

The Telegraph

Radical change is never without risk. But I truly believe that history will thank us for Brexit



ALLISTER HEATH

29 JUNE 2016 • 7:22PM

•
•



Work and Pensions Secretary Stephen Crabb (right) and Business Secretary Sajid Javid at the RSA in London where Mr Crabb launched his campaign to be leader of the Conservative party CREDIT: DOMINIC LIPINSKI/PA

No, my dear Remainer friends, I don't have buyer's remorse. I'm grateful to you for asking so nicely. I'm still just as elated and moved, one week on, by the public's epoch-defining, awe-inspiring decision to defy the establishment, even though the value of my and every other pension pot took a (temporary) tumble before bouncing back. I'm even more excited by the opportunities to reset the UK's domestic and trade policies, helping to turn us, over time, into Europe's most competitive economy and putting in place the right institutions to govern globalisation, making it more resilient and sustainable.

My one disappointment so far – and it is a big one – is that the Brexiteers have allowed a dangerous vacuum to develop at the heart of British politics by moving far too slowly since the start of the week.

Boris Johnson and Michael Gove in particular should have announced by now, in proper detail, the basis on which they would like to begin to negotiate a mutually beneficial Brexit, perhaps based around a Norway-style model with significant extra powers over migration, as Liechtenstein already has. Let us hope that when he speaks on Thursday, Boris Johnson will outline least some elements of a mini-manifesto to kick-start the economy and ensure we bounce back quickly from the loss of activity caused by the present uncertainty. If you smash our politics, you become responsible for picking up the pieces; it's not good enough to blame a lame-duck Prime Minister and [a thoroughly discredited albeit still strangely defiant Chancellor](#) for not doing more to calm the markets.

Sterling is now down an average of 15 per cent or so since November; [while this will help our current account deficit, the slump was far too abrupt for comfort](#). Bereft of any real guidance, the City is assuming the worst, the erection of trade barriers and even, ludicrously, the possible expulsion of European staff. Why haven't all the main Brexiteers pledged that all existing EU workers in Britain would of course be allowed to stay?

The problem with negative expectations is that they become self-fulfilling, and that ends up hurting the real economy. It is also why [several big firms such as Vodafone and easyJet](#) have muttered darkly about the possibility of shifting their HQs abroad if they can't access markets or hire the right staff: under any sensible negotiated settlement, they will be able to do both and thus will remain happily in the UK, especially if the business climate improves in other ways. But they need to be told all of this, and fast.

It's a terrible shame that the Tory leadership election cannot be expedited: until it's over, the country will be stuck in political limbo and the economy will suffer from a short-term chill.

Yet the more that furious, jilted Remainers howl their cries of righteous anguish on social media, or pen vitriolic articles [demanding that MPs stage a coup against the electorate by disregarding the referendum](#), the more I'm convinced that Leave voters did the right thing, and that we will, in time, be eternally grateful to them for daring to dream.

As I've argued all along – in fact since I became a Eurosceptic in disgust at the undemocratic, corrupt, homogenising, job-destroying post-Maastricht EU while growing up in France in the Nineties – [radical regime change is never without risk](#). Revolutions can go very wrong, as the French have found out, or very right, as the Americans have. The Leavers have won the first battle; I'm hopeful that they will the next rounds, negotiating a workable deal for the UK and kicking off a massive international trade liberalisation programme. There will be costs to the UK, some very tough negotiations over migration, and we will be forced to accept some damaging restrictions on our economy. But the benefits will be greater, and our national income will grow faster over the next decade than it would otherwise have done.

Am I nervous? Absolutely, but I always knew what I was signing up to when I voted Leave. Self-government comes with massive potential upsides as well as huge potential downsides. Being able to choose a different path implies the possibility of doing better as well as that of doing worse.

I have been saddened beyond words by the fact that so many Remainers, including many close friends, not only cannot see any of this but are actually still refusing to accept the outcome. Such people are now explicitly post-democratic: they no longer believe in majority rule, just as they no longer accept the idea that there should be no taxation without representation or even, [in the case of many younger people, that speech should be](#)

free. Their rejection of liberal democratic culture extends to no longer feeling able to give their political opponents the benefit of the doubt. They believe themselves to be part of the forces for good, and that their opponents are not just wrong but also obviously, unarguably evil. Many lead relatively gilded lives yet have allowed themselves to embrace a shameful snobbery that was supposed to have died out last century.

Apart from insulting working-class and non-urban voters, their analysis of the referendum, which pins the responsibility for Leave entirely on northern Labour voters, is deeply faulty: 61 per cent of Tories, including in the shires, voted leave, as did 40 per cent of Londoners, far more in absolute numbers than voted for Sadiq Khan.

I hope that this poison at the heart of our democratic culture hasn't spread too far, and that political pluralism will still be able to thrive in Britain. We cannot become like America where Democrats and Republicans can no longer even be friends.

The magnitude of the challenge is the real reason why Johnson and Gove looked so sombre on Friday morning: with victory comes huge, almost unbearable responsibility. Only the greatest of men and women will be up to the task ahead. We need determination, discipline, cool under extreme pressure, grit and seriousness; we also need a national leader who can inspire the country and hopefully reunite the centre-Right political family. Above all we need a speedy decision so that our next prime minister can begin to execute the voters' instructions in a way that maximises our economic opportunities.