



OF ARROGANCE, ANGER & AMBITION

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A certain serenity has characterised the British discussions about Europe since the arrival of the Coalition Government. I suppose it was too much to ask that this grown-up attitude could last. The British reporting of the fight over next year's EU Budget provides a case book study of ignorance, faux-ignorance and downright bloody mindedness. The Times leader on 28th October is a classic of its kind headed "Arrogance and Arrogation". The European Parliament's vote in support of a 5.9% increase is described as "arrogant, inept and self-defeating", even though it was merely supporting the budget put forward by the European Commission to carry out the policies agreed by the member states when they ratified the Treaty of Lisbon. 'The Thunderer' then blundered on to confuse the European Council with the Council of Europe. Perhaps more forgivably they also confused the Council of Ministers with the European Council.

One has to wonder whether much of the British media and political elite have actually read the Treaty of Lisbon which establishes the new budget procedure. This procedure will no doubt lead to a compromise between Parliament and the Council of Ministers, which is how the system is supposed to work. The European budget timetable has been known for some months. A cynic might believe that a short sharp burst of Euro-bashing was a flanking move designed to distract attention from the Government's Comprehensive Spending Review. Sadly however I suspect that the Government's antennae are not sensitive enough to have worked this one out. Those who seek to score domestic points off the European Union would be wise to master EU process and to think ahead. This month's scrabblings about the Budget are small beer when compared with the huge fight which looms over the next 'budget envelope', which is due to run for seven years from 2013. That exercise is shaping up to be a major review of what the EU actually does, more fundamental in its own way than the prolonged haggling over the Treaty of Lisbon. This will be the first occasion that the overall shape of the budget is discussed with the East and Central European member states as full participants rather than applicants. It is this process which will define the ambitions of the European Union for a generation. Indeed it is the intensity of this inter-institutional struggle which will finally determine the shape of the public affairs arena post-Lisbon.

These are the European issues which will dominate the sensitive closing years of the Coalition Government. I have a high regard for David Cameron's political instincts, but he should be careful not to rely only on Foreign Office briefings, which always underestimate the influence of the European Parliament. Getting European policy right is about more than squaring Berlin and Paris. Given his expulsion of Tory MEPs to peripheral darkness and his continuing refusal to meet them, he would be wise to take regular advice from Nick Clegg. Liberal Democrat MEPs in the ALDE Group are part of the political reality of the European Parliament. The importance of the Group, under the leadership of the ambitious Guy Verhofstadt, who would like to be the next President of the Commission, is certain to grow as we approach the next round of EU musical chairs in 2014. Indeed we may anticipate a first round of such manoeuvrings at the mid-point of the European Parliament in January 2012. In an ideal world Prime Minister Cameron would no doubt like to find a face-saving formula for returning his MEPs to European People's Party safely ahead of the European Elections in June 2014. Only the most myopic of national leaders could have failed to notice the significance of being in the governing majority of the European Parliament in the months after a European Election. The multi-national political parties are likely to grow in influence under the Treaty of Lisbon. What better way to cement a continuing Conservative Liberal Democrat Coalition at the UK General Election in 2015, than an amicable division of spoils with a Liberal President of the Commission, a Centre Right President of the European Council and a Conservative Commissioner able to take his pick of the portfolios. Some might consider this an impossible ambition, but after six months Prime Minister Cameron is doing better on the "Yes We Can" than President Obama. The Coalition has proved to be both ambitious and effective domestically. The signature of two Defence Treaties with France shows a similar creativity internationally. This is a Prime Minister in the tradition of Macmillan or Disraeli, with a rare combination of intelligence and self-confidence. No doubt however he will be conscious of the difficulties of the equally intelligent and self-confident occupant of the White House.

A recently published book on Ireland demonstrates why nations need to be comfortable with themselves if they are to succeed in the long run. The deliciously named Fintan O'Toole is the author of 'Enough is Enough – How to Build a New Republic'. He demonstrates how the twin pillars of the old Irish Republic – Nationalism and Catholicism fell away in the 1980s and 90s. The image of the "Celtic Tiger" filled the gap. However now that it is clear that dodgy statistics and a dysfunctional political system were the reality behind this striking image, it is clear that the Irish have more to do than just re-financing their banks. Mr Cameron will have to find an equivalent of Disraeli proffering an Imperial Crown to Queen Victoria. As President Obama learned on the night of 2nd November, it is not good enough just to be right. Emotion and the use of potent symbols are as important in governing as they are in campaigning.

Europeans have been donning face masks and surgical gloves to analyse the Tea Party phenomenon in the Mid-Term Elections. The story has everything necessary to excite Europeans about Americans – vulgarity, novelty and irrationality with an undertone of menace. In fact the movement is not that mysterious, its roots go back to the anti-Federalist State's Rights debates. It is Southern in flavour. The giveaway sign is the absence of Jewish influence in the movement and its ideological confusion. Its most likely lasting consequence is the further decline of "Blue Dog" Democrats in the South. Its form is typical of populist movements in US political and religious history. It has been discreetly funded by business as a way of rousing the Republican base. However was it to become an established part of the US political scene, it could prove to be a viper in the bosom of business. In reality their antics and indiscipline have cost the GOP the Senate. The real story of the Mid-Terms is to be found amongst more traditional players. Karl Rove and his American Crossroads organisation have used the Supreme Court judgement, allowing business to fund anonymous political attacks, to pick off long-term Democrat hopefuls. It has been said that the Mid-Term Elections are the equivalent of the Spanish Civil War ahead of the Second World War. In which case the Tea Parties will be remembered as the angry idealists of the International Brigade, swept aside in a greater and more cynical struggle for power. The sums of money spent in the election are mind boggling. It is estimated that the arrival of the "Super-PACs" has boosted spending from US\$69M in 2006 to US\$200M this year. When the dust has settled the real business of governing a superpower in relative decline can resume. I imagine that President Obama will not be too unhappy as he surveys the election results. The outcome in the Mid-West and the South were as bad as anticipated, but "Westward look the land is bright". The Republicans will have to accept some share of responsibility even as they struggle with maverick Tea Party legislators, who are likely to be a continuing disincentive for Independents to vote Republican in 2012. I have argued before that anger is based in fear. Politicians can deal with fear, whereas there is no legislative response to anger.

The arrogance of the fossil fuel industry leaves a particularly bitter taste in the year of the Gulf of Mexico disaster. It transpires that BP, along with the other oil majors, has been funding climate denying Senators facing re-election. Indeed if the paper "Think Globally, Sabotage Locally", produced by the Climate Action Network Europe quoting from the opensecrets.org website, is to be believed, there was a co-ordinated pattern of European emitters supporting both climate deniers and climate legislation blockers. There is now a growing library of work recording in detail the fossil fuel's climate denial campaign over the last twenty years. The latest addition to my bookshelf comes from Canada, entitled "Climate Cover-Up" by James Hoggan with Richard Littlemore. Unlike the authors of all previous books on climate change, James Hoggan is a senior public affairs man. As President of Hoggan & Associates in Vancouver, he came to the issue a mere five years ago. He remains angered by the deceptions being practised by public affairs colleagues in the service of the fossil fuel industry. His website at hoggan.com and the accompanying DeSmogBlog.com should be required reading for all public affairs practitioners. Anyone involved in climate change knows what has been going on.

After Copenhagen however it has suddenly become politically acceptable to discuss the power and tactics of the fossil fuel lobby. CIGI (the Centre for International Governance Innovation at Waterloo University in Ontario) convened, at the beginning of October, an extraordinary collection of individuals who had been involved in the struggle to produce a successful agreement on climate change over the last twenty years. There was a shared recognition that the negotiations would not be successful until we had solved the underlying political problem. Furthermore it was recognised that politicians had such a problem because of pressure from vested interests. It would be wrong to attribute the continued failure of the negotiations to any single cause. In my view a third of the problem is the sheer technical complexity of the negotiations, including the failure to include climate drivers other than greenhouse gasses. A second third of the problem is the pressure of a continuing, coherent and well financed

public affairs campaign from the fossil fuel industry. The rest of the problem is caused by the uncertainty of reaching agreement in a newly multi-polar world. The gathering at CIGI went from profound depression to excited activity in twenty four hours when the group concluded that there was much that could be done to re-frame the negotiations. The high point of the event was a presentation on Geoengineering and its relationship to the climate change negotiations delivered by Jason Blackstock of CIGI. For far too long those associated with the negotiations have averted their eyes from the reality of Geoengineering “solutions” to the problem of global warming for fear of moral hazard. Continued deadlock must make politicians more vulnerable to apparently painless technical solutions. Global warming is both a failure of the market to reflect the interests of future generations and a failure of collective action at the level of global governance. I predict that we will hear a lot more about Geoengineering in the coming months.

Carl Pope has been Executive Director of the Sierra Club in San Francisco for even longer than I have been Executive Director of the ECPA. This year he became Chairman of the Sierra Club and had his second debate with Bjorn Lomborg. I would have enjoyed being in the audience for this clash of titans. When I met Bjorn some ten years ago his partner was a public affairs man employed by German industry. Bjorn himself was fully aware of the role he was playing in the public affairs struggle over climate change. The outcome of the debate in San Francisco was for the apostle of statistical caution to be found advocating “immediate research on Geoengineering-projects”. Such projects whether conducted by civilians or the military pose a particular global governance challenge.

I understand that the European Commission and European Parliament intend to entitle their merged registers in 2011 as the “Transparency Register”. Transparency certainly played its part in the defeat of Proposition 23 that was defeated two to one on 2nd November. At least part of this unexpected success was due to an extensive revelation of the oil industry funders of the campaign to stymie California’s climate change laws. Solar energy can continue its growth. Former Supreme Court Justice Lewis Brandeis coined the phrase “sunlight is the best disinfectant” in praise of transparency and honesty in public policy. Surely it is not an unreasonable ambition for those of us who care about the future we leave to our grandchildren to channel our anger into letting a little more sunlight in on the public affairs of climate change?

