

A GRESHAM SCALE FOR POLITICIANS

A GAME ANYONE CAN PLAY

Gresham's Law has a history and does not always go by his name. Nevertheless, the law that says bad money (debased money) drives out good money is well established.

I believe that this is particularly applicable to politics and politicians. It is also applicable to political journalism. Just think, George Lansbury (Angela's grandfather) once edited the Daily Herald. He succeeded Ramsey MacDonald as leader of the Labour Party. Eventually it was re-named The Sun and managed to maintain its values, for a while. But then Rupert Murdoch took it over and journalistic debasement began. Sales went up while quality plummeted: bad journalism drove out good journalism.

A political Gresham Scale would place the worst at the top with ten out of ten and the best at the bottom with zero. Let me just pick a few top scoring politicians to warm up. Perhaps you might wish to award your score for them and maybe apply the scale to other politicians. Very often we hear the refrain that 'They' are all the same. Politicians are not all the same but according to Gresham's Political Law quite different politicians can all get the same score.

The main criterion here is that they should have reduced the quality of politics: bad politics driving out good politics. Too often we are persuaded to believe that politics is what politicians do. It is not. Not very often. Many of our politicians believe that politics is about power. It is not. Not ever. It is about public values inclusively discussed and mutually arrived at.

I was thinking, just for starters, of the following group of drivers out of good in favour of bad. Here are just some brief reasons why I have given each a maximum score. Perhaps that might help you decide for yourself when it comes to others.

THATCHER

Why is she a member of the Top Gresham Club? She told us that there was no such thing as society. She diminished the role of the civil service. She used North Sea Oil to fund a huge increase in unemployment. She destroyed communities, local housing and industry. Oh, this list could be very long. And she sold off the family silver. Worst of all, perhaps, she changed the political discourse to one of possessive individualism. The people that follow her on this list also believed that private was better than public, that individualism was better than collectivism and that greed and privilege could be rationalised and sold to the electorate who, absorbing our dumbed down media, could be duped into voting for the Sheriff of Nottingham.

BLAIR

For him policies did not emerge from inclusive discussion of and consensual arrival at public values: policies were targets issued by those with sofa access. Determinedly pursued, irrespective of their wisdom, which could not be questioned, those targets had to be hit or there were consequences: not for the government of course.

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) was set up by Kenneth Clarke. He is proud of that. Had Blair any understanding of education he would have abolished it. For him government is what you do *to* people. In this case Ofsted inspectors are part of the process begun under Thatcher and taken further by Blair: the process of turning on its head the notion of accountability. Governments were no longer accountable to the people. The people were accountable to government.

Who now remembers the proposal by Lawrence Stenhouse in 1975 that school inspectors work with teachers to support their research? Under Blair we got government by measurement, of what it did not seem to greatly matter.

CAMERON

As followers of Blair Cameron and his mates devoured Blair's book and also Philip Gould's book *The Unfinished Revolution: how the Modernisers Saved the Labour Party* (1999, 2011). Like Blair Cameron had his disastrous war, Libya; like Blair he fracked the school system in England; but unlike Blair he also declared war on the disabled, the poor and the homeless.

In order to control members of his own party he held a senseless advisory referendum that he declared he would regard as binding. Although only thirty seven percent of the electorate voted to leave the EU we are now stuck with a nationally suicidal policy. As Prime Minister for Oxfordshire and the Home Counties it did not dawn on him that his policies and the incompetent nastiness of his chum the Chancellor of the Exchequer might turn people away from something supported by him.

His bequest to Theresa May was an excess of monarchical powers. Without them there can be no Brexit.

MAY

It was Theresa herself who warned the Tory Party about being known as the Nasty Party. As Home Secretary her refusal to use powers to control immigration humanely while simultaneously mistreating immigrants she did not want helped to create a very nasty anti foreigner public discourse. And as Prime Minister for Brexit her first thought was to use the Royal Prerogative. She disdains Parliament and ignores its will whenever she can get away with it. She packs committees with supporters thereby suppressing dissent and disagreement and, in my view, does not have a political bone in her body.

She is an absolutist. To govern like that you need a combination of luck and competence. She has neither. She is the prisoner of a party that believes its internal squabbles have greater import than the national interest. A strange creature: a Prisoner Empress.

BORIS

More than an unfunny buffoon whose stupidity is masked by an ability to quote at length in Latin, Boris is a serious danger to serious politics. He is a liar: a serial liar. He is also a purveyor of simple-minded racism. Piccaninnies and watermelon smiles are only part of it. His insult to Liverpool over Hillsborough combined class snobbery with racism. Being Foreign Secretary is a jolly jape.

I include him among the drivers out of good politics because he seems to have no real awareness of it. Good politics means empathy. Bad politics can often confine that empathy to you and your mates. That is why Boris is here among the high scoring Greshams of politics.

FARAGE

I am not sure that he qualifies as any sort of politician. Perhaps he can be included as a disrupter of politics. Ultimately he drove the country and its government out of its senses. He represents more than bad politics. He is anti politics: a hugely destructive force whose personal fantasy has helped so many people to delude themselves about nonsense such as sovereignty. I think he should be here because of his dumbing down effect.

AND, as you might expect, TRUMP: a force of ill nature.

In the UK the verb To Trump means to fart. And as we get older we are warned never to trust a fart. The Constitution of the USA has been venerated by so many US citizens over so many years but it was always imperfect and susceptible to being gamed. The Electoral College was an attempt to keep democracy at one remove from power by selecting the great and the good to choose a President rather than to leave it to the popular vote. Trump lost the popular vote. He gamed the anti democratic Electoral College.

The Romans took hundreds of years to reach the stage of loopy Emperors. The USA has done this in my lifetime. Pax Americana was always Bellum Americana. And now Trump, the President/Emperor who defies and insults almost the entire world at the United Nations, the man who is ruining the lives of those that voted for him, the man shot through with racism and sexism, the man without a care for the consequences of his foreign activities ('policies' is not the word because it implies rationality) and the man who makes Caligula's horse look like a great intellectual politician; this total stranger to truth has driven good politics out of the USA. In terms of a Gresham score I think he is Alpha Double Plus.

A question: where on the Gresham Scale would you place David Davis and why?

Second question: who do you have in mind for a low score and why?

Cliff Jones, Christmas Day 2017 Nadolig Ilawen