

# no exit

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politics is changing - malleability, volatility & hostility are on the rise - with no reliable pointer to the way out

The conventional wisdom has been...

*'a week is a long time in politics'*

No more - the referendum result is showing us just how long a day in politics can be. Upheavals on this frequency need agile lateral thinking. What about these for-and-against starters...

- ... for re-organised and more agile political parties
- ... for replacing unreliable elections & referendums
- ... against self-interested party loyalties posturing as virtue
- ... for emerging political leaders with reforming agendas
- ... for the young as in-touch & reliable about change
- ... for embedding LGBT, work & citizen rights
- ... against demands for yes-or-no answers to complex questions
- ... for citizenship & careers work in mainstream curriculum
- ... against what corrupts and discredits the EU
- ... for independence of mind, critical thinking & creativity
- ... for making good use of bad news
- ... against twentieth-century answers to twenty-first-century questions
- ... for lifting the curtain on hidden back-stories

The theme is change - in the UK, around it, for and by the UK. There's more about all this here; but there's also what you can add to it.

What we do about it now will shape lives into an unpredictable future. But the capture of that agenda by influential interests raises make-or-break issues. Much referendum talk has been part pantomime and part smokescreen. People are already seeing for themselves what promises are kept, what advantages are realised and what damage is done. All this while long-reach planning gets short-term implementation - right-wing governments act on left-wing ideas - and unforeseen change continues to unfurl. If you're not confused you're just not paying attention.

Issues for work-life and citizenship are issues for education. Links between learning and work-life were forged long before schools were thought to be a good idea. And the more schools we've built the more fraught and unresolved have become conflicts about education for work. The conflicts are getting volcanic. They certainly cannot be settled by the merely influential.

## **education and work**

There's no consensus on education - not among politicians, educators, or students and their families. On one hand education must fit students for employment - so the settling effect of mindfulness gets a mention. On another education is for independence of mind - so the disturbing effect of critical thinking gets a mention. And what does contemporary learning-for-living most need - damping down, or firing up?

But then, where in all this is there room for education which brings playful, caring and stress-free well-being? And, while we're at it, there's bright-side-of-life education learning for generosity, hope and positive beliefs - all in a healthy democracy.

And, since we're talking about learning-for-living, do students need to question the consequences of too little commercial investment in productivity, consigning workers to where they don't have the equipment or training or wages they need if they are to claim membership of their own society. There is an education back-story here, speaking of the poor, the neglected, the marginalised and the blamed - too often off-loaded by the comfortable, the well-connected, the honoured and the lucky.

Radical new thinking is proposing a route around these disconnections. It takes people to where they can claim citizenship. In the past they have not been able to link what they know to what is expected of them. There is widespread scepticism about the usefulness of occasional visits to polling booths. And guessing where to put a cross on referendum form has proven even more troublesome. Politics has lost touch with its electorate.

Can we reconnect politics to experience? It would need alert and representative citizens in conversations with responsive decision makers about pressing agendas - a sort of extended jury service. Athens, the cradle of democracy, had just such a forum - and no elections. These days the rate of change requires the help of experts - with no axe to grind. The current version of the idea looks for citizen responses to volatile change. It is designed to be democratically representative. There are trials working on agendas ranging from transgender rights, bedroom tax and zero-hours to extremism, representation, poverty, exclusion, exploitation and the EU.

I mention it because its use in curriculum is at least as significant as in politics. These are questions for year-by-year invitations where maturing students ask how learning connects to lives. What we call education for citizenship won't do - it has allowed itself to be shaped and marginalised by policy. This is an agenda for probing policy. It needs mainstream not marginal programmes. It looks for an appreciation of causes and consequences - history would help. In a changing world it needs to be applied as independence of mind, critical thinking and creativity. Learning to pose awkward questions is necessary to knowing what is going on and why.

### **worry and belief**

Dominant thoughts and feelings about the referendum have been found to cluster around worries about economy and beliefs about the UK - jobs-and-prices are important, but so is patriotic defiance. Neither is hard to understand, but nor do they reflect any worry or belief concerning climate change, cyber-attacks, African and Mediterranean life chances, or the growing dominance of south-east Asian economies. The patriotic insistence that the UK will not be bullied misses the economic fact that the UK lacks leverage. And strong leverage needs a big platform - like the EU.

Beliefs and worries were whipped up. Boris Johnson was a dominant performer. This is the Boris who presided over a London rich in out-of-reach and grotesquely vacant penthouses. It's also the Boris reported to have buried a report on toxic exhausts harming London's children. It's that Boris who undermined friends and colleagues by cultivating media coverage for what became the 'Boris-and-Dave' TV soap-opera.

If there has been a coherent gesture for 'out' it has been two fingers to élitist metropolitans and their disdain of ordinary people. I could have sympathised with a gesture directed at the penthouses, but this one was directed at expert researchers. It was the exit team's doing; they needed to neutralise experts because experts can expose lying. The perpetrators admit that they displaced expert findings by hawking attractive beliefs which they presented as incontrovertible facts.

The remaining clues to such lying include the painted-on smiles. Boris and his UKIP rival smile a lot. But their posturing was no more than partially successful: young people came out as inclusive of migrants. Their experience has learned to welcome people from all parts of the globe. The constituencies against migration are mostly populated by the elderly. And their fears are not necessarily based on experience - unseen threats can be made to seem all the more threatening. It all leaves families with conflicts between older and younger members. The word 'unforgivable' has cropped up, in both directions.

The referendum result seems to have surprised everybody - not least the winners. People have come away with bad feelings and shaken beliefs. The unhappy voices range from shocked disappointment to regretful doubt - some admitting that they had not intended to win the day, only to frighten the 'élite'.

One reported experience of surprise involves Boris. Is it possible the great pretender never intended to win the exit but only to posture as its heroic defender? He had formerly been an EU remainer but was now claiming to have changed his mind. It's true that people move back and forth. One was a member of parliament, moving from 'out' to 'in'. It was natural for her to ask Boris why he had moved from 'in' to 'out'. His answer was 'don't worry, it will be alright'. It puzzled her - why would he say that? Then, on 'Independence Day', Boris showed signs of panic - actually avoiding the cameras. Could this be a sign of shock at the result? And does his parliamentary questioner know why? Boris has since dropped out of the exit team, evading scrutiny. And is that why, later, he handed over the leadership reins? We may never know. We know that we've not heard the last of Boris. And, for the time being, he is in the government from which his Boris-and-Dave friend has been compelled to resign.

Worries and beliefs have been manipulated to where the referendum is a shambles. It is prompting some parliamentarians and lawyers to see what can be done to block exit.

### **change and habit**

Habitual responses to change are self-entrapping - at their worst caught inside the familiar, stuck with the same old, clinging to the roundabout. The political version is of two distinct parties, each trying to oust the other. Electability is its sole test of success; and that goes to whichever best commands the middle ground. This is not an assessment of what is truthful, useful or moral - it is the fulcrum between two extremes, and when the extremes shift the middle follows. Is there a more arbitrary way of directing political action? But it simplifies commercial and media interest without making any heads hurt. It is called 'spin', and a Labour party spin-doctor has famously reduced life-and-death policy to such bog-standard binaries. But where habits are informed by spin and not by experience people give up voting for it. These habits left the door open for UKIP.

The persistence of the two-dimension scenario is startling. One account of attitudes to the referendum could find only the two bases for voting. There is, it says, socialist scepticism, and there is conservative acceptance. It calls on a simple narrative which knows nothing of what the back-story reveals about competing interests, changing priorities and shifting coalitions.

A back-story reframes worry and belief, locating it in the deeper and wider framework of habit and change. And that exposes how habits preserve beliefs and change aggravates worries. Take, for example, this version of habits preserving beliefs...

*'when in that House MPs divide  
'if they've a brain and cerebellum  
'they've got to leave that brain outside  
'and vote just as their leaders tell 'em*

*'but then the prospect of a lot  
'of dull MPs in close proximity  
'all thinking for themselves is what  
'no man can face with equanimity.  
'then let's rejoice with loud "falala!"  
'that nature always does contrive*

***'that every boy and every gal  
'that's born into the world alive  
'is either a little Liberal  
'or else a little Conservative'***

William Schwenck Gilbert

Beliefs and worries are mocked by change but protected by habit. We need to know how. That disentanglement is why we need the back-story. A back-story features what is not immediately visible, but when it is made visible it becomes a critical part of the answer to what's going on. It may be suppressed where it undermines well-protected interests. It undermines belief in binary politics, explaining why clinging to ready-made formula will wind up in a political crash zone. It moves on to explanations of how politics are re-aligning, and why parties may split. It points to the creation of smaller and more agile political organisations. Without such underlying curtain raising little makes useful sense.

A key feature of the back-story is that what we see is not just another change - managed by familiar expertise. It sees, before any establishment shows up, a volatility changing before it's noticed - again, and again. It's been called 'change upon change'. It's run-away change that we are not meant to see. The volatility erupts from massively expanding global commerce, it carries the technical apparatus that makes that dominance possible, and it repositions how people live their lives. All is being continuously re-invented - work-life, social contact, the cultures we live by. This is more than appears in corporate videos, on government website or at political rallies. Behind those curtains back-stories expose habits overtaken by change. There are no twentieth-century answers to twenty-first-century questions.

A volatile world has no time for formality. Under the curtain some liberals are closer to conservatives than they are to each-other. An attempted pairing tried to move forward by establishing a middle-ground compromise. It was catastrophically ill-fated. But there is more than one pathological optimist wanting to have another go. They will get no separating of politics from conflict - bright-side-of-life beliefs have lost touch with conflict-of-interests realities. Left-wing alliances have similar difficulties. Emerging alliances - among the greens, scots, lib-dems, Plaid-cumri, Sinn-féin and Labour - are finding no more than partial agreements. But they agree enough to re-map smaller bases which can be agile enough to take on, issue by issue, whatever changes come into view. In the contemporary world back-stories expose how hard it is to declare which way is forward.

Back-stories also revisit conventional politics. Parliamentary politicians may enthuse about the 'heart and soul' of the party they love, but some of that smacks of self interest - seeing constituents as means to winning. At its worst it disdains the neglected and suffering poor - who need politicians to see winning as means to decent chances in life. Some beat like a heart and care like a soul, others don't. But, behind the curtain, love of party proves not to be the test.

One of the greatest heart-and-soul politicians was right wing, saying...

*'though passion may have strained...  
the mystic chords of memory will swell when again touched...  
by the better angels of our nature'*

That insight into the conflict between ruthless passions and caring angels is often referenced. And, it's true, habitual politics are stronger on the passions than on the angels. But I do wonder how angelic those angels need be. Harps are not requirement for flexible thinking in a volatile world - but on-their-toes, ready-for-anything and in-touch leaders are. Beneath the curtain they will be confronting profiteering failures to invest, while robbing work of productivity and trashing worker rights. I don't know a prayer for that; but the back-story finds that right-wing governments are slow but not blind. They are stealing left-wing thinking and quietly following it by dismantling neo-lib austerity. Does it matter? - it's true that it's not doing much for left-wing electability, but people's chances in life are improved. And so, under the curtain, a caring, alert and creative left-wing opposition is making a difference by coming up with progressive ideas that right-wing governments cannot afford to ignore.

It's happening - which means that, while left-wing ideas are being stolen by the right, some on the left are trying to negate them. The leadership is pilloried for holding to socialist beliefs and trades-union rights. The sighting of a socialist-workers placard is enough to get an habitual thumbs-down. But, beneath the curtain, the words 'labour' and 'socialism' have good pedigrees. Work-life interests are at least as significant as commercial interests, and socialism is notable for its foresightful thinking. The arbitrary aligning, re-aligning and mis-aligning of political beliefs is why 'new labour' is dead in the water, why the electorate no longer knows how to vote, and why UKIP has been successful.

It is also why, under the curtain, left-wing parliamentarians were drawn into an orchestrated plot to challenge and dislodge the party leader. The plotters show little interest in the leader's commitment to dealing with the unfeeling politics of neo-liberal austerity and the changing patterns of need...

*'the injustices that scared society in the past -  
want, squalor, idleness, disease and ignorance  
have changed, what is holding people back now are  
inequality, neglect, insecurity, prejudice and discrimination'*

The challengers show more interest in the leaders' refusal to behave like a tub-thumping barker - they seem not to know the difference between posturing and leadership. Leadership is recognised not claimed - and there's no shortage of that kind of followership for this leader. The attempt by challengers to displace him fails because no incumbent can challenge himself and so his right to be heard must be built into the process. The habitual find it hard to give up. And whatever comes out of this will reverberate one way or another in the constituencies. It's not over.

The saga is said to be an unnecessary distraction from defeating the right-wing government. But history has a back-story explanation of why it is necessary. Left wing politics draws on both principles and interests. The principles are abstractions and fail to come across to working people - such talk seems to be too high up and too far away. Working people have more time for what seems like rough-and-ready talk - but which can be heard to promise improvement in their lives.

The left-wing conflict is inevitable. But right-wing politics is better at hiding back-stories, which are no more admirable. Under the curtain there are consequences all of which contain the possibility of splits - between left and left, left and compromise, left and right, right and right. On the surface this seems improbable, but under the curtain it looks like blind-and-deaf behaviour on some of the left and some of the right. It's too soon to say, but we can't rule out eventually finding two awkwardly aligned parties realigned as a more comfortable four.

Meanwhile, the UKIP door is still open. I accused Nigel Farage of whipping up a smokescreen to win support for cleverly hidden business interests. But since then UKIP has lost its role in right-wing politics. And, if Nigel gets the commercial freedom he played for, he doesn't need UKIP any more. A back-story may be about to peep above the curtain. My problem is that I can't now forgive UKIP for the bait-and-switch it pulled on

migration - people were misled. That was then; now UKIP is appointing a new leader who is clearly interested in social mobility and angry with the way its voters were ignored by New Labour. But this is now; and the left wing of today's Labour accepts and works for what UKIP accepts and works for. There's nothing straightforward here: UKIP is pro-exit and sees itself as anti-Labour. But here's a question for a party which, at the moment, has nowhere else to go: are there enough UKIP people committed to working-class interests and prepared to look for a new alliance - whether in or out of the EU. It raises the possibility of five parties where there might have been four? Can I accept that? Ask me later. Neither then nor now is forever. And we're talking change not habit.

### **cause and consequence**

So what have we got from the referendum? We are urged to accept that the people have spoken. And so they have, though it's not easy to get what they said. The back-stories find young people suffering long-term unrepresentative consequences. Lifting the curtain finds voter admissions that the vote was a gesture, not intending the consequences it got. It is uncovering broken promises and downright lies, now beginning to stack up unwanted consequences. Lifting these curtains is troublesome among politicians and on the street. The back-stories expose a now-you-see-me-now-you-don't mandate to leave. The referendum didn't work. What we've got is a mess.

The most significant interests are young people's. Younger and older people see the result differently - what seems like bad news for the young feels good to the old. But the exit negotiations will take some years to complete, and during that time older people will die. So the exit settlements will eventually land in the laps of the young, when we oldies have had time to expire. Also, during that time new cohorts will claim their citizenship. We are looking at how younger citizens will live with the consequences of what the departing have caused. This is not representative democracy. On any reading of what is fair and sustainable it's wrong.

There's more. The run-up to the referendum is peppered with arguments, in both directions, which were rarely robust, or clear, or compelling. Informed research got little air-time. Promises were made and broken. Transient big-data calculations overlooked observable day-to-day experience. Measures claiming to rescue the poor demonstrably damage them. Some expert sources declined to take part, wanting to avoid raging politics. The referendum has spawned poorly assembled causes leading to shambolic consequences.

A side effect is damage to the prospect of recovery for an EU platform which, until now, had been capable of repair. Continent-wide right-wing nationalism is using the brit exit as a trail-blazing example for other nations. The damage may well prove fatal to the EU. These causes carry immeasurable consequences for the management of human rights, global threats and national reputations.

Meanwhile domestic causes and consequences heap shamble upon shamble. Government is not ready for the transition - we have around 20 skilled negotiators to deal with around 600 withdrawal processes. The count of genuine exit heroes in government has been reduced to zero - the exit programme being handed to a remain-driven political leader. What she agrees may resemble Canada's, Switzerland's or Norway's deal - none offering a position likely to satisfy the exit purists. Whatever emerges the exited UK will need to seal its border with The Republic of Ireland, an EU-member - we don't yet know how these dismembered families, shoppers and recreations can be managed. In fact the whole exit movement is in denial of a millennia-long reality that homo-sapiens is an unstoppable migrating species - and will continue to probe and penetrate borders as students searching, families uniting, workers applying, and victims hiding. Part of all this, hidden until revealed by the back-story, is the government shifting electoral roles from family to individual units. It is a deliberate attempt to damage the opposition by effectively disenfranchising its younger supporters. Later the government, now facing defeat, regretted having held back those young people, because they were now supporters of remain. These are the causes and consequences of government action. And, while there's nothing new about governmental 'omni-shambles', these have been particularly spectacular.

And now we find that language of negotiation has been corrupted. It was the managers of the exit team deliberately feeding opinions into the debate as though they were facts. They knew that they would not be challenged by any monitoring agency. This is not a back-story discovery; the perpetrators are frank about it, arguing that winning support means saying what people can easily recognise and want to hear.

There were milder and more amusing shenanigans, including an hypnotist pitching pro-leave mind-games on Facebook.

There is also the opposition party's prolonged internal wrangling. A shady political outfit has been helping discontented plotters to dislodge the leader. The accusation is now that the leader has been half-hearted about the EU - which is true but not ill-judged. But the discontents' manoeuvring is ill judged - and, under-the-curtain, it gets worse. Discontents gerrymander voting rules to penalising leader support. Supporters have defied party-meeting shut downs. Tearful discontents speak of threats and bullying. Minor misunderstandings are pumped up into major accusations. Some allegations are found by the back-story to be bogus. The leaders' supporters are raising money to help the hard-up pay a new fee designed to exclude them. Both sides are calling on the law-courts - supporters to claim their right to vote, the discontents to challenge the leader. I leave it to you to figure why former supporters who had dumped the leader are now renewing their support. Charge and counter-charge is doing nobody any good. A discontented mogul has comprehensively lost another legal plea to unseat the party leader. The leader is calling for 'civility' - seen by some to be limp.

Meanwhile there are ferocious on-line and street-level exit-driven and triumphalist causes. They include, since the exit result, significantly increasing levels of hate-crime. They harass and bully in ways that shame us all - the historical extreme attacking those it calls 'vermin'. 'Shambles' is too weak a word to describe the consequences. Existing and potential customers, world-wide, are reassessing their relationship with the UK. There are questions about whether the Brits ever deserved a reputation for fair play. The question will keep historians busy for decades to come. Among the questions is...

*'how many ways have we found  
to forget, corrupt and discredit  
who, as a nation, we once took ourselves to be?'*

So who is listening to Labour? It has that majority of members affirming his leadership with their followership. And it has the ear of a right-wing government that can't afford to ignore its position on austerity. But it also has the ear of a discontented Labour challenger whose speeches, though middle-ground, are infused with stolen left-wing ideas - this opposition is not leading, it is surreptitiously following. A leader does not toe any ready-made line, but invites followers to embark on an un-trodden path to a better place. It is not conformative, it is transformative.

Tracking the historical, cultural and demographic causes of exit uncovers a range of overlapping consequences. Favouring exit is stronger among people with no memory of conditions during the blitz and its clear-up, with survival before the welfare state, and in a society recovering from war. Economic pressures make it harder to maintain intergenerational contact so that today's elderly can lose touch with that shared experience - unwittingly or deliberately. And that is what frees them to hold onto individualistic rather than collective beliefs informing how they live, how they justify it - and what they argue about with their grown-up children. The absence of interest has been called 'cultural amnesia', and it goes some way to explain belief in exit. The resulting questions concern whether the shifts in memory, culture and belief mean that the left-wing position is now unrecoverable. That concern with consequences includes asking if there is now any point in a party leader calling for 'civility'. It seems unlikely to penetrate the self-belief of believers believing that nothing of any interest happened until they came along. But, remember, the demography is changing - they are dying. Sad but true.

Moreover, volatile causes and consequences are not set in stone - they are malleable. It's true that the right is less malleable than the left. But its also true that, in dealing with the mix, the right is better than the left at hiding its conflicts. Those different positions are built into the different way each thinks. And evidence shows that the individualist right's core claims can be assembled into relatively simple but firm accounts of a patriotic righteousness - which everybody can sign up to. The socialist left is more visibly troubled. It is engaged in a continuous processing of conflicted accounts of various priorities. There are few yes-or-no answers to the questions it raises, the tangles need time to unwind and all is open to onlookers. The resemblance to soap-opera attracts media that have, so far, shown only passing interest in the left. But now the apparently untroubled right becomes less interesting than the deliciously troubled left. The onlooking media like family entanglements and sieze on who's-right-who's-wrong gossip. Discontented and moralistic family members work particularly well for media interests.

Left-wing socialism needs to get to grips with this exposure. The electorate needs it to explain why, in a changing and complex world, there are no yes-or-no answers to their questions. But there are answers - Labour has credible accounts of how its anti-austerity socialism is dismantling the neo-liberalism that damages the lives of all but the most privileged. Getting that hearing makes the parliamentary opposition the leader and government the follower. And when Labour finds itself in the wrong - nobody's perfect - it says so. It's greatest problem is that it needs time to work through what's going on. It's greatest advantage is that it does not lie. Time and message - will the electorate take the one to get the other?

If the discontents topple the leader their victory would not be the first Labour failure of imagination. Indeed, little of conventional politics is noteworthy for its new thinking. That evidence is that formal debates, occasional elections and impenetrable referendums evoke little credibility in contemporary experience. Their ritualism is found to be neither effective in connecting to the electorate nor for ensuring its representation. That evidence uncovers far-reaching issues calling for bold and lateral new thinking. There's talk, for example, of a post-exit loss of Scotland to the scots - post UK. Neither do I feel that we can confidently rule out the possibility that The City of London will move to a post-exit city state - protecting the financial services on which the prosperity of the rich depends. And there's more than negligible reason to wonder whether Cambridge academic high-ups are quietly nursing the protection of their global influence - and entirely irrespectively of Cambridge citizens' interests?

Where do citizens find any kind of lever on such powerful causes with such damaging consequences? People are preoccupied and distracted. Talk of exits, politics and corruption gets attention only when bread-and-butter preoccupations with survival are sorted. And, even then, the distractions of friends, fun, fashion, celebrity and game-show circuses can take over. T'was ever so - maybe...

*'two things only the people anxiously desire -  
bread  
and circuses'*

Juvenal

Or maybe not. Juvenal knew nothing of the well-documented intellectual life of the brit working classes. And his clever aphorism overlooks education. Educators have never more needed agreement about what it is for. As a trainee teacher, decades ago, I sat in on a geography teacher. He swept in making straight for the window and saying 'take a look at this'. The thirty-odd tumbled over to search through that big LCC school window. A window on their world, it was the visual aid, a street trader the question, and everybody a source - all on what kind of life that bloke might have. I've since avoided look-at-me schooling - demanding attention to what I know about 'strategy', 'negotiation', 'majority', 'referendum' - and 'Norway'. I get useable sense out of asking first what students can see and how they feel about it - maybe asking about their experience of 'pay', 'costs', 'safety', 'respect' and 'trust'? No student enters a classroom empty-handed - some have seen Norway, some knew the street trader. Schooling becomes education when the educator relates teacher talk to student



experience. It's listen-and-talk learning. I'm betting on some students' interests in back-story questions - not least about referendums.

Once the conversation is embarked there's no limit to where curiosity will take it. Sooner or later, usefully pushy students-as-interrogators will ask awkward questions about how much the UK pays to foreign expenditure, what the UN is, why is there a World Bank, how useful is NATO, what's foreign aid, why do we need trade agreements, what about protecting the planet - and is all this value for money, compared to what we pay to the EU? Some places to start eventually find useful places to go.

Talk like that undermines demands for yes-or-no questions and recognises the vacuity of simple-as-that answers. This back-story can only find questions that require us to 'wait-a-minute', and answers that begin with 'it depends'. Education is embroiled in all of this. There are plenty of wait-a-minute and it-depends moments in wondering if education is for being fit for employment, or finding stress-free well-being, or holding to positive beliefs, or damping down the troublesome.

The referendum was a test of education for citizenship, and it failed because ready-made government beliefs obscured more than they enlightened. The back-story was smothered. This is not good in a change-upon-change world. That demands an open and questioning independence of mind, critical thinking, and creativity, And that means liberating the kind of curiosity that only student-teacher exchanges in mainstream curriculum can call up. Causes and consequences.

This probing of the referendum exposes the many ways in which it was a mistake. Habitual believers distrust the Labour leader's attitude to parliamentary procedure; and he does entertain the possibility that the apparatus of elections and referendums has little representative validity. The under-the-curtain evidence finds that he has a point: the referendum result is a false majority, from a badly treated citizenship having to deal with shifting complexity, puzzling ambiguity and down-right deception. It's true that few initiatives succeed absolutely. But it is also true that, as a species, we learn more from failure than from success. A willingness to face uncomfortable realities is not a weakness, it's a strength. It is what makes political leaders trustworthy. A political impulse to camouflage failure and off-load blame does not.

A question put to the nation sheds a shocking glare on a glib comparison. The exit result more-or-less coincided with the centenary of The Somme. A question was raised about what the brits can learn from each historical event. I wondered if it was to be a lesson on the mistakes we make - then and now. But I suspected it was looking for self-congratulatory cheers for the courage, resilience and leadership on the Somme and in the exit. The question honours neither. The Somme was innocent men thrown by their nation and its leaders into useless terror, injury and death. Its leaders did not heed expert advice, they did not learn from failure, and they unthinkingly pushed men into murderous disaster - not once but repeatedly - and all in the name of patriotism. Beneath the spin we find the mortal danger of failing to learn from experience. Then and now little attempt was made to understand the causes and consequences behind the curtains. Learning is for finding and uncovering those hidden back-stories of what is going on. It's a finger-hold on survival - individually and collectively - in or out.

**25 July 2016**