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One Nation Toryism rests on patriotism, a concept the Left struggles to understand

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In British politics, there is a belief that, however we vote, nothing much changes - I lost count of how many times I was told, during the EU Referendum, that if we voted to leave, "they" would never allow it CREDIT: BEN STANSALL/ AFP POOL



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Britain's elites have not reacted well to Boris Johnson's victory (<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/opinion/2019/12/13/big-majority-would-victory-boris-johnson-brexiteveryone-slandered/>). Here are some of the responses to his triumph, all voiced by members of what we might reasonably call the Establishment: "The Arch-Mountebank has shown himself a supreme cad." "Bloated with ego and over-feeding, punctuated by heroics and hot air; I can't tell you how depressed I feel about it." "It is incredible that a man in his position should make such gaffes." "I am terrified of Boris, the only thing to be said is, he is preferable to Corbyn".

Actually, I just played a little trick on you. That last quote should have read: "I am terrified of Winston, the only thing to be said is, he is preferable to L[loyd] G[eorge]". Its author was Lady Alexandra Metcalfe, daughter of Lord Curzon, and its sentiments were typical of respectable Tory opinion at the time. All the earlier quotations also referred to the wartime Harrovian prime minister rather than the present Etonian one. All came from within the Establishment.

Churchill was carried to office by the masses, not the classes. Britain's political and intellectual elites dismissed him as an unprincipled populist, but the country at large loved his upbeat patriotism. Churchill's appeal went beyond foreign policy. Like his father Randolph, he was associated with the creed known as "Tory Democracy": the belief (broadly speaking) that the once-aristocratic Conservative Party should align itself with patriotic working men rather than with factory owners. It was Churchill's Disraelian background, his interest in social reform, that made him Labour's preferred candidate in 1940.

In his book The Churchill Factor

(<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/books/bookreviews/11182335/the-churchill-factor-by-boris-johnson.html>), Boris argues that "Tory Democracy galvanised and invigorated the Tory Party". He dwells approvingly on Churchill's career-long interest in poverty alleviation. To read that book six years on is to see the silliness of the claim that Boris has come late or opportunistically to One Nation Toryism. The PM always saw himself as an heir to that ample strain of conservatism – the strain that was generally dominant between the fall of Robert Peel and the rise of Margaret Thatcher.

Don't make the mistake, though, of thinking that this makes Boris some sort of soggy social democrat. Like Churchill, he has a reflexive dislike of bossiness, of nannying, of being told what to think. Like his predecessor, he knows that private enterprise enriches ordinary people in a way that government intervention rarely does. Like the old war leader, he grasps that cutting taxes benefits everyone –

including people who don't pay taxes, but whose prospects none the less rise and fall with the wider economy.

Boris combines a commitment to personal freedom with an understanding that, as technological change accelerates, people value a sense of belonging. His exuberant patriotism reflects the need for common endeavour that is encoded in our DNA. Again, there is nothing especially new here. On the contrary, it is a very traditional form of conservatism.

Danny Kruger, who served as Boris's political secretary until he became the new MP for Devizes three weeks ago, once put it beautifully: "Liberalism is the philosophy of the individual; it says 'I shall...'. Socialism is the philosophy of the state; it says 'you must...'. Conservatism is the philosophy of society; it says 'we should...'"

Danny's "we" refers to communities, to villages, to voluntary associations – but, most of all, to the nation. In the eyes of Momentum activists, British nationalism (<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2019/12/27/labour-partys-patriotism-problem-goes-back-much-jeremy-corbyn/>) (unlike Irish, Venezuelan or Palestinian nationalism) is an unspeakable evil. In theory Corbynites love the idea of individuals coming together for a greater purpose; in practice they shudder at the most common expression of such a coming together, namely shared loyalty to the United Kingdom.

Hence their bewilderment at Boris's success. If you see everything in terms of imagined hierarchies of privilege, the popularity of a white, privately-educated PM who quotes long passages from the Iliad must be perplexing. But, in true Tory Democrat style, Boris appeals to those – the large majority – who feel attached to their land.

What is Tory Democracy in the twenty-first century? In the first instance, it involves prising our institutions from the grip of cliques which are both anti-Tory and anti-democratic.

A great deal of the discontent with our political system stems from the belief that, however we vote, nothing much changes. The three-year campaign by our elites to overturn the Brexit referendum was the most obvious and extreme example – but it was not especially surprising. I lost count of how many times I was told, during that campaign, that if we voted to leave, "they" would never allow it.

"They", of course, means the people who administer the country regardless of who sits in Number 10. Our public institutions are largely controlled by appointees who

pursue the same agenda whatever the wishes of the ministers to whom, in theory, they are ultimately answerable.

Executive agencies, civil service bureaucracies, universities, the judiciary, the BBC – all are run by and for people who are obsessed with diversity and equality, back deeper European integration and see higher public spending as the solution to every challenge. Sure, one or two conservatives can squeak through, but they then often become targets – just [ask Sir Roger Scruton](#)

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2019/07/23/cowardly-tories-abandoned-sir-roger-scruton-leftist-show-trial/>.

In opposition, Tories sometimes make noises about constraining our quangos, or at least making more balanced public appointments. In government, it rarely happens. Or rather, it hasn't in the past.

This time, though, things are different. The campaign against Brexit dragged the issue of democratic control up everyone's agenda. Our rulers' disdain for public opinion, until now implicit, was made fatefully overt. We saw, all disguise cast off, what they thought of us, and we didn't care for it.

Understandably, people now demand public officials who behave as servants, not rulers. Boris embodies and articulates that demand. Stand by for a shift in power from Whitehall to local authorities, from appointed officials to elected representatives, from state bureaucracies to individual citizens – and, of course, from Brussels to Westminster. About bloody time.

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