

Dyson, Paterson: - the momentum is building

A decade ago, supporters of EU membership might have got away with dismissing their opponents as mavericks and eccentrics whose objectives were opposed by all the big names in politics and the business community. Not any more. In the last few days, one of Britain's leading entrepreneurs and a former Conservative Cabinet minister have both come out in support of withdrawal.

Sir James Dyson was interviewed on Radio 4's Today Programme last Friday about his plans to make a considerable investment in the UK. During the course of the interview, the subject turned to the EU. Does Sir James want the UK to stay a member? "Not particularly; No", he replied. He did not want to be in an EU which was "dominated or bullied by Germany." He added that "in our particular field we have these large German companies who dominate standard setting and energy reduction committees, and so we get the old guard and old technology supported and not new technology." Sir James also mentioned his support for EFTA.

Another important business figure, James Bardrick of financial services group Citi UK was not so keen on withdrawal. In an interview with *City AM* today, he said he would prefer "to make the EU work better and more productively." However, he did not view withdrawal with foreboding. "We'd have to make changes to our operating model to reflect some of the increased inefficiencies that being outside the EU would throw up, and there is no doubt that would lead to changes in the way we have to deploy some of our resources, both financial and people," he said, but "we can cope if we have to cross borders between the UK and the EU." These are perhaps the most laid-back words to date from a senior UK banker and proof that even if some big businesses would prefer us to stay in the EU,

withdrawal would NOT be the calamity that some claim.

Also today, hot on the heels of Sir James' welcome support for withdrawal, Owen Paterson, the former Environment Secretary, stated that the UK government should invoke Article 50 of the Lisbon Treaty, which is the mechanism by which a member state withdraws from the EU, if the Conservatives win next year's General Election. Mr Patterson was making the obvious point that closer eurozone integration would inevitably force the UK to re-define its relationship with the EU as the status quo cannot be a long-term option. "The eurozone has already embarked upon a path that we can never follow," he said. "We are simply recognising that reality. We must either be fully committed to 'Le Project' or we must build an entirely new relationship."

Such comments from someone who was until recently such a senior figure in the government are unprecedented and a refreshing change from Mr Cameron's prevarication. However, Mr Paterson also laid down a challenge to fellow supporters of withdrawal, stating that voters could opt to maintain the status quo unless they are given a "clear vision of what life outside the EU would look like".

These are wise words. Enthusiasm for the EU has never been that strong in our country, but the bottom line is that we've been a member state for over 40 years. There are many among the UK public who still need to be convinced that unpicking that relationship is worth the effort. They especially need convincing that it can be done without hurting our economy. Still, where there's a will, there's a way and the support of both Sir James Dyson and Owen Patterson cannot but be to the advantage of those like Dr Richard North and Robert Oulds who have already done so much to devise an exit strategy that will chart a viable path out of the EU where we can reap the benefits of freedom from interference by Brussels (and domination by Germany) without suffering the economic consequences that many still fear.