

The chaos to come

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Two days of enforced inactivity can be good for you, if chosen as a thing to do. I have spent the last two days being inactive. That, however is because I got food poisoning on my way back from Brussels. Thursday night is something I would rather forget, but won't, I fear. I might try food again this morning. It will make a change from living on tea alone.

But there are plus sides. I felt tired enough to watch some football yesterday and not think about anything else. And I pretty much ignored all the news: I knew full well I was not going to write about it.

Maybe, on reflection, I should do that more often. It would seem nothing changed. The Cabinet is still at war with itself. The motorcades that interrupted my progression around Brussels on Thursday did not give rise to a Brexit breakthrough. We are still in a mess.

So I have pondered on how deep that mess is, and what the appropriate comparisons might be. It's hard to be sure what they are. The 1930s were grim. But there wasn't, maybe, the political paralysis that we now see.

The Irish question in the last 19th century created some paralysis, but it has to be contrasted with a nation that was, overall, confident with itself.

The comings and goings of German royalty on the British throne created various stresses in the 18th century that continued until the Victorian era but not, as far as I can see, a paralysis to match that we now have.

I have to really go back to the English Civil War era to find anything to match that. That is both in the era leading to the war, and in its aftermath when stable government around any constant bar Cromwell proved to be impossible.

And Theresa May is no Cromwell.

Nor can Brexit be equated to the Parliamentary cause, in my opinion.

Maybe, then, we are just in an unprecedented mess. But let's not pretend otherwise now: this is a mess of our collective choosing. Despite its very obvious failings the government enjoys high levels of political support. Maybe that's because Brexit is now a fault line in politics that will last for generations, in the way the Irish Civil War still resonates in that country, even now. And maybe that's because some really cannot imagine that Labour will deliver on Brexit even though I have no doubt Corbyn wants it. And maybe that's because Remainers really do have no one with the remotest chance of power who seems to speak for them. Whatever it is, the paralysis extends beyond Westminster. The whole country has no idea what to do.

Rational voices can predict all they like what might happen in that case. Their dire warnings are heartfelt and genuine, I suspect. For once, the elite are threatened: if the businesses for which they work leave the UK then their cosy lives will be disrupted. But the business elite will be ignored. As will Unite's appeal to Labour to allow a second referendum go by the wayside.

I suspect that a nation that does not know who it is anymore, and that does not know what it wants, and has no idea where it is going, or what part it wants to play in the world, has decided to withdraw to regroup. It may not have done so consciously: it is very hard to say that anything about the Leave campaign was conscious or informed, but that does not mean that we as a nation are not now going to withdraw and regroup, come what may.

To guess what will happen is very hard, beyond saying it will be painful.

I strongly suspect the UK is over: Scotland and Northern Ireland will leave. I am not sure about Wales as yet.

I strongly suspect that political realignment will happen in those countries leaving the UK. But in England? That is anyone's guess.

All I am sure of is that the cost of this breakdown of a nation will be high.

And how long will it last? The Interregnum was 12 years as I recall. I can't see the current turmoil lasting for less.

And in that time there will be everything to be fought for. It may be in vain. There's always that risk. But to pretend that the fight will not be on now as we head for ever increasing chaos as Brexit approaches would be the ultimate folly. To get through what is going to happen we have to believe the other side, when we reach it, will be better. There is no other option to endure the mayhem coming our way.

On which thought I have to now decide if I can face breakfast, or not, as yet and whether mayhem will ensue if I do. I have to risk it, just as we as a country will eventually have to take the risk of engaging again. But it won't be for a while. And we

will be in a very different place when we do.