

Brexit: Britain voted for the parliamentary democracy it invented

By Dominic Lawson, The Times, 23 June 2016

The BBC's Katya Adler politely put her question to Jean-Claude Juncker, the president of the European Commission, at his Brussels press conference on Friday: was the British referendum vote to leave the EU "the beginning of the end" of this organisation?

First, he pretended not to hear. Then Juncker uttered the single word "No" — and abruptly walked out. The bulk of the assembled journalists, after a moment of dawning realisation ... applauded. What a cosy, complacent club.

The British radio audience got its own taste of it when Martin Schulz, the European parliament's president, told BBC Radio 4 that "this is not a crisis for the European Union". Well, anyone can understand the need not to appear to panic; but sublime indifference to the public's expressed wishes at the ballot box is almost a sacred principle of the EU.

This is ingrained in its very origins: Jean Monnet, one of its founding fathers, envisaged a new Europe governed by an elite cadre of bureaucrats who would be magnificently aloof from populism and the petty day-to-day concerns of the masses. It was a Platonic vision — that is to say, one of a benign dictatorship.

This would be infinitely superior to the malign dictatorship that had almost destroyed Europe in the 1940s — and to that which oppressed the peoples of Eastern Europe until the fall of the Berlin Wall. Eternal credit is due to it for the two achievements of tying the bonds of peace between Germany and its immediate neighbours and of assisting the path to market economies for the former communist states.

Unfortunately, the European movement, as it sometimes calls itself, has one thing in common with the Marxists. It too is a form of secular faith. Its advocates see a fully federal European state as a historically predetermined outcome, the very definition of progress. But, like the Bolsheviks, they are not prepared to wait for history to take its inevitable course; paradoxically, such alleged inevitability must be pressed on the peoples of Europe, whether they wish it or not.

Juncker is just the most disarmingly frank of these men (they are all men — the system-loving sex that worships grand ideas and scorns common sense). He it was who said in 2005 — when Valéry Giscard d'Estaing's imperial European constitution began to run into the buffers of hostile plebiscites — "If it's a yes we will say, 'On we go', and if it's a no we will say, 'We will continue'."

After its rejection by Dutch and French voters, "we will continue" was manifest in the Lisbon Treaty, which, as German Chancellor Angela Merkel noted, "preserves the substance of the constitution. That is a fact".

This was when Gisela Stuart — the Labour MP who with Boris Johnson and Justice Secretary Michael Gove led the Vote Leave campaign — became convinced of the need for what would come to be known as Brexit. The German-born MP for Neville Chamberlain's old Birmingham Edgbaston seat was one of our parliamentarians on the committee drafting the European constitution.

She told me afterwards how whenever she and her colleagues put in clauses with the purpose of bringing the EU institutions more under the control of the national electorates — and closer to them — they would always be mysteriously struck out at the last minute. Stuart realised then that this was a movement with contempt for the notion of democratic accountability; that unlike other political institutions in what we call the West it was not to be created as a response to the call for reform by the people but to be imposed top-down.

No one has expressed this better than Michael Burrage, the author of *Class Formation, Civil Society and the State*: “In contrast with the evolution of democracy in English-speaking democracies, the new European polity has evolved backwards, with an executive and a court preceding a legislature, which is still nominal, with civil society very much an afterthought. It cannot therefore perform quite the same functions as the voluntarily and spontaneously organised civil societies of the English-speaking world.”

It was, in fact, an astonishing experiment in conducting an upside-down pseudo-democracy, with the transmission of instructions not from the people upwards, but from the European Commission downwards.

This political system most closely resembles that of the People's Republic of China. The difficulty for its proponents is that the citizens of Europe do not, on the whole, have the Chinese willingness to endure imperial governance. Funnily enough, it was a former Maoist and later president of the European Commission, Jose Manuel Barroso, who declared the EU was a “non-imperial empire”.

European history, as that former Oxford classicist Boris Johnson pointed out during the referendum campaign, is characterised by the formation and disintegration of empires. The first was the Roman, which imposed its own coinage.

This was the most audacious decision of the modern planners of post-national Europe: to impose a single currency on a range of widely divergent economies.

Its consequences, in terms of the destruction of jobs in the southern EU states, do not need repeating here. It is, though, worth recalling that while Germany is seen as the villain of this arrangement, the German people themselves are blameless. They were never consulted about the abolition of the deutschmark — and at the time of the creation of the new currency, opinion polls showed most Germans were opposed to the euro, along with most of the nation's economists.

As Margaret Thatcher observed in her memoirs: “The desire among modern German politicians to merge their national identity in a wider European one is understandable enough, but it presents great difficulties to self-conscious nation states in Europe. In effect, the Germans, because they are nervous of governing themselves, want to establish a European system in which no nation will govern itself. Such a system could only be unstable in the long term.”

If this was not obvious to others then, it is glaringly so now. It is hardly surprising that the people of Britain — or perhaps I should say England and Wales — have been the first to revolt against what Thatcher called “such a system”.

Britain invented parliamentary democracy and prospered mightily under it. Unlike the great majority of member states, we did not join the EU as part of the escape from war (France and Germany) or dictatorship (Spain, Portugal, Greece). We also have an ancient legal system, characterised by popular participation, which has not shrunk from checking the powers of the executive. The British people do not need their liberties guaranteed by the European Court of Justice. At some visceral level, they realise that.

Last week I advocated a vote to leave, to demonstrate that “there is another way”. Possibly, there will be referendums elsewhere in the EU. What then happens is up to those countries’ own peoples — of whose existence, a French publication observed over the weekend, “the European Commission has just been reminded”.

It is endlessly said that there is a “growing loss of faith in democracy” across the Western world. The British vote to leave the EU has been described as a manifestation of this malaise. On the contrary: it is a vote for the re-establishment of parliamentary democracy and a fully responsible, accountable elected government. It might even catch on.

The Sunday Times

Comments:

There is a tendency to think, because Britain is at the forefront of all we enjoy, which is characterised as civilisation, that its culture and traditions are what is disparagingly referred to by multiculturalists as “white bread”, boring and uninteresting. There is no reason to think that Brits are not as patriotic, fiercely protective and proud of their heritage as anyone from what is seen as a more colourful culture.

The clearly evident divide of the areas voting to exit and those to remain demonstrates that large swathes of that proud land do not feel the benefits of a European dictatorship, only its drawbacks. Odd that journalists reporting back to Australia had so much trouble finding these exit people to interview, considering their majority numbers. I guess they didn't want to venture outside London to seek them out.

Thank God that the English realised that there is no need to sell the farm so they can trade in vegetables. There will be a significant push to override the democratic decision though. It does not suit the preferred socialist control over upstarts, nor the captive market that the Germans now have to sell their production to; a lot of money against that.

I was just thinking how most of our toys said 'Made in England' before they said 'Made in Japan', then Malaysia, Taiwan and then China. It is very very hard to find anything that says 'Made in England' at the supermarket these days. Hope to see that change. Even the matchbox cars were better back then.

The arrogant political elites across the Western world and the equally arrogant leftist media that do their bidding, have just woken up to what many of us have been saying for years, that people are angry and disillusioned in how their countries' cultures and values are being sold out. Congratulations to the Brits for voting to regain control over their own destiny and watch this space, this movement is only just starting. So wring your hands and tut tut at how "stupid" anyone is who doesn't agree one hundred percent of the time with what you want us to, but get over it because it is the very democratic process you pretend to champion that is at work. I actually call it Selective Democracy which is democracy on our terms provided you agree with us. It doesn't work that way so suck it up. Watch what is going to unfold in France, Netherlands and a lot of other countries.

This is the best article written about Brexit, Bravo.

The churlish behaviour of EU leaders after the result came in says it all.

Great article - the antithesis of that by Paul Kelly in the Weekend Australian which projected doom and gloom and the end of democracy! This was one of the greatest examples of true democracy at work. It also demonstrated something else - try to frighten the Brits and they will fight you to the death - ask others who have tried!!

For freedom to be true, then all voices need to be heard, without restriction, and for every individual vote to count. The people have spoken, and selected democracy over governorship. The elite and their minions need to accept it and move on. Just as they would have expected, had the vote gone the other way. The people have spoken... Listen.

A great piece. It is pity that more of your fellow journalists do not realise that a limited form of democracy is no democracy at all.