

Interview with Edward McMillan Scott

By [Ciarán Morrissey](#), Comment Editor (2015/16)

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Image: York Union

Before the York Union's debate regarding Britain's place in the EU, Nouse sat down with the man arguing against the motion. Edward McMillan Scott was a Member of the European Parliament for Yorkshire and the Humber from 1984 to 2014, and was elected four times as the Parliament's Vice President. He was expelled from the Conservatives for raising doubts about and challenging their European allies in 2010 and joined the Liberal Democrats, losing his seat in this year's European Elections.

Do you think the media gives anti-EU groups too much airtime?

Yeah there's a paradox here, because the BBC, for example, which is generally pro-EU, because it is pretty anti-Tory – and I speak as a former Conservative – tends to big up UKIP in order to damage the Conservatives. And that, I think, has been a strategic mistake by the BBC because what actually happened is that now, UKIP is the power in the land whereas before, it was something of a gadfly party.

Should the British people be given a vote on membership of the EU and, if not, how can we justify continued membership?

There is a consensus. This is a generation which has not had the chance of voting, in fact, my generation voted in 1975 by two thirds a majority to stay in the common market.

And you were part of the campaign to do that, weren't you?

I was part of the campaign, yeah. And there was a pretty clear consensus. Business and academics and the media, generally speaking, supported continued membership of the common market. Now I accept that there may be a case for a referendum. Indeed, my party – I'm now a Lib Dem – has never opposed a referendum. Indeed there are some who are actually suggesting we should have a referendum on the same day of the general election in May next year. So it's not as if we're frightened of it. The people who are frightened of it are UKIP and the right-wing Tories – the UKIP tendency within the Tory party – who are actually prepared to consider losing the general election so that Cameron does not get his referendum. That way, the Tory Party splits, we go into another referendum at a date in the future, break our relationship with the EU, that's their long term strategy.

So there's a big game to play for here, and it is quite important that people are informed about the issues and I think it's important that the student union at York – one of our better universities in terms of career prospects – should be giving people the information they need to make an informed opinion, first of all in the general election next May and then, if the Tories were to win, a referendum to come. So I'm very active, actually, in those seeking to keep Britain within the European Union. If there's a substantial change in our relationship, then both the Labour Party and the Liberal Democrats would agree, there should be a referendum.

How would you define a substantial change, would it be something like entering the Euro, would it be something like admitting many more member states, like, the language seems like it's very vague when it's thrown around.

I think if the proposition were put that Britain should enter the Euro that would automatically trigger a referendum. Not just because it's a major change in our economic relationship with the rest of the European Union, but also because psychologically, it's a big leap. People don't want to lose the pound, and I accept that. On the other hand if there was some less change, for example a big reform of the Common Fisheries Policy, which was consensually agreed by all the other member states, requiring no treaty change, then there would be no need for a referendum. And I think, frankly, David Cameron has put this country on a dangerous path; insecurity for business, *pause* you know, the political class completely in sixes and sevens for the next two years, is, to my mind, a ridiculous policy.

If we were to withdraw from the EU, what would be stopping us from negotiating free trade deals with the EU, or the member states of the EU, to have a similar economic relationship without the sovereignty transfer?

Well I mean, nothing, except that I'm not one of those people who thinks that Britain should, sort of, walk away from responsibilities, walk away from the biggest market on our doorstep, um, go through the whole process of re-negotiation, behaving like a Switzerland or a Norway, that's, to my mind, not the role of the United Kingdom within the European continent. We'd only be a sixth, anyway, or the rest of the size of the European Union, so, you know, what's in it for them?

Whenever the EU is brought up, immigration is an issue that tends to come right to the front. Under the current system, an unskilled labourer from any EU country would get priority into coming into the UK over a skilled doctor, say or an engineer, from a non-EU country. Does this present a problem for you?

Well, the large proportion of EU migrants into the UK, looking for work, are with university qualifications. In some cases a very high proportion. A recent report by UCL, the University College London, showed that, you know, this is not low skills coming into the country; it is high skills. And the CBI, meeting in London this week, has said that it wants this to continue. It is desperate to have the availability of highly

skilled young people from across the European Union whether it's from South or Western Europe, or indeed, from Eastern Europe, as is increasingly the case. I'm an optimist.

To read the interview with McMillan-Scott's opponent, Gawain Towler, please [click here](#).

To read a full review of the debate, please [click here](#).



One comment

Eric Allen Bunyan

29 Nov '14 at 4:35 pm

'There is a consensus. This is a generation which has not had the chance of voting, in fact, my generation voted in 1975 by two thirds a majority to stay in the common market.'

I, like millions of others, voted to stay in the Common Market not the European Union. We certainly didn't get what we voted for. We got the hidden agenda. Our children and their children should have the right to either accept or reject this game changing outcome. At least they will chose with their eyes open!

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