

Colluding in EU-British Lies: The Brexit Debate

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Global Research, June 01, 2016

Region: [Europe](#)

Theme: [Global Economy](#), [History](#)

The Brexit argument (whether Britain should remain or otherwise in the European Union), has become hysterically hyperbolic. That was the view of former Tory MP Gyles Brandreth, expressed with usual alacrity on the news quiz show Have I Got News For You.

Times in Britain are viciously partisan. No one wants to see their dog left out of this particular fight. The result is a vicious mauling being handed out by all sides on whether the leavers or stayers have the upper hand.

The Institute for Fiscal Studies, one of Britain's more prominent tax think tanks, went in against the Vote Leave campaign, suggesting that the austerity regime would be prolonged by a departure from the EU. That would be the only way to plug consequential multi-billion pound holes in the budget arising from lower foreign investment and poorer trade returns.

The IFS also took issue with various figures being used by the Leave campaign, most notably the suggestion that Brussels receives £350 million every week from the sceptred isle. That particular figure has become the holy marker for former London mayor Boris Johnson. According to the body, that assessment conveniently ignored the role of the rebate and a range of other subsidies for business and research. Taken together, the amount ending in EU coffers was more likely £150 million.

Vote Leave, in what has been symptomatic of the debate, could only dismiss the IFS projections as issuing from a "paid-up propaganda arm of the European Commission". Naturally, "The IFS was not a neutral organisation." [1] Objectivity is suffering a long drawn out death.

Then came a study by Migration Watch which emphasised the undesirables coming into the country. While Johnson and company rail against the succubi of Brussels, they also fear the influx of humans.

Migration Watch duly supplied some ammunition with a suitably alarmist prediction, claiming that up to half a million refugees and their assortment of relatives would make their way to Britain after 2020. The supposition there is that those granted asylum in other EU countries – Germany, Greece, and Italy – would leapfrog their way into the UK on acquiring citizenship.

The group's report asserts that leaked documents from Germany suggest that each person granted asylum would be followed by up to four family members. Building on figures farmed from Eurostat that 1 million migrants would be successfully granted asylum for 2015 and in the first quarter of 2016, the numbers are predictably inflated for effect.

According to the group's chair, Andrew Green, "The UK could well face a significant

secondary flow of refugees from Europe in the coming years adding to the already huge strain being placed on housing and public services.”[2]

Britain Stronger in Europe, the official front for the cause to stay in the EU, had another position, rubbishing the projections as counterfeit. For Emma Reynolds, MP for Wolverhampton North East and former shadow communities secretary, the “overwhelming majority of refugees will never get the right to come to Britain”. Another charming state of affairs.

On the side of the stayers, the situation has also been absurd, focusing on subjects emptied of political content. Vapid videos from the In Campaign are proliferating about how a lifestyle is at risk if the vote of June 23 favours departure. One, Votin, proves particularly grating in its semi-literate framing, using grammatically challenged terms. The unfortunate casualty in that production is the letter g. There is “earnin”, “makin”, “roamin” and “chillin”; there is “ravin” topped off by the smashing hashtag “#votin.”[3]

Its supposition is that the young are suitably disengaged in mindless activity to avoid the argument altogether. The reaction from that very segment was savage. “It failed to speak their language,” snorted The Telegraph, “instead implying they are stupid.”[4]

The corporate sector is similarly using another tack that emphasises a rather different notion of governance. For them, the profit factor, rather than the representative, democratic one, counts. Their apocalyptic warnings say little about reforming the EU and everything about keeping capital free.

Airbus, for instance, has insisted that leaving the EU would lead to a fall in investment in Britain. The company itself employs somewhere in the order of 15,000 people. Such direct arguments, even threats, tend to resemble acts of electoral bullying. If you vote to leave, goes this line of thought, you vote for the dire consequences of unbalanced budgets and lower growth.

Rather than drawing constructive arguments from each side, the descent to a bottom in the maelstrom of illogical fear has been undertaken. Between the dogmatic Brexiteers and the warning stayers, there is much more nonsense to be had before the referendum.

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Notes:

[1]

<http://www.scotsman.com/news/institute-for-fiscal-studies-rejects-eu-propaganda-arm-label-1-4137731>

[2]

<http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/may/31/claims-of-mass-refugee-immigration-to-uk-brand-ed-false-and-bogus>

[3]

<http://www.theguardian.com/politics/shortcuts/2016/may/25/is-the-votin-campaign-really-this-lame-or-are-they-just-pullin-our-legs>

[4]

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/05/25/the-tingey-pro-eu-votin-campaign-is-patronising-beyond>

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