

Why the Brexit trade team has hired a New Zealander as lead negotiator

A week in which five somewhat underwhelming position papers were published by the Department for Exiting the European Union was rounded off by a piece of somewhat better news.

Next week, Crawford Falconer, a New Zealander, will take up his position as chief trade negotiation adviser at the Department for International Trade.

Mr Falconer brings with him some valuable expertise which our EU membership has more or less rendered extinct in the UK – 25 years of trade experience. He has represented New Zealand at the World Trade Organization (WTO) and held various posts in foreign and trade affairs in his home country.

As far back as 1973, we surrendered our right to negotiate our own trade deals and thus no longer had need of people with the necessary skills. Given that the freedom to strike our own trade deals was one of the most frequently-mentioned arguments in favour of Brexit, it is therefore encouraging that Liam Fox's department has made this appointment.

For one thing, it shows that the UK Government is serious about developing an independent trade policy. More importantly, however, it shows that a recognition has dawned at least in one Government department that trade deals are complex, requiring specialist skills. This is in contrast to some announcements – indeed, to some of the Position papers – which give the impression that obtaining a smooth Brexit will be a piece of cake.

It won't be. For over 44 years, our country has been progressively denuded of many attributes if a fully-

functioning sovereign nation. Many of us were profoundly unhappy about this and hence the energy and vigour of the Brexit campaign in last year's referendum. We wanted our country back – to take control once more and to end our subservience to foreign institutions.

The ramifications of that vote are beginning to reverberate through both Westminster and Whitehall. The buck will stop here – not in Brussels or Strasbourg! The EU can no longer be the scapegoat when something goes wrong.

Reclaiming our sovereignty requires not only a new mindset but a sharp learning curve for a new generation of civil servants. They are going to have to do things which have been sub-contracted out to Brussels for two generations. Not one UK Civil Servant still in employment has had any experience of negotiating a free trade deal on behalf of our country. Inevitably, therefore, expertise will have to be brought in from elsewhere to tide us over and the obvious places to look are those countries like New Zealand which share our Common Law legal system, our language and our outward-looking approach to trade. We can be grateful not only that there is an Anglophone world out there, but that our Commonwealth friends are prepared to renew and strengthen their ties with us after having been cast adrift so shamefully in 1973.

The more announcements we therefore hear of appointments like Mr Falconer, the more confident we can be that our government is really getting to grips with what it will mean to be a sovereign nation once more.

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