

The Telegraph

## Why it's time for a new campaign for Brexit



ALLISTER HEATH

19 OCTOBER 2016 • 8:40PM



A new Brexit campaign is needed to make the case to leave the EU - and stop the Remainers setting the agenda CREDIT: ANDREW YATES/REUTERS

There is no such thing as permanent victory in politics. History never ends: triumphs are fleeting; majorities can turn into minorities; and orthodoxies are inevitably built on foundations of sand. Communism was supposed to be discredited forever after the collapse of the Berlin Wall; yet many young people in Britain and America now call themselves socialists.

Progress is never guaranteed in politics: there are just ups and downs and swings of the pendulum.

This applies to Brexit too, of course: those who thought that Leave's victory on June 23 somehow settled the question were deluded. The good news is that it remains likely that we will leave the EU in 2019.

[Theresa May is fully committed and will be canny and steely in her negotiations](#). But the Remainers are staging a fight-back which is beginning to inflict serious damage on the Brexiteer cause.

Every piece of bad news is blamed on Brexit; an endless supply of reports, economic “forecasts” and articles explain how leaving the EU is self-evidently bound to hurt us, slash our GDP, make us the world’s laughing stock and wreck our prosperity. Even Ed Miliband and Peter Mandelson are back.

Remarkably, given that the insurgents were meant to have seized power, the propaganda wars have been one-sided: the Government isn’t really taking part, and the other Brexiteers have vacated the battlefield.

Unless Mrs May decides to change tack, and becomes much more aggressive in defence of the policy that will come to define her, the Brexiteers will have only one option left: reconstitute a version of Vote Leave and relaunch a full-throttled, independent campaign.

One thing is clear: concern is mounting in Eurosceptic circles.

It’s not just the specifics of how we leave the EU that are still up for grabs. Some Remainians still hope that withdrawal can be delayed long enough for it never to happen; others are discussing whether Article 50 could be reversed once it’s invoked.

The [High Court case about whether the Government has the right to trigger the process](#) itself, or whether Parliament needs to vote on it, is being followed closely by the financial markets. Traders, to their great shame, are desperate for any scrap of information that they could interpret as signifying that Brexit will be stopped or at least that we will remain permanently in the customs union, the single market and just about everything else.

The election – by more than half of the MPs eligible to vote – of hard-core Remainer Hilary Benn to lead the Brexit Select Committee, defeating Brexiteer Kate Hoey, will be interpreted by some as another sign of a growing anti-Brexit revolt in the Commons.

The European elites cannot believe their luck. They are making increasingly tough statements that are being taken at face value by the Remainian echo-chambers in Britain. The plan is working: the aim is to demoralise the UK establishment, encourage the Government to be unambitious in its negotiations and rattle the business and financial establishment, thus undermining popular support for leaving.

Among the more [idiotic claims that have been aired in recent days is that we no longer need airport expansion](#): some supposed “experts” believe that the demand for aviation will now grow much less quickly after Brexit (non-EU countries never build new airports, of course).

In any normal circumstances such claims would be shot to pieces by a pro-Brexit campaign within minutes of their publication. But that’s just it: there no longer is a pro-Brexit campaign. Liam Fox, Boris Johnson and David Davis are making good speeches, and are building an extensive new administrative apparatus; but the full might of the Government isn’t meaningfully behind the Three Brexiteers.



The campaigning might of the Vote Leave machine is no longer in action CREDIT:CHRISTOPHER FURLONG/GETTY IMAGES

There is no war room, no rebuttal unit, no 6:30am meetings, no coordinated counter attacks. For every anti-Brexit economic prediction, there needs to be a pro-Brexit one; for every case made for the customs union, another must be made to end it. We need to see numbers, data, arguments and financial modelling, backed by the full force of the state machinery.

The real scandal is not that the Remainians are playing this game. It is par for the course: general elections don't mean that the defeated opposition disappears for five years, and that the Government's manifesto is nodded through. Political warfare doesn't end on the day a new prime minister walks into Downing Street: the opposition's job is to derail the government at every opportunity to snatch power back. Why should it be any different after a referendum?

No, the real problem is that the Government is operating under the ridiculous assumption that the referendum somehow depoliticised a raw, passionate struggle, magically turning it into a technocratic, managerial question. Yet governments can never stop fighting for their policies; they need to sell their ideas afresh every day and take the public and opinion-formers with them every step of the way.

The fact that the May Government was entrusted with one big mission – rather than having to choose one – doesn't change this. It needs to pretend that it invented the idea of Brexit, for that is what history and the electorate will eventually come to think. It must learn to believe passionately in it, and take all attacks on it personally.



The PM needs to make sure Philip Hammond, the Chancellor, reaches for greatness rather than simply trying to limit the damage CREDIT: JOE GIDDENS/PA WIRE

The Prime Minister in particular needs to own Brexit, not just in terms of eventual delivery but in every other way too. Unless she defines it and controls it, she will allow others to do so, to her and the country's great disadvantage.

Prior to the referendum, David Cameron had 50 of the best civil servants camped out in the Cabinet Office, [waging war against Brexit](#); the Prime Minister needs to create a similar body, making the opposite case. She needs to hire a senior Eurosceptic campaigner to run it. Her relationship with the Chancellor will also be key: she needs to remind him that his job is to reach for greatness rather than merely to minimise damage.

If the Government doesn't launch a new campaign for Brexit, somebody else will have to. They will need to set up a new campaign vehicle, hire some of the operatives who masterminded the Leave vote and go back to their donors for funding. This cannot wait until after Christmas. The Battle for Brexit must begin – again – now.

