

Populist challenge provokes an almighty tantrum from leftists

By Brendan O'Neill, Spiked Online, 18 March 2017

Has there ever been a tantrum as tinny and irritating as the one thrown by the chattering classes in response to Brexit and Donald Trump? It's the mother of all meltdowns. The huff heard round the world. A hissy fit of historic proportions.

Children who don't get their way normally foot-stomp and wail "I hate you" for three or four minutes before collapsing into a knackered heap. The liberal elite has been at it for nine months, ever since Brexit last June pricked the sealed, self-satisfied bubble they live in and reminded them that — brace yourself — there are people out there who think differently.

Brexit and Trump signal the demise of Western liberal civilisation, they sob. Fascism is staggering back to life, they cry. "Boy does this age remind me of the 1930s," said British politician and historical illiterate Paddy Ashdown about Brexit.

Russia planted Trump in the White House, they yelp, like neo-McCarthyists convinced the Kremlin has commandeered Washington with an evil eye for steering it towards destruction.

Their arguments grow more unhinged every day. Their contempt for ordinary voters intensifies. Their toddler-like search for some evil thing to blame their political troubles on gathers pace.

What we're witnessing is the rage of the entitled, the fury of a technocratic elite that had come to see itself as the rightful, most expert overseer of politics. They really cannot believe that everyday people, millions of the idiots, have had the brass neck to say: "We don't like how you do politics. We're going to try a different approach."

As with all tantrum throwers, their first instinct is to deflect blame from themselves. "I didn't do it!" is the cry of the child who did do it, and so it is with the melting old oligarchy.

Seemingly incapable of reasoned self-reflection, unwilling to accept that lots of people are simply rejecting their politics, the chattering class goes on the hunt for some naughty force on which to pin the blame.

It was Russian meddling that swung the election for Trump, they say. Trump is "Putin's puppet", apparently. A YouGov survey of Democratic voters in the US found that 50 per cent of them believe Russia "tampered" with vote counts. There's no proof whatsoever for this. It's an "election-day conspiracy theory", in YouGov's words.

Some even claim that we 17.4 million Brits who voted for Brexit were somehow got at by Putinite masterminds, though they never explain how. British Labour MP Ben Bradshaw says it's "highly probable" Russia interfered in the EU referendum last June. He's offered not one shred of evidence for this. But then, we're no longer in the realm of reason — we're in a world of tantrums.

As Masha Gessen argues in *The New York Review of Books*, the "unrelenting focus" on Russia of Western liberals has become a way of avoiding self-analysis. It's become "a crutch for the American imagination", a catch-all explanation for "how Trump could have happened to us". So the problem isn't that Hillary Clinton and her myriad media cheerleaders failed. It's that powerful foreign forces meddled with American minds and warped the American political fabric.

The chattering-class tantrum is fuelled by an urge to dodge self-reckoning; by an absolute terror of asking what the old politics was getting wrong.

Some in the meltdown lobby are blaming “bots” — computer programs that pump out pro-Trump or pro-Brexit messages on social media. These sinister machines “changed the conversation”, says Britain’s *The Observer* newspaper. EU aficionado and one-time rationalist Richard Dawkins goes further, saying “sinister social media bots read minds and manipulate votes”, and apparently this “explains the mystery of Trump and Brexit”. They really are losing it. Another ingredient of temper tantrums is the use of heated language that’s way over the top to the situation at hand. The chattering class meltdown has plenty of this.

Witness the growing reliance on Nazi talk. Protesters against Trump wave placards of him wearing a Hitler moustache next to the words “we know how this ends”. The Archbishop of Canterbury says Brexit and Trump are part of the “fascist tradition of politics”. Prince Charles says the Brexit era brings to mind “the dark days of the 1930s”. Calm down, Charlie.

This casual marshalling of Nazi horrors to demonise Brexit and those Americans who voted for Trump is pretty outrageous. It drains the word Nazi of its historic meaning and turns it into an all-purpose insult, to be hurled at anyone we don’t like. Again, it’s tantrum-like when these people shout “Hitler!” — what they’re really saying is “I’m so angry I could cry”. They’ve turned the Holocaust into an exclamation mark to their fury — an unforgivable abuse of history.

And, of course, all tantrums involve lashing out, as this one does. The levels of antipathy aimed at voters, and at democracy itself, has been extraordinary.

We have failed to “keep the mob from the gates”, says Brexit-fearing columnist Matthew Parris. American writer Jason Brennan has become a favourite of liberal publications in the tantrum era because he wrote a book called *Against Democracy* and says “low-information white people” should not be trusted to make big political decisions.

American-British conservative Andrew Sullivan frets that the “passions of the mob” have been unleashed. A writer for *The Observer* says it’s time to smash the “taboo” against saying that ordinary people are often very stupid, and “there are times when their stupidity combines to produce gross, self-harming acts of national stupidity”.

Don’t worry, mate: that taboo has been well and truly demolished, if it ever existed. Post-Brexit and post-Trump, the chattering classes have not been shy in wondering if the masses are too daft for politics.

This is the frenzy of entitlement. The “third way”, pro-EU, Clinton-style technocratic classes that have dominated public life for a couple of decades came to think of themselves as the only people properly cut out for politics.

They insulated the business of politics from popular opinion. They made it all about expertise, not public engagement. Through bureaucratic institutions like the EU, and by giving greater decision-making powers to quangos and the judiciary, they sought to elevate politics far above us, the plebs.

They really convinced themselves that politics was for people like them, for the cool-headed and clever, not for us; not for the poor; not for the ill-educated or those driven by conviction rather than science.

And that's why Brexit, Trump and other quakes have devastated them so, propelling them into a permanent state of tantrum: because they'd become so aloof and so arrogant, that they started believing no one except their set, their friends, their institutions, could be trusted with deciding the fate of nations.

And guess what? That's why so many are voting against them. We're witnessing a revolt of the demos against a political class that thought it could get away with governing from on high and treating people as problems to be fixed rather than as political citizens to be taken seriously. In a beautiful irony, the fact that their response to this revolt has been "Waaaah! How dare you?!" proves the revolt was long overdue.