

TAKING BACK CONTROL

by

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INT. A PUB - EVENING

The footie's on. GAV is wearing an England shirt and holding a pint.

GAV

It's about taking back control, isn't it? And that's got to be a good thing. A decision taken in Britain is going to be better for Britain. Better for British people. Ordinary British people, like me.

CUT BETWEEN:

INT. AN OFFICE - AFTERNOON

DEBS is processing orders and invoices at an engineering firm.

DEBS

We're not like those toffs down south. You seen the prices people pay in London? Twice my monthly rent for a week in a shoebox that isn't even near the Tube. Couldn't get away with that sort of thing round here. More common sense.

GAV

Take bananas for example. I go to the shop, I look for a nice curly banana, and I buy it. No nonsense. But then some other person, in some other country, decides they want their bananas straight, they kick up a stink and suddenly curly bananas are a no-no for everyone. Where's my choice? Taken away, that's where. You can still get them at the moment, but it's only a matter of time, isn't it?

INT. AJ'S ROOM - DAYTIME

Everything AJ owns is packed into a tiny room. He sits on the bed eating a pot noodle.

AJ

I share this house with two other people - Zak and Sue.

Generally it's OK. But Sue, she buys this posh granary bread. Thinks she's better than me, just because I like good old fashioned white sliced. She hasn't said anything yet, but I can feel her disapproving looks while I'm trying to enjoy my beans on toast. One day I'll go for a sandwich and my bread'll have mysteriously vanished, and I'll be forced to borrow her grainy nonsense. I let that slide, and she'll up her game. Persuade Zak to ban white sliced from the premises. Boom! I'll be stuck with hipster bread forever. Facism, pure and simple.

DEBS

They haven't got a clue what it's like here. Oxbridge graduates in their old boys' club in Westminster making decisions for London that affect people here in the Midlands. But it's a different population, different industries, what works down there doesn't work up here, outside the bubble of the M25.

EXT. BANK STREET - MORNING

ANNA is cleaning her car, parked outside her terraced house.

ANNA

The Council did a survey last month, about residents' parking here in Kings Heath. But that's not fair, is it? Here on Bank Street we're just a short road. Other ones - Grange Road, Station Road - they're much longer, they've got more houses, more people, they'll get more of a say. What if they all want residents' parking, but we don't? We'll still get lumbered with the cost because we're a shorter street and our voices don't count.

GAV

Did you see the other day? Some guy got fired, and sued his employer for wrongful dismissal. Court threw it out, so he goes and takes it to the European Court. They overturned the verdict and the company, a British company, had to pay out a whole load of compensation. I'll have you know that Judge Thingy was at Eton with the CEO, he knows the guy. If he says the employee was treated fairly, how dare some pen pusher from another country, who doesn't have any connection to anyone involved, claim they know better. Unbelievable.

DEBS

Them lot down south always have the final say, don't they. You get into trouble with the law and want to appeal, where's the High Court? London, that's where. What do they know about how things work in the Midlands? They want to change the tax system, or the way the police force is structured or employment rights, we just have to wear it. The 2015 local government budget cuts - national average was £53 per person. In Birmingham? £100 per person. How's that fair? Oh, but you know what they graciously allow local councils to manage - rubbish. Yeah, collecting everyone's waste. That, and fixing potholes. Thanks Westminster, really kind of you.

ANNA

And who decided to ask about residents' parking anyway? Unelected Council employees, that's who. It's my Council Tax that pays their wages, even though I don't know who they are or what they do. They don't live in Kings Heath, they won't be affected by the decision. No, matters that affect Bank Street should be managed by people who live here on Bank Street.

Every road in Birmingham is different - different width, different volumes of traffic, some have driveways, or even garages. We don't have any of that, and what's right for them won't be right for us.

AJ

Zak, he said she didn't like me playing my computer games in the living room. Wanted me to play for just two hours a night, just so him and Sue could watch their crappy TV shows. Seriously though - Master Chef? But I know that if I agree to two hours now, in a couple of months it'll suddenly become 90 minutes, then 45 minutes, then half an hour. No, I'm not having it. I've got every right to use the room when I want, for however long I want.

GAV

If we stayed in the EU, who knows what we'd get dragged into. They do some dodgy deal with China, or Russia, and the UK gets lumbered with whatever trade terms some low grade bank clerk in Brussels agrees to. Nah, much better to do our own negotiating, go in hard and show them some good old fashioned British grit. The EU may have 500 million consumers to our 60 million, but this is Britain. Great Britain. It's about quality, not quantity. America's not going to want to trade with people who don't even speak the same language. Their country was founded by British pilgrims. We won the war together. Surely that's got to count for something?

DEBS

And the BBC, our national broadcaster? Yeah, right. Spends 49% of its budget in London, and just 1.5% in the Midlands. And that's our money, licence fee payers' money. Well I say, let's keep it in our region and spend it

in our region and make great TV about our region. That's what local people want, isn't it?

GAV

And another thing, who are these faceless bureaucrats making all the decisions? Did you vote for any of them? I didn't. No, I was in Marbella that week. Cheap last minute deal. All inclusive. Didn't even have to leave the resort. Staff all spoke English and they did cracking fish and chips. Just like Whitby, but with sunshine. Anyway, my point is, no-one votes in European elections, they don't even show them on the telly. And if no-one bothers to vote, then it's not even democratic, is it?

DEBS

We don't have a hope if we can't make local choices. Devolution of power to the regions is the only way we're going to get the best deal for local people. There are over 600 MPs in the UK. Do you know how many come from Birmingham? Ten. Yes, just ten. There are 59 in Scotland. A handful of voters on tiny remote islands have six times more influence over UK law than the millions living in the country's second city.

ANNA

If we let other streets tell us what to do with our parking, what's next? That Mrs Fletcher on York Road already tuts when my front hedge gets a bit overgrown. They'll be coming over here from those other streets, telling us to keep our pavements swept, then they'll be telling us what colour to paint our front doors - and making us pay for the paint. It's like the Council Tax isn't it? We all have to pay to have the streets cleaned, even those of us who don't actually drop any litter.

I'd rather keep the money here in the street, pay the kids next door, or that Mr McKay at number seven, he's retired and not doing anything. At least that way we can see how the money's being spent. I've got no idea where my Council Tax goes. I certainly don't feel the benefit.

AJ

Zak and Sue, they wanted to have house meetings, set up a cleaning rota, but I'm not having them tell me when to get the hoover out. And Zak, he wants us to use those hippie green cleaning products, which means I have to pay more and scrub harder, just because he's got some bee in his bonnet about the environment. And because there's two of them, of course I get outvoted. Every time.

GAV

Did you know, just ten per cent of all the MEPs in the EU are from the UK? Ten measly per cent. The rest of Europe want to do something daft, like let Turkey in, we can't stop it. Not on our own. Have to spend time and money trying to persuade a whole load of people from different cultures, different experiences, different attitudes that they're wrong and we're right. What if they won't see sense?

DEBS

All those converted warehouses near the city centre, that's all because of those out-of-towners, coming up here three days a week to do business.

ANNA

Half the rubbish in this street isn't even dropped by residents. It's others coming through - chucking down crisp packets and chewing gum on their way from the park to the shops.

She picks up a fag butt from the street.

ANNA

Look - here, and here. Right outside my house, and I don't even smoke.

AJ

This one lad, friend of Sue's, had all kinds of problems - fell out with his family, lost his job, health issues.

DEBS

And they don't put down proper roots. No, they head back to their Essex mansions at the weekend. None of that money they're making stays in the Midlands, it goes into their pools and cars and golf clubs back home.

AJ

Sue fed him, let him crash on the sofa, helped him with job applications. I told her, I'm not having part of my bills money keeping him warm. He can go back to his parents, he's their problem, not mine.

DEBS

High speed rail's going to make it worse, make it even easier for people from elsewhere to come here, get what they want, then bugger off again. No communities, no loyalty, no investment.

ANNA

I've talked to quite a few people on this street and there's a lot of support for measures to discourage passers through.

DEBS

In another 20 years, won't even recognise this city any more. It'll be a deserted wasteland, or it'll be a London clone, all poncey flower shops and trendy bars. We'll lose our identity completely.

ANNA

A few posters maybe, letting people from other streets know that they should stick to their own roads, or take a different route to the High Street. It won't stop them completely, but it would definitely reduce the numbers. Mr Singh from the takeaway says it'll affect his trade, but I think Bank Street residents would go for chips more often, because the street will be a nicer, safer place to be. It's common sense, isn't it?

AJ

I'm not having my housemates dictate my life. From now on, I'm staying in my room, cleaning up my own mess, eating what I want to eat. I've got a kettle, a microwave, and I can piss straight out of the window into the gutter. When it comes to solids, I've got a deal with next door that I can pop round and use their bathroom, for a small fee. I tried to do a deal with Zak and Sue, but for some reason they wanted to charge a totally unreasonable amount. I don't know what their problem is.

GAV

No, much better to get the hell out, let them get on with it without us. No input, no influence, make our own decisions and if it all goes wrong, then we'll sort it out ourselves. Keep our money and our decisions here at home. British laws, made by British people for Britain.

AJ

Of course, Zak and Sue think I'm mad. Said I'd feel isolated. Said paying for my own bills and wifi and bathroom access would cost me more than splitting everything three ways. But it's the principle, isn't it? My room, my life, my decisions. I'm taking back control.

/END