

Freedom

I was proud to learn when young that I had been born into a freedom loving country. Our nation's story was told as a long progress to one person, one vote. We had pioneered the Mother of Parliaments and had established equal freedoms under the law from Magna Carta onwards. Our country held a distinguished record of defending the rights of smaller nations in Europe to self determination. England had become the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, after seeing off the aggressive tyranny of imperial Spain. Together we had turned the tide of the Napoleonic conquests and military rule of much of Europe. In the twentieth century in coalition with allies we defeated German belligerence twice .

As a teenager I found the defeatism of a new establishment generation surprising. I was advised as a student to emigrate, as people were so gloomy about the prospects of Labour's Britain in the run up to their forced visit to the IMF for bail out. I watched in sadness as a City analyst as our first decade in the European Common market produced the widespread destruction of industry, with closure after closure of mines, steel works, foundries, textile mills and car plants. Many senior managers had lost the will or ability to manage, and many Union leaders were willing to press companies toward bankruptcy by their strike ridden actions. Tariff free product from Germany, France and Italy displaced home production.

In the 1980s I advised Margaret Thatcher on how she could implement a vision of a dynamic enterprising UK, with wider ownership for the many, more small businesses and self employment, higher standards of education and training and better management and Unions working more often for a common good. Towards the end of her time in office I became a Minister in the DTI or Business Department. As Single market Minister given the task of helping the EU "complete" the single market by 1992 I grew to understand just how damaging the EU project was for UK enterprise and small business. Far from being a liberating wealth and income generating project, it was a massive legislative programme to put so many aspects of commercial and personal life under EU control. It was a one way ratchet to more laws we could not hope to repeal or even at times to improve against the wishes of the Commission. So often the laws set out a blueprint for how you had to make or do things based on continental multinational company procedures.

EU power advanced under successive Treaties agreed by the Conservatives at Maastricht and then far faster and deeper through Nice, Amsterdam and Lisbon under Labour to the full Treaty of European Union. I resigned from the Cabinet under John Major when he refused to rule out abolishing the pound at Maastricht and took the case to the country.

I worked with my party in Opposition to vote against and to highlight the damage the successive integration Treaties Labour signed us up to did to UK Parliamentary democracy. I worked with a few colleagues to make a referendum Conservative policy, finally persuading David Cameron when we approached a majority of Conservative MPs demanding one. When we finally got a referendum

in 2016 the majority agreed that continued membership of the EU was incompatible with a flourishing UK democracy based on Parliament and the ability of people to sack incompetent or unpopular governments in regular General elections.

Today it is most important that we make a decisive move to accountable democracy by the way we handle our exit from the EU. Leave voters did not vote to have an Agreement with the EU that recreates the legal ties and obligations of membership. You do not have to accept EU laws to trade with them, as the USA, many smaller independent countries and China can affirm. This week's news with France closing her borders against a fellow member of the single market reminds us of various past occasions when strike action closed the French Channel ports disrupting U.K. supply chains. Taking back control must herald a drive for more U.K. self reliance as we had before our membership of the EEC/EU. Later blogs will examine the other battles we need to win to re establish our lost freedoms.