

Psychology of Brexit: 4

The Ego and Mechanisms of Defence

Have you noticed that in spite of a 20% devaluation since June, repeated warnings about a slow down & inflation from the Bank of England, and assurances that we will not get any favours from European leaders, there has not been a single public admission or mention of the idea that Brexit might have been a mistake or at least a misjudgement?

How can that be? How come there is no frisson of doubt openly expressed in the face of events? How can so many continue to interpret what look like growing clouds of darkness as a new dawn? How can so many be sure that a unique event, never seen before, will play out in an advantageous manner?

In short why is nobody saying, 'wait a minute, this may not be such a great idea?'

The realisation of just how empty their hand is by the May gang has led to the disaster being shrouded in the idea that we must be secret about our 'plans'. What plans? We can't tell you yet, they say. Meanwhile our European neighbours are saying: "there is no prospect of - or point in - a plan. You must leave. We will negotiate the rights of your citizens in our countries and ours in yours. There is no trade deal. You will not have access to the single market without freedom of movement and acceptance of some EU rules. You're out. Goodbye."

In other words, *we don't have a hand to play*. [We must simply leave](#). The idea that we can barter the rights to stay of the 3 million EU citizens living, working and studying here, against the rights of the 2 million Brits living, working and studying in the EU in any way other than reciprocity is simply bonkers. If we let EU citizens stay here, they'll probably let Brits stay there. But on both sides there is likely to be enough ill-will that many will feel unwelcome and decide to return home. Hundreds of thousands of lives will be ruined but we will 'have our country back'.

This is clearly a kind of blindness, driven by splitting and projection. We are about to leave the most sophisticated, visionary, organised free market place on the planet for some jingoist flag waving. It is the most regressionary and sustained act of mass suicide since the First World War.

We need the help of the Freud family, Sigmund and his daughter Anna to understand this bizarre state of affairs. Eighty years ago in 1936 Anna Freud published 'The Ego and Mechanisms of Defence'.

Briefly, the Ego, in Freudian psychology is our reality principle. *But reality is a perception* made up from sensations from the outer world as they interact with our beliefs, judgements and values in the inner world. In general speech 'Ego' is used to signify something that is a bit more like a mixture of pride, personality, self-esteem. It is the notion of the ego and its decisions that we will return to

shortly.

Here is a brief outline of Anna Freud's defences - a list of means of protecting ourselves from thoughts, information or sensations that are troubling, anxiety-provoking or disturbing. Freud argued that we sought a state of constancy, or peace of mind in everyday language. I have taken the liberty in column three of showing how they might be employed to sustain a 'Leave' decision in Brexit.

There we have the problem in a nutshell. Once we have taken a decision - and the vote insisted that you decide one way or the other, there was no 'not sure', 'don't know', 'can't say' option which would have been much more reflective of peoples' realities - your defence mechanisms gather round to support that decision using the 6 defences in the chart.

Accepting that your decision was wrong causes loss of constancy or peace of mind and this is troubling, so we protect and hold onto our decisions, even in the face of evidence that they were misjudgements. And we seek alternative, positive interpretations like, 'we will trade with the rest of the world' - as if we did not do that already.

There has been a complete media black-out on thinking, doubts or revisions of opinion and a determination, since the media were almost wholly pro-Brexit, to present gathering darkness as a new dawn. The emerging light of that dawn may show less welcome features of this new world. Already 61% of voters in a new YouGov poll are saying they will cut spending this Christmas.

If the pound topples another 10% once Article 50 is declared to show those foreigners that we mean business, there will be many people in Theresa May's 'just managing' category (6 million families), who are no longer managing.

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