

Record of meeting between Islington In Europe and Emily Thornberry MP Parliament, 24 October 2017

On the occasion of the Pro-EU Conference and Lobby of Parliament held in the Queen Elizabeth Conference Centre on 24 October 2017, Fern Anderson wrote as a constituent to Emily Thornberry to request a meeting. Initially Fern and a group of about 10 fellow Islington In Europe supporters met two of Emily



Thornberry's assistants in Central Lobby of Parliament; fortunately, the Shadow Foreign Secretary was subsequently able to make time to meet the group in person.

At the first meeting, on behalf of the group, Fern first introduced us as members of Islington In, which comprises voters from both constituencies in Islington who campaigned strongly for the UK to remain in the EU. Islington In remains an active campaigning organisation, organising street activities and events such as the advice sessions for EU citizens in conjunction with Islington Council, the second of which is taking place on 2 November. Fern then put forward the following points and related questions:

- In the EU Referendum, Islington voted strongly to Remain. Since the Referendum, from Islington In activists' street activities there is increasing anecdotal evidence that some of those who voted Leave are beginning to have second thoughts: for example, working class voters who were attracted by the apparent simplicity of the Leave message are beginning to realise that things are not happening in the way that they expected. The falling pound means that the cost of everyday items is increasing, at a time when there is pressure on wages. People who voted Leave did not do so on the basis that they would be less well off as a result. There is evidence that this shift in opinion may not be confined to Islington.
- It follows that the "will of the people" is not necessarily set in stone. Emily Thornberry and fellow MPs were urged to take this on board; specifically, we asked the MP from Islington South to oppose any walk-out from the Brexit negotiations, any "no-deal" Brexit, or any deal which is less beneficial than the current situation.
- Pressure should continue to be brought to bear on the government to release the studies that have been carried out on the impact of Brexit.



- The need for amendments to the Withdrawal Bill to be supported was emphasised, with a view to ensuring not only that the final decision rests with Parliament, but also that if the “deal” reached is unsatisfactory, Parliament declines to accept it and seeks to remain within the EU.
- Alternatively, the amendments to the Bill should allow for the electorate to decide whether or not to accept the “deal”.

Emily Thornberry’s assistants took note of the points made and were given sample disturbing case studies (see Annex) following the previous Islington In advisory event for EU nationals, which took place in July. A warm welcome was extended to attend the upcoming event on 2 November.

Emily Thornberry, at the subsequent meeting with her in person, was receptive to the points made and answered as follows:

- The position of the Labour party, in relation to the Referendum, was clear: people were being asked to make a serious decision, which was made clear to them, and therefore it is right to abide by that decision. It is not acceptable to imply subsequently that people were unaware of what they were doing or were “too stupid” to realise the implications. Furthermore, so far any change in public opinion regarding Brexit is not as profound as it would need to be for the party to change its view: people are “set in their ways”, and “switching off”; furthermore trust in democracy should not be undermined by a failure to respect their views. Labour will therefore continue to support leaving the EU, while respecting the views of the 48%, and not wishing to distance themselves from it too far. Jobs and the economy should come first: the government’s apparent desire to push us into a “hard Brexit” would be funny were it not so serious.
- On both occasions when she was speaking for the Opposition at Parliamentary Questions, Emily Thornberry pressed the government about whether it was planning for a “no deal” scenario, and asked what contingency plans it had. Labour is trying to put an amendment into the Withdrawal Bill, specifically to allow a vote on any “no deal” scenario.
- In relation to the release of the Brexit impact studies, Emily Thornberry has been sending freedom of information requests in this regard, along with many other MPs.
- Labour has consistently pressed for a meaningful vote in Parliament on the terms of Brexit. This should not be called at the last minute: if the Bill is voted down, there must be time to renegotiate; for example, the vote would need to be the autumn before Brexit, not in the February immediately preceding it. However, the party’s position is not currently that the default situation should be that we remain in the EU: it remains a party that accepts the result of the Referendum and abides by it, because otherwise it could risk being seen as



attempting to double-cross the electorate. Labour was not in favour of a second referendum.

Further comments made by members of the Islington In group included:

- The fact that many people are already adversely affected by the uncertainty surrounding Brexit; we would like Emily Thornberry to speak out more forcefully on this subject.
- The fact that the younger generation have been placed in a situation for which there will, potentially, be no redress by the time they are old enough to vote. The referendum was advertised as being advisory. Its result is not subject to correction by the normal electoral cycle.
- A reminder of our constitutional history: it is the first duty of an MP to make decisions in the interest of the nation as a whole. Their second duty is to represent their constituents. Their third duty is to their party. It is upsetting that Emily Thornberry appears to be ignoring the first duty (since it is becoming increasingly clear that Brexit cannot be in the interests of the country as a whole) and, like MPs from other parties, is putting party allegiance before conviction and conscience.
- Brexiteers should not be allowed to dictate the terms of the debate. The choice between no deal and a bad deal is not what even Leave voters voted for: we would like Emily Thornberry to be a powerful voice for a third option.
- Listening to “the voice of the people” can become a problem if that voice changes and the political class does not follow. If Brexit turns out to be less than optimal, which is highly likely, politicians may be sure that the 52% of the electorate who voted for Brexit will blame them, not themselves. If the Leave campaign had been a financial product, the transaction would have been deemed null and void because it was based on falsehoods.

To this last point, Emily replied that despite the lies told in the course of the Referendum campaign, there was not currently an obvious enough shift in public opinion to justify changing course.

Over to us to change this, perhaps!



ANNEX

Sample case studies of EU nationals provided to Emily Thornberry MP by Islington In Europe

- Paula is a self-employed cleaner from Portugal. She cleans the homes of the well-off in Islington. She is paid cash in hand. She has been living here for five years. She has not declared her income to HMRC. Even though her earnings are low and unlikely to attract a tax liability, because she has not registered with HMRC and paid NI contributions she is unable to prove that she has resided in the UK legally and therefore cannot qualify for the new settled status. She faces removal from the UK after Brexit.
- Marie is French and married to a British citizen. She worked for two years in the UK following her arrival but since her marriage she has been self sufficient supported by her husband whilst bringing up two British children. She has not taken out a private medical insurance policy and does not have a European Health Insurance Card issued in France. She therefore does not qualify as self-sufficient under EU law due to the lack of comprehensive sickness insurance and so is not lawfully here and so does not qualify for the new settled status. She faces removal from the UK.
- Jose is a Spanish student studying at London Met University on the Holloway Road. He has studied for three years. No one told him he needed comprehensive sickness insurance. He is not lawfully here because he does not have it. He faces removal after Brexit.
- Helena is from Greece. She has lived in Islington for 20 years. Her parents are elderly. Under current EU law her parents can join her here in their old age since they are dependent in some way on her - emotionally and some financial support. Once we leave the EU she will no longer be able to bring them here unless they meet the very strict UK adult dependent relative Rules requiring serious illness or disability and an inability to receive support in the home country.
- Andres is from Poland and works as a nursing assistant in Islington earning £16k per annum. He married his wife in Poland. He wants her to join him in the UK. Under current EU Rules he can bring her here but after Brexit he cannot unless he earns £18,600.