

# When you don't understand the question

In the run up to Christmas I went to quite a few parties and social events. I do not mention this to boast about my social life, but because I ran into quite a few Remainers – some were old acquaintances I had not seen for a while, others were new to me. It was an illuminating experience.

Most of them were friendly – one was not, but then I never liked her very much anyway – and the majority accepted that they had lost. Quite a few had voted Remain only because they had been influenced by the speeches by the great and the good, others because they liked going on holiday to Europe, some because they backed the status quo. They had moved on and accepted that Brexit would happen. A few had voted Remain simply because most of the people they knew were voting Remain.

But the ones I found most interesting to talk to were those who had been vociferous Remainers and still believed that Britain should remain in the EU. And especially entertaining were those who did not know that I had spent the campaign working as Campaigns Manager for Better Off Out.

The conversations often revolved around the fact that Leave voters “believed lies”, or rather less politely “were ignorant” or “stupid”. We’ve all heard these unpleasant slanders, but I took the opportunity to probe further. What seemed to be behind these comments were that the Remainers I was talking to felt that the Leave voters had not understood the question posed in the Referendum.

These folks were keen to talk to me about the “real issues” at stake. Each person had their own take on these, but they tended to be variations on the economic issue. They were

concerned with trade with the EU. A few of them actually worked for companies that did business in the EU, but most did not. They seem to have bought the line that you need to be in the EU to trade with the EU. They were worried about the economy or jobs. Despite the lack of any economic downturn since 23 June, they were convinced that disaster would strike soon. They felt that leaving the EU was economic suicide. People who voted to leave had, apparently, not understood the economic issues at stake.

They were keen to tell me that the Brexiteers had not understood the question.

But actually, it was my party-going friends who had not understood. The ballot paper asked us if we wanted Britain to be a member of the European Union. It did not ask us if we want to buy cars from Germany, nor if we wanted to sell pizza to Italy (I jest not, I know one company that does).

Of course, trade with the EU will be affected by the terms of whatever trade deal emerges from talks with the EU. But for me at least such issues were unimportant.

Essentially the question on the ballot paper was a constitutional one. Should the UK be an independent sovereign country or a member state of the European Union?

When a Remainer says that Leavers were “ignorant” or “stupid” or “did not understand”, what they really mean is that the leavers did not agree that economics were of prime concern. They are concerned about the money, the cash, the lucre. Not that they would ever admit to anything so vulgar, of course. They talk about the economy, the jobs, the exports, but their concerns always boil down to money.

And money was not on the ballot paper. Freedom and independence was.

Next time a Remainer tells you that Leavers were “stupid”, you

know who is really showing their ignorance.