

“It’s official” The British have become a nation of mental serfs

By Theodore Dalrymple

That the British have become a nation of mental serfs – I speak *grosso modo*, of course – is suggested by the headlines starting with the locution “It’s official ... ” commonly to be found in journals of various tendencies.

I took cognisance of this recently when I noticed three headlines in the supposedly hip magazine, *Time Out*. “It’s official: this is the best thing to do in 2025”; “It’s official: Leyton is one of the coolest places on the planet”; “It’s official: the USA is the third best country in the world”.

In *The Times* I found “It’s official – 32 per cent of women are sad”. And in the *Guardian* I found “Now it’s official: Brexit will damage the economy long into the future”; “It’s official: muddy kids learn best”; “It’s official: art makes you happy”; “It’s official: the bedroom tax causes misery”.



Naturally, officialdom does not only make grand

pronouncements, it makes small ones too. For like Tsar Nicholas I in the Marquis de Custine's Russia in 1839, it is both eagle and insect. For example, in the *Frome Times* we learn "It's official! *The Frome Times* is one of Somerset's biggest newspapers".

One might have supposed from all this that the British population's experience of officialdom was uniformly happy and conflict-free, that it saw in officials (whoever they might be) the fount of honesty, wisdom and truth. Believe nothing until a bureaucrat has stated it, no matter in what contestable and inherently ambiguous, or even meaningless, proposition! On no account, make a judgment or come to your own conclusion!

Officialdom here includes authority: even in the United Soviet Kingdom, there is no office for the measurement of the coolness of the whole world, so that the authority for the statement of Leyton's victory in the contest must be the author's or the magazine's. But it is surely significant that authors and journals think that adding the phrase "It's official" to a dubious statement strengthens its verisimilitude in the minds of their readers, who they assume cannot judge for themselves.

Those who do not exercise their judgement soon will have none.

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