

Richard Corbett MEP

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for Yorkshire & Humber

Quarterly Report

Summer 2016

I write to you at the end of a month in politics that has been unpredictable, shocking and at times disturbing. By the time you read this, the dust may have begun to settle on the immediate turmoil following the referendum result. But uncertainty about the future direction of our country is likely to persist for several years to come.



The result came as a shock to many. But I want to take this opportunity to acknowledge and thank the many activists in our region and across the country, including a large number of Labour members, who worked tirelessly for a Remain vote in the days leading up to 23 June. It was a pleasure to campaign alongside so many committed Europeans on the streets of Yorkshire.

Whatever happens next, we will need to rely even more heavily on our Labour values of solidarity, social justice and internationalism.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Richard".

1. Nothing is settled

On the face of it, it's clear. The referendum decided that Britain should leave the EU.

And yet, despite this, there have been rallies across the country opposing Brexit, several million people signing a petition to Parliament urging it to vote against triggering Article 50, judicial action against the Leave campaign, and the devolved Scottish government hinting it could block the process.

So why is this? There are three reasons.

- **The narrowness of the result:** 37.4% v 34.7% of the electorate (given that 27.8% didn't vote) is felt by many to be inconclusive. It is, after all, what Leave supporter Farage himself said would not settle the issue, had it gone the other way.
- **Leave lies:** with more and more people realising that they were taken in by untruths put out by the Leave campaign, the legitimacy of the result is questioned by many.
- **Remain truths vindicated:** the warnings about the risks of

leaving, which were vilified as “scaremongering” by Leave campaigners, are proving to be accurate, with an immediate plummet in the value of the pound, Britain's credit rating downgraded, threats to jobs as companies consider relocating, and a fall in economic growth which could turn out to be disastrous.

But beyond these immediate reasons, there are above all growing doubts about what the alternative to membership might be. Two have been contemplated — and they are both problematic.

(1) Some Leave campaigners claimed we could **exit the EU but remain in the single European market** and continue to enjoy unfettered access for all British goods and services to what is still, by a mile, our vital main export market. But full access like we have now requires accepting the common rules for the common market, over which we will no longer have a say. It is also likely to require acceptance of free movement — exactly the point that Leave campaigners said was unacceptable! We'd end up keeping what they consider to be the main disadvantage of membership, while losing our say over single market rules that will affect us anyway.

(2) Other Leave campaigners therefore advocated **exiting the single market entirely** (“going

global”). This is likely to be highly damaging to our economy. We would face tariffs on exports to Europe and we would need quickly to negotiate new trade agreements across the world to replace those we currently have via the EU, which were secured with the full clout of the world's largest market behind us. No wonder the world is aghast at this prospect!

Before triggering the Article 50 divorce negotiations, the government has to plump for one of these two unpalatable options. It has no explicit mandate for either, and so should allow time for a full debate in Parliament and in the country.

But I would not be surprised if that debate gave rise to even more calls from former Leave voters for a rethink. They will rightly say that that is not what they were told. And many will even say that we're better off in rather than following either of those two paths.

Whether that requires a referendum on the alternative chosen by the government, or on the outcome of the negotiations, or a repeat of the referendum on membership, or a general election, or a reaffirmation of Britain's traditional parliamentary sovereignty for taking such decisions... this will be the subject of much debate.

But the idea that the referendum has settled the issue is certainly questionable.

2. What happens to UK MEPs?

For now, the UK remains a member of the EU and UK citizens continue to enjoy all the benefits and responsibilities of membership. This includes the right to have MEPs, duly elected by them, representing their interests in the European Parliament.

As Labour MEPs, we will continue to carry out our mandate and play a full role in the work of the Parliament for as long as the UK remains a member of the EU. We will, of course, exercise careful judgement when deciding how to cast votes. There will inevitably be decisions to be taken on future EU agreements which are

unlikely to affect the UK in the same way as our neighbours, and we will not seek to block such decisions or influence them unduly.

On the other hand, to withdraw fully from the work of the Parliament would be in the interests of neither our own constituents nor the citizens of the rest of the European Union. The EU relies on an effective European Parliament as a democratically elected balance to the other institutions. We will continue to perform this duty while we retain our mandate to do so.

3. Doorstep EU

Every day since the referendum result, there's been a deluge of UK media reports full of predictions, speculation and sometimes misinformation about the process by which the UK might leave the EU.

In an attempt to separate fact from fiction, I've repurposed my popular Doorstep EU app to focus on four key areas:

- **Behind the headlines:** continuing daily analysis of the accuracy (or otherwise!) of UK media coverage about European issues.
- **Impact:** chronicling and explaining the ongoing fallout

from the referendum — economic, political and social.

- **Roadmap:** a detailed explanation of how Article 50 works, when we might trigger it, and what key issues will need addressing in future negotiations.
- **Blog:** a mobile version of the posts from my website.

My team and I update and tweak the app's content every day, so you're guaranteed to have the most recent, authoritative and in-depth information available.

Doorstep EU has had more than 23,000 downloads since its launch in 2015. You can download it for free to your Apple or Android mobile device from www.richardcorbett.org.uk/app, by searching for Doorstep EU in your device's app store, or by scanning the QR code on the right!



4. Labour leadership

We are now plunged into a difficult contest for the Labour leadership.

We need to conduct this in a way that respectfully recognises both the huge desire for a new direction in the party, as reflected in Jeremy's election, and the fact that he has lost the support of over 80% of his parliamentary colleagues who work with him on a daily basis.

This is not a battle between 'Trots' and 'Blairites', but an agonising

choice for party members and supporters who can see both sides of the argument.

I got on well with Jeremy and have had some good discussions with him. But I have been disappointed in how he failed to follow up on things that were agreed in principle. We need a leader who can earn the respect of all parts of the party and bring them together. I will therefore vote for Owen Smith.

Find out more online

My website, www.richardcorbett.org.uk, is updated regularly with news, views and analysis on EU and Labour party topics. If you subscribe to my newsletter online, you'll be sent an email whenever I add new content.

You can also follow me on Twitter [@rcorbettmep](https://twitter.com/rcorbettmep), and on Facebook by 'liking' **Richard Corbett MEP**.

As a group of Labour MEPs, we have a shared website where you can read press releases, download resources and browse all Labour representatives in the European Parliament. www.eurolabour.org.uk

Annex: Why did they win?

In a general climate of suspicion towards politics, the establishment, and globalisation, Leave campaigners managed to portray themselves as anti-establishment insurgents, despite being led by ultra-establishment figures. [They they ran a ruthlessly efficient campaign](#), strong on the dark arts of manipulating media, manufacturing myths and rebutting anything — however authoritative — that didn't support their view, brazenly labelling it all as “propaganda” or biased or scaremongering.

They had a clever soundbite, “take control”, which they were disciplined in repeating in every speech and every interview on every subject. It had superficial appeal, and required whole sentences to rebut and explain that we have more control over many issues by being part of the EU. It avoided making any choices on any subject (if you have control, you can do whatever you want, even if that means very different things for different people). The Remain campaign's slogan was no match.

They successfully shifted the debate to migration. The Remain

campaign either avoided the issue, urging people to focus instead on economic benefits, or tried to spell out the benefits of migration — neither of which would convince those with strongly-held concerns. Many of us warned the campaign that it would have been more useful to point out that we're better off in the EU even from that standpoint, [for reasons I've explained elsewhere](#).

They told lies. [There was a breathtakingly long list of outright lies told by Brexit campaigners](#).

They built on 30 years of eurosceptic media stories, an art form pioneered by Boris Johnson himself when he was Telegraph correspondent in Brussels. The constant drip, drip of stories (from straight bananas to the volume of legislation “imposed” on us by “Brussels”) intended to make the Union appear silly or sinister has, over the years, had a major effect on public perceptions of the EU. This was reinforced by the gamut of europhobe newspapers (Mail, Express, Sun, Telegraph) during the campaign itself.

They were helped by the Remain campaign being seen to be led,

on the Conservative side, by an inevitably unpopular prime minister in his sixth year of office and a chancellor discredited after his shambolic budget, and on the Labour side by a leader who was unenthusiastic. The official Stronger In campaign was led by the disastrous Lord Rose, rapidly sidelined (but not replaced) after his initial gaffes. It focused so much on the risks of leaving that it did not get across the positives of the EU. It failed sufficiently to deploy the vast array of non-political supporters, from universities to ecologists to businesses to trade unions.

Now, the Leave lies are coming home to roost. They said there would be no damaging economic consequences — there are. They said securing a new trade deal with the EU will be no problem — it is. They said there would be no threat to the integrity of the UK — it's emerging.

Rarely has a country's history been manipulated in such a way against its best interests.

Recent activities

CLP visits

Skipton & Ripon
Richmond
East Yorkshire
Leeds Central
Leeds North East
Leeds North West
Leeds East
Leeds West
Bradford South
Shipley
Keighley
Colne Valley
Calder Valley
Halifax
Pontefract & Castleford
Doncaster Central
Penistone & Stockbridge
York Inner
York Outer
Batley & Spen
Beverley & Holderness
Harrogate & Knaresborough
Selby
Thirsk & Malton
Hull East
Bradford East
Pudsey
Elmet & Rothwell
Scarborough & Whitby

Thornton
Scarborough
Richmond
York
Sowerby Bridge
Halifax
Sheffield
Bingley

Public debates

Leeds x2
Bradford x3
Goole
Harrogate
Burley in Wharfedale
Batley
Drax
Cullingworth
Pontefract
Brussels
many TV and radio

Industry

Britvic
Icelandic Seachill
Leeds Bradford airport
Community pharmacies in North Yorkshire
Bradford College
Sheepscar Post Office
Drax power station
BASF
Hull port
Grimsby fish market
Morrisons fish processing
York Benenden
Vivergo Fuels, Hull
British Gas, Leeds
O2
Smith & Nephew, Hull
Premier Seafoods, Grimsby

Visits to the European Parliament

A few spaces are available for constituents to visit the European Parliament in November. If you're interested, please contact Councillor Elizabeth Nash on 0113 2758594 or email elizabeth.nash@leeds.gov.uk.

You can download a copy of this report in electronic format from www.richardcorbett.org.uk, where you can also view my previous quarterly reports and read regular updates from my blog.

To request printed copies, including in an alternate format or in large print, please email richard@richardcorbett.org.uk.



Doorstep EU

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