

# Two and a half years to save our country

The surprise result of the 2015 General Election means that the UK will be holding a referendum on its membership of the European Union in less than two and a half years' time. David Cameron's victory will now be concentrating many withdrawalist minds on how to achieve an "Out" vote in that referendum and the scale of the challenge becomes apparent when one of the tactics which propelled the Conservatives to an unexpected victory will be used to encourage our countrymen to stay within a "reformed" EU – fear.

The last-minute nature of the swing to the Tories and the widely-reported indecision on the part of many voters don't exactly point to an enthusiastic endorsement for David Cameron. Rather, the prospects of a Labour government propped up with SNP support made many waverers decide to back the devil they knew rather than the more frightening devils they did not. The bottom line, however, is that however grudgingly many voters put their crosses in the Tories' box, the scare tactics paid off.

Yesterday, in a piece in the Daily Telegraph, Ambrose Evans-Pritchard pointed out that a referendum held in 2020 or after would be more easily won by supporters of withdrawal. Had Labour won the election, the shock of defeat "would have flush(ed) out the last EU dreamers and leave a post-Cameron party with even less tolerance for the posturing of Commission chief Jean-Claude Juncker...There is a high likelihood that such a party would let it rip on euroscepticism while in opposition and then come roaring back in five years' time given that the most likely scenario would have been the replacement of David Cameron by a more eurosceptic Tory leader." This is a fair point, although his proposal of Boris Johnson for this role is distinctly unconvincing. Another

point which would have favoured 2020 for the referendum is that it gives us longer to address the disunity and disorganisation of the withdrawalist movement. We have right on our side and a far better case than supporters of our EU membership, but we are not winning the argument and time is short.

However, there is still everything to play for. We can win the battle for our country's freedom and while this is not the time for naïve optimism, there are a number of factors which could swing opinion in favour of withdrawal.

Firstly, while the Tory party held together with an impressive stage-managed unity during the campaign, with Cameron's many critics biting their tongues, this does not mean that they are any happier with his policies than they were a couple of years back when his leadership looked to be on the line. Especially given Cameron's stated intention to pass over anyone advocating withdrawal from the EU when it comes to choosing his cabinet, leaving him effectively with only the dregs of his party to choose from, the rebellious backbenchers will come roaring back with a vengeance before too long. With the Tories' majority so small, they will wield a considerable degree of power and if they can coalesce around a sensible exit strategy, such as "Flexcit", this will add some considerable weight to the "Out" campaign.

Secondly, the anti-politics mood has not gone away. The electorate may have given a clear signal about who they want (and don't want) to govern them, but this does not mean the profound disconnect so many people feel towards politics and politicians of all parties has gone away. The withdrawalist movement has so far failed to harness this sense of remoteness from the corridors of power. In particular, the individualism of the younger generation ought to make them natural opponents of something as remote and bureaucratic as the EU. Admittedly, the presence of pro-EU propaganda in schools has not helped, but winning the younger generation for the cause of

independence is not impossible if the message is packaged appropriately.

Thirdly, the EU itself, for all the money it may pour into the “in” campaign, is not going to change its ways, especially under the leadership of Jean-Claude Juncker at the European Commission. There will be plenty of events in Brussels which, if handled correctly, can re-kindle the fires of euroscepticism within the UK population. The bottom line is that we don’t fit and never will. Only fear and ignorance stand in the way of withdrawal.

Finally, and unusually for this website, a quote from the Guardian. Commenting on why the Tories’ strategy of fear was so successful, Rafael Behr wrote, “that kind of tactic only works when it plays to underlying weakness in the opposition offer.” Divided and disorganised the withdrawalist movement may be, but if we can get our act together and sell both a watertight exit strategy and a vision for a newly independent UK, there is nothing weak about the withdrawal offer. It is only natural common sense. We are only seeking to encourage our compatriots to vote for something that will be very good for them. Can we spring an even greater upset than this morning’s results in late 2017? **Yes we can.**

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