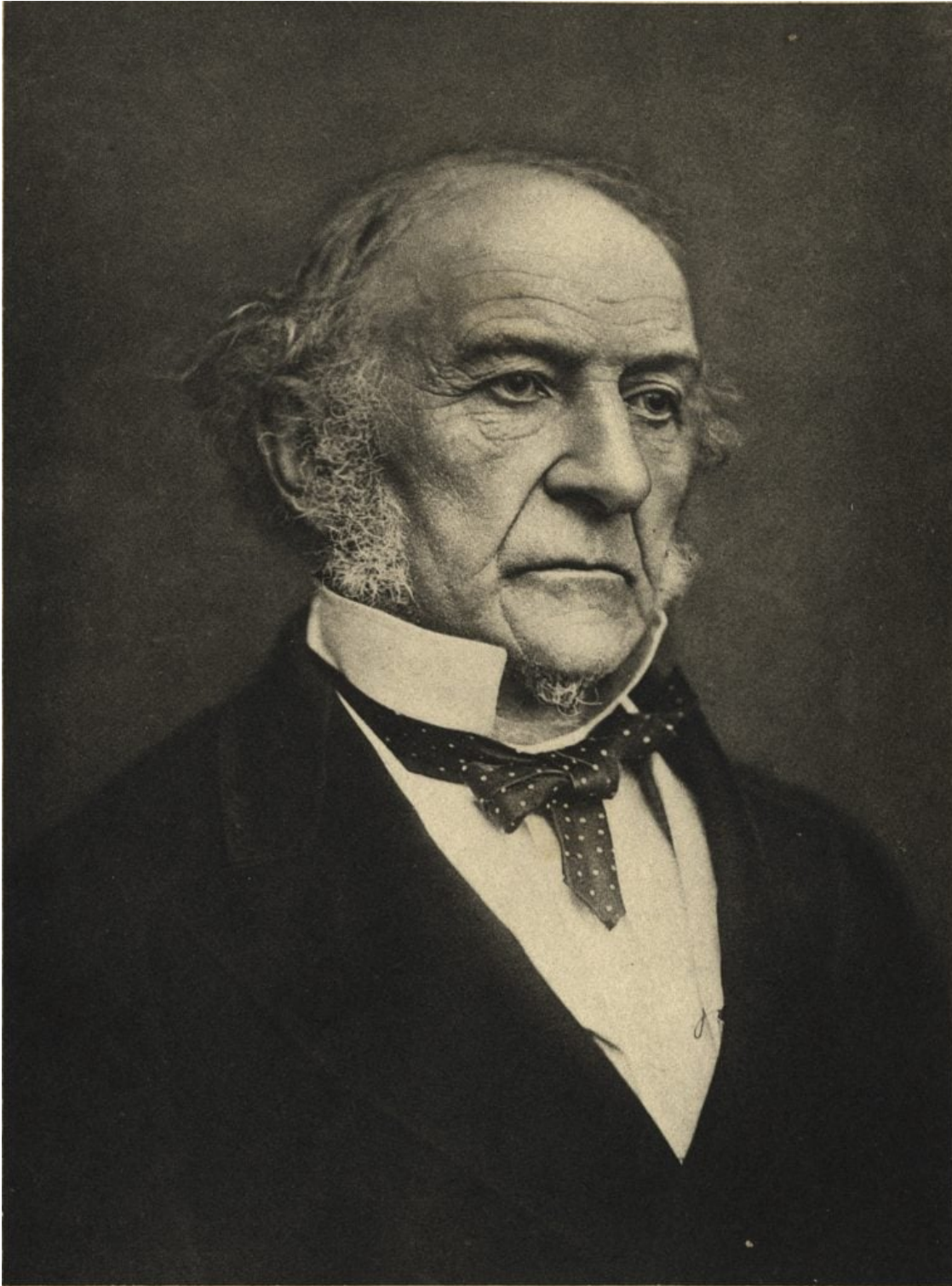


America and Britain Await the 'Snap of Firm Government'



Ewart Gladstone

William

by Conrad Black

It is distressing to see both the United States and the United Kingdom in such a deteriorated and confused political condition. Even Canada has dithered inexcusably and to the detriment of more serious issues, on fatuous notions of climate change, gender, and past injustices against the natives.

These three predominantly English-speaking countries are the three senior large democracies in the world: countries with a population of more than 20 million that have had the same political institutions, altered only by orderly amendment, for more than 150 years.

In the United States and the United Kingdom, the problems are more profound and less banal. All readers of *The New York Sun* are aware that the Biden administration has failed in every major policy area. The strong likelihood is that the midterm elections will severely restrict the ability of the administration to continue to inflict economic damage on the country.

Local pressures should produce some counteroffensive to the mighty crime wave in urban America. It is hard to see any progress on the southern border without a change in administration, and short of nuclear war, which is an exaggerated fear, we should all be prepared to fear the worst in continued inept mismanagement of relations with China, Russia, Iran, and North Korea.

The United States will still be the most powerful nation in the world in two years and in living memory, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Richard Nixon, Ronald Reagan, and to some extent Donald Trump all showed how quickly and positively the United States responds to what the British call "the snap of firm government" – purposeful, sensible, consistent policy.

The only clear visible danger of horrible problems would emerge if the Democrats, terror-stricken at the electoral

consequences of their own inadequacy, launched a spurious indictment against Donald Trump. In the last six years they have used Trump-hate as a substitute for government and sensible opposition, and a preemptive pseudo-legal strike against him could wreak terrible damage on the stability of the constitutional Republic. Surely, they are not that reckless and dishonest.

It is upon Great Britain, the proverbial Mother of Parliaments, where government has broadened down from absolute monarchy to a democracy widely admired and much emulated in the world through the generally peaceful devolution of powers through the same institutions since the Magna Carta 707 years ago.

There were dynastic wars and the English Civil War, but only a few monarchs died violently and it has all been achieved with a minimum of violence since the death (from natural causes) of Oliver Cromwell in 1660. There is no threat of violence now. But the parliamentary system is not functioning well.

Great Britain does not have a diversified source of leaders of its government: at any time the next four or five prime ministers are sitting with the incumbent in the House of Commons even if they cannot be identified with confidence. If the current favorite to become the next prime minister is included, he and his four predecessors all sat together in or around the David Cameron government just seven years ago.

The British Conservative Party became the natural party of government when, after World War I, the Labor Party stole most of the votes of the old Liberal Party of W.E. Gladstone and David Lloyd George. It has provided most of the composition of British governments for 67 of the last 100 years, though that includes one peacetime and one wartime coalition.

No British Conservative Party leader, though, has left his position at the head of his party altogether voluntarily since

Stanley Baldwin took a penetrating look at the Nazis and retired in 1937. There have been 15 leaders of that party since then. Neville Chamberlain, Anthony Eden, Edward Heath, Margaret Thatcher, Iain Duncan-Smith, Theresa May, Boris Johnson, and Liz Truss, were sent packing by their own Members of Parliament.

Alec Douglas-Home. John Major, William Hague, Michael Howard, and David Cameron resigned after defeat at the polls; and Winston Churchill and Harold Macmillan were eased out, ostensibly on grounds of age and infirmity.

Job security is not what it might be and by the nature of the system, the majority of the leaders' parliamentary colleagues is almost always composed of people who at other times preferred other leaders. Only three Conservative prime ministers in the last century, Arthur Balfour, Chamberlain, and Douglas-Home, have served in the cabinets of their successors.

This may be the time to revive that custom. In the 17th century there was a government led by Henry Pelham which included all of the identifiable faction heads and was known, in an expression that for obvious reasons would not be appropriate today, as "the broad-bottom government."

In the early 19th century, there was another cabinet that contained a range of political tendencies and was known as "the government of all the talents." The likely incoming prime minister is the former chancellor, Rishi Sunak, who was born in Great Britain but of East Indian parents. He is a former Fulbright scholar, educated in the United States and Great Britain and would be both the first non-white and the wealthiest prime minister in British history.

His father-in-law, who is also East Indian, was the founder of Infosys and, including his wife's means, the Sunaks are on the verge of being an American dollar billionaire couple. It would

be a brilliant after-piece to the now much disparaged but in fact highly successful 250-year British government of India.

The British successfully ruled an empire of hundreds of millions of people and imparted to them the English language, the parliamentary system, and the common law, and never had more than 100,000 of their own nationals in-country. One need look no farther to see the great talents of the British at colonial government.

Prime Minister Cameron bet everything on remaining in Europe and lost the Brexit referendum. Theresa May attempted to remain in Europe while purporting to leave it and ended up with no support. Boris Johnson is a great vote-getter but he governed as a somewhat profligate liberal, raised taxes, and annoyed the Members of Parliament by his flamboyant personality, but remains hugely popular in the country.

Ms. Truss produced a bold plan for stimulating enterprise and economic growth, but did not explain it properly and was thrown out abruptly for failing to address inflation. Mr. Sunak may want his three immediate predecessors, who are still in Parliament, in his government, and he will want to pivot from anti-inflation to pro-growth economic measures within six to nine months to meet the voters in a presentable condition.

The government can save itself but the British parliamentary system, so long the gold standard of the world's political science, may want to consider reforms such as a minimum term of two years if there's any further deterioration toward the chaos and indignity of the revolving-door governments of the French Fourth Republic. In England, no Charles de Gaulle to come to the rescue, as in France, is visible.

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