

Opposing Brexit is harming Ireland's interests

*Irish journalist Fintan O'Toole fails to spot the hypocrisy in his accusation that rhetoric could damage Anglo-Irish relations. His fellow countryman **Professor Anthony Coughlan** of Trinity College Dublin suggests that rather than trying to thwart Brexit, the Irish government should accept that the UK is leaving the EU. The best way it could act in the interests of the Irish people would be to act as a mediator between EU and the UK and help London get the best possible deal.*

Dear Fintan,

I had to smile to myself at seeing the heading to today's *Irish Times* editorial: "Rhetoric could damage [Anglo-Irish] relations", when the *Irish Times* has been the principal source of anti-English and anti-Brexit rhetoric in the three years since the 2016 referendum – thereby significantly damaging those very relations.

Over that time the *Irish Times* has consistently sneered at the 17.4 million people who voted to leave the EU in the UK referendum as reactionaries, racists and red-necks. At least weekly, sometimes daily, your cartoonist Martyn Turner has mocked the Brexiteers.

Your own book on the subject plumbed abysses of bile to throw at Boris Johnson and Jacob Rees-Mogg for being supposedly responsible for Brexit, even though large numbers of British Labour supporters and left-wingers, as well as Conservatives and non-party people, were among the 17.4 million people who voted Leave.

The truth is that Brexit is neither a right-wing nor a left-

wing cause. It is just democratic – a value that transcends conventional Right and Left.

By voting to ‘take back control’ the Brexiteers are looking for no more than the classic democratic right to make their own laws, command their own money and borders, and decide their own government policies, rather than have these decided by a supranational EU Federation in which the Brussels Commission, Council of Ministers and Court – bodies that are responsible as collectives to no one – effectively decide most of their laws and policies.

At bottom the EU project is an attempt to undermine the democratic heritage of the French Revolution, and the right of nations to self-determination. It works in the interests of European transnational big business and high finance, and the state interests of Germany and France.

It hollows out Europe’s nation states, leaving their governmental structures formally intact but with their original core functions sucked out of them. Yet this supranational integration project is historically doomed, for there is no European ‘demos’ or people that could give it democratic legitimacy.

Democracy can exist only at the level of the nation state. It is this principle that animates the Brexit cause.

It is a pity that you and the *Irish Times* are so uncritically supportive of this anti-democratic project. The Irish backstop was an attempt to keep the UK as a whole in the EU customs union and single market, even though any meaningful Brexit must mean leaving these.

If the Varadkar/Coveney government had conceded a time-limit on the backstop, it would have got through the House of Commons on that third vote and Mrs May would still be British prime minister.

Now that the Tory Government is bent on really leaving – which *will* happen even if there is a Labour/Corbyn interlude – it is surely time for the Irish government, in the interest of the Irish people, to do what Dr Ray Bassett, Dan O'Brien, Eoghan Harris and others have been urging: seek to act as a mediator between the EU and the UK and help London get the best deal possible with the EU, while recognising that the UK is leaving the customs union and single market.

The EU Commission will be annoyed at such a turn, but most EU Member States will greet it with relief.