

Richard Tice



Co-founder of Leave.EU July 2015 – June 2016

Founder of Leave Means Leave July 2016 – January 2020

Chairman of the Brexit Party November 2018 – January 2021

MEP for East of England July 2019 – January 2020

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Euroscepticism

UK in a Changing Europe (UKICE): What first made you a Eurosceptic?

Richard Tice (RT): When the big debate was happening really in the 1990s about whether or not the UK should join the euro, I looked at it. I am a businessperson, but my degree was quantity surveying, construction economics, and did economics at A Level. It just struck me, that I thought the whole project was completely flawed in that if you take away the right to set your own interest rate according to your own economy's needs, then essentially it is like taking away a leg of a chair. You are making the chair substantially less stable and you are reducing your own flexibility. So I was very anxious about that.

I wrote a three-page letter to Gordon Brown and I knew Nick Herbert, who you know was an MP. He was an old mate, and he was with Rodney Leach. He was the first director of Business for Sterling. So I got involved, gave them some money, ended up becoming a director of it, and it went from there.

UKICE: Lots of people objected to the Euro but didn't want to see the UK leave the EU. At that stage, would you have put yourself in that camp?

RT: I was very sceptical of the EU at that time, but in a sense, I was more focused on trying to make sure we didn't join the Euro. That was immediate, it

was tangible, and so that was my focus.

But then the more I started to look at the whole European Union, its objectives, our membership, what I perceived as the benefits and the costs and the obligations and the restrictions, my preference was to say well, it either needs fundamental reform or we should leave. So I started to write articles in the property world's main magazines, their weekly rag, about actually why it would be okay and if we left we would do fine.

UKICE: I really want to ask you if Gordon Brown wrote back agreeing with you.

RT: What do you think? I didn't even get an acknowledgement.

UKICE: Was he at the Treasury then or was he in Opposition?

RT: Yes, he was. He was Chancellor.

UKICE: Richard, can we ask you, did you have a party affiliation at that time? Were you a member of any of them?

RT: Yes, I was a member of and a donor of the Conservative Party.

UKICE: And you never thought of switching to UKIP or getting involved in UKIP at all?

RT: Not really, no. I mean they weren't really a credible thing then, so no.

UKICE: And what about when Nigel Farage took over? Was there any thought on your part of doing it at that point, when they began to attract more support?

RT: Yes. I first met Nigel in about 2012, so some time afterwards, but I had known for a fair while, through Business for Sterling days, Stuart Wheeler, the late, much beloved Stuart. So I just rang him up and said, 'Look, I might want to try and help out with a bit of cash.' So I never actually joined UKIP, but I have actually donated to three different political parties, if not four, so you can donate without being a member.

UKICE: Were you not tempted to go into front-line politics back then?

RT: Yes, I was. Bluntly and candidly, I just knew that we were raising a family, the price of it in that sense, and my wife wasn't keen and I was still trying to make some money, but I always mentally said to myself, 'Maybe I should do 20, 25 years in business and then try and help out somewhere in public life.' That was always part of my life plan.

UKICE: And so we get to 2010 and the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition. Although you might still have been donating to the Conservatives at that point, had you drifted away from the Conservatives ideologically by that point or were you still very much on board?

RT: I tore up my card. I used to give them a fair bit of money, and I said to Mathew Chattey one of the fundraisers, in, I think, 2012, 'I am leaving the party and I will re-join it when (David) Cameron is no longer its leader.' I was very upset at the Strategic Defence Review, the way they rushed that through. I felt that was basically completely misguided. So, yes, I think they had gone down the wrong path, and, yes, there were just some other things about what they were doing where I didn't really feel they had a mandate from their membership and the electorate.

UKICE: It wasn't all about Europe, as far as you were concerned, in terms of the drift away?

RT: No, it wasn't. It was some other big stuff. I felt the way they decimated the defence forces was rushed, it lacked credible thought, so I was pretty upset at the time and I said, 'Enough is enough.'

Leave.EU and the referendum

UK in a Changing Europe (UKICE): So what was your route into Leave.EU?

Richard Tice (RT): I gave some money to UKIP, quite a big chunk actually, £20,000. In, I think, 2013 or early 2014 for the 2014 European elections. I felt they had a cracking chance of doing really well, and history proved that to be the case. By then, of course, Cameron was petrified at UKIP's rise and so he had given the referendum pledge. I felt really something big was going to happen.

So that was what I did for the 2014 election. Was delighted that UKIP won those European elections, and then it was obvious that there would be a referendum post the 2015 general election.

UKICE: Cameron making that pledge wasn't enough to bring you back into the fold then?

RT: No. I was a bit torn, to be honest, because I liked the fact that he had given the pledge, but bearing in mind that he had broken many previous pledges I didn't trust him. I mean he pledged, for example, to have a referendum on the (EU) constitution. Cast-iron pledge, and then, when he came into Government, he could have carried out that pledge, but he reneged on it. He said it was already done, and so, no, I didn't trust him and I just trusted my instinct.

But as we were moving towards the 2015 election, I had a meeting with Matthew Elliott in about February 2015, ahead of the May election, and I said to Matthew, 'What is the strategy, what is the game plan?' He said, 'Well, we are just going to carry on as Business for Britain until after Cameron finishes his negotiation, and then we will have a short no campaign.'

I said, 'That is ridiculous. That is way too late, you will have missed the boat, and you will lose. Literally the day after the election, we need to come out, we have raised a bunch of money, and we are looking for a chief executive, and bang, basically put the Government on the back foot and say, "We are ready, we are raising money, we are doing up the team, we are off."

Matthew said, 'No, that is wrong.' So I was frustrated by that, and I was literally sitting on a train commuting with a pal of mine, and he said his brother knew Arron Banks. So within a week I met Arron, met Andy Wigmore, and we both said, 'Right, we will pledge X thousand pounds.' I think initially I said I would pledge 50, and we met a creative team and off we went.

Yes, and then very quickly after the election, obviously Cameron won it, didn't need the Lib Dems, and within a week or so we briefed *The Telegraph* and they did a story on it, the fact that we were off and we were starting to raise money. So that was it.

You see, I always had the view that Cameron never expected to win a majority

in 2015. I think the truth is UKIP actually helped him win a majority. Bizarrely, I think when they were lining up their expected negotiating strategy with the Lib Dems, the first thing Cameron was going to concede was that he couldn't have a referendum because he hadn't won a majority. I think the Lib Dems thought that was the one thing they wouldn't be able to ask because it was cast-iron. Anyway, that didn't come to pass, and then Cameron rushed it.

So, yes, we got going with Leave.EU. I met (Dominic) Cummings and Owen Paterson and Bernard Jenkin and co. in early July and said, 'Look, we could try and get together.' I organised a big meeting, we made a presentation with some of our early thoughts and creative work.

We had this big meeting in the Corinthia Hotel in about late July 2015. At the end of it, somewhat patronisingly, some of the Tory MPs just basically patted Arron and me on the back and said, 'There, there, dear boys. Don't worry, we have got it all covered now, off you go,' and that rather wound us up.

Then, because they knew we were about to launch, they rushed the Vote Leave, the whole thing. They rushed their slogan and their website and things because they suddenly realised they were in danger of being left behind.

UKICE: Was there anything they could have said to get you guys to back down and fold into them?

RT: There was. I tried desperately. I was on holiday in Italy in August 2015, and I was writing long emails to try and bring it together, but Matthew (Elliot) and Cummings were not having any of it. Yes, they weren't having any of it. Then they tried to poach me onto the Vote Leave board in September, October, to try and reduce the credibility of Arron's Leave.EU. Yes, I just felt I had committed to Arron, so I said no.

UKICE: And what role did you see yourself playing in the referendum in particular?

RT: Well, to be honest, I wanted business people who were pro leaving the EU, as did Arron, to have a much more prominent role. We just had a view that the typical establishment politicians would not have the same resonance.

It was a really finely balanced thing, though, I accept that, and so initially, when we got going, we had an element of prominence, and then there was the whole run-up to the designation, which turned into an absurd sort of battle. The moment we lost that, our profile and prominence dropped away very considerably. Obviously, Nigel was Nigel, but Leave.EU really and Grassroots Out sort of disappeared.

UKICE: Did you think you actually had a shot at the designation?

RT: We had a big shot, yes. We put a huge 300-page application in. We knew we had a problem with the establishment, but we put in a really big, credible document. Vote Leave, essentially, they were just going to put in a pretty short thing, they hadn't really addressed the criteria. Literally, on the day, someone read the criteria and said, 'Well, we haven't answered a load of these questions,' and they asked for an extension until midnight, as opposed to close of business, in order to get their application in.

So, yes, I mean you look back and you think the whole thing was just semi-childish, really, but when you think, relative to where it all ended up, I mean it is just ludicrous.

UKICE: When David Cameron was doing his renegotiation, were you worried about anything he might bring back that could make a real difference to the campaign?

RT: No, I wasn't, because I was doing *The Andrew Marr Show* when it was briefed to *The Sunday Times* how little he was going to ask for, and that was the first leak of his starting position. I knew then that, basically, if that was his starting position, then his ending position would be worse than that. Frankly, he had asked for nothing, got nothing, and I thought, 'He is in deep trouble.'

UKICE: Did you ever think that the two campaigns, despite the bunfight over designation, could work together during the referendum campaign?

RT: Sadly, personalities just made it impossible, and I hoped to be a bridge of common sense between the two and tried to negotiate. John Mills and I worked very hard to try and bring it together under some form of cohesive umbrella strategy, but Cummings and Elliott were not having any of it. Arron, he is a bit

of a control freak, so it was like trying to push water uphill pretty quickly.

UKICE: Did you have reservations about any parts of the Leave.EU campaign? Maybe the focus on immigration?

RT: No, not really, because to be honest we knew that immigration was an important factor of it, and we knew that there was a perfectly credible way of saying we need a sensible, fair and welcoming immigration policy that is fair and something along the lines of what Australia have. So, no.

Then it was interesting, actually. It was only in May, when they were doing really badly, that Vote Leave realised that actually they had to talk about immigration, and then they went completely the other way and started talking about Turkey. We had never dreamt of going that far.

No, I mean originally that was not in the Vote Leave strategy at all. I wrote a scathing, long email to the Vote Leave board and to any eurosceptic Tory MP, setting out the failings of the campaign and said that they had to change it, otherwise we were doomed, and that was about the time that they tried to push Cummings out. Obviously, they failed, and then shortly after they switched over to talking about immigration.

That was the moment really at which the campaign then shifted, and the Stronger In campaign, they started to become more and more outlandish in some of their economic claims. Then Obama came and the rest is history, really.

UKICE: Were you surprised by the 'in' campaign?

RT: No, not at all, actually. It was almost exactly what we expected. Patronising, 'there, there, you don't understand, it is all going to be an economic disaster,' and, yes, just 'Project Fear', big time, and just a very London-centric campaign that completely failed to read people's genuine concerns out in the regions.

UKICE: You said there was no formal coordination between the two Leave campaigns, but did you look at what they did and decide to do something different? Did you try to run a complementary strategy, if you like?

RT: No, to be honest, no. We just had a fundamentally different view as to what was going to get people to vote and to vote in our favour. If you were a completely dispassionate third party that looks at the campaigns, you could say actually it was very cleverly designed and they must have been really smart about the way they thought about this, because they approached two different target audiences. Well, I mean that is true, but it was as much by good luck as by design.

Brexit, 2016-2018

UK in a Changing Europe (UKICE): Apparently, you were the first person to be quoted by a UK national newspaper, *The Sun*, in July 2016, to say, ‘No deal is better than a bad deal’ in the context of Brexit. Were you the person who invented that phrase?

Richard Tice (RT): I was, I absolutely was. The weekend after the referendum I realised that there was going to be a major problem, the hysterical response from people. So I phoned up a few folk, and I said, ‘Look, I hate to say it, folks, but we are going to have to launch something.’ I knew legally Vote Leave had to basically close, it couldn’t carry on, so I basically just said, ‘Look, we need to raise six months at 20 grand a month, employ one or two people, create a website, and be a voice on the media.’

So that is what I did. We had a dinner, and we all agreed to chip in. Based on about six of us, we all agreed to chip in a month’s worth, and off we went. Employed someone, and, yes, that was the first slogan.

UKICE: Why were you so convinced that Brexit wasn’t safe in the hands of a Government that said it would respect the result of the referendum?

RT: Because of the hysterical response of Remainer MPs. They were getting all the airtime, and because Vote Leave had shut, and legally had to shut under Electoral Commission rules, there was no place for the media to go for the other side of the argument so it was just open season.

I thought, ‘Well, this is bad. We have got to respond, and we have got to try and help frame the nature of the debate.’ I didn’t really trust Theresa May from the beginning, despite what she said.

UKICE: Would it have been different if Boris Johnson, Michael Gove or Andrea Leadsom had become Prime Minister after that?

RT: Yes, yes, completely. Fundamentally, look, I am a businessperson. It is much easier to negotiate a good deal if you actually believe in what you are trying to negotiate for. Theresa May didn't, no one really knew about her, the stuff I heard about her made me a bit anxious, and, yes, I was genuinely worried. I thought it was important to set the frame .

UKICE: Did you have a vision for what Brexit would look like in 2016, after the referendum?

RT: Yes, I thought that, actually, as long as we were clear that we could walk away and organise ourselves accordingly that a sensible deal could be negotiated, but you had to be clear that you could walk away and you had to have a very tight time frame. It became obvious to me that the MPs, even Brexiteer MPs, didn't really understand that whole negotiating strategy and importance.

So when Article 50 was served back in March 2017, so we were due to leave 2 years later, I was then saying that we either had to have the heads of terms agreed by March 2018, so with one year to go, or I said to them, 'We have got to stop negotiating and spend the final year, everyone knows what we are doing, we are going to WTO rules.'

UKICE: But by the end of the referendum, you were convinced it was out of the Single Market, out of the customs union?

RT: Yes, oh, absolutely. Yes, neither, no question.

UKICE: And what did you think during the referendum campaign when you heard these Tory MPs say, 'Oh, well, no one is saying we are talking about leaving the single market,' etc.? Did that worry you even then?

RT: Our strategy was basically, look, you have got to get the in-principle decision and then you set your negotiation strategy for the negotiations afterwards. We did have long discussions about should we set out a definitive framework for it, and we concluded no, actually, just focus on the sovereignty

and the simple decision, but you are always going to get some people coming up with things. We just focused on the big picture, and it does what it says on the tin: Leave Means Leave.

UKICE: When you said you were worried about Theresa May, was that because primarily she had been a Remainer or was it because of what you had heard about her abilities as a chief executive or a negotiator?

RT: Both. Yes, both.

UKICE: So you just didn't see her as being the kind of person who could do that kind of deal?

RT: No. When someone said to me that having lunch with Theresa May was one of the worst free lunches that she had ever had and the most boring and the hardest work, I thought, 'Mmm, that doesn't sound like a very charismatic person that is going to show some strength and understanding.'

UKICE: And you weren't impressed with any of the decisions she made? For example, to bring on board Johnson?

RT: Well, they talk a good game, but what I have learned from the Conservatives over many years is they can talk a very good game, but, actually, very often you can't trust them, and that was my concern and so it proved. She talked a very good game. Her Lancaster House speech said all the right things, she adopted my slogan and that was the last time she ever mentioned it.

UKICE: How did you feel when she adopted your slogan?

RT: I must say, there was a moment of satisfied pride, actually. Yes. No, that was a good moment.

The Brexit Party, August 2018 - June 2019

UK in a Changing Europe (UKICE): Moving forward then to the Brexit Party. When did you decide that a new party was needed?

Richard Tice (RT): Actually, really quite late. Truth was most people believed Theresa May for a long time, so it was really hard raising money. It wasn't really clear, apart from just having something there, so we pottered through until mid-2018. As a small group, we were there. I kept in touch with Nigel.

We then got increasingly concerned through 2018. The Florence speech, we were the first people to call out the Florence speech. That was September 2017. Yes, that really worried us. We thought this is on a slippery slope, and so we geared up a bit then. Then, come Chequers, we knew it was game up, game over, we were in deep trouble. I got Nigel to join Leave Means Leave as vice chairman. We went out in August 2018. In three weeks, we raised almost £1m to really gear up, recruit some people, and we were going to launch a series of rallies around the country, which we did.

The first rally we did in late September 2018, and we got 1,600 people to a venue in Bolton, and we did a series of cross-party rallies under the Leave Means Leave banner, got all sorts of politicians and business people to speak.

It became clear through the autumn of 2018 that this was going very badly. We looked at it in November 2018. We looked at setting up a new party, and our polling showed us that it wasn't yet bad enough. People didn't realise how bad it was going. So the concept was there. It was really only in February that we then realised the moment had come.

UKICE: You mentioned earlier on talking to Bernard Jenkin and others. Did you have any contact with the ERG at this stage about what was going on?

RT: Yes, regular. We were liaising with all the main Brexit MPs, so there was very close touch. Lots of them were speaking at our events and we were meeting. Yes, we had them on our advisory committee, so, yes, we were meeting regularly and speaking regularly.

UKICE: And did you ever think that that was an alternative means of putting pressure on from the inside rather than from the outside?

RT: Well, that was the original intent. Leave Means Leave was a lobby group, so, yes, that was completely the intention. Iain Duncan Smith and Owen Paterson and folk would go in to see Theresa May, she would nod and listen

and say, 'Yes, I understand their worry,' and they would come away reassured. Then she would go and tell Olly Robbins to go and do something else.

UKICE: And was the failure to displace her one of the straws that broke the camel's back?

RT: Yes, it was, yes. Yes, I mean we couldn't understand why they weren't more vociferous to try and remove her, but then that is the nature of the Conservative model. Ultimately, they are pretty loath to get rid of their leader. They all talk behind each other's backs and talk behind their leader's back, but when push comes to shove, 'Oh, no, she is doing a wonderful job, oh!' Bang the desks, rah-rah, super, lovely job, and that is what happened.

UKICE: Can I ask you about the set-up of the Brexit Party? Why did you set it up in the way that it was set up, rather than a conventional political party?

RT: Time. Yes, to be honest, just time and, bluntly, control. I mean there were two important things. By then we were obviously very, very worried there would be a second referendum. We had to maintain a distinct, clear line between the Brexit Party and Leave Means Leave because if there was going to be a second referendum we needed to make sure that Leave Means Leave was going to be the shoo-in to be the designated party. We couldn't have Vote Leave, mark two setting up, and there were rumours.

So we maintained a bit of separation, but, from Nigel's experience of UKIP, it is a nightmare running a political party at the best of times. When you need to move at great speed with incredible clarity, Nigel realised that this is the only way to do it because you just don't have time.

We knew that, ultimately, from the moment we didn't leave on 29 March, we knew before then there were going to be European elections. No one else believed it. Everyone else thought, 'No, it won't happen, something will stop it.' Nigel knew. He absolutely knew they were unstoppable. So that was our total focus, totally single-minded, got to go for it.

UKICE: Now, of course, one of the challenges that that presents is then you have to select candidates for those elections. How was that and how was that

done? Did you have any involvement then?

RT: Yes. No, absolutely, completely. So I mean doing this at such speed, literally we made the decision, pressed the button in the first week of April. We did a press launch on Friday 12th April, we did a big rally on the 13th and the 15th, and we had a team working on candidate selection all the way through that. We wanted high-profile people from a cross-party or no-party basis who would get people thinking.

What was lovely was the phone just never stopped ringing. When you get calls from the likes of Annunziata (Rees-Mogg) or from Ann Widdecombe or Claire Fox, you think, 'We are onto something here.'

UKICE: Were you worried, in that rush, that vetting procedures might let some people slip through? Because that does happen sometimes, particularly, actually, with European elections on occasion.

RT: We did have a vetting procedure, because we had been vetting all our attendees at all our rallies for Leave Means Leave. So we had a guy. Basically, we paid £1 a person. Vetting is a really important thing, and that is why actually we never had any troubles at any of our rallies, because we always hoofed out the 10 or 20 nutcases that were trying to come along.

So we had a vetting procedure. I mean I think for the Europeans, yes, we had 1,000 applications for the European elections. We had a good guy in IT who had created a database. I think they all paid £100 so that was quite a useful fundraiser, but they all got assessed, all the CVs got read by two people, hundreds of people got interviewed. We had our whole team doing it, and we were going out and holding rallies.

UKICE: What were you looking for in candidates? Obviously, big names were useful, but apart from that.

RT: People who were committed, who had a very principled, passionate view, but also that just reflected the diversity of people who voted to leave. In a sense, we always knew that the temptation was to get distracted. We at the top said, 'No, you have got to be totally single-minded. We are not going to talk about anything else.'

Yes, after the Europeans you then say, 'Right, now you have got to create a manifesto because there is going to be a general election.' Of course, we knew then it would get much harder to bring people from left, right and centre or no particular view to try and agree some form of manifesto, but that was tomorrow's problem.

UKICE: Did you ever expect to do as well as you did in those elections?

RT: We knew from the moment the first big poll came out, which I think was about the third week of April or the fourth week of April. We got a call from *The Mail on Sunday*, I think it was, on Saturday evening. Said, 'You guys are going to be very happy. You are way ahead in the polls of anybody.'

Basically, the die was then cast. So we knew from that moment that basically we would win. It was just a question of how big could we make it and, therefore, how big an impact that would have.

The 2019 general election

UK in a Changing Europe (UKICE): Did that success, if I can put it this way, go to your head at all, in the sense that did you start to re-evaluate and suddenly think, 'Well hang on a sec. This could be more than a Brexit party. This could be a real political party with real electoral potential?' Did it change the way you thought about the party because you had done so well?

Richard Tice (RT): It is a really good question, and I think underneath, yes. You may or may not remember, our slogan was, 'Change Politics for Good'. It was quite interesting in that the original slogan was 'Fighting Back'. When we polled it, it did really badly. That is a real lesson, actually. People, voters, even when they are frustrated and angry, they want an uplifting, positive message. They don't want a message of basically war. So we came up with 'Change Politics for Good' incredibly quickly, and it polled off the chart.

So, yes, inevitably our thoughts then turned, 'Well, what does this mean afterwards?' But we were so busy during it, it was nuts. For me personally, it was very difficult. My mother died in the middle of the election, so I had to bury her in the middle of the election, so it was a very, very difficult time in that sense.

So, yes, we couldn't really think beyond, but we knew the moment the election was finished, as long as the Theresa May issue had been resolved, then, yes, who knew what would come afterwards?

UKICE: I am quite intrigued by the 'Change Politics for Good' because there are some quite interesting things that you put out in the Brexit Party prospectus about constitutional change. Did you get any sense that the people who voted for you were voting on anything wider than just we are fed up with faffing about Brexit?

RT: No. I think we just knew from the response to that that, actually, there was an appetite for real change. Of course, the truth is that many people who voted Brexit from the regions who felt left behind, who felt ignored, their areas had underinvestment, and I learned a lot more at the back end of the year in Hartlepool. People just felt that the political system wasn't working in any way, so there felt to be an appetite for change, an appetite for something different. So, yes, we felt there was.

So some of the early things we talked about actually had real resonance. Interestingly, here we are, a year and a quarter later, and actually House of Lords reform, given Boris's recent patronage, I think that will prove to be the tipping point. The BBC, what is going on there and its behaviour, again, a year and a quarter later, more and more people are talking about it. So, yes, those were two of the early things we were talking about.

UKICE: Do you think Boris Johnson's win in the leadership contest, which came after, did for the Brexit Party?

RT: Yes. The most important thing for us was that Theresa May, she announced her departure the day after the Europeans, so that was great. We thought Boris would win. It is amazing. In whenever it was, January 2019, the view then was anybody but Boris. 'ABB' was the expression going around Parliament. Five months later, we had killed them in the European elections, and it was basically Boris or we are toast. Even William Hague realised that. So they went through their process.

During the middle of it, we had a big rally in Birmingham, the last weekend of June. Five thousand people, tickets that we sold, so it was probably the biggest

political rally by a political party for a long, long time, and that was our pinnacle, really.

Then Boris was elected, and we sensed it from then on. Candidates who wanted to stand in the general election started to drift back. Yes, in a sense that is the Boris factor.

So, no, we sensed then that things were shifting, but in a sense we always felt that the Remain side would form a coalition in Parliament and would basically remove the Conservative Government and remove Boris from being the governing party in the first week of September. So we always worked on the basis that the Tories would have no alternative but to come and talk to us and do an election deal.

UKICE: What were your relations with Boris Johnson like from the time of the referendum? Did you have good relations with him?

RT: Nigel had respectful relations with him. I basically didn't know him and he didn't know me. Unfortunately, Cummings basically didn't like either Nigel or me, but we had good relations with the likes of Michael Gove and many, many Brexiteer MPs. Throughout the summer, we were talking to them, and they were all trying to steer Boris to doing an election deal. I mean I had detailed spreadsheets for every seat in the country as to which ones they should stand in and we should stand in.

So there was a period of time when we thought it was inevitable, they would have no choice. Something that the markets never really appreciated. Jo Swinson, she had an opportunity to do a deal with Corbyn, become Deputy Prime Minister and, frankly, lead the country towards a second referendum in May 2020.

She took an incredibly, I think, principled stance that that was beyond the pale. So instead of looking after her own personal interests, she made a stance for what she believed was right, and that was the Remain side doomed.

UKICE: Do you have a view on how many winnable seats the Brexit Party would look for in a deal with the Conservatives, the sort of threshold?

RT: Yes, I think our view was that, if we did a deal with them, they should have stood down in about between 50 and 80 seats that they had never won in 50 to 100 years and that we should stand in those and that we might win 15 to 20 seats. That was about our core ambition. There is then a debate about obviously where we don't stand and there would be some sort of overlap, but that was the dream scenario.

UKICE: And would you then have expected to be part of a formal coalition or a confidence-and-supply arrangement?

RT: Yes, yes. Yes, we were expecting some formal arrangement and, to be honest, some people in the Tory party were talking about ministerial and cabinet positions.

UKICE: How did it come about then that you guys ended up standing down in Conservative-held seats with no reciprocation by the Conservatives?

RT: Yes, I mean essentially we had always held out an offer to them that a big Leave alliance would crush the Remain side, would crush the Labour Party, and it would have done. To this day, I know that if they had stood down in a number of seats, then we could have got 10, 15 seats and the Labour Party would have been substantially weaker. The damage to the Labour Party would have been substantially greater, and for those who don't like the Labour Party that was a lost opportunity.

We originally thought the election would be called in mid-September. It ended up being called at the back end of October, by which time momentum was slipping away from us. Boris, against expectations, was making progress with his beautifully clean, oven-ready deal that he had read in such great detail.

In our heart of hearts, we knew that we had a responsibility to the nation not to allow Corbyn in, and we knew that basically the moment we agreed not to stand in the Conservative-held seats it was election over. The only question was what could we extract by way of a price? It became clear that we weren't going to extract anything by way of seats. There was a question of when we announced and, bluntly, the debate for us was do we, on the day the election is announced, call a press conference simultaneously or straight afterwards, within a couple of hours, and say we are not going to stand in any of the

Conservative-held seats? If we had done that, we would have gained the moral high ground, and the media pressure on the Tories to reciprocate by offering us something, I felt, would have been significant.

So we had a big debate internally. Ultimately, Nigel felt no, we hadn't secured anything, we don't like Boris's withdrawal agreement, it is Theresa May's deal with a different ribbon around it, and we have got to fight longer to try and extract something.

That was a very difficult judgement; it really was very difficult. It was a proper stinker because we knew the pain that we would get, and the pain was awful. I had emails from all my business colleagues begging me, for the sake of the country, to stand down. The abuse we got from the Daily Mail was vitriolic, and it was a very, very unpleasant whatever it was, 10 days or so.

It was so bad. I mean, literally, I had two security guards, Nigel had more than that, and we knew that if we didn't stand down, basically after the election we would have to leave the country. It was that bad. I was getting emails saying, 'You will have to leave the country if you don't stand down.' So it was pretty eye-watering.

Anyway, so we knew we would stand down, but obviously we were trying to get something out of Boris. On a Sunday night, he made a short video where he said that basically they wanted a simple free trade deal, they didn't want regulatory alignment, and, critically, that there would be no extension of the transition period. That was the promise we extracted from them.

They then put that in the manifesto, and that was the price, that was the extraction, and Nigel made that call. We negotiated that with them behind closed doors, but that was what we got. We didn't get any seats out of them, but we did get that. Actually, what that did, of course, was enhanced their victory because of that resolute clarity.

UKICE: Who did those negotiations?

RT: Those were done basically by one of our MEPs. I briefly attended a meeting with someone I had never met, before or afterwards, yes, so it was basically done over a weekend in central London. Like all these things, it was

pretty fraught.

UKICE: Did they give you any impression, because we have heard this about the ERG, that there were things that you might not like in the withdrawal agreement, but, actually, that was just to get us out and we could change things retrospectively?

RT: No, I didn't get any impression at all from them whatsoever. I have to say, I did think that the reason I was a bit more relaxed than some of my colleagues was I knew that the political declaration was a heads of terms, meant all things to all people, and you could negotiate that in a number of different directions.

In a sense, because I was relaxed about no deal, for me the most important thing was no extension of the transition period. But, no, relative to what we have seen about backing away from the withdrawal agreement, no, I didn't have that impression.

UKICE: And you were okay with what Boris Johnson negotiated on the Northern Ireland protocol?

RT: No, we weren't okay with it at all. We thought it was awful, horrible. We spoke at length about that, but at one of our rally events, after that all came out, after the withdrawal agreement deal came out, Nigel went through it in a really detailed way. Unlike all of our other rallies, it was greeted with a respectful almost silence, and we knew then that, actually, even our loyal supporters had had enough and, basically, we had all lost the will to live. So I think that was around about the time the election was called, yes.

UKICE: So you talked about the sticks, the threats as it were, that were made to you. I mean were there any carrots, blandishments dangled?

RT: Yes. Well, the one was that through a third party I was offered Rutland if I left the Brexit Party and joined the Tories. So I laughed about that, told my fellow leaders at the top of the party so that they didn't hear about anything and distrust me, and that was the one and only thing. I think, basically, we then deliberately leaked it, I had a laugh with Kay Burley the following morning or something, and that was that.

UKICE: Were you tempted?

RT: No, not at all. No, not at all. We had set a path and we were going to see it through, difficult though it was.

UKICE: Were you the only person who was offered anything?

RT: To my knowledge. Actually, let me just reflect on that. To my specific knowledge, but lots of MEPs and, indeed, candidates, in the run-up to the nominations going in, at the beginning of the election, were all offered all sorts of inducements. 'You can become leader of the local council,' and all sorts of other stuff. Yes, there was all sorts of blackmail going on in that two-week period up until the nominations went in.

There was a very funny episode in Hartlepool where I stood, in that the local Conservatives, they didn't want to put a candidate up. They wanted to give me a free run, and I heard about this. Obviously, I couldn't do anything about it and didn't want to do anything about it because I thought that just wasn't right.

Anyway, so their first candidate resigned. I think on the Monday before nominations were due in on the Thursday, the first candidate resigned. They got another candidate. He was duly announced on the Tuesday. Thursday lunchtime, he had signed all his papers, they were all there. Someone deliberately left them in their car and went on holiday. Phoned up and said, 'I am terribly sorry. I have left the papers in the car.' Thinking that that was job done, regional Tory HQ scurried around, found someone to stand, raised £500 in cash, got ten people off the street to sign the form, and they got it in at 3:55pm before the 4:00pm deadline. Absolutely nuts.

The future of British politics

UK in a Changing Europe (UKICE): Has Boris Johnson now effectively sucked the oxygen out of your part of the political spectrum? All that energy that you talked about that lay behind the Brexit Party, has he mobilised it now behind his do you think?

Richard Tice (RT): He certainly did in the initial phases, no question. From the

moment he was appointed, he was enthusiastic, optimistic, and he continued to do that through the back end of last year and for the first six weeks of this year, four weeks of this year. But I think since then, because of Covid, I think it has gone in completely the other direction.

To be honest, I think he personally is in a really, really bad place, and I think the Cabinet is in a really bad place. I think it is not far off the same moment in February 2019 when it became obvious that there needed to be an alternative offered to the electorate. What is going on currently, I think we are in an extraordinary and really uncomfortable place.

UKICE: Are you talking about the things they are doing or the fact that there might be disagreements within the party?

RT: No, I think the things they are doing in terms of the essential authoritarian approach to governing the people of the country. Lockdown was one thing, but in the face of overwhelming evidence that shows the virus is getting weaker, treatments are getting better, predominantly younger people are being tested positive for it, though, actually, they are embarking upon a partial new national lockdown as of .

I think people can see that this is not right, and it feels a really big, big moment, actually. I think millions of people are just not going to do it. Yes, I have been very critical through the whole process. U-turn after U-turn, complete lack of common sense, overpromising, and I think more and more people now have said, even in the last week, I am hearing Tory donors who have written to Boris saying, 'Never darken my doorstep again with a funding request.'

So, yes, I don't know whether they realise they are in such a bad place, but I think they are in a very bad place.

UKICE: Do you think there is space for a new party to emerge?

RT: The truth is, look, it is really, really, really difficult. First past the post is really difficult. PR makes it much easier.

UKICE: You are not going to start missing European elections, are you?

RT: No, but I do miss the PR system, and that was one of our constitutional issues in our thing. I think there is a gap where the silent majority is feeling very left out, just in terms of in all of the issues to do with political correctness is growing. Just I feel there is a shift, and the silent majority feel that something is not right and no one can see their way out of this. Where is the right of centre debating forum for any of this, apart from the Daily Mail and The Telegraph? But in broadcast terms, in media terms, there is nothing to the right of centre. I think there is a void, but it is a really strange time.

UKICE: Do you think 'Change Politics for Good' could work again?

RT: As a slogan, it is a great slogan, it is a great slogan, and, yes, I do think Boris has seriously overstepped the mark with the nepotism of giving his brother a peerage and all sorts of other people. I think that has worked very badly for them. I think his response to the culture wars during the summer, yes, I think there is an appetite for change. The BBC and the whole Proms debacle, all these completely self-inflicted things.

Yes, but who knows? I mean who knows? The sort of messages and things we are getting, we weren't getting two or three months ago.