

Another sneak peek at Brexit book ‘Will the Tory Party Ever Be the Same?: The Effect of Brexit’

The fourth book in our Bite-Size book series ‘Will the Tory Party Ever Be the Same?: The Effect of Brexit’ has now been published and is available for you to enjoy! We’re celebrating by giving you a sneak peek at a selection of writing from many of the book’s contributors.

‘Will the Tory Party Ever Be the Same?: The Effect of Brexit’, edited by John Mair, Paul Davies and Neil Fowler, provides insights and different perspectives on a really important political question. The UK is in turmoil; Parliament in chaos and the Tories left facing several directions at the same time. Will they survive?

The book boasts a wide variety of contributors, including Sir John Redwood, Damian Green and Lord Heseltine, as well as historian Richard Gaunt and distinguished commentators, including Peter Hitchens, Matthew D’Ancona, Eben Black and Liz Gerard.

Check out the other sneak peeks [here](#) and [here](#).

Your sneak peek of Sir John Redwood MP’s chapter...

The misery of our long-running row is likely to continue

European policy has overshadowed John Redwood’s life in the Conservative Party. He would like a change but isn’t sure that will happen

My adult life in the Conservative Party has been lived with the long shadow of European Union policy hanging over us.

In the 1970s the Conservative Party was strongly in favour of the Common Market (the EEC) as it then called it. I remember as a young man casting one of my first votes in the 1975 Referendum on whether to stay in. I read the Treaty of Rome which was about so much more than a common market. I decided I was being lied to by those who said it was just a common market with no transfer of

sovereignty or loss of the rights of self-government and voted against remaining in the EEC.

During the Thatcher years the EEC evolved towards the comprehensive economic, political and monetary union we know today. As it did so I and others persuaded the Prime Minister that she needed to shift from being a keen advocate of the Common Market to being a sceptic about the wisdom and desirability of monetary and political union for the UK.

This culminated in her Bruges speech and her clear conversion to opposing the single currency and other integration that would follow. Out of office she converted to believing we needed to leave the EU altogether, as it had become something she could no longer support.

In the 1990s the government of John Major was destroyed by his decision to put the UK economy through the torture of the European Exchange Rate Mechanism (the ERM). The adoption of this European policy gave us boom and bust. It undermined the Conservative's hard-won reputation for good economic management and left voters disillusioned by the loss of jobs and the economic damage done to them.

The story line was written by the incoming Labour government, which attributed Conservative unpopularity to the splits in the party over the ERM and over the Maastricht Treaty for monetary union. The polls show a different story. It was the economic damage of the ERM that turned most of the voters off, with a pronounced collapse in support when we were forced out of the mechanism, support which was never recovered.

The public understood the Government had backed a major EU economic policy which had gone horribly wrong, and wished to punish those who had made such a bad misjudgement. The ERM experience forced the Government to lie, with endless statements that the ERM was working and we would never leave it.

The markets knew better and forced us out before more damage was done.

When the Government had to swallow all its words of the ERM era it suffered a breakdown in trust in anything it said. Nicholas Ridley and I were lone voices in government against the ERM fiasco, though I forecast what was likely to happen accurately. Just before joining that ill-fated government I had written a pamphlet explaining how the ERM would lead to boom and bust.

In opposition the Conservatives had a big internal party battle over our attitude towards the Euro. John Major fought to keep open the option of the UK joining before he left office. A succession of leaders in opposition, struggling to regain the Conservative reputation for economic competence, allied with the big majority of the party who were against sacrificing the pound.

I and others made the case that the Euro was the ERM you could not get out of. The Euro, like the ERM, was bound to cause boom and bust, as it duly did for Ireland, Spain, Cyprus and other members.

We pointed out the Euro was always very unpopular with UK voters, who intuitively understood that those who control the money control the management. Leaders found it was possible to unite most MPs and party members around opposition to the Euro and opposition to a succession of centralising EU treaties.

The party voted against acceptance of the Treaties of Nice, Amsterdam and Lisbon. The Labour government sought to mislead the public by claiming these treaties were technical tidying up exercises of little significance. They were instead major transfers of power from the UK and the other member states to the EU. They removed many a veto over particular policies and laws, allowing the EU to emerge as a principal legislator and effective government in many areas of life.

We demonstrated that the party could come together with few dissenters around a platform of opposing more transfers of power to a power-hungry Brussels.

Tories back in power

In 2010 the Conservatives were finally returned to office. The collapse of the economy and damage done to the banking system in 2007-9

was considerably worse than the damage done by the ERM, with a deeper recession. This undermined support for the Labour government that presided over it and gave the Conservatives a chance again.

The problem of Europe however still loomed large. Although by this time there was clear cross-party support for not joining the Euro, the incoming Conservative government found many of its powers had been given away to the EU in treaties we had opposed in opposition.

For many Conservative MPs and party members this was an unacceptable position. Our Parliamentary system rests on the principle that one Parliament cannot bind a future Parliament. A newly-elected government should be able to change some of the laws and policies of its predecessor, because the public has voted them in to change things. In all too many areas this was no longer possible, as the overarching treaties and the cat's cradle of regulations, directives and controls from the EU greatly circumscribed the government's actions.

The Prime Minister was relaxed about the extent of EU control, and tried to tell his party that unfortunately the Treaty of Lisbon had been implemented before he arrived so we could not roll it back.

Many MPs and party members urged him to offer a referendum on whether we should stay in the EU at all, as it was clear to both sides in the argument that the only way the UK could be freed of the Lisbon Treaty was to leave the EU itself.

The argument continued within the parliamentary party until Mr Cameron conceded a referendum promise for the next Conservative manifesto and election campaign. He made this offer at the point where disillusion with his leadership had reached high levels within the parliamentary party.

Eurosceptics demonstrated their growing strength by voting against the government on European matters in large numbers. As the group approached support from half the party the Prime Minister understood the arithmetic and made the concession. He saw off a possible no confidence vote in himself as leader.

Ukip claimed the credit, but my view is the pressure that mattered came from Conservative MPs determined to have a leader who offered a referendum. We also thought it would be popular with the public and would help the Conservatives win an overall majority. The presence of Liberal Democrats in coalition between 2010 and 2015 ensured a more pro-EU stance to government than most Conservatives wanted.

In 2015 the Conservatives won the election, as I and other Eurosceptics thought given the promise of the Referendum. A rather surprised leadership of the party had been preparing for another coalition government, with the Lib Dems exercising a veto over the Referendum plan.

Mr Cameron rightly understood he had to honour this central eye-catching pledge, and undertook the Referendum legislation in good time near the start of the Parliament.

He realised that he would have more chance of winning the vote if he had carried out a successful renegotiation of the UK position. He toured the capitals of the EU member states to see what they would offer to help the UK. He was told they would offer very little. He made very modest requests for improvement, centred around more control of our own benefits system for payments to migrants. He failed to deliver on the issues he had identified and seemed shocked by the very negative response to his 'deal' among Conservative MPs on his return from Brussels.

He and his Chancellor and political adviser George Osborne still assumed Remain would win despite the reversal they suffered in the negotiations with the EU. They refused to countenance any government planning for a Leave win. The Government decided to be very partisan in the Referendum, and helped create the tone of the Remain campaign.

A negative battle

It was remorselessly negative, based around a series of threats and pessimistic forecasts of what would happen if we dared to leave. There was little about why the EU was a good thing, and little about what gains we could make in future from membership. There was a

complete denial about political and monetary union. They wished to present the EU as if it were still a grand common market, as if the relentless pressure towards full monetary and political union did not exist.

When they lost the Referendum both the Prime Minister and the Chancellor, who had been such prominent Remain figures, resigned. Mr Cameron broke his promise to send the letter notifying the EU of our intention to depart the day after the vote, beginning an agonising process of delays to the proper pursuit of our exit which came to characterise the next two years and nine months.

The party wanted to elect a Leave supporting MP, but the leadership election failed to produce two candidates for the party in the country to choose between. The parliamentary party chose Mrs May who had been a Remain supporter. A tension grew between the party in the country with very strong support for Leave, and the parliamentary party with a majority of Remain voters. A small number of these Remain MPs did not accept the result of the Referendum and set about using every parliamentary technique to try to delay, water down or even stop Brexit. Three of them eventually left the party to join the new Independent Group of former Labour MPs who also wanted to cancel Brexit.

As I write this I cannot tell what the end will be. If Mrs May succeeds in taking us out, without signing the Withdrawal Agreement, the party in the country will be happy and the Conservatives are likely to go up in the polls. If Mrs May ends up delaying Brexit and extending the long arguments over what kind of Brexit and what kind of close future partnership with the EU we should buy, the misery of the European rows will continue.

[Will the Tory Party Ever Be the Same?: The Effect of Brexit is available NOW in Paperback and Digitally on Amazon here.](#)

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