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Unintended Consequences

(Careful what you wish for)

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Summary

This paper highlights the potential connections, either directly or indirectly between the protagonists considered in this paper and Russian politics. Whether there are any intentions to benefit either financially or politically from Russia's desire to create discord and disunity in the U.K. and Europe, is not really relevant nor is the aim of the paper to prove disloyalty to the British government by the actors mentioned, especially now that opinions could be wholly different in consideration of the pariah state that Russia has become, as seen in the West after the invasion of Ukraine.

The purpose really is to demonstrate how through unintended consequences, paths cross and depending on the strength and power of the protagonists, how their influence on others can ultimately define politics on a grander scale.

U.K. Motorcyclists and European Union legislation

In October 2010 the European Commission published its proposal – *Approval and market surveillance of two – or three-wheel vehicles and quadricycles* and the Commission's proposal which was discussed within the Committee on the Internal Market and Consumer Protection (IMCO). The EU Commission proposals originally aimed to simplify approximately 20 different regulations into one framework directive (which will define the essential requirements, basic condition for production, basic rules for the internal EU market and limit values for environmental standards).

After informal triologue negotiations between the European Parliament and the Council the agreed text of the proposal was published on 10th September 2012, a full month before it was presented and voted on by the IMCO committee on the 11th October 2012. While this was more than two months before the vote in the Plenary of the European Parliament, scheduled for 20th November 2012, further procedures had to be taken into account (verification by lawyers, translations, official transmissions, etc), Council's final confirmation of the new Regulation, to be published the following month¹.

Prior to that, the European Commission's proposal was being discussed within the Internal Market and Consumer Protection (IMCO) European Parliament committee of MEPs, riders in the UK and Ireland riders had held demonstrations against the Commission's proposal. A demonstration by Motorcycle News (MCN)², a UK weekly motorcycle publication, was also planned to ride to Brussels – which took place in November 2011 - against the proposal.

There was a lot of angst amongst riders in the UK, regarding issues surrounding the proposal on the internet, especially on social networking pages – forums and in the motorcycle press.

Equally, there was misunderstanding amongst riders of what was contained in the proposal, many believed (and still do) that the Commission's proposal included the banning of filtering through traffic, banning motorcycles over 7yrs old in urban areas and the compulsory wearing of Hi-Viz clothing.

However, it was confirmed by the Commission and IMCO that the higher powered motorcycles equal to a full A licence would be *excluded* from anti-tampering measures. Furthermore, it was made clear that the measures that would be introduced for restricted motorcycles – e.g. mopeds, 125cc and medium powered motorcycles, were *not* directed at users and had *absolutely nothing* to do with bikes *in use*, with the aftermarket and *any modifications that motorcyclists may wish to apply to their motorcycles*.

What transpired was that most of this angst surfaced as anti-European Union rhetoric that the proposal was part of the EU's attempts to completely remove motorcyclists from EU

¹ www.righttoride.eu

² <https://www.motorcyclenews.com/news/2011/november/nov2811-mcn-brussels-protest-a-superb-day/>

roads – there was concern that the EU was trying to ban bikes! Various claims were made in particular by the Motorcycle Action Group (MAG) which covered preventing modifications, mandatory high visibility jackets, bans from cities, etc³

It later transpired that none of these accusations had any foundation and were simply not true⁴. However, this did not stop politicians, journalists and lobbyists from distorting facts to rally the troops against the bureaucrats of the European Union.

Brexit, Bikers and Steve Baker

When on 25th September 2011, MAG organised and held a “protest demonstration” the publicity offered opportunities for anti-EU parliamentarians to become involved⁵. In particular, the Christian evangelist Steve Baker⁶⁷ MP, not only supported the demonstration but was actively involved in the anti-EU stance taken by MAG⁸. His connection with MAG was in part because of his activity as a motorcyclist, but also because his father was the representative of the South West region within the organisation.

Along with MAG, one of Baker’s involvements in the anti-EU movement, was the “People’s Pledge”⁹ as well as being Member of the European Research Group (ERG), he was its chair for two periods. He is avowedly anti-EU, and one of the architects of Brexit.

The People's Pledge announced that on 22 October 2012 they were holding a one-day event in London at Westminster Central Hall. The participants included MPs, journalists and businessmen. The Independent newspaper claimed that the Congress would be “*the largest ever held for a referendum on Europe*”. On that occasion, the then General Secretary of MAG, Nich Brown used the above list of accusations to join the call for a referendum on the U.K.’s participation in the European Union.

Also attending that congress was Lembit Opik, ex-parliamentarian of Westminster and later in 2013 to become the Campaign’s manager of MAG.

The Conservative MP David Nuttall secured the debate on the referendum in parliament via the Backbench Business Committee and the vote was announced. In a letter circulated to all MPs on the day of the vote. The Conservative MP Steve Baker claimed

³ Motorcyclists would not be able to service their bike at home; They wouldn’t even be able to change the handlebars; They would only be able to use standard approved parts; That there is a proposal to make Periodical Technical Inspection (MoT) obligatory throughout EU – a super MOT in the UK – that would stop the fitting of non-standard parts; That the EU is proposing or considering new laws for compulsory hi-vis jackets; That the EU is proposing that motorcycles will be banned from filtering in traffic; That the EU is proposing to ban all motorcycles over seven years from cities; These proposals would stop motorcyclists customising their bikes – or fitting Braided steel brake hoses, high flow air-filters, brake pads, handle bar risers, different foot-pegs and silencers; One of the proposals is that once a motorbike is bought it cannot be customised, it must remain as it came out of the factory.

⁴ <http://www.righttoride.eu/eu-regulating-biking-regulation-adoption/>

⁵ In November 2010, East Antrim MP Sammy Wilson voiced his opposition to proposed legislation by the European Commission which would make it compulsory for all motorbikes to be fitted with Anti Lock Braking Systems. <http://www.righttoride.eu/2010/11/25/opposing-mandatory-abs/>

⁶ <https://conservativehome.com/2021/12/22/profile-steve-baker-christian-conservative-erg-organiser-controversial-backbencher-and-thorn-in-johnsons-side/>

⁷ <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/dark-money-investigations/new-brexit-minister-arms-industry-american-hard-right-and-e/>

⁸ <https://www.stevebaker.info/2012/06/hands-off-biking/>

⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/People%27s_Pledge

the public appetite for the vote could be seen with the strength of support in each constituency for the People's Pledge campaign¹⁰ and the number of supporters that attended the Congress for an EU Referendum on Saturday 22 October 2012.

However, as it later transpired, Baker's connection with MAG¹¹ became instrumental in turning the opinion of Conservative MPs to vote in favour of a referendum. Steve Baker's letter to Tory MPs was the catalyst. In this context, he deliberately misled his fellow Conservative colleagues using motorcycling as a reason.

He wrote "On 25 September, at least 40,000 motorcyclists took part in Motorcycle Action Group's nationwide protest, 'EU Hands Off Biking'¹². The only question that matters today is whether our position in the EU is a proper subject for a referendum. One way or another, all three parties have previously said that it is."¹³

What is difficult to ascertain is the exact number of motorcyclists involved, because nobody actually did a count of the protesters. What transpired was that the organisers of the protest demos decided on an estimation of c.400 multiplied by 100 starting points but based on actual participation observed during the day of the demonstrations, those figures were far below the actual number of motorcyclists who took part.¹⁴

As highlighted above, whatever figure is the "truth", motorcycles should never have been used by a member of parliament as a catalyst for a country to exit the European Union, nor should motorcycles have been used to deliberately mislead the public about European Commission proposals, because the accusations of Steve Baker at the time, were completely unfounded and he knew that because of his position as Chairman of the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Motorcycling that this was not true as he was regularly provided details of the proposed legislation on L category vehicles from the Chairman of the IMCO committee, MEP Malcolm Harbour (also Conservative).

¹⁰ The People's Pledge was a cross-party political campaign to bring about a binding yes or no referendum in the United Kingdom on the issue of Britain's continued membership of the European Union. It aimed to achieve this by making sure that only prospective candidates or sitting MPs standing for election to the House of Commons in the next United Kingdom general election who promise to support the holding of such a referendum, are elected. Specifically, it asked voters to sign up to a pledge via the campaign's website to only support such candidates. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/People%27s_Pledge#cite_note-88)

¹¹ Steve Baker is a trustee of the Global Warming Policy Foundation, a thinktank that has been accused of being one of the UK's leading sources of climate scepticism.

¹² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d84ofk3c0jQ>

¹³ This estimate is still being used today, as the current Chairman of the Motorcycle Action Group explains why in a recent online article why he voted for Brexit, "On 25 September, at least 40,000 motorcyclists took part in Motorcycle Action Group's nationwide protest, EU Hands Off Biking stating, "it's not an exaggeration to say that bikers in the UK, as Steve Baker noted in his briefing played a part in it." The "it" meaning holding the EU referendum.

¹⁴ <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/motorcycles-brexit-special-place-hell-elaine-hardy/>



APPG on Motorcycling meeting: includes Steve Baker (Cons), Sammy Wilson (DUP), Ian Paisley (DUP) and others. Also includes Lembit Opik (not in photo but sitting to the right of Baker)

Politicians and Brexit

As indicated previously, Steve Baker¹⁵ and Lembit Opik both took part in the People's Pledge conference. While not actively involved in motorcycling, Nigel Dodds of the Northern Ireland political party DUP (Democratic Unionist Party) was on the Advisory Committee of the People's Pledge and the DUP MPs at Westminster¹⁶: Gregory Campbell, Nigel Dodds, Jeffrey Donaldson, Ian Paisley, Jim Shannon and Sammy Wilson had all signed up to support the People's Pledge campaign¹⁷¹⁸. Important to note that the DUP always was Eurosceptic. The party's founder, the Rev. Ian Paisley, used to fulminate against the EEC, citing the Treaty of Rome as proof positive that the European project was a papish plot, orchestrated by Auld Red Socks (the Pope) in the Vatican himself. In 1988, at the European Parliament, he was evicted by ushers after disrupting the Pope's speech.¹⁹

¹⁵ <https://northeastbylines.co.uk/why-what-words-mean-matters-and-why-did-a-tory-mp-write-in-the-guardian/>

¹⁶ <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/dark-money-investigations/uk-government-set-to-ignore-northern-ireland-parties-transparency-calls/>

¹⁷ In fact, the DUP opposed the Good Friday Agreement because it meant accepting the right of Roman Catholics to take part in government. There has always been a strand of Protestantism in Northern Ireland, and to a lesser extent in Scotland, which regards Roman Catholicism as a corruption of Christianity. As such they believe they have the religious duty to do everything they can to exclude papists (as they call them). It's the same extremism that opposes abortion and LGBT rights.

¹⁸ <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/dark-money-investigations/substantial-fine-linked-to-dup-s-secret-brexit-donors/>

¹⁹ <https://apnews.com/article/4f84c48cbecc98500b3bbc0c17b511c0>

The Russia connection

Entering the scene is Arron Banks²⁰, part owner of the Gibraltar insurance company Southern Rock. Previously Banks set up his own insurance company, with financial backing from his relatives and from the Northern Irish insurance tycoons, Leslie Hughes from Newtownards and James Bowers from Bangor. The Southern Rock business focused on motorcycle, motorhome and van insurance. Two of the assets Banks' firm acquired were the little-known insurance brands "E-Car" and "E-Bike." In fact, both brands were owned by Southern Rock Insurance. During 2004-06 E-bike was the preferred insurer for MAG.

In June 2018, *The Guardian* newspaper suggested that Arron Banks, the biggest donor to the campaign for leaving, and co-organiser of Leave.EU received the offer of a Russian gold mine, and had had a series of meetings with the Russian Ambassador.

On 14 June 2018, Banks appeared before Parliamentary committee hearing, where he appeared to admit to having lied about his engagements with Russians, and later walked out refusing to answer further questions by citing a luncheon appointment with the evangelistic Protestant Democratic Unionist Party members, Sammy Wilson and Ian Paisley Jr²¹.



Photo taken at Westminster following Banks' appearance at the Parliamentary Committee Hearing. (L to R: Andy Wigmore, Arron Banks, Sammy Wilson, Ian Paisley)

However, according to the Independent newspaper²², *"it later transpired that Arron Banks, the maverick tycoon who funded the Leave.EU campaign with £5.6 million of his own money, made the allegation in a book which recounts an extraordinarily divisive campaign – both between the two sides, and within each camp. Mr Banks, who has also poured millions of pounds into Ukip, devotes several pages of his book, The Bad Boys of Brexit, to his dealings with the DUP and claimed to be horrified at the party's actions.*

In a diary entry for 12 February 2016, Mr Banks records: "The DUP is demanding cold, hard cash in exchange for its support! Thirty grand a month, to be precise. I know Northern Irish politics is dirty, but this is crazy. It all came about because Farage is mates with Ian Paisley Jr...". But, in a very public falling out within the pro-Brexit camp, the DUP rejected the claims as "entirely false" and countered by alleging that Mr Banks had offered the party money to support his group"²³.

²⁰ <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/dark-money-investigations/how-did-arron-banks-afford-brexit/>

²¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian_interference_in_the_2016_Brexit_referendum

²² <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/ian-paisley-jr-parliament-sri-lanka-suspend-mp-dup-trade-expenses-not-disclose-a8452521.html>

²³ <https://www.newsletter.co.uk/news/tycoon-dup-demanded-aps30000-month-back-my-brexit-campaign-1178630>

On 1st November 2018, the British National Crime Agency opens a criminal investigation into Arron Banks upon referral from the Electoral Commission and concluded *"we have reasonable grounds to suspect that: Mr Banks was not the true source of the £8m reported as loans"* and *"Various criminal offences may have been committed."* The commission believes Banks facilitated a loan from Rock Holdings to his Leave.EU campaign. Rock Holdings is barred from funding campaigns in the U.K. under British election law because it is on the Isle of Man, which is a possession of the British Crown but not part of the United Kingdom.

On 17 October 2019, the Intelligence and Security Committee of the UK Parliament passed a completed report on allegations that Russian government-sponsored activities had an effect on the outcome of the referendum to Downing Street²⁴

Lembit Opik

Lembit Opik who was born and raised in Northern Ireland, commenced working for the Motorcycle Action Group in 2013 as their Campaigns and Communications Manager. And in 2016 became Leader of Parliament of the "Space Nation" Asgardia²⁵ His background as a Member of Parliament offered a variety of connections with people and politicians of all types including his "friend" Nigel Farage²⁶. The hope of the organisation was that he would have the right contacts to promote motorcycling. His employment followed the "ousting" of the previous employees²⁷ who were instrumental in the "EU Hands Off Biking" campaign.

Recently in June 2022, at a meeting of European motorcyclists, Opik and a colleague presented the case against climate change in order to challenge the U.K. and other European governments against a potential ban on ICE (Internal Combustible Engines) in particular motorcycles. The present assumption in the U.K. is that the sale of new ICE vehicles will be banned from 2030.

It has to be noted that the current policies of the Motorcycle Action Group are not necessarily in harmony with other motorcycling organisations. The damnation of the European Union as well as the U.K. government as a cause of the demise of motorcycling because of a potential ban of Internal Combustible Engines (ICE) are now central to this organisation's lobbying. Coupled with the views of climate denialists such as Lembit Opik and the incumbent chairman of the motorcyclists' organisation, the thrust is now towards stopping the ban on petrol and diesel engines for all vehicles – not just motorcycles – MAG's position is now attempting to influence a European motorcyclists' organisation which was made clear at a recent meeting of the Federation of European Motorcyclists Associations (FEMA) that Lembit Opik attended along with another MAG colleague.

Included within the paper presented to the FEMA meeting in June, were comments such as: "All the evidence demonstrates that there is no climate crisis. Humans are not living in an exceptionally warm or exceptionally warming environment. In fact, we are living in a particularly cold period in earth's climate history – known as an 'ice age.'"

²⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian_interference_in_the_2016_Brexit_referendum

²⁵ <https://asgardia.space/pages/membersofparliament>

²⁶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3XJ5t-Ja-cl>

²⁷ <https://www.visordown.com/news/general/mag-uk-wound-down-after-losing-employment-tribunal/>

MAG's paper included what appeared to be a comment from Otomar Edenhoffer of the IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) citing the comment that he and Senior Representatives "openly state that international policy is nothing to do with climate change, but about the redistribution of the world's wealth"²⁸.

Other comments in the paper include: "There is compelling evidence to show that electric vehicles actually increase CO2 emissions". Also "There is currently no credible alternative to petrol that is both affordable and 'greener'".

Recently the European Association of Motorcycle Manufacturers (ACEM) released their position paper on e-fuel and the benefits of this ICE fuel for motorcycling stating "e-Fuel, in particular, should be developed with a production volume that supports decarbonisation of the existing fleet of ICE vehicles and for products for which electrification is not expected to be possible in the medium to long term (e.g. products used for long-distance commuting and travelling in remote areas)."²⁹ In an article published in May 2022, FEMA appears to hold a similar position as ACEM's about the need to look for alternative fuels such as Hydrogen and biofuels and e-fuels.³⁰

Lembit's Dirty Little Secrets

As mentioned, Lembit Opik is a known climate change denier as highlighted in his interview with Russian apologist George Galloway³¹
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B_J4flnzUBY

Opik is also director of a company called Ultimium Ltd (the other director of Ultimium Ltd is Howard Cox³² who is involved in a climate science denial group called CARS26).
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nfMQ9kcH6-k> This latter video refers to a product used to "cleanse" fuel (of interest is 5.23 minutes then 11.18 minutes into the video highlighting the Campaigns director of MAG UK). Considering Opik's position as a director of a company that sells a petroleum biproduct, one could suggest that he may have an interest in maintaining the status quo.

Furthermore, Opik is chairman of the Space Nation's Asgardian parliament for which he receives payment. In 2016, the Space Nation Asgardia was founded by Igor Ashurbeyli whose title is The Head of Nation. Ashurbeyli is an Azerbaijani scientist, businessman and he is also the leader of the Party of Russia's Rebirth since 2016. He also appears

²⁸ What Edenhofer wrote was "One might legitimately argue that the fight against global warming is as morally imperative as abolishing child labour or slavery. One might argue — just as legitimately — that poverty and diseases in many parts of the world are more imminent problems that should be addressed first." However, he adds, some perspectives cannot be tolerated. "Denying out-and-out that climate change is a problem to humanity, as some cynics do, is an unethical, unacceptable position."

https://www.nature.com/news/polopoly_fs/1.13755!/menu/main/topColumns/topLeftColumn/pdf/501303a.pdf?fbclid=IwAR00MkCm8Pj6dZYUe-BJjoxXqVHxgs18HVMlCg58inVGw3xNW8wAiK1hSo

²⁹ https://www.acem.eu/images/publiq/2022/ACEM_position_paper_-_Efuels.pdf

³⁰ <https://www.femamotorcycling.eu/future-of-motorcycling/>

³¹ linked with RT the Russian state-controlled international news television network funded by the Russian government and now banned in the UK <https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/george-galloway-s-russian-ramblings>

³² <https://www.desmog.com/howard-cox/>

to have close links to Russia's leadership through his involvement as Vice-Chairman of the Imperial Orthodox Palestine Society³³

Of interest are the views of Lembit Opik about the Russian invasion of Ukraine, on March 6th 2022, during a TV programme GB News, he seemed to suggest that NATO is to blame for the invasion and that the issue was really about the suppression of the Russian language in Ukraine as the cause of the war. His position as argued during the programme were such that his sympathy towards Russia seemed apparent -in fact, one of the other interviewees called him "Putin's Puppet".

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=izkilmQoTVE>

Brexit and the Democratic Unionist Party

According to Open Democracy, "few in Northern Ireland are as well connected as David Burnside. A former MP, ex-head of press at British Airways, and a constant presence at Tory party conferences, the pugnacious, cigar-chomping PR man *"has long moved in very different circles to most of Northern Irish political figures,"* according to a well-placed unionist source in Northern Ireland. *"Burnside is also the only person here with connections to serious money."*

"Politically, Burnside is firmly on the right of Northern Irish politics. He cut his teeth as a young man in the early 1970s as a press officer for the hard-line Vanguard Unionist Progressive party, but by the early 2000s Burnside was an Ulster Unionist MP. In 2003, however, he and another UUP MP led a rebellion against the party's support of the Good Friday Agreement. That other MP was Jeffrey Donaldson.

Burnside remained in the Ulster Unionist Party fold, but has often called for his party to merge with its more hard-line cousins, the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP). Jeffrey Donaldson, on the other hand, joined the DUP in 2004, and went on to manage its pro-Leave campaign during the Brexit referendum.

Burnside is a Brexit-supporting unionist and a founder member of both Friends of the Union and the Constitutional Reform Group, the pro-union think-tank set up by Lord Salisbury after Scotland's independence referendum, whose patrons include a roster of high-profile Brexit backers. Burnside remains close to many in the DUP, particularly in Westminster".

Open Democracy point out that *"In Northern Ireland, David Burnside maintains a low profile, rarely making the headlines except for the occasional call for 'unionist unity' and a merger between the UUP and the DUP. But Burnside's work has sometimes come to the attention of the UK press. It was reported that New Century Media earned at least £100,000 working for the Bahrain International Circuit. However, it is Burnside's ties to Russia that have attracted most attention.*

In 2012, Burnside invited Sergey Nalobin, the senior diplomat from the Russian embassy in London, to a Tory fundraising dinner. Nalobin, whose father was a top-ranking officer in the FSB, the successor agency to the Soviet KGB, was forced out of

³³ <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20220604-russia-plans-to-regain-ownership-of-jerusalem-historical-religious-sites/>

the UK by the Home Office in 2015. Burnside has also provided “reputation management” and “personal introductions to individuals within ... politics” as part of a £900,000 a year contract with Vladimir Makhlai, a Russian billionaire who fled to Britain in 2005”.

According to Open Democracy, “there is no allegation that the Ulster Unionist David Burnside, via his close relationship with Cambridge Analytica-backer Vincent Tchenguiz, has done anything wrong, or that he is connected to the DUP’s controversial £435,000 Brexit donation. But his close relationship with Tchenguiz who, for almost a decade, was the biggest shareholder in the company that created Cambridge Analytica, raises fresh, troubling questions about how the Leave campaign was run, who paid for it – and in particular how far the web of influence of Cambridge Analytica and the Trump-backing billionaire Robert Mercer may stretch”.

Equally, “how does Cambridge Analytica/SCL connect to the secret £435,000 funnelled to the DUP’s Brexit campaign? We now have one answer: that the man who controlled the biggest shareholding in SCL for more than a decade is represented by a key ally of the DUP.

There is no suggestion of wrongdoing by either David Burnside or Vincent Tchenguiz. But their link offers new insights into the secretive networks of money and influence that are seeking to shape western democracies. And it once again underlines the urgent need for full transparency on how the Leave campaigns in Britain operated to pull off one of the biggest political shocks in a generation”³⁴.

Russia and Brexit

Russian interference in British politics is well documented. While the incumbent government has tried to either hide evidence or deny knowledge of any interference, in a report from the Center of International and Strategic Studies commented:

“So, did Russia ultimately shape the outcome of the Brexit referendum? Given that the result was exceptionally close, and that if just one in fifty voters had felt differently when they entered the polling booth on June 23, 2016, the result would have been different, the Kremlin operation could well have tipped the balance. But so could so many other things, in a butterfly-effect conundrum of sorts: the lackluster ‘Remain’ campaign bogged down by a disunited opposition, a government that miscalculated the risks, the pro-Brexit British media, and a lack of transparency into the Leave campaign, which the media failed to hold to account for the (now proven untrue) claims they made during the campaign”.

Of course, the alleged sympathetic positions of politicians towards Russia such as Baker, Wilson and Paisley via their dealings with Arron Banks, Nigel Farage and other Russian “influencers” need to be noted that this was prior to the invasion of Ukraine and may well have changed since then considering all are banned from Russia.

³⁴ <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/dark-money-investigations/david-burnside-putin-russia-dup-brexit-donaldson-vincent-tchenguiz/>

Lies and more damned lies

As this paper indicates, lies were told – indeed, many lies were told including the famous red bus with which the now disgraced former Prime Minister Boris Johnson promised a better more functional NHS by leaving the EU, not to mention sunlit lands and cakes³⁵. In the case of motorcyclists – lies about proposed European legislation was used to frighten U.K. motorcyclists into believing that they would no longer be able to enjoy their preferred mode of travels and even today, still the lies continue with the so-called denunciation of motorcycle lobbyists in Brussels as corrupt stooges of the European Commission³⁶.

Motorcyclists

Motorcyclists tend to err towards conspiracy theories as Mary Douglas suggests in her article on voluntary organisations (1994:74), so with the use of persuasion and bluff, it is not necessarily difficult to convince the MAG proselytes that the bad European Union and personalities such as Greta Thunberg are the enemies of the organisation and by implication the wider motorcycling public.

The Motorcycle Action Group is all considered, a small organisation with a few thousand members, most of whom have no real interest in the antics of their representatives, rather are keener to enjoy the rallies that the organisation puts on each year, and more importantly, the freedom that motorcycling offers (while possibly benefitting from the cheaper insurance offered by the organisation). The vast majority of the members are older white males so understandably have entrenched views about social and political issues.

Moving swiftly on, will MAG make a difference in terms of changing the government position of banning the sale of new diesel and petrol vehicles from 2030, or changing the general view that our planet is in danger because of man made global warming? In the grand scale of things, probably not, but it's their availability to snake oil salesmen such as Baker and Opik that make it vulnerable to abuse as has been highlighted in this article. Looking into the future, change can sometimes be radical or simply be subtle. Whether our forms of transport enter into either of those categories is a fascinating prospect.

Perfect Storm

This paper has highlighted the potential connections, either directly or indirectly between the protagonists of this paper and Russian politics. Whether there is any intentions to benefit either financially or politically from Russia's desire to create discord and disunity in the U.K. and Europe, is not really relevant nor is the aim of the paper to prove disloyalty to the British government by the actors mentioned, especially now that opinions could be wholly different in consideration of the pariah state that Russia has become, as seen in the West after the invasion of Ukraine.

³⁵ <https://www.ft.com/content/7a209a34-7d95-47aa-91b0-bf02d4214764?sharetype=blocked&fbclid=IwAR27X2UyMplCmOHa7Ymwb8MZ5VU1T8ecXluyKyvNLU0DliVxepvsux-zzBM>

³⁶ <https://motorcycleminds.org/2022/09/09/we-are-still-the-boat-rockers-and-freedom-fighters/>

The purpose really is to demonstrate how through unintended consequences, paths cross and depending on the strength and power of the protagonists, how their influence on others can ultimately define politics on a grander scale. The footnotes throughout the paper provide more detailed information.

What is relevant to this paper is the attitude and political views taken whether because of religious beliefs, or nationalistic ideals of a sovereign nation or possibly more important, the hunger for power. Power is a fickle master and as has been highlighted can lead to positions that can have disasterous effects on a wider and sometimes gullible community.

Connections

	Northern Ireland (NI)	Motor cyclist	Evangelist Christian	Climate Denier	Leave Campaign Involvement	Direct Russia connection
Steve Baker	Minister for NI	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Lembit Opik	Born and raised in NI	Yes	Yes ³⁷	Yes	Yes	Yes
Sammy Wilson	MP for NI	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Ian Paisley Jr	MP for NI	Yes	Yes		Yes	
Arron Banks		MC insurer		Yes ³⁸	Yes	Yes

Conclusion

The relationship between the protagonists is documented here which demonstrate that the affinity of political and religious beliefs and power all appear to coincide in one way or another, what also connects them for all the wrong reasons, are motorcycles and through this, influence and abuse of people who simply use this form of transport either for commuting or for leisure. From that to issues such as the U.K. breaking away from the European Union, everything has escalated into a deeper and darker world.

What now is of concern is that Steve Baker has been made Junior Minister for Northern Ireland which suggests that together with the DUP, the Good Friday Agreement is in serious jeopardy. Baker, together with the “God Botherers” which form the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), make it more possible that there is a real risk that the NI protocol will be blown wide open and a barrier will return between the North and South of the island. While Russia no longer takes part in the destruction of relationships between the United Kingdom and the European Union, the damage is done. With the ultra right wing of the U.K. conservative party now in control it is hard to believe that sanity will prevail.

³⁷ <https://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/wales-news/happy-clappy-lembit-applauds-new-relationship-1932416>

³⁸ <https://www.desmog.com/arron-banks/>