

A clear aim, a clear plan

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What is the present political situation concerning the United Kingdom's future relationship with the EU?

The Conservatives have promised that, if they have an absolute majority in 2015, they will renegotiate the basis of British membership in certain, as yet unspecified, areas but possibly including restrictions on free movement of people, benefit seeking, reining back the powers of the EU Court, and regulatory reform.

They have promised that they will hold an in-out referendum by the end of 2017, although this means there is not enough time for a Convention and an Intergovernmental Conference to assent to Treaty changes followed by the ratification processes in the member states.

Therefore, the constricted timetable, and the limited nature of the changes being sought, are unlikely to be effective in securing the electorate's approval of what will be seen to be limited and half-baked. The Conservatives' position is thus very weak, but its promise to negotiate and then have a referendum has been politically effective in delaying any decisions. Clearly the electorate sees a renegotiation, whatever the outcome, as a necessary precursor to a referendum.

Should the Conservatives win the election there will, therefore, be two alternative scenarios. Either the renegotiations will fail and the government fails to achieve its objectives or there will be agreement to some weak reforms which will not have gone through the full EU negotiating process and by the end of 2017 will be provisional.

It seems highly unlikely that even in the event of a failure in the negotiations, the present Cameron leadership would advocate exit from the EU and more likely that minor concessions will be put forward as satisfactory.

Meanwhile the Labour Party's

position is not to have a referendum unless there is a new Treaty and the EU timetable means that this would take at least three years if it takes place at all. Labour regards the EU as a distraction and would not want its administration to be overshadowed by the EU issue and a referendum. This puts it also into a weak position vis-à-vis the EU.

What about the withdrawalists? At present they point to all the problems connected with EU membership and advocate leaving the EU, and will continue to do so. However, should there be a referendum it will be absolutely necessary for the withdrawalists to outline in some considerable detail exactly what their proposal for a post-EU situation would be. The weakness of the Alex Salmond approach of simply making assertions but without detailed plans has been ruthlessly exposed in the Scottish referendum campaign.

It is not possible to campaign on the assertion that 'it will be alright on the night'. That is why withdrawalist opinion is hardening behind the Norway Option, that is, to explain to the electorate that the Single Market and EU membership are two different things. It is possible to be in the Single Market and outside the EU if Britain became a member of EFTA and the EEA. This is an existing and tested, up and working solution, ready on the shelf. There are certain problems with the EEA but these are grossly exaggerated by the Europhiles. Both Robert Oulds of the Bruges Group and Richard North of the EU referendum campaign have done magnificent work in this area in showing the real nature of the EEA.

As Dominic Cummings' report for Business for Britain remarked after focus group research: *"The Out Campaign has one essential task, to neutralise the fear that leaving may be bad for jobs and living standards"* and, further: *"If those who want to leave the EU neutralise the economic arguments, then the people will vote to*

leave as there is nothing else to support membership."

Leaving the EU but remaining in the Single Market will remove the economic arguments and also any opportunity for the big business lobby to intervene. After all, economic life will continue as before.

In the past, withdrawalists have allowed themselves to get bogged down in a lot of economic arguments with europhiles as to whether this or that EU activity was beneficial or not, and whether this or that future trade relationship was beneficial or not.

In other words, instead of a tightly focussed attack on the real objective the battlefield has been widened and hostile forces allowed to multiply.

Remaining in the Single Market drastically simplifies matters. Withdrawalists need to be very clear about their aim. **That aim is to leave the judicial and political structure of the EU.** The EEA membership would entail leaving the foreign policy of the EU, justice and home affairs, the EU Court and Commission, the CAP, the CFP, the Customs Union, regaining our seat at the WTO, massively reduced budget contributions, etc.

There is disagreement among withdrawalists about the desirable future nature of the trading relationship with the EU, which is about 40% of British export trade. While some withdrawalists may consider the EEA not the best solution, it achieves the aim and comes with all the benefits of leaving the judicial and political structures of the EU and **that is the aim**, not identifying the best trading relationship with the EU or others in the future. After all, all possible trading relationships have some drawbacks. It is a matter of degree.

So, the withdrawalists are moving to a clear aim and a clear plan.

This clarity will also undermine the two other prongs of Europhile attack in a referendum, that is other than playing on the economic fears of the electorate.

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Reading and analysing the two leaflets put out in 1975, one by the YES side and one by the government, there were two other arguments they relied on and they are still relevant.

One whole page of the YES leaflet was devoted to ridiculing the divisions on the NO side. *"Ask them what positive way ahead they propose for Britain. You will get some very confusing answers."* In the same way, attacking the plain weakness and incoherence of the YES campaign in Scotland, with all its shifting and different proposals for Scotland's future currency, has paid dividends for the NO side.

A clear united aim and a clear united plan will kill this argument.

Message discipline is essential and we do not want to hear any more of the alleged benefits of fanciful trade arrangements with the USA or the Commonwealth.

The other argument, put at length in both leaflets, was direct quotations from Commonwealth leaders and prime ministers and indirect quotations from other leaders applauding Britain's role in the then Common Market.

"The old Commonwealth wants us

to stay in. The new Commonwealth wants us to stay in."

We have also seen how President Obama, Prime Minister Abbott, the Pope and even the Chinese President, have issued statements effectively opposing Scottish independence.

These are the political counterparts of the big business assertions on the economic side and they should not be taken lightly or scornfully. Presumably the 1975 politicians, and those who commented on Scotland recently, each thought that those statements would be effective.

However, one attraction of Britain leaving the EU political structure and being a member of the EEA and the Single Market is that this change is far less dramatic. Economic and investor relationships are simply not affected. It is doubtful if any of these leaders will want to get involved in pursuing the differences between EU membership and EEA membership when their own country's economy is not affected. Any possible comment is also risky as ill-informed or incorrect comments on a complex legal and political situation would be personally damaging.

The tactic of bringing in interventions from respected outside

political leaders will, therefore, be much harder if Britain stays in the Single Market.

In a poll conducted by Survation for Robert Oulds of the Bruges Group in July 2013, 71% said they would prefer Britain to leave the EU and join EFTA/EEA.

Because of the status quo effect, any referendum for change needs a substantial lead going into the campaign.

The clear aim and clear plan provides it and will lead to victory.

It has one further advantage. With the government still likely to be in the hands of europhiles, it is a clear instruction of the electorate as to exactly what action to take - not an expression of wish which the Executive can implement in a way it wants - and narrows the possibility of a fudged implementation of the referendum result. This danger should not be under-estimated.

Needless to say, if withdrawalists can focus on the agreed clear aim and clear plan, this will exert great influence on opinion regardless of whether a referendum takes place, as voters react to a clear aim and a clear plan.

Acting like a 'dictator'

According to Jean-Claude Juncker, the new head of the European Commission that a Commission without a strong female representation would "neither be legitimate nor credible".

The UK is among a number of governments to have nominated a man for one of the top jobs in the EU's executive body.

Responding to Jean-Claude Juncker's public statement that the UK Government must nominate a woman for the European Commission, the independent Labour peer, Lord Stoddart of Swindon has accused the European Commission President of acting like "a dictator" in telling an elected government what to do.

In his statement to an Austrian newspaper, Mr Juncker said "Unfortunately, and despite my repeated requests, most of the governments insist on sending male candidates. A Commission without a significant number of women is, in my view, neither legitimate nor credible. That is why I am continuing to insist with several heads of state and government that they send me a female candidate". He made it quite clear that the UK risked losing a prominent post on the Commission, if it persisted with its nomination of Lord Hill of Oareford.

Lord Stoddart said: "This unelected President of the Commission is behaving like a dictator. He clearly

thinks it is appropriate for him to override the wishes of the democratically elected UK Government. His behaviour is unacceptable and the Prime Minister should not kowtow to this jumped up bureaucrat with delusions of grandeur. Unfortunately, Mr Juncker's attitude is all too common among EU officialdom which, in general, has contempt for democracy. The EU is not an organisation to which this country should belong and its ever increasing dominance over our affairs is lamentable".

It appears that Mr Juncker has not been in touch with No 10 directly to raise concerns about the gender of the UK's male candidate, according to a No 10.