

In British Democracy Sovereignty is for Only Some of the People

News:

Lord Michael Heseltine, a former conservative deputy prime minister is reported to have said in an interview, **“Well, we have survived Labour governments before. Their damage tends to be short-term and capable of rectification. Brexit is not short-term and is not easily capable of rectification. There will be those who question whether the short-term pain justifies the avoidance of the long-term disaster... If you look at the polls there is probably a bigger majority against Brexit than the referendum secured but that, I think, will continue to happen and it will become more and more unpopular as people realise what it’s all about.”** He suggested that the Labour Party will latch onto the unpopularity of Brexit and change their stance **“When that happens, the Labour party will move, and the present government will be left holding the baby. But then you have got to realise the present government is supported by large numbers of people as opposed to Brexit as I am. How long will they remain within the tribe and loyal to the party?”** (The Guardian)

Comment:

A year and a half after the “Brexit” referendum, in which 52% of the vote favoured Britain exiting from the European Union (EU), there is increasing public discussion about the possibility that Brexit will never actually happen.

The Conservative Party, as the ruling party and the party favoured by the British establishment, made a strategic blunder when they gambled that the Brexit referendum would be closely won in favour of remaining in the EU. Despite the differing views about EU membership within the Conservative Party, the strategy of the British establishment has long been to use its relationship with Europe for its benefit, while resisting European political union, which would ultimately dominate Britain’s sovereignty and foreign policy decisions.

Democracy in Britain, which prides itself as having the oldest democratic parliament, has never been about respecting the will of the people despite its pretense that the people are sovereign. The people who are really sovereign are the capitalists and wealthy elite, whose interests are all that the parliamentary system ever aims to secure. The competing interests of the British establishment are the factors that really influence the key strategic and policy decisions. The statements of the Conservative Party and, indeed, all of the mainstream politicians immediately after the Brexit referendum result that were clear statements of the will of the people, which they claim to respect were empty words, as is clear from the ensuing period which has been about damage limitation and finding a way to avoid the negative consequences of actually leaving the EU, if at all.

Prior to the referendum, the focus of the media was on immigration and legislation from Brussels dominating British policies. Since the referendum, such reminders of why the British people chose to leave the EU have ceased to take centre stage; giving way to much negativity about the consequences of actually leaving and what the people were not told prior to the referendum. There has been much talk of soft and hard Brexits and no-deal scenarios; all devoid of any clear strategic vision for Britain’s relationship post-Brexit. Strategic planning documents have been kept secret from the rest of the British parliament, while there are now highly publicised calls for them to be published. If there were to be a second referendum now, the British people would be well primed to reject Brexit, just as they had been primed to embrace it before.

The original aim of the Brexit referendum was to act as a bargaining chip to gain extra special status within the EU so that the British elite could take all of the economic benefits of membership, while not making the Brussels legislature sovereign. The goal of reaping the economic benefits while conceding as little sovereignty as possible will remain the goal of the British establishment for a long time whatever the actual relationship with the European Union will be in the future. Neither the will of the majority nor any of the ordinary people has anything to do with this strategy which has been decided with complete disregard for them, as is the case in every democracy.

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