

# Brexit blockers – or not??

Mrs May's few hints about her proposed Brexit strategy have been enough to cause a slight fall in sterling and to generate a great deal of media speculation. In reality, she has given so little away that in CIB's opinion, the wisest course of action is to wait for her to provide some more detail rather than trying to second-guess her plan and probably getting it wrong.

It is inconceivable, as we pointed out a couple of weeks ago, that a lady with a reputation for studying the facts carefully before coming to a decision, is unaware of the possibility of retaining single market access while limiting freedom of movement – the so-called Liechtenstein compromise. We will hopefully not have too long to wait before she will give us some idea whether or not this is to be the holding position she will adopt to get us through the Brexit door.

Still, one definite and positive piece of news is the announcement by Lord Fowler, the speaker of the House of Lords, that peers will not obstruct Brexit. "The Lords recognise the primacy of the Commons based on the fact that they are the elected chamber and we are not," he told the Daily Telegraph last week. "In return most MPs value the check that scrutiny by the Lords provides. We are not here to sabotage legislation – we are here to improve it."

It would be refreshing if the mood of realism which has taken hold of both major parties in the House of Commons rally has now spread to the Upper Chamber too. One major fear among Leave voters was that the Lords may try to block Brexit, especially given the number of peers who held senior positions in the EU institutions and the general europhilia of the Upper Chamber. Our Patron, Lord Stoddart, has often found himself having to battle hard for the cause of Brexit among largely unsympathetic colleagues.

Before the referendum, a major reform of the House of Lords was in the pipeline. Since the Brexit vote, this appears to have slipped down the list of government priorities. Given the consensus that some changes are required to the size and workings of the Upper Chamber, peers may well have realised that obstructing the will of the electorate over Brexit would gain them no favours at a time when some have even suggested the total abolition of the Lords.

If their Lordships may prove more collaborative than some of us expected, the same cannot be said for some sections of the academic community, particularly scientists. Our attention has been drawn to a recent article in *Nature* magazine written by Colin MacIlwain of Edinburgh. Calling Brexit voters “a loose coalition of dissenters, doubters and right wing jackals”, he says that “researchers together with other groups threatened by Brexit should fight to keep a foothold in the European Union.” So what about democracy, Mr MacIlwain? Over 17 million people voted to leave the EU and we did it because we didn’t want to be governed by remote control from Brussels. Mr MacIlwain wants to find “a route that will keep Britain in Europe where it belongs and forestall its drift to becoming some sort of mid-Atlantic Singapore.” This is the usual remoaner claptrap confusing a political entity with a continent. We may be leaving the EU soon, but for all the lack of detail of her Brexit plan, we can be pretty confident that Mrs May isn’t planning to relocate the country. Dover will still be 21 miles or so from Calais after Brexit!

And why do remoaners love to denigrate Singapore? International Monetary Fund estimates for 2015 put its nominal GDP per capita at US\$ 52,888 compared with US\$ 43,902 for the UK. The tiny island state has been one of the great success stories of the last 50 years – and what is more, its springboard to success was its separation from a political union – in this case, Malaysia.

Mr MacIlwain is not the only scientist wanting to overturn

Brexit. Anne Glover, a former chief scientific advisor to the President of the European Commission, said that scientists should continue to fight to overturn the vote “by every means necessary.”

One can appreciate the concern of those individuals who feel their jobs may be threatened by Brexit but, as the MacIlwain article points out, the government has promised to provide an extra £2 billion to cover the shortfall in funding of scientific research. To call the Brexit vote a “flight from Reason” as one of his fellow-columnists did in an earlier issue of *Nature*, is sour grapes, while “we will lose access to EU funds” is merely the pathetic bleating of bad losers. In a fallen world, life is never perfect and no Brexit campaigner ever claimed that leaving the EU would be trouble-free for all and sundry. However, should a nation with a great history like ours be complaining that it can no longer go to a foreign country with a begging bowl to ask for alms?