

# Once more, but with feeling

**By Dr Jacob Salder, Alliance Manchester Business School**

I am resigning from Brexit.

Following the epic rollercoaster of the past five years was certainly an experience. But the time has come to move on from this issue and focus on other more productive matters. Or, at least ones with an odds-on chance of civil discussion.

In truth, I'm sick of it. Sick of the unquestioning fealty wielded by those who wanted it, with their cries of dissenting voices being unpatriotic and anti-democratic. Sick of the opponents, wasting endless hours expressing moral outrage at the charlatans running the campaign, and now the show, whilst seemingly doing bugger all to address it, aside expressing moral outrage. And sick of the experts, repeating their concerns and issues now come to fruition *ad infinitum* as if in some Sisyphean condemnation.

And I'm resigning because it's not over. How could it be? The deed is done, the exit won, but the war will be waged eternal. It will be waged through flag-waving and sabre-rattling as every perceived transgression of the EU will be the political St Peter of electoral battles from here on in. The Conservatives will forever wring its dregs come future campaigns whereby their inadequacy and litany of failures is glossed over as they rest on the laurels of delivering Brexit. And I would imagine this will work for them. At least until the uber-patriotic trench-appropriators, the bastion of the victim class still fighting a war in which they never actually served, are dead and gone. So, at least a generation.

I watched the recent CBS event on the now almost certain break-up of the Union. In particular, it was of interest to hear from Mike Danson on the effort and progress made by the Independent Scotland campaign, creating a stronger sense of national identity through asking the question "what sort of country do we want to be?".

I truly hope Scotland gets the chance to vote for independence again, and this time takes it. Not because it will throw a flying 'V' at the true

establishment, that of Johnson and Farage and their lackadaisical, insouciant contempt. But because it's clear the values of Scotland are not fully represented in the values of the UK. And it seems only fitting in these days of 'taking back control' that this identity should be allowed room for expression.

Whilst I have loved attending, even on occasion being involved in CBS events, this one left me in a certain malaise. Not because of the erudite and excellent speakers, but because five years after the referendum, we seem to still be asking the question "why?". We've focused on economic issues and the 'left behind', looked in more detail at immigration (always a red herring), and even considered the role of big tech and its manipulation in the campaign.

What none of this considers is that ahead of the Scottish Independence movement asking their question, a similar movement had been well under way in England.

Back before the referendum, I shared an office with three colleagues, all pro-European. Each was unconcerned about the vote. They felt a Remain win was almost guaranteed, that people in the end would use their logic, common sense would prevail, and the uncertainty of leaving would be considered too great a risk.

I on the other was more circumspect, and fully expected a Leave win; I was if anything surprised by how narrow it was. There were three principal reasons why I had expected the vote to go the way it did, and none had anything to do with big red buses with spurious slogans.

First, the campaign to leave the EU didn't start on the call of the referendum. It began the moment John Major signed the Maastricht Treaty in 1992. In the intervening years, the mainstream right-wing press – which is the majority of it in the UK – led an unceasing campaign against the EU.

Second, this campaign was generally well received due to our dislike of Europe. This is something you can only understand if you've been educated in England. Our history lessons are full of us standing firm against the threat of European invaders and conquests. Despite the countless acquiescence to these influences – from successive

colonisations during the Dark Ages to the ultimate humiliation of the Saxe-Coburg and Gotha Royal Family – we have a selective memory here. Hey, Two World Wars and one World Cup...

Finally, whilst all this went on, what did the EU or its advocate actually do to change this mindset? Pretty much nothing. This made it easy for people to claim they were demanding straight bananas or paying our firms to relocate to Poland. Even now the conversations are too often focused on fringe benefits; loss of Erasmus for students, touring rights for performers, obliging markets for minor exports like Mussels.

As I've reconciled myself with the realities of Brexit, I still find it hard to stomach. It's taken a while to put my finger on why exactly, but in the end it came down to one thing. Freedom of movement. And our ultimate loss of it.

Freedom of movement is something people in positions of privilege can be blasé about. That's those who have the benefit of dual nationality allowing them to maintain all the privileges of being in the EU whilst enjoying their control and sovereignty (I'm looking at you, Giesla Stuart...). Those wealthy enough to purchase access under golden passport schemes. Even those- like myself – in a position where high-level qualifications and professional specialism usually fast track access (not without bureaucracy and cost).

For many however, this represents a hugely regressive step. And this of course will be the enduring legacy of Brexit. Not that we have been robbed of being 'European', whatever that means. Not that we have become the first nation in modern, if not living history, to force sanctions upon its own businesses and economy. It will be that our ability to live, to work, to freely pursue opportunity in the majority of European countries has been robbed of us.

And not robbed by some cruel external force seeking to subjugate us, but by our own Government so willingly cheered on by our fellow countryfolk.

Add to that the shock to the political establishment is such, that as things stand there is no major political party in England willing to commit to winning back this right.

This is at best callous electioneering (Labour and Lib Dems), at worst petty vindictiveness (Conservatives). And to add insult to injury, not one Brexit voter cares to empathise with this tangible and legitimate loss of freedoms and rights. Not one can present a clear package of benefits which provide an adequate compensation.

Political unions, single markets, customs unions are progressive concepts, and I can't see a benefit in being on the outside. But if we are, I can understand and accept life going on and new methods and systems evolving to compensate. Some may even be innovative and lead to lasting benefits and improved outcomes for England's 'left behind'. I doubt it, but it's not outside the realms of possibility.

But to wilfully remove people's freedom of movement, and access to opportunity across Europe is unjustifiable. It's a transgression which should never be overlooked. And one I will never forgive nor forget.