

Parting shot



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AS AN ECONOMIST who writes about economic policy, I expect to be ignored or, at best, patronised, by policymakers. I know that governments much prefer policy-based evidence to evidence-based policy. I expect politicians to be opportunist, short-termist and have IQs much smaller than their egos. On a test of economic literacy, I would not expect to be able to reject the null hypothesis of no difference between the average politician and a penguin. So, the unedifying nature of the political debate over Brexit comes as no surprise.

I am, however, both shocked and surprised at the behaviour of Chris Heaton-Harris, MP for Daventry and a Government Whip who wrote to University Vice-Chancellors demanding details of all courses that contain material relating to Brexit. This was a sinister and threatening act quite contrary to the traditional norms of academic freedom. In future, we can no doubt expect Professors of Economics who point out that the evidence very clearly states that there are serious economic costs attached to Brexit will be labelled as ‘enemies of the people’.

With this in mind, I approached CAGE’s fringe events on ‘Challenges to the British Economy’ at the Conservative and Labour party conferences with a great deal of apprehension. Yet, as it turned out, both events were highly successful and were characterised by civilised interaction with the audiences who were prepared to engage and to argue rather than just shout. They were, it seemed, ‘policy wonks’ rather than ‘headbangers’. Just for a few moments we were back in the world we have lost. If only, ... ◀

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