

# What the Hell

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**W**HAT THE HELL has happened to them? Have they gone crazy? The British, of all people?

I have always been an Anglophile. Even as a youngster, when I was a member of a terrorist organization devoted to driving the British out of our country. At the time I was working in a lawyer's office which had English clients. I liked most of them. (For us colonials, they were all "English".)

The British always struck me as a highly rational people. Self-controlled, moderate, averse to shows of emotion.

And here they are, making a quite irrational decision on a matter of historic importance, letting their aversion for "foreigners" guide and misguide their vote.

THE VERY occasion was as un-British as can be.

The British pride themselves on having invented modern democracy. Their "elite" never had any illusions about the common man (and much later, common woman). British voters did not make fateful decisions. They elected people much more competent than themselves to make the fateful decisions, people educated for the job. Actually, people born for the job.

The democratically elected leaders of the British people often had a thinly veiled contempt for the people who elected them. The quintessential British leader, Winston Churchill, famously said that "the best argument against democracy is a five-minute conversation with the average voter."

Therefore, any kind of a plebiscite is strictly against the character of British democracy. A referendum is an invitation to irresponsibility. A person follows their fleeting emotions, they may vote for the opposite the very next day—when it is too late. A vote for "yes" or "no" on the spur of a moment can be quite random for a lot of people—certainly when the result hangs on 1% or 2%. (A referendum should at least require a 75% or 60% majority.)

Last week's referendum showed why referenda are irresponsible. A majority—although a tiny majority—of the British voted democratically to leave the European Union.

Why, for God's sake?

By now, thousands of commentaries have been broadcast and printed. Thousands of explanations have been put forward. But in the end it boils down to one thing:

the British were fed up with all those Frogs and Huns and other "Foreigners", who want to tell them what to do for their own good.

To hell with them.

I vividly remember a wonderful British poster after the fall of France in 1940: "Alright then, Alone!" British people of my generation will forever remember the spirit of that slogan.

But this is not 1940. The world has moved on. The world is continuing to move. The "Brexit" may be a nice toy to play with. But it is disastrous.

OF ALL the many explanations put forward for this decision, the most convincing one is that throughout the democratic world there is a growing distaste, even aversion, for the existing political establishment.

Many British voters, it seems, did not vote for or against the Brexit, but for or against the established parties.

This sentiment spurs on extreme fascist, and in some countries also radical leftist, parties everywhere. Donald Trump is the misbegotten child of this sentiment. So, in a more likeable form, is Bernie Sanders.

In Israel we have the same prevalent sentiment, only more so. The spontaneous outcry that sprang up on the morrow of the 1973 Yom Kippur war, "Enough, we are fed up with you!" (or "Enough, you disgust us!"), which swept Golda Meir and Moshe Dayan from power, is now more prevalent than ever.

The democratic world is fed up with the establishment. Everywhere, politicians are seen as corrupt hirelings of the ultra-rich, or, at least, as "out of touch".

The Brexit vote is part of this worldwide trend. It is a protest vote, that has little to do with the subject of the referendum. The EU is seen as an embodiment of the upper class, elitist, undemocratic bureaucracy, a replica of the homegrown "elite". So, away with it!

It is a childish attitude. A toddler kicking his mother. BUT IT is more than that. Much more.

It is the last stand of nationalism, a step back for humanity.

I am a nationalist. I believe that humanity is still at the stage of nationhood. I believe that no creed or "ism" can overcome nationalism at the present stage of human endeavor.

Communism tried and failed, after a century-long struggle. Fascism, which tried to become supra-national, tried and failed. The Christian religion has tried and failed. Wherever these and other creeds have tried to oppose nationalism, they have been crushed.

Perhaps the most blatant example was communism. When attacked by Germany, the Soviet Union fell back on “patriotism”. Where communism combined with nationalism, as in Vietnam, it flourishes.

Zionism was victorious because it turned the Jewish religious community into a modern Israeli nation.

Why did nationalism become the Zeitgeist, some 250 years ago? Because its spiritual content matched the material circumstances. Economic, military and communicational developments demanded ever larger entities. Small regional entities—like the Scots, the Corsicans, the Basques,—could not meet these necessities, could not defend themselves anymore, nor compete with larger economic units. So they joined the new nation-states—Great Britain, France, Spain. The German Reich and the Italian republic came into being.

This reality is now quickly becoming obsolete. The economy has become global, the nuclear bomb is the weapon of great powers, the global environment can be saved only by a huge joint effort by all humanity, the internet and the media connect all human beings in total disregard of borders. The nation-state cannot compete in isolation.

But human emotions do not change as quickly as material reality. People cling to old ideas. Nations still have a powerful hold on their nationals. Every international soccer match shows this clearly and powerfully. The soccer hooligans are a true reflection of their nations.

This is the real root of the Brexit. Nationalism resists regional and global logic. It fights for existence, it clings to the past. Like the weavers in the 1892 German play by Gerhart Hauptman, who destroyed the new machines of the industrial age, in order to preserve the obsolete economic

order on which their livelihood depended.

History can be quite amusing. One of the results of this movement toward larger post-nationalist entities is the breakup of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century nations. If real sovereignty moves from London and Paris and Madrid to Brussels, there is no need for Scots, Corsicans or Basques to stay in their larger nation. They can go back to their prior local mini-nationalism and remain in the EU. The United Queendom (not my phrase) will become Little England again.

AS A teenager I joined the terrorist underground because I believed that we should have our own nation-state, which became Israel. In the 1948 war I became convinced that there was no way to compel the Palestinians to give up their craving for a nation-state of their own. Thus the “two states for two nations” idea was born. But not much later I advocated the creation of a “Semitic Union”, in which Israel, Palestine and the other Arab countries would cooperate on a regional basis.<sup>1</sup>

There is something pathetic and moving in the British decision. They remember the “Alright then, Alone” mood, the proudest moment in their entire history. They remember when their tiny island-nation ruled the seas and a fifth of the continents, including my country.

But it is still madness.

HUMAN PROGRESS demands larger and larger entities. This century will see a new World Order. Alas, I will not be around, but I already see it with my mind's eye. It is inevitable.

The question is if this world order will be democratic, or not. It is up to humanity to ensure it is. The same is true for the European Union now. Those who dislike its set-up must fight for change—for its true democratization, for effective social welfare and human rights. That's what the British voters should have voted for.

Instead of which they voted for “Stop the world, we want to get off!”

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<sup>1</sup>Recently, an Israeli group called “Two States, One Motherland” took up the same idea again.