

People' Vote Meeting and Q&A at the Houses of Parliament 5th June 2018

A number of European Movement branch chairs and Open Britain group leaders were invited to the Houses of Parliament on 5th June for a People's Vote Question and Answer session with Tom Brake, Lib Dem MP for Carshalton and Wallington, Caroline Lucas, Green Party MP for Brighton Pavilion and Chuka Umunna, Labour MP for Streatham.

I have tried to capture the main points from the answers given. You may agree or disagree with what the three MPs said, but without pinpointing who said what, here they are. (It is safe to say that all three were more or less of one voice):

- There is little hard evidence of a significance shift of leave to remain although there does appear to be a substantial majority in favour of a people' vote.
- There is considerable anger from the other side of the house and in the Lords about the paltry 12 hours scheduled for the debate on the Lords amendments to the Withdrawal Bill. The debate is scheduled to start in the Commons at 12.30 pm on Tuesday 12th June and is likely to go on into the early hours.
- Don't stop the current campaigning for a people's vote, but when the motion comes before the house in October on the Withdrawal agreement, the transition agreement and the the future relationship with the EU (Lords Amendment 49), be prepared to significantly increase the pressure for a people's vote to take place before 29th March 2018.
- The EU may allow an extension to the two year A50 period if this facilitates the holding of a people's vote. For this to happen it is important that Lords Amendment 95 is upheld next Tuesday. This amendment will prevent the date and time of leaving the EU (11 pm, 29/03/19) from being enshrined in the Withdrawal Bill.
- The EU are unlikely to allow an extension just because cabinet members are still squabbling amongst themselves over such things as the Customs Union.
- Anything put to Parliament in October about the future relationship with the EU is likely to be little more than we already know. The 'real' final deal is 5, 6, 7 years away. The Prime Minister will resist amendment 95 and continue to fudge just to get across the 29th March finishing line with a promise that the detail will all be sorted out in the transition period.
- Of the other Lords amendments, No 1, a Customs Union, and No 110A which would force the government to make remaining in the EEA a negotiating objective, are significant. The latter is not supported by the Labour front bench. At the time of the meeting Labour were coming up with their own counter proposal.
- From the opposition benches you can see it in the eyes of the brexiterers that they have "been found out". The government is hiding behind the "will of the British people". Brexiterers are terrified of the idea of a people's vote.
- A cross-party and/or cross-organisational platform is needed to win a people's vote. This needs to focus on the benefits of EU membership at the macro level (a positive argument) while being more targeted (regions, public and private sectors etc) when it comes to the losses and costs (a negative argument).
- This must all add up to an irresistible 'offer' to be made to those who voted leave two years ago. Another 'offer' that is better than what the government is offering.

In spite of what is said in para 2 at the top of this page, I am bound to mention a couple of comments made by Chuka:

- As a Labour MP his priority is not to please the leader but to ensure that his party does what is right for the country.
- Jeremy Corbyn holds the key to unlocking the Brexit mess. He cannot fulfil his own election manifesto pledges if he maintains what is construed as a pro-Brexit stance.
- He (Chuka) is not campaigning against Brexit simply to maintain the status quo. He is campaigning for the UK to remain, reform and change.

Lastly, a question was asked about what the question would be on the ballot paper for a people's vote. One answer to this was along the lines of "do you agree with, approve of, accept the 'deal' (as per the withdrawal and transition agreements and the proposal for the UK's future relationship with the EU) or do you wish to remain in the EU?"

Summing up, Caroline Lucas (the last of the three to leave) made the point that whatever happened it would not go down well for Parliament alone to decide to stop Brexit and so a People's Vote would be the best way forward. This is consistent within the conclusion given by Brendan Donnelly when he spoke to the branch meeting at the University of Portsmouth on 23rd May ... except Brendan used the R word (referendum).

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