

An Open Letter to CUSU and all Cambridge Students

Time has run out. The United Kingdom is staring down the barrel of a 'no deal' Brexit as the contradictions that should have been evident from the start transform into a constitutional crisis. Theresa May's Chequers deal is unworkable. Any deal that could plausibly be agreed between May and Brussels will be rejected by the hard-line Brexiters in the Conservative party. A border in the Irish Sea is unacceptable to the DUP. A border on the Irish mainland is unacceptable to the UK and EU governments. And, despite what Jacob Rees-Mogg says, having no border at all is impossible if we wish to leave the Customs Union and Single Market. The much-rumoured technological solution does not exist. There is not a majority for any individual kind of Brexit deal. The dangerous prospect of a No Deal Brexit is now the most likely outcome.

Young people cared about this issue in 2016 – now is the time to act. CUSU must join the dozens of unions around the country, including their own international committee, who have endorsed a People's Vote. Last year, CUSU promised that this issue would be determined after a consultation of the student body. A consultation has not yet been forthcoming, so CUSU must act immediately through the elected representatives of college JCRs, given the urgency of the situation. We understand that CUSU is concerned about student consultation – we believe that the best form of consultation available is to give the 1.5 million young people who have turned 18 since June 2016 a say in their future. In a matter of weeks it will be physically impossible to hold a referendum before we're set to leave on the 29th March. We must join this campaign now, which has cross-party support, to force either a referendum in the spring or an extension of the Article 50 process.

Cambridge is a bastion of internationalism and CUSU's headquarters lies in the ward that voted most heavily for Remain in the whole of the United Kingdom. For Cambridge and CUSU to turn their backs on the wishes of students, young people, academics and professionals would be deeply troubling, and it would let the Brexit hardliners off the hook. A democracy that cannot change its mind ceases to be a democracy, as David Davis once said, and the only question is who gets a say on the deal: a hardline cabal of backbench Conservative and DUP MPs, or we the people?

We must be vocal in making the argument that any Brexit would be enormously detrimental to UK universities. Horizon 2020 is a multi-billion Euro fund for research and innovation. The country that consistently applies for the most funding? The United Kingdom. Erasmus+, meanwhile, supports Cambridge lawyers, linguists and scientists in their studies abroad. Make no mistake – funding from these programmes is threatened by any Brexit deal, and will be wiped out altogether if a deal is not reached.

People say another vote is not democratic, that 'leave' voters will feel betrayed, that there will be a backlash. We can guarantee that the backlash arising from our country becoming poorer - from motorways being turned into lorry depots, from the horizons of young people contracting, from price increases, from the fact that if we crash out we will have no trade deal with the most

advanced trading bloc in the world – is the backlash we should care most about. The crisis presented by no deal is what will really erode people’s faith in democracy. No Brexit can satisfy ‘the British people’, because ‘the British people’ do not have one idea of what Brexit should mean. More importantly, neither does the government. The Cambridge community is, however, much more united on Brexit, and it is the job of CUSU to represent that community.

But young people also understand the debt we owe to history. The majority of students here at Cambridge have been fortunate enough to have grown up with no memory of the Troubles - it is our responsibility to our own past to prevent the unravelling of the peace process in Northern Ireland, and our responsibility to the future to end the protracted farce of anger and incompetence in which British politics is currently mired.

But this is not just about CUSU passing motions, which we are aware will not, on its own, change the situation. All students need to drive this momentum. We invite everybody to join us on Saturday as we march for a People’s Vote. We ask you to write to and meet with your Members of Parliament. A year ago, another referendum seemed impossible. Now, MPs from all major political parties have thrown their weight behind this campaign. We trust that you will be next.

We must stop the madness. And we call on CUSU to play their part.

Signed,

**For Our Future’s Sake
Our Future Our Choice Cambridge
Cambridge University Liberal Association
Cambridge Student Democrats
Amatey Doku, NUS Vice-President for Higher Education
Cambridge Stays**