

Brexit: does it ask more questions than it answered?

Some Thoughts for a Future Raymond Williams Foundation Event

An Introduction:

The UK's Leave/Remain Referendum appears to have generated many more questions than the one it set out to resolve. As a result of the sustained political, economic and social turmoil around this event, there may be considerable scope for the Raymond Williams Foundation (RWF) to plan events in line with its aims and objectives, with or without the assistance of kindred partners. The following questions are just some of the topics that one RWF Trustee suggests students at our future events might consider.

Questions:

1. The UK has no written constitution. It is argued, by some, that this offers infinite flexibility in solving unexpected national crises. Others argue that a written constitution would offer definite guidance in national crises. **Do we need a written constitution? If so, how should we get there?**
2. Whilst not having a written constitution, we do live within a Parliamentary, representative democracy? **Does the popular will, expressed via referendum, take precedence over the popular will, expressed via the elected Members of Parliament? Are MPs delegates or representatives?**
3. Much comment has been made of alleged bad faith, distortion and even lying – by both sides – in the course of the recent referendum campaigns. **Is there a commonly recognisable boundary between mendacious or robust debate? Should this line be policed and, if so, how?**
4. At a time of great national uncertainty, some argue that the Monarch acts as our steadying focus. **What role has the Queen played since the Brexit vote? Would an elected President have a clearer role?**
5. Within the UK, all elections are now undertaken via one of various forms of proportional representation (PR), except for the election of local Councils in England, Wales, Scotland and the election of Westminster MPs. **Has the time come to replace first past the post (FPTP) for these local Councils and for the Westminster Parliament?**
6. Given the frequent divergences of aspirations and needs of the four countries of the UK, how can the interests of the English be best represented. **Has the time come for an English Parliament?**
7. Given the increasing divergence of aspirations and needs within different regions of England how can the voices of regional England be best represented? **Has the time come for seriously regional government, of some sort, within England and, if so, how?**
8. Referendum voters in Scotland clearly expressed the wish to remain in the EU. **How might the Westminster Government best accommodate this wish?** Greenland is part of the Kingdom of Denmark but seceded from the EEC without breaking its links with Denmark. **Could a “reverse Greenland” be envisaged, whereby Scotland remains within the EU whilst England & Wales leave?**
9. Referendum voters in Northern Ireland clearly expressed the wish to remain in the EU. **How might the Westminster Government best accommodate this wish?** What are the potential implications for the Good Friday Agreement and the earlier Free Travel Area? **How might the Irish republic and the UK jointly address the wishes of the voters of Northern Ireland?**
10. **Could England and Wales jointly secede from the UK (and/or from Great Britain) as a device to leave Scotland, Northern Ireland and Gibraltar within the EU?**
11. Whilst the UK appears to be on a path towards greater regionalism, some argue that the EU cannot make adequate responses to complex issues because it is not yet “federal” enough. The Eurozone, especially, is struggling because it has no mechanism to transfer resources from nation state to nation to another to support a putative, common monetary policy. **Is the future of the EU destined to be a formal, federal Eurozone, set within a confederal array of non-Eurozone countries?**

12. Some argue that the EU must “democratise” or it will break up within the next decade or so. What does “democratise” mean? **What is our understanding of the Democracy in Europe Movement 2025 - DiEM25 and its UK branch as “A Better Europe is Possible”?**
13. Within the UK, the effect of Brexit on Party politics has been, and continues to be, profound. Leadership has already changed, is being challenged or is about to undergo leadership elections in the following political Parties: The Green Party of England and Wales; United Kingdom Independence Party; The Conservative & Unionist Party; The Labour Party. **How do we understand what is happening to each political Party in the UK?**
14. The three biggest UK-wide Parties, represented at Westminster, have now all adopted internal rules allowing Party members to choose a new Party Leader as Prime Minister. In as much as the UK has a constitution, “sovereignty” is said to reside with “the Monarch in Parliament” and “the Royal Prerogative” powers of the Prime Minister. **Should a change of Prime Minister, part way through a Parliament, especially if the former PM has been overturned, require a General Election?**
15. It is apparent that many more women are in post as Party leaders, within the UK, the EU and further afield. **Has the political glass ceiling finally shattered? Are there any unique qualities that either gender brings to politics and national leadership or should we simply choose the best candidates, irrespective of gender?**
16. There appears to be an emerging consensus that so-called “left behind areas” provided many of the Brexit votes. **Is this true, do we know?** There is also speculation that similar trends are apparent in other parts of the EU and the USA. Is this true, do we know? **What is the state of class politics and class identity in the UK today?**
17. What is the role of social and economic inequalities in today’s politics? Some commentators have said that the pain felt after the referendum by many “Remainers” is a mirror of the pain said to have been felt by “left behind citizens” over many years. **Is there an elite versus others divide in our society and, if so, what should be done to address it?**
18. The new Tory Government will surely have to decide what Brexit actually means. Perhaps trade offs between “free trade” and “free movement” of people will be a core of the next few months’ politics. **How should UK citizens best be able to partake in formulating national policy, as the UK tries to establish its future relationship with the EU?**
19. This appears to be a time of amazingly rapid change with different classes, ethnicities, age groups and regions set against each other. **What is our understanding of the individual and collective emotion and psychology of these changes?**
20. The next few months in our national life might include many big decisions taken by lawyers or politicians or both. **In a well functioning, informed democracy what is a good balance between law and political forces?**
21. **In a well functioning, informed democracy what is a good balance between the media and the citizen?**

Postscript:

It is not realistic to expect all of these questions to be addressed in forthcoming RWF events, even if supported by a multitude of local circles, forums etc. However, the long list might serve to illustrate the multi-faceted crisis that the UK faces and provide a pool from which a short list of topics might be selected for RWF attention.

Others will certainly be able to add other questions for RWF participants to address and I look forward to any comments, additions or deletions to these notes that my non-expert thinking has produced.

Acknowledgment:

I wish to thank an old - and now frail - friend of Wedgewood Memorial College, Barlaston who has encouraged me to assemble this list of questions for discussion. He is well known to at least some of the current Trustees of RWF. Despite his frailty, he has consistently said in recent weeks, “We must analyse, then act.” So, here is my first effort. Thank you, Larry Farrow, for encouraging us all to think.

Liberté, égalité, fraternité