

Delusional? May be!

Anarcho

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Article 50 – or as some hope, Article 1950 or, for the most optimistic, Article 1850 – has finally been invoked. Few would have believed in April 2016 that a mere year later elements of the Tory party would be threatening war with Spain – or that a party whose incompetency on so many levels (not least, economic) would be doing so well in the polls. But then, under Cameron the Tories realised they can talk centre ground – even leftish – but track even further to the right.

Yet on every level Thatcherism has been recognised to have failed – the housing market is broken, the railways are not fit for purpose, the labour market is dysfunctional, etc., etc., etc. – or, more correctly, the reality is being admitted but the root causes are being carefully avoided. And how are the electorate acted? To reward the very party which caused their problems to be begin with.

So in spite of – most recently – strangling the recovery from the 2008 global recession and producing years of stagnation by imposing austerity the Tories are rated as being more economically competent than Labour. But best not to talk of the economic impact of Prime Minister Theresa May's hard Brexit plans – which she avoided when she launched the Tories local election campaign this April.

She did find time to blame everything on the Labour government (which left office in 2010!) for the need remained for “tackl[ing] Labour's deficit.” Best not mention that she may have a plan but the *original* plan was to eliminate the deficit in one Parliament and as result trying to implement that we are facing a lost decade – at the end of which we shall still have a deficit. Best not mention that after 7 years of Tory rule it truly is *their* deficit as *their* home-grown policies have ensured we need to borrow not to invest but to fill the holes they have created.

It is somewhat surreal to see May proclaim that the other “parties put their own political interests ahead of the national and local interest” when the Brexit vote was the product of infighting within the Tory Party and that all sections of this party place the interests of the few ahead of all other ones. For the rich have benefited while the poor have been punished – but still, May loves the “just about managing” as seen by how she and her party have created the conditions by which so many are created! It is not by accident (nor by EU diktat) that Britain was unique amongst developed nations in seeing economic growth with a *fall* in real wages since the 2008 financial crisis.

But May was right in one way for the facts are “contrary to the stereotype which is sometimes promoted” for the Tories have always “believe[d] in the good that government can do” – *for the*

few. Anti-union laws, for example, do not “just happen” – they need to be passed by a government and implemented (Adam Smith: “The masters [...] never cease to call aloud for the assistance of the civil magistrate, and the rigorous execution of those laws which have been enacted with so much severity against the combinations of servants, labourers, and journeymen.”). Council housing does not get sold off by itself – nor do local councils ban themselves from building more. Nor does privatisation of key industries – at knock-down prices – happen as if by magic. Nor do corporation tax and benefits cuts just happen at the same time. Nor does the NHS get top-down restructured nor go into crisis by accident. These, and so much more, need a government to do it – and, as Anarchists have always argued, being the defender of the wealthy is a prime role of the State.

May says Brexit creates an opportunity to create “a stronger, fairer, better Britain” but it was not the EU which stopped that happening before. It was the Tory party and its policies which made Britain unfair, worse and weaker – at least for working class people. And yet she proclaims that the Tories are “the party of people who work hard and play by the rules.” But who makes those rules? As Adam Smith noted long ago: “Whenever the legislature attempts to regulate the differences between masters and their workmen, its counsellors are always the masters.”

The net effect of these Tory (and New Labour neo-Tory) policies are clear even to May when she proclaims that “we must and will ensure that hard work is decently rewarded” yet she simultaneously proclaims “that the rules are properly adhered to by everyone, without fear or favour” – yes, the very rules urged by the master class and implemented by her party which produce the situation she pays lip-service denouncing! She must hope people have not been paying attention...

The reason is obvious enough. Labour produces all wealth but the product is monopolised by the master to whom we sell our labour and liberty. How much of our product remains in our own hands is not set by natural laws but rather by *struggle*. If workers stand up for themselves, organise, strike, then wages will rise. If they do not because “the rules” are such to make this difficult then hard work will only reward the owning class. If you regulate strikes you regulate the labour market and as Smith recognised: “Whenever the law has attempted to regulate the wages of workmen, it has always been rather to lower them than to raise them.”

The Tories have *never* been against the State – just against it helping anyone bar the master class. Thus when May proclaimed that the Tories “want ambitious local councils” and “effective local councillors elected on 4 May” remember that “local government account[s] for a quarter of all public spending” and that money can and must be given to capitalist companies (“in collaboration with other important local institutions”). The public purse has not been fully funnelled into private hands yet by means of outsourcing. Nor must we forget that it was *her* party in the 1980s which did more to centralise government power and control than any other.

Similarly with Brexit. Before the vote, numerous experts noted that Brexit would be such a huge undertaking that it would empower the executive and State bureaucracy for Parliament would be unable to overview it all. And so the “Great Repeal Act” – which does the opposite of repeal by making all EU law UK law – legalises this power grab. For a vote which – when not framed in terms of immigration – was meant to be about Parliamentary sovereignty its supporters are less than happy at letting that Parliament – or the people – have any kind of say.

But then, as Proudhon noted long ago, referendums empower the government not the people for it is the government which both sets the question and, more importantly, interprets the result. Which May has done to keep the rabid-right of her party happy, the right-wing media on

board and herself and her party in office. And now that the People “has spoken” those very same politicians and media barons seek to ensure they do not get the chance to speak again – nor, apparently, the very Parliament whose sovereignty they demanded.

But, then, Brexit was never about the EU but rather securing a right-wing coup. The notion of a Left-wing Brexit proclaimed by some of the left (even the “revolutionary” left) was always delusional given the balance of class forces. The choice in the vote was between which section of the ruling class would predominate – and which flavour of neo-liberalism would continue to be imposed. And by 37% to 36%, fuelled by decades of lies which reached a frenzy last year, the English-nationalist ultra-reactionary section won. What they could never have achieved by Parliamentary means they can now do under “Red, White and Blue” Brexit and other meaningless platitudes if not tautologies (“Brexit means Brexit”).

Ultimately, if the Tories gave a toss for Wales, the Midlands, etc. then these regions would not need to receive EU funds. And only those who have not been paying attention will be surprised when – as with North Sea Oil in the 80s – the Tory government decides to use the monies no longer going to the EU to fund... tax cuts for corporations and the top 5%. Writing on the side of a bus does not translate into policy decisions – for it is the government, not the people, which determines what Brexit actually means.

Still, Brexit had two possible benefits. First, Nigel Farage would disappear back into his hole. Second, the rabid-right would lose the scapegoat they have blamed for the problems caused by the politics they championed and implemented. Sadly, Farage has decided not to get his life back but the latter may still come to pass.

Perhaps people will realise that the real reason their pay has not risen is not due to immigration but rather *British* Tory anti-union laws. Perhaps they will realise that they are being squeezed is due to *British* Tory polices ensuring more and more income flooding to the top to reward those who do nothing but own (after all, in 1981 rent for a council property absorbed less than 7% of an average income but by 2015 for a private tenancy it was 52%, 72% in London, far higher than anywhere else in Europe). Perhaps they will realise by “playing by the rules” means being an obedient little servant to a *British* master class who will always seek their own enrichment first and foremost and who shape the rules accordingly? And that their vote has resulted in a power-grab by the rabid-right of the *British* Tory Party to *increase* the policies which produced the “left behind” in the first place?

So where does that leave us? Well, if all we do is vote then we will continue to be ignored by those in power. Real power lies outside the ballot box – but only if it is organised in our workplaces and communities. It is there were we must challenge the scapegoats and point to the real causes of our problems while building real alternatives. The Tories know this – that is why we have the most draconian anti-union laws outside of dictatorships and why they seek to outlaw all forms of effective – *direct* – action. However, laws can and do remain dead-letters in the face of popular protest but that is what must be organised if anything is to change for the better.

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