

Will Brexit Prove that Johnson is an Illusionist Par Excellence or Simply A Deluded Fool?

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According to [Cambridge online dictionary](#), an illusionist is an entertainer who performs tricks where objects seem to appear and then disappear. If you've not seen the 2006 film *The Illusionist*, it's definitely worth watching and provides salutary thoughts on what's going on at present with our Prime Minister.

The film is set in late nineteenth century Vienna and involves an enduring relationship between Eduard Abramovich and Sophie von Teschen who fall in love as teenagers but, because of class difference – she is a duchess – are forcibly separated. Many years later, Eduard, now known as renowned illusionist Eisenheim, meets Sophie again when he gives a performance for Crown Prince Leopold who she is about to marry purely for the purpose of advancing his power.

Illusionists entertain us though we know we are being deceived. The cleverest magicians make it look as if something incredible has occurred. What people see is based on what *they think* they've seen, assisted to a very large degree, by a combination of seduction and distraction. Crucially, once the shroud of mystery slips, the illusionist is undermined and any power they had to deceive evaporates.

Brexit was a form of illusion.

Those arguing the UK should leave the European Union claimed that membership was not in the UK's interest. According those contending that leaving would be beneficial, the EU was an organisation uninterested in 'true' democracy. Power was not held by MEPs (Members of the European Parliament), but unelected officials recruited to proliferate the principles of a federalist body.

Not only can Britain leave the EU & have access to the single market, we'd actually get a better deal [#VoteLeave](#)

Source: Tweet from Vote Leave Campaign

For good measure, the illusion of a failing organisation was 'gingered' by stories of waste, immense bureaucracy and corruption. Equally influential, were journalistic indications of an apparent agenda by economically powerful economic states, particularly France and Germany, to dictate policy and direction of the EU.

Such stories by 'well-placed' journalists including, significantly, a certain Boris Johnson then employed by *The Telegraph* as its EU Correspondent, were explicitly directed to readers receptive to such messages.

That's the nature of propaganda.

Those who've seen illusionists at work will note that strategically located props and clever lighting add to making the deception successful. Extensive explanation is usually unnecessary.

Pointedly, a glaring inability by supporters of the EU to explain the economic and social benefits of continued membership was correspondingly matched by sophistry of advocates of leave who, to borrow from the Simple Minds song, 'Promised a Miracle'.

The current situation is that Parliament having triggered Article 50, the official procedure for a member nation to declare its intention to leave the EU, and the end of 'transition' of adherence by the UK to EU rules at 11.00pm (12.00am CET on 1st January 2021) on 31st January, only just over two weeks are left. For businesses who trade with the EU, this is an impossibly short period of time in which to make arrangements should there be dramatic change such as if no-deal is the outcome of ongoing negotiations for a Free Trade Deal.

Equally, anyone wishing to travel to Europe after the end of this year will be unsure of what conditions they will need to adhere to.

This is simply madness.

What we're being told on a daily basis, is that Boris Johnson believes the principle of sovereignty for the UK to make its own laws and be fully in control of future economic destiny, is paramount. Being free of the obligations of EU membership and requirement to adhere to rules associated with the single market and compliance with obligations of the customs union will enable the UK to be an independent island nation.

Brexit would allow this to occur. Supporters of leave passionately disseminated the illusion that 'freedom' could be achieved at no cost. Indeed, no longer being a member of the EU would save money.

As the last four and half years have shown, when it comes to precise calculations of what will actually happen when the UK leaves the EU, there's no certainty. This shibboleth has been the cloak of respectability used by those who contend that leaving the EU with no arrangements in place, 'no-deal' euphemistically referred to as 'Australian Rules', will, in the long-term, make the UK more prosperous.

During the referendum campaign, many of those leading leave were somewhat ambiguous about how 'hard' the UK's eventual departure from the EU should be. EFTA (European Free Trade Association) and Norway-style arrangements were suggested that would enable the UK to continue to enjoy access to markets with as little disruption to trade as possible.

Theresa May's attempt to create a compromise withdrawal agreement infamously caused consternation among Eurosceptics in her own party. Those aligned with the ideology of Euroscepticism have, directly or indirectly, been behind the removal of every Tory leader since Edward Heath. Eurosceptics have shown little hesitation in undermining any Conservative leader whose revulsion of the hated EU is not seen as sufficiently in evidence.

Given the opprobrium directed against Ted Heath, the Conservative PM who led the country when it joined the EEC (European Economic Community) in January 1973, subsequent leaders take great care when dealing with Eurosceptics within the Conservative Party.

As we enter the last few days of transition, we must sincerely hope a deal emerges between ourselves and the EU allowing, at the very least, maintenance of as few restrictions and, ideally, zero tariffs on goods as possible. Boris Johnson, a man whose journalist career advanced through willingness to propagate untruths concerning the EU, is now PM.

That Johnson is willing to advance the notion that leaving the EU with no-deal would not cause serious economic damage, “we will prosper mightily”, to the UK would, even in the best of times, would be as risible as its irrational. In the midst of an ongoing pandemic that has so profoundly hit the UK economy, makes the prospect seem even more ludicrous.

Johnson, happy to play the lovable buffoon, is acutely aware that the forces that allowed him to achieve the prize of becoming PM through undermining his predecessor, could, should he deliver anything less than a no-deal Brexit, be turned against him.

Johnson has attempted to play the role of illusionist to effectively slake the thirst of Brexiters within his own party. This is why he continues to claim, without any evidence, that we’ll enjoy economic benefit by leaving the EU. Events over the weekend strongly suggest that the deception of no-deal is starting to lose its power.

Perceived wisdom is that Johnson is now running out of options and, in order to avoid a cataclysmic no-deal, will seek an accommodation with the EU based on what many see as an [amended “rebalanced” version](#) of the ratchet clause dealing with divergence from the level playing field.

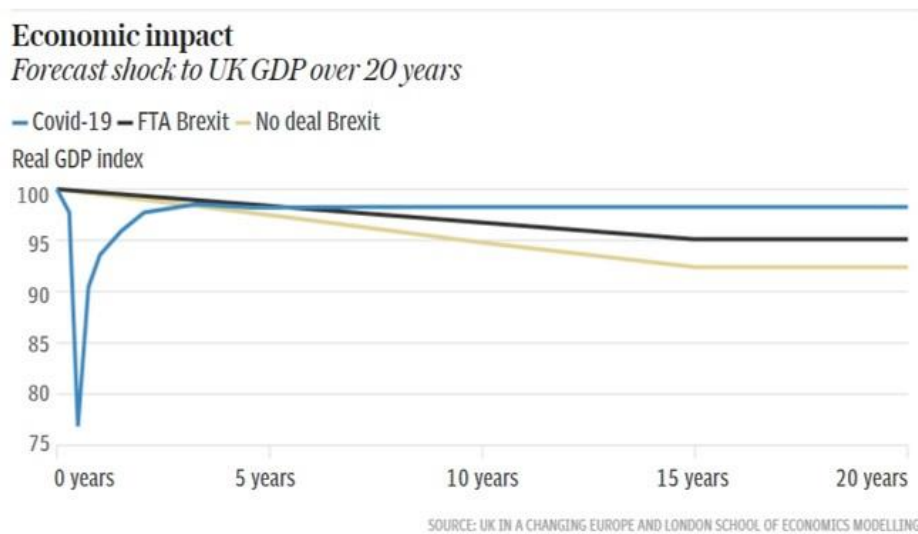
Gideon Rachman writing in [The Financial Times](#) on Monday, believes that economic reality will force the UK to achieve an agreement that will be, “largely be on Europe’s terms”.

[Polly Toynbee](#) believes that expediency and the desire to survive the fallout of economic disaster that would follow a no-deal outcome, is what will force Johnson to achieve a deal with the EU.

The Illusionist tells the story of how Eisenheim uses his skills as an illusionist to safely extract Sophie from her betrothal to a man who is

increasingly self-obsessed and cruel to her, Prince Leopold. Without spoiling the plot if you've never seen *The Illusionist*, the key to success is in being able to organise a deception that is credible.

Johnson is no fool and must be aware that, regardless of whether or not there's a deal, there are going to be major economic changes due to Brexit. This will result in long-term consequences which will, following the impact of Covid-19, make us collectively poorer in coming years:



Source: *The Telegraph*

Ever the pragmatist, Johnson will recognise that as the one of the most vocal supporters of leaving the EU during the referendum and, having achieved leadership and power by continually accentuating the benefits of doing so, he will be challenged as to why the illusion is no longer plausible.

Being a champion of the people and claiming he wants the best for them is the easy part of leadership.

This is the part of leadership that Johnson, unsurprisingly, enjoys.

More difficult is in dealing with the fallout of decisions you've been instrumental in taking. Such is the responsibility of being Prime Minister expected to take tough decisions for the greater good and not

simply to attain short-term political gain. Seminal LBC broadcaster James O'Brien made the following tweet on Monday:



James O'Brien  @mrjamesob · 14 Dec

...

Has there ever been another trade negotiation specifically designed to deliver a deterioration in the trading relationship of the negotiating parties? Seems unlikely but not impossible.

As such, Johnson is in danger of emerging not as a hero, as did expert illusionist Eisenheim, but potentially like his adversary, Prince Leopold, a self-seeking narcissist whose delusions made him detestable.

Dr. Steven McCabe is co-editor of *Brexit and Northern Ireland, Bordering on Confusion* (published by Bite-Sized Books, ISBN-13:978-1694447807) and *English Regions After Brexit: Examining Potential Change through Devolved Power* (published by Bite-Sized Books, ISBN-13: 979-8666953099). He has contributed chapters to a number of texts in the last year (in 2020 unless otherwise stated): *Brexit Negotiations after Article 50: Assessing Process, Progress and Impact* (published in 2019 by Emerald Publishing, ISBN: 978-1787697683); *The Wolves in the Forest: Tackling Inequality in the 21st Century* edited by Hindley and Hishman (published in 2019 by Social Liberal Forum); *Boris, Brexit and the Media* edited by Mair, Clark, Fowler, Snoddy and Tait (published by Abramis Academic Publishing, ISBN-13: 978-1845497644); *The Virus and the Media: How British Journalists Covered the Pandemic*, edited by Mair (published by Bite-Sized Books, ISBN-13: 979-8643725824); *The Pandemic, Where Did We Go Wrong?* edited by Mair (published by Bite-Sized Books, ISBN-13: 979-8665858326); *BBC, A Winter of Discontent?* edited by Mair (published by Bite-Sized Books ISBN-13: 979-8694863117) and *The Pandemic, Where are We Still Going Wrong?* edited by Mair, (published by Bite-Sized Books ISBN-13: 979-8563726338).