



STUBBORNNESS AND DISUNITY: those oh, so attractive British features.

Some time ago I was watching a portion of the BBC's Brexit coverage – I can't remember if it was a *meaningful* vote being discussed (mistakenly I had assumed all parliamentary work aspired to be meaningful ... how wrong can one be!?) – when I happened to catch Andrew Mitchell, a conservative, voicing his admiration for what he called those ***“Attractive British features: stubbornness and the ability to push on regardless”***.

It was as if he was harking back to those halcyon days where Sid James utters his characteristic guffaw, Barbara Windsor puffs out her formidable chest, and we all *Carry on Regardless* (in good old post-war fashion). And the Brit sitcoms that came after that could be summed using the same phrase, whether the setting was: home (*The Fall and Rise of Reginald Perrin*), prison (*Porridge*), or department store (*Are You Being Served*). They all featured Brits in character, stubborn and pushing on regardless, as if their birthright was solely to be downtrodden ... but to aspire to rise above and beyond. Wankable nonsense when you think about it!

“Shit happens, but you know what? ... we will swim through it and emerge victorious, at the other end of the sewer!”

But continuing on for a moment with the Britcom analogy, each situation does not materialize from thin air. Fletch is doing time for previous misdeeds, Mrs Slocombe's pussy rules her life and Reginald Perrin is driven by unattainable love. Their lowly place in life is the fault of no one else but themselves. It's all of their own making!

So back to the Beeb and Andrew Mitchell. Just before his *Carry on Regardless* remark a reporter had been speaking about the fact that many in the EU have seen Britain as a partner in name only, never willing to contribute wholeheartedly, whether it be Human Rights or The Euro. For them, the quicker Brexit happens, the better, so that committed states that remain can get on with the job of progressing the Union, unhindered.

Suddenly, as if night had become day, I began to understand more clearly why I no longer live in Britain. Since leaving some decades ago, I have lived and worked in a number of contrasting locations around the globe and now realise that *compromise* and *unity* are high on my list of admirable values, while *stubbornness* (somewhere to the opposite of compromise) and *disunity* feature at the other end of my ethics scale. Maybe I should have stayed to fight the good fight from within, but to be frank I knew it would be like backing Wycombe Wanderers to win the EPL ... or Basil Fawlty to achieve an award for the best run hotel in Torquay!

Outstanding examples of compromise in recent times have been the *INF Treaty*, leading to cessation of *Cold War* hostilities in the 1980s, the end of apartheid in South Africa during the 90s, and the *Good Friday Agreement* in 1998. For each, it took great leaders working together, to get positive results. It required people who valued and prioritised compromise over stubbornness, unity instead of division. In the 1980s it was Mikhail Gorbachev and Ronald Reagan who led the way, in South Africa it was Nelson Mandela and FW de Klerk, then in 1998 John Hume and David Trimble buried their differences in the cause of peace. Five of these six leaders were subsequently awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. Unfortunately, the fruits of their labours are now questioned, with Russia and the USA sparring over the original INF treaty, segregation still very much visible in South Africa, and Brexit bringing pressures to bear on a still divided island of Ireland.

The formation of the EEC and progress to the EC and EU, is also a particularly worthy example of disparate factions joining to form a unified whole; of Europe's previously warring nations acknowledging their differences, but stressing their similarities, as they worked together in a spirit of compromise and cooperation, to bring about a unity of purpose that eventually covered all aspects of human endeavor. The result of that diligence and industry, spanning almost 70 years, is what Britain, through Brexit, has decided to revisit and relinquish.

Today our world, to an alarming extent, is about ideology and partisanship: us versus them. And Britain, by its exit from the EU seems to have placed itself front and centre of that movement. In doing so, the British nation has become second only to Trump and the GOP in America as the butt of world jokes. Two great countries, respected as bastions of solidity and leaders in democracy, brought to their knees with jingles and cartoons on social media that would have been unimaginable even ten years ago.

With stubbornness and disunity as the reality and hard-hitting jibes forming a backdrop it is inconceivable to envisage Johnson or Trump overseeing a reconciliation process - as Mandela did in South Africa, or Hume and Trimble did in Ireland - putting their own baggage behind them to focus on the issues at hand, for the benefit of the people and the nations involved. Putting the needs of the populace before the wish list of the party.

Britain is no longer a world power, with a far-flung empire to rule (unless one considers Gibraltar and The Falklands to be an empire). Britain in 2020 is a small, successfully developed country, boasting a medium-sized military, peopled by a vibrant and growing multicultural population. The USA, by comparison is still a very dominant world power, with an economy and a military to dwarf most other nations. America have emerged from the Trump era severely scathed, but nonetheless the wheels can be recalibrated to favour a more conciliatory approach, both within and without. Britain by contrast, through disunity at home and stubbornness abroad, has contrived to throw the baby out with the bath water. Recalibration in the UK's case is not an option; It is left outside the EU, with a tenuous *special* relationship to the US. So much now for those oh, so attractive British qualities: stubbornness and disunity!