

Brexit through the looking glass

David Dring, Conservative Party member and active contributor to the Bruges Group's Facebook discussion group, infiltrated the so-called 'People's March' on Saturday in a bid to better understand the mentality of those seeking to undermine the referendum result.

It's not often that you get the opportunity to march with so many. It's even rarer that you get to march with so many with whom you categorically and fundamentally disagree.

In a bid to better understand the mentality of those 'Ultra Remainers' seeking to undermine the referendum result, I took advantage of one of the 120 coaches put on for the so-called 'People's March'. I travelled down to London under an assumed name, so as not to alert the organisers to my true position on Brexit. I had no wish to be deposited on the hard shoulder of the M1.

The composition of my coach was really a mix: academics, students, NHS workers... although I did spot a couple sporting their Chelsea football shirts, who I am convinced were just freeloading transport for the early kick off. There was a genuine feeling of excitement, but also some doubt among the participants as to how successful the march could be, given the almost impossible timetable to hold a second referendum prior to the 29 March 2019 deadline.

What was most striking was the lack of substance in the various debates going on up and down the coach. I did not hear a single person make a positive case for why we should remain a member of the EU.

In fact, these hardcore Remainers were surprisingly Eurosceptic. There was widespread acknowledgement of the flaws

of the European project: the CAP, CFP, general mismanagement and wastefulness of resources. Overwhelmingly, the consensus was that we needed to remain a member to reform the EU from within.

This, of course, wilfully ignores the fact that this is just what we have tried and failed to do in 45 years of EU membership. Mrs Thatcher's quote from 2002 remains just as relevant today: "Europe as a whole is fundamentally unreformable."

And so on to the march itself. Breaking away from my coach party, I tried to engage and speak with a variety of people, and ask them why another referendum was necessary.

The responses I received were generally the same tired arguments that have been regurgitated over the past couple of years. *The Leave campaign lied. The Leave campaign overspent their budget. The Russians rigged the referendum. We will all be worse off and many will lose their jobs. Northern Ireland will become a war zone again. All flights will be cancelled and we won't be able to have foreign holidays. We will lose our citizens' rights in a race to the bottom. Nobody voted to be poorer. And, of course, everybody's favourite: Brexiteers didn't know what they were voting for.*

When confronted with a more sophisticated answer, I tried to probe a little deeper. "What rights will be lost, given that on Brexit day, all existing EU law will be transposed to UK law?" I asked. "If these laws are then subsequently changed in Westminster, isn't that a proper use of our democratic process? And if we don't like the new outcomes, we have the opportunity to vote against the party inflicting the changes at the subsequent election."

Nobody really provided a satisfactory response to this. A couple inferred that the Tories would use it as an excuse to slash regulation, depriving workers of their rights, but could

offer no actual examples of any minister indicating any changes of this nature.

At least the two SNP-supporting ladies I spoke to acknowledged that the centralisation of power in Brussels does not seem to be consistent with the agenda of expanding Scotland's devolved powers. The sheer hypocrisy of the SNP's position on independence and EU membership is plain for all to see – even its own members, it would seem.

People's Marchers also seemed not to have given any thought to the fact that the EU is constantly evolving – and always in the federalist direction of 'ever closer integration'. Jean-Claude Juncker quite openly stated in his recent State of the Union address that, "We must complete our economic and monetary union," and chillingly, "we should be able to decide on certain tax measures by qualified majority." Juncker's proposed EU Army – which Nick Clegg either naively or disingenuously claimed was a "dangerous fantasy" and "simply not true" – continues to be created by stealth.

Yet astonishingly given their claimed love of the EU, many of the marchers I spoke to were completely unaware of this planned future direction. Fewer still were aware of the rise of the ruthless Martin Selmayr and the scandalous circumstances surrounding his promotion to Secretary-General of the European Commission.

We are entering a critical time for the Brexit process. Our future democracy and ability to be a self-determining nation is at stake. It is vital that we do not 'steal our young people's future'.

A clean break from the EU and its institutions is fundamental to achieving this. Based on the evidence of those I spoke to at the 'People's March', an awful lot of people didn't know what they were voting for in June 2016 – and it wasn't

the Brexiteers.

Photo credit: David Holt