

The last Prime Minister of the UK

By Gwynne Dyer

It has been suggested that Boris Johnson, who becomes the prime minister of the United Kingdom this week, is what you would get if Donald Trump had been educated at Eton and Oxford. Maybe, although there is a great gulf between Trump's bombastic self-promotion and Johnson's self-deprecating, rather shambolic persona.

There is such a thing as a national style, and Trump's shtick would fail as badly in Britain as Johnson's would in the United States. But questions of style aside, the two men are almost identical.

They are both inveterate, shameless liars. They are both what lay people call narcissists and the experts call 'sociopaths': men (they are mostly men) who accumulate numerous wives, girlfriends and children as they go through life, but never really engage with anybody. And neither of them has any real purpose in politics.

They are quite good at winning, and they target the same sector of the electorate: older, less well-educated people, frightened about their economic future, and often racist. Some of those who support them are none of those things, of course, but the courting of white nationalists by both men is unmistakable. The shriek of the dog-whistles is deafening.

What Trump and Johnson conspicuously lack is a set of objectives that goes beyond merely winning and keeping power. Trump's determination to expunge every trace of Obama's legacy (health care, the Iran deal, etc.) gives him a kind of agenda, but an entirely negative one. Boris Johnson doesn't even have that. His only role in British politics is to save the Conservative Party by 'delivering' Brexit.

Johnson wouldn't be in Downing Street today if there had not been an election in Britain two months ago. It was only an election for the European Parliament, but Britain had to vote in it because it still hadn't left the European Union despite two postponements.

The EU election did, however, give British voters an opportunity to express their views on Brexit, and it was catastrophic for the Conservatives. On the whole the vote split pretty evenly between pro-Leave and pro-Remain parties, but the Conservatives came FIFTH, behind the Greens and just ahead of the Monster Raving Loony Party.

Panic at Conservative headquarters! Their traditional voters are mostly Leavers, and they are so angry at their party for failing to get the job done, three full years after the referendum, that they are abandoning it for Nigel Farage's newly formed Brexit Party. If there is a national election in the UK the Conservatives will be wiped out? and given the deadlock in parliament, an early election is quite likely.

So where's Boris when we need him? We all know that he's lazy, feckless, insanely ambitious, utterly unprincipled and liable to make huge mistakes, but we desperately need to rally the troops and he's the one they love.

Boris generously agreed to help the Party out, so they unceremoniously dumped Prime Minister Theresa May and set up a contest for a new party leader that Johnson was bound to win. That automatically makes him prime minister as well, but he may be the last prime minister of a genuinely united kingdom.

Johnson can only succeed by taking Britain out of the EU by October 31st. He swears that he can get a better exit deal than Theresa May negotiated (which parliament refused to pass three times), but the EU says no further negotiations are possible. He could try the traditional remedy of shouting loudly at them in English, but it may not succeed.

If that doesn't work, he says he'll take the UK out of the EU anyway, without a deal. That would inflict serious economic hardship on the British population, but true Brexiters reckon that's a small price to pay for leaving an organisation they detest. Half the

English population doesn't agree ? and two-thirds of the Scots voted Remain.

If a largely English government drags the United Kingdom out of the European Union and into economic misery, then the Scots will probably decide to leave the UK and stay in the EU. The Scottish National Party is already promising another referendum on the question.

What happens in Northern Ireland with a no-deal exit from the EU and a 'hard border' between the North and the Republic is harder to predict. The shooting and bombing could start up again, or there could be a bitterly fought referendum on a united Ireland, or hopefully something less dramatic than either of those options would happen. But it will not stay the same.

So there's rather a lot at stake, including the 300-year-old Union, and the man in charge is the farthest thing imaginable from a safe pair of hands. ?Boris is the life and soul of the party, but he's not the man you want to drive you home at the end of the evening,? as Energy Minister Amber Rudd put it recently.

If parliament can stop Johnson from doing a no-deal Brexit, of course, then none of this comes to pass. But it's not at all certain that parliament can do that.

The British are living in interesting times.