

BROONLAND: THE ROUGH GUIDE

I

This, folks, is where the SI goes multi-modal. I have reverted to my Open University past, and you're getting what amounts to a reader's guide: to the weird, wacky and downright terrifying world called BROONLAND. You can use it as a road-map into the e-book of the same name which you'll find in my website www.intelligent-mr-toad.de, put into PDF form by my former assistant Dr Alex Boehm, to whom many thanks.

This isn't an ego-trip. I ended up standing for the SNP in Kirkcaldy, and directly against Gordon Brown, because the system he represented had broken down and was in denial about it. It's like the feeling we had in Scotland in 1987: that we were faced with a toxic ruling party, and we had to take radical action about it. Tactical voting made Scotland pretty much a Tory-free zone. You can take the hard road and trudge through the leaden prose of *Moving Britain Forward: Selected Speeches, 1997-2006*, in which the great and good heap praise on Broon (have Nelson Mandela, Ralf Dahrendorf, etc., actually tried to read the stuff?) and compare Planet Broon with the daily reality. Or I can do much of the hard graft for you.

The book is short and not difficult to read. It consists of an Introduction (this article, essentially), Contents, Three Chapters and a Bibliography. There is no index but you can use the 'search' facility on your computer. Key in 'Farepak' for instance, and see what horrors come up.

Bits of it have already appeared in my *Guardian* blog www.commentisfree.guardian.co.uk

, in the *Scotsman* or in *SI*. But I've tried to present the case in a way that makes a logical indictment. You won't find anything like it in the swampland of British bookselling because – as I was told when trying to flog it to conventional publishers – ‘serious politics’ doesn't sell. What we usually get is Downing Street kiss 'n tell, or maybe rather kick 'n tell. Why? Well, look at who's doing the publishing and bookselling.

II

The three sections are as follows: **Broonland One** presents the symptoms: what the great English social critic Matthew Arnold called ‘private affluence, public squalor’: and the way we can diagnose them: not just economic but political breakdown, but where finance and speculation are concerned, a blurring of the line between sharp practice and downright illegality. This is something that the New Labour government – the United Kingdom's Last Chance Saloon – has shown itself incompetent to deal with.

The saloon metaphor is appropriate. **Broonland Two** concentrates in particular on the collapse of Britain's manufacturing centre and its replacement by ‘retail, entertainment and recreation’ (*translated*: shopping, gambling and drinking) and, up there in the United Kingdom of London, increasingly risky financial jiggery-pokery. Gordon Brown promised us in theory a competent regulatory state: in practice it's like one of those westerns in which law 'n order is an elderly sheriff on the juice, whose deputies either been bought over or have vamoosed. The system is out of our hands and out of control. As I write one of Scotland's last engineering

firms, Weir Pumps, is being flogged to the Swiss. The *Financial Times*, no less, publicised on 3 February the fears of the boss of another one, Rolls-Royce Aero-Engines, that it too would be sold out of the country. We know what the consequences of this are. Brown does not.

Broonland Three homes in on Scotland through the last year: Broon's *Annus Horribilis*. Starting with defeat in his own backyard in February 2006 at Dunfermline West, and ending up with the cops in Downing Street in February 2007, and UNICEF telling us that the UK was the worst place for child poverty in the whole of West Europe. *This* is the reality of the 'dynamic, vibrant economy that is the first economy in the new era of globalisation to match flexibility with fairness.' Anything you say, Gordon.

III

'No government ever gets elected on positive policies' that great old Whig Lady Elliot once told me, 'In elections, nothing will beat "Throw the rascals out!"' She was the widow of Walter Elliot, perhaps the most intelligent Secretary of State for Scotland, who tried to cope with the inter-war depression by creating the devolved administration in St Andrew's House, and coined the phrase 'the democratic intellect'. Compare him or Tom Johnston with Douglas Alexander, Jack McConnell, or the wooden titan of 11 Downing Street. 'History repeats itself,' Karl Marx said, 'first as tragedy, then as farce.'

Outside the Houses of Parliament back in 1987, John Milne remarked in deadpan Dundonian: 'This place is like *Dr Who's* Tardis in reverse. Once you get inside, it's *smaller*.' Consider

this piece – and independence – as *Dr Who*'s police box:
Scotland's proper Tardis.

Step inside.

796 words