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## AGENDA

# Our damaged democracies must be ready for trials ahead

Countries around the world are facing remarkably similar problems, yet several different approaches have emerged in how to tackle them. This year will be a crucial one in the tussle between them. **JOHN KAMPFNER** reports



Was there a year as bad as 2020? Not in my lifetime, but I have not lived through a war. Perhaps 2016, the year of the Brexit referendum and the election of Donald Trump, comes close. Those events may have been terrible shocks to the system, but they felt like reactions to the status quo. In the four intervening years the world's reference points have shifted. The abnormal has become the new normal.

If the first two weeks of 2021 are anything to go by, perhaps even worse is yet to come? There are two ways to read the mob invasion of Capitol Hill. The first is to fear the prospect of armed attacks on Joe Biden lasting throughout his administration. The second is to hope that the made-for-TV violence of that event may have alienated all but the hardest core of Trump supporters and that he and his movement will peter out.

The focus of the next four years in the United States will be on two things: will Biden be able to deliver a modicum of economic recovery to enough people? And will the Republicans alight on a candidate for 2024 who is as extreme as Trump, but has smarter political skills?

Trump himself may finally be done for, but his movement most certainly is not. The fact that almost half the population opted for him, and that

according to opinion polls more than half of Republicans defend the insurrection, suggests a demographic trend more ingrained than a one-off protest.

This is a man who has presided over more than a fifth of the world's Covid deaths. Several millions of people lost their health insurance during that time. He has reversed 80 environmental laws and regulations. He has slashed the number of refugees coming into the country.

His one major piece of legislation brought the tax rate for the wealthiest 400 Americans below that of every income group. Lest we forget, he himself paid only \$750 in federal income taxes during his first year of office. Plus, the one figure that everyone seems to know by heart: he has lied 25,000 times while in power. And yet he received the second biggest aggregate vote in history.

Back in October, Trump survived coronavirus in some style, his burly frame and his unmasked face a picture of defiance and recklessness that appeals to millions of people. According to this mindset, Joe Biden is in hoc to the medical experts and other assorted state conspirators and do-gooders when it comes to Covid. Why else would he be preparing to clamp down on citizens' inalienable right to go about their business?

Biden will have no honeymoon, no 100 Days. He and his vice president Kamala Harris know that they should have romped to victory. The January 5 Senate run-off results in Georgia came as a relief and could mark the start of a demographic shift. But the Democrats continue to struggle, even though logic dictates that they shouldn't. The Republican share, particularly 'down ballot' votes within the states, held up remarkably well.

As ever, the forces of liberal democracy live in the land of wishful thinking. "Trump's defeat can be the beginning of the end of the triumph of far-right populisms also in Europe," tweeted Donald Tusk, former president of the European Council and now head of the centre-right European People's

Party. Perhaps Rupert Murdoch's right-wing tabloid, the *New York Post*, called it more accurately. "Even now, elites still fail to understand why people vote the way they do," it declared in a post-election editorial. "Once again, they are missing the strength and diversity of this coalition".

Once finally prised out of the White House, Trump will do everything he can, with or without Twitter, to stay firmly in the public eye. Watch out for the launch of Trump TV, a prime time show on the One America News Network that will rip the mantle of true believers away from the treacherous Fox News, which had the temerity to call in the election for Biden.

Next time around Trump – assuming he hasn't been retrospectively impeached (a bizarre notion) – will not enjoy the mantle of the insurgent. He will look and sound old. Imagine a new, fresh-faced right-wing demagogue who turns out also to be competent. That is a far more dangerous proposition. It is very likely.

Right-wing authoritarian populists around the world have taken heart from recent events. Trump was seen as a means not end to a wider shift away from democracy. Central Europe's populist leaders have stepped up their showdown with Brussels over the EU budget and its insistence that further project funding will require countries like Hungary and Poland to uphold basic liberal values. The war of attrition will continue. "Ideological pressure is used under the guise of the rule of law against certain countries just because we say no to migration, no to multiculturalism, and because we have a different view on the role of family in society," said Hungary's justice minister.

Hungary and Poland's leaderships are especially dangerous because they demonstrate a non-Trumpian competence. The same cannot be said for Brazil's Jair Bolsonaro, who called Covid "the sniffles", and Narendra Modi. India's prime minister ordered one of the world's tightest lockdowns, leading to millions of rural migrants in cities losing their jobs and heading





back to the countryside, turning packed bus stations into hot spots. Yet both leaders have soared in popularity, doling out huge amounts of public money in their wake. With access to so much cheap borrowing on the world markets, the economic reckoning will be a long time coming.



The three coronavirus vaccines that have attracted most attention – Pfizer, Moderna and AstraZeneca – have been developed and manufactured by Western scientists and big pharma. The one that is likely to have the most political significance in the long run may turn out to be the Chinese one. Still in its experimental phase, Sinovac is already being tested on volunteers in Pakistan, Indonesia and elsewhere. If it proves successful (and few would bet against the prowess of scientists backed by the limitless resources of the Chinese state) the vaccine will play a central role in Beijing’s soft-power diplomacy. Chinese largesse – building infrastructure, issuing loans – comes with political strings attached.

One doesn’t have to be a Trumpian fanatic to acknowledge that China has ‘got away’ with the pandemic, fending off its responsibility for incubating it. By locking down the entire city and region around Wuhan, and then pretty much the rest of the huge country, the communist leadership dealt with the virus in a way that few others did or could. It then went after journalists, doctors and activists who alerted the world to the problem in the first place. It cracked down further on pro-democracy activists in Hong Kong. The outline trade agreement signed by the EU and China at the end of December reinforced the hard line of Xi Jinping yet further.

The rise of this alternative model in government, economics as in disease control, poses questions that the West has long struggled to answer. It is proving attractive to many other countries, particularly when rich Western nations are hoarding vaccines for their own people. China has joined a UN-backed global scheme for its distribution. Trump refused to be part of it. It is not yet clear whether Biden will sign up.

The Chinese model provides balm for the beleaguered in the developing world; the populist-authoritarian model provides a channel for the furious in the developed world. Each group rails at the globalisation of the millennium era. They are developing a new form of globalisation: the construction of transnational, but likeminded, identities, separated by vast distances in the physical world, but a click away in the virtual world.

Fuelling all of this are conspiracy theories propagated by QAnon and others. The social media companies are now taking action, but it remains to be seen how far this will go to reduce the power and spread of fake news. For those awash in anxiety and alienation, who feel that everything is spinning out of control, conspiracies are extremely effective emotional tools. For those in low status groups, particularly those

# AGENDA



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who are geographically isolated in left-behind villages, towns and regions around the world, they provide a sense of superiority: I possess important information most people do not have.



In the US alone, more than two million women stopped work or lost their jobs during the pandemic. It will take years for that situation to recover. Two million people in the UK slipped under the minimum wage threshold as a result of being furloughed. Covid has widened the already yawning gap between the university-educated metropolitan citizenry and the rest, between the anywheres and the somewheres.

These are deep-seated problems. It is much easier to pander to the anger than to take the difficult steps to tackle systemic failings that date back decades.



Who has the tools to reduce the economic and social chasms? Biden will battle against many headwinds. In Europe, Emmanuel Macron faces re-election in 2022, when the long-term effects of the pandemic may be at their peak. By then Angela Merkel will be gone. Germany's elections next September are likely to see her Christian Democrats resume at the helm, but with a new and untested leader: None of the candidates fills the heart with joy.

There is a more optimistic scenario, however: Spain, Portugal, Sweden, Denmark and Finland all have social democratic prime ministers. The Greens are the new rising force in European politics. In New Zealand, Labour's Jacinda Ardern, has won a new term of office, seeing off right wing nationalist populist opposition. Germany and France will keep Europe together, come what may. The stock market will continue to rise. Economies will rebound.

Over Christmas, newspapers got carried away with predictions of a

**PAINFUL TRANSITION:**  
1 Donald Trump greets the crowd at the 'Stop The Steal' Rally in Washington on January 6

2 New Zealand prime minister Jacinda Ardern poses for a selfie with students

Photos: Getty Images

21st century version of the Roaring Twenties. According to this scenario, once the vaccine is seen to have been effective, happy days will return. Those with jobs will be out and about with gusto, making up for lost time and spending money they saved during the pandemic. That may yet happen, but it is likely to be far more gradual. In any case, many people will be broke, unemployed or in poor health. The 2020s will not roar for them.



And what of the Sceptered Isle? After nine months of flailing, the government has finally shown a modicum of Covid competence, introducing the vaccines quickly. Although the target of mid-February for vaccinating the most vulnerable groups has already been watered down, the progress is not unimpressive even if it patchy.

With this, Johnson has bought himself

time. He has restored his credentials among diehards by securing the flimsy December 24 deal that led to the end of EU transition.

Meanwhile, Keir Starmer has raised the white flag on Brexit, voting through the trade agreement and abandoning any lingering commitment to free movement or any form of significant renegotiation. He sees no votes in continuing the fight over Britain's place in Europe.

For passionate Remainers, his position is close to a betrayal. Yet he suspects that, given the chance to remove Johnson in 2024, metropolitan and younger voters will bite their lips and side with

Labour, except in a small number of Lib Dem strongholds.

Starmer is calculating that voters will eventually rumble Johnson and the Conservatives, both on

Covid and on Brexit. He wants them to come to

that conclusion unaided. He, like Tony Blair in the 1990s, is focusing exclusively on removing any





## POST-COVID WORLD:

**3** Joe Biden has a huge task on his hands

**4** German Chancellor Angela Merkel is set to retire

**5** Chinese President Xi Jinping is strengthening China

**6** People pose for pictures on the banks of Yangtze River on New Year's Eve in Wuhan, suspected source of the Covid epidemic

Photos: Getty Images

and all impediments to power. Yet lacking from him is any sense of passion about the existential dangers. He has given Johnson a free pass to curate the 'new normal', not just outside the EU but outside the bounds of what used to be known as mainstream politics.

The prime minister and his friends supped at the table of Trump and now effortlessly are succeeding in distancing themselves from him. If he hasn't already, the Labour leader should study the recent speech by the former governor of California Arnold Schwarzenegger. "I grew up in Austria. I'm very aware of *Kristallnacht*, or the Night of Broken Glass. It was a night of rampage against the Jews carried out in 1938 by the equivalent of the Proud Boys," he said. "Wednesday was the Day of Broken Glass right here in the United States. The broken glass was in the windows of the United States Capitol. But the mob did not just shatter the windows of the Capitol – they shattered the ideas we took for granted."

Schwarzenegger knows that those who wish liberal democracy harm are gearing up for the next battle and many more ahead. Which other politicians will step up?



# Peak populism? We can only hope

## Bonnie Greer



Was the storming of the US Capitol by the supporters of Donald Trump the beginning of the end of populism? Was this the lethal highpoint, the death knell for the crusade that went under the banner 'Make America Great Again'?

With the banning of Trump from Twitter, and the expulsion of its right wing equivalent, Parler, from the Apple store and out of the Google and Amazon universes, the question seems to be answered.

But, first we should consider what populism actually means right now. There have been all kinds of definitions of the term over the years, but it seems that where we are right now – in the early 21st century – it might be best summed up in the term coined by Jean-Jacques Rousseau: *volonté générale*, the 'general will of the people'.

In the late 20th century, populism had all kinds of definitions. In the mid-1970s, it was associated with Latin America and generally seen as left wing. It conjured up images of guerrilla fighters in the jungle. This kind of populism was connected to the *pueblo*, the people: the factory workers, the ones who tilled the soil.

Then it seemed that, from about the late 1980s, the word took a right-ward turn. Terms like *Rechtspopulismus* – populism of the right – came into being to describe Austria's Freedom Party, for example. But even that term was not considered adequate to define what was happening in the National Front in France and the Flemish Block, in Belgium. Their populism was more nativist, rooted in the soil.

And there was an element of that to Brexit. It wasn't the only factor, certainly. But it was present. Leave was to be understood and adhered to as some kind of movement that had emerged from the grassroots. But where, in the UK, had this type of populism arisen from?

First of all, you could say that Margaret Thatcher was a populist creation, and icon. But I was not living in the UK at the beginning of her rise, so I cannot be sure that it was as simple as that. The first ballot that I cast as a UK citizen was for the Labour Party in its landslide of 1997 and, although Tony Blair gave the appearance of youth and of, perhaps, coming from the people, it never felt that way.

Around that time, the term 'the elite'

seemed to be creeping into the vocabulary of politicians, becoming something that even the posh could toss around and use as a weapon against their opponents. The Labour hierarchy became, for some, 'the elite', a fascinating thing for me to watch as I had assumed that the party had been for the worker.

What did it mean? The first time that I had a real grasp of the word, in the British sense, was during the 2008 London mayoral election. Not being a watcher of quiz shows, I had no idea that Boris Johnson was a fixture on *Have I Got News For You*.

To me, he seemed to explode out of nowhere. The local paper, the *Evening Standard*, began to beat the drum for him as the next mayor. Somehow he caught the imagination of the city, his tousled hair, the faux-charm of his careless dress seemed to be what 'the people' wanted.

While Ken Livingstone toiled along as a politician in a more conventional sense, Boris made it all seem like a lark. And he continued in that way, even after he won. What was fascinating was to watch him, an Old Etonian Oxford grad, rally against 'the elite'.

It was then that I began to see that the populism we have now has something to do with the popularity of its leaders, maybe even idolisation. And, even more, it has something to do with the class system, and an aberration of it, a kind of panto of it, that can turn the whole thing upside down.

Like a theatre piece, populism could allow an Old Etonian to make the populace feel that he is their champion against 'the elite'. And if an Old Etonian

is not one of the elite, then exactly who is? Metropolitans, of course, and those who stand for multiculturalism, for instance, and Remain.

Even for those who might usually be considered part of the elite, as long as you did not genuinely adhere to these principles, then somehow you were 'of the people'. This aligning of 'the people' against 'the elite' has reached its pinnacle with a US president, a multimillionaire and TV host, aligning himself with the former, against the latter.

At the core of his populism is nativism. This is the philosophy that holds to the idea that a country, a political entity, belongs to the people, is 'native' to it. And that the people native to it have a kind of holy and mystical bond and right to the country. That it is theirs.

Trump, for example, used a nativist dogwhistle, the word "sacred", in relation to the idea that MAGA had won the 2020 US election and that it had been stolen from them.

To the mob that assembled to hear him on January 6, "sacred" defined their political choice. Defined them. They, Trump supporters, had a kind of Holy Grail mission. This mysticism, whether overtly stated or not, is one of the marks of right wing populism as opposed to left wing populism.

Did the storming of the US Capitol end populism? Did the erasure of their digital lifelines destroy the movement, the feeling? No.

Because what we saw on January 6 was 100% American. It was a malignant manifestation of the American Dream.

Populism itself writ large. And dangerous.



LAST LAUGH?: Protester Jacob Anthony Chansley, known as Jake Angeli and the self-styled QAnon Shaman, inside the US Capitol building on January 6

Photo: Getty Images

## AGENDA

# 'Bigot we should have called out on day one'

Former Commons speaker  
**JOHN BERCOW** on the  
US president, the British  
politicians who indulged  
him, and the  
Trumpian tactics  
which have  
spread to the UK



The chorus of execration of the Capitol rioters, and president Trump's evil incitement of them, has been loud, eloquent and justified. Global media outlets have simply reflected the overwhelming sense of shock, horror and outrage which decent people will have felt on witnessing the attempted coup by Trump's thugs. I share 100% that sense of shock, horror and outrage but I can't say I was surprised.

After all, this despicable, narcissistic and proto-fascist president has been preparing the ground for insurrection for at least the last two months but, in reality, ever since he refused to commit to a peaceful transfer of power if he lost. So, every mainstream politician will now agree that Trump, his enablers and the domestic terrorists stand condemned.

Yet cast your mind back to January 2017. Trump had only just been elected after a vicious campaign in which he had ritually abused his Democratic opponent, Hillary Clinton, been exposed for his rank sexism and threatened a crude racist ban on Muslims entering the United States.

The signs that he was no normal American president, but a reckless and irresponsible demagogue, were there for all to see. Despite that, Theresa May was itching to invite Trump to the United Kingdom and to speak in parliament.

Custom has it that such invitations are issued by the Commons and Lords Speakers as an address to MPs and peers is a parliamentary, not a governmental event. I was consulted by the government and expressed vociferous opposition to the idea as Trump had only just been elected and had already provoked widespread consternation at his racist behaviour.

Several Conservative MPs had told me privately that they were opposed to such an address but did not feel emboldened to say so publicly as the prime minister seemed sold on the idea. The opposition parties were overwhelmingly opposed and more than 200 MPs had signed a

motion to that effect. I was therefore somewhat put out to read in the media that the government was nevertheless intent on going ahead and I resolved to thwart the plan.

The Labour MP for Cardiff South and Penarth, Stephen Doughty, who had tabled a motion denouncing Trump asked me on a point of order on February 6, 2017, if I would inform him how such visits were organised and, by implication, what my thoughts were on the subject.

I told him that the Speakers issued the invitation, that I would have been opposed before the imposition of the Trump ban on Muslim migrants entering the USA and that, after its imposition, I was even more strongly opposed. I explained that our opposition to racism and sexism and our support for an independent judiciary – Trump had been railing against judges who dared to rule against him – were important factors in my thinking.

A handful of Conservative MPs rushed to condemn me and they were reinforced by the bigot faction in the press who absurdly talked up the idea that 150 MPs would support a motion of no confidence in me. Actually, the number was five, usual suspects long hostile to me. It was said that I was denying freedom of speech, breaching the impartiality required of the Speaker and flouting the convention that visiting presidents were invited to speak in parliament. None of those arguments was valid; all were bogus. A president can always find a podium and a lectern from which to speak.

For Trump, either the White House press conference or Twitter was the usual medium. The issue was not freedom of speech but whether Trump had earned the honour of an address to parliament. It has long been a Speaker prerogative to invite a visiting dignitary to speak. I could not be impartial between wanting to invite Trump and not wanting to invite him! The notion that visiting presidents were invariably invited was factually wrong too. Most were not. Of those who were, president Reagan spoke in the Royal Gallery – in the House of Lords – and only president Obama did so in the most prestigious setting of Westminster Hall. He was the first black president of the United States, popular in the UK and more than two years in office when invited by us.

Ironically, Theresa May's rather breathless effort to curry favour with Trump gained her no lasting traction. The moment she rightly criticised him for re-tweeting the hateful propaganda of



FAWNING:

**1** Former prime minister Theresa May and president Donald Trump together at the White House in 2017

**2** Boris Johnson poses for a photo with Trump at the G7 summit in Biarritz, France, in 2019

Photo: Getty Images

the fascist organisation Britain First the notoriously thin-skinned Trump turned on her.

A running commentary on her admittedly maladroit efforts on Brexit then became standard fare. Other Conservatives queued to laud him. Michael Gove, who has made unctious into an art form, rushed to interview him. Jacob Rees-Mogg declared that if he were an American he would vote for him and, not to be outdone, Boris Johnson opined in 2018 that Trump could be a contender for the Nobel Peace Prize! By contrast, Jeremy Corbyn, Vince Cable, the SNP and others recognised Trump as a malign force and called him out for his bigotry from day one.

Of course, diplomacy dictates that governments of countries linked by friendship avoid attacking each other's domestic policies. Trump doesn't respect that convention but our government generally does. So I can understand why, despite his industrial irresponsibility and ineptitude on coronavirus, UK ministers, whose own efforts have been undistinguished or worse, declined to criticise. But surely matters of morality, ethics and principle are in a different category.

Trump suggesting moral equivalence between racist protestors in

Charlottesville and their anti-racist counterparts was wrong. Period. The British government should have said so. Trump insulting BAME female American critics by saying they should "go back" if they don't like the US government was racist. Period. The British government should have admonished the bigot publicly. Trump citing lower jobless figures as "a great day" for George Floyd after the man had been killed by the police was off the scale offensive. Period. A British government minister should have said so.

Understandably, in condemning the storming of the Capitol, American leaders have been quick to stress that the rioters don't reflect the views of their fellow citizens. The answer to that is 'yes but...' because the polling shows that 45% of Republican voters support the actions of those who stormed the Capitol. That is a truly alarming fact but there is no escaping it. The outrage of the Trump-inspired domestic terrorism should be followed by a swift day of reckoning. Let's hope that Trump will be removed from office for violating the constitution. Failing that, Congress should impeach him so that he can never again stand for public office.

In judging Trump, we should deprecate the fact that parts of his playbook have





been adopted in the UK. Bypassing parliament. Rubbing career civil servants. Threatening to clip the wings of an independent judiciary which is the bulwark of our liberties. These are the unmistakable emblems of a cheap populism which is corrosive of good government. It is high time for democrats in all parties to assert and adhere to the basic tenets of a modern liberal democracy – respect for parliament, respect for the rule of law, respect for the accountability of ministers and advisers and, above all, respect for the truth.

In addition to all of the above, there is another virtue that has been all but lost in the volleys of vitriol that we see on social media every day. That virtue is civility of discourse. Playing the ball, not the man or the woman. Trump may depart the scene but, sadly, there are others like him.

The challenge for all of us is to recognise that democracy is not about decibel levels. A point is no more valid for being made more loudly, more often or more abusively. Democrats everywhere should strive to reach agreement on issues to serve the public interest. When we can't agree, let's strive in 2021 to disagree agreeably. That would be a welcome change from the high-octane rancour of the last decade.

# Now to deal with Trumpism here

## Alastair Campbell

Editor-at-Large



There was something almost comical about the way Boris Johnson and his media sycophants sought to distance him and his cabinet from their previous 'upsucking' to Donald Trump.

Whether Johnson backing Trump for a Nobel peace prize; Dominic Raab quite recently refusing to criticise Trump's failure to accept the election result; Michael Gove with his little 'thumbs-up' photo-op, (playdate organiser Rupert Murdoch in the room but out of shot); or Jacob Rees-Mogg with his call that a redder than red carpet should be rolled out for the Narcissist-in-Chief; they are up to their necks in Trump Upsuckery.

But of course it really does help to have so many media owners, editors, columnists and reporters willing to dance to a new tune, no matter how discordant it may be set against the tunes of the recent past, when the Sycophant Orchestra was booming out whole sunny upland symphonies on the fantastic post-Brexit trade deal that the love-in between Trump and the man he called 'Britain Trump' would deliver.

When Barack Obama directly condemned his successor for instigating the violence at the Capitol, so creating "a moment of great dishonour and shame for our nation", he was clear that though Trump was the chief culprit, he had been aided and abetted by "a political party and its accompanying media ecosystem".

That the Republican Party morphed into a vehicle for the ambitions of a conman its key figures knew to be such, that it took an election defeat, an attempt at mob rule, a handful of deaths and a risk to their own security to bring once serious politicians to their senses, is a big part of the story of how America was led to the dishonour and shame.

So too is the "accompanying media ecosystem"; the cable channels set up to challenge the traditional triopoly of ABC, NBC and CBS, engendering new levels of craziness, matched by shock jocks, crazier still; the drive to the right given a veneer of professionalism by 'fair and balanced' (sic) Fox News, even less fair and balanced channels like Newsmax and OANN, all given booster rockets by social media, which Trump turned into anti-social media, key to the whole paraphernalia of polarisation on whose algorithms of hate he joyfully gorged, QAnon conspiracy theories and all.

Noble exceptions called out the Trump lies and delusions, but they were often drowned out, not least by the incessant bleat of "fake news". Just as Republican politicians normalised his abnormalities for fear of upsetting him or the party's

base, the media ecosystem normalised the lying and delusions by amplifying and supporting them rather than exposing them for what they were.

"Their fantasy narrative," said Obama of the Republicans and their media ecosystem, "has spiralled further and further from reality, and it builds upon years of sown resentments. Now we're seeing the consequences, whipped up into a violent crescendo." But before we allow the Johnson sycophant media to whitewash his upsucking, yet another personal and strategic failure, and before we descend into a 'couldn't happen here' sense of superiority, let me say this: every word of that paragraph could apply to the UK, up to the last six words.

Johnson loves fantasy narratives, and he has a vast media ecosystem that loves promoting them for him. Most days the *Mail*, the *Express*, the *Sun*, the *Telegraph* are little more than propaganda echoing whatever new false promise he is making and some days parts of the *Times* join in.

Like Trump, Johnson became famous, and came to be viewed by his party as a credible figure, through the fantasy narrative that what politics needed was celebrity, comedy, 'something different'. He became London mayor on the fantasy narrative he was a progressive. He fought and won the Brexit campaign on fantasy narratives about the NHS, about Turks invading the UK, about having cake and eating it, getting out of the EU but staying in the single market. In the world of Johnson and his sycophant ecosystem, one false narrative replaces another.

His handling of Covid has delivered a catalogue of fantasy narratives, most with a touch of UK exceptionalism, from the start, when we were to be the country that stood up to the virus without shutting down, to where we are now, the death toll topping 80,000, and ministers rushing to tweet 'this is a great day,' on account of the Queen having had the jab.

A whole new fantasy narrative is being woven from "the new variant" of Covid. Unlike the weirdoes and conspiracy theorists, I do not doubt it is real. However, it has been used by the government, helped by the usual suspects, to erase the memory of the huge and catastrophic failings of their management (sic) of the crisis.

The fantasy narratives are also now being combined, so that as the Brexit fantasies crash with reality, and the guarantees of frictionless trade join the encyclopaedia of referendum lies and broken promises, Johnson, Rishi Sunak and Gove are already preparing the ground to blame the Brexit economic hit on Covid. The media sycophants will need no encouragement, let alone a peerage or knighthood, to ventilate yet another false narrative.

If we had a frank, fearless and free media, they would not have simply rolled over and given up investigating stories which under any previous government would have stayed part of our debate until unanswered questions were met with answers.

The multiple allegations against Robert Jenrick – his handling of Tory donor Richard Desmond's housing development; the awarding of a regeneration grant to his constituency; his travelling between homes during lockdown; the investment fund co-founded by Jacob Rees-Mogg moving to Ireland; Rees-Mogg shutting down the Brexit scrutiny committee; the Priti Patel bullying report, and Johnson's decision to junk the code on ministerial standards; the many allegations raised against Tory and Leave-donating firms securing large pandemic contracts.

Dido Harding and the billions spaffed on test and trace. The venture capitalist vaccine supremo married to a Treasury minister, now replaced by another Tory minister. Leak inquiries that lead the news when they are announced, never to be followed up again. The Brexit campaign law-breaking. Russian interference in the referendum and our life and national politics now.

Johnson stuffing the House of Lords with donors and cronies, including in defiance of the independent commission on appointments. Jennifer Arcuri. The many loose ends arising from Dominic Cummings' time in No 10. Stanley Johnson's repeated breaches of rules. The ignored Sage advice. The missed Cobra meetings. Hand-shaking. Cheltenham. Three late lockdowns. Schools fiasco. Christmas farce. Care home infection (false narrative ring of steel). False claims re. new hospitals. I could go on...

Every single one of them, had Labour been in power, would have dominated the news for days, weeks, months. The Tories and their media ecosystem, with its influence over the rest of the media, including most of our broadcasters, just move on. Yesterday is a foreign country. The news is what the government says it is, here and now. Let's roll out another promise, that will keep them quiet.

'When crimes begin to pile up they become invisible. When sufferings become unendurable the cries are no longer heard. The cries, too, fall like rain in summer.' – Bertolt Brecht.

That is part of what helped Trump win, and helped him control the agenda until, thankfully, he was beaten at the ballot box, and then he went too far. Johnson, contrary to the white-washing, has so many of the same characteristics as Trump. But the Tory Party and the UK media ecosystem are even more favourably disposed to Johnson's fantasy narratives than the Americans were to Trump's. In the US, the main print titles tend to be neutral or liberal, and several remain committed to proper investigative reporting. It is far from fantastical to imagine a scenario in which, within a decade, not merely print but also broadcast media are skewed to the right.

It is why we should be a lot more alert, a lot angrier, a lot more fearful, and a lot more determined about calling Johnson out, taking him on and ensuring that, like Trump, he does not last too long.

## AGENDA

# Jabbed by a sense of déjà vu



**JAMES BALL'S DECONSTRUCTED**



No-one ever imagined the UK would end up in a third national coronavirus lockdown, let alone that thanks to systematic government failure it would end up with the NHS in an even more parlous position even than the peak of the first wave of the virus.

But famously the third time is supposed to be the charm: this one should feel different, not least because this time the strict national lockdown is at least accompanied by the early days of the UK's vaccination program – the one thing we have been told repeatedly over the last year is our eventual way out of this human misery and economic devastation.

The problem is that in all too many ways this lockdown feels all-too-similar to the rest. It began too late, after the government first mocked and then disregarded warnings from experts and its political opposition. It's accompanied by the usual wave of government recriminations against the general public for its own mistakes, and a familiar round of overreach from police, especially (yet again) in Derbyshire.

That means the fear for many of us is that government promises on vaccination are going to end up just like government promises on test and trace, Covid-safe rules, and so many other aspects of the UK's pandemic response – a morale-destroying cycle of dramatic over-promising, under-delivering and then a long and slow clean-up of the consequences of that delay.

In theory we should have lots of reasons to believe it's actually different this time. The UK appears to be one of the leading countries in making large, early orders of multiple different potential vaccines. We were also among the first countries in the world to actually approve several of the vaccines, too, leading to morale-boosting pictures of first doses in the UK well ahead of most of our European neighbours.

Even better, we know that more than two million people have had at least one dose of a coronavirus vaccine, placing us well ahead of

most large countries. So for once the UK picture is not entirely doom and gloom – there is potentially, finally, a good news story that could emerge.

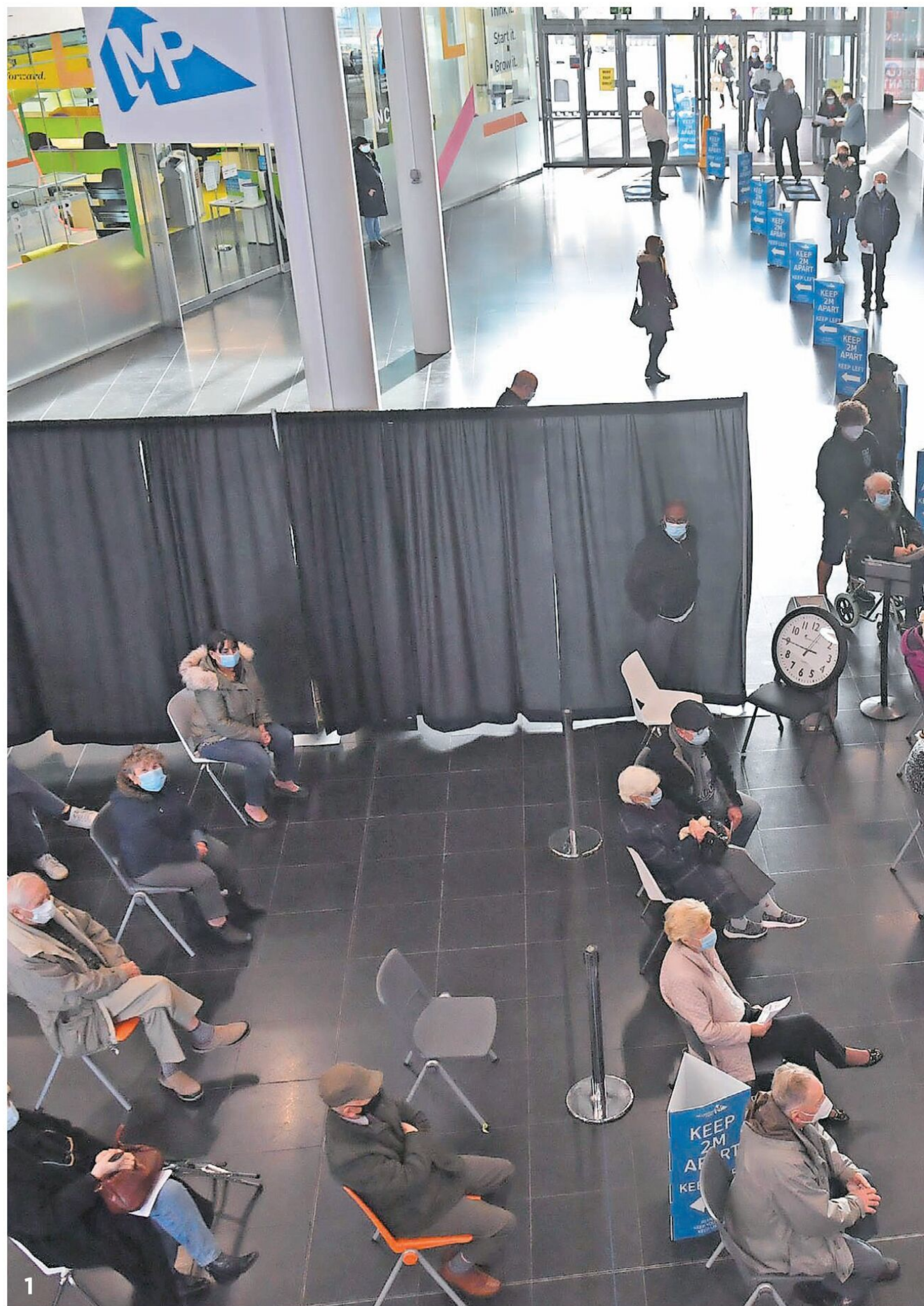
The problem is there are numerous ominous signs that this story could end like every other government rollout in response to coronavirus – and this time we're all so used to where this government screws up that we can see the signs coming.

The first of these is simply the backdrop that the vaccination campaign, overseen by minister Nadhim Zahawi, is happening against: we absolutely should not be trying to enact an inoculation campaign requiring the UK's most vulnerable people to leave home en masse and wait in health centres when around one person in 50 people has coronavirus right now.

This does not mean we should slow or stop the vaccination campaign until cases drop. But it does mean we should question exactly how it is being conducted. Concerns about the current arrangements are compounded by photographs showing waiting areas of barely-distanced chairs in unventilated public halls, and official documentation suggesting vaccine volunteers could provide conversation or company to those waiting for their jabs – hardly a great idea when coronavirus is so rife and spreading so freely.

Similarly, we seem to have no clear answers from the government on how many vaccine doses we actually have delivered – although we do know that previous promises have been broken: we were going to have 30 million doses of the Oxford vaccine by September, but didn't, then four million by December, which was missed, and only have an unspecified number now.

Ridiculously, the government have refused to answer media questions as simple as “how many vaccine doses does the UK have right now” on grounds of national security. The result is a confused mess where people are picking up on a mistaken impression that the limiting factor



on our vaccine rollout is either the availability of halls and centres in which to give jabs, or the working hours of people administering them.

The government's continued evasive answers and dodging are leading to a mounting sense of confusion. When this is coupled with a breathtakingly ambitious target to vaccinate all of the UK's most vulnerable populations – some 14 million people – by the middle of February, it starts to feel ominously like our era of over-promising and under-delivering is not yet over.

The public needs lots of clear information on how vaccines are going and where the problems are. Even if

there are problems and delays, people will be much more understanding of this if they know where those issues are and what's being done to solve them – and get updated estimates of when things are happening.

Much time seems to have been wasted on the vaccine rollout. It seems to be happening at different paces in different parts of the country.

The prioritisation system seems very crude and haphazard. It does not feel like the nine months when we had coronavirus but no vaccine were well used.

But that doesn't mean we can't get at least slightly ahead of things now. If we





**RISING HOPE:**  
**1** People wait to receive their jab at the NHS vaccine centre set up at the Millennium Point, Birmingham

**2** Nadhim Zahawi, minister for vaccine deployment

Photos: Getty Images

# Silent carnage proof of the abject failure of our government

## Ian Dunt



On politics

The UK Covid death toll now stands at more than 80,000 people. By the time it is over, it'll almost certainly hit 100,000. Every afternoon, the same terrible bell tolls announcing the number of deaths over the course of the day. And every afternoon, it reaches new unimaginable levels. On January 6, the UK reported more than 1,000 daily deaths for the first time since April. Days later, it was already at 1,325.

The NHS is, in many areas, already overwhelmed. In others, it is getting there. Non-essential medical care, like checks for heart disease, is postponed. Staffing is stretched to handle the ICU intake, leading inevitably to mistakes. Major surgery is cancelled. Ambulances carrying people with serious injuries, or suffering heart attacks or strokes, queue outside hospitals waiting for beds. The prospect of rationing is moving horribly into view: doctors being forced to make impossible moral decisions about who to prioritise for care on the basis of limited resources.

This is the world we live in now, but the full magnitude of it doesn't quite register. One of the strangest things about Covid is how quiet it is. It is a silent carnage. We are all locked in our homes. We cannot see the families grieving. The NHS keeps its doors firmly shut against film crews, so the horror of what is happening in hospitals is kept well away from the public eye. All we get is that afternoon death announcement: the strangely bureaucratic, lifeless report of vast human suffering.

This is, without hyperbole, the most severe and unforgivable example of government failure we have seen in our lifetime.

The fault is fundamentally one of timing. At each and every stage of this crisis, the government has done what was necessary two to four weeks later than when it was required.

Covid is a two-stage process. Once you are infected, it usually takes about 10

days before you need hospital treatment. If you die from it, it is usually around eight days after going into hospital. This means that the fatality stats we see are the results of events which took place around three weeks ago. It is like some terrible star: what we are looking at is the result of events which took place in the past. What we see now is the consequence of policy decisions taken in late December. And the policy decisions taken today will play out in early February.

The government knows this. It is receiving the information from its scientific advisers. The countries which have dealt with Covid successfully, like New Zealand or South Korea, have all acted on this advice firmly and preemptively.

But No.10's decision-making is not based exclusively on the science. It balances scientific advice against political interests – specifically perceived notions of public opinion and the lockdown scepticism of cabinet ministers and members of the Conservative parliamentary party. So instead of taking swift preemptive action as soon as it is advised, Boris Johnson has equivocated and delayed.

This is the pattern of behaviour whose consequences are now playing out in our hospitals. It's why we went into lockdown two to four weeks too late, on all three occasions. It's why the tiers system was only adapted weeks after scientists warned it was ineffective. It's why we witnessed the insanity of allowing certain areas to open up for Christmas only to now see their infection rates spiral out of control.

Timing, however, only partly explains what is happening. The government could have recognised and addressed this problem by now if it was alive to its own failings. It is not. Downing Street is an echo chamber. It does not listen to criticism. Indeed, Johnson purged the party of any moderate Conservatives early on in his tenure as prime minister. All criticism from outside the party is treated as evidence that someone is a political enemy.

This is why you see them making the same mistakes over and over again. The recent delay around shutting schools and imposing a new lockdown was a precise reconstruction of the delay last March over the first lockdown.

But months after making the initial mistake, Johnson made it again, almost step-by-step, like a dramatic recreation. He has learned nothing, because he does not care to learn. He has insulated himself against the capacity for improvement. And the people on whose behalf he governs are forced to pay the price.

This is what government incompetence does. It costs lives. And we have the very great misfortune of living under the most incompetent government of our lifetime, right when we most needed leaders who knew what they were doing. The scale of this failure is beyond reasonable comprehension. And anyone involved in it should hang their heads in shame.

start with proper public information, that will build confidence.

The next step would be to build expectations: some people believe that we could reopen society to a large extent as soon as over-70s are vaccinated. That does not seem to be the view of most public health experts – so why don't we manage expectations now?

The public will put up with a lot if it doesn't come as a nasty surprise. Does vaccinating the over-70s mean we move to, say, tier three rather than no-tiers? If so, then let us make sure that's communicated in advance – and then take the next step: who needs to be vaccinated to get back to tier two? Tier

one? And open? If the public feel like we have an actual plan rather than just an overly-optimistic target, and we have clear and public thresholds as to when things might be able to return closer to normality, we'll start to feel better, even if it is still some way off.

The danger is that yet again in the government's mad bumbling dash to convince us everything's okay will once again makes everything worse.

Given the recent history, you can't blame anyone for not holding their breath.

■ See pages 12 & 13 for Europe's stuttering start to its vaccine roll-out

“ This is, without hyperbole, the most severe and unforgivable example of government failure we have seen in our lifetime

## AGENDA

The European Union performs many roles for its citizens. The most important – if one of the least-discussed – is to keep them safe from harm.

And that is the issue causing grave concern across the continent right now, as the EU and its member states try desperately to speed up the process of coronavirus vaccinations, amid mounting criticism at its slow pace.

Brussels is responsible for coordinating the purchase of vaccines for all of the union's 27 members, and has been the focus of much of the anger at its supposedly sluggish response. But national governments – which deal with the administration of the vaccines – have also been coming under pressure, as they slip behind in the global league tables for vaccination rates.

The European Medicines Agency (EMA) has thus far authorised two vaccines: the Moderna and the BioNTech/Pfizer jabs. Approval for a third, the AstraZeneca/Oxford one, is expected in the coming days, which will bring the bloc into line with the UK, where all three options are already authorised. The comparison with the UK is a fair one. Many Europeans have been looking enviously at Britain's early pace-setting and wondering why they are not doing more to close the gap.

Just across the Channel in France, for instance, the rollout has been a fiasco: last week France had vaccinated only 500 people. By the weekend that number had reached 45,000 – an improvement, but not enough to put an end to consternation.

Speaking on Europe 1 radio following the arrival of 50,000 doses of the Moderna vaccine, health minister Olivier Veran promised that 100,000 of France's 65 million people would be vaccinated by this coming weekend and that 300 vaccination centres were being opened, with a focus on the hard-hit east of the country.

Research minister Frédérique Vidal sounded defensive when she insisted: "France is not late, it has chosen to use and prepare vaccines whose distribution and the sharing may be wider than current vaccines." Others may not see it quite the same way: newspaper *Le Journal de Dimanche* reports president Emmanuel Macron has said privately that things need to change "fast and hard". But while getting things done could almost be the slogan for Macron's presidency, time and again reality has intervened with large sections of French society dragging their heels.

Meanwhile, hopes pinned on a vaccine co-developed by France's Sanofi and the UK's GSK appear to have been dashed. The vaccine from France's pharmaceutical research standard bearer was so awaited that the lab where it was being developed not only received a visit from Macron, but was the source of outcry when Sanofi's boss said the US would get the lion's share of doses.

Now a reported 'laboratory error' means there has been a six-month delay in the vaccine's development, with *Le Monde* reporting the company is under pressure from the Ministry of Finance to make its production facilities available to its competitors. Certainly it's a blow to French prestige, but the public is focussed more on the deployment of *any* vaccine rather than hanging on for a French-developed one.

Or some of the public is, anyway: often puzzling for visitors who see pharmacies on almost every street corner, France also

# EU vaccine roll-out in desperate need of an injection of pace

JASON WALSH reports on Europe's stuttering start on protecting its people



has a strong anti-vaccine movement to overcome. Indeed, before the slow rollout came to dominate French complaints many wondered if significant numbers would simply refuse the vaccination entirely. One Ipsos Global Advisor poll reported that only 40% of respondents wanted the vaccine.

Even if vaccine scepticism can be overcome, many in France, including in government, have been quick to complain that the country is not swift when it comes to getting things done and familiar themes of bureaucracy and inflexibility have come to the fore.

It will come as little consolation either

to French authorities or the public but the country is not alone in its travails: other European countries have struggled.

In Germany last week over 250,000 first shots had been received but while a far cry from France's low numbers public impatience has been pronounced. There has also been political infighting: Lars Klingbeil, general secretary of Germany's Social Democratic Party (SPD) pointed the finger at health minister Jens Spahn, a member of Angela Merkel's conservative CDU, and demanded that production be sped up.

Tensions over vaccine roll-outs have emerged not just within countries, but at

FALLING BEHIND:  
1 Hundreds of health workers line up to be vaccinated at a facility set up in an exhibition centre in Naples near the city's football stadium  
Photo: AFP via Getty Images

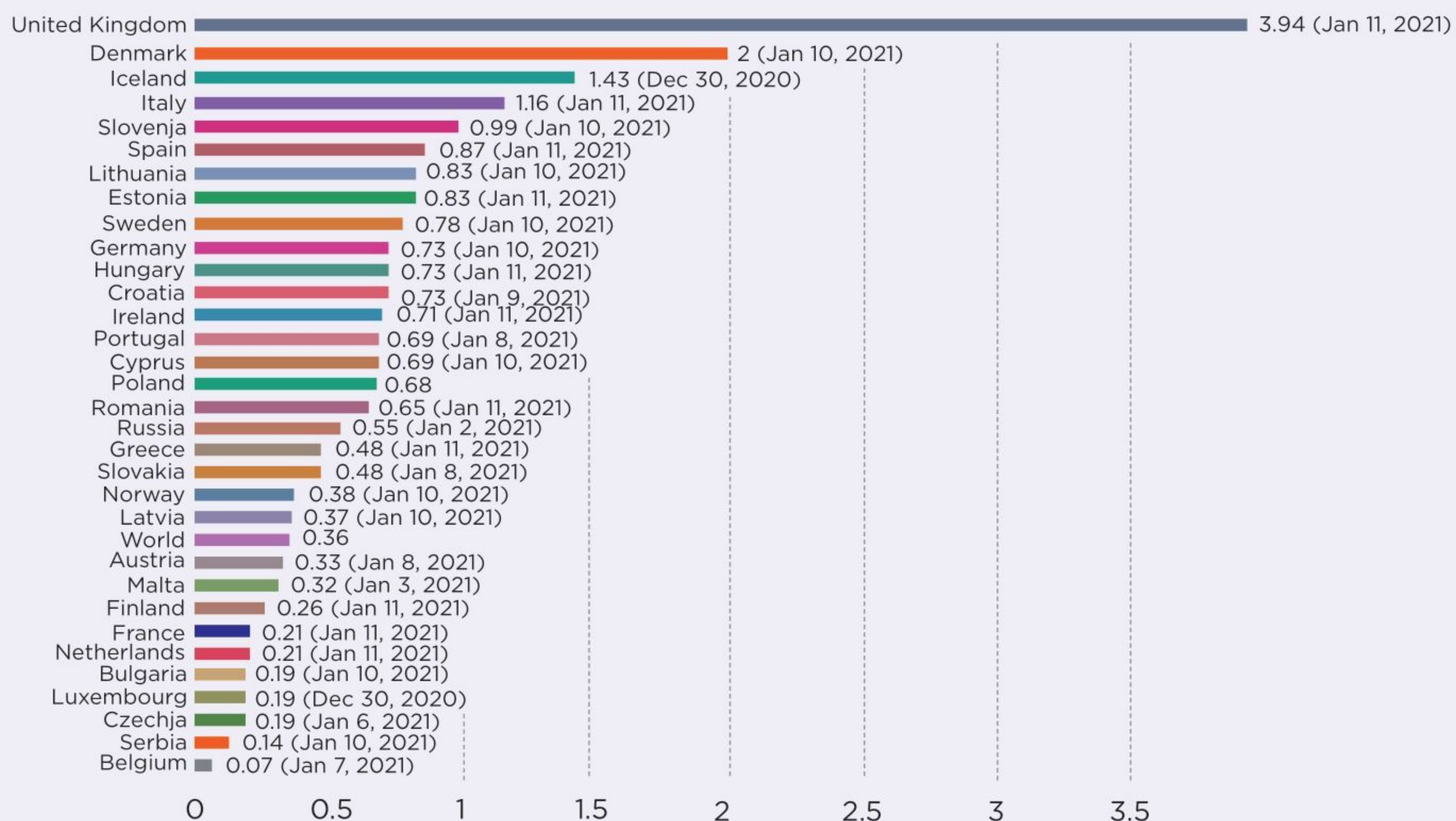
EU level too. The revelation that Germany had apparently breached EU rules by buying extra BioNTech/Pfizer doses outside of the bloc's own deal has undermined the idea that the vaccination process is a beacon of EU solidarity. An example of "all working together," as Commission president Ursula von der Leyen put it.

But Germany's unilateral actions also underlines the frustration that many have felt about Brussels' own performance. The EU's decision to coordinate the purchase of vaccines – which it then distributes between countries on the basis of their population



### COVID-19 vaccination doses administered per 100 people, Jan 12, 2021

Total number of vaccination doses administered per 100 people in the total population. This is counted as a single dose, and may not equal the total number of people vaccinated, depending on the specific dose regime (e.g. people receive multiple doses)



Source: Official data collated by Our World in Data

– was intended to avoid competition, to make sure smaller countries did not miss out, to increase purchasing power and reduce costs.

However, the strategy has run into problems, with critics describing it as a “vaccination disaster”, suggesting it has not secured enough doses and has created delays. One criticism is that the EU has been caught out, as it wrongly assumed that several different vaccines would be ready at once and therefore spread its orders accordingly.

The German government has said its scheme will be complete by the end of summer. Other countries seem less

**DEFENSIVE:**  
2 French health minister Olivier Veran, left, and higher education, research and innovation minister Frédérique Vidal in Paris

Photo: AFP via Getty Images

optimistic. Neighbouring Austria gave its first shot on December 27, with an 84-year-old Viennese woman receiving the vaccine, but progress has been slow since then.

Notoriously, the Netherlands was the slowest to start vaccinating. The first person did not receive the jab until January 6 – 10 days after their European neighbours and nearly a month after the UK. The delay was described as “shameful” and “embarrassing” by the country’s own medics and public health experts. One of the main factors behind the delay was an upgrade needed to an IT system to allow health authorities to track appointments and check which vaccine each patient has received.

In Spain, regional divisions have opened up in the country’s vaccination rates. Last week, 140,000 first doses had been deployed with Asturias in the north of the country leading the pack by working seven days a week to get shots delivered. However, while Asturias had used its entire allocation other regions lagged behind, with Cantabria, Catalonia and Madrid all deploying under 6% of their allocated doses.

There have also been reported irregularities. An investigation has been launched into allegations that relatives and close friends of employees at a care home had received the jab, despite not being priority cases. Spain’s severe snowstorms have also added to logistical difficulties, with vehicles carrying the vaccine

left stranded and hospitals inaccessible.

Though there are no blizzards cutting logistics supply chains, Irish health minister Stephen Donnelly is also under pressure. The country is now in its third national lockdown and fears are growing that the country’s health service will run out of intensive care beds. Health service chief Paul Reid has said it was under “increasing strain” and that the number of hospitalised patients could reach twice that of the peak of the first wave.

Facing this, the country would have an “accelerated vaccine plan” that would see 65 vaccination teams and the ambulance service work “seven days a week into the night”, Donnelly said. The *Business Post* newspaper said it calculated 585,000 doses will have arrived in the country by April 1. Still, with a population of 4.9 million this leaves a long road ahead. Indeed, the *Irish Times* reported this week that it could take until mid-summer for 70% of the population to be vaccinated.

This news is made all the more dispiriting by the fact that Ireland, which before Christmas had the lowest rate of Covid-19 spread in Europe, as of Monday had the highest infection rate in the world.

There are positive stories in Europe though. Italy, the first country in Europe hit hard by the coronavirus, is working fast. It had vaccinated over 400,000 people by last Friday and was one of the fastest-vaccinating countries in the bloc. Around 45% of doses that have

arrived in the country have been injected, including to more than 345,000 medical and paramedical staff. The country is planning to roll-out “pop-up” vaccination booths this month.

The top performer is Denmark, which has had, by some measure, the EU’s most successful vaccine rollout. The country of 5.8 million has secured a total of 5.25 million doses. Health minister Magnus Heunicke said the majority of doses should be deployed by the spring. By last week 1.41% of the population had received a first dose.

Denmark’s success, like that of the UK, appears to stem partly from a rapid start. Prime minister Mette Frederiksen told reporters in mid-December: “Even though I am a big supporter of coordination at European level, the vaccine must be run out and distributed the moment it hits Danish soil”. Beyond that, though, it has also taken a programmatic approach to vaccination, with the State Serum Institute reporting daily numbers of administered doses.

Underscoring how seriously it takes vaccination, the country has now announced plans to roll out a so-called ‘digital vaccine passport’ which will be required for those who enter the country from abroad, including Danes.

Despite Denmark leading Europe, the EU as a whole lags behind not only the UK, but also the United States and world-leader Israel. Ultimately though, this race is not against other countries, but against the virus itself.

As it has done in societies across the world, Covid-19 has exposed tensions and weaknesses in Europe – within nations and the EU itself.

But these are still early days in the vaccination process, and those early delays, arguments and stuttering starts may be forgiven if ultimately that race is won.



**LETTERS:** Have your say, email [letters@theneweuropean.co.uk](mailto:letters@theneweuropean.co.uk)

# Trump reminds us we face our own problems

It has been intriguing to note those here in the UK highlighting the recent invasion of the Capitol as a sign of the failings in US democracy.

However, before being so quick to comment, we in the UK dare I say it are in no real position to cast such a judgement.

Firstly, let's not forget that senior Tory politicians, including the former prime minister Theresa May and current prime minister Boris Johnson, fawned over the president, despite being fully aware of his character. Johnson, let's not forget, called for him to be awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

In 2019, the UK parliament was ordered to be prorogued on the advice of Johnson, advice later ruled to be unlawful. This was to avoid parliamentary scrutiny of the government's Brexit plans.

In the US both legislative chambers are elected, but here in the UK we have an upper chamber where appointment is based on birth and patronage and is the second largest in the world after China. Numbering 830 (and with no maximum number), unelected lawmakers pick up £300 a day in expenses, often doing very little as members of what is in essence a publicly funded private club.

Before we criticise others, we in the UK should have some humility and dare I say it, look to get our own house in order.

**Alex Orr**  
Edinburgh

THE TRUTH ABOUT BECKHAM AND HIS PR MACHINE  
**THE NEW EUROPEAN** Page 22  
ISSUE 100 JULY 2020  
ISSUE 100 JULY 2020



ATTACKS ON JUDGES, ON MINORITIES, ON FREE PRESS...

**IS TRUMP A FASCIST?**

ALASTAIR CAMPBELL ★ TIM FARRON ★ SANDY GRANT ★ RON ROSENBAUM



## Told you so?

I saw a great interview with Prof. Tim Snyder on C4 news calling Trump and his followers fascists and persuasively explaining why they are. *TNE's* 'Is Trump a fascist' edition was ahead of its time.

**Will Goble**  
Rayleigh

## Animal readers of THE NEW EUROPEAN



**Otto**

Here's Otto, a Dachshund of German origin with Russian parents. He was born in the Irish Republic and is now living happily in England. And Ivan, a belligerent cat recovering from a leg strain sustained in a confrontation with local cats.

"He likes nothing better than relaxing on his



**Ivan**

favourite newspaper as well as free movement across any borders he likes," says servant Rosie.

■ Send photos of your pets reading *TNE*, together with crucial biographical details, to [letters@theneweuropean.co.uk](mailto:letters@theneweuropean.co.uk)

## Ruminations on rejoining

I agree with Nick Hopkinson's argument that the UK will have to work hard to persuade the EU to accept us back, should we wish to rejoin ("There's a way back", *TNE* #226).

But I think there is an even bigger hurdle. As an aspiring member state, we would be obliged to commit to adopting the Euro. Even many committed pro-Europeans would feel uncomfortable giving up control of monetary policy to the ECB. The sovereignty argument would return with a vengeance, and it is hard to see how it would be effectively countered. I think pro-Europeans need to think carefully about this awkward issue. It could easily lead to a splintering into pro-Euro and anti-Euro factions, which would be best avoided. I don't have an answer, but we now have ample time to think about it.

**Simon West**

If we are to ever to rejoin we need to change the focus of the argument. All too often I see and hear negative campaigning. We lost the argument over Brexit because instead of extolling the benefits of being in the EU it seemed that Remainers spent the time arguing in a negative way against the Leavers. Leavers believed the lies told to them because they were portrayed in a positive manner.

It will do no good to try and win

arguments already lost, whether factual or not. Therefore we must set our own positive agenda and win both the moral and physical high ground. Everyone loves a winner, no one loves a whinger.

**Keith Unwin**

I am almost 70 years old and have never written to a newspaper before but am still so angry and frustrated following the referendum. Brexit is nothing less than political, economic and cultural vandalism brought about by the lies, deceit and fraudulent promises of short sighted anti-European politicians, business and media.

Prior to the next election the opposition parties should form a tactical alliance such that in key selected constituencies only one candidate stands against the incumbent Tory. That gets rid of the Conservative government. The new government then establishes a citizens assembly comprising a cross section of UK personnel and EU residents including experts (academics, business, commercial, scientists, service personnel and trade unionists etc.) students and young people over 16 years old.

The assembly's remit shall be to review the pros and cons of the result of Brexit and of rejoining the EU. It should submit a detailed report to parliament together with recommendations as to the basis upon which the UK rejoins the EU. Parliament debates and then votes to rejoin. A majority of 52% should be plenty. Perhaps the remit could include voting reform and the need for a written constitution.

Obviously the above would be complex and problematic. But radical and beneficial changes can be achieved when the appropriate vision and effort is applied – that's how we got the NHS. If a vandal breaks my window I don't just accept it and do nothing. I fix it. As pro Europeans we lost the referendum battle. But let's not forget that 'defeat is not the act of falling down but the unwillingness to get back up again'.

**John Coulter**  
South Croydon

We will never get back into the EU as currently constituted, but we might, we just might find a way into a different arrangement, given time and good will on all sides? Once the Brexit myths have been exposed and rejected, you invite David Owen to reprise his very sensible idea to renew membership of EFTA. He thought we could have done it before leaving the EU, but that was scuppered at the time.

We might be able to resume membership of pan-European organisations like Galileo or the Erasmus Scheme. Maybe that time will come, once it is obvious that current arrangements are just not satisfactory. Maybe it will be possible to go back to something like Theresa May's pragmatic attempts to bridge the chasms between Remainers and Leavers, something that everyone, including the Scots and the Northern Irish could live with?

**Celia Frayling**

## Rejoining is wrong priority...

At 11pm on December 31, Twitter was again flooded with #FBPE Tweets. For some, it was a last act of defiance. For others, 2021 marks the start of a long term campaign to rejoin the bloc. To my fellow former Remain supporters, I say: rejoining is not our immediate challenge. Our new focus is to form new political alliances to save the UK Union from the inevitable second Scottish independence referendum.

We must create a compelling and empowering narrative, distinct from Boris Johnson's jingoistic bluster, for this kind of Remain.

Johnson, the self-appointed Minister for the Union, has become the union's biggest threat. In 2021, the question is not 'why leave?' but 'why stay?' When the time comes, we must be prepared to offer a genuinely radical political and economic resettlement for all the regions and nations. That work starts now.

**Tom Parkin**  
Sheffield

# 🇬🇧 The Dutch have stolen our sarnies... is this war? 🇬🇧 TIM BRADFORD



## ... Not for us it isn't

So the UK has left the EU. As we sit here in south west Scotland we can see just across from here a part of the UK which is effectively still in the EU. That's Northern Ireland and they voted to Remain. Every citizen there is entitled to EU Irish passports, can be part of Erasmus, can drive into the EU across a customs free open border and are subject to EU environmental and food standards.

All 32 council areas in Scotland from Shetland to the English border voted to remain in the EU. Where are we now? Totally without any of Northern Ireland's advantages and truly Brexited: disastrous for a country which, of the four nations of the UK, has the only positive export balance with the EU.

We can do better. Denmark, the Irish Republic and Finland have similar sized populations to Scotland and prosper with fewer resources than us. Sorry, Britain (and the UK) we cannot afford to stay like this. We look outwards to the future.

**Stuart Campbell**  
Dumfries and Galloway

The Nordic Council formed in 1952 currently comprises Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, the Faroe Islands, Greenland and the Aland Islands. The main purpose is to facilitate agreement to manage shared interests.

The United Kingdom, of which Scotland is currently a part, a very junior and subservient part, has left the EU, against the declared wish and votes of the Scottish people.

My proposition is this. Scotland should liaise with the Nordic Council, based in Copenhagen by the way, and initially seek observer status to promote Scottish interests.

Since 2016, Schleswig-Holstein, part of the German Republic, has had this status. So, I ask, why not Scotland?

It follows that I would like to see Scotland open an office in Brussels, Copenhagen, and maintain and expand

## BETTER LETTERS

**In these unprecedented times, we are receiving an unprecedented amount of correspondence. To stand the best chance of having your letter published in full...**

■ **Email letters@theneweuropean.co.uk before 9am on Tuesday for possible inclusion in the following Thursday's edition.**

■ **Put the contents of your letter in the body of your email rather than adding an attachment, such as a PDF.**

■ **Please be concise. With limited space available, letters over five paragraphs long will almost always be edited before printing. Thank you!**

contacts with our European friends, partners and allies, with an equivalent EU and Nordic Council presence in Scotland.

Scotland's government should declare itself willing to forge alliances. Why not start with courting the Nordic Council of nations? We have much to offer and much to gain.

**Michael Clarke**  
Langholm

## Caught out by Covid

Looking at the tragically record-breaking Covid stats, I'm reminded of a headline from the *Express* before Christmas: "Boris battles experts to save Xmas." Look where that's landed us.

The government has been utterly woeful, but do (some of) the media share some of the irresponsibility currently afflicting all of us?

And - if we're honest - do we the public also bear a tiny bit of responsibility for not refusing to listen to the charlatans of politics and the media when they say what we want to hear even if we know they're talking nonsense?

Is my memory failing me, or were we not told repeatedly last year that international comparisons of Covid-related statistics were not relevant? All, of a sudden, though, Johnson now starts crowing that more vaccinations have been given in the UK than in the EU. Just another example of his hypocrisy, and a convenient shield for the manufacturing, supply and distribution problems.

**Phil Green**

When the Oxford Astra Zeneca vaccine was approved I felt optimistic. The government seems to have messed up everything else to do with Covid, surely they must get this right. Then I heard three things about the planned roll-out: regional vaccine superhubs, a new national booking system and Nadhim Zahawi in charge. Suddenly I was not so confident. It is beginning to sound like "Test and Trace" again. Please, please don't let them mess this up as well.

I hope I am wrong to be worried, but nothing this government has done gives me confidence. Unlike "Test and Trace", if we find the big approach isn't working, lets hope they can show the flexibility to follow a more 'local' approach. I'm keeping my fingers crossed.

**Nick Roberts**  
Selly Oak  
Birmingham

It must be a regret to us all that so many people have died in the UK during the pandemic and that the World Health Organisation has recently predicted that other viruses may soon follow. This scenario surely not only requires immediate action; but significant planning for the future.

The two areas that seem to have had so little attention in relation to this are NHS provision and a more developed strategy for social distancing. This country has 6.6 beds critical care beds per 100,000 people compared with 11.6 in France and 29.2 in Germany. I have seen no plans for growing capacity or for developing a more flexible approach to the utilisation of the 1.2 million employees in the NHS.

In relation to social distancing you only have to be a casual observer to identify measures that could be progressed to reduce the spread. Far better messaging in the long term, the quality of masks and their correct wearing over nose and mouth, fit people shopping alone, a more rigorous approach to 'bubbles', better practices in work places such as construction spring to mind.

**Jamie Sharpley**  
Woking

## WHERE TO FIND US

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Europe party in normal times, the Tories quickly evolved Euroscepticism (even Europhobia) once an upstart party appeared on their right wing, stealing their core voters.

The UK needs to build (and build) a waxing Europhile Rejoin movement; one that risks, and then begins, stealing Tory voters in Tory heartlands. When Tories see a genuine threat to their voter base, watch the overnight metamorphosis. The cult of Brexit would be dropped faster than a Johnsonian U-turn.

**Robin Cameron**  
Darlington

The Leavers were better organised and more determined than the Remainers in 2016. Defeat galvanised the Remainers. Groups sprouted and cooperated. Alas, our efforts to stop Brexit have been in vain. But, as another *TNE* writer points out, the facts of history and geography will tell. A face-saving change of name might recreate one of the greatest economic and political partnerships civilisation has seen.

**Margaret Brown**  
Burslem

We should have persuaded young people to vote: had they all done so we would have won the referendum in 2016. Our campaign should have targeted the young and pressed the older generation to ask young relatives whether they wanted Britain to remove itself from its international role.

**Elizabeth Smith**  
Exeter

The Remain argument was to doom monger, however correctly, rather than promote the EU. This may have been how it was presented by the media, but I always felt that with the expectation we would stay in the EU, politicians did not want to give up the option in the future to scapegoat the EU with any unpopular decisions.

**Sally Hayter**

Few political leaders have talked about the advantages of the EU. I have heard them talk often enough about the problems of leaving the EU, but in order to win people over to supporting the EU a positive message needs to be articulated.

If we are going to argue for rejoining, and I for one am up for doing this, we need to have a campaign that emphasises the positive – the negatives will be obvious. It should talk about a principled vision based on morality and hope.

**Ben Vickery**

We Remainers (understandably) are beating ourselves up as to why this happened, but maybe we ought to reconcile ourselves to the fact that it was inevitable and we were never going to win.

For 40 years we took EU membership for granted and said nothing positive about being at the heart of the group of 28 when for years the “bastards” in the Conservative party were poisoning the wells, removing leaders, agitating; UKIP took hold of the anti-European argument; the economic benefits of membership were never trumpeted and so what life would be like outside was never understood.

One mistake from the past was that all pro EU parties blinked and went solo on Europe leaving a way through the middle. One party needs to head a coalition and be the megaphone for EU realignment and this probably needs to be Keir Starmer.

Rejoining can only happen when a positive case for the EU has been made. Or maybe the new relationship we actually culture may be the one that satisfies all. We should take account of the fact that might be a compromise that satisfies most people and not be too quick to set up a “rejoin” campaign until the subtle groundwork is complete.

**Richard Goodwin**

The fundamental reason that the Remain side lost is that they made no effective attempt to explain and sell the huge benefits we enjoyed as members of the EU, economically, politically and culturally.

Instead they simply tried to scare the public with negative arguments which enabled the Brexiteers to portray them as “Remoaners” peddling “Project Fear”. That was no way to persuade people. The leading Brexiteers used the very effective tactics of having a few very stark slogans and shouting them repeatedly.

**Michael Hanna,**  
Hassocks, West Sussex

After 2016, there were two contradictory Remain approaches. There was one section who wanted to overturn the previous referendum result. In their

case it didn't really matter what the referendum was. The other approach was that the population had the right to choose whether they approved of the deal on offer or not. The Brexit side were successful in framing the argument as the first and the Remain side failed to frame it as the second.

It would have been better to argue for a ‘preferendum’ on either a Canada (hard) or a Norway (soft) or ‘None’ by giving 1st and 2nd preference. That might have gathered more support than what was perceived as a simple overturn of the first referendum before the result was implemented. It would also have been better for the Remain side to be slightly more critical of the EU and put forward concrete plans for reforming its structures thereby gaining greater support.

**Dani Thomas**

I campaigned on the streets with the European Movement in Lincolnshire and Peoples Vote in Nottingham from 2016 to 19. I talked to 1,000s of Leavers. Most of the them want the same as us: better funded public services, better jobs, quick access to NHS, well resourced schools and smaller classes. They had been told this was only possible outside the EU.

In January 2019 I pleaded that we change tack in People's Vote and start exposing the lies. Until people understood the truth they would vote the same way, and we were not changing any minds. We were getting the 48% to write postcards, but achieving little. Our focus should have been on changing the minds of the public not the MPs. Instead of campaigning for a People's Vote our focus should have been on exposing the lies of the referendum and the reasons why the result should not be respected.

**Helen Rushby**

I would argue the Remain argument was as good as it could have been. But, I also think other conditions assisted the Leave campaign. For example, the media coverage of the politics and coverage of European affairs and European parliamentary debates throughout our membership of the EU was woefully inadequate. This approach must have aided the arguments about making our own laws, getting our country back and being in control of our borders.

The negative campaigning of the leave side benefitted from a fertile, pre-prepared political background in which the most gross lies were believed. This led to good and decent people believing they had to vote leave to preserve their national integrity, jobs and life style.

**Ron Darwin**  
Ripon

Something which would almost certainly have prevented Brexit, and which must be fought for now to ensure our ‘democracy’ truly reflects the country's diversity of opinions, is the introduction of a fair voting system for general elections – UK wide – and local elections – England. The current first past the post (FPTP) system is a shambolic disgrace. While not a panacea for every political ill, PR will play an essential part in revitalising Britain's troubled democracy, by allowing

**BATTLED IN VAIN:** Marchers pass Trafalgar Square during a rally organised by the pro-European People's Vote campaign in London in March 2019

Photo: Getty Images



everyone to feel that their vote matters. Make Votes Matter!

**Conor Niall O'Luby**  
Bournemouth

The Remain campaign was too polite. When Leave lied Remain should have said so much louder and clearer. Remain's campaign was too negative. The emphasis was all on the adverse consequences of leaving. The campaign should have stressed why freedom of movement is good, and how shared sovereignty gives us more control than being outside on our own.

What I'm now desperately looking for is a new organisation that will campaign assertively for closer ties with the EU in the short term and rejoining longer term. The European Movement is too low key. We need to start banging the drum loudly now. It's not too early. It's already clear that Brexit is a costly shambles. And what are the millions of people who share this view supposed to do when Labour doesn't want to represent them but instead try to appeal to Leavers.

**Elliot Grant**

There were not enough “visuals” of the EU for the UK population to identify with. Having worked in France, Italy and Holland, EU flags are prominent alongside national and regional flags flying on masts outside or on governmental buildings. I never, ever saw EU flags in the UK. From this, we can enter into a certain understanding of the EU by the UK political body.

Similarly, projects funded by the EU were seldom announced to the public as they are in mainland Europe.

My feeling is that we will need to hit rock bottom before many in the UK understand the positives of the EU.

**John Chisholm**

I took part in a march to Birmingham and a later one to London, having never in my life marched or demonstrated before. I weighed up the possible risks and went anyway: but risks? There were none: because millions of us behaved well. We were very close together and there was a little jostling, but if a toe was stubbed you immediately heard: ‘Oh, I'm so sorry!’ We were civilised, cultured people: angry, but committed to good behaviour.

So my answer to Alastair's question is that there is inherently nothing we can do. Because our demonstrations were peaceful, nothing happened. They were under-reported and numbers were under-assessed too. But the point is we will never behave with violence or disorder; never be like the protestors at the Capitol. That is our problem.

I remember someone once telling me that at his business, the people who shouted and raged down the phone got their problems sorted first, because they were so disruptive. But this won't change my behaviour. This is why we are in danger. I think we will have to play the long game and allow the people in power at the moment enough thick, sturdy rope to hang themselves. This is not a comforting thought; but through the centuries people have had to endure, and wait, and hope. Us too.

**Chris Shepherd**  
East Devon

## AGENDA

# More cooperation and compromise..

## The task was always immense, but divisions and distractions doomed us

### MARY HONEYBALL Former Labour MEP



We pro-Europeans must show humility. We lost. Leave won. Many Leave voters were on low incomes, over 50 and male. They viewed the EU as an alien force working against Britain and its people.

We must listen to those who feel this way. Really listen, not just mouth platitudes. Those pro-European organisations with local groups could mobilise in the areas who voted Leave to find out what those living there think and feel.

We have too often viewed Leave voters as the victims of tabloid newspaper rhetoric rather than people with genuine concerns. What is required now is a proper understanding of them and their views. We need to look beyond snapshot opinion polling and discover the reality. 'We' must become more than just those who voted Remain. We must work to understand. Only then will we be successful.

### MIRIAM GONZÁLEZ DURÁNTEZ International trade lawyer



We must start by accepting that we pro-Europeans have failed comprehensively. Brexit is clearly what British people want, because they voted for it four times: in 2015, 2016, 2017 and 2019.

There are many things that could and should have been done differently. But the most important question is: what should happen now?

With victory comes accountability. Every single time things go south because of the hard Brexit negotiated by Boris Johnson, the Conservative party should be made accountable for it – not because of a sense of 'I told you so', but because there will be opportunities in the near future to revisit the relationship with the EU. Just look at the pressure for another referendum in Scotland only six years after the previous one – who would have thought? And certainly negotiating a much closer relationship with the EU will be possible in four years time, after the next general election.

When those opportunities come, people should have a clear view on the

effect that every aspect of this hard Brexit has had on their lives. The main lesson from the failure of the anti-Brexit campaign is that noise serves for nothing unless it translates into political action. No matter how frustrated we may be with our political systems, change is only possible through politics.

If we really want to change things we all need to spend less time demonstrating and venting anger and outrage in social media and much more time campaigning and canvassing. The issue is whether all those who dedicate themselves to showing outrage and anger have the capacity to accept the compromises that politics require.

### BARNABY TOWNS Former Conservative Party adviser



In politics, the best time to think about strategy and tactics is before, not after, the event. In our case that meant the three-and-a-half years from Cameron's January 2013 Bloomberg speech announcing the referendum through June 2016. Laser-like focus on the many benefits of our EU membership – not 'Project Fear' – communicated by cross-party messengers with some currency with the electorate was required. Perhaps Alan Johnson and Ken Clarke fronting the campaign but not David Cameron and George Osborne. Instead, most Remainer activity took place after the main event with the weakest argument: we had already had a referendum and lost.

### DENIS MACSHANE Former Europe minister



It was almost mission impossible. Labour under Corbyn was never going to be pro-EU. The Lib Dems had sunk thanks to Clegg's coalition with Cameron. Most Tory MPs switched to Brexit. The press were gung-ho for Brexit.

I tried to encourage constituency-level information campaigns but all the funding went to glamorous but pointless high court fun and games.

There was a small window from July to October 2016 if all Remainers had united around the Norway option (out of EU but in the single market and customs union) but pro-European Labour MPs

LOST CAUSE:  
Anti-Brexit supporters demonstrate outside the Houses of Parliament in March 2019  
Photo: Getty Images

were terrified over freedom of movement. The Remain campaign in 2015 and 2016 was appallingly led and organised, and no better after July 2016.

### TIM WALKER New European writer



My answer is informed by my experience standing – very briefly – as the Lib Dem parliamentary candidate in Canterbury at the last election. What it brought home to me is that politics has become hopelessly top-down in our country, too many of our politicians have become blindly obedient creatures of their parties, and, somewhere along the line, it became acceptable to have an arrogant disregard for what ordinary voters on the ground actually want.

The absurdity of the situation was brought home to me when I sat on a sofa in a TV studio during that election with rival candidates Rosie Duffield (Labour) and Tom Tugendhat (Conservative) and noted that we were all at heart Remainers.

It took Tom a few moments to remember his party line and protest, and for Rosie to start explaining that she didn't agree with her leader on

Brexit, but was still happy to stand under his banner, and that was when I realised none of us could be who we really were.

That my party expected me to trudge on, zombie-like, with my campaign when it became clear that all I was going to do was divide the Remain vote and let in a Tory Brextremist in Anna Firth, I realised I personally couldn't take any more of it, but I'm not a professional politician and never will be.

It was glaringly obvious from the start that Johnson was unscrupulous and unfit, Corbyn unelectable and Swinson simply under all kinds of illusions about herself and what was possible. But, in the final analysis, the party leaders weren't the problem. The problem was the system that had brought us to this pretty pass – and that we're going to have to fix or there are going to be more nightmarish aberrations like Brexit to come.

### IAN DUNT New European writer



The ultimate failure of Remain lay in an absence of cooperation. This took place in two ways. First in the split between the



were largely steeped in arrogance – a government that did not think losing was a serious possibility, and was setting everything up to limit the damage caused once they won. Had the vote been taken seriously earlier, it could have been structured better, the campaign could have been run better, and the outcome could have been better.

Imagine a two-phase referendum: it would have been a non-starter for David Cameron but would almost certainly have kept us in the EU. Or else a campaign less focused on healing the Conservative party and more focused on winning. Or even a Remain campaign that spoke anything like plain English. There is much Remainers could've done differently, but almost all of the big changes needed to happen before the 2016 vote – after that almost every hand was a losing one.

**GINA MILLER**  
Campaigner



Once the 2019 election was called, I could see that the only chance we had was a tactical voting campaign similar to the one that reduced the forecasted landslide victory for Theresa May in 2017, but, unlike that election where we were able to work in collaboration, have a clear message and where the other side did not also have a powerful tactical voting campaign, things were far more complicated, disorderly and fractious.

Our realistic aim was not to defeat Johnson but to reduce his majority to ensure a more robust parliament. I set up a tactical voting campaign and website, commissioned the best polling experts and social media data experts possible to identify the candidates, executed social media campaigns in the target seats and went door to door to support candidates most likely to win against Johnson's Brextremists.

Instead of understanding that this was the paramount goal once the election was called, different factions and groups distracted, even demonised each other, employing devious tactics to undermine each other whilst the Brexit factions worked in concert.

As civic organisations, the odds were stacked massively against us, and so often when I addressed rooms full of potential supporters, I saw that the terror so many people had of Corbyn outweighed any rational arguments I could make. Asking voters to tactically vote for Labour whilst reassuring them that the data showed there would not be a Labour majority government was just too enormous an ask.

**BONNIE GREER**  
New European writer



As a former deputy chair of the British Museum, I am always impressed with the British genius for categorisation. But it is also this great country's downfall. From my American ex-pat observation, it seems that it is near impossible to do more than one thing here and be considered any good. You can only do one thing well, be one thing well.

Remain did not really speak outside of the one thing it did well: be metropolitan, elite, well-travelled, monied. It did not look like it let in enough of the non-metropolitan, the

non-white, the non-university educated, the non-London-based. What Remain needs to do now – to paraphrase Joe Biden – is to Build Back Better.

**FRANCES BARBER**  
Actor



Brexit was something a lot of people felt in their hearts, rather than their heads, but it was their heads only that we tried to engage with. Our campaign lacked colour and fun and humour. There were those who talked about "good old Boris", but no one in their right minds would talk about David Cameron – who led Remain in the referendum – as "good old Dave".

We could have tried something like taking off *The Life of Brian's* "What did the Romans ever do for us?" sketch, but doing it in relation to the EU.

Had we used the considerable talents of Remain celebrities to pump out exactly what the EU has done for Britain – i.e. Welsh invigoration, Erasmus, freedom of movement, roaming charges, health insurance, etc – then maybe we could have got somewhere.

We were also much too polite, if not deferential. So much of what was being said was patently absurd, but we let it stand. We should have made fun of our political opponents as it's only when a politician is getting laughed at that he knows he's beaten. All we had was the relentless gloom of the Cameron campaign.

We should have turned the cameras on the millions of Brits enjoying living in Spain, Portugal, France and highlighted their sense of loving their adopted homes, but still retaining their sense of loyalty to the UK. Particularly older people, as the Brexiteers assumed it was the liberal young elite that wanted to stay.

Constantly attacking Brexiteers for being thick and bigoted was a catastrophe. You never win anyone round to an argument by abusing them.

It's a privilege to travel regularly, as I am sure most readers of *The New European* did in better times, and we all knew that Brexit would mean interminable queues and inconvenience for us, but that was never going to play well with Brexiteers who often travelled rarely – if ever – beyond our shores.

My family live in Wolverhampton and voted Leave. No argument I could come up with would win them over. The assumption was I was out of touch. I had suddenly metamorphosed into a member of the metropolitan liberal elite. We allowed that mud to stick and what's worse is that we diffidently gave up our flag and patriotism to those who cared about only their own interests.

We should not have allowed them to say, too, that Churchill and Thatcher – two heroic characters for Brexiteers – hated Europe when in fact they both played their parts in taking Britain into Europe.

Thatcher for all her faults got us on to Europe's top table. A lot of people never realised how powerful we were. That point was never made strongly enough and it's only now we have left will they experience the diminution of status which would always inevitably come when we severed our links with our big neighbour.

movements for a People's Vote and soft Brexit. And second between anti-Brexit politicians at the 2019 election. This wasn't, in my experience, a problem at the grassroots level. Most people I met fighting Brexit, for instance, were fairly open about whether they'd take soft Brexit or a second referendum. But at the top level, and particularly in parliament, it was a major issue.

**CASH BOYLE**  
New European podcast host



The biggest mistake made by Remainers was to assume that there would be the same strength of feeling on the decisive issues. That complacency was arguably what led to the referendum being called in the first place – it was inconceivable to David Cameron that Remain could lose.

To give an example, the devotion to preserving freedom of movement was widely presumed to be equally felt by all. After all, what reasonable person would want to sacrifice this privilege? Yet in reality, for an influential number, having that unrestricted right doesn't matter

when Brexit guarantees trips of up to 90-days visa-free.

The disparate views on this freedom exemplify a disconnect that ultimately influenced the vote: Remain was seen as the ideology of the metropolitan elite, whose love affair with the EU is little more than a status symbol. This is patently false, but Remainers could – and should – have done more to push back against the strategic creation of an us vs them narrative.

The reason for failure – despite a huge effort – appears obvious to me. The anti-immigration rhetoric which drove the Vote Leave campaign propelled the desire to strive for true sovereignty. What's lamentable is that this sovereignty was never truly lost.

**JAMES BALL**  
New European writer



I think Remainers had such a tough hand after losing the referendum that it is almost impossible to say what could've been done differently after the vote without the benefit of hindsight, which feels like an unfair advantage.

The big mistakes of Remainers were made before the referendum result, and

## AGENDA

## Euronews:

### TURKEY OFFERS TALKS TO REDUCE TENSIONS WITH GREECE

Turkey invited Greece to resume talks designed to reduce tensions between the neighbours, following last summer's dispute over maritime borders and energy rights in the eastern Mediterranean.

The so-called exploratory talks would be the 61st round of a long-running process of negotiations between Greece and Turkey that aim to improve relations that are often tense between the two neighbours.

The countries are at odds over a series of issues, including territorial disputes in the Aegean Sea. The two countries have come to the brink of war three times since the mid-1970s.

### HEALTH CHECKS FOR MIGRANTS AT TROUBLED BOSNIAN CAMP

Many migrants and refugees staying at a camp in northwestern Bosnia have complained of respiratory and skin infections after spending days in makeshift tents and containers amid freezing weather and snowstorms, aid workers warned.

Most of the hundreds of migrants stuck at the Lipa facility near Bosnia's border with Croatia have been accommodated in heated military tents following days of uncertainty after a fire gutted most of the camp on December 23. Bosnia has faced sharp criticism for leaving around 1,000 people without shelter after the blaze.

The authorities first said they would move the migrants to another location, but they ended up setting up military tents at the site instead.

From Bosnia, migrants first aim to reach neighbouring EU member state Croatia over illegal mountainous routes before moving on towards wealthier nations in the 27-nation bloc.

### EU WARNS IRAN ENRICHMENT MOVES COULD IMPERIL DEAL

The official supervising the agreement aimed at curbing Iran's nuclear ambitions has warned that Tehran's decision to ramp up uranium enrichment could undermine efforts to keep the deal alive amid diplomatic efforts to bring the US back on board. EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said Iran's intention to enrich uranium up to 20% at the Fordo underground nuclear facility "is a very serious development and a matter of deep concern". Last week, Iran began enriching uranium to levels unseen since the deal was struck in 2015. It has argued that it is no longer obliged to respect limits laid out in the pact because Donald Trump violated it first by pulling the US out of the deal in 2018.

### BELARUS LEADER RIDICULES US OVER RIOTS AT CAPITOL

Belarus president Alexander Lukashenko defended his country's ability to host this year's hockey world championships by ridiculing the United States following the violent attack at the Capitol. The authoritarian leader met with International Ice Hockey Federation president Rene Fasel for talks amid calls to move the world championships following mass protests against Lukashenko's rule.

He told Fasel that the protests would not make it unsafe for Belarus to host the tournament, and compared his country with the United States, where supporters of Donald Trump rioted at the Capitol last week. Belarus is scheduled to co-host the world championships with Latvia in May and June, but the opposition in the country has called for a boycott and the Latvian government has said it wants Belarus to be replaced.

# The polling that signals the plight of the Union

Polling expert PETER KELLNER on how the Scottish elections could supercharge the SNP's campaign for independence



If Boris Johnson thinks that life will get easier in the spring, he should think again. Even if the current lockdown and vaccine programme both succeed, a fresh crisis is almost certain to erupt in its wake, to last longer than coronavirus, and be harder to tackle.

This year Scottish voters will elect a new parliament to Holyrood. (Polling day should May 6 but may be delayed, along with elections in England and Wales.) Johnson has two reasons to fear the outcome. First, it is almost certain that most members of the new Holyrood parliament will want a new referendum on Scottish independence.

The second is that Scottish views on independence are now closely connected to views on Brexit. Johnson will confront not just a desire to leave the United Kingdom but a demand that Scotland rejoin the European Union. Independence is no longer an end in itself: it is now a necessary step towards a European future.

Moreover, a quirk of Scotland's election system could result not just in a parliamentary majority in Holyrood for a new referendum, but a landslide. This would make it far harder for Johnson to

continue brushing aside demands for a new vote on independence.

For some months, polls have found that most Scots want to leave the UK. For the first time a sustained majority favour independence. When we look under the bonnet at the details from the polling, it becomes clear what has happened.

At the time of the 2016 Brexit referendum, Scottish attitudes to Europe bore little relation to attitudes to Europe. Remainers and Leavers both opposed Scottish independence by similar, modest margins.

That is no longer true. Support for independence has grown sharply among pro-EU Scots, and declined by broadly the same proportion among pro-Brexit Scots. But as Remainers outnumbered Leavers in 2016 by almost two-to-one, the number of Remainers converting to independence is much larger than the number of Leavers becoming unionists. The overall effect has been a marked increase in support for independence.

Comparing YouGov's results from just before the Brexit referendum with its latest findings from a few weeks ago shows how the 'Brexit gap' – the difference between Remainers and Leavers in their backing for Scottish independence – has jumped from a negligible three percentage points to as much as 30.

Separate research findings from both Ipsos MORI and the Scottish Social Attitudes Survey tell much the same story. Scottish voters are increasingly sorting themselves into two distinct tribes: those who support both independence and membership of the EU, and a smaller but still significant



number who oppose both. This reconfiguration of Scottish politics has big implications for the coming election. The two pro-independence parties, the SNP and the Greens, are also strongly pro-EU. The combination of the two causes is increasingly popular.

That is not all. It is the existence of two such parties, and not just one, that could convert a majority in the electorate into a landslide in Holyrood for a fresh referendum on independence.

Scotland's electoral system was designed to make it hard for a single party to win an outright majority. It has happened only once in the five elections that have been held: in 2011, when the SNP secured a majority of nine in the 129-member parliament. Each voter has two votes. The first is for one of the 73 local constituencies. Each of these MSPs is elected by first-past-the-post, as in a UK general election. The second vote is a regional vote. Each of Scotland's eight regions elects seven regional MSPs, so 56 in all.

The aim is to make sure that each party's overall number of MSPs in each region is broadly in line with each party's regional support. This means that parties that win a significant overall vote but few if any constituency seats, win regional seats by way of compensation. By the same token, parties that win shedloads of first-past-the-post constituency seats cannot expect much joy when the regional seats are shared out.

% support for Scottish independence among...

	Remain voters in Brexit referendum (a)	Leave voters in Brexit referendum (b)	Brexit gap: (a) minus (b)
May 2016	46	43	3
Nov 2020	59	29	30
Change	+13	-14	+27

Source: YouGov



RISING NUMBERS: Supporters of Scottish independence protest against Brexit in Glasgow in January 2020

Photo: Getty Images

Which is reasonably fair – unless parties and voters game the system. The point about Scotland’s system is that it is quite easy to game, and this time supporters of independence have every incentive to do so.

At the last Scottish election, the SNP won 59 of the 73 constituencies. When it came to the regional allocations, they won only four more seats. In six of the eight regions they won no regional seats at all. The latest polls indicate that SNP popularity is now higher than it was in 2016. It may well win even more constituency seats – but few, if any, regional seats.

This has a clear lesson for SNP supporters. In at least six regions, and possibly all eight, they will be wasting their regional vote if they stick with the SNP, for it could not help to elect a single extra SNP MSP. If SNP supporters want to maximise the number of pro-independence, pro-EU MSPs, they need to back another party that has the same two objectives.

This is where the existence of two such parties comes into play. The voting system provides a strong inducement for pro-independence Scots to cast their constituency vote for the SNP and their regional vote for the Greens. Suppose the SNP wins around 65 of the 73 constituencies (it could achieve this even if its current poll rating slips slightly). If the Greens’ current support holds up, they might win 8-10 regional seats

without tactical voting by SNP supporters. This would bring the pro-independence total in the new parliament to 73-75, and a modest majority in Holyrood.

However, if enough voters split their vote between the SNP at the constituency level and the Greens regionally, the number of Green MSP could rise to 30 or more. The consequences would be dramatic. Almost 100 MSPs would be pro-independence. They would outnumber the combined ranks of the anti-independence parties – the Conservatives, Labour and Liberal Democrats – by three-to-one. These pro-union parties might feel hard done by: the Greens would be gaining at their expense. But the system is what it is. As with any other voting system, there is nothing to stop voters and parties adapting their tactics to do as well as possible.

None of this means that a fresh referendum is inevitable. Legally, it would need Westminster’s consent; and Johnson has made it clear that he won’t allow it. However, that will not end the story. Whether or not the number of pro-independence MSPs is boosted in the way I describe, the election will produce a clear victory for their cause. Scottish voters are unlikely to cheer English MPs who block their way. Here is a classic example of politics colliding with the law. In the short run, the law usually has the upper hand; but in the long run, politics tends to prevail.

# Mandrake

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## Downing Street’s costly makeover

Having blown tens of thousands of pounds on new offices for his former henchman **Dominic Cummings**, **Boris Johnson** is now focusing on making Downing Street a sufficiently opulent place for him to live and work.

Transparency disclosures show that since Johnson, *pictured*, became prime minister in July 2019, a total of £1.6m has been spent on what is being called The Downing Street Modernisation Programme – all but £34,000 of which has been paid to the established government contractor Interserve Facilities Management, which also works with the Home Office, Foreign Office and Department for Transport. Its boss is **Alan Lovell**, whose wife **Virginia** is the daughter of the late Commons Speaker **Bernard Weatherill**. Cabinet Office spending on the programme appears to have been accelerating lately with £1,019,646 spent in November, £348,406 in October and £205,525 in September, as well as £32,280 in April. This is significantly up on the £227,000 spent between August 2019 and January 2020. The Cabinet Office doesn’t disclose what exactly the money was spent on. All the payments to Interserve come under the general heading of “PPE – POA & AUC (Owned) – Cost additions – buildings.” Still, throwing taxpayers’ money around in this way must come as some consolation for Johnson who is said to be resentful he is £900,000 down on his outside earnings, including the money he was able to make out of the *Telegraph*.



now go to someone else – **Maggie Carver**, the broadcasting watchdog’s deputy chair, is doing so well as its interim boss that she’s expected to be given it full-time.

## Health kick

Whoever **Michael Gove**’s “friend” is who keeps tipping him as the next health secretary – anything to escape responsibility for the calamity that is Brexit – doesn’t seem to be getting through to Boris Johnson. The *Times* reported over the weekend how “some” saw Gove as “a natural” to replace **Matt Hancock**, and quoted “a cabinet minister” saying how he’d done “a solid job” chairing the Covid meetings. Before Christmas, the *Daily Telegraph* had said much the same, quoting “one source” – the same one who’s been blabbing to the *Telegraph*? – as saying “Mr Gove would be a perfect candidate at the Department of Health”.

Over the weekend, the *Sunday Times* quoted a “minister” who is obviously becoming increasingly frustrated taking a shot at Johnson himself over the government’s handling of the pandemic. “What we actually need is behavioural change from Boris,” he harrumphed.

## Happy ending

The idea that journalism is about standing up for the little guy against the mighty took a novel turn when the *Daily Telegraph* columnist **Allison Pearson**, *pictured*, threatened to sue and “finish” **Dave Bradshaw**, a scientist, who’d alleged she was stoking aggression towards NHS workers doing their best during the Covid pandemic.

Bradshaw apologised, but Pearson, who has been sceptical about the dangers posed by Covid, threatened him with a libel action and tweeted details about his employer and workplace. There was widespread disapproval of her tactics and eventually she accepted Bradshaw’s apology.

Happily, some good has come of this. Mandrake hears that **Gina Martin**, the campaigner who helped to make “upskirting” illegal, raised £6,800 to help Bradshaw through his ordeal. Bradshaw has selflessly donated every penny to the Mind mental health charity.



## Invisible man

Mandrake had been waiting patiently for the former *Daily Mail* editor **Paul Dacre**’s three-part television special for Channel 4 in which he would grandly recount how he had re-shaped modern Britain.

The series – first announced in August 2019 – was expected to air early this year, but Channel 4 has not had a word to say about it. The assumption was it would coincide with the publication of his memoirs – tentatively entitled *A Dish Best Eaten* [sic] *Cold* – that he’d begun at the behest of **Natasha Fairweather**, Boris Johnson’s literary agent. No word, either, about these.

Even the job at Ofcom that Dacre was said to be in line for looks like it will

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# EXPERTISE

Few politicians come with a reputation as controversial or fierce as Priti Patel's. **IAN BIRRELL** talks to insiders to find out what lies behind that uncompromising image



Soon after Tony Blair won his second landslide election victory, the *Daily Telegraph* interviewed five women to ask why they wanted to become MPs for the stale, male and moribund Tory party. Among them was a British-Asian public relations executive who had hung out with “a bunch of lefties” at Keele University, liked to play heavy metal music “loud” and talked “lovingly about her frayed biker jacket and Doc Marten boots”.

The paper's political editor was so entranced by this 30-year-old with “heaps of self-confidence”, the state-educated daughter of Gujarati shopkeepers, that he concluded she “could be the salvation of the party”.

The headbanger's name was Priti Patel. She claimed to be the “classic backroom girl” who had never considered becoming an MP but who had become so frustrated with the floundering party – then under the disastrous leadership of Iain Duncan Smith – that she selflessly thought to herself: “Dammit, somebody has to do it.” Having started hunting for a seat, she said the problem facing the shellshocked Tories was clear. “It's in spangly colours and flashing lights: this party has got to progress. It's all about perception. We are seen as the nasty party.”

This was, intriguingly, two months before the party chairman Theresa May sparked a storm by using the same loaded words at their annual conference. Patel looked and sounded like a prototype for the type of modernisation that was promoted later by David Cameron, a shift in direction that helped her win a safe seat in 2010. Yet fast forward a decade and this same woman – having played a key role in the Brexit campaign that demolished Cameron's brand of conservatism – is seen by critics as the smirking embodiment of a reinvigorated nasty party.

Patel, now 48, is the hardline home secretary tasked with overseeing an immigration strategy to help shape our post-Brexit nation. She bounced back from a humiliating cabinet sacking to be handed one of the great offices of state, before successfully resisting a second dismissal over bullying charges. Her tough stance is loved by the Tory party's elderly army of activists, while her robotic style of repeating spin lines infuriates foes.

Despite posing as a symbol of progressive conservatism in that profile, Patel's views have hardly changed over the decades. She has dropped her support

SMIRKING: Priti Patel is seen by critics as the embodiment of the Conservatives' 'nasty party'

Photo: Getty Images



## TOUGH AT THE TOP

for the death penalty, but still stands for the traditional shire county Toryism of law and order, low tax, small government and suspicion of foreigners. It is no surprise that she found a natural home among Essex Conservatives in the largely-white constituency of Witham. Nor that she is such a popular figure on the party's rubber chicken fundraising circuit with speeches telling party activists what they want to hear.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of her ascent is that she is now at the heart of a party that has moved to sound more like her. She is not renowned, however, for strategic flair or smart ideas. “Priti is a totally one-dimensional politician,” said a former Downing Street aide, who added that she was known as the ‘useful idiot’ both in government and the Brexit campaign for the unblinking way that she would take the latest lines. “I've never met a less inquisitive or intellectually challenging politician in my life.”

It is instructive to watch a 2011 edition of the BBC's *Question Time* in which the new MP argued for restoration of capital punishment by saying it was a deterrent that was needed due to dire failures by the criminal-justice system. She was followed by *Private Eye* editor Ian Hislop, who spoke with passion about his magazine's work over half a century in helping overturn miscarriages of justice, highlighting the risk of executions and creating terrorist martyrs.

Asked to reply, Patel simply ploughed on by saying she was not influenced by such arguments. She ignored Hislop's mocking rejoinder that it was not a deterrent to kill innocent people, mechanically reciting that it was a deterrent for guilty people and the system was failing.

Her debating style has not changed over her time in Westminster – although she denied ever being an “active supporter” of the death penalty in her first interview after becoming home secretary. She used this interview to express a hope that crooks “literally feel terror at the thought of committing offences” following her appointment; certainly criminal-justice reformers were chilled to the bone. Yet a prominent Asian figure in the party told me that Patel reflects a strand of migrant thinking that the left struggles with; one that takes a firm line on many issues on the basis that their family prospered under their own steam and thus does not see why others need much state support, let alone sympathise with miscreants.

When a Labour MP accused the Tories of failing to understand racial inequality, she delivered an impassioned response in parliament. She spoke of being “frequently called a P\*\*i in the playground” as a child, racially abused in the street and advised to use her husband's name to advance her career. This speech also highlighted how she has been hurt by some personal attacks when she savaged a *Guardian* cartoon that portrayed her as a fat cow with a ring through her nose. “I have said repeatedly there is no place for racism in our country,” she said. “Sadly too many people are too willing to dismiss the

## EXPERTISE

► From page 23

contributions of those who don't necessarily conform to pre-conceived ideas of how ethnic minorities should behave or think. This in my view is racist in itself."

Patel was born in London in 1972. Her parents Sushil and Anjana had started a chain of newsagents – after their lives in Uganda were shattered by Idi Amin's regime.

She uses this background to tell a well-worn story about why she became a Conservative as the child of hard-working immigrants, joining the party at the age of 18. She identifies Margaret Thatcher – another shopkeeper's daughter – as her inspiration. Others suggest she is more accurately compared with Norman Tebbit, who also represented an Essex seat and held uncompromising right-wing views.

"Priti genuinely loves this country," said one fellow Tory MP, who thinks she might next become party chairman. "She adores her parents and sees how Britain embraced her family after their arrival, giving them – and thus her – a great platform. She feels enormous warmth towards Britain. And in return there is something about her that the grass roots warm to, seeing her as an expression of Thatcherism when she talks of her parents coming here and her humble beginnings."

Yet when Europe began to bubble up as a toxic issue for the Tories, Patel left the party in 1995 to work as a press officer for the Referendum Party launched by billionaire financier James Goldsmith. "She was pretty, flirtatious and hard as nails," recalled one Westminster journalist, adding that she "disrupted the narrative about Goldsmith being a racist misogynist". Critics have subsequently argued her presence on the frontline helped disrupt similar narratives about Brexit and Tory immigration policies.

She rejoined the Conservatives after the 1997 general election, becoming a press aide to William Hague. "Everyone liked her since she was competent, fun, affable, handled journalists well," said one colleague at Tory Central Office. "But no-one would have predicted great things for her." When I asked this person what he thought of her these days, his reply was terse and highlighted her ability to

divide opinion. "I think she is absolutely appalling."

She later moved into the private sector, where she lobbied Brussels against tobacco controls and worked on 'reputation issues' for British American Tobacco over its work with the military dictatorship in Burma. Patel fought a Nottingham seat in 2005 election before landing Witham as part of Cameron's drive to diversify the look of the Tories.

She met her husband Alex Sawyer on a by-election campaign. During Patel's stint as secretary of state for aid in Theresa May's government, it emerged that he was holding three paid posts: working as a marketing consultant for the US stock exchange Nasdaq; earning tens of thousands of pounds running her office; and serving as a south London councillor.

Once in Westminster, her PR skills and media contacts garnered attention. One fellow member of the 2010 intake, admiring her skill at courting publicity, was amazed to see she even wangled an invite to Rupert Murdoch's wedding to Jerry Hall.

She caused a stir with *Britannia Unchained*, a manifesto for turbo-charged Thatcherism written with other rising stars including Liz Truss and Dominic Raab. This slim book called British workers "among the worst idlers in the world" and praised "the intense spirit of competition" found in communist China. It also called on Britain to 'stop indulging in irrelevant debates about sharing the pie between manufacturing and services, the north and the south, women and men'. Now they are all key ministers in a free-spending government focused on levelling-up the north.

She has always been consistent in her desire for Brexit. Although friends say she liked Cameron since he listened to her views on building party relationships with ethnic minorities, he wrote in his biography that among "raging Brexiteers" it was her behaviour "that probably shocked me the most" during the 2016 referendum campaign with pointed attacks on "wealthy" leaders of Remain, criticism of the party manifesto she stood on the previous year and hammering of her own government on immigration. "I was stuck, though: unable to fire her because that would make her a Brexit martyr and fuel the psychodrama," noted Cameron.



RAGING BREXITEER: Priti Patel on the Vote Leave battle bus in Portsmouth during the 2016 referendum campaign

Photo: Getty Images

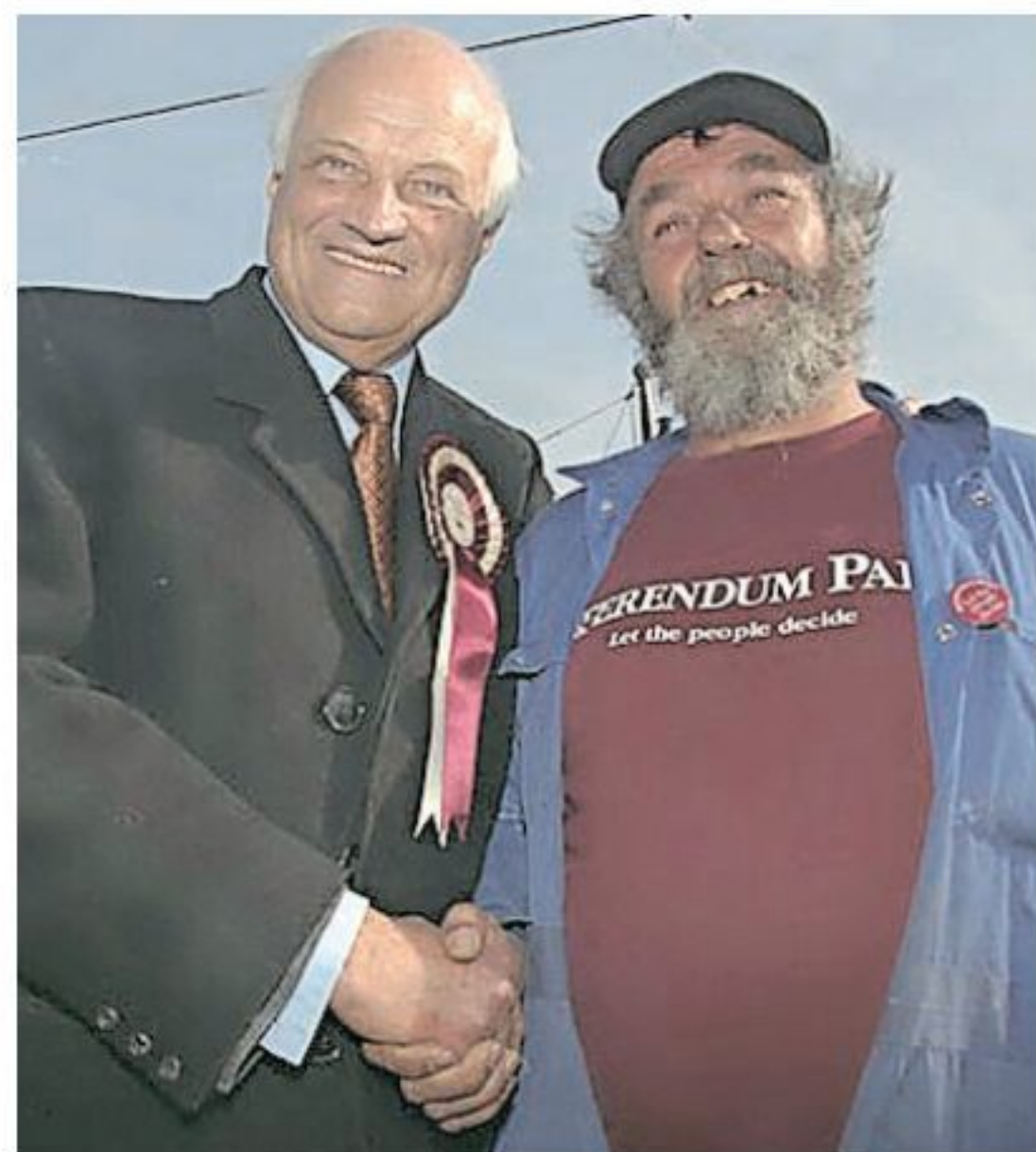
## TIMELINE: PATEL'S PATH

**1972**

Born in London to a Ugandan-Indian family; she goes to school in Watford; then Keele University, studying economics. After a postgraduate course on British government and politics at the University of Essex, she becomes an intern at Conservative Central Office

**1995**

Patel heads the press office of James Goldsmith's eurosceptic Referendum Party



**1997**

Returns to the Tories to work in the press office

**2000**

Leaves to join PR firm Weber Shandwick, where she works on the British American Tobacco account

**2003**

Moves to Diageo, the alcoholic drinks firm

**2005**

Stands for the Tories in Nottingham North, losing to the incumbent Labour MP; She is offered a place on David Cameron's 'A list' of preferred candidates and is adopted as PCC for Witham, a safe Tory seat, in 2006

**2007**

Rejoins Weber Shandwick

**2010**

Becomes MP for Witham; two years later she and other MPs from the 2010 intake publish *Britannia Unchained*, their vision for a more productive UK, with a reduced welfare state. In 2013, she is drafted into the No.10 Policy Unit

**2014**

Becomes Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury





EXPERTISE



Theresa May had no such difficulties, however; after Patel was found to be indulging in freelance foreign policy with unofficial meetings of ministers during a holiday in Israel, which ensured her first job in the cabinet ended in ignominy. Her sacking was a humiliation, with an order to fly back from Kenya to face the music. Yet the pair were never soulmates. The serious and shy prime minister, a former home secretary, saw her international development secretary as shallow while Patel allegedly described her boss in private as “that f\*\*king woman”, believing she was leading an establishment fightback to soften Brexit.

Ministers and officials were not sad to see Patel’s exit from a department that she had previously argued should be abolished. Cabinet members mocked her penchant for speaking in management cliches that made little sense, joking after meetings they had no idea what she was saying.

The big question that dogs Patel is not about her views, which are crystal clear; but about her behaviour; after a cabinet office inquiry found she broke the ministerial code by bullying officials. She apologised, admitting “I’ve clearly upset people”, but Johnson retained her as home secretary, sparking the resignation of his standards adviser.

One former Downing Street aide called her “the classic kiss up, kick down” character when I asked about this, yet other MPs and aides say she can be kind and forgiving of criticism. Perhaps the most accurate appraisal came from a former minister: “She is not a nasty person, not some kind of sadist, just out of her depth and trying to show she is in control so she tends to assert herself far too much.”

Did hostility from officials lie behind the recent leaks about her department looking at ludicrous plans to dump asylum seekers on islands in the south Atlantic and use wave machines to deter boats in the Channel? Regardless, Patel has used her time in the home office to rebuild bridges with the police and try to clear up the Windrush mess left by May as well as to unveil the government’s new immigration strategy. According to one well-connected source, she thinks “the problem with the Home Office is that they see their role as stopping all people getting to this country when they should

see it as stopping the wrong people while letting in the right people”.

The central feature of the new immigration strategy is a system that allocates points for speaking English, earning above £25,600 and having an approved job offer. It is called an Australian-style system, although in reality the ideas date back to reforms introduced under Blair.

There are fast-track visas for doctors and nurses – although not for care workers despite a terrible staffing crisis in the sector that has been intensified by Brexit. Critics complain their approach is bureaucratic, complex and very inflexible. Meanwhile Patel has unleashed a barrage of crass attacks on “do-gooders” and “lefty lawyers” defending the rights of refugees, even lumping them in with people traffickers as she assails them for supposedly “defending the indefensible”.

One friend suggested Patel is aware that her rise may not take her to the very top. “She’s the only member of the cabinet who does not sit there thinking that she could do a better job than Boris,” he said. “It is very difficult in the public limelight, but on a different level for the prime minister. She likes her job but would not like that. I don’t think she wants to be PM.” Who knows if this is true or not, given the remorseless ambition that has seen her impressive rise to date. She may not be the saviour of her party, as predicted all those years ago. But she does symbolise how cosmetic modernisation in politics can backfire with nasty consequences.

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2015

Promoted to cabinet-level as Minister of State for Employment



2016

Patel campaigns for Leave; after the referendum she supports Theresa May’s leadership bid, arguing her challenger, fellow Leaver Andrea Leadsom, would be too divisive to win an election. May appoints Patel as international development secretary



2017

She is sacked from the role over unauthorised meetings with Israeli officials

2019

Appointed home secretary by Boris Johnson

2020

Apologises after a bullying inquiry found she had broken the code governing ministers’ behaviour but keeps her job

## EXPERTISE

**HELEN PARKINSON** on the history of the dirndl, an outfit co-opted by the Nazis but which has successfully shrugged off this association



ts feminine frills are more likely to conjure images of Oktoberfest's beer-slugging or Julie Andrews spinning on a hillside than a catwalk. But when fashion designer Vivienne Westwood, on a visit to Austria in 2001, said "there would be no ugliness in the world if every woman wore a dirndl", it was a harbinger of the Alpine folk dress' unlikely style renaissance.

From a star turn at the Dolce & Gabbana show during Milan Fashion Week to Kim Kardashian, no less, channelling Heidi on holiday in Munich, the dirndl was back in vogue – not least in its mountain home, where it remains a wardrobe staple. Buried beneath the petticoat layers, however, lies a troubled past.

The dirndl we know today – a smart bodice, blouse, skirt and apron ensemble – has its roots in the 19th century. At this point, the dress and its fetching male counterpart, the lederhosen, were the garb of the rural population of the eastern Alps. Stretching from Switzerland in the west, through Liechtenstein, Austria, northern Italy and Bavaria, this *tracht* (the German word for traditional clothing) was worn for working the land. But a new hankering for provincial culture among the upper classes would see it broach new territory, swapping its natural habitat of the mountain meadows for the gilded splendour of the royal palaces.

Tracht became entwined with the dawn of romantic nationalism – the importance of local customs and traditions in forming a national identity. Europe had been left licking its wounds after the Napoleonic Wars ended in 1815 and the states affected by the conflict wanted to rediscover their national identity – or what was left of it. In Bavaria and Austria, this triggered a fresh interest in cultural heritage: folk art, music, literature and, of course, fashion, were to become the latest fad.

At today's Oktoberfest, the unofficial tracht uniform is donned with glee by Germans and tourists alike, but things were very different at the first event. The inaugural Oktoberfest in 1810 was a horse race to celebrate the nuptials of the future King Ludwig of Bavaria and his wife, Queen Therese.

Alas, unlike the modern festival, there was not a pair of ill-fitting leather breeches or a sky-high skirt in sight. The academic Simone Egger, author of *The Oktoberfest Tracht Phenomenon*, notes that Munich's residents were given then-fashionable French-inspired outfits to wear to the celebrations, instead of their normal clothes.

Yet, in a change of fortune 25 years later, tracht would be the guest of honour at Oktoberfest. A parade of folk costumes at the 1835 festival were among the celebrations for the silver wedding anniversary of Ludwig and Therese. A further royal seal of approval came from



# THE COSTUME THAT CAME BACK FROM THE NAZIS

Ludwig's successor, King Maximilian II of Bavaria, who allowed tracht to be worn at the royal court. The Bavarian bourgeoisie followed his lead in adopting the rustic fashion and soon, the dirndl was no longer the preserve of the countryside.

Seeing the dirndl make fashion strides among the upper classes led to a resurgence in favour for tracht among the general population – and two entrepreneurial brothers spied a business opportunity. Julius and Moritz Wallach moved from Bielefeld in north-west Germany to Munich in 1890, where they became enamoured with their new

#### NATIONAL DRESS:

1 Young women wearing traditional Bavarian dirndls celebrate the opening of the 2013 Oktoberfest beer festival at the Theresienwiese in Munich

Photo: Getty Images

home's folk traditions. Inspired by the designs worn by the wealthy Bavarians holidaying in the southern Alpine resorts, they began to produce exquisite, hand-printed dirndls and sold them from their Munich boutique.

Word spread fast, and the Wallach brothers quickly made a name for their designs in the city. Their dresses appeared at the centenary celebrations for Oktoberfest in 1910. They soon became in demand outside the city confines, with one of their designs being worn by Prussian royalty. Their work was even snapped up by the theatre world, appearing in the operetta *Im*

*Weissen Rössl (The White Horse Inn)*. Offstage, they cannily marketed the dirndl to the masses during the First World War as a casual summer dress and its popularity boomed.

But as the flames of Nazism started to burn through German and Austrian society, the Jewish Wallach brothers' flourishing business was fatally hurt. To promote the idea of a Pan-Germanic identity, the Nazis seized the same ideas of the nationalism movement of the previous decade and appropriated dirndls, lederhosen and other symbols of folk culture for sinister gain. The dirndl's homely, feminine image was co-opted and



1



2

used in propaganda photos of the time portraying Aryan ideals.

Under the Nazi regime, Jewish people were banned from participating in folk culture – something the Wallachs and other Jewish families had played an instrumental part in helping to develop. Julius and Moritz fled to the United States, while their other brother, Max, died in Auschwitz in 1944.

The damage was done to the dirndl. What was once an innocent dress now seemed to be tainted for a generation. While rural folk continued to wear the clothes of their heritage, tracht fell out of fashion in the cities after the war, contaminated by its far-right associations. But as the decades passed, and memories began to fade, enthusiasm for the traditional clothing swelled once more.

The Munich Olympics of 1972 was a first marker of tracht's return; the hostesses' official uniforms were bright blue dirndls that made a striking impression on the new colour broadcasts on TV screens worldwide. As the 21st century arrived, the dirndl had become a wardrobe staple for young and old in the Alps once again.

## THE PATTERN ON SCHUHPLATTNER

This is the foot, knee and thigh-slapping folk dance popular in Bavaria and Tyrol, often performed in traditional dress. Dancers strike the soles of their shoes (*Schuhe*) with their hands held flat (*platt*).

Like the oom-pah bands synonymous with Bavarian beer tents and *schuhplattler*, Alpine folk costumes are far more than a stale cliché – they are part of the cultural fabric of the Alps. Just bag an invitation to a Tyrolean wedding, Viennese ball or the Oktoberfest itself to see for yourself. All the industry's major players have boutiques in Munich, like Gössl, the family-run firm from Salzburg. The ornate dresses in the windows of its chic Residenzstraße store can cost four figures.

For some commentators in the German media, there remains a lingering right wing association with tracht. Dirndls and lederhosen, with all the trimmings like

SINISTER PAST:  
2 Adolf Hitler and Joseph Goebbels with a group of women in dirndls, 1937

3 Newlyweds in traditional costume of dirndl and lederhosen in Carinthia, Austria, circa 1935

Photos: Getty Images



3

the traditional Tyrolean hat, are a common sight at events for the more conservative-leaning political parties, for example the FPÖ, Austria's right-wing 'Freedom Party'.

That said, Austria's president, Alexander Van der Bellen of the centre-left Green Party also took to donning lederhosen instead of his usual suit on the campaign trail in 2016 in an effort to win over the rural voters. Could his leather breeches have been the winning ticket?

Back at the Wiesn, hashtags like #dirndlliebe (dirndl love) and #wiesnmadl (Oktoberfest girl) trend on Instagram every September, showcasing a rainbow of dirndls. Traditional dirndl manufacturers are making use of social media to keep the new generation of tracht enthusiasts on side.

In 2019 Krüger, a brand with over 60 years of history, launched a blogger collection teaming up with key social media stars like German fashion blogger Leonie Hanne and Austrian singer Victoria Swarovski to create their own dirndl designs. Traditionalists may shudder, but it's an undeniably novel way of keeping a centuries-old fashion alive for many years to come. *Prost* to that!

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# HOW REBATE COST US IN THE END

It might have vanished with Brexit, but the UK's rebate was crucial to understanding UK-EU relations. **JOHN ELSOM** explores its history



In 1979, within six months of winning her first election, Margaret Thatcher attended her first European summit in Dublin. She went with a specific request. Britain was paying too much annually into the EEC's budget and receiving too little in return. She demanded a rebate. She was offered £350 million, which she rejected as far too small. She wanted one billion pounds. "Let me be very clear," she insisted. "I am not asking the Community for money. I am asking for my money back."

The battle over the rebate lasted for nearly five years. It was settled at the summit meeting in Fontainebleau in 1984, with a complicated formula, whereby the UK received back annually two thirds of its net contribution, the difference between what it had paid into the Community and what it received back in the form of subsidies and regeneration grants. It was immensely popular in Britain. It was one of three 'victories' which earned Thatcher the reputation of being the Iron Lady, others being the miners' strike and the Falklands War.

But the French president, François Mitterrand, was among those who believed that she could have struck a better deal, if she had been more aware of what her EEC colleagues were trying to do. The Community was growing in size and ambition. Spain, Greece and Portugal were about to join. The European Space Agency was recently established. Britain should have played a pivotal role in such developments, winning investment and influence. Thatcher was behaving like someone sitting with her colleagues in a restaurant, haggling over the bill, but deaf to the rest of the conversation.

In the UK, the size of the contribution had been a source of contention since the week-long debate in October, 1971 which led to British entry. This was by far the best-informed of the many debates that preceded and followed it. The terms of entry were known. MPs had discussed the details with their constituents during the summer. The draft agreement that the prime minister, Edward Heath, and Sir Alec Douglas-Home, his foreign minister, had struck with the EEC was more precise than any previous attempt under Macmillan and Wilson. There were rebels in both main parties. Tory members were allowed a free, un-whipped, vote, Labour MPs were not, and the motion was passed by a majority of 356 to 244.

Denis Healey led for the Labour opposition, concentrating on the matter of money. Britain would be paying 25% of the Community's income and receiving only 6% in return. Much would be spent



on the Common Agricultural Policy, which in 1985, amounted to 70% of the EEC's total budget. In Britain, CAP was an object of scorn with stories of wine lakes and melting butter mountains. Michael Foot, an ardent anti-European, was scathing. Why should we join a club whose main purpose was to support the inefficient French farmers?

On the second day of the debate, the first voice was raised in support for the CAP. John McKie, MP for Enfield, pointed out that, in the mid-1950s, there had been more than 22 million small farms within the Community, chronically poor, which had been reduced to some 10 million holdings, relatively prosperous, which could afford to buy their own tractors. CAP's first aim had been to feed the many millions, left starving by the Second World War, and to ensure that the EEC would always be self-sufficient in food supplies.

CAP had taken into account the mistakes made in the Soviet Union, with its collective farms, and in Britain, where the landscape was transformed during and after the war. The hedgerows had been uprooted. Huge new fields had been created and there was a careless use of chemical fertilizers. CAP tried to preserve, where possible, the quality of the countryside. But it confronted another problem. How could the wealth of the industrialised Europe be spread around to benefit its rural regions, the

**MONEY MATTERS:** Margaret Thatcher speaking at a European Council meeting, 1981

Photo: Getty Images

1980s equivalent of Boris Johnson's levelling up? Farming was by its nature unpredictable. There were gluts, famines, and animal infections. Global warming was a fresh cause for concern.

This ambitious project in social engineering began by subsidising farmers for what they produced, but soon acquired other functions. It sought to regulate abattoirs, control the use of pesticides and monitor mad cow disease, first detected in the mid-1980s. It should have been in the interest of British farmers, as of everyone else, that these matters were handled at a community level, for the threats were shared. But the UK imported many food products from other parts of the world, including the Commonwealth and the US. These would face similar rules and higher tariffs.

In *North-South: a Programme for Survival* (1980), a report from a commission, led by the former West German chancellor, Willy Brandt, the concentration of power and wealth within industrial countries from the north, and the lack of it among the impoverished regions of the south was outlined. Heath was one of his contributors. Brandt, a Social Democrat, feared that this split would lead to wars, mass migration and the degradation of the planet. He hoped that a more united Europe, bringing back those countries lost to Russia in the east, could act as a

force for good, healing the wounds left by its destructive 20th century history.

His views were shared by the French finance minister, Jacques Delors, who became the new president of the European Commission in 1985. Delors reduced the dependence of the farming industries upon subsidies. He was a Social Democrat, but believed in the market economy, up to a point. CAP's share of the EEC's budget went down from 70% to 40% during his period of office. At the same time, he widened CAP's remit to include measures to combat climate change, to protect the environment and to develop new sources of income, such as tourism, which supported the rural economy.

Few of these measures should have alarmed farmers in the UK, except that they were introduced by what some still regarded as a foreign power. Elsewhere in the Community, the reformed CAP was greeted with enthusiasm. It would be cynical to suggest this was solely for financial reasons. Poets and painters of the Romantic Movement – Wordsworth in England, Mickiewicz in Poland, Pushkin and Chekhov in Russia – inspired a haunting love for their natural landscapes. Their verses were learnt at primary schools, their pictures were hung on cottage walls. Among the right-wing country parties, hostile to immigration, and the mainly left-wing Greens, the aims of the new CAP struck a common chord in their hearts.

Thatcher should have been on their side. She spoke eloquently against the causes of climate change, but 'modified her position', or 'conducted a U-turn', what you will, later in life. In the battle over the rebate, her relentless stress on value for money seemed limited and materialistic. As Mitterrand predicted, Britain drifted into the slow lane of EEC expansion, except on that one issue, the free market, which was at the core of her beliefs.

The special terms of the annual rebate was repeated nowhere else and caused resentment among those poorer countries from central Europe, seeking to join. The UK was once the 'sick man of Europe'. As the result of membership, it claimed to be among the richest in the world. And yet it denied to others the special terms that it had received for itself.

Successive PMs – Major, Blair and Cameron – came under pressure to get rid of this exceptional treatment. The rebate was an anomaly, an accident of history, a contorted formula that satisfied nobody. But, in the UK, it was politically very popular. It appealed to those people (naming no names) who believed that the best way to deal with Johnny Foreigner was to stick to your guns and wait for them to surrender. God created the English Channel, according to an interview given by Thatcher to US journalists, to protect the freedom of the individual from the practices on the continent, a very large whiff of Anglo-Protestantism. December 31, 2020, will put these ancient beliefs to a timely test.

■ John Elsom is the author of *State of Paralysis – A Cultural History of Brexit* (The Lutterworth Press, 2019)

## EXPERTISE

## Mitch Benn

Comedian,  
Musician,  
Writer

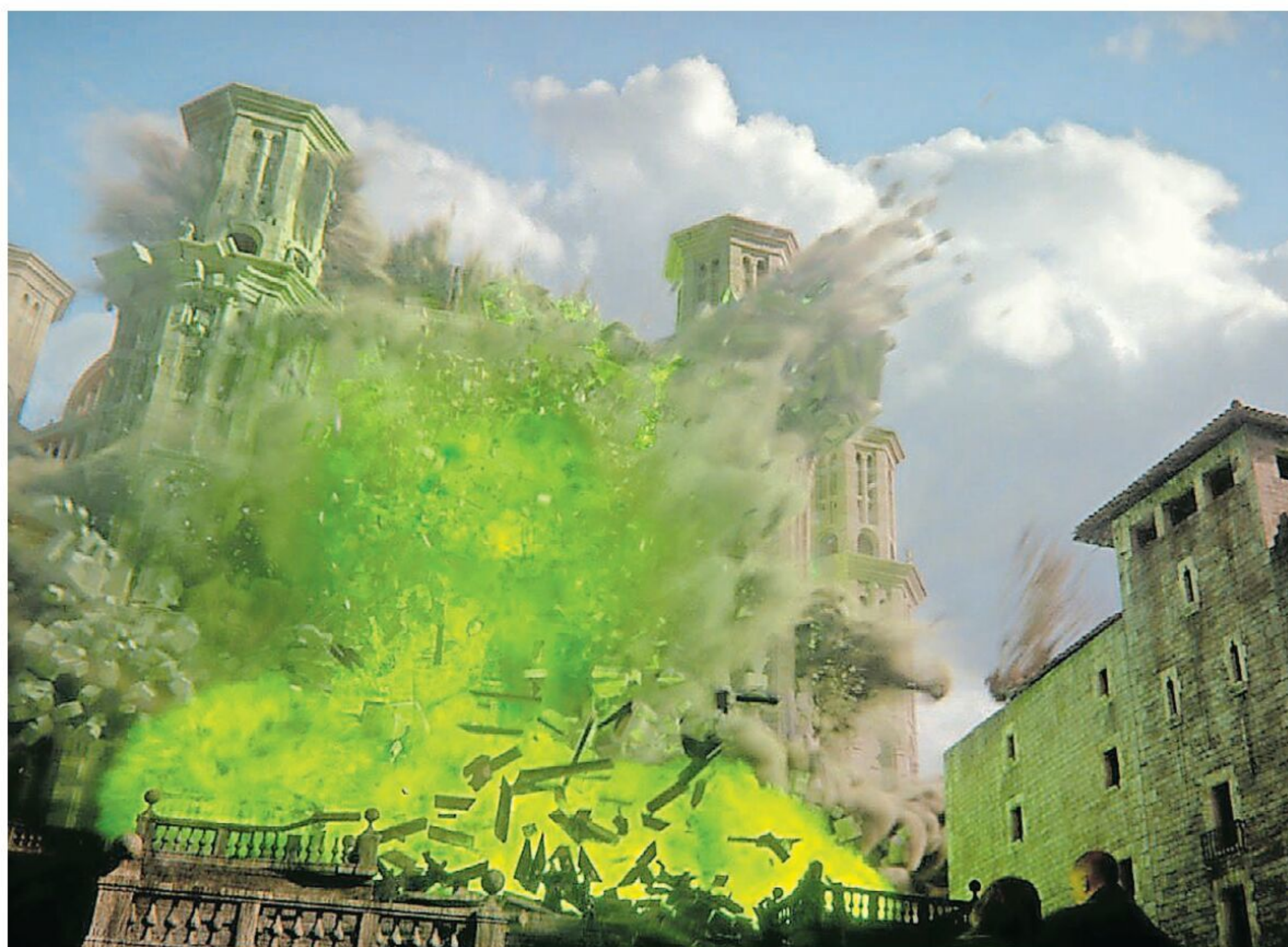
Here's the thing: I'm not an expert. On anything. I know a fair bit about a fair few things, but the capacity to store and retrieve biggish reserves of largely trivial information does not 'expertise' make. I have a few marketable skills; I'm pretty good at writing songs, funny and otherwise, I'm not bad on the guitar and I have a peculiar gift for accents, but the point is I'm not exactly an authority on anything. I'm just a guy with a decent turn of phrase and a sense of humour who's been lucky enough to bag a newspaper column in which to vent his varying well-researched opinions (mind you, 20 years ago so was Boris Johnson and look what happened there).

And yet I, a humble troubadour and poker of fun, managed to predict that Donald Trump would never accept losing this last presidential election all the way back in February 2017, just a month after he took office. Because it was already self-evident.

It was in this very newspaper; some of you may even recall the piece in question because as is often the case with my 'bits' I'd based it around a rather tenuous pop culture analogy. I was referring to the episode of *Game of Thrones* in which wily Queen Cersei, due to stand trial in the Cathedral, instead blows the Cathedral up with all her gloating enemies waiting inside it. The moment which struck me as particularly germane was the line delivered by Cersei's rival Queen Margaery; realising too late that something is very wrong, she points out that Cersei knows the dire consequences of not turning up to the trial, and yet hasn't turned up anyway, and that as such "she has no intention of suffering those consequences". Boom.

The point I was making was that president Trump, having never enjoyed a majority of support in the US (he lost the popular vote in 2016 by three million votes) began his term by announcing a raft of controversial policies which drove his approval figures down to about 40%: I mused that, like Queen Cersei, if a politician insists on outraging the majority it's because they've decided that they don't fear the judgment of the majority. Even then, just four weeks after his inauguration, it was obvious that Trump would never accept the outcome of an election that didn't go his way. (He'd even said as much during the 2016 campaign.)

So if this was obvious to me – the funny song guy – four years ago, why have I spent the last week reading how nobody could have predicted that Trump's first term would end in revolt



# I TOLD YOU SO ON TRUMP.. BECAUSE I'D SEEN IT ON GOT

and bloodshed? Plenty of us predicted exactly that. We may not have foreseen the precise circumstances – Trump dispatching a lynch mob to storm the Capitol – but we'd always known something like this would happen.

What I didn't see coming – and perhaps should have – was Trump's chosen method of self-preservation: the construction of a North Korea-style personality cult around himself. I guess this is where human subjectivity kicks in; to me it's unfathomable that anyone could find Trump anything other than emetically repellent on every conceivable level (I can't even listen to people doing impressions of him anymore) but it's obviously the case that lots of people find him – much as he finds himself – magnetically

charismatic. His supporters now cleave to him as an exercise of faith rather than as a result of any sort of practical analysis; after all, he's done precious little to actually benefit them.

**BLOODSHED:** Queen Cersei used explosive potion wildfire to take out her enemies in hit series *Game of Thrones*. Trump's tactics were different. Left, Mitch Benn's TNE column from February 2017 that predicted Trump wouldn't accept election defeat

There's no doubt that most if not all of those who charged the Capitol sincerely believed – on no evidence other than Trump's say so – that some sort of chicanery was taking place in there, that a coup was under way – little realising that they *were* the coup.

However things play out in the next week or so it's this – establishment of the Church of Trump – which gives the most cause for concern about America's future (and by extension, the future of the world). Trump got 70 million votes, it's true, but this doesn't mean he has 70 million glassy-eyed acolytes – as we know, many people vote numbly and loyally for whichever party they've always voted for, irrespective of what that party's actually doing at the time. But there is now a worryingly large contingent on the American right whose decision-making processes are now utterly unmoored from reality. I'm not sure what the Democrats – or, indeed, the Republicans – can do about this.

All the more reason for the new administration, once installed, to prosecute the newly-vulnerable Trump and his co-conspirators for inciting this revolt and every other crime they can build a case for. Even if there's no way of breaking Trump's Mansonesque hold over his followers, they can at least ensure he's no longer in a position to exploit it.



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# EUROFILE

STRIKING OUT:  
Wassily Kandinsky's  
*Black Lines 1*  
(*Schwarze Linien 1*),  
(1913)

Credit: Solomon R.  
Guggenheim Museum,  
New York; VEGAP,  
Bilbao, 2020

## KANDINSKY THE KALEIDOSCOPE

Colour was always at the core of Wassily Kandinsky's art. **CLAUDIA PRITCHARD** reports on a stunning exhibition which traces his creative journey as he was shifted around Europe by the events of the early 20th century



## EUROFILE ART

The career path from lawyer to artist is not often taken. Tchaikovsky managed to duck out of jurisprudence and into composition. But for his fellow Russian, Wassily Kandinsky, the circuitous route itself helped forge his distinctive painting style.

Born in Moscow in 1866, Kandinsky read law and economics in the city, and took an especial interest in the legal systems of rural communities. As an expert in this field he was asked to join an ethnographic survey of Vologda in the north, in 1889.

There he was captivated by the brilliance of traditional art, with its fearless reds and optimistic yellows.

These dramatic colours and the unashamed shifts from one side of the colour spectrum to the other were to become essential to his own artworks.

At 30 Kandinsky abandoned his legal career altogether and set up as a painter. Moving to the vibrant centre of the European art scene in Munich, his personal style quickly developed as he challenged accepted norms one by one.

Observational scenes flattened and gave way to less representational forms. Colour no longer replicated real life, but showed instead the artist's reaction to what he beheld, so that by 1908 and *The Blue Mountain*, not only is the hillside azure, but horses are yellow and human faces green.

Apart from the pivotal ethnographical tour, two other formative influences on Kandinsky echoed throughout his career. One was discovering on a gallery visit before leaving Moscow the *Haystack* pictures of Claude Monet.

This series, depicting the same mounds of hay at different times of day, amazed Kandinsky: here the stacks were red, here purple, then silvery grey. At the same time as these infinite possibilities for colour opened up, he heard the opera *Lohengrin* by Richard Wagner, with its vivid orchestral effects.

So began a lifelong endeavour to do on canvas what a composer does with sound – to create a world that is not figurative but yet coherent and that, without direct reference to any event or person, arouses emotions in the listener/viewer.

Kandinsky had synaesthesia, the condition that links sound to colour. In artists and composers such as Olivier Messiaen, who also had the condition, this crossover between the visual and the aural is like an extra sense.

The Russian went so far as to name his works, with reference to the musical world, *Improvisations* and those that he – and the world – considered his masterpieces, *Compositions*. There were 10 *Compositions*, of which three were lost.

It was a visit to Kandinsky in Munich by the American collector Solomon Guggenheim in the 1930, who had been buying his work since 1922, that was ultimately to bring Kandinsky to a wider public.

In 1939 Guggenheim opened New York's Museum of Non-Objective Painting, forerunner of the Solomon R Guggenheim Museum. Today, the great Guggenheim collection, further enhanced by the gifts of other benefactors, includes some 150 works by Kandinsky.

Since October 1997, when the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao opened in Frank Gehry's spectacular building, works have been loaned to by New York, most recently for a large-scale exhibition







**RADICAL LANDSCAPES:**  
**1** In *The Blue Mountain* (1908) Kandinsky redefined the role of colour

**2** The brick tower in *Landscape with Factory Chimney* (1910) slices through the picture

**3** Early woodcuts such as the Hilla von Rebay Foundation's *Church* (1907) illustrate Kandinsky's familiarity through research with his native Russia's folk traditions

Credit: Solomon R Guggenheim Museum, New York; VEGAP, Bilbao, 2020

**RIDERS IN A STORM**



**MOVEMENT:** Wassily Kandinsky's cover of *Der Blaue Reiter Almanach* (1912)  
 Photo: Wikipedia

The Blue Rider (*Der Blaue Reiter*) group was a very short-lived art movement. It came together in Munich in 1911, as a rejection of the *Neue Künstlervereinigung München* (NKVM), ('Munich New Association of Artists', formed two years earlier and also centred around Kandinsky. The Blue Rider group considered that the principles of the NKVM had become too strict and traditional. *Der Blaue Reiter Almanach* ('The Blue Rider Almanac') was published in early 1912, featuring reproductions of more than 140 artworks, and 14 major articles. A second volume was planned, but the onset of the First World War prevented it. Franz Marc and August Macke, both members of the group, were killed in the conflict.

entitled simply *Kandinsky*, which can be viewed online.

Here the artist's journey from figurative to abstract painter is traced in 62 works showing the influence of his travels not only through his native Russia and adopted home of Germany but also France, and the impact of two world wars.

While dismissing as merely decorative art that were merely pleasing arrangements of forms, in *Landscape with Factory Chimney* (1910) Kandinsky began to fragment scenes.

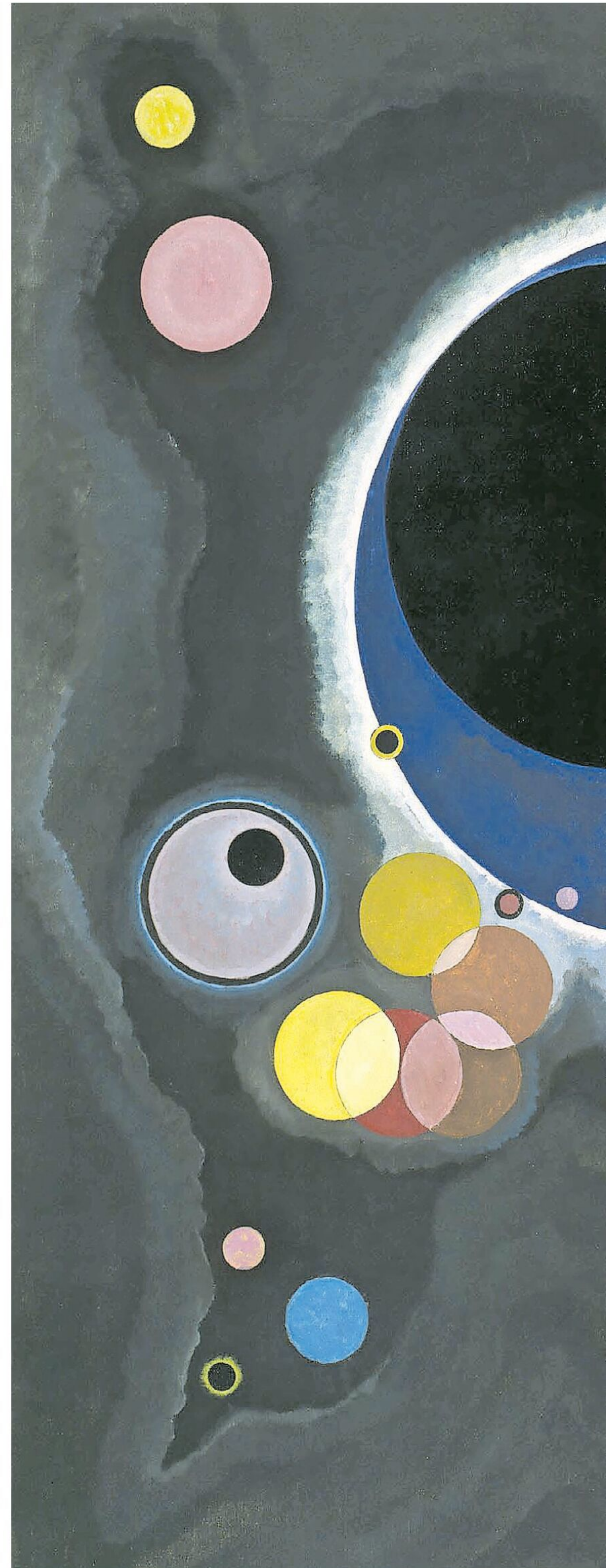
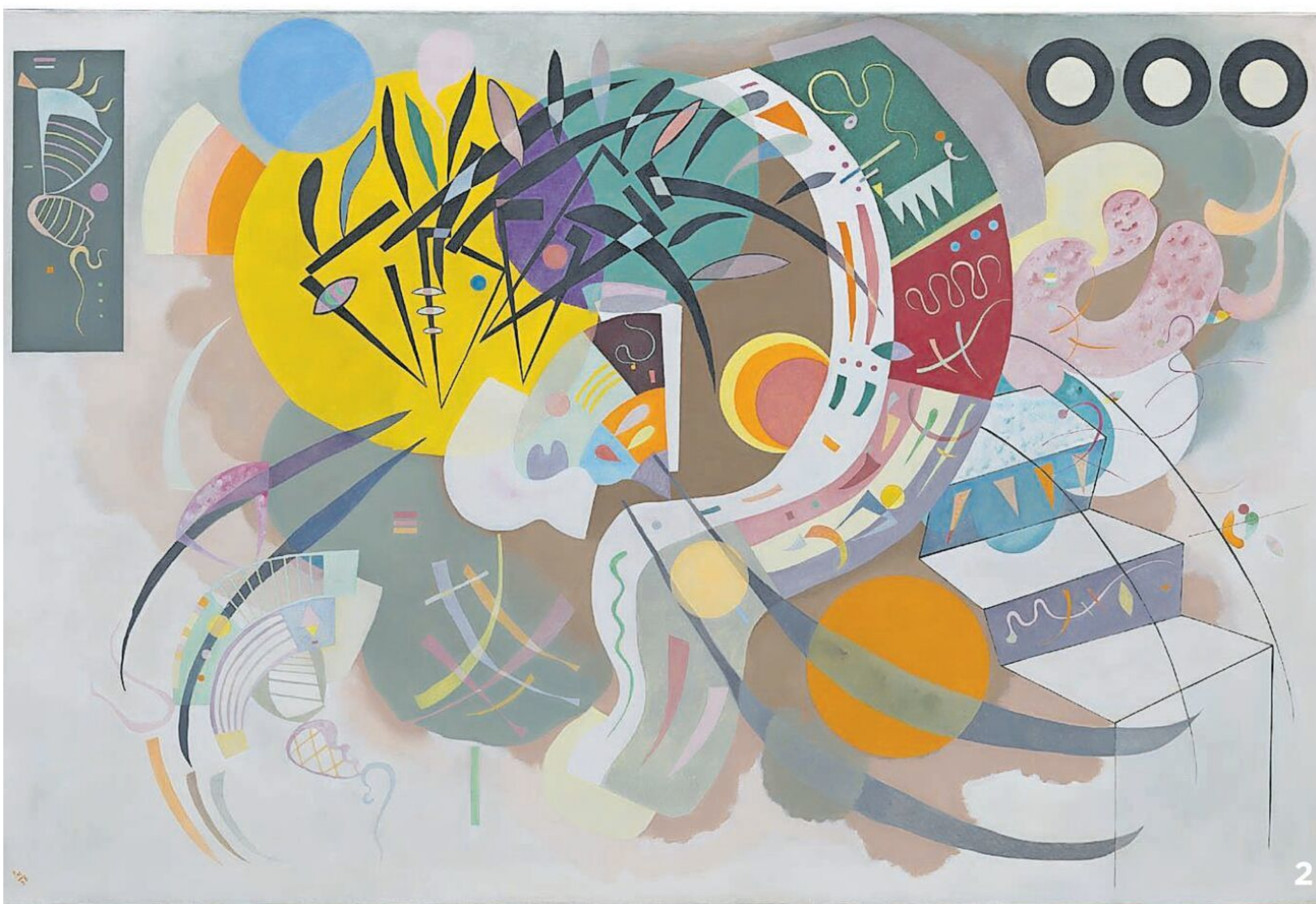
Within two years, works such as *Improvisation 28 (Second Version)* and, in 1913, *Small Pleasures*, were marked by recurring but detached elements – hillocks, towers, questing lines.

A familiar motif is the horse and rider, representing Kandinsky's own crusade against convention.

With the German artist Franz Marc, Kandinsky founded the *Der Blaue Reiter* (The Blue Rider), an unstructured group of artists interested in the expressive potential of colour and the spiritual power of form.

Sometimes Kandinsky's horseman was represented by his weapon, as in *Painting with White Border* (1913), where the busy world contained by the ribbon of white is pierced by a ghostly lance.

**EUROFILE ART**





## CIRCLES OF INFLUENCE:

**1** Portrait of Kandinsky (1933) by Erfurth Hugo

Credit: Centre Pompidou MNAM-CCI, Dist. RMN-Grand Palais/ Guy Carrard

**2** Biomorph forms inhabit *Dominant Curve* (1936), a legacy of Kandinsky's growing interest in specimens from the natural world

**3** The artist, who regarded the circle as the supreme geometric form, created a whole constellation in *Several Circles* (1926)

Credit: Solomon R Guggenheim Museum, New York; VEGAP, Bilbao, 2020

▶ From page 33

Other motifs were similarly refined – rolling hills were suggested by arching curves, trees are replaced by purposeful verticals.

At the outbreak of the First World War, the artist was obliged to return to his home country. There Kazimir Malevich, Natalia Goncharova and Mikhail Larionov were among the groundbreaking artists who were also experimenting with untethered forms – geometrical statements floating and clustering across the canvas.

From 1917, the year in which he married, until 1922, he was influential in teaching and curating posts until his work fell out of favour with the rise of Socialist Realism.

Returning to Germany in 1921, with his wife Nina, he continued to experiment

“ The following summer Kandinsky began teaching at the Bauhaus, where his work chimed with the rationality of geometric form. He shared, too, with its other teachers, a belief in the transformative power of art in society

with his visual lexicon, devising a loose vocabulary of form and colour.

The triangle embodied feelings active or even aggressive; the square stood for peace and calm; the circle was the supreme form, spiritual and cosmic. *In the Black Square* (1923) has echoes of Malevich, but Kandinsky's quadrangle frames a symphonic explosion of fast-moving rhythmic forms and bold colour.

The following summer Kandinsky began teaching at the Bauhaus, where his work chimed with the rationality of geometric form.

He shared, too, with its other teachers, a belief in the transformative power of art in society. When the state-funded school fell victim to the Nazi government in 1933, its artists and architects scattered. Some, such as Josef and Anni Albers, sought a safe haven and new creative and teaching opportunities in the United States.

Kandinsky resettled in Neuilly-sur-Seine on the outskirts of Paris, where over his final decade fellow artists drawn to or resident in the capital included Robert and Sonia Delaunay, Fernand Léger, Joan Miró and Piet Mondrian.

Against the backdrop of a vibrant, urban arts life he further developed a growing interest in natural forms. He had collected natural specimens and scientific encyclopedias while at the Bauhaus, and now works such as *Dominant Curve* (1936) began to suggest a living world of living world with fleshy organisms and simple, soft-edged moving cells.

The final movement of his life's composition had come full circle, from the natural world to an intellectual utopia and back again.

■ *Kandinsky* is at Museo Guggenheim Bilbao, until May 23 2021, and online

## EUROFILE TELEVISION

*Ready Steady Go!* was hardly one of the sixties survivors, with few traces left of the show that did so much to define the decade. But, says **GARTH CARTWRIGHT**, a new book manages to capture the spirit of a legendary programme and its moment in time



“The weekend starts here” went the tag line to a dynamic new TV show and, between August 1963 and December 1966, this truly was the case for many British youth, as *Ready Steady Go!* began its broadcast at 6pm every Friday.

Heralded by some as the greatest music TV series ever, *Ready Steady Go!* attained ‘legendary’ status decades ago but, frustratingly, appeared to have vanished leaving few traces, more mythic than tangible.

This situation has been changing, though, first with a BBC4 documentary, screened last March, and now a huge hardback book, *Ready, Steady, Go! The Weekend Starts Here: The Definitive Story of the Show That Changed Pop TV*.

At first glance author Andy Neill’s book appears the literary equivalent of those multi-album box-sets (containing demos, retakes et al) that are aimed at uber-fans: it weighs a couple of kilos, documents each episode and is jammed with photos and memorabilia, the perfect present for a 1960s obsessed, Brit pop anorak. Upon reading I quickly realised that Neill – biographer of The Who and The Faces – has written far more than a glorified fanzine: *Ready, Steady, Go!* was, he convincingly argues, popular entertainment television that helped change both British TV and society.

Long described as the soundtrack to ‘Swinging London’, Neill demonstrates how *RSG!* was more than simply chic pop stars and presenters: as Pete Townsend notes in his interview, “it’s not flippant to say that *RSG!* probably helped pave the way for sexual liberation, but more seriously to the legalisation of homosexuality in the UK and a broader racial integration”.

Indeed, *RSG!* gave young women leading media roles (as presenters and producers), embraced African American culture in a way no other British media previously had and caught youth culture’s fizz, the sense that the young were no longer going to remain deferential to their elders. More than any other document of that era – including the Beatles’ films – the series captured what made the 1960s so dynamic.

Ironically, *RSG!*’s founders gave little initial thought to challenging establishment values. Instead, journalist Elkan Allan, having been appointed Head of Entertainment at Rediffusion, a media company created to make programmes for ITV, realised with the onset of Beatlemania that a pop programme would likely succeed.



# THE TV SHOW THAT MADE THE SIXTIES SWING



1



2



3

**STONES AGE:**  
**1** The Rolling Stones rehearse for a *Ready Steady Go!* appearance in 1965. From left, Brian Jones, Bill Wyman, Mick Jagger and Keith Richards

**2** Dusty Springfield, pictured with Martha Reeves of Martha and the Vandellas, left, was a *RSG!* regular

**3** David Bowie performs on *RSG!* in March 1966

Photos: Getty Images

At 41, Allan realised he needed youth to help shape his vision so hired his 24-year-old secretary, Vicki Wickham, as assistant producer. Wickham was an inspired choice although his initial presenter, 34-year old Keith Fordyce, was less so, being the epitome of the senatorial TV chap.

Allan then hired 20-year-old Cathy McGowan – who beat 600 other applicants who had answered an advertisement for “a typical teenager” – her chic dress sense, long fringe and unforced ebullience ensuring she instantly became the “face” of *RSG!*.

McGowan had no media training and it showed: she got names wrong, asked naff questions, giggled and behaved like the bands’ buddy. In doing so McGowan made teens across the nation feel she was one of them and so grounded *RSG!* in their reality.

Filmed live in Rediffusion’s Holborn studios each Friday – the rest of the week they shot children’s TV here – *Ready, Steady, Go!* featured both British and international artists miming to their new releases while Wickham sourced the best dancers from clubs across the West End so to keep energy levels high and ensure fashions and dances were fresh.

Indeed, the mod movement broke beyond London via *RSG!* and The Who appeared regularly.

Dusty Springfield, who began her solo career in late-1963, was a semi-regular presenter and it was her devotion to African American music that ensured Wickham and Allan would begin to book more and more African American artists. Alongside giving the likes of Nina Simone, John Lee Hooker and Buddy Guy their first ever UK TV exposure, *RSG!* would devote entire episodes to ‘specials’ celebrating the artists of pioneering R&B labels Motown and Stax plus “Soul Brother No 1”, James Brown.

Black was just beginning to be seen as beautiful and *RSG!* took mod enthusiasm for African American music, clothes, dance, slang and more into the UK mainstream. Kenny Lynch, the self-described “black Cockney”, was also a regular performer. Considering the Race Relations Act wasn’t passed until 1965, *RSG!* was groundbreaking in its multicultural vision.

In 1964, 24-year-old American director

## EUROFILE TELEVISION



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Michael Lindsay-Hogg came on board and emphasised *RSG!*'s pop art feel, pushing the lighting, titles and camera angles to a degree never seen before on British TV.

Unknown new talent was invited on, so giving Donovan, David Bowie and Jimi Hendrix their first TV exposure. Peter Blake and Peter Cook were both regularly on set – *Ready, Steady Go!* capturing London's zeitgeist like nothing else. By 1965 many artists were insisting on performing live – miming deemed uncool (unless it was ironic: a classic clip features members of the Rolling Stones and McGowan goofing about while pretending to mime to Sonny & Cher's *I Got You Babe*).

Yet by becoming so cutting edge *RSG!* would lose the mass pop audience who were devoted watchers for the first two years when the Beatles, Rolling Stones, Kinks, Sandie Shaw and other chart busters appeared regularly. Inevitably, this led to its cancellation.

The BBC, previously having struggled to showcase popular music on TV, launched *Top of the Pops* in 1964 to

compete with *RSG!* and, by focusing only on hits, soon captured far greater viewer numbers. But, beyond helping sell vast numbers of 45s, *Top of the Pops* had little resonance while *Ready, Steady, Go!* energised and informed British culture as much as the artists it featured.

Unfortunately, like many other 1960s-era TV series, most episodes of *Ready, Steady, Go!* were wiped once they had been screened so then-expensive videotape could be reused.

Lindsay-Hogg managed to get several episodes recorded for his own collection and these are all that remain today. Dave Clark – of the Dave Clark Five – purchased this footage and issued it on VHS in the 1980s but nothing has ever been available on DVD.

German music behemoth BMG now own this footage and, as they published Neill's book, surely are intent on making it available: British pop culture's lightning rod has the book it deserves. Now let's hope the surviving footage get similarly regal treatment.

■ *Ready, Steady, Go! The Weekend Starts Here: The Definitive Story of the Show That Changed Pop TV* by Andy Neill is published by BMG

ZEITGEIST:  
Presenter Cathy McGowan, left, with Lulu at the *RSG!* New Year party in January 1966

Photo: Getty Images

## READY, STEADY VOICES

**LULU:** "I was a teenager in Glasgow and the whole of the city used to empty when *Ready, Steady, Go!* was about to come on. This was the days when everybody stayed indoors to watch a specific programme and *RSG!* was a phenomenon. Before I even went on it, I was a big fan of the show, I watched it every week because it was what was happening with the dances and the fashion. When my first record *Shout* came out in 1964, I did other shows but none were as cool as *RSG!*"

**RAY DAVIES:** "The mid-Sixties was a special time and *RSG!* reflected that period with art, dance and fashion, as well as the music. There was no other live showcase like it, one that had its finger so firmly on the pulse of a cultural revolution."

**MARY WILSON (The Supremes):** "The kids on *RSG!* would be right in between you and doing very odd dances. That was one of the things I found kind of strange but, at the

same time, wonderful because it exposed us to a different approach." **MICK JAGGER:** "*Ready, Steady, Go!* was the best rock 'n' roll TV show of all time. It just seemed more vibrant and real and could, sometimes, be sensational. It was exciting to be on, while the other shows, *Thank Your Lucky Stars*, *Top of The Pops*, *Ed Sullivan*, were more like commercial vehicles, rather than being shows in themselves."

**MARTHA REEVES:** "What was remarkable were the musicians. I remember they had to take tea breaks during the rehearsals which was something that was brand new to me. The guys stood up and said, 'Oh it's teatime' and I said, 'What's teatime?' and they all proceeded to take their break which was mandatory as the English union insisted that they take their time and not rush things. However, they were quality musicians and did very good at emulating the Motown sound."

Few musicians were as fired up by Brexit as the Sleaford Mods. **MATT WITHERS** talks to Jason Williamson about how it might pan out, and the appropriation of working class culture in music



**T**his time last year Jason Williamson of Sleaford Mods, the Poet Laureate of Brexit Britain, was writing the first songs for the band's sixth studio album.

The themes would have been familiar for those who know the acerbic East Midlander's work. But then... well, you know what happened next.

The album, *Spare Ribs*, ended up recorded under lockdown at Nottingham's JT Soar studio. Technically, it made little difference – “Same business as usual apart from the fact we were wearing facemasks,” says Williamson – but inevitably the virus impacted.

“We tend to generally talk about the things around us,” says the 50-year-old, speaking to me from Nottingham on Zoom. “We wrote four or five of the tracks in January of last year so we had a rough idea of where it was going, but obviously when Covid hit... I didn't really want to talk about it because I just felt it was a bit obvious, we didn't really know enough of it, we didn't really understand our experiences of it. It was a little bit too premature, I thought.

“But as the summer rolled on it became quite clear that it was a f\*\*\*ing s\*\*\*show and it then started to weave itself into the ideas, you know.”

That emerges in an album which opens with *A New Brick* (“We're all so Tory tired/And beaten by minds small”) and, in *Shortcumings*, which immortalises Britain's most famous self-prescribed eye-tester in music.

The three themes which thread throughout the album are lockdown, childhood, and, as Williamson puts it “the kind of class tourism that you find in music, in creativity as a whole, I guess, in anything really... cultural appropriation”.

This is a theme Sleaford Mods (who are neither from Sleaford nor, really, mods) have turned to before: in 2019 Williamson sparked a spat in what remains of the music press when he turned his fire on Bristol rock band Idles, accusing them of “appropriating a working class voice”. It's something he alludes to in *Spare Ribs'* *Elocution*, mimicking a middle class artist talking about the importance of independent venues, hoping that the resulting profile boost would mean not having to play them again.

“What we know about other acts that I've criticised is, you know... for the most part they're middle-class,” he says.

“It's like... do not put yourself in a position where it looks as if you are aligning yourself with imagery that you really haven't been connected with in your life. And it infuriates me. And I think it's an age-old thing, it's been going on from the dawn of time. Plenty of singers, plenty of bands have adopted the working class culture to use quite successfully for their own work.



# STILL SEETHING... BREXIT BRITAIN'S POET LAUREATE

EXERCISING THEIR ANGER: Jason Williamson, left, and Andrew Fearn of Sleaford Mods

Photo: We Care A Lot PR

“Why can't you just investigate the corridors of your own self? Why should that not be as entertaining as thinking that hijacking other people's misery and using it as a uniform for yourself is gonna be any better, you know?”

Sleaford Mods' music, with its uncompromising nature and Sprechgesang style, is relatively rare as an unambiguous, unrelenting response to this government, its hard Brexit and haphazard response to a pandemic. But weren't we always reassured that such times were fertile ground for art, for politicised music? Where, I wonder, is this generation's? There's no 2021 equivalent of the Specials in the charts, for example.

“One point perhaps is that the anger's changed,” says Williamson. “It now exists in bravado, it now exists in talking about killing people in rival gangs, it now exists in talking about buying 20 pairs of trainers and ‘look at all my money’. It now perhaps exists in misogyny.

“And all of these things you can find in drill music, in grime music, do you know what I mean? Where the four walls are 2cm away from your nose, and so then

you've got all the ensuing emotions that follow that.”

As for the Sleaford Mods' own music, he says, he's not exactly looking to trojan-horse his way on to the Radio 2 playlist.

“As long as I am exercising my anger to a certain degree – and most of these songs are angry songs – if I'm exercising my sadness if it comes to that, or whatever emotion I want to convey in a song then I'm happy.”

He is an unapologetic Europhile, a Remain voter and also a working class boy who grew up in Grantham, where 60% of people voted to leave the EU (Lincolnshire voted heavily for Brexit – bandmate and producer Andrew Fearn's home village of Saxilby voted to Leave by 62%). Where does Williamson's fervour come from?

“There was a massive working class presence with the Leave vote, but also there was a massive old vote within it as well,” he says. “And let's not forget the middle class that voted for it as well. I don't think you can necessarily blame the working class for it, which a lot of people are doing – which I tend to do sometimes as well, I might add. But

places like Manchester, Leeds, they were Remain.

“I don't know, it's a weird one. I mean, I am a working class person. Or was. I come from that area, but I always wanted to get out. And where does my support for the EU come from?” He lists “the c\*\*\*s” who led the Leave campaign – Farage, Johnson, Gove – but adds: “Perhaps I've been rewarded with my hard work by being able to experience Europe by touring.” (Next time the band is able to play in the EU the red tape will be far greater but he's confident there will be a waiver for musicians eventually).

“And so therefore my allegiances with it are very strong. I love Europe, you know? My time in Germany and Amsterdam, wherever – places I wouldn't have gone to before, have obviously swayed my vote.

“So really, getting down to it, is that a good thing? Is my vote just, because a lot of people can't experience that, they will never experience that? At the bottom of the pile, when you're on minimum wage, you're not going anywhere.”

■ *Spare Ribs* is out now on Rough Trade

## EUROFILE MUSIC

# Havana

## A CITY IN MUSIC

Before and after its revolution, Cuba's soul has been found in its music, says **SOPHIA DEBOICK**



Despite existing in a silo for decades, Cuban music has swept the world. The long-standing post-revolution embargo has seen artists struggle to get visas to play in the all-important US, and the thaw of relations begun by the Obama administration has been rolled back under Trump, but Cuban rhythms have proved irresistible and artists from the capital and cultural centre of the island in particular have received international recognition.

When Havana-born, Miami-raised Camila Cabello's sultry global hit *Havana* – emblematic of the triumph of Latin rhythms and Spanglish on the contemporary charts – became the best-selling digital single of 2018 it suggested that Cuba is more culturally relevant in the West than ever.

Before the revolution, Cuba was a playground for the rest of the world. As the go-to party destination for American citizens seeking a good time and – under Prohibition – a drink, the island hosted gangsters and American film stars and offered probably the most thrilling night out in the world. The atrocities of the Batista regime apparently proved not much of a discouragement to foreigners as Havana, lying just 100 miles off Key West, offered some of the best casinos, bars and nightclubs in the world and, of course, incredible music.

Celia Cruz was one of the larger-than-life performers of that glittering era. A native of Havana's working-class neighbourhood of Santos Suarez, Cruz's big break came singing with dance troupe Las Mulatas de Fuego from the late 1940s before she joined orchestra La Sonora Matancera. Her first recording with them, *Cao Cao, Mani Picao* (1950), was an example of the up-tempo and light guaracha and saw her dubbed 'La Guarachera de Cuba'. Cruz's ostrich feather and sequin-clad turns at the opulent El Tropicana club typified the glamour of mid-century Havana.

Beny Moré was another transcendent star of Havana's thriving pre-revolutionary music scene. He was born in 1919 in the tiny rural town of Santa Isabel de las Lajas in the island's interior. The oldest of 18 children, he went to Havana to seek his fortune when still in his teens. Early years scraping a living gave way to singing on Havana's thriving radio stations, and when he landed a regular spot at the famous El Temple bar and restaurant he was spotted and recruited by popular group Trío Matamoros. He would use the group as a springboard to stardom.

Landmark recordings for RCA Victor made in the 1940s like *Bonito y Sabroso* ('Beautiful and Tasty') – Moré's signature song which praised Mexican women's mastery of the mambo as a reminder that Havana and Mexico City "are two cities that are like sisters" – saw him become Cuba's most celebrated singer. His reframing of the idiom for the full gamut of Cuban popular song, from mambo, son



# PLACE WHERE PLEASURE AND POLITICS MEET

LATIN RHYTHMS: Musicians perform on the street in Old Havana

Photo: Getty Images

and guaracha to bolero and cha cha cha led to him being dubbed 'El Bárbaro del Ritmo' ('The Master of Rhythm').

Moré's success was not unalloyed, however. He suffered racial discrimination as a mixed-race Cuban of partly Congolese slave descent and while his own La Banda Gigante, founded in 1953, became massively popular in the Havana clubs, just six years later the triumph of the revolutionaries saw the nightclubs closed and life in Havana turned upside down. While Celia Cruz fled the island and went on to living

legend status in the US, Moré stayed and died in his adoptive city aged just 43, a victim of alcoholism and circumstance.

While the Revolution marked the end of one period of Cuban musical creativity, it also signalled the birth of another. The nueva trova – an updating of the trova folk music form that had first arisen in the 19th century and of which Carlos Puebla was the master into the 20th – emerged in the early years of the Castro regime, with socially conscious songs that looked both to the



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Find the accompanying playlist on Spotify. Just search

**NEW EUROPEAN: HAVANA**  
Featuring:

**Havana**  
Camila Cabello

**Guantanamera**  
Celia Cruz

**Bonito y sabroso**  
Benny More

**Oh Vida**  
X Alonso





## COODER CUBA CONNECTION

American guitar legend Ry Cooder was partly responsible for a revival of international interest in Cuban music in the mid-1990s. He went to Havana to produce *Buena Vista Social Club* (1997), the eponymous album of a project bringing a spotlight to pre-revolutionary performers like singer Ibrahim Ferrer and pianist Rubén González. Cooder also played on the debut album of allied project the Afro-Cuban All Stars.

*Poet is You*'), had been imprisoned in one of Castro's labour camps in his early 1920s and, although he continued to support the revolutionary project, he was keenly aware of its failings.

Into the 1990s, nueva trova lived on in Havana. Rodríguez opened Ojalá Studios – named after one of his best-known songs – in the Miramar area of the city, and his protégé Carlos Varéla became the face of novísimo trova ('newest song'), which added a stronger rock feel to the genre. But other voices came out of the city in that decade too, and the socially conscious nature of post-revolutionary Cuban music took a new path.

While Afro-Cuban music had been part of Cuba's musical backbone for centuries, in the 1990s hip hop and rap provided the impetus for a flowering of a new, politically charged Afro-Cuban music. Having got his start in his parents Carlos Alfonso and Ele Valdés' world music band Síntesis, rapper X Alfonso pioneered a fusion between Cuba's rich musical heritage and hip hop on his 2001 album-length tribute to Beny Moré, *X-Moré*. He has become one of the most innovative and outspoken voices in Afro-Cuban music.

X Alfonso painted a realistic portrait of Havana's poverty and its "ditches full of garbage" on 2005 song *Habana*, but nonetheless maintained in the lyrics "Esta es mi ciudad" ("This is my city") (his founding of the Fabrica de Arte Cubano cultural centre in the city in 2014 showed his civic pride). This year's spoken word song *Reflexión*, concerned with abuse of power, had obvious relevance to the oppressed of Havana.

The 1990s also saw two other Havana rap outfits emerge to engage with issues of race. *El Disco Negro* (2011) by married rap duo Obsesión was essentially a concept album about racial injustice in Cuba, with the track *Victimas* dealing with police harassment while *Calle G* called for Havana's colossal monument to José Miguel Gómez, president at the time of the 1912 uprising of Afro-Cubans, to be pulled down. Rap group Orishas, meanwhile, who take their name from the deities of the Yoruba people, found success after leaving Havana for Paris from where they have released a succession of politically conscious albums which have garnered critical acclaim.

While still seen as a socialist utopia by some, the reality is that Cuba is still on its journey, with arbitrary detentions, endemic racism and suppression of freedom of expression marring its society. Cuba's music will continue to defy and engage with those circumstances in equal measure.

native folk music of the past and the political bent of new American troubadours like Dylan and Baez.

While elsewhere in Latin America nueva canción ranged itself against US-installed dictatorships, Castro's Cuba was a place where the anti-Western sentiments of nueva trova's leftist politics meant it could be at least tolerated and was often actively encouraged. Its leading lights worked under the auspices of the regime's Cuban Cinematographic Institute and the Casa de las Américas cultural institution, and the International Protest Song Meeting, held in Havana in 1967, is seen as the point of the movement's birth.

Two performers at that meeting would define nueva trova. Silvio Rodríguez, born in Havana Province in 1946, is the master of philosophical, existential and mystical lyrics that have made him a legend of Latin American music. His songs carried the hopes and dreams of leftists across Latin America, with his *Unicornio* (1982), which uses a lost blue unicorn as a metaphor for the eternal search for utopia, being widely adopted as a liberation anthem. Havana Conservatoire-educated Pablo Milanés, known for songs like his tribute to Che Guevara, *Si El Poeta Eres Tu* ('If the



## THE SHOWS THAT SOLDIERED ON

This is the time when I traditionally look back on the shows I've reviewed over the previous 12 months and select the ones I've most enjoyed. I have, however, a practical problem that will no doubt soon be confronting the judges of the big theatrical awards: there isn't an awful lot to choose from.

I hope that the shows I consider to be the best of 2020 won't be looked down upon for that reason. The small handful of productions that I have reviewed in recent months – in addition to those I saw before the imposition of the first lockdown – have taken more courage and fortitude to put on than any since the war. Imagine, for a moment, what it took to go out on stage, uncomplainingly, in those final days in March when theatre was still lawful, but the hospital admissions were rising sharply, and so little was known about the killer virus among us?

Courage comes in many shapes and forms and I have seen it in abundance not simply in actors, but also in investors, who were willing to put up money for shows knowing full well that their chances of recouping a single penny were at best remote. This I found immensely moving because it shows a love for theatre that goes way beyond balance sheets. I've heard, too, of some of the big West End managements doing everything in their power to ensure their people don't go hungry during the lockdowns, not least because, with so many of them freelancing, they've shamefully been ineligible for handouts from Rishi Sunak.

In terms of my favourite productions of this year, first of all a rider. I'm not including any online productions, because it doesn't come under any conventional definition of what theatre actually means. It's also quite frankly not my bag and I haven't enough experience of it to talk knowledgeably about it. It is

hopefully a here-today, gone-tomorrow phenomenon, and, when we are eventually all back in our seats in theatres, we'll remember these strange little shows we saw on our laptops with bemusement.

So to my favourite theatrical production of the year and that is *On Blueberry Hill* by Sebastian Barry that I saw at the Trafalgar Studios in Whitehall a few days before the first lockdown in March. It was a powerful piece about the redemptive power of the human spirit that was beautifully acted by David Ganly and Niall Buggy under the assured direction of Jim Culleton.

Special commendations, too, for Frances Barber in *Musik*, the Pet Shop Boys musical, which was bold and brassy and quite unlike anything I'd ever seen before. Jenny Seagrove and Martin Shaw achieved the best chemistry in the all-too-brief run of *Love Letters* at the Theatre Royal Haymarket. The most fun production of the year – the first big show out of the stocks after the original lockdown – was *Sleepless: A Musical Romance*, which was a glorious and much-needed blast of colour and exuberance.

Best actor: Laurence Ubong Williams in *The Welkin*, a production at the National that I didn't especially enjoy, but his quirky, imaginative performance nevertheless remains ingrained on my memory. Best actress: Jennifer Saunders' joyous turn as Madame Arcati in *Blithe Spirit*.

Commiserations to all the shows that didn't get to go on and I sincerely hope all involved will yet get their chances to shine. I don't see theatre back up and running properly again until the autumn, but, until then, I'll review what I can and talk about the great personalities of the noblest profession that I've got to meet over the years in *Star Turns*. Break a leg!



POWERFUL: Niall Buggy and David Ganly in *On Blueberry Hill* at London's Trafalgar Studios

Photo: Marc Brenner

## EUROFILE BOOKS

**CHARLIE CONNELLY** on a new book telling the story of Rotwelsch, a secret language developed by the thieves, beggars and itinerants of central Europe



**B**ack in the 1990s I spent several summers working on a travelling music festival. For four months every year a group of us would be on the road, travelling the country with a big top, arriving in a different town or city every fortnight, staging a weekend hootenanny in a park then breaking everything down and moving on to the next destination. The crew, a full-time core of a dozen or so, did everything together, living, working, socialising, the lot. All we saw was each other, our caravans, the parks and the motorways.

At the end of the first summer I returned home displaying that essentially British festival season mixture of sunburn and trenchfoot, brim full of brilliant stories that I was eager to share with my friends. The thing was, for the first couple of days or so, when I tried to tell them what I'd been up to they could barely understand a word I said. My three months as an itinerant had changed the way I spoke. Drastically.

The people with whom I spent the summer were a mixture of circus folk and working class lads from Nottingham. Hothoused as we were and freed from the restrictions of place for several months, by linguistic osmosis we'd all adopted parts of each other's speech to produce our own dialect. Largely a mixture of showpeople's cant and Nottingham slang, we'd engage in exchanges like, "Yareet yoth, sin his gills, merch geez wibbig keks?" "In tilt, yoth", which translates as, "hello old boy, have you seen what's-his-name, the large fellow from the merchandise stall?" "I believe he's inside the big top, old chap".

It took me a couple of days or so to linguistically re-assimilate at the end of the season and friends could stop worrying I'd had some kind of stroke. Then the following year I slipped back seamlessly into my summer argot virtually before the stabilisers had been wound down on my caravan. Even now, half a lifetime on, when I meet with friends from those days we've usually slipped back into the lingo in which our friendships were forged by the end of the first pint.

Malleable and constantly evolving yet existing within its own parameters, language is a rich and many-layered subject for analysis, especially in Europe with its wide range of dialects and tongues. Across the continent language can be a fascinating indicator on a hyperlocal level: Liechtensteiners are able to identify which of the tiny Alpine nation's 11 small communities a person is from purely from the way they speak, for example.

Being from a family of authentic Bow Bells cockneys I've been aware for as long as I can remember of how such dialects and slangs can develop specific to place: for my grandparents' generation even my first name couldn't escape the rhyming

word-grinder, hence from an early age I often found myself answering to 'oats and barley'.

Cockney is by no means unique in Europe as a slang employed by a particular working class area, either: Mattenenglisch is an old dialect still heard in the poorer parts of Bern, for example, while Latin dos canteiros is an argot specific to the stonecutters of Galicia.

On a wider level language can help to build a tangible sense of nationhood: the Basques, with their highly distinctive tongue forged by centuries of near-isolation in the rugged landscape of their homeland, unite around the consonant-heavy Euskara. The Welsh national anthem *Hen Wlad Fy Nhadau*, instead of boasting of vanquishing foes and praising monarchs in the traditional manner, focuses instead on landscape and language. "*Os treisiodd y gelyn fy ngwlad tan ei droed*," runs one verse, "*mae hen iaith y Cymry mor fyw ag erioed*", which roughly translates as "if the enemy should ravage my land underfoot the old language of the Welsh remains as alive as ever".

But what of people without a specific homeland or region to call their own, the wanderers and itinerants, some of whom have criss-crossed the continent for as long as Europe has had people? Like it was for our motley band of festival caravan dwellers, language can become a unifier separating one group from the rest of society, identifying the itinerant speaker as a member of a particular community distinct from place of origin.

Sometimes it's a form of speech developed as a type of protection from those who would seek to oppress them, on other occasions it can be used by groups seeking secret communications to carry out nefarious activities (hence these dialects are often collected under the pejorative banner "thieves' cant").

In the US there is a system of 'hobo signs', mysterious symbols carved on fence posts and walls indicating whether the wanderer is likely to be given food or work by the occupants, or whether they can expect a hostile reception and should pass by.

Harvard professor of English Martin Puchner would have found these symbols familiar from his childhood in Nuremberg during the 1960s and 1970s, when his mother would answer the door to shabbily dressed men and rush to give them food and something to drink. Carved into the stonework of their farmhouse was a *zinken*, a symbol indicating that passers-by in need would receive sustenance and a friendly welcome.

What really stayed with Puchner however was the language in which these pedlars, knife-grinders and itinerant labourers – "people eternally on the road,

Rotwelsch and the people who speak it have been ostracised by those threatened by the rootless, who fear a group of people who operate on the margins bound by neither convention nor borders



# THE UNDERGROUND LANGUAGE OF EUROPE'S OUTCASTS

## OUTSIDER:

Locals stare at a beggar in the street in Posen, Prussia – now part of Poland, 1910

Photo: Getty Images

escaping to nowhere," as his father put it – would converse. It sounded like German yet he could barely understand a word. It was a language unique to the peripatetic of Central Europe, a tongue that dated back centuries, called Rotwelsch.

Those childhood encounters have produced a book, *The Language of Thieves: The Story of Rotwelsch and One Family's Secret History*, published in the UK this month by Granta. In it Puchner discovers more of a family connection to the language than a few gentlemen of the road rat-tapping on the door with their hats in their hands hoping for some bread and cheese.

The author's father and uncle had both shown a vigorous interest in the language, Uncle Günther in particular conducting in-depth research that even saw him translating biblical passages into the mysterious tongue. But the family's connection to the language, and the core of this absorbing book, runs far deeper than mere curiosity.

Rotwelsch combines features of Yiddish and Hebrew, with occasional sprinklings of French, Latin and Romany,

but is mostly Germanic in origin. "This was why Rotwelsch drove so many people crazy," writes Puchner, "it sounded like German but was incomprehensible to an outsider".

And drive people crazy it certainly did. For half a millennium, from Martin Luther to Adolf Hitler, Rotwelsch and the people who speak it have been ostracised by those threatened by the rootless, who fear a group of people who operate on the margins bound by neither convention nor borders.

As he conducts his research Puchner realises that most of the historical transcriptions and analyses of the tongue – strictly speaking it's a sociolect rather than a language, a spoken dialect without a grammar structure that binds a particular group of people – have been hostile ones, made by police and lawmakers trying to crack what they regarded as a criminal code rather than the representative argot of a particular group of people.

Dating back as far back as the 13th century, Rotwelsch spread in the aftermath of the traumatic Thirty Years



War that devastated most of central Europe during the 17th century, displacing countless former combatants and people whose homes and villages had been destroyed, sending them out onto the roads.

At the same time many Jews were also wandering, banned from owning land across the continent and forced into itinerancy by anti-Semitism, hence the language picked up its Yiddish and Hebrew inflections and by extension the distaste of anti-Semites even though, as Puchner demonstrates, only a minority of Rotwelsch speakers were Jewish.

Hence just as Nordic languages have many different names for snow, Rotwelsch developed various words for prisons and the police. It was certainly a language that appealed to criminals as so few people understood it.

Puchner tells the story of an 18th century Rotwelsch speaker named Grinder Berbel, a notorious itinerant thief and matriarch of thieves, who took on a protégé and lover known as Konstanzer Hans.

Taken in to custody and then betrayed

by his father at his trial in Württemberg, a furious Hans broke the omerta of Rotwelsch's criminal element and not only ratted out a host of fellow thieves but gave up many of the dialect's secrets too.

The transcripts taken from Konstanzer Hans by the police represented the first in-depth written record of Rotwelsch, establishing something of a tradition.

"No-one felt that it was a problem that Rotwelsch was not written down," says Puchner, "except for the unintended consequence that the entire written record on Rotwelsch was therefore written by its enemies... producing a record of this language, for most of them, was precisely the way in which they wanted to eliminate it."

Even the name of the dialect seemed to represent the threat posed to the established order by these outriders of society: although Rotwelsch looks to derive from the German words for 'red' and 'Welsh', it's actually from words meaning 'incomprehensible' and 'beggar'.

Puchner's book is much more than the

## FIVE GREAT BOOKS ABOUT LANGUAGE

**IN THE LAND OF INVENTED LANGUAGES**  
Arika Okrent  
(Random House, £13.99)

While most languages tend to evolve organically or at least by consensus, there has been a range of geniuses, dreamers and crackpots who have tried to invent their own. Esperanto is the most famous example, but in this fascinating book Okrent introduces us to others including Babm, Blissymbolics and Loglan.



**MOTHER TONGUES: TRAVELS THROUGH TRIBAL EUROPE**  
Helena Drysdale  
(Picador, o/p)

Drysdale's account of a motorhome journey through Europe's nations without borders is a wonderful travelogue and a fascinating insight into the importance of language to community identity. From the Frisian Islands to the Basque Country, Corsica to Provence, this is a fascinating journey into the small and threatened cultures of our continent. Out of print but easy to source second hand.



**LINGO: A LANGUAGE SPOTTER'S GUIDE TO EUROPE**  
Gaston Dorren  
(Profile, £9.99)

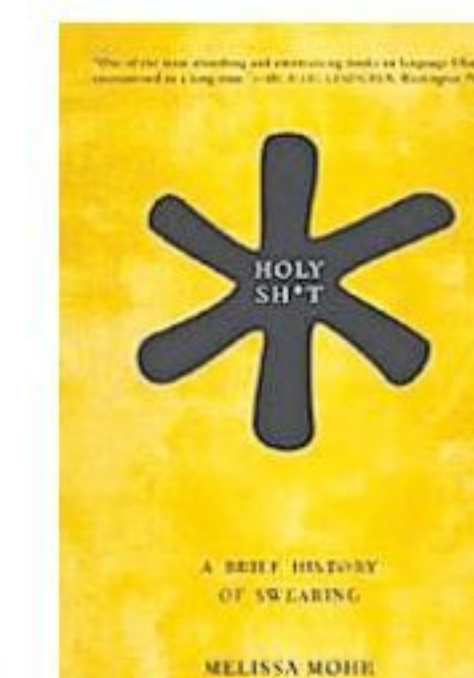
If *The Language of Thieves* whets your appetite for Europe's lesser known tongues then *Lingo* may be the next on your list. As well as the major languages



Dorren's whistle-stop tour of the continent doesn't miss a single linguistic nook or cranny as it introduces dialects you won't find anywhere on Duilingo, from Ossetian to Sorbian to Channel Islands Norman.

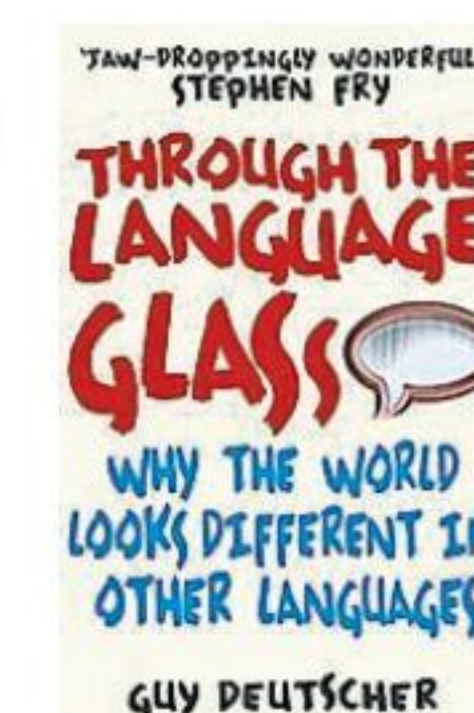
**HOLY SH\*T: A BRIEF HISTORY OF SWEARING**  
Melissa Mohr  
(Oxford University Press, £10.99)

Even in the age of the unfettered internet certain words can be taboo enough for emails to vanish into the ether if they contain certain combinations of letters, which is a problem if your name is Dick and you come from Scunthorpe. In this lively, engaging, iconoclastic and surprisingly far-reaching history of swearing, from oaths to Irvine Welsh, Mohr presents arguably the definitive history of the subject.



**THROUGH THE LANGUAGE GLASS: WHY THE WORLD LOOKS DIFFERENT IN OTHER LANGUAGES**  
Guy Deutscher  
(Arrow, £9.99)

Described by Stephen Fry as "jaw-droppingly wonderful", *Through the Language Glass* argues that our mother tongue can influence the way we view the world. From assertions that the ancient Greeks didn't have our level of colour perception because it wasn't reflected linguistically to Guugu Yimithirr speakers in Queensland who give directions only in anecdote and wisdom.



history of an obscure dialect, however, even if that's a fascinating story in itself that encompasses Franz Kafka, *The Golem* and an international brotherhood of vagrants that gathered in southern Germany in 1929.

*The Language of Thieves* also explores the Puchner family's complex and intricate ties to the language, from an ancestor who one day left his family to take to the roads as an itinerant musician to Puchner's grandfather, a historian of language and names whose shocking anti-Semitism Puchner discovers by chance in a document from the 1930s held in a Harvard archive and causes him to reevaluate his relationships with his grandfather, father and his uncle. All the Puchner men were flawed in their own ways, all of them were curiously united by Rotwelsch.

"History, even when it deals with the actions of people, tends to be distant and can therefore be absorbed without putting yourself, your own person, on the line," he writes. "Family history is different. It challenges the instinct within families to keep things hidden,

the desire to spare children from harmful knowledge about their parents or grandparents, the desire of children to love their parents no matter what they might have done."

Family history is like a layer of the past placed over the wider historical narrative. Sometimes they mix together comfortably, other times they drift along separately but in confluence. Occasionally there's a serious damming, an unexpected, unwelcome jolt that affects the flow of all that comes after it. Languages, dialects and slangs can operate in the same way, a mixing of tongues among those destined either to be confined by circumstances or fated to keep moving, a community tightly knit by its very itinerance, be they Swabian knife-grinders or a train of trucks and caravans bringing music to muddy municipal recreation grounds. Rain or shine, the atching were reet, yoth.

■ *The Language of Thieves: The Story of Rotwelsch and One Family's Secret History*, by Martin Puchner, is published by Granta, price £16.99.

**EUROFILE POEM AND PUZZLES**

*a poem for europe*



**JOHN KING** is a retired doctor, pro-European campaigner and occasional singer in pubs. His article *Brexit: can Scotland ride to the rescue?* currently features in the SNP magazine.

**SCOTCHING BREXIT**

Mad dogs and Englishmen  
Go out in the midday sun  
Singing Rule Britannia  
And getting Brexit done

They meet a canny Scotsman  
Who pipes a different tune  
“Get ready for the Indyref  
Which will be coming soon.

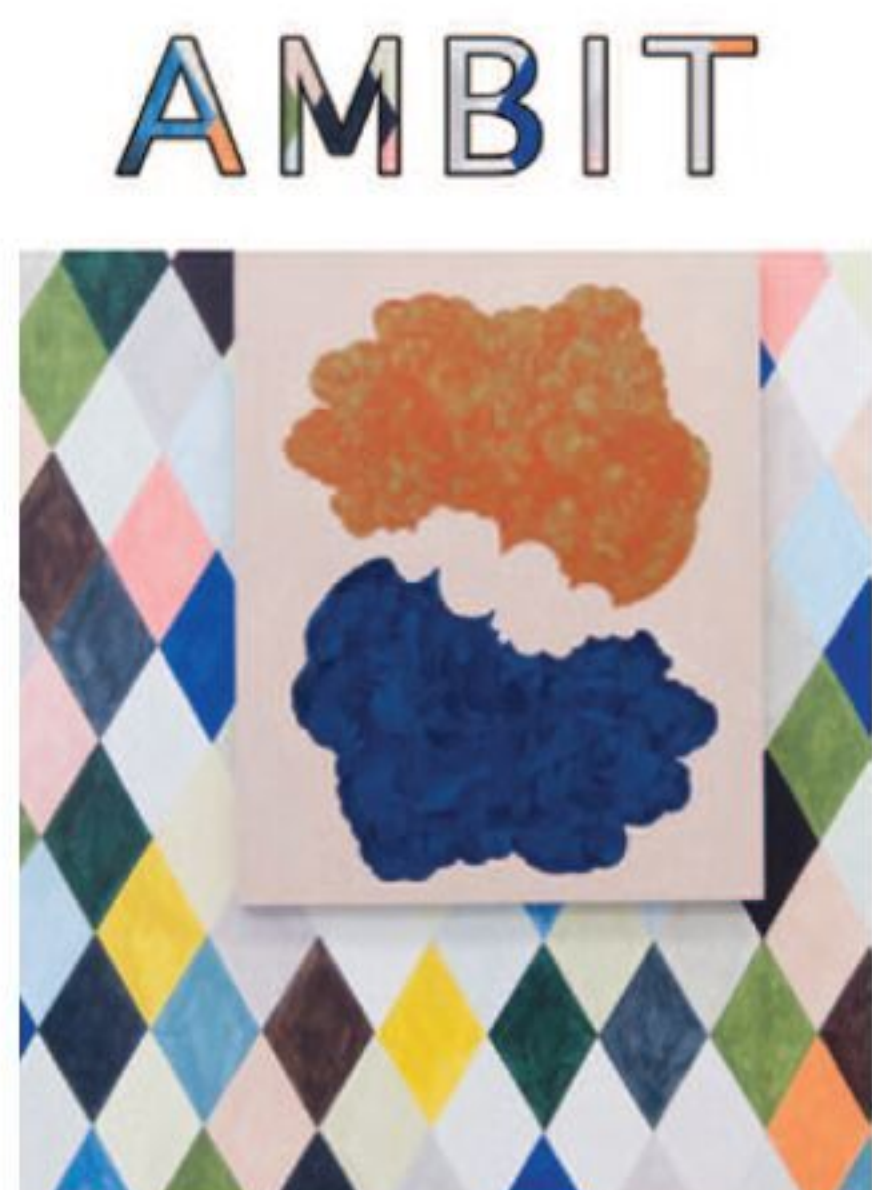
“I’ve filled my Jerry can with malt,  
I’ve peeled my Brussels sprouts  
I’m European to a fault  
I have nae any doubts

So let’s escape the Brexit mess  
The answer’s simple, just vote yes!

Or if you’re English, wish us well  
As we renounce Westminster’s hell  
And dinna worry, dinna sigh  
You’ll come tae join us, by and by”.

with apologies to Noel Coward

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**Cryptic crosswords sponsored by**

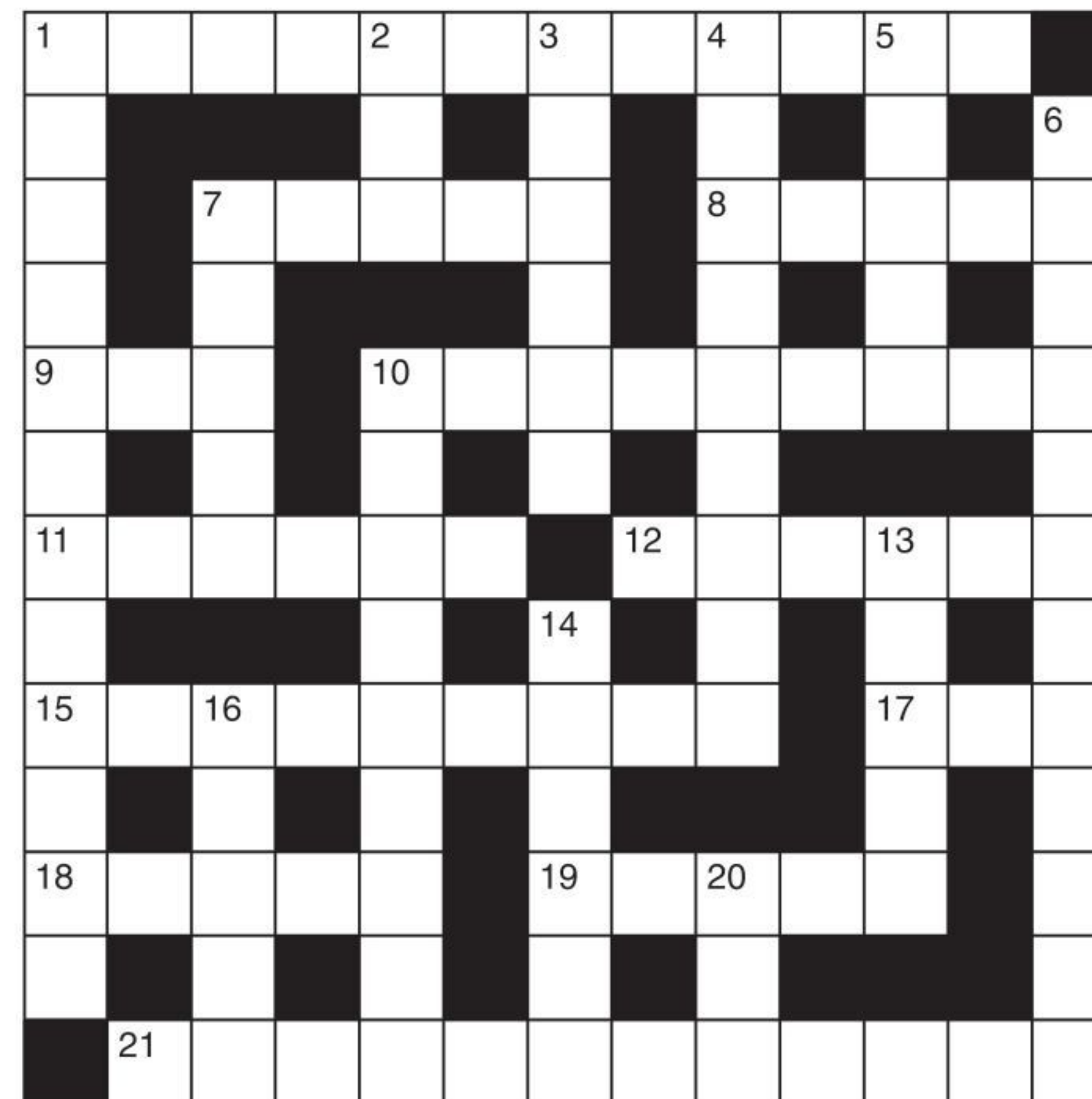
**Cryptic 1**

**Across**

- See 19 Across.
- 7 Across & 10 Down. Invested on the Market? Subjected to medieval punishment! (3,2,3,6)
- Joint setback for this musical combination (5)
- 9 Across & 20 Down. The time of the Big Freeze (3,3)
- A trio will upset me, so there! (9)
- Festival that's not completely oriental (6)
- See 16 Down.
- Proper countenance needed for one of the military commands (5,4)
- In using a standard form of power (3)
- Surrounded by dreadful cost, I will be the one to endure hardship (5)
- 19 & 1 Across. Presumably doesn't take the first bow! (5,6,6)
- Furniture for the actress's Cambrian maid! (5,7)

**Down**

- What the soldier wears for church parade? (7,5)
- Fruit seen when the cask is overturned (3)
- Regalia is more splendid before the end of the display (6)
- The air will cause people to move in time (5,4)
- Write part of the bill in government language (5)
- The position of one whose final departure is imminent (2,6,4)
- Tight crowd of journalists? (5)
- See 7 Across.
- Young attendants appearing in the book (5)
- International players are excelled (6)
- 16 Down & 12 Across. This may cause amusement when manually operated (5,6)
- See 9 Across.



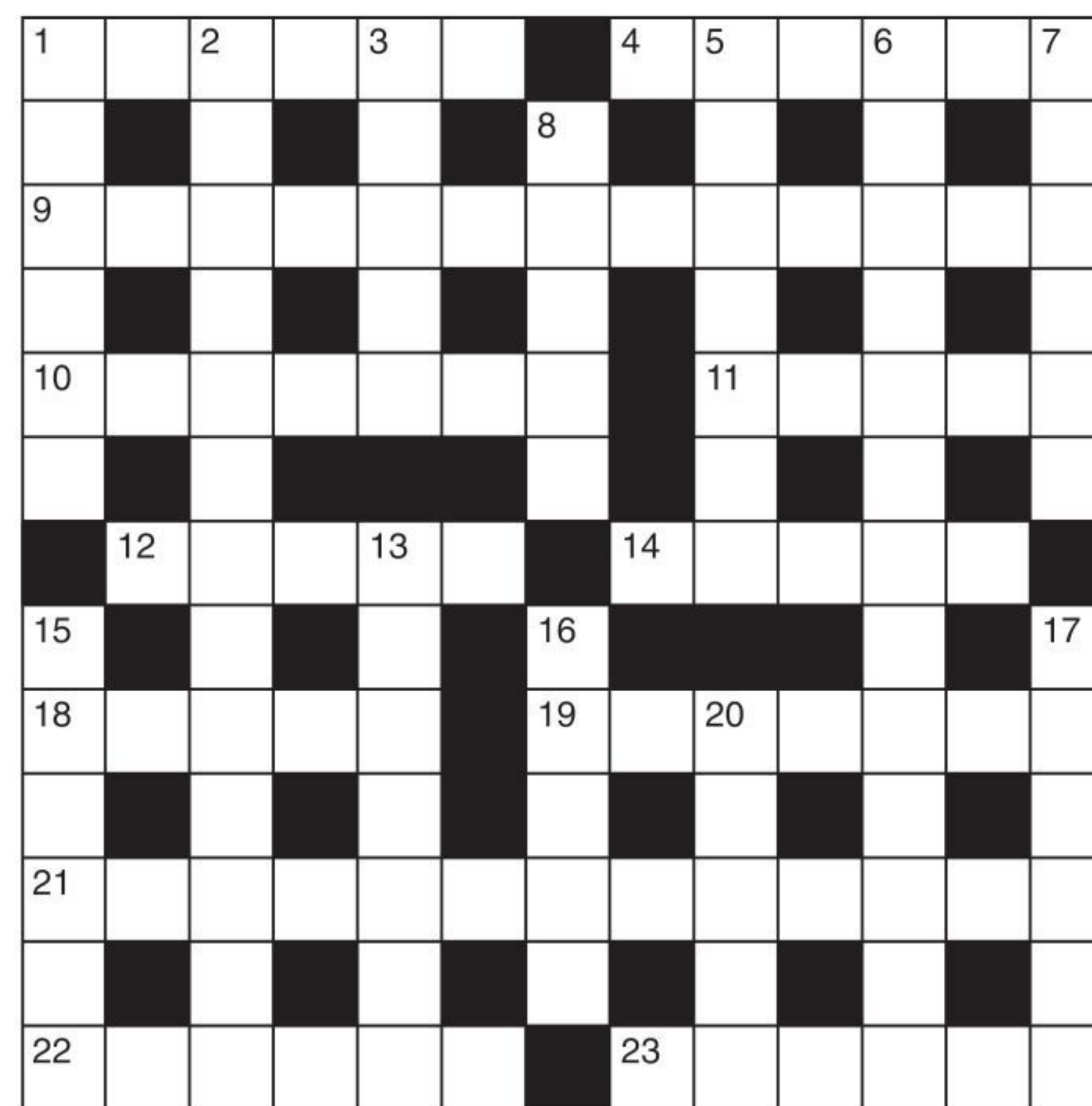
**Cryptic 2**

**Across**

- Clara's upset by the scoundrel (6)
- Put a hole in part of the rifle, we hear (6)
- Previous feats surpassed – as the result of slipped discs? (6,7)
- She has a high range of performance (7)
- America for example put back one of the customs (5)
- Changes direction... (5)
- ... to make these lines! (5)
- Beheading the cleric is a light crime! (5)
- Describing one who is insured being held up by a gunman (7)
- Description of explosive reaction that could be more than cruel! (13)
- In the tangled reeds I live (6)
- In the tangled reeds a letter is deleted! (6)

**Down**

- Stoutly built public transport encircled by corrosion (6)
- Put an end to daily information? No, it's the very latest (4-5,4)
- An age going back to the scene of battle (5)
- He chooses solitary confinement (7)
- Not just inspections of radio pick-up equipment (6,7)
- Don't waste time coming from Athens (6)
- Is it made from brushwood? (5)
- Man coming back in a rush to be given another title (7)
- He fails to save the western flower (6)
- Cosmetic preparation dispatched, we hear (5)
- Very much liked to make a fuss with Communist following (6)
- Some of the civic arrangements for the serviceman (5)



**Numberfit solutions**

1

7	3	5	7	1	7	1	5	5
3	1	9	2	5	3	5	1	3
5	3	7	5	3	5	1	5	5
5	5	6	3	3	6	5	7	5
1	2	6	3	1	6	3	1	4
3	5	2	1	2	2	7	7	7
7	1	5	7	3	3	1	5	4
7	3	3	1	5	1	3	1	7

2

9	4	4	1	1	8	6	9
9	1	4	8	5	3	3	3
4	8	9	2	1	3	3	3
3	9	6	5	5	4	1	8
1	5	1	4	1	9	2	6
6	2	9	3	1	9	4	6
4	4	2	3	4	3	4	4
8	4	1	4	9	2	1	8
1	1	8	9	6	6	4	8

**Sudoku solutions**

Medium 1

6	4	1	2	7	5	9	8	3
9	5	3	1	6	8	4	2	7
8	2	7	9	3	4	5	6	1
3	8	6	5	2	1	7	4	9
5	7	9	3	4	6	2	1	8
2	1	4	8	9	7	3	5	6
4	3	5	6	1	9	8	7	2
7	6	2	4	8	3	1	9	5
1	9	8	7	5	2	6	3	4

Medium 2

8	3	1	7	5	6	2	9	4
9	5	6	1	2	4	7	8	3
2	4	7	8	9	3	1	6	5
3	8	2	9	1	5	4	7	6
5	7	4	6	8	2	9	3	1
6	1	9	3	4	7	5	2	8
4	2	8	5	3	9	6	1	7
1	6	5	2	7	8	3	4	9
7	9	3	4	6	1	8	5	2

**Crossword solutions**

Cryptic 1

Across: 1 Second fiddle; 7 Put in; 8 Nonet; 9 Ice; 10 Threesome; 11 Easter; 12 Puppet; 15 Right face; 17 Gas; 18 Stic; 19 Plays; 21 Welsh dresser.

Down: 1 Service dress; 2 Nut; 3 Firey; 4 Dance tune; 5 Lingo; 6 At death's door; 7 Press; 10 The stocks; 13 Pages; 14 Capped; 16 Glove; 20 Age.

Cryptic 2

Across: 1 Rascal; 4 Breach; 9 Broken records; 10 Soprano; 11 Usage; 12 Veers; 14 Verse; 18 Arson; 19 Covered; 21 Thermoclear; 22 Reside; 23 Erased.

Down: 1 Robust; 2 Stop-press news; 3 Arena; 5 Recluse; 6 Aerial surveys; 7 Hasten; 8 Broom; 13 Renamed; 15 Waster; 16 Scent; 17 Adored; 20 Vicar.

Sudoku – medium 1

	4		2				8	3
9		3		6				7
	2			3	4			
3					1	7		
	7	9				2	1	
		4	8					6
			6	1			7	
7				8		1		5
1	9				2		3	

Sudoku – medium 2

		3		7	5	6			
9		6					7		
	4			9				6	
3			9		5				6
5		4					9		1
6			3		7				8
	2			3				1	
		5					3		9
				4	6	1		5	

Sudoku – hard 1

		3		4		1			
6	8						3		
					8		5	6	
5			3						4
		8				2			
2					4				7
	9	2		4					
		1						9	2
			8		2			5	

Sudoku – hard 2

			5			1			
					4	6		8	
3		2		9					
						8		9	3
	5	6					7	2	
1	9		4						
				2			8		9
	4		5	6					
			9				4		

Numberfit

Fit the listed numbers into each grid.



Numberfit 1

- 2 digits: 25 – 31 – 37 – 53
- 3 digits: 131 – 313 – 352 – 523 – 657 – 731 – 751 – 755 – 795 – 925
- 4 digits: 1233 – 1263 – 1325 – 1631
- 5 digits: 16623 – 76625
- 7 digits: 5375351 – 5737315
- 9 digits: 535717577 – 733151317 – 735513177 – 735717155

Numberfit 2

- 2 digits: 39 – 46 – 64 – 94
- 3 digits: 194 – 213 – 349 – 419 – 423 – 426 – 434 – 489
- 4 digits: 1243 – 1346 – 1485 – 1492 – 1514 – 1825 – 1926 – 8952
- 5 digits: 11869 – 11896
- 6 digits: 151519 – 629319 – 643219 – 655418
- 8 digits: 93386648 – 94316481

# HOW WE TANGLED UP SPAGHETTI

**PETER TRUDGILL** on the arrival of Italian food in Britain, and what got lost in translation



Like most British people of my age, I first encountered spaghetti in a tin, in tomato sauce. In our house it was kept in the pantry alongside the tins of baked beans, and we ate it in the same way as the beans: on toast, for breakfast.

When I was a child, spaghetti on toast was one of my favourite breakfasts. I write *was* here rather than *were*, because English speakers decided long before I was born that the word *spaghetti* was singular. We say “this spaghetti is good”, not “these spaghetti are good”. This is in spite of the fact that the pasta itself – and so the word – first came to Britain from Italy, and that in Italian *spaghetti* is plural.

Even if we did not initially follow the Italian way of serving and eating spaghetti, we did preserve the Italian spelling. But when English first borrowed the word *spaghetti* from Italian, we did not preserve its Italian grammatical status.

*Spago* is the Italian word for ‘string’. *Spaghetto* is a diminutive form of *spago*, meaning ‘little string’ (*larghetto*, from *largo* ‘slow’, is a musical direction indicating ‘less slow than *largo*’; *stiletto* is a small *stilo*, ‘dagger’). The plural of *spaghetto* is *spaghetti*. So what I so much enjoyed eating for my breakfast was literally ‘little strings’. Unlike us, speakers of certain other languages appear to have taken note of the fact that this noun is plural in Italian. German speakers say *Diese Spaghetti sind gut* and Swiss Germans say *d’Spaghetti sind guet*, both meaning ‘These spaghetti are good’. In Czech, the form is *spagety*, and it too is plural. For Greek speakers, *spaggeti* often has a plural form, although the special singular form *spaggeto* also occurs; and Greeks are in fact just as likely to call spaghetti *makaronia*, which also plural. English speakers are in quite good company, however, in sticking with the singular interpretation. Swedish, Hungarian and Finnish use a singular form, *spagetti* (its usual spelling in these languages); and in Polish *spaghetti* is singular too.

In addition to *spaghetti*, the English language has borrowed a large number of other words for various forms of food and drink from Italian, not least from the coffee lexicon: *espresso* (sometimes anglicised as *expresso*), *doppio*, *cappuccino*, *latte*, *macchiato*, *ristretto*, *americano*, *freddo*...

A rather recent Italian foodstuff borrowing is *panini*, which seems to have made an appearance in North American English in the 1980s. *Pane* is the Italian



PLURAL PARTY: Five Broadway showgirls in a 1948 ‘spaghetti swooshing’ contest, where they had to eat a plate of spaghetti and sauce without using their hands

Photo: Bettmann Archive/Getty Images

word for ‘bread’, with *panino* being a diminutive which literally means ‘little bread’. (The diminutive suffix *-ino* (masculine)/*-ina* (feminine) can also be seen in *difficilino*, from *difficile*, ‘difficult’, meaning ‘a little bit difficult’. A *sonatina* is a short sonata.)

*Panini* is the plural of *panino*, and so literally means ‘small breads’, though in modern Italian it has basically come to mean ‘sandwiches’. In English, we have again ignored the original grammar and treated the word as singular – to the extent that we have now created a new English plural form of *panini*, as in “two chicken and pesto paninis, please”.

Spanish speakers have done the same thing with *spaghetti*, and say *Los espaguetis están muy ricos* ‘The spaghetts are very tasty’. There are even Americans who go along with hispanophones and speak of *spaghetts*.

*Fettucine* ‘little ribbons’, *tagliatelle* ‘tapes’, *vermicelli* ‘little worms’, and *macaroni* (*maccheroni* in the modern language) are also plural in Italian.

The ultimate origins and meaning of the word *macaroni* are uncertain; but there is some suggestion that it may have come from Greek.

*Lasagne* is plural too: to an Italian speaker, a *lasagna* is a single flat sheet of pasta. The plural form, *lasagne*, has to be used to refer to the dish as a whole because it consists of several such pasta sheets and other ingredients baked together. But, like us, most of the rest of the world does not know this, and even German speakers treat *lasagne* as a singular.

## CAPPUCCINO

Italian *cappuccino* is a diminutive of *cappuccio*, ‘hood’. Capuchins are a religious order of Franciscan Catholic friars who are so called because they wear a tunic with a hood. The tunic and hood are a particular shade of brown, and cappuccino coffee was thought to share that same particular colour.

**EUROFILE** GREAT LIVES



OUT OF HER  
TIME: Anaïs Nin  
pictured in 1969  
Photo: Getty Images

## GREAT EUROPEAN LIVES

BY CHARLIE CONNELLY

# #180 ANAÏS NIN

FEBRUARY 21, 1903 - JANUARY 14, 1977

**A**naïs Nin was sitting in a Paris café when she saw the advertisement. “Houseboat for rent. *La Belle Aurore*. Quai du Pont Royal.”

It was September 1936. The Spanish Civil War was under way, Hitler was tightening his iron grip on Germany, Mussolini had just increased Italian power in East Africa and was days away from sealing the Rome-Berlin Axis. As summer turned to autumn Europe was slipping further into febrile uncertainty and the tension was almost palpable in the Parisian air.

Nin dashed straight from the café, found *La Belle Aurore*, skipped down its ladder and knocked on the hatch, which was opened by the eccentric Swiss actor Michel Simon. Explaining that he’d hoped to live on the boat with his monkeys but they kept escaping and running riot on the quays, he showed Nin around.

“It was beautiful,” she wrote, “with windows through which I could see up and down the river, and the Quai d’Orsay as well as the Tuileries gardens.”

She rented the houseboat on the spot, despite the fact that with her banker husband she already had several properties in the city. Returning later in the day with her Peruvian lover Gonzalo Moré, he told her of an Inca tradition whereby households would have access to a secret garden called *nanankepichu*, meaning ‘not a home’. *La Belle Aurore*, he suggested, was Nin’s *nanankepichu*.

The boat, on which she would stay for three years until the outbreak of war, was perfect for Anaïs Nin. On it she could entertain literary friends and lovers like Moré, Henry Miller, Christopher Isherwood and Lawrence Durrell, but it was also somehow symbolic. Her ‘not a home’ was just that, an escape from the chaos of late 1930s Europe raging above, just a few steps away on the quay. On the river she could stay separate, rising and falling with the tides, observing, thinking, writing.

“Day and night the river laps at the wood, rocking the houseboat gently,” she wrote in her diary. “It gives me a feeling of departure.”

Her diaries made her. One obituarist called her “the most famous diarist since Samuel Pepys”, and the seven volumes published in her lifetime combined unabashed literary gossip with a deep, explorative introspection to bring a literary success that had long evaded her. The first volume did not appear until Nin was in her sixties but the timing couldn’t have been better. The growing force of international feminism immediately adopted her as a woman fiercely possessive of her personal and literary independence, a woman who had put herself in a position

of influence able to facilitate the careers of others even while struggling herself, but struggling mainly because she refused to compromise her integrity.

“Henry Miller and Lawrence Durrell were always telling me, you have to write the traditional novel,” she said in 1970. “Edmund Wilson said, why don’t you write like the Brontës? He sent me a whole set as an example. But I had a feeling a woman had something else to say.”

Most of what she had to say was contained in diaries begun when she was a child, more than 150 notebooks chronicling a remarkable life that, she said, “covers all the obscure routes of the soul and body seeking truth, seeking the antiserum against hate and war, never receiving medals for its courage. It is my thousand years of womanhood I am recording, a thousand women.”

Like her houseboat bobbing outside the political crises of the 1930s Nin was a woman out of her time, living a life entirely separate from norms and expectations. She wrote about sex, unashamedly and from a woman’s point of view, giving frank accounts of illegal abortions, affairs and even incest in a way that would still be remarkable today let alone in the middle of the 20th century. Inevitably she was criticised by some as an attention seeker, a scarlet woman, even a liar, but none of it prevented her living her life on her terms.

It was on a ship from Spain to the US when Nin first opened a notebook and began to record her thoughts. She was 11 years old and, with her mother and brothers, was setting out for a new life on the other side of the Atlantic. Paris-born, her father Joaquín was a musician and composer and her mother a singer. Anaïs was two when her father abandoned the family for one of his music students. As the ship rose and fell on the Atlantic swell she began writing as if she was writing to him.

“The diary became first of all a sort of letter to my father. It was something I could confide in, a personal thing.”

She returned to Paris in 1924 having married the wealthy Hugh Guiler at a ceremony in Havana. The couple moved into a large 18th century house on the outskirts of Paris where Nin soon found herself isolated and unfulfilled.

“I was in my 20s and I didn’t know anyone at the time, so I turned to my love of writers,” she recalled. “I wrote a book and I suddenly found myself in a bohemian, artistic, literary writer’s world.”

The book was a volume of literary criticism analysing the works of D.H. Lawrence published in 1931. “From

Lawrence I learned that the naked truth is unbearable to most and that our art is our most effective way of overcoming human resistance to truth,” she said.

It was through her book that she first met Henry Miller. The pair encouraged each other’s literary aspirations and soon embarked on an affair and a friendship that would endure for the rest of their lives. Miller seemed to benefit most from the relationship, certainly at first. When they met he was 40 years old, unpublished and living in poverty. For 10 years Nin paid his living expenses and even financed the publication of his first novel *Tropic of Cancer*, establishing the American writer at the cutting edge of the *avant-garde*.

While she became a noted champion of others’ work, giving spiritual and financial support to a succession of gifted writers, no-hopers and outright chancers that came after Miller, Nin found no takers for her own.

“I seem to identify with the one who needs,” she mused late in her life. “People who read the diaries say I made them feel like living, writing, painting. Who did I inspire? I can’t say because of men’s vanity.”

Unable to find a publisher, she published her early works herself on her own printing press, including her surrealist novel *House of Incest*, written in 1936. It would take until 15 years after her death and the publication of her unexpurgated diaries for it to be revealed that having been reunited with her father in her early 30s the pair embarked on a brief physical relationship around the time she was writing the book.

It wasn’t the only aspect of her private life that broke taboos. As well as her numerous extramarital relationships, in 1955 Nin married former actor Rupert Pole in the US despite still being married to Guiler. She later agreed to the posthumous publication of the reams of erotic stories she’d written in order to provide for both her husbands and *Delta of Venus* appeared shortly after her death in 1977 praised as the first significant collection of literary erotica by a woman author.

She’d left for New York with Guiler at the outbreak of the Second World War and became a staple of the American literary scene for the rest of her life, especially after the publication of her diaries in the 1960s. But it was with Paris that she was always most strongly associated.

“Sometimes I think of Paris not as a city but as a home,” she wrote, reflecting on a life spent largely on the move. “Enclosed, curtained, sheltered, intimate, the sound of rain outside the window, the spirit and the body turned towards intimacy, to friendships and loves. One more enclosed and intimate day of friendship and love, an alcove. Paris intimate like a room.”

She was only there for three years but *La Belle Aurore* was as much a microcosm of Nin’s Paris as it was a microcosm of her contradictory life; an escape from the world and the centre of her world, the personification of her individual introspection and a haven for those drawn into her orbit.

In 1938, when news reached Paris that Hitler had annexed Austria, she wrote in her diary, “I have created individually, personally, a world as I want it which serves as a refuge for others, as an example of creativity. If one does not believe the world can be reformed one seeks an individually perfect world. The houseboat is like Noah’s Ark”.

# WILL SELF

Time, eh – it just keeps on slipping, slipping, slipping into the future, as the Steve Miller Band so perceptively observed in their 1976 chart-topping ditty, *Fly Like an Eagle*. At least that's one obvious function of the renewed national lockdown: time – understood as our experience of duration – has begun to drag again, while the future has become a dusty attic in which we've dumped all those things we're unable to do in the present, such as visiting other places, socialising with friends or family, or enjoying any number of cultural pursuits. The French philosopher, Henri Bergson, identified our problem with time as being our tendency to think of it by analogy with space – this explains why Zeno's paradoxes trouble us so: we too, halve the time to the next big event, halve it again, and again – and so never arrive at the moment when lockdown ends. Or at least we feel this way if we equate our own experience of duration solely with clock-time – and this explains why clock-watching (or calendar observing for that matter), can induce in us the most appalling sense of stasis.

Some, of course, embrace the distinction between the psychological experience of time passing, and its objective clockwork correlates. I always deeply admired the character of Dunbar in Joseph Heller's novel, *Catch 22*. In common with the other US airmen in the novel, Dunbar faces the deranging prospect of his own imminent annihilation on one or other futile bombing mission; but unlike them, he doesn't seek a way out spatially by deserting or malingering. Rather, he escapes temporally, by the simple psychological act of cultivating boredom. Reasoning that every hour he lives through bored lasts exponentially longer than those in which he is interested, Dunbar extends his life expectancy – even in the thick of a war zone – by wallowing in torpor and ennui.

As I've had cause to remark before: the martial metaphors beloved of those charged with public health campaigns are both spurious and counter-productive. If we're engaged in a 'war' with the coronavirus – a weapons race, indeed, between its ability to mutate and ours to develop and deliver effective vaccines – then it's one in which the bulk of us have no choice but to be pacifists: 'Stay At Home!' The electronic signboards blazon – which is hardly on a par with 'Your Country Needs You'. Under such circumstances even the most focussed and productive individuals could be forgiven for questioning the significance of their work. Even if we produce something deemed essential – or provide an equally important service – removed from the commonweal, and labouring in our darkened rooms, our faces eerily illuminated by our computer screens, it's hard keep an eye on the main chance, which, together with time itself, keeps on eluding our grasp.

And if the relationship between duration and clock time has become confused for us at a personal level – how much worse is it at the collective one? It's a truth universally acknowledged that science fictions of both the distant and the near future are always really about now. Back in the 1940s and 50s when



## Multicultural Man .. on catching up with Blade Runner



BLADE RUNNER: Really a dystopian vision of 2019

Photo: Warner Bros/Getty

technological advance – despite the Holocaust and Hiroshima – was still viewed as an unmitigated good, all such fabulists saw were the shiny and the modern. So it was that the worlds they invented were also shiny and modern. Arthur C Clarke's *2001* represented the apogee of this: a cosmos full of wipeable surfaces in which humans – albeit menaced by maverick computers – travelled at great speed into the mystical awareness that their progress was ordained by benign aliens.

But fast-forward a few short years to Ridley Scott's *Alien* (1979), then a little further still to his *Blade Runner* (1982), and we have a very different picture of a near future that's now in the past: this is a world (or worlds) in which technological developments are discontinuous, such that the old, the dirty, the stained and scumbled, exists alongside all sort of magical-seeming gizmos – such as space ships and astoundingly lifelike cyborgs. In the Los Angeles of 2019 as depicted in *Blade Runner*, an Asian wet market is the promiscuous environment within which the suggestively named 'replicants' run amok. Really, Scott's masterwork represents the point at which – at the level of all humanity, or at least those punching the clock – our experience of duration began to be reasserted: we stopped seeing progress as inevitable and digitally incremental, and began living through some rather uncomfortable and protracted moments.

We remain in one of them to this day; while Matt Hancock addresses us every evening at more or less the same hour, reassuring us that there's no need to dip our pocket watches in the tea – all we have to do is sit tight, and time will recover from the furious beating we've been giving it. I have to say, I'd find this a lot more believable if he didn't look so very much like... a dormouse.

THE NEW EUROPEAN  
PODCAST



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