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Today's voters are crying out for sincere opinions and authentic personalities



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In all the excitement you may have missed one of the more telling moments of Friday morning's news coverage. Interviewed on the Today programme, Peter Mandelson made a particular point of praising the splendid "professionalism" of the Stronger In campaign and its director, Will Straw – as if the fact that they had lost, and utterly misjudged the feelings of the electorate, was purely incidental. It was like a television critic lauding the production values of a programme that had totally flopped with the viewing audience.

What matters in politics apparently is not the verdict of the voters but the quality of the message delivery. Suddenly it was possible to see with luminous clarity all the absurdity of modern political strategy and the terrible end to which it has come.

[This defeat for Remain is about much more than the country's dislike of the EU.](#) When politics became a branch of the advertising industry, it was just a matter of time before it lost touch entirely with the point of the democratic process: it became at least as important to run a "professional" (slick, controlled, flawlessly manipulated) campaign as to represent the views of real people.

Or even to listen to them. Because if anybody in that sinister alliance of mainstream parties had bothered to listen they would have gathered that what had alienated the public most was precisely what political strategists call "professionalism".

What the voters want – as they have now made stunningly clear – is unprofessionalism: genuine, spontaneous responses from people who may sometimes look amateurish and flawed but who appear to have sincere opinions and authentic, idiosyncratic personalities. [\(Cue Boris Johnson?\)](#)

There was a time when British political life was full of such people. Jim Callaghan, George Brown, Norman Tebbit and Ken Clarke are names that drift inevitably into memory: they had wildly differing opinions and degrees of effectiveness but they were alike in their authentic humanity, and were often popular with people who disagreed with them.

Then they were replaced by homogenised androids whose messages were honed and performances strictly managed – and now we are where we are: with a population so furious and disillusioned that it does not believe a word that its national leaders utter.

It is important to understand who it is exactly that is so angry and disgusted with the super-professional management of politics. There is a dangerous myth being reinforced in the post-mortem discussion that the result of this vote was entirely attributable to the anger of the “white working class” (code for “reactionary bigots”). This is certainly not true. The real white working class, as opposed to the demonic one that suits the purposes of cosmopolitan liberals, is a now a shrinking minority of the population. It could not, by itself, have accounted for the fact that every single region of England apart from London, voted for Leave.

There aren't that many white van men and disgruntled low-paid workers in Surrey and Berkshire. If affluent Home Counties and economically successful Midlands towns went for Brexit then there is something more going on here than the condescending cosmopolitans of London like to tell themselves and each other (because they speak only to each other).

Well, you may say, there is one party leader on the scene who is about as unprofessional as it is possible to be without falling off the stage. [Surely Jeremy Corbyn meets the requirement for authenticity and amateurishness which I am advocating](#). So why isn't he overwhelmingly popular with a public longing for natural, unscripted politics?

The answer to this is double-edged: in truth, Corbyn's candidacy was originally supported by a great many people who found him attractively “sincere” even when they did not agree with him at all. (Believe me, this is true.

I know some of these people.) But he is now an electoral catastrophe because he represents almost nobody outside of the inbred north London circles in which he is immersed. It isn't enough to be a holy fool who speaks from the heart: there must be a substantial constituency in the general population for whom your words are meaningful and relevant. Otherwise your honesty is nothing more than self-indulgence.

Indeed, the identity crisis is much greater for Labour than it is for the Conservatives because it is an ideological party whose historical *raison d'être* is to represent the interests of the working class. There have always been middle-class sympathisers with this aim but if they – and the trade union vested interest – are all that is left, it has lost its existential mission. Corbynite Labour is now a hobby for self-congratulatory urban dilettantes, not a mass movement. All the frowning sincerity in the world cannot reconnect Mr Corbyn and his Guardianistas with the disenfranchised of the North.

The Tories on the other hand are free to re-invent themselves at will. Particularly since the 1980s when they became the party of the aspiring working class and the proudly virtuous lower middle, their remit has been a portable feast. You need no inherited loyalties or local affiliations: if you share the values and a desire for self-determination, and you like the personality of the leadership, then you come on board.

Whoever replaces David Cameron will have an easier task than whichever poor devil follows Corbyn.

[Then there is Nigel Farage, who looks like a race course bookie and talks like a saloon bar bore](#). He certainly does, whether you like it or not (and I don't) have an

appeal that is thoroughly unprofessional in modish terms. I feared at one point that he had committed an offence of such egregiousness with his “Breaking Point” poster that he had lost the referendum for us.

But for all the attempts to smear the official Leave campaign by association, the people were not fooled. The frantic attempts to shame Brexit voters by linking them with intolerance, and even with a murder, cut no ice in the end.

They may just have succeeded in causing people to conceal their voting intentions from the pollsters (especially in telephone polls where one is speaking to a sentient being rather than a computer), thus rendering the polling results useless.

But the determined effort to appoint Mr Farage as the true apostle of all those who wanted a return to self-government for Britain would not fly. Not when there were such plausible and engaging people making a humane case for Leave. Boris and Michael Gove are too well-known as social liberals to be plausible Farage-clones. Andrea Leadsom and Gisela Stuart ([who was subjected to a peculiarly unpleasant attack by Remain’s Lord Sugar](#)) deserve special mention in despatches for eloquence and unfailing decency.

Everybody is saying that this was an earthquake: the most tumultuous political event of our lifetime. That is certainly right but it may be true in an even more cosmic sense than is generally recognised.

This is an opportunity not just for the country to find a new global role and a renewed commitment to self-government, but for a national revival that might offer something to other democratic societies that have lost their way.

What is often called “populism” – the demagogic rousing of mass sentiment – is not the only alternative to overweening unaccountable governance. Being answerable to the electorate and treating their concerns with respect is the most basic requirement of a would-be governing party: without it, public trust in the institutions disappears.

Parliamentary democracy was this country’s gift to the world. Maybe this is a moment to appreciate what it actually involves.