



EU Referendum Debate

Saturday 28th May

**Hilton Grosvenor Hotel,
Glasgow**

“Women, who are the cornerstone of communities, both socially and economically, need to have their voices heard as part of the debate around the EU Referendum. The campaigns need to engage with women and listen to their concerns and emerging issues. This event will ensure that those attending are able to raise and seek answers to matters which are important to them.”

Agnes Tolmie
Chair, SWC

www.scottishwomensconvention.org

Introduction

As part of the 2014 Scottish Referendum debate, the Scottish Women's Convention (SWC) held a series of events throughout Scotland, which gave local women the opportunity to ask questions directly to both campaigns. The SWC also organised similar events around the recent Scottish Parliament elections.

On 23rd June 2016 Scotland will take to the polls. Women continue to be engaged in political processes and have questions and issues they want to raise. With that in mind, the SWC organised a debate around the upcoming EU referendum. This event was held at the Hilton Grosvenor Hotel, Glasgow, on Saturday 28th May and was chaired by Agnes Tolmie, SWC Chair. Former MEP Elspeth Attwooll outlined the structure and history of the EU. Representatives from both campaigns outlined arguments and key points for remaining within and leaving the EU. Women were then able to ask questions relevant to them, their families and communities across Scotland.

The SWC would like to thank all of those who attended and contributed to worthwhile discussions.



Elspeth Attwooll

- In the EU, rules are proposed by the Commission. They are made once agreement has been reached on their wording between two bodies. These are the Council of Ministers, made up of Government ministers from Member States and the European Parliament, where members (MEPs) are elected. There are six MEPs in Scotland.
- The EU has played an important role in acquiring and achieving equality, with some aspects being written in from the very beginning. Equal pay, for example, was written into the founding treaty in 1957. The UK Equal Pay Act, however, was not passed until 1970. The European rules meant that equal pay for equal work did not just apply for men and women doing the same job. It also applied to jobs of equal value. This was hugely important.
- By the year 2000 there was a change to the Treaty, resulting in the passage of very wide anti discrimination laws, covering a range of issues including race, age, disability, sexual orientation and religious belief, but again only on employment matters.
- These laws only tackled discrimination between men and women in the workplace. Work had to be done on equal access to goods and services. One of the key barriers was with insurance companies who did not think the rules should apply to them, i.e. men and women should pay different insurance premiums because of their gender. This was, however, overturned in 2011 by the European Court of Justice (ECJ).
- A great deal is done by the organisations within Europe to practice what they preach on gender equality. The Parliament is almost 40% female. At present the use of gender mainstreaming is being considered when drafting laws and policies, and there is also pressure from EU organisations to implement rules to help improve the number of women being elected.
- The EU has also implemented a raft of measures around sexual harassment, protecting part time and agency workers, pregnant workers, extending maternity leave and introducing shared parental leave.

Kathleen Walker Shaw

- The EU does have flaws and needs to be reformed. This, however, has to be weighed up against the risks of leaving when both the UK and EU economies are fragile. There is value in the solidarity that membership of the EU brings.
- Referendum polls state that women are the most undecided group. Women are looking to see what the outcome of this vote means to them and their families. It is a serious decision and women should not underestimate how important their voices will be.
- The EU has made great strides in the area of equalities. Women do not want to lose the rights which have been acquired - they matter within the workplace, particularly with the current Government who are intent on attacking trade unions. If Britain left the EU, the right to four weeks paid holiday, rest breaks and time off for those who have been working on call would all disappear.
- There are around 3 million EU migrants in the UK, the vast majority of whom are contributing to the economy. They are 45% less likely to use public services and health services than British people. They are not the burden that the media wants people to think. A lot of EU workers come to the UK because they are actively recruited in their home countries to the exclusion of UK workers. People who come to work in Britain should receive equal pay for equal work. At a European level the UK Government is preventing the passage of legislation which would allow for this.
- There is a myth that 'Europe takes all of our money'. Austerity is not a result of the money paid into Europe. It was a political choice by many governments on how to deal with the crisis. There is, however a significant amount of uncollected tax at an EU level. Approximately one trillion Euro is being lost through non payment of taxes. The EU want to crack down on bankers bonuses and create regulations on banking and finance to stop the 'casino capitalism' which put the UK into recession in 2008. This has, however, been consistently blocked. If that money was circulating through economies, the UK would not need to have austerity.

Zoe Streatfield

- In 1986 the Single European Act (SEA) eliminated obstacles to the free movement of capital, goods and labour within the EU. Under this approach, employment rises, wages fall and profit for big businesses increases. The EU therefore effectively prohibits large scale borrowing to invest in public services and infrastructure, manufacturing and jobs.
- Subsequent directives have seen an end to the public ownership of utilities, state aid for industry (which could be attributed to, for example, the collapse of the steel industry in this country), as well as the introduction of compulsory competitive tendering in the public sector. This has resulted in large scale privatisation across the EU.
- While public sector borrowing was restricted, private sector lending and the creation of credit were not. The privatisation of pensions and housing saw banking profits increase through short term lending, where the risk was highest and therefore profit was highest.
- The EU works on the assumption that labour markets will be flexible. In 2000, however, the Lisbon programme required national Governments to implement reforms which created a more inflexible labour market, targeting pensions and benefits. In 2006 the services directive meant employers could bring in workers from other Member States and pay them a lower level than the rest of the workers in that country. The ECJ heard cases where unions took strike action when workers were being brought into undercut their wages, ruling that these actions were in contravention of the free movement provisions within the treaty. The court therefore ruled against the workers on strike.
- Most of the rights guaranteed by the EU were won by militant trade unions. The EU have sat idly by while most of these rights have been taken away by successive Conservative Governments, most recently through the Trade Union Bill. Politics are determined by the balance of power between workers and big business. Legislation means nothing unless militant trade unions are there to back it up.

Emily Beaver

- Women have the most to lose in this referendum. The rights to equal pay for work of equal value has been underpinned by the EU for a long time and while it is unlikely that all benefits would disappear overnight if the UK voted to leave, they would likely be chipped away over time. Michael Gove has said Brexit would mean the UK would not have to follow the most costly EU directives and they no longer burden businesses. One of the most costly is the working time directive, which gives part time women workers holiday pay, as well as those covering sex discrimination and parental leave. EU membership has also helped the lives of black, disabled and LGBT+ people.
- Mobility and freedom of movement is incredibly important. Studying abroad, even for a short term, raises employability and is transformative for the individual. Leaving the EU would risk limiting these opportunities. There are currently 125,000 EU students in UK universities, bringing with them knowledge, skills and cultural diversity. If Britain left the EU they would be charged international student fees of up to £13,000 per year.
- The EU's record on the environment is one of its most noticeable achievements. Being part of a union has enabled coordinated action and the agreement of policies to improve quality of life, including air, seas and wildlife. If the UK were to leave the EU, it is unclear which elements of existing European policy would continue to operate in the UK. With the real risk of fracking, Britain cannot afford to loosen environmental legislation.
- Positive attitudes towards the EU are strongest in Scotland, which can be attributed to a stronger understanding of devolution. People in Scotland understand power lies in different places and that each place has a role to play. Scotland benefits from EU funding to the tune of £1.2 billion, which is set to rise to around £1.7bn over the next five years.
- There needs to be a discussion about how the UK
- can make the EU more democratic, how to increase the number of people voting in these elections and how to hold MEPs to account. No-one is saying that the EU is perfect, but rather than standing outside the room complaining, the UK needs to be at the table

Sarah Devenney

- The EU's founding four freedoms are not personal freedoms. The free movement of capital, labour, services and goods are there to serve profit. The EU does not promote or protect collective bargaining or the right to strike. Anti trade union laws are legal under EU law, which gives trade unions no extra protection.
- The EU is not the solution to many issues, but is in fact the problem. Even those who support it know and acknowledge that it needs to be reformed. The Prime Minister says that the UK must stay in the EU in order to influence it. He also says that as members of the EU, the UK has a say on trade rules. That is not the case. The EU speaks for Britain at the World Trade Organisation, rather than the UK having an individual vote there. If the vote is to leave, the UK would then have an independent say.
- Unions rightly oppose TTIP, which is not a trade agreement, but a protection racket run by US and European Transatlantic corporations. It is an economic war against workers, the NHS and industry. A vote to stay would bring TTIP closer, whereas leaving the EU would sink TTIP. Europe's Commissioner for Health wants the EU to control Member States health policies. It seems that the only way to keep the NHS safe is by leaving the EU.
- Inside the EU the UK is trapped in a falling, failing, unstable, unfree, undemocratic stifling block. There is no freedom to change policies which the UK opposes or to vote out leaders it opposes. The EU is bad for Britain. The UK economy is weaker, unemployment is up and industries cannot be protected. The UK is stuck with attacks on the NHS and with TTIP. Trade is stifled and there is no control of UK Borders. Leaving the EU would be great for Britain. Outside the economy would be stronger. The UK could stay out of TTIP and trade better. A vote to remain is surrendering our democracy, a democracy that many have paid in blood for and women fought hard for.

Question and Answer Session

Do you agree that the moral challenge you each face is not to demonstrate that staying or leaving the European Union might or not make our world better off economically but in convincing Scottish women here today of the option which will help to shape a more just people who endeavour to create a more peaceful world? Or is it, in the words of a famous female singer, just about the price tag?

Sarah Devenney (SD)

- The notion of democracy is the foundation for a just society. A number of proponents on both sides seem to be scaremongering and using economic arguments to persuade voters. A number of esteemed commentators have, however, said that forecasts are extremely difficult to arrive at so we shouldn't place all of our hopes and fears in the figures which are being used. The EU is a huge spend - approximately £250 million per week for, among other things, the decimation of our fishing industry.

Zoe Streatfield (ZS)

- Much of the argument against the EU comes down to the notion that power needs to be in the hands of the people. It is important to make that happen, rather than allowing unelected Commissioners to make the decisions. I'm opposed to the EU because it's undemocratic and forces austerity, not because it's expensive.

Emily Beever (EB)

- Many of the worries of those who want to leave centre around economics and trade. However those who want to remain do not just want the trade aspect of EU membership, but the other benefits that come with it, such as social justice.
- Many of the conversations in this debate have centred around refugees and migration. Those of us who wish to remain do not want to close off our borders. There is a general feeling in Scotland, particularly in Glasgow, of welcoming refugees. The current crisis, which the UK has played its part in creating, can be resolved with our input.
- We need to keep the bond and tie that exists between countries. We are better placed to make sure that these issues are solved by a united approach in the EU.

Kathleen Walker Shaw (KWS)

- Much of this debate has been about men shouting at each other, as well as 'personality politics', rather than a focus on the real issues. Peace, the maintenance of peace, social justice and solidarity are all vitally important. Sometimes the problems in achieving these are closer to home than many think. The EU is not the problem in every situation.
- There has been discussion about the economic arguments in this debate. There is, however, very little discussion around, for example, the roads that were built in Glasgow and the restructuring that went on in shipyards through EU funding, or the domestic violence project for which the GMB received EU funding to undertake a campaign. People are worried about their jobs so we have no choice but to consider the economic arguments. We need to be aware that big business may no longer wish to invest in the UK because we are no longer part of the EU.

I'm voting to remain because ...

"The idea of being left to be overwhelmed by a ruling Tory cast is horrifying."



I'm voting to remain because ...

"From what I know about the issues, I want allies in an independent Scotland."

A lot of people want to leave because they think people are coming in through EU migration rules and ‘stealing our jobs’ – how do we put forward the positive messages for migration instead?

KWS

- There has been a lot of bias in the mainstream media and the GMB undertook research into how issues have been reported. The BBC and Financial Times were shown to be giving the Leave campaign much more airtime than other arguments.
- It is very difficult to counter, for example, arguments about how the NHS would fare both in and out of the EU if the airspace is not given for honest debate. That is why events like this are so important, as well as through talking to people and using social media.
- There are sensitive issues and people are genuinely worried, particularly around jobs. We have to, however, ask what is really happening and who is actually the villain. Migrant workers are portrayed as such, but they are being exploited by employers. The Government is doing very little about that. Successive governments have not supported the notion of a worker being paid the going rate for a job. We need people to be asking the questions and looking into figures themselves, rather than believing the mantra which the media are putting forward.



I'm voting to remain because ...

"I want the UK to have a seat at the table to create a more progressive Europe."

SD

- Migration is under the microscope because of a troubled economy, fewer jobs and greater unemployment since 2008. There is broad support for managed migration but there are more issues. Migrants have been used as scapegoats because of the economy. They are exploited to the detriment of our domestic workers, which results in wage suppression.
- Other countries, such as Canada and Australia, ask potential migrants to be able to demonstrate how they would deal with issues such as funding their exit from the country and their healthcare arrangements. There is no thought that this type of managed migration policy is racist. On the contrary, it seems sensible that migrant workers would benefit the economy and help plug skills shortages in particular sectors.

ZS

- There is no doubt as to the contribution that migrant labour brings to our public services, particularly our NHS. There is, however, a services directive which allows big corporations to advertise jobs which are based here, to workers in other countries, that pay less. National Government cannot go against this rule.

EB

- We have to recognise that many migrants who come into this country create jobs and businesses, employ people from the UK and contribute to the economy. We have to look past the headlines in the mainstream media, especially in order to dispel the underlying racist narrative that often goes along with that.
- We also have issues around formally standard contracts in the UK in quite terrifying sectors, such as those imposed on pilots. Previously, they were paid full time by airlines. They are now only paid when they fly and not on their down time.

What can be done with regards to exploitation around zero hours contracts? A poor person needs to eat as much as a rich person. Is it national government or the EU who should be tackling this?

KWS

- Zero hours contracts and precarious work are significant issues at the moment. It is very difficult, for young people in particular, to get a job unless they come through an agency or take up a zero hours contract. The situation is worse than many would think.

- ECOSOC has been asked to start looking at these important issues. Initially, many at EU level said they did not know about zero hours contracts and claimed it was UK phenomenon. It then emerged it was wider spread than was first thought. Zero hours contracts are epidemic in the UK and have been developed as an avoidance of rights. The EU is realising that. We have to make sure there are rights and protections for people so they are afforded proper employment status and proper working conditions.

ZS

- There are about 1 million workers on zero hours contracts in the UK and about 7 million who are underemployed, the majority of whom are women. That doesn't get mentioned enough. These workers are not afforded the same rights – they are not guaranteed sick pay, maternity pay or holiday pay. The EU has not done anything about that.

SD

- It is worth noting that Britain passed the Equal Pay Act in 1970, three years before we joined the EU. Prior to our membership we already had the Abortion Act, the Divorce Reform Act, as well as access to free contraception. Soon after joining we passed the Sex Discrimination Act and Employment Protection Act. We have also had a female Prime Minister. We did this all on our own, without the EU. As a sovereign nation we have a proven track record of legislating in areas that promote social justice.



Some of the challenges faced by immigrants are exacerbated when policies which have previously been brought in by Governments are removed or repealed by subsequent administrations. An example of this is the removal of post-study visas. Graduate migrant students cannot access graduate employment schemes unless no British citizen qualifies to do the job within that sector. EU laws are more steady than UK laws which are subject to change. How will this be impacted if we vote to leave?

SD

- Concessions in terms of democracy for our own country may lead many to feel that it is better to have EU legislation to govern immigration and migration policies. There is, however, a mismatch with EU Member States, who cannot agree on migration policies. The horrifying result is populist uprisings of a racist nature across EU Member States. Recently a far right party in Austria was nearly voted into power. The failure to adopt a coherent migration policy approved by all Member States is causing civil unrest. While domestic policies fluctuate with successive governments, there is a hope for something better with a vote to leave.

ZS

- There would still be protection through the UN and European Court of Human Rights (ECHR). The immigration bill currently going through at Westminster has a lot of quite frightening provisions and the EU simply will not step in to help.

EB

- The NUS were recently involved in the case of an overseas student studying a post graduate diploma in counselling. The Home Office went into his home, took him away from his two young children, for whom he is the primary carer and tried to deport him.

- Pressure from a number of organisations stopped that from happening. When the UK Government is allowing this to happen then why would we want to be away from the protections of Europe, who can act as a measure to hold them to account.

KWS

- There can be confusion as to the various levels of powers within the migration debate. Inter-EU migration is governed by EU free movement and applies to EU citizens moving from one country to another. There is also third country migration, certain aspects of which apply to EU law. Much of the control of non EU migration is, however, with national Member States. In the UK our Home Office has control over non EU citizen migration flow. The power of countries to keep control over their borders causes a lot of problems that we cannot defend and feel happy about. Were the EU to try to tell the UK Government what to do, they would be told they were interfering in a national state issue where they have no authority to do so.
- There is a worry that the UK Government would walk away from EU legislation around anti-discrimination on the basis of ethnicity and race if there was a vote to leave. Everyone needs to be aware of how high the stakes are.

There is a myth that we cannot change EU laws. Britain, like any other nation, can get the European Parliament to agree with them and we have used our veto very strongly. Have our political parties taken seriously their role in the EU, in terms of the MEPs and informing people in Britain about the EU and the benefits of it?



EB

- We have not fully taken our role seriously as citizens. There was something of a backlash vote in the last EU election, which led to the election of people we don't necessarily align our views with. There are individuals who are very positive, but overall not enough is done by MEPs to convey the message about what they do and how people can get involved. We do not take them as seriously as other politicians.

I'm voting to remain because ...

"Of the equality rights that have been established through the EU, such as equal pay and maternity rights."

ZS

- The European Commission decides the laws so there is not much democracy within the EU. A lot of the current UK Government's policies on privatisation and austerity go hand in hand with EU legislation. There would be significant constraints on a progressive Labour Government if one were elected in 2020.

SD

- Parties are not doing enough to educate the electorate on EU matters. So many people do not have an understanding of what the EU does and they do not care as much as a result. There is little knowledge around, for example, the number of regulations that unelected Commissioners create. There are, for example, over 400 regulations alone pertaining to a towel. These constraints are causing havoc for small businesses across the UK, who are simply unable to get off the ground. There is a gap in information sharing, therefore it is inevitable that people will be disengaged.

KWS

- Europe has been a very convenient kicking horse for successive Governments of all political colours. They have been allowed to do that because of the broadly anti-EU press in the UK. There is also the notion that although we are in the EU, we don't consider ourselves part of it – there is a real 'over there' mentality.
- It is not true that the UK Government has no power in the EU. Various Prime Ministers have either blocked or sat on the fence on a number of important issues. Nothing gets through the EU if certain Member States Governments and Ministers do not want it.

How would the UK fare outside the EU in a world dominated by multinational companies?

EB

- The financial industry has said that if we leave, the financial capital district in London would likely move quickly to mainland Europe to a city like Frankfurt.

ZS

- There is a danger that, if we choose to stay in the EU, TTIP will put all of our public services out to tender. That is very dangerous.

SD

- We only have to look at countries such as Switzerland and Norway, who are not in the EU, and their GDP to see how we could succeed.
- These countries, who do not want to join the EU and have a GDP per capita which is infinitely better than the UK. Both are in the top five richest European countries.

KWS

- Comparing the UK to non-EU European countries is like comparing apples and pears. For example, Norway have less than 1/6 of the UK population. They may be out of the EU but they are in the European Economic Area. In order to trade with the EU they have to adhere to a lot of strict laws. They do not, however, have a seat at the table to decide if they like them or not.
- Other countries would have to decide to let us trade if we left. There is a real worry Brexit could economically trigger a recession. Other countries do not want the insecurity that would cause. 60% of our exports go to the EU – if they are in recession, they are not going to be buying ours and are less likely to do so if they think we've caused their financial situation.

*I'm voting to remain because ...
"I want to protect workers rights."*



*I'm voting to remain because ...
"I believe in the strength and protection of being a part of something bigger."*

As a parent who goes to the voting booth with my children at the back of my mind, what would you say to persuade me that what I vote for is for the good of my children?

EB

- We live in a globalised world and the freedom of movement within Europe is so beneficial. Being able to move freely broadens cultural horizons.

ZS

- The potential that leaving could bring. The EU will stand in total opposition to any progressive UK Government. Greece elected an anti austerity Government and they were forced to have a referendum because the EU was not happy. That's the future if we vote to remain.

SD

- We need to do as much as we can to promote our economy. There is no doubt that we have suffered as a result of being part of the EU. Free from the Common Fisheries policy, coastal communities would flourish, farmers will not suffer through stifling regulation and, vitally, domestic laws can be repealed where necessary and appropriate.

KWS

- A quality, well protected job, which is something that can be done through the EU.



Summaries

Sarah Devenney

- There are differences between non EU countries, such as Norway, and the UK. It is important to bear in mind, however, that these countries chose not to join the EU. That needs to be looked at in context.
- It is highly unlikely that there will be the onset of World War 3 in the event of Brexit, nor will there be a huge impact on jobs.
- People have a lot of concerns about the current UK Government, believing that they should be kept in check by the EU. There needs to be a Government of the people, by the people. The UK needs to build something better.
- It would be a different institution if MEPs proposed, debated and repealed legislation but that is not the case. The only way to get a system where decisions are made by directly elected representatives is to leave the EU. A Brexit result is the right way forward.

Emily Beever

- The problems being encountered by the UK cannot be solved by the UK alone. There is a need for the support and co-operation of and with other Member States on issues such as the environment and immigration.
- Being part of the EU means that Britain can push the social justice agenda and can have a more equal, fair society.

Zoe Streatfield

- The European Commission (EC), The European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) control borrowing to countries who need loans. None of these are elected bodies.
- The EC is currently negotiating TTIP, against which there has been lots of activism and marches. It will, however, keep going through because the UK does not have control over the institutions which will make the decisions.
- There is not peace in Europe - there is a civil war going on in Ukraine. The EU was part of removing the democratically elected parliament which led to this, however there has been a media blackout on that.
- Austerity policies have caused the far right across Europe to do extremely well. Continued cuts will make them grow and the UK needs to caution against that. Europe is full of Colonial powers who have been waging war against African countries and the Middle East for years and this needs to be addressed.
- The current UK Government has turned back the clock on rights that generations have fought for. There has been some good legislation to come from Europe but much of that was already won by trade unionists. The UK cannot rely on legislation alone. There is no hope if the UK remains within the EU.

Kathleen Walker Shaw

- There is talk about the EU as a mass but that is not the case. The European Parliament is directly elected by you and the MEPs serve you. The Council of Ministers are also directly elected and are there arguing Britain's corner with a mandate to do so.
- The EC does not have the power to decide rules alone. They negotiate on the mandate of Member State Governments. Processes could be much more open, transparent and people centred but that will only change if we stay within the EU.
- There is not enough discussion about people in Europe who are devastated that the UK are making this decision. They appreciate Britain's eccentricities and quirks in negotiations and that the UK is diplomatic in disagreement.
- The UK does have control in the EU. Britain might not always play its cards right, but it is wrong to pretend there is no ability to make changes. Part of a vote to remain is deciding what kind of EU is wanted. It is worth fighting for reform so that the EU puts people at the front. Things are done better when people work in solidarity.

Links

About My Vote

<http://www.aboutmyvote.co.uk/upcoming-elections-and-referendums/eu-referendum>

The European Union

http://europa.eu/index_en.htm

The European Commission

http://ec.europa.eu/index_en.htm

The Council of Ministers

http://europa.eu/about-eu/institutions-bodies/council-eu/index_en.htm

Scottish MEPs

http://www.europarl.org.uk/en/your-meps/uk_meps/scotland-mep.html

European Court of Justice

http://europa.eu/about-eu/institutions-bodies/court-justice/index_en.html

GMB Europe

<http://www.gmb.org.uk/about/gmb-in-europe>

Vote Leave

<http://www.voteleavetakecontrol.org/>

Scotland Stronger in Europe

<http://www.strongerin.co.uk/scotland#0UXT3GR5ybirEtW2.97>

Scottish Left Leave

<http://www.euleftleave.scot/>

NUS Scotland

<http://www.nus.org.uk/en/nus-scotland/>

ECOSOC

<https://www.un.org/ecosoc/en/home>

European Economic Area

<https://www.gov.uk/eu-eea>



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