**Brexit – the road to freedom**

Albert Einstein once said that ‘We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking that created them'.

*That*, is very useful advice for the place in history we find ourselves in.

We began as a people having to fend for ourselves, having to battle nature for a living. From the earliest days we had to be self-sufficient, there never has been a god who has provided for us; it’s always been us who have very generously provided for gods, and their disciples.

After the development of agriculture enabled us to settle rather than roam, some interesting things happened. Apparently in this country, perhaps uniquely, before the Norman Conquest, ploughing began to be done in long single strips, chiefly around Nottinghamshire it appears. This seemingly innocuous development meant that ploughmen could plough while walking along next to each other. In turn this meant that they could talk to each other while they ploughed, and talk they did, thus quite possibly giving us the beginnings of what is rather grandly now called our democratic tradition - workers talking.

Through the vicissitudes of the millennia we always remained self-sufficient, and did develop a species of self-sufficiency in politics. When the Black Death more than decimated the population, giving however the possibility to improve peasants’ wages, those peasants revolted when feudal lords tried to keep the price of labour down; that was the Peasants Revolt of 1381.

When a King tried to rule without parliament we cut off his head, and no monarch has successfully tried it since. Our Revolution took place 150 years before the French, and 250 years before the Russian.

We created another revolution, the Industrial Revolution, leading the world towards the beginnings of a material plenty which could only have seemed fantasy to earlier ages. And to survive *that* industrial revolution we had to create Trade Unions, to protect us from the ravages of an employing class which would have worked us to death if we hadn’t stopped them.

That industrial revolution, and those Trade Unions led directly to the creation of a fine British achievement, the NHS, and they also enabled us to prevail over a fascism heartily supported by pillars of the establishment from within the monarchy to the church, and from the Lords to the Commons.

In all of this was a self-sufficiency, a self-reliance. We knew that if *we* didn’t do it, no-one would do it for us.

But, a little over a hundred years ago, that self-reliance wavered. We began to feel that we’d reached the limits of what we could, or perhaps what we should achieve by standing on our own feet. We decided that we should channel our efforts away from our workplaces, where we were finally getting a grip on the employing class, & finally coming to understand the mechanisms of its’ profit motive, and we turned aside, and decided instead that the old employing class’ talking shop, parliament, was where we should be.

So we created the Labour Party, and tried with might & main to delegate our thinking to it. ‘You go to parliament and do the fighting for us’. This was the new creed. The highest political achievement was a place in Westminster & the possibility of changing the system from within, blithely ignoring the fact that all members of parliament have to swear allegiance to the very system reformers want to change. Crossing your fingers behind your back when you’re taking the oath doesn’t count.

This step into parliament, seen as so positive by a majority of workers, was the greatest imaginable step backwards. It marked a turning point away from self-sufficiency, and towards what in time has become known as social democracy. It’s as if we thought we could get someone else to do the ploughing for us.

Well an unploughed field runs to weed, and our collective mind became quickly overgrown. A kind of national lack of confidence followed, especially as the generation that won the war grew older. We seemed to believe that we could not achieve progress by ourselves, that we would need not just one governing class to look up to, but that we’d better have instead six governments to look up to, then nine, and eventually the 28 that now comprise the European Union.

This lack of self-confidence came to a head during the dark days of Thatcher. At least before then workers organised in Unions had relied on themselves. If they didn’t achieve what they needed to for their members there was no-one to blame but themselves. Then a bright idea dawned; the organisation then called the European Community sounded a nice touchy-feely alternative to the harshness of Thatcher’s de-industrialisation.

Not that anyone can seriously have thought that Jacques Delors was going to re-open the pits, shipyards & steelworks Thatcher had brutally chopped. Almost overnight proud Unions born in conspiracy centuries before opened offices in a foreign country in the belief that progress lay in supplication.

But then, starkly, on 23 June 2016, there was a reassertion. A referendum result that shocked and frightened the establishment, nearly as much as it frightened and shocked those within our class afeard of their own shadows, never mind frightened of striking out once more as an independent country. Good enough for Viet Nam, independence, or even Croatia. But not for Britain.

Trade Unions unfortunately were spectacularly out of step with their members on the referendum issues, and worse still, they still are, having learnt nothing. Many went so far as to accept EU funds to run remain campaigns among members, often without any kind of mandate to do so. This, in spite of the fact that EU law bans industrial action which obstructs the EU’s founding principles of free movement of goods, services, capital and labour – which just about covers everything that Trade Unions might ever need to take industrial action over!

On top of that, in spite of some worthy ‘solidarity with Greece’ noises in the Unions, the EU virtually outlawed industrial action in Greece, and arguably outlawed Unions themselves as a condition of bailouts to Greece, bailouts which were themselves really just a way of siphoning money to German banks. And surely should we know why this process was so viscerally hated in Greece?

Because that country got virtually not a Drachma in reparations for the devastation that German occupation of Greece caused during the war, and now they’re told that they’ve got to be bled dry to keep German banks afloat.

And the effects of this EU-led austerity are swingeing. We know that the Greek population has steadily fallen since the so-called ‘bailout’ was imposed. The same is true of Rumania, even without a bailout, where one quarter of its workforce has left the country, and, between 2011 – 2013 alone, a massive one-third of its’ doctors!

And imagine, many things Unions regularly complain of – lack of application of the minimum wage, inequalities at work, zero hours contracts – how have EU labour laws fared in outlawing any of them.......?

One might think that Unions would be concerned about unemployment, or pay, both massively affected by millions of workers coming from EU countries. Six EU countries have *average* wage levels less than a third of Britain’s *minimum* wage, and in another eight it is less than half. Brexit gives us the possibility to control this migration. Controlling migration does not mean by the way, necessarily stopping all migration, just as controlling your food intake doesn’t mean that you stop eating!

It’s worth saying though that many of the people who want to source food locally don’t want us to source our doctors locally. We don’t want our asparagus to come all the way from Peru, but we demand the right to get our doctors from India.

A Bank of England study concluded that a 10 percentage point rise in the proportion of migrants is associated with a 2% reduction in pay in the semi- and unskilled services sector. These are facts which remainer Trade Unions wantonly ignore, as do those pontificators who are not directly affected by this migration, because I haven’t seen many Polish high court judges, or Bulgarian Newspaper editors, have you? So they can afford to be against migration because they get cheaper plumbers, whilst knowing that migration doesn’t threaten *their* livelihoods.

Journalist Robert Peston has said that ‘immigration has shifted the balance of power between company and worker too far in the direction of the boss’ – well if he can see that why on earth can’t Trade Unions?

And while on the subject of movement of people, reflect on this; any EU country can make anyone in the world a citizen, and then every other EU country has to accept that person as a citizen of theirs if that person wishes to move there. At a stroke this completely removes the possibility of any country controlling who comes into its sovereign territory.

Just to go back a bit......... It can be argued that the Reformation, that great overthrowing of rule from abroad, didn’t begin in 1517 in Wittenburg with Martin Luther, but in 1511 in St Paul’s when Dean Collet preached in favour of the statute of praemunire, the legal doctrine rejecting rule from abroad. That refusal to accept rule from abroad was reversed 462 years later in the desire precisely to *be* ruled from abroad, when we joined the forerunner of the EU. Ruled this time not from Rome this time, but from Brussels.

I don’t think anyone really ever thought that they’d have more success in lobbying Brussels than Westminster, but somehow it felt better to have your enemy further away, and because it’s impolite to be rude to foreigners it had the added advantage that that meant we couldn’t be rude to our enemy, to our bosses, making us all the more respectable.

So really, it was a giving up, not a relocation of effort. After all, the British plainly didn’t care; barely anyone voted in European parliamentary elections, and very few can name more than two or three MEP’s, or explain the differences between the Council of Ministers, the European parliament & the European Commission.

As Will Podmore’s excellent book, ‘Brexit, the Road to Freedom’ – upon which I have drawn heavily this evening - demonstrates, the years of our membership of the EU have seen Britain grow more slowly, suffer more unemployment, and invest less than at any other time in our history.

The calls to get out of the EU straitjacket grew as the malign effects of membership became more evident. Eventually there was no way in which the establishment, and in particular its oldest political party could prevent the tearing of its’ very fabric, and it called a referendum to drive a stake through the heart of anti-EU sentiment. For make no mistake, the referendum on membership was called for one reason, and for one reason only; because Cameron & his crew thought they’d win it, and that we’d vote to stay in. They envisaged the chains being tightened and more manacles added. It never crossed their arrogant little minds that the British people were not yet entirely cowed.

Well, just like Churchill in ’45, you should never take the British people for granted. Some pro-EU types said that 40 years of anti-EU propaganda swung the referendum. No - it was the 40 years experience of being *in* the EU that swung the referendum!

The referendum wasn’t about what laws we should have, but about who should write the laws.

So we started with working people talking to each other at the plough, and workers talking to each other is what we had a lot of before that referendum when it finally came in 2016. The campaign itself was heavily loaded in favour of those arguing to remain in the EU: the remain campaign spent just over £16 million, the leave campaign £11 million. In addition to the Labour Party spending nearly £5 million, American banks chipped in too, Goldman Sachs and J.P. Morgan both bankrolling the remain campaign to the tune of half a million each.

And listen to this, J.P. Morgan – *an American bank* - issued a statement saying that it “deplored constitutional protection of workers’ rights, consensus building systems and the right to protest if unwelcome changes are made to the political system.”

On top of that, the Cameron government said in 2015 it had no intention of spending public money on the campaign; in the event it spent £9.3 million on a pro-EU leaflet which went to every household in Britain.

Money generally was very much at issue in the campaign, in particular the contribution we make to the EU. The £350 million / week figure was pooh-poohed both before and since the referendum.

Well, if you add up the governments own figures from 2009 to 2016, the contribution made by the British taxpayer to the EU, only a small part of which has come back to us in various ways, was an incomprehensibly large £135.641 billion. Estimates are that last year we handed over, including VAT receipts, a whopping £20 billion, which is £384.6 million PER WEEK.

Interestingly, £384m / week is exactly the amount Theresa May said she’d additionally allocate to the NHS in June this year. That’s a bigger increase by the way than Labour promised at the 2017 election.

The leave campaigns’ figure of £350 million / week was not a promise to transfer the expenditure from the EU to the NHS, by the way, but it was a statement of fact - £350 million a week is *available* to be spent on the NHS when we stop giving it to the EU. Or for that matter available to spend on a combination of industry, education, social care and the NHS.

The sooner we get our hands on it the better; at the rate of £350 million/week (and now we know the amount is higher than that) we have given to the EU *since* 23 June 2016 £42.350 billion. Imagine what we could have done with that! Is anyone from the pro-EU camp telling us what magnificent benefits we’ve had from such an eye-watering amount of money? The silence is deafening.

The EU of course says we pay in considerably less, between 11 & 15 billion euros, which apart from anything else shows that they don’t actually know how much we do pay in!

And if that wasn’t enough, they’re saying that we’ve got to pay a further vast sum to be allowed to leave - £39 billion – with possibly *another* £17 billion if we don’t agree quickly enough! There stands the EU as protection racket; pay up now or we’ll make you pay even more to leave. Provoking the joke, what do you call an organisation that you have to pay to leave? The answer is not the EU by the way – it’s the mafia!

The media, and in particular, and shamefully, the BBC was heavily biased in the referendum campaign: between 2002 & 2017 there was 274 hours coverage of the EU on the BBC, involving the views of 6,882 people: *only 14* of those people were non-Tory advocates of leaving the EU! You could almost be forgiven if you thought there weren’t *any*.

It was said by many pro-EU advocates that the vote for Brexit came from the same motives here as did the vote for Trump in America. Not so! There, the *rich* voted for Trump; here, the rich voted for the *EU*. Trump won in all income groups of more than $50,000 per annum; here, in local authority areas where average earnings were *above* £23,000 in June 2016, 65% voted to *remain*, but where the average earnings were *below* £23,000, only 23% voted to remain. And even more revealingly, of the 232 local authority areas with the highest levels of manufacturing industry, a *really* huge 86% voted against being in the EU.

It was a campaign in which every conceivable scare tactic was deployed, and it is interesting now to see a list of claims about what would happen if we left:

* Farming would disappear altogether from Britain (Patrick McLoughlin)
* The global environment would be under threat (Ed Miliband)
* Leaving the EU would risk bringing war to Europe (Cameron)
* Brexit could lead to the downfall of western political civilisation (Donald Tusk)
* Brexit risked the destruction of the international order (David Miliband)
* Britain could not enforce workers rights without the help of the EU (Gordon Brown [more of him later])
* Brexit could derail the fight for women’s rights (Harriet Harman)

It should be a source of great pride that more people dared to do the unthinkable, and vote against the advice of their ‘betters’, than anyone had thought possible. More people voted for this one single thing, independence, than had ever voted for anything before. And special mention should be made of the brave young people in London (some of them in this room) who voted for independence in spite of the varying degrees of intellectual intimidation they faced.

Only for the outcome of the referendum to be described as ‘advisory’, which has repeatedly been said. Those saying this go on to say that, guess who should have the final say? That’s right – Parliament! A parliament of remainers.

Again to quote ‘Brexit, the Road to Freedom’, “Imagine if the remain camp had won the referendum, and the government had then said ‘well we’ve listened to the debates and have now decided that *leaving* the EU is the right thing to do, your vote was only advisory’”.

In the end, 17,410,742 people voted to leave the EU; more than ever voted for Thatcher, Blair, or any other Prime Minister in history, so if the referendum result is somehow illegitimate, or the majority too small, then every government we’ve ever had has never had a mandate to do anything!

And there are those who deliberately underestimate the significance of the vote. I was in a meeting the day before the referendum where a member of the SWP said that, although on balance they were for leaving, the vote wouldn’t change anything; the 24th June would be the same as the 23rd, nothing would have changed. Well John McDonnell, no enemy of the SWP, said even before the referendum, “the Brexit campaign has done more damage to capitalism in four days than the Socialist Workers Party did in 40 years.” And that was just the campaign! So imagine what damage Brexit itself will do!

And Gordon Brown, not usually given to overstatement, wrote this about the decision; it was “the largest popular revolt against political, business and financial elites, the nearest Britain has come in centuries to a revolution”. Maybe I should read that again..........Yet we’re always told that Brexit is a ‘right wing project’, whatever that might be.

The key issue in the referendum was democracy. In a poll taken on the day, of those who had voted, the biggest single reason for voting leave was given as ‘the principle that decisions about Britain should be taken in Britain.’ So it was a decision about national democracy.

That is why it is so profoundly *un*democratic to impede the process we voted for, or even to delay it. After all, I think millions who voted to leave expected Article 50 to be invoked the next day – not 9 months later. Never mind that leaving was a further two years after that!

And one of the features of democracy is, or at least is supposed to be, a degree of freedom of speech. So listen to this, from the EU Advocate General, the custodian of all those pro-worker laws we hear so much about; “Criticism of the EU is akin to blasphemy, and can be restricted without affecting freedom of speech”! We need another reformation it seems.

Also, there has been a lot of talk about the rights of the minority, of those who lost the vote. Well they have the same rights as any other citizen, but those rights don’t include the right to *overrule* the majority, i.e those who won the referendum.

I’m afraid that anyone who thought that the vote in itself would lead to our leaving the EU straightforwardly have been proved to be naive. We can now see what should have been clear all along, that we have got what is at least a two-stage process. The first stage is the declaration, the declaration of independence if you like; that was the referendum.

But the second stage is to impose that decision, to actually make it happen. That’s the stage in which we now find ourselves. How to ensure that the view of the majority is accepted, and not subverted, by an unholy alliance of newspapers, politicians, employers, and, worst of all, Trade Unions.

Whenever independence has been achieved in the world, whether it was the United Provinces of the Netherlands wrenching themselves away from Spain in a bitter struggle over sixty years, or America or the majority of Ireland becoming independent of Britain, it was not achieved by voting, it was achieved by a long and hard struggle.

Even in that part of Yugoslavia which became Croatia it wasn’t their referendum that clinched their so-called independence, it was German recognition and NATO bombing, in that order, that created that so-called country. Independence has to be fought for, is the lesson, and we will have to fight for ours.

We should ask those in favour of the EU how many of them are in favour of empire, would they call themselves imperialists? I say this because of how the EU views itself. Jose Manuel Barroso, representing the European Commission, said in 2015, “We are a very special construction unique in the history of mankind....Sometimes I like to compare the EU as a creation to the organisation of Empire. We have the dimension of Empire”. Wow! He also said, “There is no sovereignty any more. Only the markets are sovereign”. Could the nature of the EU be put any more clearly? Brexit a right wing project??

Negotiating with the EU is like fighting a monkey in a dustbin; we should walk away, just leave.

The majority, those who voted to leave, together with a growing number of those who voted to remain but who respect the decision of the people, have to ensure that if we’re not out in five months time, Britain becomes ungovernable. That’s in around 150 days, so not a long time.

So the saboteurs must be warned – stop undermining the express wish of the British people, and accept with as much grace as you can, that our future lies outside the EU.

And saboteurs, real saboteurs, do exist. Just as Lords Halifax and Rothermere egged on Hitler, there are those who egg on Brussels.

The EU *needs* to make Brexit as difficult as possible. Soon the Italian economy will collapse in the way that Greece’s did, and Brussels wants to prevent those two countries following Britain out of the EU. Should they leave, then the euro as a currency is dead, and that would mean the end of the EU.

Take a hard line with Britain the saboteurs say, make it as difficult as you can for them to leave. Well a dictionary definition of treason is ‘betrayal of one’s sovereign country’, and that’s exactly what these people are doing, which makes them traitors. Off with their heads!

The only reason they don’t consistently call for a *second* referendum is that they know they’d lose it, and that *really* would finish them off. And now we’ve got arch-traitor Blair threatening a *third referendum!!*

The old EU strong arm tactic brought up-to-date – we’ll just keep on forcing you to vote until you come up with the result *we* want. Remember all those countries who were made to vote again & again until they ratified EU treaties?

It’s increasingly clear that free trade, as opposed to simply trading freely, is incompatible with the nation-state. And the truth is that Brexit and parliamentary democracy look increasingly incompatible too. It looks more & more as though we are not going to get the former through the agency of the latter. And this has massive, even revolutionary implications.

When a ruling class cannot rule in the old way, a certain Mr Lenin said, you’ve got a revolutionary situation.

Well let’s not overstate matters, but let’s not be blind to the writing on the wall either. If parliament blocks Brexit, if prevarication and procrastination become the precursor to our being locked in to a customs union which is indistinguishable from being in the EU, then parliament, not the EU, becomes the enemy.

That would be final proof that our self-sufficiency has to be reasserted, that it can’t be delegated to parliament, because parliament will not carry out our will.

That is the significance of the place in history we find ourselves in.

That is the significance of the long game being played by those in & out of parliament who see independence as a threat to their ability to rule - and we should welcome it. We should welcome the veil being lifted from our eyes, it will help us to see all the more clearly. Finally the road we have voluntarily trodden, leading away from relying on ourselves, will be abandoned. There will be no-one *left* on which to rely, we will *have* to do it ourselves.

There should certainly be no illusions about what *Labour* might do; in fact perhaps we ought to take this opportunity to remind Jeremy Corbyn what he surely must remember, that Kenneth Clarke said as long ago as 1983, “the great thing about Europe is that it makes most of Labour’s policies illegal.”

True then, true now. So why on earth would that party want to remain members of an organisation which will prevent its’ policies being enacted, and to pay through the nose for the privilege??

So there’s now no left and right in Britain, if ever there was. There’s only leave and remain. *In*dependence, or dependence. Home rule or Brussels rule. The question is one of control. Who doesn’t want to control their own lives? So why wouldn’t we want to control our own country? It’s not, as is sometimes said, about taking *back* control, because we, the sovereign people, have never really had control. It’s about *taking* control, really taking control for the first time.

We shouldn’t over-dramatise the situation, or for that matter reach into the past for historical analogies, but I think we should look at how civil wars start.

There are no hard and fast rules, but civil wars revolve around a single central issue, an issue which in the end argument and debate cannot resolve, and one which splits the country, even families.

The ingredients are maturing in Britain for a fundamental change, and one which involves the most fundamental of questions; who should run our lives? That question lies at the heart of all civil wars; after all there’s not much point in tearing a country to pieces over anything less.

The level of thinking that created the mess we’ve endured was the thinking that left the solving of our problems to others, to parliament first of all and eventually to the EU. We will have to replace it with a different thinking.

A thinking more self-confident.

A thinking that will unite an overwhelming number in common cause to build a better future.

A thinking which will lead us to rebuild our nation, and to work with all other nations who will work with us, to build not just a better Europe, but a better world.