

Brexit it Is! Cameron Resigns...

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The Vote Leave chief executive Matthew Elliot was wishing to get voters out for the cause, circulating a message that, "There is a very real chance that voters in London and Scotland will vote to keep us in the EU today despite the heartlands of the country voting to leave."

The circulated email also sported a picture from a "leafy" part of London, with queues to boot. "If you don't want people in London to force you and your family to stay in the EU please email and call all your friends and make sure they Vote Leave today!"

Chuka Umunna, Labour MP for Streatham, retorted in disgust that, "Vote Leave are ending this campaign as they began it - by seeking to divide our country not unite it, turning regions, nations and communities against one another."

As the votes neared their final tally, Elliot found himself on the right side of history, keeping company with other Leave campaigners. Almost 52 percent had decided that the Leave campaign had made their case, while the Remain case limped in at 48.1 percent.

UK Independence Party leader Nigel Farage was truly chipper, calling the referendum result, after expressing initial doubts, an assertion of independence. June 23, he confidently claimed, would "go down in our history as our independence day." [1]

The entire Remain campaign was deservedly routed. From the 2013, Prime Minister David Cameron was caught by the populist surge both within his conservative party, and the pressure from UKIP to press for a renegotiation with the EU.

Having marketed himself as John Bull saving Britain from the clutches of continental bureaucracy, he looked out of sorts attempting to argue for a Remain campaign he only ever seemed half-hearted about. Such untidy minds constitute true punishment indeed.

That has been the nature of the entire debate from the start, with strong resonances from the continent about where the European Union fits in the debate. The EU is a spouse with visible defects that has resulted in a vote of divorce. Umunna's point, along with those of the Remain campaign, was never well made, if, indeed, it was made at all.

When prosperity, wealth and peace might have been framed as both arguments and aspirations, the Remain team decided that mocking critics as bumpkins, village hicks and extremists was the way to go.

A sour taster of this came in the broader, nigh hysterical response to Keith Adams and his expressive pro-leave, near blind "93 year old mum". Adams, on making a post of his mother's intentions, was trolled with some rigour, with various accusations about being a liar, a "right wing racist brexiteer" and a fabricator. ("It can't have happened because blind people vote using Braille.") [2]

Umunna's own Labour party came across as cool and indifferent to traditional blue collar constituents, with Jeremy Corbyn himself a long time sceptic of much of the EU program. Within its ranks, a populist reassessment has been demanded, taking into account traditional areas which the party has left behind.

While London, Scotland and Northern Ireland fronted up with numbers for Remain, the English shires and Wales went for Brexit. Traditional labour bastions such as Sunderland gave the Leave campaign a 22 percent margin of victory. Newcastle scraped in with Remain with a mere one percentage point.

All in all, this vote saw a return to the politics of anger and estrangement. It revealed two classes, "staring at each other across a political chasm."^[3] It is the message that Podemos is capitalising upon in Spain. Ditto that of those on the Right, such as Geer Wilders in the Netherlands.

Not all have the same view on how best to tackle the EU conundrum. Genuine concerns about centralised governance and intrusion have been muddled with a terror about refugees, immigrants and life style choices. A distinct spinelessness from Europe's leaders on this point has not helped. Gone are the broader discussions about accountability and liberty.

A perfect illustration as to how problematic any challenge to the way the Union is governed came in the market chatter. It resembled all too closely the language of the portfolio prospectus, with its monthly updates on shocks and instabilities, rather than political questions of sovereignty. Forget discussions about reform, or the application of Article 50 of the Treaty of the European Union. Such commentary was far more interested in the wounds that a democratic experiment had inflicted.

The Economist and *Wall Street Journal* noted with alarm how the pound had fallen to its lowest level relative to the US dollar since 1985. Futures and the S&P 500 fell by five percent. Stock markets in Asia were given a drubbing. All of this seemed academic as polls closed, with a sense that the Remain campaign would edge out the Brexiteers by a few good points. The position was totally reversed.

While there was much mythmaking and manufacture in the grounds for the Leave campaign, the sentiment was sensible enough. Not all should be dismissed as raw nativism and autarchic romance. Those on wanting Britain to stay did just that.

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Notes

[1] <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-eu-referendum-36613238>

[2] <https://justablogwordpress.wordpress.com/2016/06/23/trolled/>

[3] <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/jun/23/united-kingdom-two-nations-political-chasm-left>

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