

Voters in the U.K., France and the U.S. are all in the mood for change



People watch the results of the U.K. election, in London on July 4. PHOTO BY OLI SCARFF/AFP

by Conrad Black

The three countries that have made the greatest historical contributions to the concepts of democracy and human rights are all in an election year, and two of them, the United Kingdom and France, recently produced unusual results. In the British election, the public did what was necessary in severely punishing the Conservative party (which is not in the slightest conservative), for its unprecedented accomplishment of producing five consecutive thoroughly failed prime ministers in eight years. David Cameron completely bungled Britain's relations with the European Union; Theresa May interpreted the Brexit vote to leave Europe as an authorization to remain while calling it a departure. Boris Johnson got Brexit done but engaged in such hypocrisy during the COVID shutdown and strained the parliamentary requirement for truthful answers so severely that his own MPs, who largely owed their election to him, deserted him. His initial replacement, Liz Truss, produced an admirable budget but failed to support it with adequately persuasive funding projections and was dispatched as if in an ejector seat after a record-breaking 45 days. Rishi Sunak followed and raised taxes, which British Conservatives don't do if they have any wish to be re-elected. Naturally, the electorate had to punish such a horrifyingly, if at times comically, inept performance.

But they did so, not with a flight of votes to the Labour

opposition, but by defecting in large numbers to Nigel Farage's authentically conservative Reform party and in substantial numbers to the moderate centre-left Liberal Democrats. As a result of the British first-past-the-post system, Labour gained one of the largest majorities in history with approximately twice the percentage of members of Parliament that it enjoyed in the popular vote, roughly two-thirds of the MPs for one-third of the votes. To elect a Labour MP required on average only 23,000 votes, while to elect a Conservative MP required about 56,000 votes. Thus did the British punish the Conservatives for their egregious failures without implying an irresistible surge of confidence in a new Labour government. The new prime minister, Sir Keir Starmer, has proclaimed that his principal objectives are economic growth and to raise people's incomes.

The new prime minister's claim that generating economic growth is his chief objective runs counter to his party's historic instinct to redistribute income. The Labour party has never successfully turned an ailing economy around. Further, as a matter of law, the Climate Change Act of 2008, which was adopted by the last Labour government, imposes upon him the duty to reach stringent emissions targets by 2050. If courts of law are persuaded that individual policies interfere with that duty, they have the legal ability to overturn those policies. Once again, as in Canada, the tendency to judicialize policy by creating inflexible legal guidelines restricting legislators and the government usurps democratic accountability and assigns it to the vagaries of the bench. Starmer has appointed the energy secretary who enacted the act, Ed Miliband, to his old job. Labour is chained to an impossible policy. The U.K.'s heavy reliance on wind and solar have caused it to have among the world's most expensive electricity, sacrificing the competitiveness of its manufacturing industry and greatly increasing the cost of living. This has been Britain's official answer to the declining North Sea oil reserves and the incoming government

shows no sign of slipping the shackles of this suicidal policy. In Britain, as elsewhere, the climate terrorists blunder dangerously on.

With France, as usual, it is more complicated. As I've written here before, Charles de Gaulle resolved the long struggle between the monarchists and the republicans by creating a monarchy and calling it a republic. The French president retains extensive powers, regardless of the composition of the country's Senate and National Assembly. President Emmanuel Macron seemed to respond impetuously to the defeat of his party in the European elections by Marine Le Pen's Rassemblement National (RN), and he dissolved the National Assembly for new elections on a tight timetable. Instead of elevating the populist RN, the president's Ensemble party and a pantomime horse of far-left elements all ran fairly closely together, with the leftist New Popular Front leading. This is a coalition of Communists, Socialists, unusually militant greens and the goofy-left La France Insoumise led by the forensically flamboyant Jean-Luc Mélenchon. While the media of France and the world represent Le Pen as an extremist, she has in fact not uttered a particularly controversial statement in years. Apart from her party's relatively strong stand against illegal immigration, the RN is a fairly mainstream conservative party and, apart from all the fear-mongering that has been bandied about, it could easily agree in many areas with Macron. Many of the other members of the Assembly are in traditional moderately conservative parties and whomever they attach themselves to will have the largest of the three principal formations.

Macron presumably expected Le Pen to win so he could spend the next three years of his presidential term harassing the RN from the presidential palace and forcing it to squander its novelty and its honeymoon. French parties come and go and none of the three current principal movements existed with the same names 10 years ago. Macron could try to negotiate majorities

with different parties on different legislative projects, or he could further respectabilize the RN by reaching an agreement with it. If he actually tries to co-operate with the far left, he will hand the keys of both executive and legislative power to Le Pen. She is pretty well politically house-trained by now and France has survived many worse fates.

As for the United States: Donald Trump has won. The disasters in every major policy area, the erosion of U.S. President Joe Biden's fitness to execute his office and the Supreme Court's rejection of the attempted pseudo-judicial lynching of the former president have all come as thunderbolts that have revealed in their ghastly infirmity the fraudulence and incompetence of the Trump-hate movement. Trump's "lies" are mainly refutations of his enemies lies about him. The former braggart and billionaire Archie Bunker has reemerged as a doughty underdog. The world, even the mindless parrots in the Canadian political media, will come to appreciate him in his second term.

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