

Spain and the EU test democratic legitimacy and consent

Growing up as I did in a settled country with a strong but flexible constitution, the issue of government legitimacy and democratic consent were ones for the history books.

The transfer of major powers to the EU changed all that. I came to realise I was caught up in a re run of the democratic struggles of earlier centuries in the UK, as many people and some in Parliament came to challenge the authority of government – not this time of the King, but of the EU. We have now found our resolution, through the ballot box. We have also resolved the issue of Scottish nationalism through a democratic vote of the Scottish people, which was agreed to be a once in a generation matter by both sides prior to the vote.

In Spain they are far from finding a resolution. The Spanish state has always had tensions between the powerful regional states and the centre in Madrid. The Basque country has chafed at Spanish rule, and Catalonia has long had an independence movement. These feelings have attracted more support as a result of the EU demanding more austerity year after year from the Spanish budget, and because the EU has assisted with a general economic policy which has failed to deliver good levels of employment and income.

In December 2016 the Spanish voters elected a Parliament which was simply incapable of forming any kind of government. Another election ensued in June 2017. Again no majority government could form. Instead the second largest party, the socialists, agreed to abstain so the leader of the largest party could win a vote to head a minority coalition government. Mr Rajoy, the PM, was elected on a ticket of no tax rises, but has to put some into his budget to try to comply with EU deficit rules.

It is this very weak type of government that has to handle the Catalan crisis. It is true Mr Rajoy can count on more Parliamentary support from Spain outside Catalonia, the Canary islands and the Basque country. Most of the rest want to keep Catalonia in Spain, where it makes a substantial contribution to tax revenues above its share of public spending.

The Spanish government's decision to deploy national police to take control by force set public sector workers employed by the Spanish state against public sector workers employed by the devolved Catalan government. It has shaken the whole question in many Catalan's minds, of who should have the authority and the power over them? Mr Rajoy may come to appreciate that in a democracy those with the power must behave in a way which preserves the implied consent to the system by most of the people for most of the time. If too many people come to resent or challenge the democratic authority, the fact that it was elected does not solve the problem. When elected to office, particularly in a weak coalition that cannot even command a majority as a coalition, office holders should understand the need for sufficient consent

to exercise their constitutional powers.

[Weak new UK car market continues](#)

The new car market was growing before the Brexit vote, grew well after the vote and continued growing after the Article 50 letter. It turned down in April of this year as a result of Treasury and Bank of England policy.

The Bank has required banks to rein in car loans. The Treasury hit buyers with higher VED on dearer vehicles. The government put question marks over diesel and petrol vehicles leading people to worry about future values. This continued decline was to be expected and I have explained this before on this site.

[Why young people should embrace Brexit](#)

There is no greater gift that we can pass on to our children than the gift of living in freedom.

I was born into a free country. I valued the democratic traditions, the rule of domestic law, the ability to fire the government through the ballot box, the right to voice a view and debate what was wrong.

I watched with growing apprehension as the decision to join a common market morphed into the wholesale loss of our freedoms.

We surrendered the right to make our own decisions about what taxes to impose, what laws to pass, what tariffs if any we should impose on our imports and how the government should spend the money it has raised. The European Court struck down our duly enacted legislation, made us repay corporation tax to large companies, and often found our country in violation of their wishes.

The decision to leave the EU changes all that.

Today, in the EU we are not allowed to remove VAT from female hygiene products as Parliament would like to do. We have to place taxes on a wide range of green products from insulation to boiler controls, that Parliament would like to abolish. We have to impose high tariffs on a range of foodstuffs coming to us from the Commonwealth and the wider non EU world, making food dearer and punishing developing countries. We see our fishing grounds run down under an EU policy that manages to be harmful both to the

fish and to our fishermen. We have gone from being a large exporter of fish prior to joining, to be a net importer.

Leaving the EU gives us all the chance to change things for the better.

Where we like an EU law or regulation we can keep it. Where an EU law or tax is unjust or damaging we can amend or remove it.

Young people will be particular beneficiaries of the change leaving generates. It will create great opportunities for enterprise, for creativity, for better government. It will strengthen the voices of the young and give more power to their votes. They will inherit a political system which allows them to shape or dismiss the governments that rule. We are not turning our backs on Europe. There will still be plenty of joint working, cultural exchanges, movement of people to visit, learn, shop and invest in each other's countries.

Just look at the opportunities it will offer us for more and better jobs. There will be big scope to replace imports with domestic food and industrial products. This will provide opportunities for well paid jobs and for establishing new businesses. If the EU opts for tariffs and other barriers as they seem to want, our farmers will supply us with more of our own food, and our car factories will produce more of the cars we chose to drive.

Just look at the opportunities it will offer to improve our laws and make our government bend more to the popular will. We will be able to spend the £12bn a year we currently send to the EU and do not get back will help in many ways. We need to debate more how we should spend this Brexit windfall, whilst reminding our government we do not want to go on sending money to rich countries in the EU once we have left. Education and health are priorities which we can spend more on once we have left.

Above all where young people see an injustice or want to follow a cause for a better country they will be able to do so safe in the knowledge that we have the powers here at home to adopt the remedy. Where today the answer is so often Brussels will not allow us to do that, tomorrow once out we will be able to do as we wish.

Freedom is heady. It teems with opportunity. Let us unite in confidence that when the UK is a free country again, it can also be a better country as a result.

[Thames Water meeting and a new reservoir](#)

I met Thames Water at Conference to review progress with handling surface

water, waste water and future drinking water supply.

Thames said they were making good progress with reducing leaks and installing meters which cut demand. They expected to need a new large reservoir at Abingdon in due course, as a rising population will need more water despite measures to cut waste and to manage demand.

I am all in favour of making good provision for water, and do not want water to be rationed by high prices and restricted supply as it is a necessity for us all.

I asked them to work with Wokingham Borough and West Berkshire on ensuring surface water can be handled when there is persistent and heavy rain. Above all we need to avoid more cases where surface water swells the levels in waste water systems to the point where they overflow.

The fishermen's case

At Conference I was handed the following figures taken from NAFC Marine Centre Study 2016

EU (ex UK) boats land 10 times more fish from our waters than we land from theirs

14 times more cod and haddock

173 times more herring

16 times more mackerel.

This is a very one sided Common Fishing Policy.