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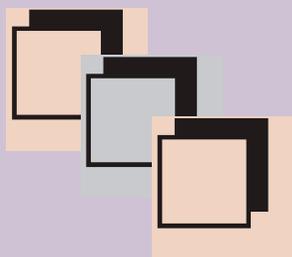
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Comment

It seems that we have a new phrase to work with: 'The Windsor Framework'. Coined apparently by foreign secretary James Cleverly, it refers to an agreement reached by prime minister Rishi (Risky) Sunak and European commission president Ursula von der Leyen. The agreement is intended to solve the problem with trade with Northern Ireland which was brought about by the disastrous deal imposed by Boris Johnson's gang after Brexit.

So far so good and Cleverly says that he is: "Genuinely pleased to hear positive reactions from businesses in NI." But then I wonder: what's it got to do with businesses? It is the politicians that we have to satisfy. It has to be said that the head-bangers in the Conservative party seem moderately accepting (pleased might be too strong a word here). But the Democratic Unionist Party are the head-bangers beyond all head-bangers and these are the guys Risky has to worry about.

There was a time when politicians were elected to govern on behalf of the electorate. Not any more it seems. These days they are mostly interested in imposing their own prejudices on their electorate. In spite of the majority of voters in Northern Ireland voting to stay in the European Union the DUP, along with a big chunk of the Conservative party, just don't like Johnnie Foreigner.

The prime minister says that the framework is about the people of Northern Ireland but, in the long run, that statement could prove to be somewhat naive. There are still people in Westminster as well as NI who would like nothing better than a fight with the EU. Because of them we walked away from a huge trading block 30 miles from our doorstep. No trading deal with a country the other side of the world could replace that.

So, we have no tomatoes, though we can always eat turnips; and yes, a politician did actually say that recently! Of course the fruit and veg crisis has nothing to do with Brexit but to unexpected bad weather in Morocco. The fact that nowhere else in Europe is there a problem, is neither here nor there. Of course, Brexit cut off a ready source of labour. Willing workers were able to come and go as they pleased and were prepared to do the jobs that we Brits find distasteful. Including picking turnips. Personally I don't see why allowing those workers to come here should be a problem, it is something we have been doing for centuries.

Adding to the problem, it seems that the pandemic lockdown has had a bit of an aftershock. It turns out that an awful lot of us don't want to work anyway. Something like 2.5 million people are presently classed as 'economically inactive'. They are not working but not looking for a job either. Many of them, it seems, have just chosen not to go back to work after lockdown ended. Something that is causing great consternation in the government. This is on top of the people just refusing to go back to the office. I mentioned in January how employers, from Elon Musk to Microsoft, are getting fractious about workers just not turning up. Of course, not everybody can work from home, you need an 'office job' to make that viable but attitudes have changed and it is hard to see how they can change back.

It would be handy though, if a few politicians changed their attitude. A buoyant economy has always relied on immigrants and we could do with making it easier and do away with our hostile environment.

I don't see it happening any time soon, but at least they have given us a new cliché: *The Windsor Framework*. Fair rolls off the tongue doesn't it?

John Roper

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