

## How the EU sought to make us dependent

As we exit the EU fully we need to be aware of just how far the EU had got in seeking our integration and submission to their system. They were always bitterly disappointed that the UK avoided joining the Euro, the main mechanism by which a fully integrated EU economy is being created. Greece and Italy have discovered the hard way that there are many policy choices they can no longer make as they are committed to the disciplines of the Euro.

Despite this they sought to ensnare us with various common policies. The Common Fishing policy took more and more of our fish to foreign ports, leaving us with one of the richest seas in the world to become net importers. The common energy policy got us to depend more on imports through interconnectors, making a country with plenty of its own energy partly dependent on a continental EU short of energy and committed to Russian gas. The common state procurement policy meant we bought more and more goods than the UK is quite capable of making from EU suppliers with continental factories. The Common Agricultural Policy led to a sharp decline in the proportion of our food we grow and rear for ourselves. The trade policy made us impose high tariffs on food products from outside the EU we could not grow ourselves. The animal welfare policy fell short of what we wanted, but we had to accept live movement of cattle and the standards the EU would accept for everything from chicken cages to sow tethers.

In future blogs I will be examining the scope there now is to improve so many things. The annoyance is the way the last Parliament and much of the UK establishment blocked preparatory work to grasp these many opportunities to do better more quickly.

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## How should the UK government handle Devolved government?

I opposed the creation of a devolved Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly when Labour offered its second referendum on these matters in 1997, as did the Conservative party as a whole. I accepted the result fully, even though the Welsh one was very narrow. Since that day I have never asked for another referendum to test opinion again, and have always supported co-operating properly with the devolved bodies.

I have not felt the need to change some of the arguments I put at the time. For example, I argued that setting up these bodies would not create a happily united UK in the way Labour envisaged. It was more likely that nationalists in Scotland would use the excellent platform the Scottish Parliament offered them to campaign continuously to move from devolution to separation. This has

predictably come to pass. Not even a full and fair referendum to ask the question did Scotland wish to be independent was sufficient to restore peace on this issue, as the SNP unlike Conservatives never accept the result of a referendum when it goes against them. Today in Parliament every debate on whatever matters is another debate on Scottish independence as far as the SNP is concerned.

Today we see the results of managing the CV 19 response when the devolved authorities of Scotland, Wales and some City Mayors wish to be involved and wish to differentiate what they do. We get mixed messages, public disputes, selective leaks of privileged conversations and variable responses around the UK. I think a good case can be made for more local decision taking on this issue. After all the virus spreads at very different rates and at different times around the country. Hospital admission needs and death rates are very variable. Local circumstances over testing, hospital capacity and Care home management are different.

This argues for a two tier approach. The national government should provide a menu of powers and national advice on the best medical, scientific and economic response to the crisis. The national government and Parliament can decline powers that are thought to be too damaging and unhelpful. Devolved authorities should be free to select from the menu of special powers and responses what they wish to impose in their areas. The U.K. Parliament needs to press harder for a plan which does less economic damage than the current one.

Trying to do it by collaboration is more difficult, as this blurs responsibility and allows devolved authorities to play politics with a national crisis. The SNP government is said to have selectively leaked confidential information about possible future options before a common position was agreed or announced. They also spent the first part of the pandemic setting slightly tougher rules in Scotland, claiming this would allow Scotland to be virus free whilst England would suffer from being too lax. It did not turn out like that, with the Scottish government now needing to explain why their different approach did not produce better results.

Today why not let devolved authorities decide what they should do about rising case rates. They do not seem to like the national government telling them how to organise their pubs and restaurants, and they want to be more responsible for track and trace in their areas. If a Council or devolved assembly wished it could ask the national government to take responsibility for it. Otherwise the government will need to be firmer with sending plans to local and devolved government that they just need to implement as agents of central government.

The best argument against local differentiation is the variety of rules that will apply. The best argument in favour is many areas of the country will not need the heavy handed lock down the government's advisers think necessary for areas with a high incidence of the pandemic.

(In the 1979 referendum Welsh voters rejected devolution by a massive 4 to 1 margin. In 1997 they voted 50.3% Yes on a 51.3% turnout, with a majority of

just 6721 votes for devolution)

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## Time to walk away

The EU is not negotiating in good faith. The PM should keep his promise and end the talks.

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## The Great Reset

I have no problem with the idea of building better or investing in a better future, but I do have problems with some of the agendas drawn up in the name of the Great Reset.

The problems of the past were not brought on by taxing enterprise too lightly or by being too generous to the self employed. We did not have too many large companies offering better new goods and services, and we did not have too many people working hard and investing their time, energy and capital in serving us better. We needed more of both, a need that has just been intensified by the damage done to both by the lockdown measures. Taxing work, enterprise and success more is a bad idea.

Many of the great advances in living standards and quality of life have come from the innovation and enterprise of the private sector. It was not government effort that launched billions of smart phones and electronic pads on the world. It was not government which provided the cars to liberate many more people with flexible personal transport, or supplied the great entertainments of stage, screen and events. It is important that as we build back from lock downs these gains are banked and enhanced, with broadening of reach to ever more people.

When the agenda proposes taxing and regulating the very products of the digital revolution and the transport revolution that have offered to the many the freedoms and advantages that used to be the preserve of the few I worry that build back better just becomes a cover for more state control over our lives.

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# My speech during the debate on the Fisheries Bill [Lords]: New Clause 8 – Agency arrangements between sea fish licensing authorities, 13 Oct 2020

**Sir John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con):** I am almost seduced by Opposition amendment 1. It is an admirable idea that we should land more of our own fish in our own ports, but I am probably not going to make it to their Lobby, because they lack ambition—why only 65%? We heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Moray (Mr Douglas Ross) that the Norwegians and the Icelandics, who have had control of their own fisheries for much longer or never surrendered them, have much higher percentages than that. These are small, prosperous countries that took their destiny in their own hands, and they have a much finer fishing industry than ours—crippled as it has been for too many years by the common fisheries policy.

So full marks to the Opposition for wanting, for once, to go in the right direction, but let us have a bit more passion and ambition, because it is a disgrace that, after all these years in the common fisheries policy, the overwhelming majority of our fish is taken by others, and it is a disgrace that this great fishing nation imports fish to feed ourselves. I want to see a much higher percentage than amendment 1 suggests, because I think we need the food for ourselves or we would be very good at processing it and adding value to it. I do not just want fresh fish for our tables; I also want to see us putting in those extra factories and processing plants in our coastal communities so that they can produce excellent fish preparations or derivatives of fish for our own purposes and for wider export around the rest of the world. This is crucial.

I am afraid that I am not seduced by amendment 2 either. While I and the Government, and I think everyone in this House, think that sustainability of our fishery will be most important, I do not think it is the only aim, or even the prime aim. It is a very important aim that we want to use our fishery to feed ourselves and others, and to produce much better jobs, more paid employment and factory processing. It is very important, as others have said, that we look after the wider marine environment—not just the fish stocks, but the environment in which the fish and others are swimming.

I think we need to have multiple aims, and I think that is what the Government are setting out. The Government are very much in favour of sustainability, so when we wait—desperately worried—on these negotiations, I say, “Please, Government, do not give our fish away again!” That mistake has been made too often—in the original negotiations to go into the European Economic Community and in annual negotiations thereafter. Let us hope that our fish is not given away in those negotiations. If we cannot fish enough of it in the short term, because we still do not have the boats and the capacity, let us leave it in the sea and rebuild our stocks more quickly,

while we get that extra capacity. I would like to hear and see more from the Minister and the wider Government on how we are going to support the acquisition of much more capacity.

Should we not be helping fishermen and fisherwomen commission new boats from British yards, and have that combined shipbuilding capability and the fishing capability, leading on to the production capability? Many of our industries were badly damaged or demolished by our presence in the European Union. This is a prime example of an industry that was crippled. The scope for much greater prosperity for our coastal communities could be added to by the right schemes to get more boats, and by the right schemes such as enterprise zones that allow us to go right up the value chain and produce the best fish dishes in the world.