

Brexit – the mood at grassroots level eight weeks on

Away from the debate between politicians, businessmen and campaigners about the best exit route, eight weeks after the memorable result of June's referendum, life for ordinary people has settled down remarkably quickly.

In fact, it soon became apparent within a matter of days after June 23rd that life was carrying on as normal for much of the country. I recall a trip to London during the final week of June. Walking down the south bank of the Thames, it struck me how little effect the referendum result was having on day to day life. A long queue of people of all nationalities were waiting to buy tickets to the London Eye and the restaurants were full – in fact, my train home was even fuller! In short, you wouldn't have thought we had just taken a major political decision only a few days ago.

Initial statistics suggest that life did indeed carry on much as normal during the first full month after the Brexit vote. The number of people claiming unemployment related benefits fell by 8,600 in July. It had been expected to rise by around 9,000. The fall was the first since February this year. Other data showed that the employment rate in the UK reached a record high of 74.5% between April and June this year. Retail sales also grew by 1.4% during the month. The vote to leave the EU has not deterred people from spending money. Furthermore, for all the uncertainty generated by David Cameron's decision to call the referendum, London attracted more venture capital for start-ups than other major European cities. According to an article in *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, it attracted €1.5bn in the first half of the year, well ahead of its nearest rivals Stockholm (€1bn), Paris

(£674m), and Berlin (€520m).

Significantly. although the rate of UK consumer price inflation jumped to 0.6% in the year to July following the Brexit vote, it was only slightly up on the 0.5% recorded in March and still well below the 1% threshold which triggers a letter from the governor of the Bank of England to the Chancellor explaining why inflation is so far below the 2% target!

BBC Radio 4 broadcast an interesting programme on Wednesday Evening where two groups of people from the most pro-leave and the most pro-remain areas of the UK met in separate rooms to discuss their feelings following the Brexit vote. *Two Rooms*, hosted by Fi Glover, was another fascinating insight into how quickly life has settled down. The leavers, from Boston, Lincolnshire, were the more optimistic of the two groups, expressing great hopes especially for the UK's trade prospects. The remainers, from Brixton in South London, talked of their shock when the result was announced. They were concerned about possible loss of access to the single market and expected an economic downturn.

Both groups, however, accepted the result. Indeed, one person used the phrase "now we've left", even though we haven't even invoked Article 50 let alone come out the other end! Interestingly, both groups saw Brexit as a long overdue opportunity to re-boot our democracy and to decentralise power to a local level. For all the initial horror of some Brixtonian remainers, there were no calls for a second referendum. They may not have wanted a leave vote, but Brexit as far as they were concerned means Brexit.

Such attitudes at the grassroots level should not come as a shock. For four months David Cameron's decision to call the referendum thrust the issue of EU membership into a prominence it had never previously enjoyed. A year ago, just before the General election, a survey by YouGov placed

“Europe” as far down as 7th in its list of voters’ priority issues, well behind housing, welfare and health. Anyone who has ever stood as a UKIP candidate will have known the frustration that in general elections, the EU was never widely viewed as the most important factor in determining how people would vote. After its moment in the spotlight, it is therefore unsurprisingly again receding into the background.

But not totally. News that over a million Eastern European migrants are now working in the UK will have served as a reminder to some people why they voted to leave, while the *Daily Express* has unearthed another story which will raise plenty of hackles:- a German-based agency called medaltracker.eu whose data is used by official EU websites, has published a chart showing that the greatest number of medals in the Rio Olympics has been won by the EU! Nowhere is the UK to be seen, which is particularly galling considering the tremendous performances by Team GB. It seems that the Brexit vote has done nothing to change the mindset of the EU élite who opened a museum four years ago costing £44 million and called the “House of European History” which calls the Second World War a “civil war”, in spite of quite a bit of the action taking place in North Africa and the Far East

While it seems impossible to change this very selective and bizarre interpretation of history, hopefully, if our government and Civil Service can get their act together, by the time the 2020 Olympics begin in Tokyo, “now we’ve left” really will mean “now we’ve left” and the likes of Medaltracker will not be able to repeat their insult to our heroic athletes.