

## Brexiteers: driving us to hell in a handcart on the bas...

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I got a note from someone who I have known for a long time yesterday. He was writing in response to [my suggestion](#), also made yesterday, that the political crisis that we face as a result of Brexit is gargantuan. Since I am bound to reply, I will share my thoughts here, simply anonymising the identity of the commentator in this occasion. This is what he wrote:

*Dear Richard*

*I'm not sure I agree with you on Brexit.*

*I think Theresa May is making a better fist of Brexit than any other politician serving this realm could do. She is hated by the Press, who go around like a wolf pack, all thinking the same stuff, as usual, about the westminster reality, if reality it is. I'm fed up with the slavering anti-ness of her deriders. They're beginning to look a bit unBritish and just a bit foolish.*

*There is no worry about the Irish border in any thoughtful mind: the Norwegians and the Swedes showed the way many years back. Its not that difficult.*

*When we are out of the EU we will be as beholden to their Courts as to any other countries with whom we have cross citizen residency issues. ie, our Courts will decide here and theirs in their lands. They know that, our legal lot know that.*

*Of course the EU wants as much money as it can screw out of us - that's as plain as a pikestaff. They will dikker until the last second and beyond - that is how they have behaved for years when doing deals. If our lot keep the cost recognizably lower than their greed desires, they will be seen in the UK mind as having done a decent job.*

*Getting tax paid in country on business done and profits earned in country is far far far more important, and group think that it must be done is not quite there yet, though it is really growing and could get there.*

*Yours*

I would add, the person in question is no fool. He's had a long career, and been a director of quite large companies. His experience would normally demand that I should take his comments seriously.

I regret, that much as I would like to I cannot, in all conscience, do that on this occasion. I cannot recognise a great deal of reality in what he has said to me.

First, and as a minor aside, I resent the accusation of being called unBritish and just a bit foolish for thinking that breaking our trading relationships with just about all nations on earth without any known obvious alternative (given that almost no-one uses WTO rules, for what must be good reason) is a matter of inconsequence. Apart from the fact that I have never felt very British, because the term excludes any consideration of Ireland and is therefore inappropriate in my opinion, to worry about a clearly foreseeable outcome which is very obviously unattractive because of its implications for large parts of the UK economy appears wise, and not foolish. It was not a good opening shot.

To then suggest Theresa May is doing better than anyone else might do is interesting. Three comments follow. First, clearly this is not true, because it's not the media that is telling me she's making the most almighty mess of this; straightforward observation lets me reach that conclusion. Second, I think there may be others able to do this much better, but that they would not wish to do so simply because the action is so unwise. Third, if the observation is true then it says that the quality of those politicians committed to Brexit (and there are few enough of them, maybe for good reason) is so low that the question has to instead be asked why that is the case.

As for the Irish border issue, I found this comment very hard to take seriously. The comparison with Norway and Sweden is naive. First, they never had an EU / EU border and so there never was such a border to unwind, as there will be now in Ireland. Second, in that case all they had to work out was how to adapt national borders to a non-EU / EU border, which is very much easier than actually erecting a border when there has, in effect, been none. And, third, to ignore the political history of this border is very British, and deeply foolish. The suggestion made shows a remarkable lack of understanding of any of the issues involved, in my opinion, and I have not even got near the technical ones.

The comment on the rule of law is equally naive. It presumes that there are no cross border issues to resolve. To hold true the comment made would require everything to happen to discrete people who only ever exist in one place without consequence in another. But of course that is not true. We exist in more than one place and the relationships between legal systems matter the moment we cross borders. And that extends to business across borders, of course, where it is invariably the case that contracts (unsurprisingly) specify a law that must apply to resolve disputes or different decisions on one issue might arise in different countries without a mechanism to

resolve the resulting conflicts. Again, unsurprisingly, that extends to a myriad of issues for governments where, very obviously, there have to be mechanisms to resolve disputes and local courts are not always considered the appropriate place to do this. Our 'legal lot' most certainly do not know what my correspondent claims. I think they know the exact opposite.

Regarding money my correspondent is right. The EU want money. I agree with him; they do, and lots of it. But then, so would I if I was the EU. If I was them and I had seen the UK commit to a spending plan from which they seek to withdraw I too would want the commitment made honoured. That would be because if this was a commercial matter then the UK would quite clearly be in breach of contract by trying to withdraw and not pay now. And so it will be politically as well if it does not pay. I have never had much time for those for whom their word is not their bond. And the UK is going back on its word here. Quite rightly the EU member states are livid. And that's why we have no hope of a soft landing with them in the case of a hard Brexit. I'm wholly on their side because I know, if in their shoes, that's how I would feel. But in that case the definition offered of a good deal for the UK is that we've got away with welching on our neighbours who will resent us for a generation or more as a result. If that's a good outcome, heaven help us.

As for tax, I suppose I have just one question, which is what's that got to do with it? I think tax is important. But getting tax paid is inconsequential if the tax base has disappeared. And, in any case, the Brexiteers appear to be the most ardent enthusiasts for tax havens and the exemption of large companies and the wealthy from tax that there are in the UK, so Brexit offers no hope on that front in any event.

So why have I bothered replying? Because if this profoundly hollow set of arguments is the best that someone of usually sound mind can come up with to disagree with me on regarding this issue then I am, if anything, even more worried than I was beforehand. Brexiteers aren't just driving us to hell in a handcart, they're excusing themselves from the requirement for sound reasoning when doing so. And that is very depressing.