

Two years on – reflections

I am sure that none of us who campaigned for the UK to leave the EU will forget the euphoria of that moment on June 24th 2016 when the result was announced. This was the piece which I wrote for the website later that morning. It is interesting to look back on what I said at the time. It seems like another age, but I was perfectly correct in saying that “a lot will happen before we are finally and formally out of the EU”.

I certainly did not expect just what a mess the government was going to make of the Brexit negotiations, although by the time I wrote this piece a year later to mark the first anniversary of Brexit, there were already indications that it was not going to go smoothly. “What a roller coaster we have endured!” I wrote. We’re still on that roller coaster. The EU (Withdrawal) Bill may have avoided being wrecked by some amendments proposed by the House of Lords and my conviction that most MPs do not want to prevent Brexit still stands, with the caveat that some of them will only support a Brexit which they are confident will not induce a recession.

However, the EU and our government’s team are still a long way apart and the likelihood of a no-deal Brexit has increased. At the moment, this is causing few ripples in the general public, even though a number of businesses, notably Airbus and BMW are seriously concerned. Certainly where I live, one hardly hears anyone talking about Brexit. Which ever way people voted two years ago, most just want the government to get on with it. The EU has never set that many people’s pulses racing in this country and after its brief prominence two years ago during the referendum campaign, for most people, it has become once again a non-issue. The public is apparently evenly split over the wisdom of voting to leave the EU, with a slight majority thinking it was wrong (although there is no doubt that their numbers have been boosted by the government’s poor handling of the Brexit negotiations), but that does not equate to any

groundswell to revisit the result.

Of course, there are a few exceptions and with the second anniversary of the Brexit vote falling on a Saturday this year, both sides took to the streets to mark the occasion. Claims that some 100,000 people turned up to a rally in London to demand a second referendum have been challenged by some of those who were present on the day. Going back to my June 2016 piece for the website, it is interesting to note that within hours – yes HOURS! – of the referendum result being announced, a petition demanding a second referendum managed to gain 100,000 signatures. Thankfully, the government and the majority of MPs have continued to ignore these headbangers. We voted, the people made their choice and with Mrs May stating her determination to make a success of Brexit, her party knows that any backsliding on this issue would be suicidal.

But the government needs to be getting on with it and, in spite of being given far less media coverage, a pro-Brexit “Freedom March” was also held in London. Was it as well supported as the anti-Brexit rally? perhaps not, but one person who was present stated that “I found the noise so great that I couldn’t hear my mobile phone or, when I tried to use it, the voice on the other end” so there must have been a good turnout. Sadly, the same correspondent also stated that “oppressive policing was to the fore” Another correspondent wrote that there was a “good atmosphere”, adding “people want to see some action”.

Yes indeed. Furthermore, this was not the only pro-Brexit event held in London, with Leavers of London holding a picnic elsewhere in the capital. Neither will it be the last. The government must deliver what it pledged to deliver – or else.

(if you were one of the individuals who commented on my 2016 post, I’d be interested to have your thoughts two years on)

Photo courtesy of Derek Bennett