

Britain – A Divided Kingdom

On Thursday 23rd June, 2016, a referendum meant to bring Britain into a more united future revealed a rift in British society so large that the country may never be able to be called the United Kingdom again. Unfortunately, I will have to utter the dreaded 'B' word: Brexit.

After an overwhelming winning vote in the 2015 General Election, David Cameron could not have hoped for a better time for the Conservative party. Only a year into his second term, his confidence in Conservative voters seemed to convince him that he could take a risk; a risk that, if it paid off, would only gain more support for the Conservatives. The 'EU Referendum' was proposed, a vote that would give all British citizens the choice of remaining in the European Union or leaving it. Cameron, naturally, proposed to remain, believing that any path he chose, his loyal supporters would follow and ensure his victory. Winning the vote to remain would make Cameron able to state that because Britain voted to remain, this must be the overall opinion of Britain and would demoralise Labour supporters and win them over to his side.

But immediate mutiny within his party destabilised his campaign right from the get-go. Boris Johnson, former Mayor of London, joined forces with UKIP leader Nigel Farage to form a Leave campaign. As time until the referendum closed in, attacks from either party became increasingly over the top and petty. An image of an apocalyptic wasteland, with no society and law, haunted the Remainers who feared a Leave vote, and a prison-like, government oppressed view weighed on the minds of Leavers fearing a Remain vote. This battle of politics quickly whipped the country into a state of patriotic fervour, which would only end in disaster. Jo Cox, a Labour MP, was murdered by a nationalistic Thomas Mair, who killed the avid Remain supporter with the claim, 'This is for Britain!', only a week before the referendum.

And Britain voted to Leave.

Nearly a year later, and the aftermath of the shocking outcome is still sending shockwaves through the British political scene. David Cameron resigned almost immediately after the result, humiliated by his most devastating of political defeats. Boris Johnson led a short and unsuccessful campaign to run as Prime Minister, against Nigel Farage. Neither succeeded, and as the Conservative party was still in power, the Home Secretary Theresa May took power. Theresa May, originally a Remain campaigner, now leads Britain as Prime Minister through the agonisingly slow process of leaving the EU. But Article 50, the law that states Britain's intention to leave the EU, is set to trigger on 25th March; the Queen has even signed the Article into law with Royal Assent.

The split in political opinion will never heal, however. The huge split between views in the North and South was apparent as soon as voting began, with the South, in particular London, voting to Remain, and the North voting to Leave. But going further north, to Scotland, reveals the biggest split in Britain. A vast majority voted to Remain, with 62% of voters opting to stay in the EU. And now, unsatisfied with the result of the referendum, Nicola Sturgeon, First Minister of Scotland, is demanding a referendum for Scotland's freedom to allow it to remain in the EU. Whether this will throw Britain into more political turmoil when it begins Brexit negotiations remains to be seen, but Britain is leaving the EU, whether public opinion changes or not.