

Letter from Scotland



“What referendum ?” asked
the Mad Hatter

“So I suppose you just move round the table,” said Alice. “Exactly so,” said the Hatter. “But what happens when you get back to the beginning ?” Alice ventured to ask. “Suppose we change the subject,” said the March Hare.

I feel as if I’ve been round the Mad Hatter’s tea table several times in the last few weeks. This morning, when I woke up to find we were leaving the European Union, I truly thought I had fallen down Alice’s magic well. What a crazy world England seems to be...and Wales for that matter !

Here in Scotland, we hung on to our sanity by 62 per cent to 38 per cent, just as the opinion polls had predicted. All of our 32 districts voted “remain.” The question now arises: are we prepared to be “dragged out of the EU against our will” as our First Minister Nicola Sturgeon puts it, or are we going to demand a second referendum on Scottish independence ? And this time, we may well vote “Yes.”

I suggested last week that England seems to be dividing itself into the “old” and “new” camps. So the old working class in the former industrial areas have teamed up with the Home County blazers to say “No” to immigration, international co-operation, the whole complicated modern world. They prefer to relive the 1950s when we all knew our place and the Toffs were allowed to be eccentric and behave like Lewis Carroll’s Oxbridge mad hatters. In fact, Like Boris Johnson and Nigel Farage. The young in age, location, employment and aspiration, have been overruled.

We are now about to embark on a “negotiated Brexit” which has

already terrified the money markets and will terrify the long term investors too. We will be sailing off into an unknown, and probably unfriendly, sea, madly singing "Rule Britannia." Boris talks of Britain remaining outward-looking, willing and ready to co-operate with our European neighbours. Yet has just led campaign which has been arguing exactly the opposite.

The crazy thing is that all this turmoil is unnecessary. We've already had a referendum on Europe, in 1975. We've been living with the EU for 40 years. And the only reason David Cameron promised a second referendum was to solve a little local difficulty inside the Tory party. The result is likely to be another economic recession and a very big difficulty inside the Tory party with the pro-Europeans threatening to split away.

There may also be repercussions in Scotland, Ireland and across Europe. The noble project to hold us all together in peace and prosperity is now under threat. Other countries, like England, may lose their nerve that a better European Union is possible. The EU may either abandon its reform agenda – to spread democracy, tackle corruption and poverty etc – or break up into an inner group and an outer group, risking yet another divided Europe and yet another century of war.

To trump all this mad-hatterdom, Donald Trump has arrived in Scotland to open his refurbished golf course at Turnberry. He says it's "a great thing the Brits have taken back their country." When Boris and Donald team up, I know I've fallen into wonderland. Where will it all end? I think in tears, many years from now...unless of course we have another referendum when the recession comes and we move round the table yet again.