

Brexit Means Brexit – Accept when it doesn't?

By Jessica Guy

A packed lecture theatre on a sunny October afternoon in Birmingham was the setting for today's Brexit Means Brexit Conservative Party Fringe event by the Bruges Group, a collective who take their name from Margaret Thatcher's famous Bruges speech nearly thirty years ago (1).

Having been invited to attend by a representative of the group, I had mixed feelings about what lay in store. On the one hand I was pleased to engage with the Leave side of the argument, on the other I was slightly nervous about walking into this setting as an employee of institution which like most other universities, benefits significantly from the European Union. This concern was heightened by some of the jibes from the crowd, including one gentleman behind me, who expressed his opinion that he would riot if Brexit was not carried out to the letter.

The panel was made up of well-known MPs within the Conservative Party, including Priti Patel, Owen Paterson and Andrea Jenkyns. These figures were clear in their aims to the wildly enthusiastic crowd, hungry in their need to hear that Brexit does indeed mean Brexit and that they will do everything in their power to ensure it is carried out. The people had spoken, they had raised their voices when they voted in the referendum of June 2016. A 'People's Vote' now would be a huge insult to the democracy of which this country is built on. The sentiment was very much about taking back control and honouring the result of the Brexit vote.

Now, I must profess that on some points, I do actually agree. The idea of a People's Vote to me personally is problematic. If such a vote were to be held, I'd want to know that the question would be different, that it might be about which deal we take (entirely fanciful on my part, as I think we're edging ever further to a 'no deal' Brexit by the day). What I wouldn't want to see is a repeat of the exact same vote. To me, much like the feeling of the Bruges Group, you cannot

keep having new referendums just because it's not the outcome that was hoped for by David Cameron.

The most worrying part for me, was the clear acceptance of 'no deal' in many ways, being the best outcome. I believe there will be positives from leaving the EU because we've got to find them in order to survive, I do not however believe that 'no deal' is the best outcome. Whether leave or remain, more or less everyone I've met can agree that the UK Government is making a spectacular mess of this process. From this point came the need to remove Theresa May as Prime Minister. Again, I can understand this because of the progress (or rather lack of progress) in negotiations and the recent crash of the Chequers Plan. What I can't understand is, if these three MPs believe Theresa May is completely the wrong person for the job (as was reiterated several times), why they haven't done something about it? The Conservative Party is after all their party or are they going to state this 'red tape' we hear so much about as the reason they haven't done anything? And who is the alternative? Does anyone really want a government headed up by Boris Johnson? (2).

I enjoyed hearing different perspectives on the impact of Brexit. Everyone does, after all, have their right to an opinion, but I did feel that the atmosphere somewhat blurred parts of the message. That isn't to say however, that there aren't potentially similar expressions from Remainers (John Crace of The Guardian, please don't resort to childish snubs to try and convey your contempt. Thanks) (3).

NB: This blog is written in a personal capacity and the views expressed are not those of the Centre for Brexit Studies or Birmingham City University.

End Notes

- The Bruges Group, [Online], London, (2018), viewed on: 2nd October 2018, available at: <https://www.brugesgroup.com/about/the-bruges-group>
- Watts, Jo, (2018) 'More Britons prefer Theresa May as prime minister than Boris Johnson, new poll finds', *The Independent*, 10th September 2018. Available at: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/boris->

[johnson-prime-minister-theresa-may-poll-leadership-bid-a8531071.html](https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2018/oct/01/johnson-prime-minister-theresa-may-poll-leadership-bid-a8531071)

- Crace, J (2018) 'Conference or crack den? Tories fight over what's left of their stash', *The Guardian*, 1st October 2018. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2018/oct/01/conference-or-crack-den-tories-john-crace>