

Short changing the British people over Brexit

It is becoming an increasing concern that the British people are being short-changed over Brexit – by Mrs May, the Department for (not) Exiting the European Union (EU), the government generally, and Parliament. The final Brexit settlement with the EU should correspond in large part to addressing the significant wishes, hopes and fears of the electorate as expressed in the Referendum vote. Are there important pieces of information which we not being told that we really should know? What will be the political consequences if and when we find out the hard way that our leaders are misleading and cheating us?

The vote to leave the EU was a cry for a change of direction. In particular, it was an expression of the desire to leave the EU, which is evolving into a centralised homogeneous superstate. It was certainly not for “politics as usual” – the status quo whereby an out of touch ruling establishment in Westminster and Brussels would continue to conceal the truth, using fear to manipulate people and doing what it wanted to whilst ignoring the wishes of the Electorate. Ultimately, the Brexit vote was about ‘the sovereignty of the People’ and their right to be governed by consent – in other words, government of the people, by the people, for the people. Brexit, therefore, needs to be a complete change of political direction, not leaving us stuck in the political EU (aka Greater Germany) under a different name, all the time aided and abetted by a deceptive Westminster clique.

If we had voted to remain in the EU, whatever the reasoning of individual voters, we would have been forced to accept not only the current status quo but also of the EU’s direction of travel. Remain voters were effectively putting their trust in the ruling establishment in both Westminster and Brussels.

Any Brexit settlement outside remain voters' 'comfort zone' of EU membership therefore needs to provide something like the same measure of reassurance and must address, wherever practicable, their real concerns.

Whilst it would appear the objectives of Leave and Remain voters are completely different, that doesn't necessarily mean that they cannot, or should not, be reconciled in the resulting Brexit settlement. To ignore the minority who voted Remain is tantamount to a dictatorship of the majority and very un-British. It is also quite likely that the economic fears of Remain voters are also shared to some extent by Leave voters, whilst many Remain voters share the Leave voters' disillusionment with, and distrust of, the ruling élite and share their concerns about uncontrolled immigration and open borders. Political independence from the EU whilst maintaining close trading arrangements (such as through the Single Market) and co-operation should be achievable if Mrs May and Mr Davis understood how the EU thinks and works, following the example set by other prosperous European nations which are not in the EU.

The political establishment and main stream media are not presenting us with anything like the full picture on leaving the EU. In turn, the resulting distortion is creating misconceptions about what can and cannot be achieved. Firstly, if we re-join EFTA (the European Free Trade Association) we can remain in the Single Market (more accurately the European Economic Area, EEA) under different, much more flexible or bespoke conditions including allowing us to control immigration (by unilaterally invoking Article 112, the Safeguard Measures) in the EEA Agreement and leave the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice. Secondly, the *acquis* (or body of law) of the EEA is about a quarter of the total EU *acquis* and is relevant to the facilitation of seamless trade, rather than the furtherance of a political project. Thirdly, about 80% of the EEA *acquis* originates

outside the EU, to facilitate more global trade, so we would (probably) need to comply with it anyway. Fourthly, 'all singing, all dancing' Free Trade agreements (FTAs) take several years to negotiate and don't provide seamless trade. Fifthly, the EU is unlikely to agree to an advantageous FTA because it is not in the interests of their centralising control-freak political agenda. Sixthly, outside the EEA we will be a 'third country' subject to vastly increased difficulties while trading with the protectionist EU through tariffs and non-tariff barriers including regulation, approvals and surveillance.

Mrs May and Mr Davis's Transitional Deal and overall handling of Brexit so far has the potential to lead to widespread dissatisfaction and disillusionment on both the Leave and Remain sides. For the leaver, there is dissatisfaction that Brexit under the current plan will not be a clean break on 29th March 2019, but will begin a period of costly servitude to the EU, effectively a vassal state, which will last for at least 21 months and quite possibly even longer. In other words, it will be an indefinite Brexit in name only. For the concerned remainer who is not an ideological europhile but motivated primarily by worries over the economy, the limited duration of the proposed transitional period may result in either an unsatisfactory Free Trade agreement or else an extension of the transitional deal with the resulting uncertainty this would cause. Businesses share these concerns and at the moment have not been given any clear idea of the potential barriers to seamless trade with the EU that will occur whether or not there is an FTA.

Since the Referendum, the disillusionment with the ruling establishment has continued. It is not a problem peculiar to the UK or engendered by Brexit as there have been similar trends within the EU and in the United States. Often decried as 'populism', it is a visible rejection of mainstream parties, the political status quo and its direction of travel.

Our electoral system does not make it easy for new parties to make a breakthrough, but it cannot ultimately prevent radical change if dissatisfaction grows sufficiently. Given the trend amongst the ruling class to respond to their obvious unpopularity by becoming more insular and arrogant, we could see even greater political instability.

The Brexit dividend, which offered an opportunity for our country to reinvigorate freedom, enterprise, democracy and our world-leading traditional strengths for the benefit of all is being wasted. A period of unpredictability on the political front is looking increasingly likely given that it will not be long before the British people conclude *en masse* that the main problem, which is making their lives and those of their children potentially worse, is the ruling class.