “Stuff the lot of them” party at national level.

The LibDems went into coalition with the Conservatives after the inconclusive 2010 election, supported the worst excesses of the politics they were elected to replace and were almost wiped out in 2015. Now they are only relevant in areas where they might still hold or regain seats, but these are a diminishing number, and MPs from the coalition generation won’t be able to regain them, tainted forever.

The LibDems openly call for a return to the EU, but who cares? Everything else they want is tired old sensible politics, which they themselves made mainstream by getting it voted for and then adopted by other parties. The future world of mass Liberal support and radical change, always a possibility in the days of their pomp, is as dead as a dodo, and because that was once so attractive to so many it is nigh on impossible for the party to create a new and more attractive image to give it any influence.

The Scottish Nationalists are in many ways leading the charge against BoJo. They became the new “alternative” party in Scotland itself, and now hold almost all its parliamentary seats.

But like the LibDems, they are victims of their own relative success. As the Scottish Establishment, they are in danger of going down as the Conservatives and Labour once did there, swept away as if they had never been simply because they are the expected rulers. They do not stand for elections outside Scotland, so can never form a UK government, and would not want to, as they exist to achieve Scottish independence, leaving old England behind.

So it’s BoJo or nothing, unless the Conservatives themselves get rid of him, as they have long been rumoured to want to do. But as John Major found when he succeeded Margaret Thatcher, your only option in those circumstances is to stick by what your predecessor did, and eventually go down with the same ship.

It was the Conservatives who gave us BoJo, despite many attempts to get rid of him. But they can’t disown him and his legacy any more than US Republicans can move beyond Donald Trump. It will take a new dynamic and new thinking, and with every day the world observes that the once mighty UK doesn’t have it, the harder it will be for it to emerge.

**The Pontypridd Effect**

There is however one way the UK can reinvent itself, and consign BoJo and his wilfully chosen band of crooks and incompetents to history. Its salvation does lie within its own borders, but not where it is presently being looked for.

All European countries have the sort of programmes which in the UK are called “regeneration”. These involve taking deprived areas and reinventing them as desirable locations, by improving the built environment, job opportunities and social amenities, with a mixture of public money and private investment.

Sometimes these projects improve things, sometimes they don’t. But in all cases they make some sort of change to the character of the area, and the nature of this change, and how it meets the expectations of the people already there, largely determines their success or failure.

The South Wales Valleys have long been a source of despair for progressives. Their towns, each proudly independent, grew up with the coal and steel industries in the nineteenth century. But they also reflected the boom and bust cycles of those industries, creating mass poverty when they declined, and now coal and steel have gone altogether, leaving nothing but memories, outmoded institutions and migration to places where people have jobs and lives.

However some South Wales towns, though still in the lower socio-economic brackets, are experiencing quiet revivals. As themselves, with their own traditions, they retain all the old problems. But as dormitory towns for Cardiff, which as the capital of Wales always has jobs available, some are once again becoming a desirable alternative, where the greenery and cheaper old houses are more of a draw than the old pits and factories.
It is largely popular taste, not deliberate policy, which has created this revival. But it gives the UK a way back into the EU. If, like a small valleys town, it can be content to be part of someone else’s success, it does have a way forward.

There are other international alliances which the British public don’t find as threatening as the EU. All of these have well established trade relations with the EU, and want more.

The UK may be geographically isolated from bodies like MERCOSUR and NAFTA, but if these bodies can use the UK as an outpost through which to deal with Europe, the UK can use both its denuded trade relations with the EU and any arrangement with these bodies to its advantage, as a staging post providing the best of both worlds.

Most countries live in the shadow of others, hoping to take advantage of their benefits. This is the not the tradition of the UK, but it is better than anything BoJo can offer – and would be seen as such by both the rest of the world, which would take the UK seriously again, and the British public, who will gain some trade and supply benefits as an upgraded EU partner without the negatives they hold the EU responsible for.

Any leader, one who can offer a vision where not all foreigners are evil, and the British are still inherently good, has a future, provided [that leader] can offer one. It won’t be anyone around at the moment, but it can be done – and then, in the spirit of 1 Corinthians 13:12, people will have the guts to admit that they do know that BoJo and his clowns are the equivalent of Warren G. Harding and his Ohio Gang, because they have some credible alternative with which to compare them.

*Seth Ferris, investigative journalist and political scientist, expert on Middle Eastern affairs, exclusively for the online magazine “New Eastern Outlook”.*