

## **BREXIT: SYMPTOMS AND TRUE CAUSES - A DESPAIRING LACK OF FAIR PROCESS LEADERSHIP**

**By Prof. LUDO VAN DER HEYDEN**

---

### **THE MAIN PROBLEM FOR EU AND UK TODAY: LACK OF FAIR PROCESS LEADERSHIP**

The premise to this article is a simple linear theory linking the how and the what of collective action: fair process leadership (the “how”, abbreviated FPL) is a leadership method that generates both collective performance and individual commitment (the “what”), while, conversely, violations of FPL reduce collective performance as well as individual commitment.

In short, the more the EU is seen to be applying FPL, the more people will adhere to it; the more people perceive the EU to be violating FPL, the more they will resist and fight it, even though they might agree with the EU (and Brexain) as a desirable outcome!

It can't be simpler: FPL is for the social sciences what Newton's law is for physics and engineering. Unfortunately, it is, let's say, a well kept secret. As a former student stated “FPL is common sense, it simply is not common practice.” In the words of French philosopher Levinas, FPL finds its roots and justification in others, and not in one's urges, instincts, or self.

The same applies to the UK today: because so many perceive the whole process leading to the Brexit vote as unfair – and there is enough evidence for that conclusion – these same people will continue to fight the outcome, with the unhappy consequence that Britain, instead of being firmly behind the vote and committed to its outcome (the declared intention of the vote), will be divided and face great difficulties moving forward.

There is no sustainable outcome in the long term outside the realm of FPL. If you doubt this, consider the USSR, communism, the inquisition, and the great leaders that re-unified South Africa. It is such a process that Britain will probably have to turn to to re-unify and regroup following this disastrous episode.

### **HAPPY ARE THE COUNTRIES LED BY FAIR PROCESS LEADERS**

Due process, fair process does not exist like the oxygen that fuels each piece of life on the planet. Even in fair process cultures, due process can disappear when leaders stop being fair play with each other and with their citizens. The Weimar Republic sought to be relatively fair play in post-WWI Germany. However, the winners decided to literally crush Germany,

with war reparations that killed the German economy, and that unfair deal the Weimar Republic, even with its best intent, could not alter. We now what happened after. A new leader taking charge can largely reduce the prevailing fair play in a country: the successors of Mandela, De Klerk, and Tutu are living proof of that. It also is the biggest charge against the Bush administration (that of George W, not the father), which showed a fair amount of FPL violation, culminating in the (second) Iraq war: we can watch the negative fall-outs of this non-FPL decision making daily on our TV screens.

The South African episode also demonstrates something more fundamental: it is when leaders are clueless, truly challenged, but still have the best interests of their country at heart, that some turn to fair process leadership. The prototypical leader of this type would certainly be Abraham Lincoln. When driven by private and darker agendas, they become Machiavellian, manipulative, or even worse, use force, with of course appropriately biased argumentation. At that point countries risk falling into the darkness. Eventually, when they survive, a new fair process leader emerges, fuels renewed democratic energies that lead the country into periods of light and renewed prosperity. The figures of de Gaulle, Adenauer are other examples. And if Germany is great it is because it had a string of these, including Schmidt and now Merkel. And if the EU is going to be great, the EU President and Commission better be perceived as practitioners of fair process leadership. If not, the project has no chance. That is the big lesson from the vote.

## **FAIR PLAY AS A VALUE PROPOSITION FOR THE EU**

Therein also lies the hope: that renewed energies and renewed commitments to fair process leadership might emerge to the benefit of all – for its denial is at the expense of all. There is no other sustainable path. The future of the EU requires fair process – precisely because it is such an innovative, and thus challenging.

The first point is to realize that fair process, as stated before, does not fall like manna from the air, that it is brought, exemplified and hence diffused by fair leaders. Which the current leadership on both sides have not shown to be. I do not just think of the EU's Commission or President, but also the presidents and prime ministers whose basic practice it is to point out any realization of the EU as the result of their own contributions, and any EU failure as the work of others. As Sartre said, "l'enfer c'est les autres!" Well in the EU there are quite a number of others that can be blamed for something unfair! It was one of the major points of the Brexit camp, which the EU leadership insufficiently countered. Of course, the leadership of the Brexit camp also proved to be unfair play, leading its leader, Boris Johnson, to have to withdraw and leaving the UK in crisis too, for there is no sustainable victory outside of FPL.

The first requirement for FPL is the prevalence of fairness, as a basic premise or value proposition. Here also lies the first hurdle for FPL : few people would blatantly admit they are unfair. "Of course, we are fair, we have to!" Unfortunately, as Anaïs Nin stated so brilliantly, "we see the world, not as it is, but as we are." We have a Darwinian tendency to agree with ourselves more than with others. Dictators have this proclivity to an unreasonable degree. It sometimes takes millions of victims and a good legal system to find justice in such

cases. Stalin's victims were vindicated only in the miserable end of the USSR, but this proof by extinction was insufficient for fair process leadership to emerge.

## **THE PURSUIT OF FAIRER SHARES OFTEN COMES AT THE EXPENSE OF FAIR PLAY**

One of the big confusions in fairness is that between fair share and fair play. One of the reasons why it is so important to operationalize fairness is to understand the main distinction between two radically different notions of fairness: "fair play" on one hand, "fair share" on the other. Fair play is literally how we play the game, it is within our realm; fair share is largely what we inherit, and is largely the work of others. "Life is unfair" because we typically do not choose our endowments: the choice of parents (our own DNA), place of birth, gender, ethnicity, ...

FPL theory simply states that people, families, organizations and societies ought to privilege fair play over fair share, with the promise that, if the game is played fairly, people (especially those that lose and have a rough deal) will come to accept a tough deal for the greater good of the community, and because they consider it as the outcome of fair play. As a union member once said, "I hate the outcome, but you have been fair play, so I have to accept the outcome, even if it goes against me." It is the fair play introduced in the EU market that has come to the benefit in terms of higher gains for trade. Before national champions, often with the help of their governments would limit access by foreign competitors to their markets. Increases in fair play typically increases competitiveness.

There is a fundamental duality that all leaders need to be clear about: the pursuit, especially the passionate pursuit of (so-called) fair share typically generates unfair play. Financial traders, in pursuit of their fair shares, will resort to unfair play, traders often seeking "inside information" to generate superior returns - something financial economists have described using the lovely term of "asymmetric information." To really make good money you do not need to be smarter, or more innovative, you can also seek to possess information that most others do not (Armstrong won many French tours because he better than others knew how to cheat, presumably supported by the UCI). When it is your smarts, your research, all is ok; when it is through insider information or other illicit means, it is unfair play.

The big contribution of this line of academic thinking (accomplished over centuries) has been to define the necessary and sufficient conditions for fair play. There are 4 conditions (there is no shame in admitting that FPL is not rocket science): clarity (or transparency), consistency (the absence of bias, whether against people, over time, or across issues), voice (the ability to speak up without fear of reprisal (something that is absent from too many corporations and families, that devout protestants facing the inquisition found absent too ...), and, finally, correctability in the face of new evidence.

The pursuit of a Brexit victory led its camp to make false promises to old people in the UK (concerning the NHS budget), and also cleverly diverted the focus of the campaign to current and local issues, away from the vote issue, which was the future of the UK and of the EU. It worked in the short run, but victory, acquired through unfair play, is not lasting. Worse, the UK which defended its national sovereignty, might break up as a result. The major point of FPL – and this is key in politics – is that the country has to regroup and recommit to the

winners. A wide perception of non-FPL amongst the Brein camp (which includes the young, the City of London, Scotland and Northern Ireland) is going to be a major challenge, which is going to require a kind of South African reconciliation process.

Philosophers have argued convincingly that “the truth escapes the judge,” that fair play cannot become a compliance code, and that it calls for a culture of unyielding and uncompromising search for “the right thing.” That then is the 5<sup>th</sup> and final requirement of fair play. All agree that the spirit prevailing over the Brexit discussion has been of the worse that people can recall.

## **THE BREXIT VOTE: RIFE WITH UNFAIR PLAY**

The evidence is now coming in in droves: many British voters did not know what they voted on. The economic turmoil that has followed the vote amply demonstrates this: the shock is proportional to the surprise. Not having had a voice in many EU matters (such as immigration), they finally were given a vote which they used to say no to the current EU process. In this they are akin to many Greeks who, unlike EU rhetoric, were not given 300 billion € but rather 30 billion, a big part of the rest being spent on rescuing major French and German banks. However, at least many Greeks admit that many of the problems of Greece lay with the lack of reform in Greece, and the race to get a share of EU funds, even if one is unfair in the process. The sad thing is that many citizens in the EU agree with the British people on that, but that was not principally what the vote was about – since indeed it should be easier to fix up the EU problems with authentic UK support than without.

A premise of democracy is that people know what they are voting on, are presented with clear options and understand likely consequences. None of this was true in Brexit, as is typically the case in many EU votes that too often end up in some kind of national vote. Brexit leaders unfairly reframe the vote not as one about the future of Britain, but as one that would, amongst others, allow funding to go to the NHS, something that the EU has little power over, even if it wished. The EU has allowed itself to be cast as the black sheep of national ineptitude. The Brexit crowd has an uncommon talent for exploiting this.

The British debate was insufficiently driven by a culture of doing the right thing for the UK (clarified by debate), but rather by ideology (which violates the criterion of correctibility), self-interest, or emotion. UKIP and many Brexit voters are driven by an independence ideology that the British nation is sovereign and ought to remain so. It is not the smallest paradox of the vote that it so instantly reveals that no British nation actually exists (hardly a surprise for a “united” country) and that the most likely outcome (if this farce is played to its unhappy end) is that Scotland (and perhaps also Northern Ireland) will now seek independence from the UK. This is truly becoming independence day, but not in the way Mr Farage assumed: the farce is boomeranging back!

So what might have driven the politicians to decide on holding a vote on Brexit after all? David Cameron sought to win back the leadership of the Tory party, and most likely, so did Boris Johnson, who certainly showed little inclination to do the “thing” that a large majority of Londoners wanted, which is to remain in the EU. Mr Farage found another platform to voice his hatred (of the EU, if not more), and to peddle his most deceitful premise of “we are

going to make Britain great again!” As FPL theory predicts, all lost and and got their “fair share” (out they are); what was certainly not fair play is the imposition the vote imposes on others.

## **FAIR LEADERSHIP AS A FOUNDATION FOR DEMOCRACY**

One of my (few) academic contributions has been to add “leadership” to fair process, based on the realization that fair play only exists and sustains itself if exemplified and sustained by fair leaders. To be short, George Washington and Abraham Lincoln were amazingly fair leaders, the second perhaps even more so than the first. A lot of what makes America great is still due to the shadow and the imprints cast by these two great leaders. Mandela, De Klerk, and Tutu were the fair process leaders that led South Africa to end its apartheid chapter, and open a new one. Unfortunately, fair process leaders are not necessarily succeeded by fair process leaders. Some say it is the liberty God gave us...

Let me be clear: I find the lack of clarity and courage of EU leaders scandalous. The voices of Jacques Delors and other EU founders such as Adenauer, Monnet, Schuman, and Spaak have gone silent. Obama was a sole voice in the Brexit debate, but his intervention was seen as unfair play and backfired. In any case, Every voice that could enlighten was immediately silenced by nationalists (a well honed tactic, practiced in other EU countries as well).

So all remained silent, in ignorance, in hope, finally in ignominy ... This has been seen before, with more dramatic consequences than Brexit, for sure. Where were the voices presenting the EU viewpoint, with clarity, conviction, passion, talking about a world that is converging and so interconnected that it is scaring many, especially the elderly, into believing that national retreats are the only heaven. This is what citizens believed too during the great pest, taking refuge in their “safe” homes, avoiding contact with others ... where they would be condemned to die with near certainty by rats carrying the plague on their backs. One simply should declare EU votes out of the bounds of national debates and votes, for too complex. Better left to the Parliament, until such date that Europeans, all together, can vote on European issues in European elections.

Leaders are there to unify the country behind a clear purpose, not to divide them more than they already are. The referendum was in current circumstances neither needed nor helpful ... except for reasons of opportunistic party politics. A great leader does not take his or her country hostage for his or her private agenda. History should have thought us by now dangerous this path is, and how likely.

## **THE IMPORTANCE OF DUE PROCESS**

FPL theory does not stop with fair play and fair leaders. It further states that fair play ought to be enforced by fair and effective processes. Legal scholars would call it due process. Academics have worked on that too, identifying five fundamental steps of any due process.

The first step consists in engaging voters implicated by any decision around the key issue of framing the right question: what are we truly vote on? What is the question that we need to debate and which needs to be resolved? That is exactly the question that ideologues of UKIP,

the Front National in France, or the Flemish Blok (now called Belang) in Belgium do not wish to engage in with an open mind – for they already have framed that question in a way that suits their agenda, and will find any excuse to kill any framing that differs from theirs.

The argument is simple: independence or sovereignty is safety, so anything that challenges sovereignty is wrong ... for it attacks independence! Let us not forget that it is sovereignty and nationalism that causes wars, and that there is no safety in war! As the Syrians find out, as the Germans found out twice, as the Lebanese are finding out today. As the US destroying Hussein and its written Iraqi regime found out.

And as the Brits are now finding out: in an interconnected world, sovereignty is not necessarily bliss. It is the process of abandonment of some part of sovereignty that the Europeans are experimenting with. Abandoning sovereignty is something we do all the time: the town does it to the province, the province does it to the nation. The Scots finally realized they had abandoned too much sovereignty to the English Parliament, so they got theirs back. As is always the case in innovation, early experiments rarely work perfectly.

Cameron by calling the election, Farage and Johnson by their emotional tactics of fear, ridicule, nostalgia, and lies (involving promises of more monies for NHS, definitely not an EU issue) are likely to have inflicted more damage on the UK and the pound than any vindictive Brussels bureaucrat could have envisaged. FPL theory states that it will not bring them far, and that it will not be sustainable. In the case of Johnson, it has only taken a few days for him to resign from becoming PM, while Farage had to admit the next morning that some of the Brexit lines were lies, but effective ... We shall see said the blind man ...

To be fair, one should never call a vote on something that is so hard to fathom, let alone understand: the future of the UK is a formidable question, the future of the EU is an even bigger one.

The UK has seen a 100 year decline relative to its grand past (built on trade, industry, and empire). Joining the EU was a grand change: from Commonwealth to EU-wealth. Then, if you go for this, for God sake, take leadership. One of the great shames of this entire debate is that the UK never quite tried EU leadership, and that the EU has never seen what UK leadership could bring to the EU project. It may remain one of the great unanswered questions.

The most important point is that a good decision process is one where the alternatives are clear, including on consequences. That is why the decision to vote was so irresponsible. One should call a referendum when the issue is clear – and requires national approval. Not when the vote is not really required in the short run, and when it will only reveal how deeply split the UK is, also on its own future. In such conditions one calls for straw votes, to find out where people stand, and whether further debate is needed.

## **AND NOW WHAT?**

Contrary to the prophets of doom, the world is converging, and nation states have to unite, in the interest of the planet, the world, and themselves.

The EU is a very modern idea, a true innovation, it is imperfect, like any innovation. But it would be both a denial of the history of nations and of the human race if the temporary denial of fair process leadership that is represented in the Brexit episode were to sustainably take the upper hand.

The Empire has stricken back. It is likely to be a swan song. The EU is a movement for fair process that calls for greater leadership. It also is the biggest movement on this planet that is not imperial, not threatening to anyone. Quite on the contrary, it is a good bet for a better and safer world, and it is the best one around.

Brexit may end up to be the necessary wake-up call, both for the UK and for the EU. I know where my vote lies, I want the UK firmly as part of the EU. But fairly, authentically, with a clear voice, one that is willing to listen and change its mind, based on facts (or as they say in Washington, true facts), bringing to the EU debate all the talents and competences, and its unique viewpoing. It may still happen, I am not despairing yet, something good will come out of the current mess.