Lies, Damned Lies and Election Porkies!

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A commentator on LBC Radio last week has declared that whilst this is undoubtedly a 'Brexit election', it may also be regarded as a "lying election." As he explained, there is an increasing sense that though politicians have a credibility problem at the best of times, the volume and profligacy of promises being bandied about by each of the main parties is leading voters to wonder who can be believed.

Politicians undoubtedly reinterpret facts to suit their view or reinforce arguments. They use various rhetorical flourishes to justify such actions. If the consequences weren't so serious, such sophistry might seem amusing. Who can forget the late Defence minister Alan Clark in 1992 being questioned by Geoffrey Robertson QC in the 'Arms-to-Iraq case' when his argument for discrepancies between his testimony and statements made previously was that he was being "economical with the *actualité*."

Clark, who luxuriated in being an inveterate snob and looked down on those he considered beneath him, pretty much everyone not born of nobility – he famously critiqued Michael, now Lord, Heseltine, for having bought his own furniture – knew full well what the truth was. However, he would have considered falsehoods as being necessarily 'part of the game' of defending the realm and therefore in the national interest.

It's probably unsurprising that this election is being fought by all the political parties on the basis of what *they* believe is in the UK interest. Accordingly, therefore, the simplistic message from the Conservatives is that with sufficient MPs to form a government, they will "get Brexit done". This, prospective Tory MPs stress *ad nauseam,* will allow the country to recover from the paralysis and uncertainty that has descended upon it over the last couple of years.

The other major parties claim that getting Brexit "done" requires appreciation of the complexity involved and pose far greater threats that is being suggested by the Tories' crude remedy that suggests the UK will be out of the EU by the end of January 2020. Their alternatives are, it has to be said, not conducive to garnering public support. Any belief that LibDem leader Jo Swinson may have harboured about forming a majority government on the basis of the promise to revoke Article 50 is now seen as fanciful to the point of ludicrous.

Labour's spending plans, should it win a majority on 12th December, are regarded by a range of financial experts, most notably the Institute of Financial Studies (IFS), as potentially ruinous to the economy. As many, including a significant slice of the electorate, egged on by almost all of the 'mainstream press', are asking, how can Labour's hugely ambitious plans be afforded? Labour assertion at its manifesto launch in Birmingham a couple of weeks ago, that only the top 5% of taxpayers would pay additional more in taxes, has now been debunked.

It's no wonder those wondering how to vote next week are somewhat perplexed at who they should vote for, particularly should they wish to respect the outcome of the June 2016 referendum, but do not wish to see Johnson's Brexit deal implemented.

However, there's a world of difference between making outlandish commitments that, no doubt Jeremy Corbyn believes are vital, and telling what are barefaced lies. One master of avoiding the truth in this election is surely Boris Johnson. Johnson's background included a litany of instances of his willingness to engage in lying such as being sacked by *The Times* in 1988 for writing a story containing falsehoods.

Johnson was sacked by Shadow Conservative leader Michael Howard in 2004 as Vice Chair of the Party and Shadow Arts Minister because he was considered to have lied in denying an affair with fellow *Spectator* journalist Petronella Wyatt. Prior to his dismissal when asked about his relationship with Wyatt, Johnson described rumours as "complete balderdash." The fact that Wyatt's mother confirmed that the affair did indeed occur, and that her daughter had undergone a termination fatally undermined his denials.

That Lady Verushka Wyatt added, "The reason she went out with him was because he said he was going to marry her" would suggest that Johnson's promises might be taken with a rather large pinch of salt! All of this was well known before Boris Johnson was voted leader by Tory members despite having no aversion to being economical with the *actualité.*

Many commentators and, significantly, those who have worked with Johnson, stridently warned that his character and, in particular, his ease at trotting out statements he knows to be untrue should have fatally undermined his long-cherished dream of becoming Prime Minister (PM). This is a role be assumed to require credibility and absolute integrity. Nonetheless, Johnson was democratically elected by members of his party as leader and, by virtue, PM entirely due to his commitment that he's complete a task his predcessessor had not achieved; taking the UK out of the EU.

Prior to becoming PM, Johnson's supporters passionately claimed, once he'd achieved his coveted prize, we'd see his ability to act as statesman emerge. He'd recognise the importance of the office and show that his, numerous previous indiscretions and misdemeanours were momentary aberrations and not at all characteristic of the man who believes himself to be a reincarnation of wartime leader Sir Winston Churchill, about whom he wrote a biography that critics widely panned.

Sunday's BBC interview of Johnson by Andrew Marr would indicate that he's not learned from previous mistakes. Without the merest hint of embarrassment, Johnson made a series of claims that he must surely know to be untrue. This included his statement that, "We have a Queen's Speech that was blocked by Parliament."

For anyone who attended the vote on 24th October, including Johnson, as well as anyone who watched the debate on television, this statement would have come as a surprise. The Queen's Speech Johnson referred to as being "blocked" was actually passed by 16 votes.

Lies, it seems are becoming a new norm in this election.

Johnson's interview with Marr included a number of other claims that have been, as every pronouncement made by politicians in this election are, checked for veracity and found to be untrue. Two such claims concern issues that are 'shaping' rhetoric surrounding the election; the NHS and terrorism.

Johnson stated that said should the Tories become the majority party after next week's election, that they would be "determined to make huge investments in the NHS. The largest in modern memory. £34 billion." As analysis shows, whilst this figure is correct, once inflation is taken into account, the figure in real terms would be £20.5 billion by the end of the next Parliament in 2023-24.

Moreover, according to the Health Foundation, an annual increase of 3.2% annual would represent slightly over half of the 6% average achieved by Labour governments between 1997 and 2010. Besides, as the IFS point out, the Conservative manifesto pledges to increase health expenditure 2023-24 by £2.9 billion; just a third of one per cent more than had already been planned by the Government.

These facts prove Johnson to be incorrect when he states that investment under him would be the "largest in modern memory" unless, of course, such memory only goes back five minutes!

Health is always an emotive issue in general elections; particularly one that is based on getting Brexit done and the ramifications that would follow. Suggestions by some that any trade deal with the US would include access by American firms, especially pharma, create great unease about the future of the NHS. However, statements made by Johnson and his ministers that the NHS will not be part of any negotiations with the US tend to be treated with scepticism.

On Tuesday morning Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab was questioned on Radio Four about claims that such a trade deal wold result in more private firms or higher drug prices. Raab, when asked about privatisation of the NHS, stated that he's "never" advocated privatisation.

Embarrassingly for Raab, it was pointed out that in 2011 he'd written a chapter in a book, *After the Coalition, The Future of Britain and a Renewed Conservative Party,* coedited by him and Kwarsi Kwarteng,

Priti Patel, Chris Skidmore and Liz Truss in which is explicitly stated his belief that the NHS should be privatised.

In any election there is always the danger of an unexpected event to take place. Last Friday's terrorist attack on London Bridge was horrific and, given that it was carried out by someone who'd previously been convicted but released early due to a change in the law, was going to generate controversy. Johnson and others criticising Labour for this seems to many opportunistic and, it must be said, crass, for a party that has been in power for nine and half years. This was a point that Andrew Marr continually emphasised in his interview with Johnson.

Though taking advantage of tragedy is traditionally seen as not *de rigueur,* all politicians will push the 'Overton Window' of what is acceptable if they believe it's to their advantage. However, Johnson's statements and tweets, some of which were plagiarised from those made by the 'Secret Barrister', are rebounding on him and leading him to be condemned by, notably, the father of victim Jack Merritt.

However, the tweet made on Sunday by former chief crown prosecutor for north-west England Nazir Afzal concerning comments made by Johnson and Home Secretary Priti Patel is especially excoriating in its message:

"30 years working in criminal justice. Half that time at Chief Officer level. Having overseen prosecution of perhaps a million cases. Worked with dozens of ministers of all parties. I have never felt need to say this: This Prime Minister (& Home Secretary) are both lying to us #Marr"

That President of the US, Donald Trump, is visiting the UK as part of a summit to celebrate the 70th anniversary of NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organisation) underlines how much Johnson seems to have learned from him in fighting an election based on controversial statements and mistruths.

As if to demonstrate this approach, when questioned about Prince Andrew and the ongoing story concerning the nature of his relationship with deceased paedophile Jeffery Epstein, Trump claimed he didn't know him; "I don't know the gentleman…I don't know Prince Andrew". The fact that there is a wealth of photographic evidence

showing precisely the opposite appeared not to make the slightest difference.

If telling 'porkies' and lying is now considered the norm for political leaders, we've reached a very sad state of affairs. We deserve better.