

John Mills' Brexit reflections

*John Mills is a long-time friend of CIB, and the founder of two of our affiliated organisations: **Labour Leave**, and the **Labour Euro Safeguards Campaign (LESC)**. In this interview, he reflects on the 2016 referendum and the subsequent battle to ensure the result was respected. This interview was originally published by Brexit Central and is reproduced with kind permission.*

Brexit Central (BC): When did you first come to the view that the UK would be better off out of the EU? Did you ever think that the EU could be reformed from within to make membership tolerable for the UK? Tell us how your views developed over time on the issue.

I came to the view that membership of what was then the Common Market was not in the UK's interest back in the early 1960s. I thought that joining it, in particular, would raise food prices, damage our manufacturing industries, lead to balance of payments problems and involve heavy net budget contributions. Events since then have not substantially changed my view. As you may recall, I was the National Agent for the National Referendum Committee "No" campaign during the 1975 EU referendum.

BC: What was your most memorable moment during the referendum campaign?

The day at the end of April 2016 when Labour Leave – by then separate from Vote Leave but on a friendly basis with them – really got going to provide a home for Leave-leaning Labour

voters. Polling evidence indicates that about 10% of all traditional Labour voters switched to Leave during the final two months of the referendum campaign – a major contribution to the final result.

BC: Who was the most unlikely ally you campaigned with or shared a platform with during the referendum? Did you strike up any unexpected new friendships across traditional political divides?

I found it really easy to get on with Leavers right across the political spectrum, from UKIP to the Far Left.

BC: Where were you on referendum night? How did it feel?

I was at the Millbank reception until daylight the day after the referendum, both excited and awed by the fact that we had won.

BC: Did you think then that it would take as long as it has for Brexit to actually happen?

No! I thought that Remainers would accept the outcome of the referendum in the same way as I am sure that Leavers would have done if the outcome had gone the other way, but this is not what happened.

BC: Were there any moments in these last few years since the referendum when you thought the prize could yet be snatched from us?

Yes, there were too many occasions when it looked as though we were at best going to finish up with Brexit In Name Only or

that we were going to slide into a second EU referendum.

BC: Do you think the British electoral landscape will return to type once Brexit has been delivered? Or will Brexit have caused a lasting change to the political map of Britain?

I really hope that we can now put Brexit behind us as a settled matter, but I am not entirely sure that this is going to happen – especially if EU membership rumbles on as an issue, I suspect that it will continue to divide the country in the same way as we saw in the recent general election.

BC: What changes do you want/hope to see made now that the UK has taken back control? Can you summarise your vision for Brexit Britain?

For three and a half years Brexit has dominated UK politics while many other critical issues have been neglected – the huge divide between London and the rest of the country, the social care crisis and stagnant wages, to cite but three. I think we now need to turn to addressing these non-Brexit challenges for which leaving the EU at the end of January 2020 will clear the decks.

BC: Do you have any special plans for 1st February, our first day outside the EU?

I think I will spend 1st February 2020 feeling proud that we have got this far with Brexit, but mindful that we still have a long way to go!

John Mills is an entrepreneur, economist and Chairman of John

Mills Limited (JML). He founded Labour Leave and the long-running Labour Euro-Safeguards Campaign, and has been Chair of The People's Pledge, Co-Chair of Business for Britain, Chair and then Vice-Chair of Vote Leave. His personal website is [here](#).