

Book Review: How to Stop Brexit (and Make Britain Great Again) by Nick Clegg

In How to Stop Brexit (and Make Britain Great Again), Nick Clegg offers a short, accessible book seeking to persuade the ambivalent or undecided as to why Brexit should be stopped; to suggest what the average voter can do about it; and to propose an alternative model for relations between Britain and Europe. While this is an engaging and lively read with a number of thought-provoking suggestions, Robert Ledger questions whether the book will succeed in its aim to change minds when it comes to this divisive issue.

How to Stop Brexit (and Make Britain Great Again). Nick Clegg. Bodley Head. 2017.

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Nick Clegg's new book, *How to Stop Brexit (and Make Britain Great Again)*, caters primarily to the many 'Remain' voters who have been asking themselves a very similar question ever since 23 June 2016. Clegg, former leader of the pro-European Union Liberal Democrats and — until the 2017 General Election — MP for Sheffield Hallam, puts forward a number of suggestions as to how Brexit, or at least the hard or cliff-edge variety, might be prevented by citizen action.

Clegg has well-known and often-articulated pro-European views, so one could probably conclude that this book is aimed at Remainers. This is not, however, Clegg's stated objective. The book is 'mainly for those people who don't hold their views for or against Brexit especially strongly', and 'who voted for Brexit knowing exactly what they were doing [...] but who now see that Brexit is not turning out the way they were promised' (2). Clegg wants to change these voters' minds, for 'there is nothing wrong with revisiting a decision' (1).

This short, accessible, book is set out into a number of sections: a broad-ranging analysis of Britain's relationship with the EU to date; why Brexit should be stopped; what the average voter can do about it; and an alternative model for Britain and Europe. Yet, Clegg has no doubt that Britain will remain close to the EU, however Brexit works out:

in the end, a simple truth will prevail: we are condemned by history and geography to be allies, neighbours and friends sharing the same space, the same seas, the same continent and the same values (137).

The historical analysis of Britain's at-times awkward relationship with the EU will be familiar to many readers. Nevertheless, it provides an informative overview. British policymakers in the 1960s and 1970s saw the European Economic Community as a collective based upon trade, and through a transactional and un-ideological lens. Britain never had the same attachment to the project due to events of the Second World War. When the EU integrated more deeply and expanded ever wider, a hardcore rump of British nationalists, conservatives and Thatcherites — however unfaithful this interpretation is to the Iron Lady's actual views towards Europe — mounted a long campaign of insurgency to withdraw the UK from the European club. Despite Clegg's earlier ambition, this analysis will probably already diverge sharply from many of the narratives harboured by Brexiteers. They may also point to — as anti-EU opinion sees it — a 'democratic deficit', the stifling effect of European bureaucracy and the assault to British parliamentary sovereignty.





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The 2016 referendum, why it was called and the conduct of the campaign are also discussed. The Leave Campaign's claim that the NHS, once Britain was outside of the EU, would gain £350 million a week is one of several used to demonstrate that the British people were sold a false prospectus. Clegg also discusses the assertion that Brexit is an anti-establishment endeavour, stating that the referendum campaign was financed by a shadowy cabal of business people and financiers: 'wealthy individuals with personal motives' (135). These are described as the 'Brexit elite' (63). We also learn about the negative impact that Brexit, particularly the no-deal version, is likely to have.

Having ascertained that EU membership is in Britain's interests and that the referendum was fought on a disputed, if not outright dubious, set of promises, the former Deputy Prime Minister sets out how Brexit can be averted. His main points for action revolve around political engagement. Voters are encouraged to join either Labour or the Conservatives, and then lobby its politicians in a pro-European direction. Although this is admirably non-partisan — indeed, both parties' leaderships are correctly described as being, at best, lukewarm towards the EU — it may come as a surprise to readers that they are not advised to join Clegg's own Liberal Democrats, who, after all, are the most pro-EU of the mainstream parties. Clegg writes that 'if 1 in 100 Remain voters were to join the Conservative Party, they would outnumber the current membership of the party' (103). On the other hand, a quick check of the numbers also shows that if 1 in 35 Remain voters joined the Liberal Democrats, it would become Britain's largest political party and surely exert more influence than is currently the case. That Clegg avoids partisanship is refreshing compared to the literary work of most politicians. It is nonetheless curious that the author, by and large, does not involve his own party in his strategy.

Finally, Clegg sets out a possible future arrangement between Britain and the EU, and it is this section that readers will find most thought-provoking. Short of full, core, EU membership, the UK could sit in an outer 'concentric ring'. This is, more or less, the current — if unacknowledged — *de facto* situation in Europe, where different countries sign up, *a la carte*, to the various EU initiatives. The idea has influential proponents, such as French President Emmanuel Macron and ex-German Finance Minister Wolfgang Schäuble. Angela Merkel has also signalled she might be open to this kind of arrangement, at least in principle. Clegg moreover suggests that a new relationship could be (according to the concentric circles idea) arranged via a joint UK-EU Convention and co-chaired by, for instance, [Sir John Major](#) and current Dutch Prime Minister (and a friend of Clegg's) Mark Rutte. Major would be an 'honest broker' and has previous experience negotiating at the European level: for instance, the Maastricht Treaty (122-24).

How to Stop Brexit (and Make Britain Great Again) will appeal to the general reader — it is written in an engaging and lively manner, and makes a number of thought-provoking suggestions. Whether it will be of interest to those who support Brexit or will achieve its stated intention of changing people's minds is less certain. [There are currently a host of books being published on Brexit](#), from analysis of the machinations of the 2016 campaign to proposals for the various future directions for Britain and the EU. Nick Clegg's book provides a fast-paced commentary on the topic. The nature of the subject, however, means that it will not be for most Leave voters, and will struggle to break through the echo chambers that have emerged around the EU issue.

Robert Ledger has a PhD from Queen Mary University London in political science, his thesis examining the influence of liberal economic ideas on the Thatcher government, and an MA in International Relations from Brunel University. He has worked in Brussels and Berlin for the European Stability Initiative – a think tank – on EU enlargement and human rights issues. He has published widely on European and British politics, edited the *Journal of International Relations Research* and is also a regular contributor to Global Risk Insights, a political risk group. [Read more reviews by Robert Ledger](#).

Note: This review gives the views of the author, and not the position of the LSE Review of Books blog, or of the London School of Economics.