

A winnable referendum

I have received a number of e-mails from people who say that in their opinion, the “leave” side is not putting up a particularly good show and that far too many people are being frightened into voting for “remain”, even if they don’t really like the EU.

Obviously, the Campaign for an Independent Britain is only one part of the “leave” campaign so we can’t speak for every group fighting for withdrawal. What we can assure our supporters, however, is that we are working flat out – supplying literally hundreds of thousands of leaflets, dealing with all manner of phone calls and e-mails, speaking at meetings, keeping this website up to date and so on. The list is endless.

Furtherore, we are convinced that this is a winnable referendum. Opinion polls have yet to indicate a significant move in our direction, but activists up and down the country do paint a more positive picture than the headline numbers suggest.

One interesting assessment comes from the EU observer on-line newspaper. In a piece called Stumbling towards Brexit, Gareth Harding says that “the remain camp is in trouble, big trouble.” His reasoning is that we are doing so well in a campaign which is loaded strongly against us. “Given the heavyweight opposition ranged against it, you would think the Leave campaign would be on the canvas facing the count. Instead, it appears to have weathered most of the punches landed on it and is still standing strong with the final bell still to be rung” he writes.

The main reason why he expects us to vote to leave is that our hearts will overrule our heads. “Rightly or wrongly they will cast their ballots based as much on laments for imperial

greatness, anxieties about immigration, tabloid horror stories about barmy Brussels bureaucrats, stubbornness at the idea of being pushed around by a PM or a US president, and a deep-seated desire for Britain to keep control of its destiny as on any rational arguments about the economy or the country's place in the world put forward by mainstream politicians."

We may not agree with this assessment, but the article provides statistical evidence that voters are distinctly unimpressed with David Cameron's claims that our leaving the EU could result in a war. Apparently, 35% of voters think that EU membership makes it more likely we will go to war as opposed to a mere 19% who think it less likely.

It is encouraging that the deluge of dire economic consequences have not had as great an impact as the "remain" side had hoped. Part of it is that like the well-known story of the boy who cried "wolf", the sheer intensity of the barrage has led to considerable cynicism. There are good reasons to be sceptical, as Tim Martin of J D Wetherspoon points out. After all, many of the claims about economic meltdown do not come from neutral sources. The IMF, the OECD and George Osborne all want us to stay in. We have already shown on this blog that previous "divorces" with parallels to Brexit have not had a negative economic effect.

Furthermore, the idea that business is united in supporting "remain" is a myth. We have exposed this in our "5 Mistaken assumptions" leaflet and further evidence for this has come in the shape of a letter to the Daily Telegraph signed by more than 300 business leaders whose companies range from hospitality, retailing and aviation to finance and insurance.

After all, we are only looking to re-join the rest of the world in managing our own affairs. The hypocrisy of President Obama and others in urging us to stay in the EU when their countries would never contemplate joining such an organisation has also cut very little ice with the electorate. At least a

few figures from the Commonwealth have been more supportive, including Winston Peters, New Zealand's former foreign minister and the former Australian Prime Minister John Howard, who said that if he was a UK voter, he would support Brexit.

Nonetheless, the economy remains our achilles heel. Sovereignty and immigration are issues which favour us but fears of job losses worry a sizeable number of voters and could decide the outcome of the referendum. We have a new leaflet in the pipeline which will assure people that their jobs are safe – watch this space!

Access to the Single Market is a big worry for some companies. Of course, the desire of all supporters of withdrawal is that we can end up with a trade-only relationship with the EU, but this won't happen at once. The move towards global bodies driving regional trade agreements is gathering pace. This, essentially, will eventually result in a redundancy notice as far as the EU's role in our trade is concerned, but – to repeat – we are looking several years into the future.

As for the immediate future after Brexit, the worldwide reduction in tariffs does not mean their elimination, not to mention the non-tariff barriers we would face outside the Single Market. Relying on World Trade Organisation rules for our trade leaves some big holes in our arguments and big worries for many company directors.

It would be a tragedy if fear was the real victor in this referendum and the electorate voted to stay in project they really don't like, with the basic issues unresolved. There are convincing arguments that will address the economic worries and if they can be heard, it will leave very little ammunition left in the Remain camp's arsenal, so the goal to which many of us have aspired – in some cases for many years – could finally be within our grasp.