

Brexit: past, present and future perspectives

A History & Policy conference at King's College London

The Council Room

Wednesday 2 November 2016, 2pm-6pm

After the political tumult of the summer, the real work begins.

Prominent economic and political historians will come together to give their perspectives on what the past can tell us about the future. Has the referendum result changed our "constitution" irrevocably? Does it signal an embrace for the principles of free trade or their rejection? Is Brexit a sign of a wider reaction against globalisation? What if anything can Britain's pre-European past tell us about its economic future?

Above all, what challenges will Westminster and Whitehall face over the coming years as they address these questions? The discussions seek to offer long-range guidance and perspective to policy makers in a situation for which there is no institutional memory. Historical context has never been more important.

2pm - 3.15pm Session 1: Brexit and British politics

Chair: Anne Perkins, *The Guardian*

Professor Andrew Gamble: 'The impact of Brexit on British politics.'

Abstract: The consequences of the Brexit vote in June 2016 will take many years to be fully understood. The focus of the debate has already shifted from whether there should be a Brexit at all to what kind of Brexit the UK should now seek to achieve. The result of the referendum has already had a profound effect on all the UK's main political parties, and has raised again difficult questions about Britain's future role in the world, and the future of the United Kingdom itself. This paper will assess the changes which have already taken place, and will ask whether Brexit will have lasting consequences for British politics and British government. Will it come to be seen as a watershed in the political development of the UK, or only an episode in a continuous process of evolution?

Dr Michael Kandiah: 'What opposition to the first UK application to join the EEC in 1961 can tell us.'

Abstract: tbc

Respondent: Dominic Grieve MP QC.

3.30pm - 5pm Session 2: Brexit, the UK and the wider world

Chair: Kate Bell, TUC

Professor Frank Trentmann: 'Brexit means Brexit but does Free Trade mean Free Trade?'

Abstract: One of the many curious aspects of the Brexit debate this year has been its almost utter lack of interest in the no less explosive and divisive controversy over Free Trade in early twentieth century Britain. Free Trade, then, was not only at the centre of heated political debate once but in the general elections of 1906, 1910 and 1923. This talk ponders the lessons from that history for the present. There was a comparable battle over meanings. "Free Trade" meant retaliation and bargaining tariffs to some, revenue tariffs with an open door to others, and full-blown unilateralism to yet others. Ambiguity serves a function in politics, but the Edwardian debate also suggests that a highly emotive and charged public debate tends to crystallise and simplify positions. Moreover, trade was linked to different political ideas and stories. Free Trade then stood for a national story of progress and emancipation. It stood for transparent democratic processes and seen to safeguard the interests of citizen-consumers. This made it incompatible with trade negotiations, which is what Brexiteers think of when they evoke free trade. The events after 1931, when Britain formally abandoned free trade, is a sobering story of the very limited gains from negotiations, at a time when Britain was more powerful and still had an empire. Today, such negotiations and the prospect of international agreements are vastly more complex, difficult and less transparent, as Free Trade no longer just aims to free the movement of goods but concerns services, patents and standards that reach more deeply and widely into the social and economic fabric of nations.

Professor Martin Daunton: ' Does Brexit mean a reversal of globalisation?'

Abstract: Many supporters of Brexit claim that it is a return to free trade, a rejection of the EU as a customs union in favour of trading with the world, and that the TTIP is flawed. But does Brexit and the strong support for Trump mark the moment at which globalisation will go into reverse? The ration of world trade to output has been stable since 2008, and flows of foreign direct investment have fallen. The forces leading to globalisation have weakened now that many labour intensive commodities have been outsourced, and growth of the Chinese economy has slowed. At the same time, protectionist pressures have started to appear which could turn the stagnation of globalisation into retreat. These sentiments have arisen as a result of past failures to balance the gains and losses from globalisation, and to provide support for those who lost. The backlash that has resulted might lead to a shift away from multilateralism that some commentators see as a return to the beggar my neighbour policies of the 1930s to protect national interests. One of the major economic challenges after Brexit is to ensure that policies are put into place do not destroy the post-war institutions but that recreate, in different circumstances, a balancing of domestic welfare and international economic growth.

Lord Hannay: "What might the outcome of the Brexit negotiations look like ? "

Abstract: tbc

5pm-6pm Panel discussion

Lessons from the day and questions from the audience.

Chair: Professor Linda Clarke

Dr Andrew Dilley
Martin Howe QC
Dr Kirsty Hughes
Dr Helen Parr

Participants

Kate Bell is Head of the Economic and Social Affairs Department at the TUC.

Linda Clarke is Professor of European Industrial Relations in the Westminster Business School.

Martin Daunton has recently retired from his roles as Head of the School of the Humanities and Social Sciences and Professor of Economic History at Cambridge.

Andrew Dilley is a Senior Lecturer at the University of Aberdeen, with a focus on the economics, politics, and culture of the Empire-Commonwealth.

Andrew Gamble is Emeritus Professor of Politics at Queens' College Cambridge.

Dominic Grieve is MP for Beaconsfield, was Attorney General in the Coalition Government from 2010-2014 and is currently the Chair of the Intelligence and Security Committee.

Lord Hannay was Permanent Representative to the European Economic Community from 1985-90. From 1990 until 1995 he was UK ambassador to the United Nations.

Martin Howe practises in the field of Intellectual property law. He is a member of the Conservative Party's Commission to create a Bill of Rights and Chairman of the Centre for Social Justice's Courts and Sentencing Policy Group.

Kirsty Hughes is Senior Fellow, Friends of Europe, Brussels, and a visiting academic at the Centre for Constitutional Change, University of Edinburgh and has held senior roles at Chatham House, the European Commission and other EU thinktanks.

Michael Kandiah is Director of the ICBH Witness Seminar Programme, and teaches at King's College London.

Helen Parr is a senior lecturer at Keele University, researching post-1945 British history, particularly Britain's relations with Europe, Britain in the Cold War, British-French relations, and British nuclear weapons policy.

Anne Perkins has been a leader writer, lobby correspondent and feature writer for the Guardian since 1997.

Frank Trentmann is a professor of history in the Department of History, Classics and Archaeology at Birkbeck College, University of London.