

The EU may work for the metropolitan elite – but it doesn't for most working people

People generally vote in a way that benefits their own interests. It is with this in mind that we can learn a lot about the type of people who are supporting Remain versus Leave.

Who is in favour of Remain? Overwhelmingly, the metropolitan élite. They are the people who have done very well out of globalisation. They are in secure jobs earning high incomes and are more than content with their comfortable lifestyles.

The EU brings them all the advantages which the Remain side trumpets – plentiful opportunities for travel helped by cheap flights, the scope for living and working in different countries, opportunities for grants from EU financed organisations, and lifestyles enhanced by an inexhaustible supply of waiters, au pairs, plumbers and gardeners, eager to work hard and conscientiously for low wages.

The cost of the UK's net contribution to the EU matters little to them because their incomes are high enough for it to be barely noticed. They are not that worried about democratic deficits in the EU because what they know of EU policy, they broadly support.

So it doesn't come as a surprise that it is this same metropolitan élite who lead the charge for Remain. They are the people who write reports threatening the UK with

catastrophe if we leave the EU and who set the tone for much of the *bien pensant* media coverage, much of it with a persistent if unconscious bias in favour of Remain.

Because the centre of gravity of our political system is so firmly in London, the leadership of all our main political parties is coloured strongly by the metropolitan view that opposition to our continued membership of the EU is clearly misguided, and so arguments in favour of Leave are barely worth serious consideration.

Who, on the contrary, is in favour of Leave? It is very largely those who have not done well out of the direction in which both economic and political developments have taken place in the UK in recent years.

It is people who have seen their incomes remain static in real terms for almost a decade. It is families who cannot get medical appointments because the NHS is so overstretched by our rising population, who cannot get on the housing ladder because house prices are so high, and who struggle to get their children into school places.

These people do worry about the cost of the EU because they are outraged to see huge sums being paid to Brussels while their local services are being cut. They don't like mass immigration not because they are racists but because they suffer from what they regard as unfair wage competition as well as being squeezed out of services to which they feel entitled.

They have lost faith in politicians who they regard – too often with considerable justification – as not really interested in their concerns; politicians who don't respect their culture and values, who think that internationalism is

more important than patriotism, and who are not that bothered about watching incomes, wealth and life chances becoming more and more unequal. They don't like the way in which their world is developing and they feel powerless to do much about it.

The result of the referendum on 23rd June is now projected to be on a knife edge – a long way from the relatively easy victory for Remain which was so often predicted a year or so ago. The main reason why Leave may win is surely that the Remain camp has been so poor at realising how strong the feeling among those favouring Leave has become and then basing their case for staying in on arguments which many Leave adherents find deeply unconvincing.

There is too big a disjunction between what seems obvious to those in the Westminster bubble and a big proportion of the population living outside the M25. The leaderships of both our major political parties have mounted cases for staying in the EU with which large numbers of their would-be supporters don't agree – a majority in the case of the Conservative rank and file and a very large minority among Labour-leaning voters. This is surely very dangerous territory for both the Labour and Conservative Parties to find themselves in.

If we vote to leave the EU on 23 June, it will be very largely because of a passionately strong Leave sentiment which has been generated among Labour-leaning voters outside London; working people who have been unconvinced and alienated by what seem to them to be the self-seeking arguments put forward by the well-heeled London political class. This reflects, unfortunately, the biggest weakness of the EU across all the 28 countries now in membership: the lack of democratic endorsement for the way it is going.

To much too great an extent, the EU is the creature of a

favoured élite who have done very well out of it. The price which it then has to pay is that it may not be able to stand up to the sort of democratic scrutiny which our referendum will provide.