

A strategy for victory in a referendum – some more thoughts

You would have to be a remarkable optimist to believe that we could secure independence from the EU if a referendum were to be held in 2015. Those wishing us to stay in have plenty of money and plenty of supporters in corridors of power. Let's face it, although the most vocal supporters of EU membership moan about "the eurosceptic press", only the Daily Express has yet come out unequivocally in favour of withdrawal. A referendum in 2017 is winnable, but only by a well-run campaign with a well-thought out strategy

The first plank in any strategy must be to demolish any fig-leaf renegotiation which claims to be a major clawback of powers from Brussels but is, in reality, little more than window dressing. Unfortunately, the electorate may be vulnerable to the same tactics used by Harold Wilson in 1975. Few of the UK population are keen on the EU. Even fewer support the idea of a European superstate, but for many, independence is seen as too big a leap into the dark, especially if a renegotiated relationship within the EU is on offer. An opinion poll undertaken by YouGuv on 20th and 21st October confirms this. Given a choice between independence and the EU status quo, there would be a narrow vote in favour of independence. 42% would vote to leave and 36% to remain in the EU. However, if David Cameron secured 'modest' renegotiation, 44% would vote to remain and 36% to leave and if the renegotiation was 'major', 53% would vote in, and 23% to leave. Already one of the proposed targets of renegotiation, immigration restriction, has thankfully been shot down by both the old and new presidents of the European Commission along with Germany's Angela Merkel. We mentioned José Manuel Barroso's comments in a previous post

<https://campaignforanindependentbritain.org.uk/barroso-says/> Jean-Claude Juncker has followed suit a couple of days later, insisting that he is “not willing to compromise” on the issue of the freedom of movement of migrants within the European Union. Mrs Merkel indicated last weekend that Germany “would not tamper” with the principle of the free movement of workers. So one key item on our Prime Minister’s renegotiation agenda has already proved itself to be dead in the water before serious talking has even begun, but will this be sufficient to stop him trying to pull the wool over our eyes in some other area? Time will tell.

Another important point was made by Michael Fabricant, one of a number of Tory MPs who has come out openly in favour of withdrawal. In an article for the Guardian (<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/oct/21/eu-outer-s-europe-without-britain>), he claimed that “angry-looking grey men” will never win an “out” campaign. Supporters of withdrawal will need to find younger, positive, articulate spokespersons who will be able to command widespread support. He has a good point. Let’s be clear – there is plenty for the electorate to be angry about. Disillusion with politicians is understandable. Frustration about immigration cannot be dismissed as “racism”. However, there are not sufficient Mr Angrys about to win the vote without support from elsewhere and there are plenty of voters who will not be won over to supporting withdrawal if it’s the Mr Angrys who are fronting the campaign.

And this leads on to the third point. Given the small size of the majority in support of withdrawal even without renegotiation, winning round the undecided – or indeed, those who support the status quo by default without really being aware of the true nature of the EU – requires a positive campaign. To quote Michael Fabricant again, any successful “out” campaign must “instil positive images of the sunlit uplands that will open to Britain as a prosperous global

trading nation free from EU directives and dogma.” Polling by the Bruges group suggests that if offered a choice between EU membership and re-joining EFTA, voters swing round to EFTA by a margin of almost four to one. Even the immigration debate can be given a positive slant. Not only would cutting (or better still, stopping) immigration from the EU help preserve our beautiful countryside, as fewer houses would need to be built, but also, research suggests that for anyone who loves freedom and peace, it is desirable to live in a society as ethnically, linguistically and culturally as homogenous as possible. There are also economic benefits of independence, as has been explained by, among others, Professors Tim Congdon and Patrick Minford. An independent Britain really has an exciting future if a successful withdrawal strategy can be devised. Obviously, the negatives cannot and must not be swept under the carpet. Many people are still unaware that the EU’s objective is to create a European superstate and continued participation in the EU project will ultimately lead to the destruction of all that gives our country its distinctive features. However, to persuade our fellow-countrymen to leave, we must both show them just how much better life could be and assure them that there is a viable escape route. CIB has put on a number of seminars recently exploring the possibility of taking the “Norway Option” – combining membership of the EEA and EFTA. It is far from ideal as a long-term relationship between an independent UK and the EU, but it deals with all the fear about job losses and at a stroke, while relieving us of having to follow the diktats of the European Court of Justice, enabling us to strike out 80% of EU legislation and saving us money – a moot point given the sudden recent demand by the EU for £1.7 billion extra dosh from the hard-pressed UK taxpayer.

The bottom line is that there will be no option in any referendum to vote for the status quo. As more member states join the Eurozone, those determined to keep their own currency will find themselves increasingly marginalised. Independence

is by far the better of the only two real alternatives on offer, but sadly, such is the powerful hold of those supporting continued UK membership of the EU on the press and parliament that it will need the right strategy to win over hearts and minds for something that is ultimately nothing more than common sense.