

## Two Angry People Walk Into a Cafe

### Time for Some Clarity

*This was the Clarity view in late March 2016, three months before the Brexit referendum*

These two people seem to you and me to be reasonable, but they are worried and frustrated and they engage in an argument. It's the sort of argument where they don't listen to each other. They use random facts without an overall coherent point of view. To the bystander this looks like an argument of soundbites that they are lobbing at each other in an untargeted way.

#### **This Can Only be Brexit**

From what we are seeing this referendum in June is shaping up to be as unsatisfactory a debate as the 2014 referendum in Scotland. Unsatisfactory, because we believe it runs the risk of resolving little and dividing a lot.

#### **Bad Divisions Already Here**

We are seeing very unsatisfactory divisions already. Brexit seems to be polarising people on many levels including rich and poor, educated and less educated, north and south, Scotland and England, establishment and frustrated, those who travel abroad and those who don't. Imagine a United Kingdom where the rich, educated, southern, establishment, helped by the Scots win this referendum, or vice versa.

#### **What is it Going to be Like on June 24<sup>th</sup>?**

The question we should be asking now is how is the United Kingdom going to feel the day after voting?

We argued long before the Scotland referendum that the 'Better Together' campaign was too negative. Scotland was left feeling it won for defensive rather than positive reasons. David Cameron reinforced that with his speech on the steps of 10 Downing Street the day after, that made clear to Scots how angry the English were with them and that they were now going to be marginalised.

The outcome hasn't only been divisive between the two nations. In our research we see that in Scotland some families and friends are still divided – what happens now is that there is a continual looking for proof of why the other side was wrong.

### **Two Negative Positions**

Currently there appear to be two positions in the Brexit debate and both are based on fear. A *fear of immigrants* is prompting a desire to leave the EU or a *fear of the unknown* encouraging a desire to stay. Both sides will argue that they are doing more than this, but from what we see, most voters aren't seeing a greater choice.

We believe that if the debate cannot elevate beyond these two positions, then June 24<sup>th</sup> will be a miserable day for the United Kingdom whichever side wins.

### **The Nature of Democracy**

Even if you lose in any election, a key part of democracy is that you come together and identify things you can rally around. That requires a positive view that has been promoted long before a vote. However much you believe in something, you can't bring together a population around a negative.

We'll offer an insight for either side in this debate. From what we see, the one thing that might encourage people to look up beyond mundane, parochial, self-interest is children and grand-children. Asking the question 'what United Kingdom do we want for our children and grand-children?' could elevate this referendum beyond fear and soundbites.

We need a bigger debate before June 23 if we are going to walk into that café happily together, the day after.

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