



Dear Simon,

According to Boris Johnson, London's ex Tory Mayor, the European Union is following Adolf Hitler and Napoleon Bonaparte's footsteps. Isn't that a little rich? What does it mean? And by the way, what is his successor Sadiq Khan's attitude regarding Brexit campaign?

Napoleon, Hitler, and the Mayors of London

What Boris Johnson said in the interview given to the Sunday Telegraph on 15 May [<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/05/14/boris-johnson-the-eu-wants-a-superstate-just-as-hitler-did/>], is that by building a 'European super-state' the EU was using 'different methods' to realise an objective already pursued by Adolf Hitler and Napoleon.

Boris Johnson is not a fool, whatever people might say about him. Remember that he has been elected Mayor of London twice and is one of the most-trusted public figures on the EU debate. So when he makes reference to Adolf Hitler and the Nazis, then he does it knowingly and with much consideration.

It achieves three clear purposes. Firstly, and least importantly, it echoes something that some people in the UK genuinely feel to be true: that Germany is a big country and that the EU is just another way to get what it wants from others.

Much more importantly, Boris' comments mean that he sets the news agenda for several days. This is a version of the 'dead cat' strategy used by the Tories in the 2010 General Election: if you dump a dead cat on the table, then everyone talks about the dead cat, regardless of whether it's relevant or acceptable. Thus, Boris has changed the debate away from the sustained attacks that the Leave campaign have been taking on their economic forecasts.

And finally, this all keeps Boris in the public eye. The general assumption is that he is using the referendum as a springboard to fight to become the next leader of the Tory party, and so Prime Minister. Working on the maxim that 'no publicity is bad publicity', we can expect more controversy from Boris in the coming weeks.

Concerning Sadiq Khan's emphatic election as London Mayor, it has been widely seen as an approval of a multicultural and inclusive London, especially in light of the strong criticism he faced during the campaign about his alleged links with extremists. The contrast he offered both to the previous Mayor, Boris Johnson, and to his main rival, Zac Goldsmith, was clear and played very well in a naturally left-leaning city. However, the impact on the referendum is likely to be limited.

Firstly, Khan built his public profile at arm's length from the national party: he is not a natural ally of Jeremy Corbyn and so will be cautious about any campaigning that might force him to spend any more time with his leader than he has to. Likewise, while London is one of the most pro-EU regions of the UK, Khan will not want to use any more of his political capital than he has in fighting for something that – while important – is only part of what shapes London.

In summary: chances are that over the five weeks until the referendum, rather than hearing from the current Mayor of London, we will hear a lot more from the city's ex-Mayor...