

Some reflections from a bewildered Brexiteer

To my dying day, I will always look back with a sense of real satisfaction and pride in having played a part, albeit a pretty minor one, in securing that crucial vote on June 23rd last year. This time last year, like many leave campaigners, I was in the thick of one of the most hectic, demanding periods of my entire life. The late nights travelling back from debates, the numerous phone calls and e-mails to answer, the leaflets to put through doors in my neighbourhood. It just didn't stop. When it was finally over, it took a month, even for a fit and healthy person like myself, to recover.

But it was worth it! That sense of exhilaration on the morning of June 24th when the leave votes hit that magic total 16,775,992 was something I shall never forget. We leavers had started as the underdogs. We had Cameron's government using all the levers at its disposal to persuade us to stay in. We had a very limited timespan to get our message across. We were not united on exit strategy and there was no love lost between several leading leave campaigners, but yet we won.

I can understand some remainers' motives. Some people, albeit a dwindling number, believe the government and therefore fell for "Project Fear". Others decided to "hold on to Nurse for fear of something worse", which was understandable given the lack of a clear post-Brexit vision. "There's a lot wrong with the EU, but it's the least bad option to stay in." Some people reached polling day still with little idea of what the EU actually was and therefore decided to stick to the status quo. The EU has historically been a peripheral issue in UK politics – just ask anyone who has stood as a UKIP candidate in a previous general election!

However, what bewilders me – and no doubt many other leave campaigners – is just why anyone who actually understands what the EU is all about can actually want their country to be a member state and even now would love to stop the Brexit process – neither out of fear nor of concern about economic problems, but because they really believe in the EU project.

This applies not just to the hard-core remainiacs over here but the members of EU-27. As the final preparations for the Brexit negotiations get under way, the BBC took some soundings from a number of European countries. The comment which shows the least understanding of the sentiment of the UK electorate came, rather surprisingly from the Netherlands. “A self-inflicted wound” was one Dutch columnist’s description of Brexit. Perhaps the best response to this is that Brexit is like a cancer operation. There may well be some pain at first, especially if the negotiations end badly, but for us, EU membership is like a malignant tumour which had to be cut out if we were to survive. Yes, the surgery may leave us with a wound, but the alternative would have been far worse. The columnist in question has clearly not moved on from the drama of last June when a number of continental leaders, including the former Swedish Prime Minister Carl Bildt, called the Brexit vote “beyond comprehension.” Bryan Macdonald, an Irish journalist who is based in Moscow, used exactly the same phrase five months later. “It’s beyond comprehension that the UK would vote itself into irrelevance,” he wrote.

Actually, dear Messrs Bildt and Macdonald, it’s very easy to understand why we voted to leave. There are umpteen reasons. Here’s just a few:-

- We should never have been part of the EU in the first place. Last June’s Brexit vote righted a great wrong perpetrated on us by Edward Heath over 40 years ago. When he realised that honesty about the real objective of the European project would have resulted in the UK electorate rejecting membership, he deliberately

downplayed the loss of sovereignty. Resentment over this deceit has been festering ever since.

- Back in the 1940s, the idea that a professional class of politicians, aided by an army of bureaucrats, may have seemed a good way of stopping another World War, but things have move on since then. There is no threat from Soviet Union to counter any more and the professional politicians and bureaucrats, far from offering any solutions, have become part of the problem.
- The EU is fundamentally undemocratic. Even as ardent supporter of the European project as the Labour MEP Richard Corbett talked of a “democratic deficit” as far back as 1977. And nothing has changed in the subsequent 40 years. The Dutch and the Irish were made to vote again when they rejected the Maastricht and Lisbon treaties respectively, while Cecilia Malmström, the former Trade Commissioner, responded to a petition signed by three million people against TTIP, the EU-US Free trade deal, by saying contemptuously, “I do not take my mandate from the European people.”
- As far as trade is concerned, we are much better off with one of our own representatives on global bodies like the World Trade Organisation speaking for us rather than having someone from the EU trying to represent 28 nations which sometimes have very conflicting trade objectives. Likewise, we are much better off seeking our own trading arrangements with other countries, free from the protectionism that is still endemic in some EU member states.
- We desperately need to cut the numbers of immigrants coming to the UK, Our poor little island is badly overcrowded and advances in robotics will soon knock on the head the argument that we need mass immigration to keep the economy ticking over. Thanks to the principle of freedom of movement of people, however, unless we leave the EU, we can do little to staunch the flow.
- The waters surrounding the UK are some of the best

fishing grounds in the world, but the EU Common Fisheries Policy has devastated our once-flourishing fishing industry. Only Brexit can allow us to regain control and to determine who catches how many fish in our own waters.

- The nation state is far from dead and buried. Only in Europe has this lack of confidence in the ability of a nation's institutions to manage its own affairs taken such deep roots. The Brexit vote was an expression of a desire to re-join the ranks of sovereign, independent nations. What is hard to understand about that?

To any convinced Brexiteer, these arguments are so overwhelming that unless anyone either has their snouts in the EU very substantial trough or else is stark raving bonkers, what is so bewildering is not so much why anyone should want to derail Brexit either in this country or in Brussels, but why we are not at the head of a queue of nations scrambling for the exit door and freedom.