

Globalists versus Little Europeans

How many more times do we have to debate staying in the Customs union? The Commons has twice had important lively debates, and has twice voted decisively to leave the Customs Union in accordance with the views of both the Remain and Leave campaigns in the referendum that we would have to or want to. The amendment to the EU Withdrawal Bill in the Commons to keep us in the customs union was defeated by 322 votes to 99. The proposed amendment to the Queen's speech debate along similar lines was rejected by a similar margin. The whole Bill without customs union membership was approved by 324 to 295.

Remain always wanted to make the referendum a debate just about trade. Leave countered that it was a debate about something much bigger. It was a debate about democracy itself, and who is in charge. We voted leave to take back control of our money, our borders, our laws, and yes also our trade policy. In the referendum debates I always stressed both that it was in the EU's interest to accept the UK's likely offer of a free trade deal, and that they might nonetheless decide to self harm. Given the imbalance in trade and the fact that tariffs are only high on agriculture, the UK could do just fine on WTO terms.

The trade debate itself is one between Little Europeans and Globalists. The Remain case was always contradictory. They say that WTO terms on UK/ EU trade would be deeply damaging to the UK, but our bigger trade with the faster growing rest of the world on WTO terms was just fine! Remain decided to grossly exaggerate possible adverse effects of agricultural tariffs on the UK, a net importer, and ignore them on the rest of the EU, the net exporter! During our membership of the CAP and CFP we have lost market share and ended up as heavy importers. Meanwhile we are banned from buying cheaper imports from non EU sources, where they make us impose large tariffs.

We globalists constantly pointed out in the referendum that the EU Customs Union was a nasty set of restrictions on our trade with the rest of the world. They are especially damaging to poorer countries who would like to sell us their food at good prices but face large tariff walls. The Leave side had its own debate between those who think like me we should bargain away some of these tariffs for free trade deals with many countries, and those who wished unilaterally to sweep away many of the food tariffs and go for cheaper food straight away.

I find it difficult to accept another Groundhog day where the Remain politicians and media wish to relaunch their incoherent Little European approach to trade, and wish to reinforce the EU's aggressive stance against food producing poor countries. Giving a bit more aid is no substitute for trade which could help lift the incomes of poorer countries more quickly.

I am a globalist in this debate. It is better for the emerging countries. It is also better for UK farms and fishermen, who will recapture market share from the continent when we leave properly.