

5th April 2019

Dear Mr Rees-Mogg,

I wrote to your colleague Mark François the other day – you are all still “colleagues” in the Conservative Party, are you? Monsieur François, who has “nineteenth-hole Powellite bore” written all over his smug, estuarine face and probably pronounces his name “Fransoyze” in a patriotically Dogger Bank accent, had just come out with some guff on the BBC that was as intemperate as it was ignorant. Being somewhat intemperate myself, I settled on the ignorant and decided to go to town.

I admit that I wasn't in the best of moods. I'd just endured your neighbour, the MP for South Dorset and fellow “man of the people” Richard Grosvenor Plunkett-Erle-Drax, rise in the Commons in order both to confess and demonstrate a quite remarkable lack of political judgement. How a man of Richard Grosvenor Plunkett-Erle-Drax 's expensively assembled – and, I hear, even more expensively defended – reputation thinks he can win friends by admitting that he'd just been diddled by Theresa May I shall never know. But then again, YOU voted for her deal last week too, and you'd have us believe that you know exactly what you're doing. Was this man, I asked myself – for there are more of them than one might imagine – the same Richard Grosvenor Plunkett-Erle-Drax who stated to your constituency dinner in Camerton village hall last year that “the Germans are trying to do with the Euro what they failed to do with the Jackboot”? Or was he another Richard Grosvenor Plunkett-Erle-Drax? Like I said, there are a lot of Richard Grosvenor Plunkett-Erle-Draxes about. Far too many for my liking, actually.

But I apologise for I have digressed as usual. Here is my letter to your fellow cockle-digger *le Comte de Canewdon*, *le Maréchal de Maplin Sands*:

Dear Mark François,

You just claimed on the BBC that “the people” not Parliament is sovereign.

You claimed that your opponents were mounting “a coup” against them.

You went unchallenged on both points.

You are either seriously mistaken or lying. Either way you are wrong. You shouldn't have made the comments and you should retract them.

We live in a representative democracy. Although Brexit will probably kill the concept, it is not yet dead. The people is sovereign at the moment it elects a Parliament. Parliament is sovereign until the next election. MPs should vote with their consciences.

You not only fought the EU Referendum campaign on that principle but indulge it when it suits you.

Parliamentary sovereignty includes having the right - indeed the duty - to override the result of any UK referendum if enough MPs consider it is not in the national interest to affirm it. You know that full well.

If voters don't like the choices their MP makes, they can vote him or her out.

That is our democracy.

But what incentive is there for you to get things right when the BBC is so weak in the face of falsehood?

Perhaps, therefore, you will kindly justify your claim to me, and with a substantive response not something pre-prepared or off the shelf.

Many thanks in advance,

Peter Roberts

I put a copy of the letter on Facebook and soon received this reply from a lady of your persuasion. Let us not reveal her true name and instead call her "Chlamydia":

Chlamydia: *"What he [Mr Francois] says is true and it's what we the people who voted to leave know to be true. He had the guts to say what most people inside and outside parliament also know to be TRUE."*

I felt compelled to respond. (I always answer communications, Mr Rees-Mogg. Do you?)

Me: " 'Know' to be true, Chlamydia? Can you say why you KNOW it to be true (as opposed to it being your opinion, however strongly held) and point to somewhere in law or in our constitution that supports you?"

Chlamydia: *Well every leaver I know fees he's a hero, you most probably don't because you are a remoaner, and cant accept the democratic vote, anyways I don't feel the need to answer to you, you're mind is obviously made up, as is mine.*

Me: Please say how you think I'm wrong - with evidence. Just asserting it isn't enough. You have to say on what factual grounds you disagree with what I wrote to Mark François. To start things off, here's part of the evidence for my case: the Parliamentary Briefing Paper number 07212 of 3rd June 2015. Among other comments the Briefing states that, "The UK does not have constitutional provisions which would require the results of a referendum to be implemented." Please refute this with evidence.

[Note that I didn't inform Chlamydia that the legal and constitutional status of the 2016 EU Referendum had been confirmed to me in a personal conversation with no less than your fellow Brexiteer Bernard Jenkin MP on College Green last summer. I thought that it might sound arrogant and elitist, and make my task of convincing Chlamydia through force of reasoned argument even harder.]

Chlamydia: ??????

Me [after quoted her original comment about my post as a reminder]: Again: what evidence do you have that he (and you) are right and I am wrong? With evidence, please.

[Are you bored yet, Mr Rees-Mogg? I am. Are you experiencing a certain dismal familiarity with the style of “debate” favoured by those who hang like willing corpses from your every word? I am. For it’s not the first time I’ve quoted from a discussion of this kind, is it? But since there is some rough and bumpy mileage in it, I shall forge on.]

Chlamydia: *It's my opinion and what I believe to be true. Say what I think with evidence, just asserting isn't enough? who are you the Brexit Police? why in the hell would I? you're the one with the problem, think its called Romoaner Syndrome, you know when someone can't get over the fact that they didn't get their own way, think you can get some therapy for that, Seek help elsewhere.*

Me: Chlamydia, it's usual for someone who asserts a point to have evidence to back it up. It's got nothing to do with the police and everything to do with a mutually fair-minded attempt to have a debate so as better to get to the truth of something. Are you saying that you haven't any evidence to back up your opinion?

Chlamydia: *I'm saying I don't have to answer to* you. Period*

*[sic: interesting psychological sub-text in the use of the word “to” there, wouldn't you say, Mr Rees-Mogg?]

Me: No one's forcing you to answer to anybody. But that's not the point. If you don't want to justify your opinion then why did you post it on my wall in the first place? Perhaps you DO have evidence. But refusing to say what it is makes it look like you don't. And as someone claiming that you're a democrat (and that I'm not), that's not very impressive. I don't expect you to admit it publicly, but I'm sure you can admit it to yourself. If you can tell me what your evidence is, and it's good evidence, I promise to accept it and change my view.

Chlamydia: *No it says go bother someone else, don't you get out much?*

Me: Oh come on Chlamydia! You can do better than that! (And it was you who "bothered" me, by the way.) I'll tell you what: don't let me know what your evidence is; just say whether you have any and we'll try to build from there. A simple "yes" or "no" will do.

Silence.

Me [for I can be relentless at times; unforgiving, even]: Chlamydia, please respond! You chose to put your opinion on my timeline. I didn't ask you to - but you're welcome because it's good to debate with people with whom we disagree. I'd go so far to say that it's what democracy is all about. I have to presume that you wanted me and others to know what your view is or you wouldn't have posted it. So it's fair and not at all discourteous for me to ask whether you've any evidence to back it up. If you have, then surely you'll be keen to say what it is, particularly if it contradicts my opinion and proves me wrong. I've taken your view seriously enough to give you my evidence, so please respond in kind. If you stay silent or are impolite or dismissive or evade the issue, people will reasonably think that you don't actually have any evidence for your opinion. And if that's true, you may have to conclude that you need to re-visit it. So I ask you again: do you have any evidence for your opinion or not?

And do you know, Mr Rees-Mogg, I'm still waiting for a reply! It's all gone quiet. The unseen scourge of Chlamydia seems – metaphorically speaking, of course – to have disappeared from the face of the Earth. Self-eradicated, you might say. How attractive that would be in reality. But it isn't, of course. For, as you yourself so elegantly but

unconvincingly demonstrate, your lot may run away ... but you never go away. You hide behind the anonymity of social media. You hide behind the prerogatives of fame. You hide behind the sheer force of number, forswear serious debate ... and call it “democracy”.

Why do I continue to plague you with this crap? Why bother to drag this strung-out, gut-wrenched carcass of yet another attempted debate across the silver, slug-slippery track of your merry tune? I'll tell you why. It's because such discussions are bloody typical. From my mate Darren down The Happy Onion to your mate Richard Grosvenor Plunkett-Ernle-Erle-Drax down The Pickled Peasant, I've STILL not heard, read, seen or encountered a decent understanding of our democracy, a willingness to consider evidence (let alone debate it properly) or even a momentary contemplation that reason may just occasionally squash emotion. And least of all from you, Mr Rees-Mogg; from you, the biggest, most self-satisfied and most elusive gob of them all.

So why not wear your democratic medals rather than just boast about them? Why not answer my questions not pretend, like chlamydia, that if we close our eyes to them they'll cease to exist?

- 1. Was Edmund Burke wrong in his address to the electors of Bristol in 1774?*
- 2. If so, with what principle would you replace that which he set out in it?*

Yours infectiously,

Peter