

CIB's first post-referendum rally

So much has happened since 14th May 2016 when we staged our last rally. On that occasion, our Chairman, Edward Spalton, pointed out that it could be the last rally before we gained our freedom. Forty days later came that historic vote, but there is much to do before we will be totally free of the EU's clutches. Even so, looking back on last year's event, it is hard to believe that we are finally on the way out, with a new Prime Minister who has pledged herself to honour the Brexit vote and has already triggered Article 50 of the Lisbon Treaty, thus formally beginning the withdrawal process.

Our first speaker, Patrick O'Flynn MEP, will be one of those who will lose his job when we finally withdraw, but he didn't seem too perturbed about it. He said that UKIP will be putting country before party and does not intend to field a full slate of candidates in the forthcoming general Election. A distinction will be made between long-standing consistent Brexit supporters, especially if they only held their seats with small majorities, and those he called "five-minute-to-midnight" converts to the Brexit cause. His concluding remarks were particularly well received:- Remainiacs were welcome to campaign to reverse the result, he said, but it would take forty years by which time the EU would no longer be in existence.

The next speaker was retired ambassador Leonidas Chrysanthopoulos, who described in graphic detail the ongoing problems faced by Greece as a result of the EU-imposed austerity package. The Greek sovereign debt crisis began as far back as 2009 and the enforced belt-tightening has ruined the country, with the death rate having increased dramatically. Furthermore, in spite of massive spending cuts,

the country's debt to GDP ratio has got worse. It was 146.2% in 2010 but by 2016, it had risen to 179%. Ambassador Chrysanthopoulos is a member of EPAM, a Greek anti-EU campaign group with whom CIB has had links that go back a number of years.

Based on his own country's unhappy dealings with the EU in recent years, he advised the UK to walk away from the negotiations if the EU presents insurmountable obstacles. The timing of his words is remarkable as his compatriot Yanis Varoufakis, the former finance minister, had been extensively quoted by Ambrose Evans-Pritchard in the *Daily Telegraph* only the previous day warning of the difficulties of negotiating with the EU.

Philip Benwell from the Australian Monarchist League made us all feel very ashamed as he described the sense of betrayal felt in his country when we abandoned our Commonwealth friends to join what was then the European Economic Community. Some of us had not previously realised the economic impact on the agricultural sector in Australia and New Zealand by Edward Heath's wicked deceit, nor that it was a factor in the rise of republicanism in Australia. Of course, that sector has now recovered but, as Mr Benwell reminded us, the result of our flirtation with Brussels is that Asia and China in particular has replaced the UK as the main trading partner.

There is nonetheless considerable enthusiasm within the Australian government to open trade talks with the UK, but Mr Benwell was looking for one particular gesture of goodwill from the UK government in return. Immigration controls in a post-Brexit UK should no longer group other subjects of Her Majesty as aliens and that we should all share a common immigration channel. His organisation, which has 40,000 members including plenty of young people, has campaigned against this discrimination for some years but has thus far been snubbed by pro-EU civil servants.

After a short break, Luise Hemmer Pihl from the Danish People's Movement against the EU (*Folkebevægelsen mod EU*) reminded us that we are not the only country with a long-standing history of opposition to the EU's encroachment upon the nation state. She mentioned the various referendums in which the Danish people had consistently rejected further integration, including a recent vote to pull out of Europol. Like all our like-minded friends across the water, her organisation was greatly encouraged by the Brexit vote.

The last speaker, John Ashworth from Fishing for Leave, will need no introduction to regular readers of this website. His most recent book, *Seizing the Moment*, has been published by the Campaign for an Independent Britain. Continuing the theme of how awkward the EU can be as a negotiating partner, he told us how obstructive it was when Greenland voted to leave and only the threat to close its waters to (what were then) EEC vessels forced Brussels to agree a deal.

The film *Witness to History* concluded the afternoon's programme. Lasting 35 minutes, it features a fascinating interview with Lord Walsingham, who worked in the Foreign Office when plans for the European Iron and Steel Community were being discussed in 1950. His concerns about the UK signing up to a project which was ultimately designed to weaken our heavy industry, along with his opposition to the denazification policy being pursued by the Americans led him to resign and fight in the Korean war instead.

Before the speakers gave their presentations, one man who has been a consistent opponent of our EU membership ever since being present in the House of Commons in the evening of that fateful vote on the Accession Treaty in 1972 was presented with a silver salver by our Chairman, Edward Spalton. George West, who has been President of the Campaign for an Independent Britain since taking over from Lord Stoddart on his retirement, has decided to stand down. Readers will, I am sure, wish Mr West all the best for the future and thank him

for his contribution to the cause of independence.