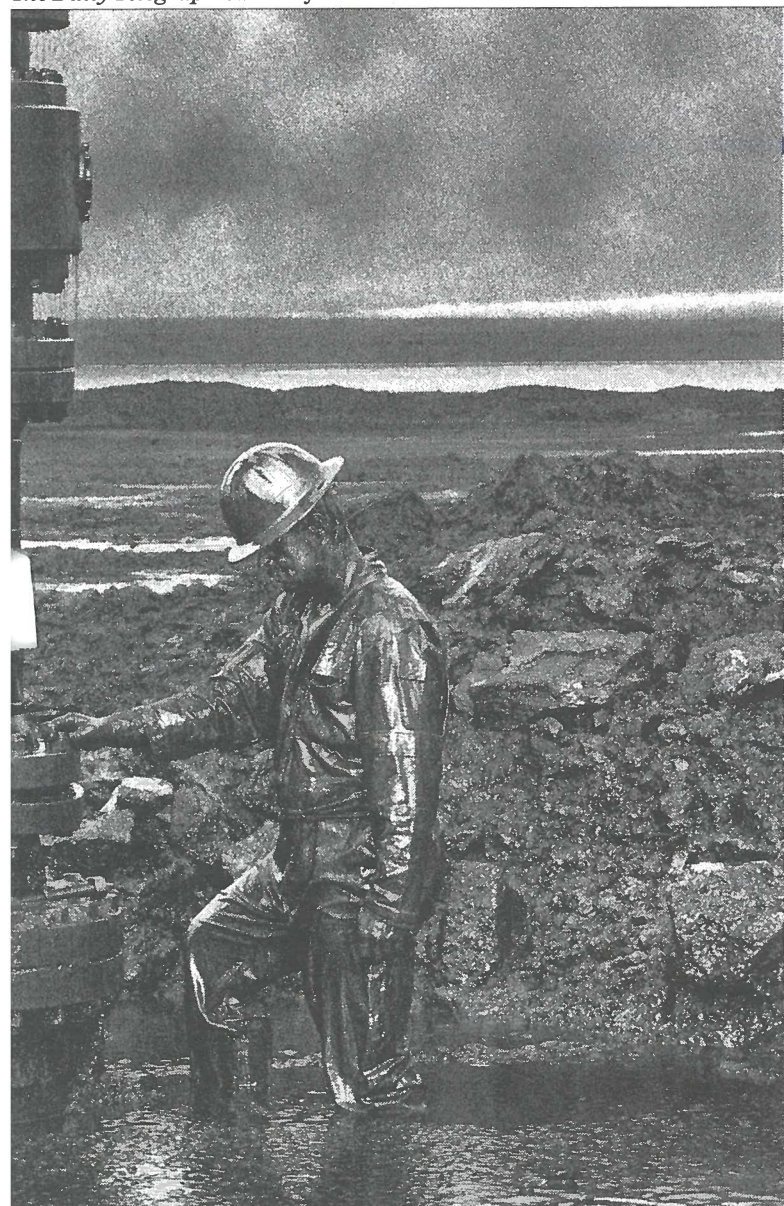


BOOKS FOR CHRISTMAS



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the currency alive, European politicians have caused what Stiglitz calls a “lost decade”, where income per head is lower than it was at the time of the financial crash.

One consequence of Europe’s obsession with saving the Euro is that it has caused soaring youth unemployment across the continent, especially in countries such as France, Spain and Italy – yet another cause for resentment against Europe’s ruling elites. With general elections due next year in Germany and France, there is every possibility that the Brexit contagion could spread far beyond the British Isles.

How did the political classes become so out of touch with the voters that they cannot address these problems before it is too late? A useful insight into the vacuity that lies at the heart of the modern ruling elite is provided by **Unleashing Demons: the Inside Story of Brexit** (Hodder, £20), an utterly fatuous account of one of the most seminal events in modern political history, written by Craig Oliver, David Cameron’s spin doctor at the time. While the book tells us a great deal about how Oliver rubbed shoulders with Merkel, Obama and other world leaders, it also reveals his total failure to comprehend the significance of the main issues that emerged during the referendum campaign – immigration, globalisation, sovereignty and so on – or show why it ended in disaster for Cameron, who found himself dumped unceremoniously out of Downing Street just a year after he had won a surprise election victory.

With so much turmoil in the world, there were those in Europe and America who had been looking to Democratic candidate Hillary Clinton to provide a stabilising influence, hoping, as most of the polls predicted, that she would achieve her long-held ambition of being elected America’s first woman president.

With 30 years of experience in public office, including a four-year stint as Secretary of State during Barack Obama’s first term as president, many believed she had the background and statesmanship needed to put the Western alliance back on an even keel.

Some pointers as to why she failed to achieve her dream are provided in **Hillary Rising** by James D Boys (Biteback, £14.99), the least hagiographic of the many biographies that appeared during her election campaign. Despite her slick appearance on the campaign trail, Clinton is portrayed by Boys as a conceited and egotistical woman who had struggled to make friends since high school, which may help explain her abject

failure to win over the electorate.

Not so with Donald J Trump. In **The Making of Donald Trump** (Melville House, £18.99), American journalist David Cay Johnston argues that, in a country whose outlook is forged by television, it was no surprise that Trump, whose modern-day political persona is as the boss in American television’s version of *The Apprentice*, was elected president.

In a country whose outlook is forged by TV, it was no surprise Trump won

When Trump was first offered the role in 2002, he was seen very much as yesterday’s man – a dubious businessman with no serious political credentials. But his intensely ballsy and aggressive approach to the reality television show dramatically raised his public profile. We will have to wait to see if Trump can undertake another transformation in his

public persona when he takes up residence in the Oval Office in January, this time turning himself into a world statesman.

But while his election has caused great consternation in world affairs, we should also remember that there are other issues to be addressed, far more pressing than Brexit and the American presidential election result – such as ending Syria’s brutal civil war, which has been raging for nearly six years.

In **The Battle for Home** (Thames and Hudson, £16.95), Syrian architect Marwa al-Sabouni gives an angry and personal account of the decades of political repression and sectarian divisions that caused the bloodshed in the first place. With the death toll now passing the 400,000 mark, ending the Syrian conflict must surely be one of President Trump’s most urgent priorities.

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is a fool’s game – as the polling industry found to its cost with the Brexit vote and Trump’s triumph – we can certainly try to understand how we got here. What were the pressures that led to the greatest peaceful manifestation of popular discontent we have experienced in the modern age?

We might start by examining the underlying economic trends that have left so many people on both sides of the Atlantic feeling abandoned by a political class that appears ever more detached from the needs of ordinary working men and women. To this end, in **The End of Alchemy** (Little, Brown, £25), Mervyn King provides a sobering analysis of the causes of the 2007-08 financial crash that helped to fuel widespread disillusionment.

As Governor of the Bank of England during the boom years of the Blair/Brown era, the mild-mannered Baron King of Lothbury, as he has now become, was all too aware that “money and banking were financial alchemy”. He argues that the mixture became particularly toxic when hubris ran riot among the banking community. In turn, the financial services culture became one of “taking advantage of the opportunity to manage other

people’s money, rather than acting as a steward on behalf of clients”.

King identifies this as “a collective failure” that led both Britain and the US to lose around 15 per cent of national income in the crash that followed. But perhaps the most alarming lesson to be drawn from King’s imperious analysis on the failings of modern capitalism is that the measures so far taken to prevent a recurrence have done little to reform the system’s fundamental

European politicians have caused what Stiglitz calls ‘a lost decade’

failings, thereby making another major crisis “certain”. If King’s prediction is accurate, the recent political convulsions will look mild compared to what is yet to come.

If economic discontent has been the driving force behind the people’s revolt, then Nobel Prize-winning economist Joseph Stiglitz’s compelling argument in **The Euro** (Allen Lane, £20), that the EU’s single currency is doomed to failure, is hardly going to improve matters. By keeping

9
Simple
by Diana Henry

Diana Henry’s writing never fails to inspire, and *Simple* is destined to become a kitchen classic. It’s straightforward but never dull; vivid yet resolutely unfussy.

8
Born to Run
by Bruce Springsteen

The rock star’s gritty, honest account of growing up in New Jersey in the Fifties and Sixties is so vivid it can trick you into nostalgia for a childhood you didn’t have.

7
Falling Awake
by Alice Oswald

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