

Learning to see beyond Brexit with my canine companion

A welcome dose of pre-election perspective from Toastie the springer spaniel

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The Big Issue

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In times of national crisis and unprecedented disruption I look for calm, sane and measured thought. I speak to my springer spaniel, Toastie. You, my regular reader, will know Toastie has been invaluable in the past. For instance, when seeking some perspective on a Twitterstorm and the desire of many to feel better about themselves by judging somebody else, he was the only man. As it were.

And so, as he leapt over an empty ditch last Thursday, he and I talked about the election and what it all meant.

“Kick some leaves first,” Toastie said, in his own way. “Kick them high. I will leap at them. And then we will get into this.”

The issue, I said to him, as he ran into the stream, is whether this will make a damn bit of difference. The election is a Brexit election. And the Brexit Party are going to split votes, even though they don't seem to back Brexit, as it stands. They're a single-issue pressure group scared that the single issue will be sorted. And Labour are struggling to unite behind a common idea. The Tories, under Boris Johnson, are making it up as they go along. The SNP have Indyref in their crosshairs, the Lib Dems are policy-light, and while the Greens make sense, especially around the climate issues we all need to address, they are small.

So, I said as Toastie chewed his ball, is this going to fix anything? The systemic issues around inequality and poverty are not being addressed here. In-work poverty grows. There has been a kids' picture book written about a trip to a foodbank! What is wrong with us all?

Also, Toastie, the well is poisoned. So many MPs, especially women, are getting such appalling abuse from faceless cowards, legitimised, in their own eyes to say anything they like because they buy into bogus cant about traitors. And also because they're misogynist bastards. The election is unlikely to fix that.

However, governments crack and systems fall, Toastie, 'cause unity is powerful.

“Are you quoting Paul Weller?” Toastie seemed to sneer as he rolled in some fox scat.

What if I am? It makes as much sense as anything else.

Toastie took a very deep breath.

So did I.

This was like that time Leonard Cohen said he knew the secret to everything.

The pause went on.

I’m going to speak to the trees instead, Toastie, I said.

You know Toastie, you’re being uncommonly unhelpful.

But of course Toastie was making sense. Pause, see the bigger picture, and focus on that.

Three weeks ago we announced plans for the Future Generations Bill, a means to hardwire long-term planning into governments, so that general elections and changes of minister don’t derail positive and vital work for the future. It’s a bright, essential, shining move. It goes beyond the Brexit quagmire. It goes to tomorrow. That will be where The Big Issue is in this election. Challenging leaders to move up and above platitudes and short-termism. To build.

Still, Leonard Cohen’s answer had merit. The answer to it all, he said, was A-wop-bop-a-loo-mop-a-whop-bam-boom, quoting that other seer, Little Richard. And Leonard always knew.

I looked for Toastie. He had disappeared. It wasn’t always easy to see him in the wood, for the trees.