

The emerging reality of Remain

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I have watched events in the UK with interest in the last day or so. Being well over 2,000 miles away, and in the company of people from many nations who view Brexit with bemusement at best, and outright bewilderment more commonly, adds a different perspective.

Three thoughts emerge, being picked up between conference events. First, what the heck is Labour doing? Is John McDonnell right to say that it will back a second vote or are those near Corbyn who say that is not what he said correct? Who knows? What I do know is it does not help them to deny what is obviously true: they are bound to be in favour of a second vote if and when the 'meaningful vote' on May's deal rejects it, as seems likely. What is the problem with talking about political realities is the question that needs to be asked of Labour?

Of course May will say that Labour are ignoring the referendum result. And I would argue that she is like the satnav user who believes that they must follow it even when it instructs them to drive through a flooded ford, or down a road that is very clearly unsuited for vehicle use. When the facts change so must the decision. The facts have changed. Labour should say so, and that to ask again is to respect the referendum and not undermine it: having another one is to say referenda are trusted, right or wrong.

Second, that fact that the ECJ is going to rule on the legality of Article 50 renunciation by the UK as soon as possible is good news: it is essential that all options are put on the table.

Thirdly, there were the economic forecasts. I will not pretend to have read all the detail: that has not been possible in the time available. Messages do emerge though. Whatever the option, and whatever the forecast issued yesterday, the message was that Brexit is going to reduce income in the UK. I am presuming that hard Brexit will not happen as there appears to be absolutely no real parliamentary will for it. In that case Mark Carney's dire forecasts for the Bank of England do look to be largely irrelevant. And it can be argued that none of the Treasury's are much use as none models the Brexit option May has negotiated. But there is a statistic that to me says that argument

about which measure of scale is right is largely irrelevant: in October this year UK car production was down 10% on a year ago. Suggestions of a Brexit impact cannot be avoided: the downturn is already real.

What does all this say? I'd suggest that between all the political posturing - and like everyone I know I am really bored by that now - there is a reality that is emerging. That reality is that there is a choice available that will prevent the losses - financial, political and social - that Brexit will create. That the choice to remain is still real is what that reality is. And, as John McDonnell said before Seumas Milne denied he had done so, Labour has to embrace that possibility if it is to remain relevant to a large number of the people who might vote for it. So too will the Tories have to do so if they are also to have any chance of remaining as a credible political force. The fact is that unless Labour and the Tories do recognise Remain as an option now then they will fail so many people that their political credibility with half the population will be destroyed for a generation or more.

That's the reality that is being fought now. It is a fight for credible choice, which is at the heart of what democracy requires. The question is whether, given the obvious need for it to be presented to the people of the UK, politicians will actually have the courage to offer Remain to the UK. The answer is not clear as yet, but it seems increasingly likely. And that has to be good news. And there's not much to cling to in this mess.