

Brexit is the politics of continual disappointment in p...

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I am grateful to Brenda Steele for drawing my attention to a [blog post](#) by Prof Chris Grey, the title of which is:

Brexit gets more real, Brexiters get more unrealistic

The post is long, and all worth reading but I will pick out in theme. As Chris Grey notes:

*Owen Paterson MP [is] listed as one of the contributing authors of a new report by the Centre for Brexit Policy (of which he is also the Chairman). Entitled '[Replacing the Withdrawal Agreement](#)' (WA) **this is being widely publicized, with coverage in the Daily Telegraph (£) and of course The Express, and a write-up by the Centre's Director-General, John Longworth, on the Politico website. So it has the look of a concerted campaign.***

He adds:

The report itself, as its title suggests, propounds the extraordinary idea that the government should unilaterally create a new 'Sovereignty Compliant Agreement' to replace the WA and present it to the EU. If they do not agree, the UK would no longer regard itself as being bound by the WA.

And as Chris Grey notes, this is despite the fact that the WA has a number of key characteristics. It is a legally binding international agreement. It is the foundation of the 'oven ready Brexit' on the basis of which Johnson was elected. And it survives whether we get a deal or not, with regard to Northern Ireland, for example. The idea that we can just walk away from it simply does not exist as a viable option.

That this walking away is, however, demanded provides Chris Grey with his core argument, which is:

The proposition in the CBP report, of course, is that whether or not there is a deal the WA should be ditched. It is, frankly, an insane idea — politically, legally and diplomatically - but it grows from the long-evident way that the Ultras are never

*satisfied with Brexit, however hard and in whatever form. This is partly because the ideas they have of what is possible are total fantasy, and so as soon as they encounter reality, as they did in the Article 50 negotiations, they are doomed to be 'betrayed'. But the deeper issue is that there is, actually, a **desire** to be betrayed, a desire always to be campaigning for something even more extreme, always to be insisting that Brexit is being denied them. In the most recent example, as in the past, this extends to denouncing as betrayal even things that they **themselves** have supported or voted for in the past. It is a pathology which has totally deformed British politics so that, now, at the moment of their victory, they are still complaining, still unhappy, still spitting out vitriol, still blaming remainers.*

This idea is fascinating, and I think true. It does not, of course, only apply to Brexit. It also explains why even when they have reached the pinnacles of power these populists portray themselves as outsiders still fighting a system that is opposed to them in all it does. Their control of that system is still not enough to make them insiders.

And likewise no Brexit will ever be Brexit enough. Because if it was Brexiteers would have no one left to blame. They would have to accept ownership of what they had done. Responsibility would be theirs, and theirs alone. Remainers could not then be to blame for what they had never wanted.

But that's not what Brexiteers want. Theirs is a politics that relies on there being someone, literally anyone, to blame for what is happening, which permits them to always say that they cannot accept responsibility for what we have because it is not what they demanded, and so has been sabotaged by others who are now to blame. And, crucially, that rejection also includes (and necessarily has to include) rejection of positions they once promoted and said they desired, and which they even celebrated achieving,

Brexit is the politics of continual disappointment in pursuit of a new despair that can be blamed on anyone but a Brexiteer. This is the politics of modern populism. And there is no point seeking to constructively engage with it, because it will deny any and every position it ever held if it suits it do so. There is no rationality in its logic. The only thing to do is offer alternatives, none of which, including any form of Brexit, will ever be acceptable to those demanding ever yet more extreme solutions.

So we might as well promote what we really need and give up any consideration of compromise, because it will never get us anywhere.