

Neverendum!

The Bank Holiday has only just come and gone but already, developments are coming thick and fast with the forthcoming EU referendum.

First of all, the Electoral Commission has decided that the wording of the referendum question needs to be changed as it appeared to favour the supporters of staying in the EU. Voters will now be asked whether they want the UK to remain in the EU or leave the EU. In other words, the two campaigns won't be the 'Yes' and 'No' campaigns but more likely the 'Remain' or 'Leave' campaigns. Whether this change, to which David Cameron has agreed, will benefit those of us wanting UK independence (whatever we are now going to call ourselves) remains to be seen. While there is an instinctive desire in many people to want to please by affirming the positive (in other words, to say 'yes' is seen as being obliging rather than awkward), 'leave' could still be associated with a step into the unknown with 'remain' as the safer option. This, of course, can be overcome if 'leave' is seen as embarking on an adventure – a gateway to a more promising future while 'remain' is equated to stagnation and decline. Incidentally, another reason for the change in wording is that the Electoral Commission believed that some people may not actually realise that we are in the EU in the first place and may have been confused by the original wording! After over 42 years, this seems a bit incredible, but you never know with some people.

Another concession which David Cameron may find himself forced to make concerns the so-called Purdah period before the referendum. A period of 28 days of government silence before a referendum has become the accepted norm, as it is seen as preventing Government intervention on the side which they want to win. Apparently, as many as 40 Conservative MPs may support a Labour amendment banning public spending during the referendum campaign. The Government's argument is that such a

restriction would prevent it from carrying out its regular business in Brussels for four weeks. This, however, has not convinced a number of Tory MPs nor, it seems, their Labour counterparts. One of the Tory MPs keen to see the Purdah period observed warned of the dangers of “Neverendum” – in other words, a vote to stay in being regarded as rigged and therefore not a valid result and not putting the issue to bed at all.

It is very apparent that Cameron is very, very desperate to ensure we stay in and will only allow a level playing field with great reluctance if at all. His master plan, it seems, is a spin-off from the desire among the leaders of the Eurozone countries (although not necessarily their populations) for closer political and economic union. Accepting – well, seemingly – that the UK will never adopt the Single Currency in the foreseeable future, we will be offered some form of associate membership, except it will be called something else. It will be sold as the looser relationship with the EU that everyone desires, no doubt with an exemption from “ever closer union” thrown in as a sweetener. In reality, it will be an official second-class status within the EU and the worst of both worlds. We will be excluded from the EU’s “top table”, at which Mr Cameron insists we must have a seat, yet will still be subject to the full EU *acquis*, enforced by European Court of Justice. In practice it will be little more than taking the slow train to the same destination which the Eurozone leaders want to zoom towards in their TGVs. At the same time, we will still be locked out of the really important top tables, UNECE, the World Trade Organisation and other bodies where the EU is represented as a single entity. It is a vastly inferior option to the EEA/EFTA alternative which Mr Cameron, either through misleading briefings from his civil servants, sheer ignorance or plain pig-headedness refuses to consider and what is more, this route would accomplish the objectives he publicly professes a desire to achieve. No matter how well his arguments get shot down, as they surely will be, he just

doesn't want to go down in history as the UK's Lee Kwan Yew, the man who reluctantly led his country to independence and prosperity. Still, if we play our cards well, he will have no choice and the Neverendum conundrum can finally be laid to rest for, given that the referendum will not be a fair fight, if we vote out, no one can claim the result was rigged.