

A new chapter opens

Congratulations to all the successful pro-Brexit candidates and to the many volunteers and workers behind the scenes, whose efforts over many decades, as well as in this election campaign, combined to assure their victory.

In the present circumstances, the Conservative party has become the vehicle for our return to democracy and self-government, for which CIB has campaigned since 1969. Many people, formerly of other parties and none, have 'crossed the floor' and entrusted the Conservatives with that solemn responsibility. The government under Boris Johnson now has a sufficient majority to deliver on its Brexit commitment. The Conservatives will rightly be under the most intense scrutiny.

Whilst we look forward with confidence, we have to look back to see how far we have come from the days when opposition to the European project and ambition to return to democratic self-government was regarded as either eccentric or nasty. While Britain was conferring independence on the countries of its former empire (generally regarded as the right thing to do), we were slyly manoeuvred by our own politicians into becoming a province of another empire, run from Brussels. Those days *should* now soon be behind us.

But nor must we be complacent, as we were after the referendum victory of June 2016. To borrow from Churchill, the passage of the Withdrawal Agreement will not be the end of our battle for independence, nor even the beginning of the end; it will only be the end of the beginning. The WA literally stipulates how we will leave the EU (including the infamous 'divorce bill'). But leaving the EU in legal terms does not automatically guarantee complete independence, which will depend in part on the details of the future relationship that is negotiated with the EU *after* we leave.

Our members – including at committee level – have expressed particular concerns about the following issues as we move into the next stage of negotiations on the future relationship:

- To reverse the surreptitious steps taken towards integration of our armed forces in the EU Defence project – that European army which Nick Clegg said was ‘a dangerous lie’ and ‘a myth’, but which is now at the centre of EU leaders’ discourse.
- To ensure that we get full benefit of resuming control over our own territorial waters and Exclusive Economic Zone for our own fishing fleet. Any licensing of non-British vessels in our waters must be wholly and solely under British control and law, based on reciprocal rights in that other country’s waters OR payment of suitable fees – which would not confer any right of permanency.
- To forestall the sly return of EU jurisdiction under the guise of security co-operation in matters such as the European Arrest Warrant or the authority of the recently appointed EU prosecutor. Co-operation is not subjection.
- Definitions of a ‘level-playing field’, which risk reducing our competitiveness and giving British consumers a raw deal. In a recent radio interview, Stephen Kinnock mentioned that British steel producers and other heavy industries were paying twice as much for power as the the Germans. Subsequent enquiries established that Germany had been able to do this since 2013. Hardly a ‘level playing field’! The EU Commission had actually tried to stop this reduction in ‘green’ surcharges but Germany was able to persuade the European Court of Justice otherwise. The British government should arrange to do the same for our own heavy industries and not permit us to be ‘locked in’ to any permanent disadvantage of this sort.

There will be many technical issues of this sort, which are

unlikely to create great public concern but which are vital in establishing a sound new relationship with our EU neighbours and with those countries where we presently rely on EU-negotiated treaties. We hope that MPs will assist affected firms and trade associations to get their points across to ministers and officials.

CIB stands ready to co-operate with them and with other groups, such as our friends in Fishing for Leave and Veterans for Britain, to act as a force multiplier and facilitator in helping the government to drive forward its Brexit policy whilst also holding it to account.