

Little Britain

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The Guardian [carries an article this morning](#) on what might happen if the UK leaves the EU on 23rd June. It is interesting, but misses the fundamental point by concentrating largely on process.

I happen to think the article is right when suggesting that over all that process will be slow and deeply revealing of the error that Brexit will represent. There are, however, two fundamental points of difference that I have with the analysis.

First, I think it quite wrong to assume that if Brexit happens there will be a smooth transition to a Boris Johnson premiership. I cannot see some in the Conservative party accepting that. I cannot see many in the nation being willing to accept that. And Michael Gove would just make things worse. To be very clear, I cannot see a Tory majority based on the 2015 mandate surviving in the House of Commons. In that case the assumption that it will be Johnson negotiating our new relationship with Europe is, I think, dependent upon his prospect of winning a general election, and that I doubt. The Tories are at war, far more than Labour could manage, and the electorate do not vote for parties at war.

Second, the assumption that a referendum would lead to us leaving the EU may, again, be misplaced. I do not dispute that it might lead to the commencement of a negotiation process, but as the reality of leaving becomes apparent I think that the government elected late in 2016 without a strong commitment to leaving could wisely, and appropriately, suggest that the actual terms put on the table by the EU should be the subject of a second referendum, and I very strongly suspect that such a vote would go in favour of staying.

The interesting questions in that case are whether or not Labour could lead such a process (which I leave to others to discuss) and what the consequences of it might be.

The first consequence will be the diminishment of Britain. The last vestige of the idea that we are somehow 'Great' will fall away. Our special relationship with the USA will be at an end. So too, pragmatically, will be our EU rebate if we are to stay: that will be

the price that will be extracted.

Second, the Union may end. I have little doubt that a Brexit vote will encourage the Scots to explore independence again, and this time successfully. I suspect that they will have a remarkably smooth transition to EU membership. Questions on much more marked devolution to Wales and Northern Ireland will follow.

Third, England will suffer a period of significant self-doubt as a consequence of this process. This will be extremely stressful and will expose the massive challenges that hosting the world's biggest tax haven financial centre creates for us as a society. The prospect of London separatism should not be ignored, but will have to be strongly resisted.

And in amongst all this there will, also, be real prospect for beneficial change. I do believe [neoliberalism is dying](#). It is good to note [Aditya Chakraborty's article on the same theme in the Guardian](#). I am increasingly believing that a vote for Brexit will not mean that we leave the EU. And I do think the EU will vote to keep us even if we vote to leave precisely because the turmoil within the UK that a Brexit vote will create will crush the hopes of those parties opposing the EU in so many other countries. No one else will be fool enough to replicate our experience.

But, more importantly, out of the turmoil a vote for Brexit will create I do see some prospects for hope. Those promoting Brexit as a political cause are doing so from a fundamentally right-wing, small-minded, neoliberal perspective. There is no real spirit of emancipation in what they're doing: the aim is to capture the UK as a bastion for fundamental market freedoms that are not in the best interests of most people in this country. If this becomes apparent then another nail in the coffin of neoliberalism will have been delivered. And, whilst the City will not go down without a fight, the idea that its view of unfettered capitalism should prevail would have been lost, with the result that whatever outcome arises, even within the Little Britain that England will then represent, there will be better prospect for achieving the appropriate checks and balances that are necessary to create the better structured society that this country really needs.

This does not change my view that voting Remain is the right thing to do. It does make me think that there is life beyond Brexit.