

Beer in Totnes: A Champion for Devon

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Now a totally different kettle of fish, of which commodity more later. I have been privileged to be the guest of Jeff Beer and his family in the delightful constituency of Totnes on the South coast of Devon.

A day's leafleting may seem an odd way to prise open the lid of a large rural constituency but Jeff reminds me strikingly of what Tory MPs used to be like but which so few today are: a solid pillar of his community to which he is committed by the bonds of public service as a local magistrate and by his sheer love of the place he calls 'Home'.

His enthusiasm is unbounded. Not a professional politician as 'we now understand the notion (though formerly a Tory councillor), yet with clear ideas of what ought to be done and how to do them. And open to new ideas as I discovered for myself. And consistency would, I am sure, be his 'motto': His Tory opponent, Dr. Wollaston, he rightly castigates for flip-flopping on Europe. Chosen by open primary she is firmly adherent to the Cameron Tendency which these days requires one to repeat the tired and risible old mantra 'In Europe but not ruled by Europe' a hundred times a day.

Things, however, may not exactly be going tickety-boo as she and her Tory clique (the same ones that kept the egregious Anthony Steen with his bottom comfortably in the Expenses Trough for so many years) have had a fright lately: and lo & behold, the good Doctor has suddenly discovered she is, after all, a Eurosceptic. She must think the good Burghers of Totnes are stupid, a tendency of the political elite of the Old Parties that has been ever more evident in this election.

Which really rather suggests that Jeff has been making serious inroads into the Tory vote (unsurprisingly given Cameron's duplicitous behaviour over Lisbon) and that they are worried that the Lib Dumbs might sneak in...or even that Jeff himself is sneaking up on the outside rails.

We talk at length of the sorts of problems Totnes faces. Second home ownership is a serious problem in some parts. The fishing port of Brixham faces the usual caprices of the Common Fisheries Policy. Jeff tells of his discovery that whilst we dump something like 800,000 tons of fish a year because of the quota rules (set for our fishing grounds by unelected and unaccountable foreign officials in Brussels), we are then forced to import huge quantities of hake from the fishing out of fleets of the South Atlantic operating the west coast of South Africa and Namibia from ports such as Walvis Bay and Saldanha Bay. His judgement: 'Bonkers', and he is, of course right.

We have a minor pub crawl, though not on the scale of a Farage Foray (Nigel reckons the pulse of a place can well be taken in local hostelries and has been to well over half of Buckingham's licensed premises!): two pubs and I get to sample some first class local brews. This and a trip to Loddiswell where there is a thriving village post office make the point neatly about the value to local communities of these two institutions. UKIP would, as you might imagine, do everything it can to support these two vital organs that give life to our villages. The Old Parties, of course, pay lip service to both but have little commitment to them in reality.

We encounter one young woman with a six-year old daughter who neatly encapsulates the Rural Dilemma. She moved away when younger because there was nothing there for her and has moved back only to raise her family. She articulates the eternal problem of how young folk can get on the housing ladder. It is a circle which is increasingly hard to square and makes one ponder what the long term effects of this will be over another generation or so.

Jeff does not have a pat answer which is what you would get from the Old Parties. They would spew out promises like confetti at this point. I rather think that the more thoughtful and honest approach of not having an instant solution seems

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a better way to deal with our fellow citizens who, as my travels have shown, are all too fed-up with the Old Parties' way of doing business. They now know for sure that those who claim to know all the answers and solutions don't.

This was another absorbing day and I learnt a great deal from it. Being stuck in Brussels makes you quite detached from the realities on the ground and Jeff's patient explanations were spot on. Which leads me instantly to the thought that he would be far better placed to judge the right way forward for his fellow citizens than, say, an unelected and unaccountable Romanian who knows nothing of, and frankly cares nothing for his lovely corner of Devon.

Jeff, on the other hand, is passionate about his patch and would be a formidable representative at Westminster. Just as Frank Maloney would in Barking, he would fight Totnes's corner. A healthy leavening of UKIP MPs would be a breath of fresh air and any Constituency that had Jeff as its MP would have a doughty champion. If you can help, they need it...so call on 0800 5876587.

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