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**“I THINK SHE QUITE FANCIED HIM, ACTUALLY...”
INSIGHTS INTO THE CAMERON-MERKEL RELATIONSHIP,
BY TWO CHRONICLERS OF HIS TIME IN OFFICE**

So recently triumphant, yet so abruptly dethroned, our most recent ex-Prime Minister leaves something of an enigmatic legacy. Over-privileged stuffed shirt, or gifted political brain? Socially liberal would-be reformer, or inhumane advocate of austerity at all costs? Success story – or wrecking ball? To Anthony Seldon and Peter Snowdon, the authors of the new tome *Cameron at 10*, what Cameron leaves in his wake is complex – but inevitably dominated by the stunning failure of his campaign to keep Britain in the European Union.

“This is the first post-Brexit, post-PM event we’ve done,” Snowdon noted as the pair took the stage at the Edinburgh International Book Festival. “It’s all past tense...” Tense indeed, when it comes to Europe – that unresolved crisis from which Cameron fled when he resigned. “I thought he fought a rotten campaign,” Seldon said. “It was an infantile campaign, which for better or for worse will take this country out of Europe and possibly trigger a second Scottish referendum and the break-up of the Union... This will completely colour and define his premiership.” Both writers agreed that Cameron effectively had no choice but to call the referendum, Europe having been, as Seldon put it, “a running sore for forty years.”

Regular Tory rebellions over Europe and the rise of UKIP created an unsustainable position. “Politically and tactically it was a good call to make. Strategically? That’s debatable. It’s the way he pursued it that’s highly contentious.” Not only a flawed campaign did for Cameron, though: some in his party had had it in for him long before Brexit broke. “They never liked him,” Seldon said, citing Cameron’s old Etonian poshness as a distinct minus among a new generation of state-schooled Tory MPs. “He wasn’t very good at handling that image.” Moreover, “They hated Europe, and they thought he was weak on it; indecisive; unconvincing.” Finally, the fact that Cameron made a point of putting himself on the line for international aid and gay marriage was never going to play well with the right of the party.

Seldon and Snowdon’s book contains no unsavoury gossip about pig parts – “Ours is the kosher version” – but attempts to get to the bottom of what kind of politics Cameron practiced and what qualities he brought to the role. Seldon considers him “socially compassionate” and defined by “that upper middle class sense of responsibility”. Rumours that he was disorganised – an “essay crisis” Prime Minister – were also borne out by the pair’s exhaustive research. “He did leave quite a lot of things to the last minute,” Snowdon said. “One of the most notorious examples of this was the run up to the Syria vote. He had not

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done enough pitch rolling. He hadn't got all of his ducks in a row. They went into that vote unprepared – and they lost." Is he lazy? "Lazy is the wrong word," Seldon said. "More... optimistic." The fact that he was our youngest Prime Minister in 198 years might also have affected his ability to get things done – although it helped him to get on Angela Merkel's good side. "I think she quite fancied him, actually," said Seldon. "He charmed her; he knew how to flatter her. And let's face it, they're not a whole bundle of fun, the other EU leaders."

Intriguingly, the two make the contention that Cameron was happier in coalition than when his party unexpectedly gained power all on its own. "He is somebody who likes to reach out and make compromises – maybe too much, and maybe he delegates too much. He enjoyed the space the coalition gave him to try things out." Approaching the Scottish referendum, Seldon said, panicked him more than anything else he undertook. "He had his resignation speech lined up. He was just petrified that if he lost he was going to be compared to Lord North, the British Prime Minister who lost America... I kind of wish he'd had the same passion in the EU referendum."

And what now for this divisive and confounding individual? "They are rubbish, these people, at handling their lives afterwards. But he might do it better than most: he's very much a family-driven person and he's quite philosophical." He's also, currently, on his fourth holiday since leaving office – so perhaps this "becalmed character" is not losing too much sleep over the state in which he's left things. "He seems to be spending a lot of time sunbathing," Seldon said.

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