

The Centre Cannot Hold

April 25, 2018

The British may spell their words in funny ways, but their political problems do not seem all that foreign. Their left-of-center party has gone far left, *Marxoid* left; their right-of-center party has gone ultra-incompetent.

A healthy majority of Brits disapprove of both parties. So, no wonder many Brits are looking to create a new one.

A new *centrist* political party, no less.

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Over at *The Economist*, the columnist writing under the name "Bagehot" (pronounced "badget") predicts that this hope will be dashed, for at least three reasons:

First, Britain already has a centrist party, and it is not doing very well.



Second, there sure are a lot of contenders — 35 new parties have been formed just this year, including one called, with humble brag, "Sensible" — and all that competition fractionalizes the vote.

Third, the country sports the same system of vote counting and elections as America does, first-past-the-post, which "is hard on startups."

That last point is worth thinking about. In multi-candidate races, the British-American electoral system declares as winners those who obtain a bare plurality of votes — thus ignoring the preferences of those who vote for minor party candidates. This means that those who "waste" their votes not only hurt the candidacies they like as second-best but also insulate the second-best parties from those voters' influence. So the parties become narrow-minded and unhinged from an interested group of voters.

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This is Common Sense. I'm Paul Jacob.