

For EU but not for US

One issue which supporters of continuing EU membership is that other countries want us to remain. This article by Matt Ridley in the Spectator knocks this particular argument on the head.

America is urging Britain to stay in the European Union. But it would never dream of joining a comparable organisation

So the US Secretary of State, John Kerry, thinks his country has a 'profound interest... in a very strong United Kingdom staying in a strong EU', and President Obama is planning to join in campaigning for the Remainders too. They say this not because they think it is good for us, but because it is in their interests that we influence Europe in a free-trading, Atlanticist direction.

Well, two can play at that game. How would Americans like it if we argued that it is in our interests that the United States should forthwith be united with all the countries in their continent north of the Panama Canal ~ Canada, Mexico, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Belize, Honduras, El Salvador and Panama ~ into a vast customs union governed by a transnational, unelected civil service. Let's call it the American Union, or AU.

Imagine that Britain's Foreign Secretary has just made a speech in Toronto saying he thinks America should join the AU in order to influence Mexico in the direction of free trade. The great and the good in America agree, because they think being part of the ten-country AU will prevent war, boost trade, help smaller nations compete with the behemoths of Europe and China, enable free movement of people, stand up to Russia, encourage scientific co-operation and ensure environmental protection.

Above all, we argue, it would show the world that America is not small-minded, xenophobic, protectionist and isolationist.

To this end we think the AU should, er, agree a common tariff against imports from the poorer countries of South America and have free movement of peoples within but not from outside the union. We also think the United States should give up the dollar and use a common currency issued in central America, called the auro, sometimes known as the oreo, or if it is not ready to do that, should encourage others to use the auro, even though there is limited fiscal harmonisation, which bodes ill for the single currency. Oh, and the flag of the AU, consisting of ten radial yellow stripes on a blue background, should be prominently displayed alongside the Stars and Stripes.

Unfortunately, in the current political climate, it turns out that these manifest advantages, deliciously attractive though they might be to the American elite, because they offer an escape from having to think about people in places like Iowa and New Hampshire, apparently do not have quite the same appeal to the American electorate. People are worried about Mexicans taking their jobs, using their health care and drawing upon their welfare if they join the AU. And about Panamanians running up deficits, Guatemalans passing laws that affect Americans and Nicaraguans sharing a common foreign policy.

The average Trump voter might not like Congress much, but he likes the idea of an expensive international parliament that shuttles between Mexico City and Vancouver even less, and of an international executive whose directives pass automatically into law still less, let alone one whose corridors of power are positively seething with lobbyists from big business and big pressure groups (funded by the AU to lobby it). As for the idea that the US Supreme Court could be overruled by judges sitting in Toronto or Managua...

Yes, yes, but not to worry. Mr Kerry and Mr Obama agree the AU is not perfect and should be reformed before America joins. Indeed, let's suppose they have spent the past few months

shuttling between the capitals of North and Central America to achieve this. The results have been disappointing and tend to show just how hard it is to get agreement to change anything as unwieldy as the AU, but no matter, we would advise the Americans to go ahead and join anyway. It's in our interest that they do so.

Perhaps you think my analogy unfair? We are already in the EU, whereas I am suggesting that America joins the ~ currently fictional ~ AU. So what? Surely the decision is identical. If the AU/EU is worth joining, then it's not worth leaving, and vice versa. Perhaps you feel the cultural and economic differences between Seattle and Tegucigalpa are greater than between Manchester and Athens. I don't agree. Perhaps you think it unrealistic to expect such a big country as America to subsume itself into such an arrangement. Well, Britain is vastly bigger than many very successful, independent countries and has the fifth largest economy in the world. America could expect to boss the AU far more than we get our way in the EU.

Perhaps you think America should be more concerned with building free trade and good relations with people on other continents, rather than the countries that happen to be next door: that is, with China, Russia, Brazil, Europe. In which case, don't you think the same is true for Britain? Silicon Valley has benefited from a flow of talent from the Indian subcontinent precisely what we have denied our creative industries here as we struggle to control immigration overall but are not allowed to restrict numbers from one particular landmass.

There is a serious point here. Most Americans I know think Britain would be mad to leave the EU, but that's because they think the EU is like Nato or Nafta or the Organisation of American States – a club of nations bound by a treaty. They think it is a trading bloc. They do not appreciate that it is a common government, run by a common bureaucracy and answerable to a common court system. Once you explain this, by

using the analogy I just used, they get it immediately. They would never join the AU in a million years.

And then pause to consider the irony of America, a country born in rebellion against being governed by others through a democratic deficit, lecturing the British on how we should stay inside the EU. The chairman of Conservatives for Britain, Steve Baker MP had this to say about John Kerry's remarks: 'I refer Mr Kerry to the US Declaration of Independence. We will do peacefully at the ballot box that for which his nation fought a war of bloody insurrection. If the USA must express a view on the UK's right to the separate and equal status among the nations of the world to which many of us feel entitled, perhaps they might consider whether they wish to discuss their back taxes.'

Put your money where your mouth is, Mr Kerry. Unite your own continent into a superstate first before you tell us to do the same.

Photo by Center for American Progress Action Fund 