

# Forgetting the lessons of the past

Oh dear. They never learn, do they?

Those Eurocrats over in Brussels think that they have hit on a clever new ploy to victimise Britain and punish us for having had the temerity to vote to Leave. After years of telling us that life outside the EU would be awful for Britain, they have now been forced by reality to admit that, actually, it is going to be pretty good. All those free trade deals that Liam Fox is busily chasing are going to be good for British business.

So now the EU has decided that when the rules of the EU say that a member state cannot agree to any trade deals due to the restrictive nature of the Customs Union, what it really means is that we cannot even talk about a free trade deal until after we have left.

What they hope to do is build in a time lag of a year or more between the UK leaving the Customs Union and any new trade deals coming into operation. That will hit the pesky Brits in the pocket and allow the Eurocrats to crow over our misfortune.

And they intend to follow that up by dragging their heels over a UK-EU trade deal. They will throw obstacles into the path of British trade to the EU. More punishment for the UK.

But they forget that this has been tried before. And it did not end well for the European Empire that tried it.

Back in 1806 the Emperor of the French, Napoleon Bonaparte, ruled most of Europe. France itself extended deep into what are now Italy and Germany, while his family and acolytes sat on thrones in Italy, Germany, Poland and Scandinavia. Only

Britain stood defiant. After the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805 Napoleon had no chance of an armed invasion of Britain. He was stymied.

Then he had an idea. He called it "The Continental System".

Under this masterful plan all contact between Britain and the European Continent would be cut off. Not even the mail would be allowed through. All trade would grind to a halt. Britain would be economically prostrate. She would be bankrupt in a matter of months and forced to surrender. Napoleon issued his orders. The ports were closed to British ships, no ships could sail for Britain. Every country in Europe was bullied into joining the Continental System.

All except one: Portugal. Portugal is Britain's oldest ally and had important trade links to Britain. So in 1808 Napoleon invaded Portugal. To do so he had to march through Spain, and so invaded Spain as well. The Portuguese asked for British help. The British sent an army under Wellington and so began the Peninsular War that would drain France of men and money.

Meanwhile, the Russian economy was tottering toward collapse without British trade and British investments. The Tsar of Russia lifted the embargo and began trading with Britain again. So in 1812 Napoleon invaded Russia, a campaign that destroyed his own army. With the threat of Napoleon's army gone, more and more countries opened up to trade with Britain. They had been suffering economically and unemployment was rising.

In any case the French economy itself was crumbling. The tax take was nose-diving and Napoleon's government was facing bankruptcy. Napoleon could no longer keep a large army in the field. He was defeated and exiled to Elba. His attempt to return to power was crushed at Waterloo. He ended his days a prisoner of the British on the remote island of St Helena

As for Britain, how had she fared while Europe suffered

massive economic dislocation and bankruptcy? Well, British trade with Europe fell by 55% between 1806 and 1808, and did not recover for years. However, the British had the open sea to take advantage of, and they did. British ships had to take British goods further, but they found eager customers.

Britain ended up more prosperous after the Continental System than before.

If only the Eurocrats bothered to read their history they could save themselves a lot of trouble.

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