

A Negotiation Emergency?

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*"For nobody would understand,
And you kill what you fear,
And you fear what you don't understand."*

Powerful words. As a progressive rock music aficionado, these lyrics taken from the song "Duke's Travels" by my favourite band, Genesis, have often brought me up short as I listen to the album from which they come, 1980's "Duke".

"You fear what you don't understand." And you kill it. Whatever "it" is. A person, a group, a philosophy, an institution, an idea.

The lyricist concludes:
*"You're on your own until the end.
There was a choice but now it's gone,
I said you wouldn't understand,
Take what's yours and be damned."*

Lack of understanding, bequeathing a zero-sum outcome. Be damned.

We are all losers. How familiar is that?

As we head for a "do or die" Brexit in the UK, these words have a poignant resonance. Let's kill it. Death is now perceived to be better than working really hard to face the realities of our complex situation. How did we get here?

And what happened to the art of conflict resolution? Where was mediation – or at least a mediative approach? Was it tried? Did it fail? In this most important of issues for post-World War 2 Europe, why did we not Get to Yes? Why have we failed to Get Past No? Where was The Third Side? Did anyone try to Mediate Dangerously? Books with these titles adorn my bookshelves. Must the ideas contained in them always stay there, on the shelf?

The need for a "Conflict Revolution" is clear. We have a Negotiation Emergency at the same time as we have a Climate Emergency. Perhaps mediators need their own Extinction Rebellion.