

How we agreed to leave the EU

I find it extraordinary that people still write in here criticising me for not recommending withdrawal from the EU during the last century. As I have explained, as a democrat I accepted the verdict of the 1975 referendum to belong to a common market. That meant I did not keep on campaigning for a cause which was lost. I did keep criticising the EEC/EUU for moving further and further away from the common market people thought they had voted for. I did with others seek to create an opposition to the EU's more dangerous and undesirable policies. In the 1980s that meant trying unsuccessfully to stop UK membership of the Exchange Rate Mechanism, and in the 1990s successfully campaigning and writing books to stop the UK joining the Euro. In the first decade of this century I worked as part of the official opposition to oppose the treaties of Nice, Amsterdam and Lisbon which took the EU far beyond the common market of the 1975 referendum.

It was while helping the Conservatives form a Eurosceptic policy and argue the case against the new Treaties in Parliament that I and some others decided we had to help get the UK out of the EU. It was obvious it was going swiftly in a direction that had not been approved by the 1975 referendum and was likely to prove unpopular with the voters. Our task was made more difficult by the Labour government and establishment presentation of all the centralising changes as having no more significance than an edition of the Beano. Anyone who stood against these moves had to be personally vilified and marginalised in case their reasoned objections gained wider support.

The arrival of UKIP on the scene made things more difficult. I had many arguments with contributors to this site, and with correspondents around the country who wanted me to join UKIP. I refused to for two good reasons. The first was I do not agree with all their policies. The second, more important, was that I saw them making the task of getting us out of the EU more difficult, not easier. I explained that there was an easier route than expecting the public to elect a UKIP government. I always thought it unlikely the public would elect a single UKIP MP let alone the 330 it would need to do the job of leaving the EU. As it turned out the public did once vote for one UKIP MP in a General election, one more than I expected. He was a former Conservative MP with his own following who promptly fell out with the UKIP leadership who did not like his views on a number of topics.

I pointed out those of us who wanted to leave had to do 3 difficult things. First, we had to help secure the election of a Conservative government. Second, we had to persuade that government to hold a referendum. Third, we had to win that referendum. As things worked out we were able to use the partial Conservative victory in 2010 to good effect. During the 2010 Parliament we built support amongst Conservative MPs for a referendum. When we demonstrated rebel voting strength at more than 100 with convincing prospects of commanding a majority in the Parliamentary party for a referendum Mr Cameron decided to make it official policy to hold one. He saw the strength of our case and realised that we could get the voting strength to replace him as leader if he was deaf to the cause. It was entirely the

position inside the Conservative party that we were arguing about to secure the referendum. We did not sit around discussing how to deal with UKIP, as many of us agreed with their main aim of quitting the EU.

United the Conservatives went into the 2015 election offering the important popular vote on the EU. The rest is better understood history.