

Political Thinking Meeting Report No 25

Chiltern U3A 'Political Thinking'

Meeting No 25 Monday 17th September 2018

Topic What would be a good Brexit?

The discussion focussed on published material submitted by members which identified characteristics described a "Good Brexit."

In the discussion it was noted that all possible outcomes were described by their proponents as a "Good Brexit."

Thus leaving without any deal at all was considered by one commentator reported to the group to be a "Good Brexit." Not leaving and remaining a member of the EU on current terms ie no change was also considered to be a good result by a different commentator.

Curiously - or perhaps not - there was no report of a commentator who considered the so called Chequers proposals to be a "good" Brexit. All commentators appeared to consider this to be a "bad" Brexit, or at least not a good one. The main criticisms were that it did not reflect the will of the people on the one side; and on the other that the EU would not countenance a border that was not a border, ie the Irish.

Other commentators described various degrees of affiliation to the EU as "good" in some sense that they defined more or mostly less precisely.

Some eg CBI defined the maintenance of current trading relationships as "good." Others considered that enacting the will of the people was "good." Whatever the consequences.

Thus there appeared to be very little commonality in the criteria used to define what was meant by "good" in the phrase.

Our group discussion followed a similar pattern.

Those in favour of Brexit considered that leaving the EU was worth it whatever the cost.

Several years of pain would be followed by some benefit and eventual gain, and even if the gain did not eventually outweigh the pain it was still worth it was the view. But what the mechanisms or driving forces were for the gain were was not disclosed. The gains were considered to follow

eventually and inevitably from “taking back control”, “regaining sovereignty” and the like. The notion that independence, autonomy, sovereignty and similar in respect of nations might be concepts that did not fit well into the modern world was not explored.

Historical references to Britain “standing alone” in respect of WWII were cited in support of Brexit, contrasted with behaviour of some European countries. The argument seemed to be that these countries were somehow unsuitable associates for a 21st century Britain.

Those against Brexit cited the technical reports of experts of unfavourable economic consequences.

In commerce, in science, in technology, in arts, in all fields of human endeavour, contact, exchange, collaboration, cooperation were valued as the means to advancement and progress. These are not merely economic considerations, important as these are, but are the signs of a well developed civilised society. Withdrawing from our nearest neighbours as Brexit implies flies in the face of these values.

Several members reported the views of their contacts in the younger generation who very considerably seemed to consider Brexit to limit their personal opportunities, both in career possibilities and cultural and social opportunities.

Though there was dialogue between those with opposing points of view, there was no understanding. Neither side could comprehend the other.

There was a general view that negotiations had not been well conducted by the Government. But no agreement as to what the failings were, other than failing. Both sides of the argument were displeased with how the negotiation has been handled. Presumably on the basis that the agreement anticipated and desired had not been reached.

Perhaps our group is representative of modern Britain. Our group was divided about evenly with irreconcilable views, as is Britain.