

## **The Brexiteers vs The Establishment: a very tall tale**

by rpinto\_anglodeutsch - Saturday, June 18, 2016

<http://anglodeutsch.eu/brexiteers-vs-establishment-tall-tale/>

And so, with less than a week to go before the EU Referendum scheduled of the 23 June 2016, the Leave (or Brexit for British Exit) campaign took a lead in the opinion polls for the first time, quickly followed by other polls showing that everything is to play for. Such polls are not an exact science: they have not known for their accuracy in the UK. In the last referendum they were predicting that Scotland would choose to divorce from the UK. More recently they did not predict a majority for the Conservatives in the last General Election. Still something is happening which might result in the unimaginable: Britain could soon find itself heading out of the European Union (EU).

A theme which becomes more and more apparent in recent polling is that a shift has occurred and it is connected with particular social groups representing the working population pushing for Brexit. The reason has probably little to do with the EU itself, which is generally not that well known (in itself is an on-going problem and not just in the UK). Rather this seems to reflect be a [groundswell of concerns, anxieties and fear](#) which go beyond EU immigration:

*“... the EU referendum debate has opened up a Pandora’s box of working-class anger and frustration... I would argue that the referendum debate within working-class communities is not about immigration, despite the rhetoric. It is about precarity and fear ... For them, talking about immigration and being afraid of immigration is about the precarity of being working class, when people’s basic needs are no longer secure and they want change. The referendum has opened up a chasm of inequality in the UK and the monsters of a deeply divided and unfair society are crawling out. They will not easily go away no matter what the referendum result.”*

This analysis rings true to me and hence my fear that the EU Referendum could swinging towards Brexit, whatever the merits of the Remain case. The Leave campaign has detected and tapped into this sentiment, and is now milk it for all it is worth. By contrast, the utter failure of the Remain campaign to articulate a strong case for remaining, as opposed sketching gloom and doom Brexit scenarios, has an alarmist and thus false ring to it.

Instead, the Brexiteers have positioned themselves to pander to these fears and anxieties, while at the same time offering them a golden opportunity to giving a bloody nose to the toffs representing the British Establishment / Elites that would preserve the status quo (i.e. remain in the EU) at all costs and against the best interests of ordinary Britons.

Austerity has undoubtedly intensified the sense of precarity in British society and this is being exploited by the Brexiteers. However, the issue is what exactly is the motivation of the leading Brexiteers and their backers? Should Brexit occur, would they prioritise dealing with these legitimate concerns upon Brexit or are the Brexiteers spinning a very long tale?

**The Noes**

The “Noes” camp is led by Boris Johnson and his band of merry men such as Michael Gove, Iain Duncan Smith, Priti Patel, etc. (all Conservatives). Nigel Farage (UKIP) is ploughing his own furrow. The others consider him to be “toxic” to the Brexit because of his focus on the issue of EU immigration, most recently demonstrated in [UKIP’s intemperate use of the refugee crisis](#), though in reality the immigration theme is one which the rest of the leading Brexiteers have increasingly latched on to.

They are joined by those well-known supporters of democracy and transparency who only wish Britain well for the future, such as Marine Le Pen, Vladimir Putin and Donald Trump. All are encouraging Britons to Brexit, thus freeing the UK from the clutches, if not shackles, of the EU.

They all stress the need to regain control of the borders (i.e. stop EU immigration), stop EU [benefit tourism](#), stop EU [heath tourism](#), stop [housing](#) being taken up by EU foreigners, stop [school places](#) being taken-up by EU migrants’ children, stop the loss of [British sovereignty](#), stop EU [enlargement](#), stop payments flowing to the EU, etc. (follow the links for an alternative analysis of the causes and the solutions). The grand plan is to stop anything and everything emanating from the EU because it is self-evident (to them) that all of Britain’s problems stem from being in the EU. This has the simplistic ring of pure populism and we all know what that has led to in the past.

The Brexiteers have few ideas about what they would do upon Brexit. The plan is basically to stop the EU, regain full sovereignty, regain control of the borders, reduce immigration through an Austria style points system, sign-up new trade deals and plough Britain’s EU financial contribution into public services. Britain will soon thrive upon Brexit. Apparently.

The possibility that most of the key problems in Britain ([housing](#), [health](#), [education](#), [low productivity](#), infrastructure, massive public and private sector debt, etc.) are the direct result of Britain’s own systemic policy failures and would cost a few zillion pounds more that the EU annual contribution seemingly does not cross their mind.

The EU is to blame for everything and the British Establishment / Elites (i.e. pretty much anyone daring to challenge the Leave arguments, especially experts) with it.

## The Ayes

On the other side of the fence is a very long list of those calling for Britain to Remain in the EU because it is in Britain’s present and future interest to do so, including:

- The majority of the Conservative Party, including the Prime Minister and Chancellor;
- The majority of the Labour Party, including the leader of the opposition (officially);
- The Social Democrats;
- The Scottish National Party;
- The Greens;
- Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton;
- The Treasury;
- The Institute of Fiscal Affairs;
- The Federal Reserve;

- The World Bank;
- The World Trade Organisation (WTO);
- The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD);
- The International Monetary Fund (IMF);
- The other 27 EU nations;
- The trades unions;
- The great majority of established businesses;
- The great majority of health professionals, NGOs and similar;
- Almost all economists (since there are almost as many differences of opinion as there are economists, the fact that about 600 have united behind Remain is remarkable).

This is an overwhelming group of institutions that favour Remaining in the EU.

Such an incredible array of opinion would normally sway public opinion.

But the reality is that they are cutting little or no ice with the social groups previously discussed.

Instead, the Brexiteers have gained momentum and could well win the day.

### **The Anti Establishment Band?**

The Brexiteers are putting-up a fight – an increasingly bitter one at that (as was the previous Brexit referendum in 1975).

They stress that they are fighting the British Establishment / Elite, pointedly alluding to the wealthy toffs such as David Cameron and George Osborne.

They emphasise that the Establishment prefers the status quo, rather than what is right for Britain.

They maintain that the Establishment from abroad (USA, Japan, Germany, France, Italy, Canada, Australia, etc.) should butt-off and allow Britons to get on it, as if we are not all interconnected in this globalised world where whatever Britons decided affects all other EU national, as well other countries.

They dismiss international organisations for being stuffed full of overpaid and under-taxed bureaucrats that simply trot out what the EU and the Establishment wants to hear. They do the same with any other experts, Britons or not, for all being in the EU's pocket.

Since the economic and trade case for Brexit is non-existent, except in their own imagination, they increasingly contrast themselves with the Elites / Establishment, while they uphold the interests of ordinary working class Britons by braving political correctness and speaking out against current EU immigration as well as immigration from future accession countries such as Turkey and Albania.

They point out that, unlike them, the Establishment has lost contact with ordinary, working class voters, who are suffering from the consequences of the EU.

And they insist that they are not racists, they are not nativists, they are not isolationists and they are not

Little Englanders. They just want what is in the best long-term best interests of the UK.

There is an element of truth in some of the above; there has to be a veneer of it in order to connect with people.

But there is a very tall tale at the core of it too, which is what I would like to emphasize in this post.

### **Question: when is the Establishment not the Establishment?**

### **Answer: when you belong to the leading Band of Brexiteers**

Maybe it is possible that all the British and other institutions previously listed are not in cahoots in a someMachiavellian national, European and global conspiracy to get Britons to vote for something that would be detrimental to their own future.

Maybe ending EU membership will not miraculously cure Britain's structural problems, which are the main reason that the key British public services are in their current state.

Maybe Britain's austerity, which has nothing to do with the EU, is the driver of all the angst.

Maybe Brexit might actually accentuate the problems, not least the massive and growing public sector deficit, in the short, medium and long-term.

And maybe, just maybe, the Brexiteers are themselves deeply embedded in the very bedrock of the Establishment / Elite which they are so dismissive of.

Consider the following:

- Boris Johnson: Eton, Oxford University, ex-Mayor of London, Cabinet Member;
- Michael Gove: Robert Gordon's School, Oxford University, Cabinet Member
- Iain Duncan Smith: St. Peter's RC Secondary School, Sandhurst Royal Military Academy, ex-Cabinet Member;
- Nigel Farage: Dulwich College, ex-city trader, Member of European Parliament.

Put in these terms, and not even alluding to their likely personal wealth, the band of leading Brexiteers dismissing everyone else for being the British Establishment / Elite could be construed as a good case of "the pot calling the kettle black," to use a quaint but fitting British saying.

The most prominent Brexiteers did not exactly grow-up in a council housing estate, attend a public school, let alone go around waving a flag of St George or driving a white van, to use some of the usual terminology which the media and politicians now use to denote the white, working class social groups in England (Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland remain solidly for staying in the EU).

I doubt that Boris Johnson and his band of merry Brexiteers are to be regularly found at the local pub, quaffing a celebratory pint of ale after a football match to wash down their bacon butties (unless TV crews are present, of course). I exaggerate, but the point is that all the leading figures of the vote Leave

campaign appear to have done rather well out of being an integral part of the British Establishment /Elite. You can be confident that their children and grandchildren are likely to do well out of being part of the same social group.

Therefore, for this set of people to be tapping into the palpable angst among working class Britons in order to further their own political ambitions grates with me. They are seeking to mobilise working class sentiment to achieve an ideological objective which, in the long-term, may very well work against those same voters while, at the same time, propelling BoJo and his band of merry Brexiteers ever further up the greasy pole of British politics and Establishment positions.

The fact is that the leading Brexiteers are not exactly committed to protecting the average person.

In a recent televised debate, Boris Johnson said that the Leave side is “[determined to protect the workers](#)” after Nicola Sturgeon quoted something he once wrote: “*The weight of employment regulation is backbreaking. We should get rid of the collective redundancies directive, the workers’ directive, the working time directive and 1,000 more.*”

Yet these are the very things which are protecting British employees from having their rights undermined by such British developments as “zero hour contracts”.

Nigel Farage has been widely reported for calling for a move away from a state-funded NHS.

Gove is the architect of educational academies that is not only flawed but may well be damaging education while also increasing inequality.

Iain Duncan Smith is the author-in-chief of the austerity drive which has cut out billions from the welfare state, thus impoverishing the lives of the non-working population of the UK, while also dismantling various parts of social security safety net for low income workers.

The sad fact is that the leading Brexiteers and Brexit, which is definitely on the cards likely, may actually accentuate the fear, insecurity and precarity that is driving the recent trends in voting intentions in relation to the forthcoming EU referendum. When they no longer need to take the EU into consideration, further deregulation and labour market flexibility will lead to even more winners and losers. Your guess about who is likely to be on the losing side is as good as mine: the very people that might vote for Brexit as the outlet of their frustration and anxieties?

## **The EU Bashers**

The band of Brexiteers is far from being alone in the aggressive fight for Brexit.

There is a strong anti-EU bias at the core of the British Establishment. A recent study by the [Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism](#) found that the British press coverage of the EU Referendum is “*heavily skewed in favour of Brexit*”. It is not just any newspapers that are anti “Europe” but specifically the ones which just happen to be most influential in terms of the social groups turning towards Brexit, as well as having massive circulation compared with the pro-remain newspapers, as illustrated below.

<b>Pro Leave</b>	<b>Circulation</b>	<b>Pro Remain</b>	<b>Circulation</b>
<b>Sun</b>	1.800,000	<b>Mirror</b>	809,000
<b>Mail</b>	1.700,000	<b>Financial Times</b>	198,000
<b>Telegraph</b>	472,000	<b>Guardian</b>	164,000
<b>Express</b>	408,000	<b>Independent</b>	55,000
<b>Times</b>	404,000		
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,784,000</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>1,226,000</b>

In other words, much of the British reporting (printed and online coverage) has a strong anti-EU spin and they are not particularly concerned about such trivialities as balanced argument and truthful reporting. The fact is that the Brexiteers are not exactly in their own: they are strongly and systematically aided and abetted by the most influential newspapers in terms of circulation and readership by social groups which are turning against remaining in the EU. The “drip drip” effect clearly works.

### **Billionaire Brexit Backers (BBB)**

The Brexit backers are not restricted to a few billionaire newspaper tycoons such as Rupert Murdoch, Barclay Brothers, Lord Rothermere, Richard Desmond, etc. A simple internet search of the backers of the UKIP / Leave campaigns reveals that quite a few multi-millionaires / billionaires are bankrolling Brexit. These are mainly financiers of various sorts, as well as property tycoons, ICT and retail magnets.

This is not to suggest that the Remain campaign does not have über-wealthy supporters but to illustrate the sort of people that are funding the Brexit campaigns. If these über-wealthy individuals are not, like the leading Brexiteers, and [much of the British media](#), not part and parcel of the very essence of Elite / Establishment, then I do not know who is. If these sorts of individuals not extremely well-placed to take advantage of the opportunities that might arise post-Brexit, not least from the turmoil that might be caused in the property and financial markets, then I do not know who is.

These are not the sort of individuals who are likely to take much notice of the concerns of working people in relation to jobs, wages, housing, social services, etc. It is a safe bet to suggest that protecting British workers’ rights upon Brexit and thus counteracting the drivers of the recent referendum polling trends is not likely to be at the top of their post-Brexit agenda. Take an illustrative quotation from one of the billionaires bankrolling Brexit. Peter Hargreaves has acknowledged [the insecurity that would result from Brexit](#) and stressed that: *“It would be the biggest stimulus to get our butts in gear that we have ever had” ... “We will get out there and we will be become incredibly successful because we will be insecure again. And insecurity is fantastic.”* Maybe a billionaire stockbroker truly believes this but I doubt that the average Briton will see perceive insecurity in quite the same manner. This very insecurity is what is driving part of the trend in the possible Brexit vote.

Picking-up on the earlier quotation, for once BoJo is correct: the fact is that millions of the currently working-class people are actually protected by the common rules applied throughout the EU designed to create a single market. The protections include:

- Anti-discrimination rights;

- Written terms and conditions;
- Maximum 48 hour working week, rest periods/breaks;
- Paid annual leave;
- Improved health and safety protection;
- Maternity rights;
- Parental leave rights;
- Equal pay for equal work between men and women;
- Fair treatment of part time, fixed term and agency workers;
- Rights for outsourced workers;
- Collective rights such as human rights, collective bargaining, information and consultation, etc.

Source: UK employment rights and the EU

These are not the sort of things to give-up lightly... unless you are so well-off that you do not need them. The people that are feeling the consequences of austerity most certainly do benefit from these labour market protections.

### **Wolves in Sheep's Clothing?**

Don't be fooled by the über-rich advocating for Brexit on behalf of the ordinary working (and non-working) class British citizen. The great majority of the journalists / media advocating for Brexit stem from the same [privately educated, Oxbridge elites](#). Whatever they may imply, protecting the average working (and non-working) person in Britain from the angst that plagues many of them is not their beer.

What many of them seek is a future where Britain can continue unimpeded down the path of deregulation and maximum labour market "flexibility" such as zero hour contracts.

A lot of Britons are anxious and angry. They have seen a few do very well indeed while austerity and the poor economic performance since 2007 has taken a chunk off their disposable. They know that we are certainly "*not all in it together*". They have seen politicians such as David Cameron saying one thing to them and doing another himself. They have seen public services steadily deteriorating and that the future for people that depend on them is anything but rosy. This the result of decades of lack of investment in public services due to lack of political prioritisation. But during the EU Referendum the media and the Brexiteers point to the EU and EU immigrants and ordinary Britons fear that there will be even greater competition for a perceived smaller share of the social and economic pie.

But Britons are nothing if not fair and sensible: they know that when things appear to be too good or too simple to be true, they usually are. They know that pointing to the EU and EU immigrants (and who else post-Brexit?) is a simplistic solution to a complex set of British problems which will not be solved overnight and may well be accentuated by Brexit, especially if the economy takes a turn for the worse. The EU budget will not make much of a dent on the needs.

I grew-up in a council housing state in inner London.

I went to a low achieving secondary school and I was in the tiny minority that lucky enough to get to university.

I worked my way up my profession without the benefit of old boy networks.

I stumbled into an international career which has taken me throughout the EU member countries, as well as all the Candidate Countries knocking at the EU door.

My friends and family count among the people that are suffering from the angst that afflicts Britons.

So I feel able to say this: by tapping into the anxieties and frustrations of ordinary working Britons, the leading Brexiteers, their Oxbridge educated journalist buddies and their billionaire backers are spinning a very tall tale so as to tap into the legitimate concerns of ordinary Britons.

They are doing this knowingly, manipulatively and without the least intention of doing something about those concerns, should Brexit occur. Quite the opposite: their privileges and advantages are likely to be reinforced once they no longer have to look over their shoulder or deal with the bright glare of the other 27 countries of the EU.

Brexit will undoubtedly lead to winners and losers.

You can be certain of which side the leading Brexiteers, their über-wealthy and well-connected friends funding the campaigns and writing the misleading newspaper articles will be on.

But can you be so certain that your employment rights, wage levels, social benefits, etc. will be protected, let alone improved, upon Brexit?

I'm not. Not in the least.

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