

Flag waving at the Proms

Some have expressed regret that someone gave out a lot of EU flags for people to wave at the Last Night of the Proms. Relax, I say. I have no problem with people coming from the continent to enjoy our traditions and wanting to wave the flag of their emerging state.

It may help to remind readers that the Last Night of the Proms has a very UK patriotic second half. The audience gets most animated in support of Henry Wood's Fantasia of sea shanties. He wrote this as a nine part celebration of the experiences of the ordinary seaman at Trafalgar, for the 100th anniversary of the battle in 1905. It included "See the conquering hero comes" and "Rule Britannia". The latter has now obtained her own slot after the sea shanties. It was good of so many to join in with the commemoration of the UK's naval traditions. His original medley has been adapted since.

The first tune is from the "Saucy Arethusa". This was written in celebration of the first English victory over the French at the start of the American War of Independence. A tough battle between the English 32 gun frigate Arethusa (captured from the French navy in 1759 and re commissioned) and the 36 gun Belle Poule, a French frigate, 30 miles off the Lizard was in practice inclusive. Both vessels were badly damaged with many dead, and both retreated to recover. The British claimed victory because they captured two smaller French vessels, having a superior force at sea. The French also claimed victory as the Belle Poule escaped from the superior force and did not have to bow to the British commands.

(The navy was still often called the English navy in the C18. At the time of this battle Scotland , England and Wales were united so it was by then the British navy. Ireland joined the Union in 1800, after this battle but before Trafalgar)

Where has Mr Blair been for the last eight years? We voted to take back control, including control of our money.

Mr Blair's fantasy re negotiation of the UK's deal with the EU ignores Mr Cameron's long attempt to negotiate just such a change to the EU benefits and migration policies without any success He ignores the fact that there is no machinery or legal basis for any such attempted future renegotiation.

He of course dismisses the referendum, which he does seem to be aware of. He does not seem to have grasped that when we voted to leave we voted to take back control of all matters, not just EU migration. Did he not hear any of the debates about wanting to spend our own money, which I see he just ignores. Did he grasp that we want to pass our own laws?

It is most disappointing that a man who gained the top political office by democratic means now has such a scorn for the wishes of the people who used to sustain him.

Constituents stuck in the hurricane zone

I have only heard of two constituents who are said to be alive and unharmed but stuck on a holiday island that has been wrecked by the hurricane. When I got the message yesterday I contacted the Foreign Office website and hotline. They told me of the immediate plans to send in supplies and personnel to the UK related islands, and to work with the French and Dutch who will do the same for the islands under their protection. They had no plans to help get people home yet. They urged my constituents to contact the local government on the island concerned, which in this case is not a UK related island, for further guidance.

I want the UK government to help the private sector and the governments of the islands to plan for the safe passage home of all those UK tourists, business people and others who want to get back after their harrowing time with the disaster. I have therefore written to both the Minister of State in charge, Sir Alan Duncan, and to the Foreign Secretary urging them to consider this and make more advice and help available as soon as possible. I appreciate airports and seaports have in many cases been damaged and the weather still presents hazards to shipping and planes, but those stuck would like to know someone is planning to recreate some transport links that can work soon.

Let's pick some truth from this continuing EU debate

A few noisy Remain supporters, including now much of the Parliamentary Labour party, persist in spreading falsehoods from Project Fear and the referendum

campaign.

We now know that their predictions about the first year after the vote, and after the Article 50 letter, were wide of the mark. Unemployment did not surge. House prices did not plunge. Commercial Property did not tumble. There was no first winter recession post the vote. The economy continued to generate a lot of extra jobs and housebuilding expanded at a lively pace.

Today they still assert that the UK will lose the benefits of the 50 or so free trade Agreements the EU has with other countries when we leave. This includes particularly important ones with Switzerland, Canada and South Korea. There are no such agreements with USA, China, India or the other large economies. I have every confidence that all these FTAs will pass to the UK as a member state co signatory, as they are entitled to do under international law. The only thing that could stop them passing is if the non EU state that entered into the Agreement wished to block. None have said they will block the UK keeping these agreements.

It is still fashionable for them to argue that the EU will have to punish us for leaving, to discourage others from doing the same. This is a bizarre view of friendly neighbouring countries that they wish us to stay close to. If the EU is as good as they say why would others wish to leave? Many of them are net recipients of cash, unlike us, so they certainly have no incentive to leave. The reason they are wrong is that the EU does not have the power to punish us once we have left. They cannot give us worse trade terms than they afford the rest of the world, as they are co signatories of the WTO protocols and agreements. We have rights under the WTO to trade redress if they tried heavy handed tactics. We would also have common cause with many other countries who will not want the EU using UK departure from the EU as an excuse to turn more protectionist against the UK and all the other WTO members in consequence.

There is a strange wish on the part of many establishment figures in the UK to send lots more money to the EU because that is what the EU would like us to do. They need to grasp two simple points. The first is we owe them nothing other than our usual contributions up to departure. Secondly UK voters will be livid with them if they try to give large sums to the EU with no legal basis. We do not need to pay to trade – indeed that is illegal under WTO rules. If they want to charge us to trade it has to be done by imposing tariffs, where they are limited on what they can do by the WTO schedules.

There is also a stupid pessimism about the UK's abilities to run a borders and customs system once we are out. We have to run a policed system at the moment. Lorries and planes arriving at UK ports have to be checked for illegal migrants, terrorist materials, animal welfare, plant health and other matters. Non EU trade has to be assessed for tariffs. It is well within the UK's ability to have a functioning border to trade with the EU as we trade with the rest of the world if we have no deal by 30 March 2019.

Some say there will be huge problems with too many parked lorries in Dover and Folkestone. We do sometimes have a big problem with parked lorries when there are French strikes, and for that reason are putting in a huge lorry

park near Ashford at the moment to cope with this eventuality. It will not normally be needed once we are out, but is a useful contingency for disruption if there are more French strikes.

Others say planes will not be able to fly! Try telling that to French and German airlines who will make sure they have rights to come to the UK and in turn will understand we need landing rights in their countries.

German questions

Occasionally I am invited to appear on German television. I usually agree, as I find I learn more about current German attitudes from the bias or drift of the questions.

This week I was surprised that many of the questions still seemed to be rooted in the idea that the UK was somehow going to remain part of their EU plans. In preparation I was asked what it was I disliked about the EU. Realising this would lead to a line of questions that either led them to tell me I had interpreted the EU wrongly, or to propositions that if we stayed in these disagreeable features could be toned down or changed, I gave my answer. "Everything" I said. I wanted to move us on to the more productive issues of what relationship will an independent UK have with Germany and the EU.

Instead they pressed the issue. What in particular was annoying, they asked. I clarified by saying it was the EU's ability to make our laws and tell us what to do that we rejected. There were various individual cases that the UK was particularly unhappy about, but it was the general power, the ability to force more bad laws and policies on us in the future that led to the decision to leave. They seemed to think if there was some fudge or fix on migration the UK would be happy. They still have not grasped the meaning or significance of the winning phrase of the campaign, we want to take back control.

It made me think how absurd this whole so called negotiation the EU wants us to have about leaving is. The Treaty gives us an absolute right to leave. It imposes no additional bill or other requirements. All we had to do was send a letter and give them two years notice, which we have done. That notice will cost us more than £20bn and we accept that. It is not an invitation to negotiate over which of their laws and financial demands we need to carry on with in the future.

IN the interview proper the German presenter had got it, and allowed me to make clear that as far as the UK is concerned we are leaving. The UK is very willing to talk about our future relationship, and has made a generous offer of continuing free trade without tariffs. It is up to the EU to decide whether they want that or wish instead to impose what barriers they can on their trade with us under WTO rules. Clearly this all comes as news to many in Germany, who still see us a fellow paymaster of the EU under its control.