

Campaigning: thoughts, concerns and ideas from EM Portsmouth and Chichester.

The primary objective

While we understand the sometimes need for political nuance, our members and supporters must be clear on the objective of our campaigning. We understand that Stephens's position is to stop Brexit. Open Britain has always been more for a soft Brexit leading Lord Malloch Brown to recently send a letter to those that had signed-up to Best of Britain stating that his organisation could not co-campaign with any group that was not for stopping Brexit. On 12th February, in a Q&A conference call with Chuka Umunna in his capacity as leader of the Grassroots Co-ordinating Committee, 70 branch chairs and other activists understood him to say that our goal was get a majority in Parliament for a vote on the final deal and that this would be the route to stopping Brexit.

To add to the confusion, EM HQ then published the new Community Survey the preamble for which says that "the information collected will be used to help us run campaigns to get the best deal for Britain". This is not what any of us thought we were about.

The Survey and the Leaflet

I joined a conference call on 27th February for a 'walk thru' of the new survey form, revised from the original used by Open Britain in Bury St Edmunds. I sent it to several of my most active members including three with experience in using surveys, data analysis and market research. The feedback was not positive. On 15th March, following the its general release, an activist put up a post on the recently created EM Branch Activists Facebook page asking what we all thought of the new survey. The general opinion seems to be that it is unusable. It is too long, too complicated, not asking the right questions and difficult to analyse. It is unloved. Surveys are great tools for engaging with the public in the street, but 'experts' tell us that any would-be designer of a survey form must first ask what is the question for which I am seeking an answer.

At the same time as the release of the survey, the new leaflet on the peace theme quoting Churchill was made available for purchase. This is very noble and a good point worth making more of, but neither it nor the persistent repetition of the Brexit impact on the NHS are likely to change the minds of 'soft' leavers.

The Brexit: Is it worth it Bus Tour

You are undoubtedly aware of this crowd funded event that toured the country between 21st and 28th February. It was controversial, partly because the bus was red like the original 350 mio for the NHS bus, and partly because it quoted the £2 bio a week cost figure. Although this was supposed to have come from leaked government papers (based on a new FTA with the EU having a 5% impact on GDP), people are still suspicious of such figures, even with a 'credible' explanation behind them. However, overall the event was a success. We hosted the bus in both Portsmouth and Chichester and had photos and articles published in our local papers. The "Is it worth it?" slogan attracted considerable attention, demonstrating a potential to make people think again if underpinned with carefully constructed messages.

Nick Hopkinson's Initiative

Nick Hopkinson has now become involved in branch concerns about campaigning and has put a post on the EM Activists Facebook page which begins as follows:

Over the years, there have been repeated complaints about the quality of centrally generated leaflets and briefings, often resulting in branches producing their own materials. As some may know, I am forming a group which hopes to produce a series of 12 or so briefing sheets for campaigners and associated leaflets. The group will then work with branches, HQ and design professionals to ensure we are all happy with the finished product. The challenge we all face is boiling down complex EU facts and issues into a format which is digestible and readily understood by our campaigners and the wider public.

I and others think this is a good initiative. It recognises that resources in EMHQ are limited and need supplementing. Furthermore, the members and supporters in the branches, the 'foot soldiers', do have ideas about what they think works and doesn't work when out on the streets and so should have some direct influence over what resources are expended on what materials. The next step should be to identify a simple process for reviewing and editing submissions, which lead to a decision about what should be professionalised and printed. James and Hugo at EMHQ and their counterparts in the other Millbank organisations should be involved in this process.

Campaigning ideas

- 1. Expose the falsities and misrepresentations of the 'Take back control' mantra:** Back in Mid-February, Richard Corbett posted a blog article entitled 'Losing control of our money, borders, laws and trade' in which he succinctly demolished much of what had been claimed by the leave campaign. I have volunteered to Nick that I will have a go at writing up three 2-sided A4 briefing papers on money, borders and laws together with design and content for accompanying leaflets. Directly after Theresa May's speech on 2nd March I posted the following on Facebook:

Noticeable that the PM started off by repeating the need to respect the referendum result i.e. to take back control of money, borders and laws. But then the rest of it seemed to be that we will duplicate, replicate, reciprocate, re-negotiate everything we have today in order to take back control of sovereignty which we never really lost, money which represents less than 0.5 % of GDP and borders which we could have controlled with registration of EU arrivals and application of the three-month rule.

- 2. Identify the broken promises:** It is probably futile going back to what Vote Leave or Leave.EU told the public prior to the referendum. However, what we know now could be set against what was said in the February 2017 White Paper that preceded the Lancaster House speech and in the 2017 Conservative Election Manifesto. What was promised versus emerging realities can almost certainly be applied to money, laws, immigration, trade agreements, fisheries, agriculture and more over the next months. Which leads to

- 3. Costs versus Benefits:** Stephen summarises the issues quite succinctly in his message following the PM's 2nd May speech

What is the problem to which Brexit is the solution? Why will Britain be better off if we do accept all the "hard facts" she says are unavoidable? The Prime Minister says we must accept the "hard fact" that we shall have less access to continental markets than we have now. We must accept the "hard fact" of a border in Ireland. We must accept the "hard fact" that we shall have to continue to pay into the EU budget. We must accept the "hard fact" that European law will continue to apply to many areas of national life. The costs are clear What is the benefit?

We should be able to construct a form of Brexit balance sheet i.e. the assets (the benefits of EU membership) versus the liabilities (the obligations in the form of the control we give up as the price of membership). A profit and loss account format would show that the perceived benefits of leaving, the so-called Brexit dividend, are few when compared with the tangible benefits of staying in. Whichever way this is presented, we must point out the concessions and compromises that will be made; need for continuing immigration, jurisdiction of the ECJ in some areas, cooperation on crime and security etc.

- 4. Emerging realities:** That is to say incorporating into our campaigning new realities which support the pro-EU / anti-Brexit arguments. These could be new positives for the EU such as the anti-tax avoidance directive, impending new trade deals such as with the South American Mercosur group, or new negatives for Brexit such as diversion of new investment from the UK to the EU, loss of business and jobs to the EU. These new realities could be publicised stand-alone or incorporated into any of the other ideas above.
- 5. The slogan "Brexit: Is it worth",** the theme of the Brexit bus tour, can be applied to all of the above. It may have been a coincidence, but this slogan has gained greater traction since the Handelsblatt journalist Kerstin Leitel asked Mrs May after her 2nd March speech "is it all worth it". The answer given was that (paraphrase) "if this is a roundabout way of asking if the government will reverse Brexit the answer is no. We have to deliver on the referendum instruction of the people".

This slogan is proving to be popular amongst my branch members and supporters and it has been suggested that a time will come in the Autumn when the slogan can be modified to "Brexit? no, it is not worth it".

Simple rules:

- Avoid generating a Project fear mark II.
- Resist telling or even implying that leavers were/are wrong. They have been misled, mis-sold.
- Present irrefutable realities unassumingly but confidently.
- Achieve some balance between presenting both facts and feelings (emotions) as the latter play to both remainers and leavers alike.

Challenging MPs (Parliament)

There has been considerable debate about how to go about this; choice of topics, timing, understanding the position of one's own MP e.g. which party, remainder or leaver, ERG member, minister, PPS, potential rebel. Broad exhortations from HQ to write to our MP on this or that have a mixed reception. There needs to be greater thought and guidance about what will engage meaningful attention rather than merely soliciting a stock party-line response. As was done with Amendment 7 back in December, a target list of potential rebels should be identified, maintained and monitored. What might we be asking them to do as events continue to unfold?

The names Anna Soubry and Chuka Umunna are frequently mentioned. One thought is the possibility of persuading Chuka to be the active bridge between the co-located groups at Millbank and Parliament. This might determine whether his position as leader of the Grassroots Coordinating Group (GCG) has substance into which we can tap. He does of course have to reconcile this with his own position in the Labour party.

A few other thoughts

- How quickly will the Cambridge Analytics / Trump election scandal transfer itself to exposing possible interference with the EU referendum campaign and what could be gained in support of our anti-Brexit endeavours?
- Should we expend effort in trying to 'deglorify' the pre-EEC/EU sentiments of many older leave voters; 'We were alright before, we had the world's greatest empire, we won the war (yes even that), we have the Commonwealth etc'. This is a difficult argument because it may involve some harsh lessons about Britain's post-war economic and social history, probably up until 1976 when the country had to abandon Keynesian economics and go cap-in-hand to the IMF. Best avoided?
- How can we do a better job of engaging younger voters particularly students. Experience at both Portsmouth and Chichester Universities suggests that whilst most are inclined to remain, they are reluctant to become actively engaged.
- Should we play on the cost of Brexit in terms of all the extra civil servants that have been recruited just to cope with the UK's exit from the EU; this coupled with the amount of parliamentary time being taken up and so distracting from other urgent non-Brexit issues concerning the NHS, social care, schools and more.

In conclusion

Nick's idea is that we work to get briefing papers and leaflets together by end of April ready to capitalise on what is likely to be a poor showing for the government at the local elections on 3rd May. Whether we can achieve this or not remains to be seen. But it is clear that the time has now come to openly promote what the EU does for us and what the benefits are set against the myths of taking back control and all of the other costs of Brexit. While the facts and arguments are sound, the challenge is to find the way into the hearts and minds of the soft leavers. We have no immediate answers to that.

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