

General Electric, China and an erstwhile remainder with regrets

On 1st July, barely a week after the Brexit vote, the FTSE-100 index of leading shares touched its highest point in over six months.

The pound may still be down by 10% against the US dollar and some banks are suspending lending to buyers of commercial properties in London, but not everyone is gloomy. John Mills, a CIB Committee member, has long argued that the pound is overvalued and that UK exporters have been struggling in consequence. Furthermore Arcadis, a construction consultant, predicts that the London property market will actually boom once the dust has settled.

Furthermore, following on from noises from Australia and New Zealand about improving trade links with a newly-independent Britain, Chinese officials, frustrated with their lack of progress in getting the EU round the table, have apparently been discussing the possibility of launching trade talks with our country too.

As for those job losses with which we were threatened, Mark Elborne, the head of the American manufacturing giant General Electric, reaffirmed his belief that the UK will remain an attractive country for investors.

General Electric employs some 22,000 staff in the UK and Mr Elborne recently praised "the UK's 'strong export mindset' and attractive domestic market", described Britain as "a good place to do business" and "a good place to run a business from". Interestingly, these comments come from a man who backed "remain" during the referendum period.

Another "remainer" who has made some interesting comments is Mark Piggott. Writing in The Spectator, Mr Piggott says that he now wished he had voted leave. It has been the attitude of remainers to losing the referendum which has prompted the re-think:- *"As the week progressed, and demonstrators with radical piercings marched on Parliament in solidarity with EasyJet and George Osborne, I found my mood change. As one Guardian commentator after another dismissed the opinion of the poor, the old, the white, the uneducated, I began to wonder if the Leavers hadn't been right all along. Perhaps the Remain side were out of touch with what much of Britain thought."*

"More appalling than the predictable racist claim has been the dismissal of older voters as reactionaries, wreckers of our children's future", he continues. "As if 'older' people, who've worked, paid taxes, brought up children in far tougher times, shouldn't have a say and that the young, many of whom couldn't be bothered to vote, should have their non-votes registered."

"Then came the petitions. Remainers calling for the referendum to be ignored, or worse, re-run, revealed themselves to be the enemies of democracy. How many of them would tolerate similar calls from the Leave camp if the vote was reversed?"

Actually, I think we'd win a re-run. While I came across a few young zealots wearing their "In" t-shirts, I recall being quite shocked to observe that in one debate in which I took part, the handful of self-identifying "remain" people handing out literature were all older than me unless, that is, their support for the EU has caused them to age prematurely!

Leavers showed passion and commitment. They worked their socks off and would do so again. Would all the Generation Snowflake students who have been demonstrating about the vote during these last two Saturdays be willing to dig in for the long haul of a gruelling campaign stretching out several months?

I'm not so sure.

Furthermore, whoever the next Prime Minister is, he or she would not be using the full weight of government machinery to support remain and the Leave side would surely not be so foolish as to enter a second campaign without a decent exit strategy.

Nonetheless, in view of the widespread publicity given to some leave voters who now regret their decision, the candour of Mr Piggott has been refreshing. In view of the positive prospects for the UK economy and the length of time needed to call a further referendum, however, the likelihood of a second ballot looks remote, especially as one of its leading advocates, the former Prime Minister Tony Blair, has had his last shred of credibility ripped apart by the publication of the Chilcot report.

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