

Union Jack and the Beanstalk – a modern fairy story

Union Jack was asking himself once again why he was called Union Jack.

He had just been reading a history book about a time when his country, the United Kingdom, was independent and free and used to display lots of so called Union jacks or flags.

Could his Mum have been wandering down memory lane? He asked her again.

She was quite severe with her reproof. “I have told you many times” she said “that I called you Union Jack after our glorious European Union, and don’t you forget it.

It’s seditious talk, you know, to suggest otherwise. If you bang on about the old union jack flag they might start questioning you for racism, and I haven’t got time for all that”.

In truth, all was not well in the UK part of the great European Union.

Jack and his mother could see the distant European castle that governed them. More importantly they had regular dealings with the EU Inspectors and tax collectors. They were told about all the latest laws by the local police.

Jack thought secretly that they were having to pay more and more tax.

Their income did not seem to go up. Indeed, it was going down. The fish from their local seas mainly went to the Union’s ships, so they were banned from fishing for them.

They had to accept big taxes on any food coming in from outside the Union. They lived under increasingly complicated and expensive rules which made it slower and more costly to grow and make things for yourself.

If Jack ever shared any of this with his mother she warned him off it. She told him the European Union was very good to them really, and it would be much worse if they were not in it.

For a couple of months, they had to just concentrate on changing all their emails and website to comply with some new directive, instead of earning their living.

Privately, Jack’s mother did understand that things were going from bad to worse.

She could not afford to keep going as they were, but was scared of saying so to her son in case he got into trouble for repeating it.

The European Union had been very clever, and made sure anyone in government,

in the universities and in big business all thought the Union was great and defended it at every opportunity.

The system was too powerful to pick a fight with. They all thought the same. They all talked down to people like her.

They were good at making predictions of how much worse her life would be if the people did revolt against the European Union. They did have powers to make her life even more difficult.

One day though, the money had run out. She told her son things were a bit tight, and told him to take their cow to market to sell. It was a dangerous measure. It meant they could pay the bills for a bit, but would no longer have any milk.

On the way to the cattle market Jack met a man who asked him where he was going. Jack told his sorry story.

The man was very sympathetic, and said he too thought the European Union was damaging their prosperity.

He got some beans out of his pocket, and said these were special freedom beans. If Jack took those for his cow, he could grow the precious plant of freedom which should transform his position. Jack was much cleverer than people realised for someone who had not had a great education.

He did know a bit about freedom, and had been thinking for sometime how the Union was crushing him and his mother. So, he asked, "how could freedom help me?".

"Well" said the man "if you were free you would not have to pay all those taxes to the EU, and not have to obey all those costly regulations."

Jack was smitten, and willingly accepted the beans for his cow. It also cut down the journey and the difficulty of getting a half starved reluctant cow to market.

When he got home, Jack told his mother the great news that he had a way to improve their situation.

When she heard his mother was livid, and afraid. How could her little Jack stand against the might of the EU.

She scolded him and threw the seeds out of the window. Didn't he know the great and good would rig it all against his precious freedom?

Next morning Jack and his mother arose and were shocked beyond belief. A massive beanstalk led away from their garden right up to the gates of the European Castle.

His mother was distraught, realising they could be found. Jack took courage and decided he was going to see how the other half lived.

When Jack crept through the castle gate unseen he was astounded by the wealth they had.

All those tributes from the Union meant they lived well in the governing castle, led by the five Presidents. They always seemed to have a fish course from all those fish they took from UK seas.

Jack soon found the Treasury and there to his delight was the money that the UK had agreed to send.

It was a signed promissory document, so Jack tore it up. He took the pieces away with him and showed his mother when he got home. "We are rich", he said.

"Now our country can have all the teachers and nurses and doctors it needs, and we can pay less tax so we have more to spend. "

"You are naïve" said his mother. "Don't you understand our local government will just send it back again to the EU because they want to keep us poor".

"So," said Jack, "we will have to see about that". Off he went again to the castle before his mother could stop him.

The next time Jack came back with more torn up paper. He had found the binding document that required the UK to impose high tariffs on the rest of the world and blocked any special trade deals and lower tariffs with their friends in the USA or Australia or New Zealand.

"There" said Jack to his mother, "this is just like the golden goose in the old fairy story.

Now we can buy cheaper goods and trade better for ever, so we will be better off". Once again, his mother, petrified by now of what the EU and all their powerful friends nearer to home might do, told him to stop.

Once again Jack dashed up the beanstalk. This time he seized the most precious item of all, the voices of the UK people who were singing by a large majority that they were going to be free and they would not obey the 5 Presidents any more.

Just as he was leaving the castle, the 5 Presidents were catching up with him and chasing him.

They didn't shout at him that they could smell the blood of Englishman, because they didn't want to be a caricature of badness. They did want to teach him a painful lesson.

He raced back down the beanstalk, whilst they were still trying to negotiate it.

They were slower than him as they had so many good meals at his expense over the years. Jack, as in the old fable, hacked the beanstalk down, and the 5 Presidents disappeared from view and from the UK for ever.

The chopped down beanstalk deposited them in France, still alive but knocked about a bit.

So, what happened to Union Jack?

All the sages in the UK government, the Central Bank, the universities and big international business predicted poverty, isolation and unhappiness.

They expected Union Jack to have a few bad years and then to beg to go back to the EU on worse terms than before. Instead, Union Jack and his mother flourished.

Spending all their money at home bought lots of improvements to public services, with tax cuts to give everyone's income a boost.

Catching their own fish meant they could have fish every day if they wanted to, or sell it to others if they didn't.

They had lots of friends in other countries who wanted to trade more with them.

Even the EU, after a hissy fit, agreed a free trade contract and accepted in the end the UK did not owe them any more money.

The people's voices had been right, and all those experts wrong. Just as in the original tale, Jack and his mother lived happily ever after.

They had rediscovered freedom, thanks to the voices of all those UK voters.

And what happened to all those so called experts?

Well they did alright as well. They pretended they had not made such a big fuss and got it all so wrong.

They carried on paying themselves lots of money and giving themselves lots of grand titles and honours as if nothing had ever happened.

The people grew less angry with them, because everyone was better off.

The people did have one last hurrah against the establishment.

They voted out all the ones who had done most to stop them being free. They felt better for doing that.

Freedom is wonderful thing.

Safer roads with better junctions

Many people tell me of the difficulties they experience getting around in our local area. I sympathise as I get stuck in the same jams. Some of it comes from roadworks, where they are best done at less busy times of year and need to be done as quickly as possible. Much of it comes from inadequate junctions.

Junctions are also the place where there is most danger, with traffic of all kinds in potential conflict with each other and with pedestrians as cars and bikes, pedestrians and lorries try to cross lanes and change direction. I am encouraging the Councils to take another look at all their main junctions with a view to making them easier to use and therefore safer.

Traffic light controlled junctions can be improved by

1. Changing phasing of lights to reflect relative traffic flows
2. Introducing traffic sensors to regulate phases
3. Allowing main road priority with traffic sensors for side roads
4. Introducing right turning and or left turning lanes to segregate traffic
5. Allowing left turn phases on a filter .
6. Removing lights from roundabouts or making them part time only for the peak
7. Introducing short phase right turn off a main road with longer phase for main road with green in both directions
8. Pedestrians to have green phase lights, phased with the road traffic lights.

Roundabouts

Often a better choice than light controlled junctions.

Large roundabouts need clear lane marking where two or more lanes of traffic possible and permitted

I would be interested in feedback about these principles, and open to suggestions to pass on to our local Councils about how individual junctions can be improved.

Correction – when will Parliament vote on the Withdrawal Agreement?

This blog contains substantial fact based analysis of the current economic and political situation worldwide. I use published official sources and wish

to be accurate. It also provides my views and forecasts, which are distinguished from the factual analysis. I often compare what governing institutions say they are planning to do with their outturns as captured by official figures and reports.

In a recent blog I said that the government has delayed the vote on the Withdrawal Agreement until January 14th. I had not read this in an official source, but relied on press and media reports which I assumed were based on official briefings. I need to correct my piece, as there is still no official statement of when the Withdrawal Agreement will be voted on. All we know is the Parliamentary debate on it starts again on Wednesday 8th January and continues on the following two days. I will keep you posted as to when the debate will conclude and when there might be votes.

Middle Eastern Wars and the US alliance

Secretary of State for Defence, General Mattis, has resigned over a dispute with the President. The President wishes to keep his campaign promises to pull US troops out of Syria and Afghanistan. The General thinks the US should stay in these countries to be close to its allies.

It is true that the world's leading power will have more influence and be more likely to succeed if it builds and maintains alliances. The US can depend on NATO, whilst understandably objecting that many NATO members fail to meet the minimum financial contribution which the US and the UK manage. The US will also have more influence in the Middle Eastern war torn region if it maintains local alliances and keeps troops there. This does not mean, however, that the President was wrong to campaign to reduce US military commitment to the Middle East, nor does it prove he is wrong to insist on keeping his word.

When the President asks his staff what US military intervention in Syria has achieved so far, there is no easy answer. The US and her allies did not want the Assad regime to continue, but had to assist the Assad regime in getting rid of ISIS, seen as an even bigger threat. Vacillation by the West over who the true enemy was – Assad or Isis – led to indecision and to growing Russian influence, based on strong backing for Assad. The roots of President Trump's wish to exit can be found in the unwillingness of the Obama regime to commit fully to helping Assad against Isis, or the failure of President Obama to come up with another strategy to rid Syria of both, which would have required huge force from the US and her allies to have any chance of success.

When the President asks what good can current low levels of troops do in modern Syria, where Assad is close to controlling the country again and where Russia is well dug in as a substantial external influence, there again is no great answer. If the USA and her allies are not prepared to commit many more forces, and if they have no clear alternative to the Assad tyranny backed by

Russia, there is not a lot of point in staying.

In Afghanistan things are a bit different. The USA and her allies does have a government to co-operate with, and the western coalition in the past has spent much blood and treasure on resisting extremists in that country. There, too, however, defenders of western involvement have to answer how much longer do we have to stay? How much more training do the Afghan security and defence forces need? Are we happy with the political results of the long war?

On both sides of the Atlantic there is war weariness over the Middle East, and some disappointment with the results of substantial past intervention. The military have done a brave and good job in difficult circumstances, but the politicians have found it difficult to translate that into successful political action to form war free states following democratic principles.

The European fall in car sales

Some in government wrongly worry that Brexit could damage our car industry. Latest sales figures show there is plenty of damage being done by EU regulations, UK taxes and a credit squeeze before we leave. Why doesn't any of this worry them? Why don't they do something to stop it?