

Patriotism is not enough

In the centenary year of her execution, independence campaigners would do well to recall the words of Edith Cavell. The controversy over our membership of the EU has moved from being a cherished hope amongst a small, slighted minority to the realms of political possibility. With or without a referendum, it will not go away.

In the wilderness years, one motivation for burning anger was the sly adroitness with which politicians of the main parties concealed the profound injury to our constitution, caused by their subservience to the alien authority of the EU. Ministers who, as Privy Counsellors, had assented to the oath, *"...You will to your utmost bear faith and allegiance to the Queen's Majesty and will assist and defend all civil and temporal jurisdictions ... granted to Her Majesty and annexed to the Crown ... against all foreign princes, persons, prelates, states or potentates..."* brazenly made the Queen and all of us into mere subjects of the EU. A soldier takes an oath of similar import, to be kept at the risk of his life and with the prospect of severe punishment if he should break it. Yet he is sent into battle by a minister who faces no penalty for dereliction of his most basic duty at the very heart of the state.

The sheer maleficence and treachery of British Europhile ministers – "Europe at the heart of Britain" rather than "Britain at the heart of Europe" – was a strong motive for many to keep going. Yet it found little resonance with the wider public. Much of the heated debate within the independence movement was conditioned by such righteous wrath and took very little account of opinion amongst the vast majority of our fellow countrymen and women or of our country's realistic role and opportunities in the wider world.

Just over two years ago, Nigel Farage ventured the opinion

that his ideal free trade agreement was “a blank sheet of paper”. It may have gone down well with his audience but it showed a profound, determined ignorance of the way in which trade, not just with the EU but with the wider world, is now regulated. In that world Britain must make its living. Belatedly, UKIP and the wider independence movement is beginning to realise that it must have a credible strategy to deal with that world, if it is to be taken seriously. Slogans and pent-up rage against our political class are of no use but rather a hindrance

The world has changed enormously since 1972 and nowhere more so than in our schools. The Campaign for an Independent Britain has published a booklet on the recently introduced national history curriculum, entitled “Generations Betrayed – Cutting the Roots of our National Identity”. It is written by Christopher McGovern, a head teacher of thirty five years’ experience, and explains how the teaching of our national story has been sapped and subverted by political correctness. This method of teaching, sometimes called “history lite” has been increasingly influential over the last forty years.

Schools and teachers will vary but frustrated defenders of our former happy constitution will find here one source of explanation for their lack of success. Without factual, sequential knowledge of our history, those who hear them have no frame of reference.

In England, though not so much in Scotland or Ireland, many share Henry Ford’s view that “History is bunk”, summed up in the demotic by that West Country folk group, *The Wurzels*:

*“Never been to school,
Never been to college,
Sooner be dead than fill me ‘ead,
With a load of useless knowledge.
Never couldn’t see
No use in history,*

*'cos I weren't there,
So I don't care.
So don't tell I, tell 'ee!"*

And with such a leaden, dispiriting, official framework and method of instruction, it is an opinion which is easy to understand. All credit to those teachers who manage to maintain a lively enthusiasm and interest in spite of the way they are told to work.

Against this background, independence campaigners have to produce a narrative which is true, lively, forward-looking and attractive. This requires a great deal of that most difficult effort, actually thinking outside our well-trodden paths of thought – not disregarding our knowledge but realising that it now mostly serves a niche market which shrinks with the years.

We actually have to get to grips with the way countries become independent in the real world and some of what happens is quite counter-intuitive. One of the first things which newly independent Ireland did was to repatriate nearly all of the laws which had been enacted in Westminster during the 120 years when Ireland was part of the United Kingdom. This was absolutely necessary for the continuation of orderly government and trade – county councils, district councils, criminal law, civil law, weights and measures, protection of public health and so on. Although they had a new flag and the post boxes had been painted green, the laws governing newly independent Ireland were overwhelmingly those which had come from England – but now able to be repealed or amended over time by their own parliament.

Something similar will need to happen when we leave the EU. Taking just one example: if we simply repeal the European Communities Act 1972, we will have no laws at all protecting food safety. They all come from an EU Regulation which will no longer apply. Not only will this be an enormous public health hazard here but it will mean that none of our considerable

food exports to the EU could clear customs until they had been detained and found wholesome by detailed testing.

We often think of regulation as being a pain in the neck but we need it to keep us from food poisoning and it often promotes real convenience and practical freedom. Your mobile phone still works when you cross borders in most parts of the world – but only because of very detailed regulation. Similarly, if you need a new battery on your travels, you can buy one that will fit. That did not happen by chance but because of regulation on a global scale. For twenty years now, the EU has been legally bound to accept global standards. Britain needs to be represented on the global bodies which make the rules – and where we can have a veto. The EU keeps us off that top table. So we must raise our sights confidently to wider horizons, persuading the majority to do the same.