

A good note on which to end the year

Walking into the local supermarket, the newspaper headline in the *Daily Express* screamed out at me: **51% want to leave the EU.**

Actually, the *Sunday Times* got in on the act yesterday with a similar piece and furthermore, the results of the WIN/Gallup survey are not that dramatic. Only a few days ago, we reported that an opinion poll conducted by *Survation* on behalf of The Freedom Association yielded a much better result:- 46.6 per cent of those surveyed would vote “out” while just 34.3 per cent would vote “in”, with 19.1 per cent undecided.

However, it is encouraging that, in a year where various other polls in the summer and early autumn put supporters of withdrawal in a minority, disillusion with the EU is on the rise again. A combination of the demand for more UK taxpayers' money by the EU and the admission by David Cameron that he cannot curtail free movement of people while the UK remains an EU member are the most likely catalysts for this change in public opinion.

It is very apparent that the UK population does not love the EU and never will. If I may be allowed a couple of personal anecdotes, I was talking to a man only last Saturday who admitted to me that he had now become more open to the idea of withdrawal, while a lady in a shop this morning made it clear to me that she was no fan of the EU, but concerned about how we could exit tidily after all this time. When you're in the midst of Christmas shopping and rather pushed for time, it's probably not the best moment to start explaining the mechanics of a successful exit. Perhaps I'll pay her a visit in the quiet season after New Year.....

The Gallup survey revealed a growing disenchantment with the EU in other member states, although nowhere else registered a majority for withdrawal. Holland, with 58% supporting continued EU membership as against 42% wanting to leave, came the nearest. However, the answer to another question: "Over the past 12 months, have you felt more European?" saw a majority for the "No" option in every country surveyed – even Germany.

So 2014 is ending on a positive note for the campaign to see the UK leave the EU. This does not mean it's in the bag. Far from it. There is much work still to be done. When Scotland threatened to register the "wrong" result in its independence referendum, the big guns swung into action and exposed the weaknesses in Alex Salmond's arguments to great effect. Until we see something like a 70/30 majority in favour of independence, with the majority of the electorate not only wanting to leave the EU but convinced that a reasonably seamless departure is achievable, we cannot afford to relax. Even if the Tories win the election next year and the referendum takes place, every effort will be made to convince us that we would be better off staying in a "reformed" EU. We can expect our politicians to try to repeat Harold Wilson's sleight-of-hand in 1975 where the public were fobbed off with insignificant concessions about the UK's budget contribution and import quotas for New Zealand butter and cheese, which were sold as substantial achievements. Even if they fail to pull the wool over the electorate's eyes and we vote to leave, how will our own government react? Will it obey the voice of the people and begin withdrawal negotiations?

At this stage, no one can be sure of anything. As next year looms, with the prospect of the most unpredictable General Election in many years, all we can say is that the Campaign for an Independent Britain will do its utmost to ensure that the question of the EU will not be swept under the carpet in the build-up to 7th May's poll.

On this positive note, may I, on behalf of the Committee of the Campaign for an Independent Britain, wish you all a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.