

SARAH VINE: Basket case Britain is starting to feel like a Third World country

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By [Sarah Vine for the Daily Mail](#)

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The Italians have a wonderful word, *menefreghismo*. Loosely translated, it means 'don't-give-a-f-ig-ery', a general it's-not-my-problem, you're-on-your-own-mate approach to life.

It conveys a general sense of shoulder-shrugging, the kind of attitude you encounter when dealing with a petty official, a traffic warden or just your general jobsworth.

Of course, they could help, if they wanted to. They could cut you some slack, make your life that little bit easier. But they sure as hell won't because, quite honestly, they don't care.

Menefreghismo is what I encountered the other week, when my [British Airways](#) flight back from Marseilles was unexpectedly cancelled. Indifference mixed with incompetence, a truly frustrating combination.

After I wrote about my experience, many of you got in touch to recount similar — and, in some cases, much worse — treatment at the hands of BA.



SARAH VINE: For a good many, this latest fiasco will have been the last straw in a summer characterised by delays, cancellations and travel chaos

I imagine that after this week's air traffic control meltdown, there will be considerably more tales of woe courtesy of Britain's so-called flagship airline. You have my deepest sympathies.

For a good many, this latest fiasco will have been the last straw in a summer characterised by delays, cancellations and travel chaos. I don't know anyone who hasn't been affected, one way or another.

For example, my daughter, who has been saving up for months to take her boyfriend to Rome for his 21st birthday, spent yesterday on tenterhooks, waiting to know if the trip she'd been planning since April was going to go ahead, wondering whether to cancel her Airbnb in the hope of at least recouping some of the money.

As I write, she's on her way to the airport, having been assured by easyJet that her flight is on time. We shall see.

Meanwhile, my mother, who had planned to travel to the UK from Italy this week for my uncle's funeral in Cornwall, will now be unable to say her last goodbyes.

Even if she could get here, it wouldn't be much use, since [rail strikes this weekend](#) mean there are no trains to Cornwall.

In any case, the last time she and my father tried to catch a train in this country, they ended up stranded at Newport for five hours, arriving at their destination late at night and so exhausted that my dad, who had recently suffered a serious stroke, slipped and fell.

The truth is that, while the past couple of days have been defined by incompetence in our skies, things aren't much better on the ground. Britain feels like an absolute shambles, a basket case. Almost nothing works any more, and it hasn't done so for a while now.

All around us, the social and physical infrastructure that once held this country together is crumbling. You name it: our roads are rubbish, our rivers are polluted, our streets are overrun by lunatics wielding machetes — it's impossible to get anywhere or do anything without it turning into a three-act drama.



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Once an example of can-do competence, community spirit and common sense, we seem to have turned into a nation where no one cares, no one can be bothered and everyone always has a excuse for why none of it's their responsibility.

A place where the ordinary law-abiding, taxpaying citizen or loyal, fee-paying customer is increasingly powerless in the face of other people's selfishness, incompetence or, in many cases, plain greed. It's all me, me, me and sod the rest of you.

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Stranded passengers have been left to sleep on beds laid out on the floor at Schiphol Airport in Amsterdam, Netherlands

The examples are endless. Take Sadiq Khan, with his bitterly contested Ulez expansion, dressed up as an environmental measure but, in reality, just another stealth tax designed to enrich his office. It's guaranteed to cause endless misery for small businesses and individuals.

No amount of pleading or petitioning on the part of the public has managed to make him reconsider — just as no amount of reasonable opposition to his plans to criss-cross London with hard cycle lanes managed to stop him turning parts of the capital into a car park. He just shrugs his shoulders and repeats the same old script.

Take the rail unions, determined to make families' lives a misery by going on strike in the run-up to the start of the new term — despite drivers being offered salaries of up to £65,000 a year, way more than the average worker.

Again, no amount of inconvenience or suffering on the part of passengers can derail them from their mission, which is to use their leverage as providers of a vital public service to hold the Government — and taxpayer — to ransom.

Forget notions of public service or anything absurd like that.

Meanwhile, British Airways, once the pride of the skies and 'the world's favourite airline', is now so lackadaisical in its attitude towards paying passengers that it can't even provide the most basic level of customer service, or have the decency to properly compensate people for its own failures.

Look at universities, where some graduates still haven't even been given their degrees this year because teaching staff were so busy being on strike.

Others have just announced they are planning to switch to a three-day week to allow undergraduates to take on part-time jobs to help fund the crippling charges they face (for not being taught). No mention, naturally, of courses costing less for fewer days' learning

— God forbid.

Meanwhile, student accommodation in places such as Manchester doesn't even reach basic standards. Some of it is so grim, it makes the Bibby Stockholm barge look like Claridge's. Except that at least if you're a migrant you get housed free, instead of paying through the nose to share your student room with mould and assorted vermin.



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Don't like it? Fine. Like we care. We'll just sell your place to a foreign student for twice the money.

As for teachers, doctors and civil servants, forget a sense of duty or vocational calling. Of course, many are beyond reproach but vast numbers — highly paid hospital consultants on strike, for instance — seem interested only in what they can squeeze out of the system.

Increasingly they are indifferent to the needs of the people they are letting down, and constantly come up with excuses as to why their welfare matters so much more than everyone else's.

It's not just that nothing works properly or does what it's supposed to do. It's also that the very fabric of what makes a happy, healthy society seems to have been ripped apart by opportunism and self-interest at almost every turn.

The reason why Britain feels like a Third World country falling apart at the seams is that so few seem to want to put in the effort any more. Doing things right requires time and application. But people just want something for nothing, and their sense of entitlement seems to far outweigh any obligation, certainly as far as the important stuff is concerned.

When it comes to the superficial, that's a different matter. Everyone is deadly serious in their dedication to the trivial.

Mis-gender someone and all hell breaks loose. Forget to obtain signed consent in triplicate before paying someone a compliment, and that's you cancelled. Dare to suggest that a woman is an adult biological female and see how quickly the room clears.

Meanwhile, the things that really matter continue to deteriorate. We tinker around the edges, wasting time on platitudes and political correctness while our health service crumbles, our transport system falters, our school standards fall, our universities fail to deliver, and all the things Britain was once admired for fade away.

Maybe I'm wrong. Maybe it's just the way the world is these days. Maybe we have to accept that incompetence has become the norm, and that excellence and high standards are things of the past.

But I, for one, can't see why. Like many others, I do still care. Things need to change, and fast. Before we reach the point of no return and Britain becomes like everywhere else, a land of menefrehismo.

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