

It's time to get rid of the flags

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I was amused by this tweet by Naga Munchetty:

<https://twitter.com/tvnaga01/status/1372631015164948482?s=21>

It was made in response to tweets like this, and the comment of her colleague on air yesterday:

https://twitter.com/haggis_uk/status/1372454942716391425?s=21

I have no doubt that Naga Munchetty was leant upon to issue her apology.

But what really amuses me are the number of replies. I have not, of course, read them all, but the overall sentiment was that she and her colleague were absolutely right to be facetious about Robert Jenrick's flag.

I am amongst those deeply offended by the current proliferation of Union Jacks in politics. And yes, I know it is supposedly our national flag, although that assumes that the identity of this nation is fixed, and it is not.

More important, that identity is now in itself seen by many as oppressive. Within that current sense of oppression is deep disquiet about what we have been as a nation, and not without good reason and a sense of remorse and regret about past abuses, which cannot and should not be denied, but to which the use of the flag as a political gesture appears a current affront.

There is, too, deep disquiet about the current state of our nation even if it is of agreed identity, lost and adrift as it is after Brexit, projecting a pretended status to the world after Brexit, whilst apparently unable to comprehend, let alone comply, with the legal obligations into which it entered as a consequence of that deal, which it chose. The flag does, in that case feel like a projection of aggression.

And maybe this is an age thing, but there is deep within me a mistrust of politicians who use their national flag as a symbol. There is within the message that they are

seeking to project the implication that they alone are the patriotic choice of a nation, and that to choose another politician would be an act of betrayal. The suggestion is that there can only really be one choice. The message implicit in that is that democracy, by offering the option of an alternative, is not acceptable. The suggestion is that there is but one true party. The aim is to undermine democracy itself.

And that denial of choice happened in my parent's lifetime, but also in mine too. Spain and Portugal were fascist dictatorships when I was a teenager. The Colonels ran Greece in my lifetime. And then there was the oppression of the Soviet era within Russia itself and in Eastern Europe and the other satellite states.

It is an uncomfortable fact that democracy is hard to deliver and harder still to maintain.

The message I get from the current bout of flag waving is deeply divisive. It is that this country is not united at all, but is instead deeply divided. And it is that those who sowed this division are intent on maintaining that division by claiming that theirs is the only true identity with which we must associate.

Naga Munchetty and her colleague were right to point out that one small flag is already insufficient for this purpose. Multiple flags now seem to be required. Soon arm bands will follow, to replace the absurd lapel badges of recent years. Then there will be banners flowing down buildings.

Nothing about this suggests outcomes that might end well. Democracy is dependent upon the tolerance of the right of others to rule. This flag waving is clear indication of intolerance to that idea. My offence is in that case not purely aesthetic. It is instead based upon a deep sense of disquiet that the tolerance of the 'other' is ending in this country. My sense of loss is real. My sense of foreboding is bigger. I am worried.

It is time to get rid of the flags before this ends in tears, or worse.