

How to debate with Leavers - some ideas.

Here are some Top Tips for Remainers when attempting to debate with, er, less, er, thoughtful Leavers. They are by no means exhaustive, though you might find them exhausting. Please critique and/or add your own ideas. We are all going to need them in the months ahead as we turn this mother of a ship around.

1. Don't get angry. One of you is enough.

2. Remember that you are the patriot. They are nationalists. You love your country enough to criticise it where due and know that partnership is not surrender; they are likely to be insecure enough to deny all its failings and fear that partnership will reveal them.

3. Don't immediately rebut what they say: ask why they say it and what evidence they have. If none, politely tell them that you can't debate their point unless they can give you some. Keep drawing out their beliefs and their reasons for them.

4. Remind them that the Referendum was advisory: Parliament is sovereign and Parliamentarians are representatives not delegates, so they (and we) can still change their minds. Use that to refute accusations of not being "democratic".

5. Don't get drawn into defending the EU, however much you're tempted and however well you're able: WE are still in it and THEY want to leave it - so they still have to make and defend their case for changing the status quo.

6. Don't be afraid to criticise the EU. Only the dafter among us haven't a trace of scepticism. The crucial thing with your Leaver is to compare the EU's failings with the disaster of leaving it. Then, having established some common ground ...

7. ... re-frame the sovereignty question. It will often be expressed by your opponent as "getting our country back" or a similar second-hand excuse for original thinking. Ask what they think of the UK's care system (adult social care, mental health care etc.), our education system, the state of the NHS, our prison system, our road, rail & transport infrastructure etc. - there are more! Unless they're really on a suicide mission they're unlikely to sing any of their praises. Then point out that the EU has no or next to no input in any of them. These problems are products of our sovereignty not membership of the EU! You may also want to point out that, by international comparisons, we're one of the least healthy and least literate countries in the developed world and have chronically low productivity compared to all major and many smaller EU nations. Nothing to do with the EU. Hand the question back to your opponent: what faith do *they* have that we would use our sovereignty more wisely after Brexit, and why?

8. Accept that this might all fail; indeed, if I know my average Leaver, it will be likely to fail without their having left a mark on you (metaphorically speaking; they may of course by now have clumped you one or told you, in what seems to pass in such circles as the argument clincher, to "fuck off"). If so, smile, use Ronald Reagan's presidency-winning phrase "There you go again" – and end the conversation.

Then go home and kick the cat or a convenient synthetic – but easily recyclable – alternative.