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### TABLE OF CONTENT

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Editorial .....   | 3  |
| Huib Wursten  |    |
| Brexit and the Joy of Democracy .....   | 5  |
| Berwyn Davies   |    |
| Culture and Brexit: A Catastrophic Partnership .....  | 19 |
| Stephen I. P. Martin  |    |
| Democracy and the Need for Autonomy .....   | 25 |
| Huib Wursten  |    |
| The Avatars of Democratization in Central and Eastern Europe.<br>How Could Citizens Strengthen Democratic Integration in the European Union?..... | 33 |
| Anton Carpinski   |    |
| Democracy and Lifelong Learning, the Forgotten Sides of the Same Coin .....   | 45 |
| Joseph Kessels  |    |
| The Great Indian Democracy .....  | 57 |
| Divya Susan Varkey  |    |
| Democracy in Latin America .....  | 73 |
| Fernando Lanzer Pereira de Souza  |    |
| Of Wise Old Men and Rebellious Youth.....   | 79 |
| Adnan R. Husain Cornelissen, Loes B. Husain-Cornelissen   |    |
| Democracy in Africa and Ubuntu.....   | 91 |
| Luc Zwaenepoel  |    |

# BREXIT AND THE JOY OF DEMOCRACY

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## Abstract

A majority of the UK electorate voted to leave the EU in a Referendum where the choice was clearly set out.

History suggests that the UK's 'Contest' cultural values should have enabled a straightforward Brexit.

Instead, a relatively new normative Oligarchy, that now controls most of the main levers of power in the UK, disagreed with the Referendum result and worked to undermine it. They may yet succeed.

An electoral shock (ironically in the EU parliamentary elections) may (may) put the UK back on track for Brexit. But what has happened since the Referendum has highlighted some long running weaknesses in the way the UK is run.

Traditional British Contest democratic values may be unable to reassert themselves.

**Key Words:** Anti-democratic, EU, Brexit, Contest, values.

## Introduction

Earlier this year, the former UK Supreme Court judge, Lord Sumption, gave a rather chilling warning. If democracy disappears, he warned, we will not notice – at first. The institutions will be there. The rhetoric will be there. But democracy would have departed.

The bad news is that the UK has been drifting in this direction for some time. But the process is not complete. The good news is that people have noticed. And have kicked back. Hard. Twice.

This is the story of how an emerging Oligarchy (acting against the UK's mainstream cultural values) acted to overturn democracy. And may yet succeed.

To use a football analogy, I am writing this late in the second half. Scores are nil-nil. The game could go either way. But what we have seen so far allows us to draw some conclusions about Brexit and UK culture.

### 1 Some caveats

**First:** Nothing I write here is original. The analysis I present can be found in whole or in part in many journals in the UK. But it's not the mainstream media analysis. That focusses on how 'Difficult' Brexit is, how there was no 'Plan', how nobody can understand what the electorate really wanted when they voted to "Leave the EU". All code words for emasculating or blocking Brexit.

**Second:** I write from a particular perspective. I voted for the UK to leave the EU. I did so with a heavy heart but no doubt. I voted to remain in the last Referendum in 1975.

### A vote that wasn't a vote

I finally despaired of the EU during the shenanigans surrounding the EU Constitution and Lisbon Treaty in 2005 -2009. The mooted 'Constitution' was a major centralising step.

To succeed, it needed to be approved by a Referendum in all member states. A tiresome piece of Democracy for the EU governing class.

The Constitution was voted down in France and the Netherlands. After which voting was stopped. The Constitution wasn't even tested in the UK.

Game over, a democrat might think. No more Constitution. Come come, don't be naïve. Those who run the EU (like their peers in the UK) are made of sterner stuff.

Undeterred therefore, the EU Commission (a politicised bureaucracy whose purpose depends on greater centralisation) came up with the Constitution in a new wrapper. This was no 'Constitution' but a 'Treaty'. Otherwise they were identical. Treaties did not require popular approval (except in tiresome Ireland) and this one sailed through the national oligarchies to emerge triumphant as the Lisbon treaty. So much better for men and women of good sense and reason to agree these things than to ask the ignorant mob.

The message from the EU was clear:

*'You can say what you want. You can vote if you must. But you'll get what we decide. For your own good of course.'*

### **An Anti Democratic EU**

Against this background, the EU stands as an anti-democratic 'Caesaropapal' force. With the EU Commission, at its heart.

In Hofstede terms the EU as an institution, (embodied again by its Commission) is High Power Distance, High Uncertainty Avoidance and Normative. There are Low Power Distance countries in the EU but the culture of the EU Commission is High Power Distance. A recent article by the Economist for example noted that Germans in Brussels were rather different from their compatriots back home.

The EU thus embodies Lord Sumption's warning. The institutions are there (sort of), the rhetoric is certainly there, complete with a young lady singing Ode to Joy to assembled EU parliamentarians. But democracy is lacking.

## **2 Contest Values: How things would be expected to play out**

Despite what I have said about the EU, the British have been the authors of their own misfortune over Brexit. They betrayed their own cultural values. Let's have a look at how things should have worked.

What follows assumes some familiarity with Geert Hofstede's work (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005). Though that is not vital to understand the thrust of this section.

Building on Geert Hofstede's work, his colleague Huib Wursten showed that countries with similar 'Hofstede' values could be grouped into 'Clusters'. The UK is part of the 'Contest' group comprising Ireland, the USA, the UK, Canada, New Zealand and Australia.

Core Contest values based on Hofstede's four main Dimensions are:

- **Low Power Distance:** Distrust of authority.
- **High individualism:** *'I'll make my mind up for myself thank you'*. A sentiment that was to play strongly in the EU Referendum.
- **High Masculinity:** *'Don't push me around'*.
- **Low Uncertainty Avoidance:** Willing to take a calculated risk. Focussed more on what is to be gained by a course of action than what is to be lost. Acceptance of 'Creative Destruction'.

### **The Contest System - in Principle**

These values have produced a Contest system that, at least in in principle, reflects;

1. Continuous Competition: Competition for money, for ideas, for influence. All the time.
2. The winner is entitled to the fruits of his or her victory.
3. Pragmatism. A preference for what works in practice over theory.
4. The concept of 'Fair play'.
  - Few rules (though that's rapidly eroding) but strictly enforced
  - A degree of magnanimity on the part of both victor and loser. The Contest system is often wrongly described as 'winner takes all'. In fact the 'winner' is expected to behave with a degree of grace.
    - Certainly there should be no victimising or discrimination against opponents.
    - Laws should be even handed and apply to all
    - Public contracts for example should be awarded after an honest tender process. Not simply awarded to cronies of the winning party.
  - Crucially for Brexit though, the loser is expected to accept defeat with equal magnanimity.

This concept of fair play (not always clearly articulated) places some limit on the worst excesses of an untrammelled Contest system. It has enabled the UK to demonstrate remarkable resilience to change over the centuries.

1832, 1846, 1867, 1911, 1945, 1979, 1997 - all saw what in other countries may have been revolutionary watersheds. They passed off (mostly) peacefully with the (sometimes grudging) consent of the losers.

Brexit was to break that pattern. The losers were to kick back.

To understand why, we need to understand another of Hofstede's Dimensions and then the changing nature of those who hold the levers of power in modern Britain.

### **The Joker in the Pack – the 5<sup>th</sup> Dimension and Normative values**

The 'Contest' values set out above reflect a combination of Hofstede's four original and most powerful Dimensions.

However there is a Fifth. Less well defined, less consistent over time and altogether more quirky. Most of the time it does not exercise much influence – but when it does, it does so with a vengeance.

The aspect of the Fifth Dimension that concerns us here reflects work done by associates of Dr Hofstede, building on his work. These are the concepts of right and wrong and normative ('You must') values. Once things can be framed in normative terms, concepts of winners receiving the fruits of their victory, of magnanimity and of acceptance of defeat are weakened. Phrases containing normative views often flow on the following lines

- *'This is right and must be done'.*
  - *'This is simply wrong and cannot be accepted no matter what'.*
- One can see times in the past when normative values came to the fore.
- The abolition of slavery in the British Empire. Long before America. In the eyes of its opponents, slavery was just wrong.
  - The change from the rather laissez faire morals of Georgian England to the more buttoned up Victorian era.

You can never be entirely sure with culture but normative values seem to have their roots in monotheism. Deep in monotheistic cultures (even those primarily atheistic today) is a modern version of the belief that humankind lives under God's laws. Under those laws some things are simply wrong. There can be no debate.

But, as we have seen, the UK has accepted major change before. Popular votes have led to changes bitterly opposed by many, but in the main accepted.

Why were things different this time? For this we need to look at the changing nature of those who hold the main levers of power in the UK

### **3. An Emerging Normative Oligarchy**

Low Power Distance does not mean NO Power Distance. Hofstede's own definition merely notes that Power Distance reflects the extent to which people accept that Power is distributed unequally. Power may be distributed less unequally in Low Power Distance Countries. But its distribution is still unequal.

The UK has thus always had more powerful groups. In the recent past, these more powerful groups were 'The establishment'. A 'small C' conservative grouping. But one that had a variety of life experience and was essentially pragmatic. A feature was that dissenting views could readily be expressed. The 'Contest' for ideas was encouraged. Normative values were not much in evidence.

Over the last 20 years or so this group has progressively given way to a new, more normative group in which 5<sup>th</sup> Dimension normative values frequently overrule traditional Contest values.

Power holders see no conflict as they see what they are doing as 'Right'.

#### **3.1 Omnipotent Moral Busybodies**

The essential nature of this new elite was grimly described by the author CS Lewis (Lewis, 1970);

*"Of all tyrannies, a tyranny sincerely exercised for the good of its victims may be the most oppressive. It would be better to live under robber barons than under omnipotent moral busybodies. The robber baron's cruelty may sometimes sleep, his cupidity may at some point be satiated; but those who torment us for our own good will torment us without end for they do so with the approval of their own conscience."*

The shift between the two 'establishments' has been going on for some time, but really gained momentum with the government of Tony Blair in 1997 – as complete a collection of 'moral busybodies' as can be found in modern British history.

Since that time something has palpably changed in the way Britain is governed.

Under Common law, a Briton was always free to do anything that was not specifically forbidden, but was accountable for any harm caused. In contrast with the continental, Roman-Napoleonic tradition where the law dictates what is allowed.

However, the UK has seen what the commentator Matt Ridley calls the '*creeping growth of a Regulatory State*', perhaps not coincidentally more similar to the Continental model. To quote Ridley again:

*Hundreds of budget-maximising, state-funded agencies, charged with running much of the country but largely beyond democratic accountability, are now in a position to tell you what you can and cannot do,.... to punish you if you do not obey, to pursue political objectives with effective impunity and to hire expensive lawyers at your expense if challenged.*

The growth of the Regulatory state can be seen in the fact that the Blair government alone created over three thousand new crimes.

Three thousand! It's a wonder the whole country is not in jail.

As part of this expansion, the nature of regulation changed. Where regulations used to focus on ends (what is achieved), now they focus as much on process (how things are achieved).

#### **3.2 Controlling the main levers of power**

By now this emerging Oligarchy controls most of the main levers of power. It comprises:

- Most Members of Parliament (MPs). In truth, Parliament is less monolithic than many other oligarchic bodies. Yet the vast majority of MPs voted to Remain. Showing our elected representatives to be significantly out of step with those who elected them.
- The Civil Service – especially the Senior Civil Service
- What is known as the ‘Public Sector’ – education , health, the ‘regulatory state’ described by Matt Ridley
- Most of the Mainstream Media
- Crony capitalist/cartelised parts of the economy. Sectors that are notionally capitalist, but whose profits depend more on pleasing regulators or government than on pleasing customers. This sector is depressingly large.

As Eamon Butler, Head of the free market Adam Smith Institute, has pointed out (Butler, 2019): *‘Most (of the Oligarchy) owe their living to the State in some form’*.

And not to the Democratic state. The hidden, bureaucratic regulatory state. What Butler calls *‘the managerialist Mafia’*

#### 4. Key features of this emerging Oligarchy

1. It is not (yet) monolithic. Though it is cohesive
2. We are not describing a conspiracy. There is no central driving command structure. But, again, we are describing a group that does have a single normative view on things.

Eamon Butler again:

*‘These Godfathers of the state see themselves as uniquely qualified to talk about and run things....They reinforce each other in the supposed correctness of their views. They are genuinely surprised when members of the public divert from their world view – putting it down to stupidity, coarseness or extremism’*

3. The central philosophy of the new Oligarchy is a form of bourgeois Political Correctness.
4. Members are not evil in the established sense of that word. Rather they are the moral tormentors described by CS Lewis. To quote the writer James Bartholomew :

*This new elite is not intentionally evil at all. On the contrary, its members consider themselves to be among the most civilised, well-meaning and decent among us.*

5. Support for the EU is a core belief. *James Bartholomew again:*

*‘They think that, since they are supremely civilised.... this necessarily means they are in favour of membership of the European Union.’*

Indeed, many seem to see themselves as part of an international ‘elite’. More at home in Davos and Brussels than in Hartlepool. The Nation State is, to them, somewhat passé. Things are better done at an International level, agreed between oligarchies behind closed doors and then passed in to domestic legislation as ‘Done deals’.

6. The emerging Oligarchy can be quite isolated from popular opinion.

After the Referendum, Robert Peston, formerly the BBC’s business correspondent, wrote a book called ‘WTF’ (Peston, 2017) trying to make sense of a result that had stunned him.

He admitted that, *“In my closest circle of perhaps a hundred family members and friends, no one voted to leave the EU.”*

A senior correspondent with the national broadcaster could be expected to keep broadly in touch with public opinion. 52 percent of the UK voted for Brexit. Yet Mr Peston knew none of them

7. The Oligarchy is also physically isolated. It is concentrated in a few Remain voting areas of a few cities – London especially.

8. Intolerant of diverse views. ‘Groupthink’ has become the norm. A big change from the past and a key feature of the ‘Normative approach’.
  - An anonymous ‘Senior Civil Servant’ writes in the Sunday Times :  
*‘Most horrifying is the sheer disdain and utter contempt my colleagues display towards people who voted to Leave..... I live in fear that my colleagues will discover through a slip of the tongue that I voted to Leave. .... I might lose my job*
  - Groupthink spread insidiously from the Public Sector. Paul Burke writes of how the advertising industry changed – again since the election of Tony Blair. He sees *an oppressive culture of groupthink, of always being ‘on message’.* *Behind the veneer of virtue, the Labour establishment instilled a real fear of stepping out of line. And unfortunately, that’s where the advertising industry is stuck; compliant, censorious and terrified of offending the establishment.*
9. The English language itself has been subjected to Orwellian twists. Thus the Oligarchy trumpets ‘Diversity and Inclusion’. What they mean by this is greater gender and racial representation. Good. But no thought diversity. Their ‘Diversity and inclusion’ is skin deep.
10. Arrogant. In the words of the journalist Alistair Heath, *‘Their contempt for real democracy is matched only by their preposterous self regard.’* Hardly a mixture likely to deliver good government
11. Limited life experience. Most members of the Oligarchy go straight from university to their life careers. Take politicians. In the past, most people became Members of Parliament (MPs) after some years in another occupation. Parliament was thus composed of a group with wide life experience – that lent itself to a degree of pragmatism. Today, typically, aspiring MPs leave university to join an MP’s or Minister’s private office and then try for selection by a constituency.
12. Self Serving. The historian Lord Acton coined the phrase, *‘Power corrupts. Absolute Power corrupts absolutely.’* It is unsurprising that an Oligarchy that combines power with limited accountability becomes self-serving. Thus:
  - The Kings Fund , an excellent health charity found that, of all the tens of billions of additional funding poured into the National Health Service, only about one third made it to improve patient care. Most of the rest went into an expanding bureaucracy.
  - Dominic Cummings, a senior adviser to the current Prime Minister noted:  
*‘The senior civil service now operates like a protected caste to preserve its power and privileges regardless of who the ignorant plebs vote for.’*
  - The UK Office for National Statistics confirms that average Public Sector salaries are greater than those in the Private Sector. Terms and conditions are better too. The Oligarchy is well paid.
13. Less competent. In their book ‘The Blunders of our Governments’, two respected academics (King & Crewe, 2013) note that government in the UK has become markedly less competent over the past 20 years or so.

They list a depressing series of blunders and express surprise to see these in a country that had until recently been seen as well governed. They note that there are too many for these blunders to be the product of chance or wayward individuals. Instead, they feel something has fundamentally changed in the way Britain is governed. They date this change broadly from the time the Oligarchy really emerged.

To my mind this lessening of competence stems directly from many of the factors set out above. Limited life experience coupled with arrogance and isolation tend toward a certain dogmatism in thinking and a belief that one has the right to direct others. Yet those same factors preclude a pragmatic approach that focusses on results.

Of course the UK is not the only country to witness the growth of a disliked ‘elite’. It seems to be a common phenomenon in the West.

But the UK was to have a popular ‘Push back’ over Brexit.

## **5. The Referendum. ‘Taking Back Control’.**

So far we have seen

- A Caesaropapal EU
  - Contest Values and how they should have supported a straightforward Brexit.
  - A Normative dimension that can override Contest values
  - The growth of an emerging Normative Oligarchy
- And so we come to Brexit.

### **5.1 Incompatible Visions of ‘Europe’**

There has always been a disconnect between the British view of the EU and that of most other Member States.

- To the mercantile, Low Uncertainty Avoidance British, the EU was essentially a trading arrangement, with a few optional bits of neighbourly cooperation thrown in. Stresses emerged as those bits became more intrusive and less optional.
- Partly for historical reasons and partly as a reflection of High Uncertainty Avoidance (The EU is overwhelmingly High Uncertainty Avoidance), many others in the EU saw something very different. An incremental merger into some sort of Federation or Union.

These two visions were always bound to clash and through what was really a misjudgement by the Oligarchy (a story for another time), they came to a head in the form of the Referendum.

### **5.2 A Large Section of the Population had Stopped Listening**

I am convinced that the vast majority of the 33 million people who voted in 2016 did so soberly on the issue in front of them. Often they made their decision on balance, seeing arguments on both sides.

The wording on the ballot paper was admirably clear. For the UK

- To ‘Remain a member of the European Union’. Or
- To ‘Leave the European Union.’

52% percent chose Leave. The largest mandate for anything in British political history.

Not an overwhelming margin you may say. But this ignores the fact that few were very enthusiastic about the EU. Had the UK been outside the EU in 2016, it is unthinkable that even that 48% would have voted to enter.

This lack of enthusiasm for the EU was certainly reflected in how the Oligarchy fought the Referendum campaign. There was almost no mention of the supposed ‘benefits’ of the EU. Instead, we saw ‘Project Fear’ – a focus on the dangers of leaving.

And the Remain side had the vast majority of the big guns. The Oligarchy pulled every lever of power that it could. Three major parties, ‘Business groups’ (often of the crony capitalist sort), most of the media, every manner of ‘expert’ and a range of foreign dignitaries all trumpeted the dangers of leaving.

Then US President Barack Obama for example promised the UK would be at the ‘back of the queue’ for a trade deal if it voted to leave.

What the Oligarchy had missed though was that a large section of the population had simply stopped listening. They didn't believe the propaganda. Though they may not have articulated things in this way – they didn't trust the Oligarchy.

### **5.3 What did People vote for?**

Having groaned under the rule of one self-serving Oligarchy (the UK's own), a majority had no desire to be ruled by one that was even more remote and unaccountable.

However there was another dimension. The campaign slogan of 'Vote Leave' was '*Take back Control*'. In voting to leave the EU, the vote was certainly to take back control from the EU. But it was also a (perhaps unconscious) insurgent vote to take back control from the UK Oligarchy. Ed Conway, economics editor of Sky News, concurred:

*'What if taking back control also meant handing power back to the people to run their lives without government interference.'*

However, the Oligarchy would fight back.

### **6. Muddying the Waters. From Brexit to BRINO**

After the vote, those who voted to leave the EU felt pretty good. The Vote Leave campaign disbanded.

True, we had a Remainer Civil Service that would do most of the negotiating, a Remainer Parliament and a Prime Minister (Theresa May) who was rather indifferent.

But still, most Leavers expected an honest Brexit. We expected that Contest values (though we may not have expressed things like that) would prevail.

And in truth, what was required from the government (despite all you may have heard) was quite straightforward.

To begin with, things looked good. Theresa May was clear. Leaving the EU meant

- Leaving the Customs Union
- Leaving the misnamed 'Single market'. In reality, 'busybody central' for the tsunami of regulation the EU loves to produce.
- No jurisdiction by the European Court of Justice.

A Free Trade Deal along the lines of that negotiated between the EU and Canada - designed to serve as the future model for such deals – would have been useful but not vital. And in truth such a deal would have been to the benefit of both sides - IF they accepted an honest Brexit.

Mrs May was also clear that '*No deal was better than a bad deal*'.

Mrs May was to break all of those commitments.

Leave optimists had reckoned without the Oligarchy and their normative views. For the Oligarchy, the EU was simply 'Right'. Leaving it was 'Wrong' – no matter how the public had voted. They would work to undermine it - Normative values overriding Contest ones.

However, the UK was still a (sort of) democracy. The Referendum could not simply be set aside. Not immediately anyway.

The approach of the Oligarchy, in the form of the British government and Civil Service (supported by most MPs and most of the media) was thus to find a way for the UK technically to leave the EU, but otherwise materially to remain within it. This approach even had a name – BRINO. Brexit In Name Only. There were also two subsidiary hopes;

- The eventual 'Deal' may appear so bad that parliament and/or the people (via a second Referendum- much promoted by the Oligarchy) would decide to recant their decision of 2016. The UK wouldn't leave after all. Hurrah! It was 'all too difficult'.
- Even if the UK did technically leave, the way would be clear to re-enter the EU at some stage in the future. The UK would hardly have diverted from EU norms

Digby Jones, the former head of the Confederation of British Industry (the cartels' lobby body), and hardly a man given to hyperbole, summed up the approach.

*The establishment elite have set about sabotaging Brexit. People of influence and power have decided the UK isn't going to leave the European Union'*

The BRINO approach can be seen in the way the British chose to negotiate. If you step back and look at how the British played those negotiations, you would probably conclude they made every rookie mistake in the book. But that misreads the situation.

The truth was aptly summarised by Igor Grazin, an Estonian MEP and Member of the last Supreme Soviet of the USSR. A man who knows of what he speaks. He noted

*'We sent people to regain Estonian independence who believed in independence - not Party apparatchiks who believed in the USSR'*

But that's what the British did. Those who negotiated for the UK (mainly Civil servants) were people who thought the UK should remain in the EU – and acted accordingly.

- Apparently, Donald Tusk (head of the EU Council) offered a clean Brexit and Free Trade Deal. Exactly what the voters had expected. The British negotiators didn't pursue this.
- Worse – a recent BBC documentary tells us at no time did the British negotiators suggest that the UK may leave without a 'deal' if reasonable terms were not secured. They 'had' to have a deal. The EU Commission had an open goal – with the connivance of the UK Oligarchy.

### **6.1 A new Treaty – that the UK couldn't get out of.**

Those who aimed for BRINO succeeded at first – and may yet prevail. The UK agreed not only a disadvantageous 'Deal' but also something much worse. A new Treaty. A Treaty that would essentially subordinate the UK to the EU for the foreseeable future. And unlike nearly every other Treaty in the history of man, this would have no exit clause. Once signed, as the Government's own senior lawyer (the Attorney General) was grudgingly forced to admit, the UK would be unable to withdraw.

The UK would become a rule taker. Bound to the Customs Union and much of the Single Market. Required to accept EU legislation without question. And who would adjudicate any disputes under the Treaty? You know the answer. Not an independent Tribunal. But the very European Court of Justice (a politicised normative body) that Mrs May had promised to escape from.

Having agreed this Treaty, the Government's game plan was then to ram it through Parliament as a 'done deal.' No amendments or negotiation accepted.

### **6.2 A Crucial Misjudgement**

When I consider this Treaty, I have two rather conflicting thoughts

1. Disbelief that a British Government could propose this as an honest way forward. Subordination. To the EU. For the foreseeable future. Required to accept new rules on who knows what under the EU doctrine of 'Direct effect'. Rules that we would have no say in formulating.  
We like to see ourselves as the nation of Churchill and Spitfires. This was a surrender.
2. Surprise that it didn't get through parliament. The journalist Wolfgang Munchau, writing in the Financial Times, put it succinctly:  
*'Remainers should have taken the deal...It would have ensured a close relationship with the EU while keeping the option of rejoining in the future open.'*

MPs are overwhelmingly Remain. Most are quite Oligarchic/normative. For those who wanted the UK remain in the EU, this gave them the next best thing – albeit at the cost of some national humiliation.

The ‘Deal’ could have succeeded. It was presented to Parliament three times – failing on the last occasion by only 38 votes. In a parliament of roughly 650.

Why didn’t it get through? Blame Contest divisiveness to a degree. The Opposition parties, despite being more united against Brexit than the ruling Conservative Party, knew the ‘Deal’ was unpopular in the country – especially among Leave voters.

Most MPs represent Leave constituencies. Many wanted the ‘Deal’ to pass but didn’t want the opprobrium of being seen to support Theresa May. Many others still hoped that the whole idea of Brexit could be dropped. Arguably the ‘Deal’ was just too bad and pleased nobody.

You can’t fool everyone and some did speak up. As examples

1. Conservative MP Zac Goldsmith

*I cannot support this convoluted mess. That it takes us towards a rigged Referendum between her deal and no Brexit is just grotesque.*

2. Journalist Piers Morgan is not a man with whom I would expect much common ground. But he got this right.

*I voted Remain, and still don't think Brexit is a good idea. However, if there were to be a second EU Referendum, I would vote Leave.*

*What's going on now is a disgrace: a House of Commons packed with Remainer MPs trying everything in its power to reverse the 2016 result or dilute Brexit so much that it ceases to resemble anything that Leavers voted for.*

However, the Oligarchy had made a mistake. Failure to ram the deal through Parliament meant that the UK’s deadline for leaving had to be extended, by six months, to October 31.

The revised game plan was to cajole, influence, bribe, bully or beat up enough MPs to get the ‘Deal’ through by October.

That had a decent chance of success. Until.....

## **7. The EU Saves Brexit?**

If there are Gods looking over us, they certainly have a sense of humour. By securing the six month extension, the Government had to accept an unfortunate side effect.

The UK was now committed to take part in the EU elections. And all changed.

The ‘People’ had been onlookers to events since 2016. Many had been deeply unimpressed. Now they had their opportunity.

Crying ‘Betrayal!’, a new party – the Brexit party – surged to first place. It took over 30% of the vote. In a further joke by the Gods it is now the largest single party in the EU Parliament.

But the biggest effect was felt by the Conservative Party. Mrs May’s party. The party that for over 200 years had, in its various forms, seen itself as the Natural Party of Government. It got less than 9% of the vote.

The British domestic electoral system, (misleadingly named ‘First Past the Post’) is very hard on smaller parties. Now, as the larger ‘conservative’ party, the Brexit party could (maybe) dominate the next election.

At least in the fevered imagination of many Conservatives, their party faced an existential threat.

### 7.1 Self Preservation Comes to the Fore

There is an old saying in British Politics: *'Never underestimate the desire of a Member of Parliament (MP) to remain an MP'*. At such times principle, honour, loyalty, Contest values, normative values all rapidly give way to self-preservation.

Time for radical measures. So:

Out went poor Theresa May. In came someone more from an earlier generation. Boris Johnson.

- A politician not afraid to make a joke - in stark contrast to the dull Oligarchy figures of recent years.
- A 'Marmite' character – named after the spread many Brits put on their toast in the morning. Marmite's advertising slogan is: *'You either love it or you hate it'*. So it is with Boris Johnson.

In came a new rhetoric. The UK would leave the EU on October 31. *'Deal or No deal. Do or die'*. Those were his words. Contest words.

In came a new policy. Johnson claimed he wouldn't even meet the EU Commission unless the EU agreed beforehand to drop the most contentious part of Mrs May's deal. The hated (and again misnamed) Northern Ireland backstop. A document of over 200 pages, part of the Treaty, that set out in excruciating normative detail how the UK would remain subject to the EU.

### 7.2 It's all still to play for

Will this work? We will see. This story has had more twists than an Agatha Christie novel. No one can predict the outcome. And Johnson faces formidable odds. To quote an anonymous 'Senior Conservative' on the day he became Prime Minister:

*These are unprecedented times and there's a fifth column out to completely sabotage Brexit. If (Boris) thinks MPs are going to be out to get him, then that's nothing compared to Whitehall mandarins (code for the Senior Civil Service).*

The Oligarchy has not gone away.

By the time you read this you will have a better idea than I do of how things will play out.

## 8. Conclusion: Where do we go from here?

So far we have seen

- A Caesaropapal EU.
- Contest Values and how they should have supported a straightforward Brexit.
- A Normative dimension that can override Contest values.
- The growth of an emerging Normative Oligarchy.
- How that Oligarchy sought to frustrate Brexit – and may yet succeed.
- How an electoral shock may (may) have upended the Oligarchy's plans.

**Whether or not the UK leaves the EU as the people voted for, Brexit has highlighted some long running weaknesses in the way the country has been run.**

**Normative 5<sup>th</sup> Dimension values, held by an emerging Oligarchy, now pose a threat to the Contest model and to democracy.**

**There are two main ways forward:**

### 8.1 The UK recovers faith in its Contest values.

In this scenario, the Brexit Treaty represents 'Peak Oligarchy'. Cultural values vary over time, and in this case the pendulum begins to swing back. Contest values reassert themselves. In parliament. In the country. We would see such things as:

### **Main Hofstede Dimensions**

#### **Low Power Distance:**

- Recovery of the idea that Public Servants are ‘Citizens in service’ not ‘People in Power’.
- Reform of the electoral system so that MPs more closely represent the views of their Constituents. There are good models in other Contest countries.
- MPs to have had a career in the real economy before joining parliament

#### **High individualism:**

- Greater emphasis on self reliance
- Renewed emphasis on freedom. People are free in the main do live as they please – but are accountable for any harm caused.
- Where government compulsion is used, it is used to support self-reliance. Compulsory pension and health care premiums for example.

#### **High Masculinity:**

- Clear and effective mechanisms for challenging bureaucratic overreach

#### **Low Uncertainty Avoidance:**

- MUCH less government. Reduction of the ‘Regulatory State’.
- Review and repeal the many laws that now govern us in ‘busybody’ ways.
- Pragmatism resumes as the main approach of government.
- Regulations focus on results, not process.

### **Overarching ‘Contest’ Values**

#### **Continuous Competition.**

- Break up the cartels
- An end to ‘Groupthink’. As in the past - welcome dispute and disagreement so long as it does not advocate violence.
- Recognise that Representative Democracy needs the reinforcement of a robust if sparingly used Referendum system. Learn from successful practitioners like Switzerland.

#### **Winners are entitled to the fruits of their victory.**

- Subject to ‘Fair play’.

#### **‘Fair play’.**

- Winners should behave with magnanimity. Losers accept the result.
- Many fewer rules but rules that are clear and strictly enforced

I put the chance of achieving even half the above at less than 40%.

## **8.2 The Oligarchy Regroups**

Under this scenario, the drift to Oligarchic rule continues. Brexit would be a bump in the road.

For some time, Oligarchic rule would be by people who feel they are decent and civilised, but who also feel that their views should override the electorate. For their own good.

Of course, these Oligarchs won’t remain decent and civilised for long. Power corrupts.

So the long drift to Lord Sumption’s prediction will continue. The institutions of democracy will remain. The rhetoric will remain. Parliamentarians will continue to shout at each other across the floor of parliament in what will look like Contest debate. But democracy will have gone.

That would be a great shame. A culture that has been of benefit to the world will become something much less.

I put the chances of this outcome at something above 60%. Traditional British Contest democratic values may simply be unable to reassert themselves.

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