

My old teacher is spinning in his grave

I read an article in *Nature* journal yesterday.

Now, I don't want you to run away with the idea that I spend my time browsing the academic scientific literature. I don't. I prefer history. No, this article was pointed out to me by a scientist friend who was apoplectic about it.

And with reason.

Remember that *Nature* is regarded by many as the premier scientific journal in the world. It was founded in 1869 and prides itself on being the most cited journal on record. Scientists compete ferociously to get published in it, knowing that their work will be taken seriously as a result.

But the article I will draw your attention to is entitled **"Scientists should not resign themselves to Brexit"**. It is written by a chap called Colin MacIlwain, a freelance journalist with a degree in "Economics and Social Change in Britain". You can read the whole thing [HERE](#) if you like, but to save you the trouble I will summarise. He says that Brexit will be bad for science, that scientists are jolly clever people, that science is very important and that therefore Brexit must be stopped to make life easier for scientists.

I will leave it up to you to decide if a decision voted for by more than 17 million people should be overturned for the convenience of a few thousand working in one particular industry; I'm more interested in the column itself.

Nowhere does the author offer any evidence that Brexit will be bad for science. Will UK universities suddenly stop doing science? Will vast numbers of scientists be made redundant? Will British industry stop doing research to develop new

products? Facts? Data? Nope, none of that.

Instead he falls back on emotional feelings. "The mood in science departments is universally grim", we are told. And other people are upset too: "It isn't just EU-born students, postdocs and staff who are unsettled: countless spouses and offspring feel dejected and unwanted in the United Kingdom, too."

Again, no evidence or data. We just have to take the author's word for it that a few thousand people are feeling a bit upset.

Helpfully, the author makes his own feelings very clear. He tells us that there was a "loose coalition of dissenters, doubters and right-wing jackals who voted to leave Europe". Has the author gone out and surveyed a representative sample of Leave voters to reach this conclusion? Apparently not. He is just telling us his views.

But does Mr MacIlwain want to know about our views or our feelings? Obviously not. ***"Commenting on this article is currently unavailable"*** we are firmly told.

Sadly this attitude is all too prevalent among the more extremist remainers. They consider themselves better than we Brexiteers, or at least better able to understand the complex issues involved in Brexit. They sneer at us – I particularly like that bit about "right-wing jackals". They believe that their views should take precedence over ours. They despise the democracy that puts great issues into the hands of the people.

Well, they are entitled to their views. What I find puzzling is that a prestige scientific journal such as *Nature* should publish an article that is so short on fact and so long on feelings and opinions.

When I was a lad my science teacher was a strict old boy. He caned more of our class than all the other teachers put

together. And he had a saying that he drummed into us endlessly. "Facts! Facts! Facts! Science is about facts. Leave your emotions at the door, boy. Here we deal with Facts!"

How he must be spinning in his grave.