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Executive Director, Britain Stronger in Europe July 2015 – September 2016

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Building the Remain campaign

UK in a Changing Europe (UKICE): Who approached you to play a role in the Remain campaign, and why did you decide to say yes?

Will Straw (WS): Well, I saw a job ad for what was advertised as the Interim Campaign. Laura Sandys was due to be the Executive Chair and was recruiting for a Campaign Director. So, I put in an application. I'd been at the Institute of Public Policy Research (IPPR) for about five years. I'd stood as a Labour candidate in a marginal seat in the 2015 election. I was looking for a new challenge in politics.

And what could be more interesting than being involved in the referendum? And I've always been pro-European and had run the EU research programme for IPPR, and we had done a lot of research, including on questions like the democratic deficit and the need for the EU to have some sort of democratic reforms. So, I'd immersed myself in the debate, but I saw this as a once in a generation opportunity to play a part in a massive public debate.

I put an application in, and I went and saw Laura, had a good conversation with her, and then things went quiet. Behind the scenes she, essentially, left that position. So, the nascent cross-party board of Peter Mandelson, Damian Green, Danny Alexander, Roland Rudd as treasurer, and Lord Sainsbury as the chief financier, then approached me, initially through Peter Mandelson. They said, 'Look, we've seen your application and we'd like to talk to you

about whether you'd like to take on the position of Executive Director'. I said, 'Well, I'd be really interested in that'.

So, I went and spoke to all of them and, essentially, put my pitch about how I thought that this campaign would need to be different from previous campaigns. It would need to have a very heavy focus on social media and digital expenditure, and it would need a different approach because political parties are used to campaigning on a constituency-by-constituency basis, and this would be a single constituency for the whole country.

It would need to be very data-led, in terms of our understanding of the electorate and how we could target different messages at different groups. We would need to learn the lessons from the Scottish referendum, but, in my view, not fall into the trap of avoiding having a cross-party, cross-sector campaign – I always felt that it was really important to bring groups together.

I guess the pitch must have been successful, because they asked me to take on the position. So, I started in July 2015, and inherited a team that they were also involved in recruiting. So, Lucy Thomas was then the Director of Business for New Europe – it was a pro-business, pro-EU lobbying group – so she came on board as Deputy Director, with a focus on communications.

Ryan Coetzee, who'd been advising the Lib Dems, came across as Strategy Director. The group Business for New Europe had a team underneath it, including a brilliant guy called David Chaplin, who became the head of the press team. And then we very quickly got some consultants involved as well. So, there'd been a lot of conversations with Populus, who became our pollsters, with Tom Edmonds and Craig Elder, who came over as our digital consultants, and Tom, essentially, came in-house as our Head of Digital and Creative. So, that was the start of the team, and then we had a very busy summer recruiting.

UKICE: You say learn the lessons of the Scottish referendum. What were those lessons? For some people, the lessons of the Scottish referendum was that we came far closer to losing than we should have with a message of potential economic loss, and it struck me that David Cameron's lesson from the Scottish referendum was we won.

WS: Well, first of all, I think that fundamental point is right, that the Scottish referendum was won, and it was won, essentially, on laying out the risks of leaving. And I don't demur from an approach that set out the risks of leaving. We clearly failed to win that argument with the British public, and I think there are clear reasons for that. The main one which we never managed to get across, was the need for a more emotional case on both the benefits of being in along with the risks of leaving.

It fundamentally failed because the political spokespeople for the campaign, particularly the Conservative spokespeople, were never comfortable making an emotional case for the EU. But there was an emotional case that would embrace both the risks of leaving, but also the benefits of membership. So, that was the insight for me, and we were never able to realise it as the campaign went forward. But that fundamental point, that you had to make economic risk front and centre of the campaign, I think was right.

And when we did the polling and focus groups, which were very significant as we were shaping our messaging that summer, what became abundantly clear was that people could spontaneously tell you what they felt was wrong with the EU. They could tell you about the cost, they could tell you about immigration, they could tell you about the bureaucracy. It was normally summed up as being about bureaucracy and gold-plating, but it was essentially a sovereignty point.

Unless they were very pro-European, they couldn't tell you a single tangible benefit of being in the EU. What they did know was that there was a risk to them and their family, and a risk to the economy, of leaving.

I always wanted a longer campaign, and argued with David Cameron's advisers that June 2016 was way too early, that we needed longer to roll the pitch, particularly on the benefits of being in the EU.

But the tangible argument we had was risk, to you and your family in terms of your pocketbook, your weekly budget, and so on – and then a broader macro risk for the economy. As the campaign went on, those points remained salient with both those voters who identified themselves as Remainers and those who were undecided. And they also registered with people who were Leavers. They just preferred other issues. So, that was a really important insight.

I remember Douglas Alexander coming and talking to us in the summer of 2015 and saying, 'One of the things you need to understand is there are no shared facts anymore, there are their facts and there are your facts'. That wasn't to diminish the importance of people having evidence. So, what we then sought to do was to try and roll the pitch on what some of those benefits of being in the EU were, because we knew that if we got into a row about costs, we would lose.

And, unfortunately for us, third-party commentators and the BBC got embroiled in a row about costs, because the £350 million claim was so egregious. We could just never get out of that cul-de-sac. But what we were seeking to do, and if you look at the materials that we pumped out, the leaflets the volunteers handed out, the social media materials that we used, the scripts that we gave to politicians, it was all about trying to establish the benefits of being in Europe, and that was the whole point about Britain being stronger, safer and better off in the EU, and the risk of leaving. That was all part of the messaging that we had at the start.

People heard about the risks, because the Conservative Government was comfortable making the case, and George Osborne probably overly revelled in setting out the risks. All those Treasury documents that came out, they certainly landed the risk, but I think we know now they went too far. But what was much harder to establish when you had Conservative politicians as your leading spokespeople.

And when you had a Labour Party that took months, and months, and months to engage properly under a leadership that just wasn't really interested or engaged, establishing a more emotional, positive case for being in just didn't happen, much as we, as a campaign, wanted it to.

UKICE: When you started the job, the decision to have a referendum hadn't been made yet. Did you go to (David) Cameron and say, 'Look, this is the focus group evidence, this is what we need to do and why we need to delay'?

WS: I didn't meet Cameron until the conclusion of the renegotiation. No 10 observed, essentially, this distance from us right until that point. I had a conversation with one of Cameron's advisers in the late summer of 2015, who basically told me that our establishing a campaign was a nuisance, an

annoyance, and wasn't helpful. I think they felt that they could just set up a campaign in five minutes, and do that after they'd concluded the renegotiation, which was for the birds. But that was the very clear view of some in the Government during the summer of 2015.

They realised, as the autumn went on, that they needed to have some more day-to-day contact with us. So, through Andrew Cooper, who as the head of Populus, was our pollster, we had a back channel in. I think Peter Mandelson had some conversations with George Osborne. And then, as the autumn went on, we had initial meetings with Stephen Gilbert, who'd been Cameron's Political Director, and with Craig Oliver, and started those conversations.

As the new year picked up, we had some more meetings with advisers, with people like Gabby Bertin, Ameet Gill, Adam Atashzai, and so on. Essentially, in those meetings, we were starting to plan out the strategy for the months ahead. My assumption was that at the February Council, there would be, as there had been in December 2011, a sort of stage-managed walkout where the deal wouldn't be good enough and you'd come back a month later for a better deal.

I made the case, not directly, but to Stephen Gilbert and Craig Oliver, in that period up to February, that we should take our time, that the earliest to hold the referendum should be the autumn of 2016, and that, ideally, they would spin out the renegotiation. Because Cameron had said the referendum needed to take place before the end of 2017, so we could keep this going until 2017.

And I remember being at a dinner in the summer of 2015 and that question of timing came up. And the consensus in the room from all the journalists and advisers that were gathered was that there would be another immigration crisis in the summer of 2016 and the referendum would, therefore, become framed by immigration if we allowed it to go beyond the summer of 2016.

I remember being maybe not a sole voice, but a bit of a lone voice in the room, saying, 'Hold on a second, guys. This referendum's going to be about immigration whatever happens. Actually, we need longer to spell out this case, and avoid rushing the renegotiation.' Unfortunately, those perspectives weren't heeded.

UKICE: You have come from a Labour background, having stood as a Labour candidate, to run this campaign. However, ultimately, loads of the big calls are in the hands of the Conservative high command in Downing Street, including the extent to which the Conservative Party would campaign for the Government's position. Were you concerned by your lack of links into the Conservative Party?

WS: So, think about the summer of 2015. You've got a Labour leadership contest going on where Andy Burnham's the front runner and where there's a chance that Yvette Cooper could overtake him and come through the middle. So, you're anticipating a referendum campaign where you've got a quasi-centrist Labour figure with David Cameron, alongside the Lib Dems. You knew that the TUC and the CBI would be on board.

So, you had this big coalition, and the approach we were planning at that stage was that you would have joint ownership of the campaign, as had happened in Scotland. And then several things happened. The first was that it became clear that (Jeremy) Corbyn was going to win. I think partly to pre-empt that, but also partly because of some of the concerns about Labour having been wiped out in Scotland, Harriet Harman, as interim leader, made the announcement that Labour would establish its own 'Labour In for Britain' campaign and would not be part of the formal Stronger In campaign.

I wrote Harriet and Alan a memo explaining why that was a really bad idea, and why that was not a good lesson to take from Scotland. From a party political Labour point of view, it would've been more damaging for Conservatives to be seen on a platform with Labour than it would've been for Labour to be seen on a platform with Conservatives.

In relation to the Conservatives, within the campaign we were taken by surprise that Steve Baker ran rings around David Cameron in terms of some of the rules and regulations around the campaign that he had control over, essentially, as head of the executive. There's a great chapter in Tim Shipman's book about this, which sets out the five or six areas where Steve Baker essentially ambushed Cameron on these questions around the nature of the campaign, including, critically, whether the Conservative Party would be neutral or not.

That was obviously a big issue for us because, with Labour and the Lib Dems, we benefited indirectly from their data and links, and the Conservative Party wasn't going to do that.

We all knew there would be people like Chris Grayling, and so on. But I remember hearing that the concern from Cameron and (George) Osborne was that Theresa May would be a Leaver. They thought that (Boris) Johnson was absolutely nailed on as a Remainer, and they thought that (Michael) Gove was a longstanding Leaver, but that he would go quietly, and he would not take a formal role in the campaign.

In terms of that central point then about the links to the Conservatives, I was concerned by this, but what we sought to do, as we were planning for a cross-party campaign, was to make our recruitment as broad as possible. So, I recruited a Head of Field Organising – a guy called Stuart Hand, who'd been the Conservatives' marginal seat coordinator in the 2015 general election. Masterminding, by the way, my defeat as a candidate in a marginal seat!

We recruited James McGrory as our chief spinner from the Lib Dems. He and Craig Oliver had worked in Number 10 Downing Street together during the coalition and gone head-to-head repeatedly and briefed heavily against one another. We had Edmonds Elder, the digital team who had run the Conservatives' well-regarded 2015 digital operation, who'd been taking chunks out of Labour.

And then we had people like Joe Carberry as our Head of Research, who had come over from the Labour Party, who, later, would work very closely with Adam Atashzai, who was the Head of Research at the Conservative Party.

We created a culture inside the organisation which was cross-party and had links into all the different political parties. So, initially, Andrew Cooper, and then, in time, Stephen Gilbert and Craig Oliver, helped guide me with those relations, particularly with Cameron and Osborne.

But what was a frustration for the campaign was that we didn't have that centralised, political management of the campaign, as they'd had in the Scottish referendum and as they'd had in the 1975 referendum. Instead, you had it run, essentially, within Cameron's very close inner circle with us at

arm's length. I think in the entire course of the campaign I was invited into a maximum of three of Cameron's 4pm huddles with his advisers.

I mean, we had a very good working relationship with them. I have no criticism about the fluidity of the information from those strategic meetings, but it meant that we couldn't often make the case ourselves about what was in the campaign's best interests. And so a lot of the time, we were frustrated. I mean, during some of the stuff about blue-on-blue, we just wanted Cameron and Osborne to take the gloves off and go as hard at Iain Duncan Smith, Johnson, and Gove as they were going for him and Osborne, but they were thinking about repairing the Tory Party following the referendum. Obviously, they wanted to win it, as well, but I think they felt that was in the bag.

UKICE: As the renegotiation was going on, did you think it would make any difference?

WS: I always felt it was a fig leaf in terms of a renegotiation. The areas covered in the renegotiation were all areas that weren't going to change much about the relationship. Some of the more important aspects of reform around the budget and so on – for example, if you were going to massively reduce the Common Agricultural Policy and have much more funding focused on Research and Development, which would've been good for the bloc but also good for Britain – weren't really on the table. They just weren't politically feasible. So, I think everybody knew that it was more about internal Conservative Party management. And they were never going to get anywhere with free movement.

The deal, in itself, was fine, as far as it went. I think it moved things in a positive direction. I remember the points about the opt-outs from 'ever closer union' and that sense that we would be more of an associate partner going forward, having some of those things enshrined was good.

There was nothing particularly controversial. It was positive, but I think the idea it was going to sway public opinion wasn't realistic, and that's why the Conservatives, more than anybody, just dropped it from the script. As the campaign went on, it was almost as if there hadn't been a renegotiation.

UKICE: Should they have made more of it in the campaign?

WS: I think it was so technical and so far from the expectations they had built. As I say, our core strategy was about establishing the benefits of being an EU member, with a public that had had 40 years of negativity, and asserting and establishing the risks. But the renegotiation muddied the water on the benefits, because it made it look like there hadn't particularly been any benefits. Cameron himself had previously used that language about the EU being too big, too bossy and too bureaucratic.

So, there were two problems with that. One was that it reminded people that perhaps there hadn't been benefits. Secondly, and this was something I didn't fully realise at the time, but it became apparent afterwards: it hurt Cameron's own credibility.

I was asked to do a talk at Oxford University to compare and contrast the 2016 referendum with the 1975 referendum. They sent me a transcript of Harold Wilson going on the Today Programme in the last few days of the 1975 election, where he was playing a sort of avuncular figure above the debate, above the fray, saying, 'Well, I've heard the arguments and I've given them a lot of thought, and I have to say, on balance, I think taking this step to leave would do us economic harm and wouldn't be in our best interest. So, I've come to the view that we should stay in'.

It was a very reasonable, 'I'm splitting the difference, but coming out on this side' position. I don't know whether, politically, it would've been possible for Cameron to do this, but it might've actually been a better bridge for him, from the posturing he'd had in the run-up to the renegotiation. Because I think what voters saw was him turning on a sixpence from this very negative view of the EU, to suddenly saying the sky was going to fall in if we left. I think that stretched people's credulity, and I think it was one of the factors for why our messages around economic risk didn't land.

UKICE: Were you clear from the start, speaking to some of these Conservatives, that, whatever the renegotiation, there was no question that David Cameron would campaign for in? Did you harbour a moment's doubt about that?

WS: Not really. You had to do a scenario plan of what would happen if he did campaign for out, but it didn't feel realistic, and during those early

conversations with the advisers it certainly became clear that that wasn't the plan.

I think what did surprise us, though, given the intelligence that we were receiving from key Conservative advisers, was the size of the rebellion.

In the end, I think, it was it a majority of backbenchers were for Leave, and they felt it would be two-thirds Remain. If the Leave campaign had been led by Iain Duncan Smith, Chris Grayling and Priti Patel, it would've looked a bit extreme. It was having Gove and Johnson that gave it credibility.

Also, I think it empowered Cummings and, to a lesser extent, (Matthew) Elliott, rather than allowing either the kind of (Nigel) Farage-ist narrative to dominate, or the ridiculously hectoring Peter Bone and his cabal to use very technical language about sovereignty.

So, it was the benefit of having them in as great communicators, but they also moved the centre of gravity of the debate, and that did them such a lot of good.

UKICE: Looking at the Leave campaign, there was a point of time before the actual referendum started where it looked like they were a complete mess, with divisions within and between camps. By the start of the campaign, were they in a stronger position than you had anticipated, because of their recruitment of a large number of MPs and Cabinet Ministers?

WS: We always knew it would solidify once there was a lead campaign, because that status from the Electoral Commission and the massively increased expenditure limits that you have at your disposal meant that that would give them natural authority, and it gave them authority to shape who the people in the TV debates were. So, we were rather keen on Leave.eu becoming the lead campaign, although we had no control over it. So, I think that just naturally concentrated control.

But, yes, absolutely, particularly having Gove playing such a central role, with his longstanding relationship with (Dominic) Cummings. I've no first-hand experience of this, just what I've read, but you will have heard about that attempted coup when Cummings was called over to Bernard Jenkin's office, and they had the tanks at the door and Cummings' team dug in. That was a

critical moment for their campaign.

But there's nobody in the world that Aaron Banks hates more than Dominic Cummings, and what that essentially meant was that you had two Leave campaigns, and so they were able to land the perfect segmentation of their electorate, where there was a high turn-out encouraged by the Farage-ists. I think it was Nigel Farage who was more responsible than anybody for getting the non-voters to the polls to vote for Leave. Non-voters, people who habitually didn't vote in general elections, went 80/20 for Leave.

I think Farage and the (Aaron) Banks operation were responsible for that, whereas, with Gove and Johnson, the Vote Leave campaign was trying to make a more reasonable economic case. Until, of course, and this is one of the things that angered me most about the campaign, they totally went for immigration as an issue in the most unbecoming way with their Turkey poster, and with the claims that they were making towards the very end of the campaign.

Having said they weren't going to go there, they went there, I think harder than anybody involved in mainstream politics anticipated. It was so brazen and such a dog whistle. That aside, they were able to have much more of a campaign at the centre.

UKICE: It was always intriguing that you went for this Britain Stronger in Europe branding not least because when I heard the acronym BSE, that had slightly negative connotations for someone who'd lived through that in government. I just wonder what thinking went into the branding, the messaging, and all of that sort of side of the campaign.

WS: The name and branding came from the Populus research that I inherited when I came in. It looked at which arguments were salient with the British public. The issue we had was that most Brits couldn't tell you a single tangible benefit of being in the EU. But one of the phrases that did resonate was this idea of strength, of British strength, and this idea of Great Britain deriving strength by being part of these different international networks, the EU being one of those.

So, we felt it was very important to claim that particular mantle of patriotism. It

would've been a mistake for the campaign to have wrapped itself in the EU flag, though I know lots of the activists wanted to. That would have moved us towards a 30% rather than 48% outcome.

But it came from that idea of British strength, and we expanded that to be 'Britain is stronger, safer and better off in the EU than we would be on our own'. That was the longhand, and then 'Britain Stronger in Europe' as the shorthand. We used the shorthand in the campaign and on all the idents for TV, everything, was 'Stronger In'. That was the point we wanted to get across, and then that was even contracted further with our branding.

We used a great brand agency. These are the guys behind the Tate, Science Museum, Coop, they've just done the Earthshot Prize, they're called North Design. And I thought the branding was really strong, and we got great feedback from it, because it used a patriotic palate of red, white and blue, and it just had this rather bold "I'm In", and that really worked well. That was a sort of mentality and an ethos for our activists, but, also, for some of those undecided voters who decide they were for Remain – 'I wasn't sure, but now I'm in'.

You might recall that it only became Remain/Leave, I think, in September. We did think about 'Should we just be 'Vote Remain'?', but 'remain' is such a sort of odd word. It's not well used in common vocabulary, whereas 'leave' is a very regularly used word, so 'Vote Leave' worked, and the idea of leaving something works quite well.

It's very rare you'd hear yourself using the word 'Remain', so it just didn't feel like it was a resonate phrase.

UKICE: I'm very intrigued by that, because I think 'remain' was a very interesting word, because, as you say, 'remain', "I'm going to leave this party because it's bad," as opposed to, "I'm going to remain at this party," I'd say, "I'm going to stay at this party."

WS: You say 'stay', yes.

UKICE: Did you ever consider contesting the wording? Once you'd lost the yes/no, I think was the original proposition wasn't it, to remain or leave-

Did you ever consider arguing , “Well, let’s use the natural English phrase, which is ‘stay’, as opposed to ‘remain’?”

WS: Yes, we discussed it but the decision was made by the Electoral Commission. I think, in a funny way, if it had been Leave/Stay, it would have been a lot easier, because ‘stay’ is a word that people use more commonly. And if you think about the Scottish referendum, they used ‘No Thanks’, which was a really clever piece of political marketing and phraseology, because it’s just something people say, and it’s polite.

And then you had ‘Better Together’ which was a nice, warm phrase that people use, and just worked, and we just didn’t have that with the word ‘Remain’. We felt we’d done the research, that idea of British strength worked for us, and more people associated the idea of British strength with being part of these different networks, going back to Churchill’s circles, being part of the Commonwealth, and the G7, and the EU, and the UN Security Council. And we could then build on that with the points we wanted to make about being safer and better off through being part of the European Union, and that’s what we sought to do.

I remember going up to the University of Manchester and being admonished by some pro-European academics for running a negative campaign, and saying, ‘That is not what we’re trying to do. If you look at our literature, if you look at our website, if you look at our social media, the arguments that we’re making are about the balance of positive arguments for the benefits of being in, but, on the other hand, the negative risk of leaving’. But, of course, all the public heard was what the politicians were saying on the news. And the Conservative politicians congregated towards the negativity, and we really struggled to get the Labour voices on the telly.

UKICE: Were you worried that, as ‘Brexit’ just became such a term of art for the whole thing, you didn’t have your comparable phrase? There wasn’t a sort of ‘Britin’, as opposed to ‘Brexit’.

WS: Yes, exactly. We talked for a bit about whether we could try and get the broadcasters not to use the word ‘Brexit’, for it to be, in a sense, a pro-Leave phrase, and so they should be much more neutral about it, but it just became common parlance. I mean, those attempts were as successful as trying to get

them not to focus on £350 million and just to say, 'This is a disputed claim,' and move on. It just became the language.

Much of this goes back to that point about preparation. Matthew Elliott had got his 'Best for Britain' campaign going two or three years out from the referendum, and the £350 million claim was actually an extraction of a longstanding UKIP message, which was '£50 million a day'. And I remember going on Radio 5 Live and other broadcast programmes long before the referendum campaign, debating against UKIP people who used that £50 million a day slogan. And people knew it. When we did our research, it was one of the things people knew.

We didn't have anything like that, and then the Conservative leadership decided that it was sensible for us to have a four-month campaign rather than an 18-month campaign.

The referendum campaign

UK in a Changing Europe (UKICE): Did it surprise you how little talk there was of Jeremy Corbyn's position on Europe during the Labour leadership campaign? Are you one of those people who thought he really didn't put his shoulder to the wheel during the campaign itself?

Will Straw (WS): Yes, who doesn't?

UKICE: Some of his team.

WS: So, first and foremost, our worry during the leadership campaign was that he could come out for Leave. There was an article in *The Guardian* or somewhere, with some remarks that he had given at some hustings event. He basically gave a longstanding Jeremy Corbyn remark about his views on the EU. So, we were really worried about that, and what that would mean.

But we also knew that that was so far from where the Labour Party membership and the PLP was, and, actually, where Momentum and his supporters were, that it was unlikely that he would have any political room for manoeuvre on that. So, the question became all about what he would do.

So, I did the judicious thing and emailed the person on his campaign who I had the best relationship with, who I'd known as an adviser to Ken Livingstone, right at the start of the leadership campaign, offering full access to the campaign briefings, meetings, whatever they needed at whatever point they wanted it as I was doing for all the other Labour leadership campaigns.

I then reiterated that offer when it became clear that he was going to win, and then again when he had won. I'm sure that Alan Johnson will talk separately about the frustrations that he, Patrick Heneghan and others had in their relationships inside the Labour Party. It took me until March to have a meeting with Simon (Fletcher), and I never met Corbyn.

I bumped into John McDonnell at Sky News around the same time – I think we were both doing clips – and we had a nice, cordial chat. He's, as people came to know, very charming. He said, 'Well, you must come in for a cup of tea. We must hear from the campaign and what you're doing'. So, obviously, I followed up several times. That never happened.

Despite being the lead campaign for Remain, we only had half a route into the Labour leadership.

We had daily calls with the Labour Yes campaign at an operational level, sharing information and so on, as allowed by the Electoral Commission rules, and I had regular contact with Alan Johnson, and then with Tom Watson as Deputy Leader, and with a whole host of members of the Shadow Cabinet and backbenchers. But trying to get any coordination with the Leader's Office was hopeless, and I'll give you a couple of anecdotes to show that they didn't put their shoulder to the wheel.

It became clear that the Labour voice was not being heard. There was a poll, I think around early April or early May of 2016, which showed that 50% of Labour supporters were unclear about the Labour Party's position, which was just extraordinary. So, we then agreed that we would have, in addition to our own campaign meetings, a daily campaign call with myself and the Labour Yes team, and with a member of the Leader of Opposition's Office (LOTO). LOTO didn't turn up once.

I don't know if this is true or not, but I heard it from the Labour Yes campaign.

We were having this daily call at 8:30, I think, after we'd already had a round of morning calls starting at 6.15. And the view was, 'Well, they don't really turn up for meetings before 10', so we'd be lucky to get them at this time.

And then for our media grid in the closing weeks of the campaign we, as you may recall, had Gordon Brown playing the leading Labour voice, and he did an amazing role, staking out some of those arguments. And so we would, essentially, just get the Tories to disappear for the day off doing some regional campaigning, and Gordon would take the main campaign broadcast slots. But we were desperate to get Corbyn or McDonnell to have at least one, and hopefully several, days where they would be the lead Remain story. Our aim was to clear the grid for them and get them out there.

And there were a couple that worked. There was one event hosted by the TUC, who we had a good relationship with, that got all the union bosses and the Labour Shadow Cabinet together to talk about the NHS. And they did that, Corbyn had his picture taken and I think Watson did the media clip. But there was one day where we had what we felt was indirect agreement from us, via Labour Yes, to the Leader's office that McDonnell was going to do the morning media round.

They wouldn't tell us what they were going to do, which is extraordinary in itself, but when you're doing this, what you're anticipating is briefing an op-ed or a story into the morning papers, taking the Today Programme 8:10 slot, leading the bulletins with whatever your story is, and, essentially, leading the day's news agenda with your story. Of course, Leave are trying to do that, as well, and some days you'll get 8:10, and sometimes they'll get 8:10.

But you're trying to lead that day with your story, and if there's going to be a row, it's going to be a row around your story and not theirs. So, it's really important you get that right every single day and that your story is better than the other side's story.

And we found out very late at night that McDonnell had dropped out of the Today programme, so we were giving up our slot, and then he did a speech or some remarks, or a brief the next day that was critical of the Remain campaign rather than advancing a solidly pro-Remain argument.

And, look, there are plenty of criticisms that you can lay at the Remain campaign, and I've heard them all. But the idea that you do that with two weeks to go in a national referendum when you're supposed to be putting your shoulder to the wheel for Remain, I mean, that stretches credulity for me.

UKICE: What do you make now of the talk about the Remain campaign being too New Labour, too metropolitan, not representative of the rest of the country, and did it impinge on your thinking then?

WS: I was very mindful of this. Bear in mind I'd just stood as Labour's candidate in Rossendale and Darwen, and the North West, as a kid, was as much a home for me as London. So, I was very, very consciously aware of that metropolitan critique. The campaign hoped to launch in Manchester but, unfortunately, that was kyboshed by Roland Rudd, who just felt that we wouldn't be able to get all the great and the good there. The point for us of doing it in Manchester was we might get the event stuffed full of students and normal folk, rather than captains of industry, but we lost that battle.

Part of the appeal of Corbyn and McDonnell was that they might appeal more to that kind of old Labour voter. We were desperate to get the trade unions involved, and the TUC did a great job. But, obviously, they don't directly represent union members and it took a long, long time to get the unions involved.

Now, part of that was because, during this period, the Tories were trying to push through their trade union bill, which was going to heavily restrict the powers of the trade unions in the most gratuitous way. People like Sir Terry Burns had done an independent review and made a series of recommendations to water down the legislation.

One of the things I'm most proud of in the referendum was that I managed to persuade, mainly via Stephen Gilbert, Cameron and Osborne to accept all the key amendments. That created the moment when the trade unions finally committed to put in their full funding and resource into it. UNISON were brilliant. I don't know whether (Len) McCluskey was a closet Leaver, but UNITE didn't put as much muscle in as UNISON did. GMB did a good job.

It was just very, very hard to create space for the unions in the media grid.

They didn't want to share a platform with either the Conservatives or with Stronger In because, by that stage, we were seen as being a Conservative-led operation. So, it just became very hard to coordinate with them and get those more working-class voices out there. We put a lot of effort into our regional media and ground game. So, we had supporters all around the country organising, mainly in the major university cities, but then fanning out into the more 50/50 areas.

If they were heavily Leave, it wasn't really worth doing, but we arranged busloads of activists to go out and try and talk to voters, in some cases putting themselves at risk of abuse. We had regional bus tours where we would get politicians from the area, people like Tristram Hunt the Stoke MP, Hilary Benn in Yorkshire, Phil Wilson in the North East. We had champions in these regions who would go out and try and make the case in their regions. And then, as well as the national media grid, we had a daily grid for each region with who our lead spokesperson was going to be.

So, we really were trying to contest it. But you're right, the national debate that people heard was (Boris) Johnson, who somehow manages to be a bit teflon, going around the country waving bunches of asparagus and fish, auctioning off cows, and doing all these things that Cameron couldn't do, primarily for security reasons, which was a massive frustration for us. We just didn't have a Labour politician who was willing to be guided by us on what the stunt should be for the day. So, what people heard was, essentially, Cameron and Osborne standing behind podiums making their case. So, it was very hard to break out of that.

UKICE: Did you expect business to do more?

WS: We certainly hoped for business to do more. In retrospect, whether that was wise or not, I think, is another question. But among their many arsonist tactics, Vote Leave had run this very, very heavy campaign against both charities and businesses in the summer of 2015, essentially trying to scare them from playing a part.

Very aggressive letters had been written to charities warning them with dubious interpretations of the Charities Act, and to businesses – I remember that stunt at the CBI Conference, and so on. So, it took quite a brave CEO, or

charity CEO, to stand up and be counted on this, but there were some who really did. The CEO of Siemens, Jürgen Meier, did a lot,

BAE, did as well. Carolyn Fairbairn at the CBI put her back into it. But it did, I think, then play into that kind of elitist story, and when you had all the alphabet soup of acronyms, the OECD, the IMF, and so on, all saying it was going to be a disaster to leave, I think we did end up, without a shadow of a doubt, looking too metropolitan, despite our best endeavours.

UKICE: With regards to the trajectory of the campaign, when did you start thinking, 'This is getting problematic for us'?

WS: We were, as a campaign, much less complacent than the commentariat, I think, particularly in London. If you talked to commentators, business leaders, civil servants, they just thought it was a shoe-in, and I'm sure that had an impact in depressing turnout in London and Scotland, which, obviously, were the two strongest Remain areas.

You talk to people anecdotally, who are not involved in politics, and they say 'I couldn't believe that we lost. How could we possibly lose?' Whereas, as a campaign, we knew that it was far tougher. For example, there was a YouGov tracker showing that Remain was behind as much as it was ahead during that five-year period running up to the referendum.

I don't think people know that, but that was the reality going into it. We also knew from our polling in the summer of 2015, that we were only winning 52-48 at that stage. We were in the margin of error the whole way through the campaign. When it dipped, because it did dip, and Leave went into the lead for the first time, we had some advance warning of that.

We had two guys doing our research: Jim Messina and Andrew Cooper. So, Jim Messina, we had brought in to do the granular data metrics of the British population, assigning codes to every single person on the electoral register and, therefore, allowing us to target them via social media, and with our postal communications.

All the stuff that Vote Leave have been famed for doing was pretty standard, and been standard since Obama in 2008, and particularly 2012. So, we had

Jim Messina doing that for us, we didn't have physicists in a broom cupboard, but we had a very well-established guy doing that.

And then you had Andrew Cooper doing the more traditional polling and focus groups. And to aid his data analysis, Jim Messina did quite a large telephone poll, probably in early March. It showed that Remain was in trouble, and in a much less positive place than where Andrew Cooper and Populus were.

And what (Andrew) Cooper and Populus was saying at that stage is, 'The online polls are more negative than the telephone polls, and we've adjusted for that, and this is why we think it's actually more optimistic than it is'. James (Kanagasooriam) brought out a paper about why all the online polling was wrong and the Populus polling was right, and that wasn't true.

So, Jim Messina was saying, 'Look, we've got an issue here, and you can believe this guff if you want, but I've got confidence in my poll, and I think there's a problem here'. So, at that stage, very early on, we knew that it wasn't just in the margin of error, but we were losing. And then you had the realisation about how much of the Labour vote we were struggling with.

The really interesting point about this, which I think sometimes gets lost, is that when you look at how people actually voted in the end by their stated party intention, in order to get 50% plus one, we needed two-thirds of the Labour vote, and we pretty much got that in the end. So, whatever you say about Corbyn and the rest of it, by the end, Labour was pretty much two for one in favour of Remain. All the polls assumed that non-voters wouldn't vote, and they were all wrong about that, and the non-voters voted 80/20 for Leave, which largely explains the gap.

But we also assumed that we would get 50% of Conservative voters, and in the end, we only got 40%. The group that shifted the most during the campaign, slightly out of sight, were those comfortable, shyer Tories persuaded by Gove and Johnson, who were fed up with Cameron and not really feeling like he was one of them anyway. The comfortable home-owners, well-to-do voters that the campaign assumed we had in the bag were actually the people who shifted in the end.

UKICE: Did you expect those voters to react positively to the economic

message? Because you could argue that they had pensions, they had houses, so they could have taken a risk with the economy in favour of sovereignty and reducing migration. What was your tactic to try to bring them around, or were you assuming that the Conservative strategists would ultimately appeal to them?

WS: It's important to state that the point about losing those Conservative supporters is a retrospective point. The Populus segmentation that we used broke voters down by these individual segments of the electorate, and that didn't make party allegiance part of the story. We had seven groups that we were tracking.

So, we knew that we had a turnout issue with the three Remain groups, and that's why on social media we pumped a huge amount into that turnout message, but it wasn't enough, particularly in London and Scotland where turnout was lower than other regions. That may have been weather-related, because if you remember there were terrible storms in London. I woke up in the night on the morning of 23 June with water coming through the ceiling. I should've realised it was an omen.

So, for us, it was within our 'heads versus hearts' group that we could see that was leaning more towards Leave as the campaign went on. Now, I think, at that stage, the die was cast, it was impossible to broadcast an emotional message when your lead spokespeople were Osborne and Cameron. (Alan) Johnson tried it a bit, but he didn't really cut through.

So, the only card we had left was economic risk. We saw those Treasury documents the night before, we had no input in them, and that's probably appropriate because they were civil service documents. I can't honestly say that I raised an alarm about this at the time, but you can see in retrospect that they probably went a bit far and stretched people's credulity and just felt a bit over the top.

UKICE: What was your view on the Obama visit?

WS: We knew that foreign leaders went down like a cup of cold sick. We had all these various embassies in London saying, 'What can we do to help? Would you like us to get our prime minister to make a statement?' and we

said, 'No, thank you. We can do without that'. But the two leaders that the British public responded better to were the Irish premier and Obama, whose approval ratings were very high. So, we, with an open mind about it, planned that trip, and it was all led by Number 10, but we did it with our eyes open and we thought that it would be beneficial. Although it angered Leavers, I've never seen any evidence that it swayed the undecided voters, and what it did do was create a row- campaigns are all about rows, and you want a row in your territory, and not theirs- about whether we would get a trade deal with the US, and about whether we would lose face on the international stage if we left the EU. So, that was a good day for us, and I stand by it.

UKICE: What did you make of the Leave campaign? What do you think were their big successes?

WS: I would say they were totally amoral. They occupied a place, which we have become more used to in politics, in an election or referendum that really hadn't been occupied before, and that was to embrace the one-off nature of the campaign. They realised that, as an organisation, they were not a repeat performer, they had no reputations to preserve. Therefore they could ignore the rules, and ignore the codes that campaigns have always had about the information that you put in the public domain having some semblance of truth.

Instead, they had a very utilitarian view of what was going to help them win votes. In a general election campaign, obviously, politicians will try and spin arguments to suit them, but they never tell an outright lie in order to create a row, because they know they'll be held to account, if elected, and there's another election in the future. Maybe this actually isn't true anymore, but being found out as a liar is damaging to your personal stock.

And so on £350 million, on the claims about Turkey, but, also, on all that stuff about the money funnelled to the BeLeave campaign, they just ignored all the norms about how to conduct campaigns.

UKICE: But in a general election campaign, you also don't get a leaflet from the Government setting out its case delivered to every household in the country, just before the election starts. If you're on the Leave side, you would say that is the Government tilting the playing field very much in favour of its view, rather than having a fair and equal campaign?

WS: I don't think that justifies the way they behaved, though. I don't think that justifies telling outright lies in the public domain. It's obviously much more common now, but I still think it's a deeply corrosive part of public life which Donald Trump, for example, has taken even further, and which may be a hard genie to put back in the bottle.

Certainly in terms of the UK, they were the first movers on this. It would've been tempting to do all the things that they did, but there was zero possibility of our being anything other than squeaky clean on the rules and being able to justify our claims.

One of the things that frustrated us the most was that, when you sometimes have those fact check sites, in order to retain some kind of balance, they would put the £350 million claim up against some of our economic claims, as if they were equally dodgy. So take, for example, the claims about the aggregate impact to families of leaving the EU over a 15-year period. The Treasury was actually in the middle of the range.

There were forecasters like the London School of Economics and others, who were much more extreme in terms of the damage. And there were some that were less harsh. The Treasury was in the middle of that range. They were projections – we won't actually know until 2030. But the idea that you could put that against a known lie about how much money we sent to Brussels each week was just extraordinary, and I just thought it was a total failure of journalistic standards

They exploited what they knew about the way the media would react. You had lots of people who'd been part of climate-sceptic circles, and thankfully the BBC has changed its editorial guidelines on this, but there was a period at that stage where any climate science piece included a climate denier, even though 97% of climate papers suggest that climate change is real and man-made. They'd tried these tactics quite successfully in the 2011 AV referendum, and they were just willing to go there. So, that certainly took us by surprise.

UKICE: You said that they took lessons from the 2011 AV referendum, and Matthew Elliott and Dominic Cummings had both been involved in that. Shouldn't you have worked out that they were going to import very similar tactics into what's, fundamentally, a much bigger campaign for them?

WS: We anticipated the cost claim, and we knew that was going to be a part of the debate because UKIP had used it for such a long time. Our approach to that, which ultimately failed, was that whenever we put up somebody, we should not engage with the cost question and we should instead talk about the benefits. We should show that the benefits outweigh the costs by ten to one and cite all the different studies showing that. And then over the course of the campaign get people familiar with some of those benefits, like the roaming charges and tariff-free trade, and all the rest of it.

But it's complicated, it's atomised, and it was hard to get across. As I said earlier, the main conversation the media wanted was a row about costs, and they could always find an academic or a backbench politician to go on and say that it was a lie, but then you'd have a debate about costs. And some useful idiots would go on and say, 'Well, it's not £350 million a week. The cost is £150 million a week' and all the voters are hearing is 'cost, cost, cost' and £150 million still sounds like a staggering amount of money to most people, but we wanted to talk about the benefits.

So, we weren't naïve about it. But they kept going further. For example, the posters with the passport with the door opening saying 'Turkey is joining', and the feet walking through. There was a very clear, racist implication from that. I mean, it was a bit less in your face than the 'Breaking point' poster, which ended up being criticised heavily. But I don't think, in terms of the ethos behind it, it was any different. It was trying to scare voters about brown people coming to the UK. That's racist.

UKICE: What about two of the positives of the Leave campaign – their message discipline about 'Take Back Control' and their refusal to be pinned down on a blueprint for what Leave would look like? Did you think you'd be able to pin them down on actually defining a vision of Leave that you could then attack, or do something to see off their control message, which seemed to cut through?

WS: I think their strategic genius is overplayed. I don't doubt that they used some highly tactical, successful manoeuvres, including pushing the boundaries of veracity and decency in the way that we've discussed, and they definitely had message discipline. You basically had Cummings and his team with Gove and Johnson, and that was the core of the campaign. And that is always going

to be a more disciplined campaign, going around the country on a bus, getting headlines for that group doing eye-catching things every day. Whereas ours was much more amorphous and had all these different challenges that I've mentioned.

But their stated strategy, from all the Cummings blogs and all the rest of it, and some things Matthew Elliott said afterwards, was that they would fight the contest on economic grounds. By the end of April, we had them totally on the ropes in terms of that question about what does the arrangement with the EU look like once we leave. You'll remember the videos that we put out, which had one person saying 'WTO rules', someone else saying 'Norway model', someone else saying 'we'll be in the single market'.

It was just a mess, they had zero message discipline on that. We knew that that was playing into our hands, on our argument that leaving is a 'leap in the dark'. So, they pivoted. Gove went on Marr on a Sunday in early May and said that leaving would mean leaving the Single Market and the customs union. That was a break for them. That was the first time that they had explicitly used that formulation.

And that then gave them the ability to say, 'And we will, therefore, end free movement', which they had not been in a position to do while they were hedging their bets on the single market beforehand. Then soon after, you had the immigration figures come out. We knew they were coming out, we knew that they were going to show very, very high levels of net migration. It just moved the conversation on to immigration, which is where it stayed for the next month. We were all over the place.

UKICE: And when you saw that change, did you have any sort of talks internally, or with Team Cameron, about how you needed to have something new to offer on migration? Did you finally persuade Cameron and Osborne that this was becoming existential for them and that they needed to go for Gove and Johnson much more?

WS: This is my biggest regret about the campaign. As the core campaign team, we were absolutely clear about this. We needed politicians to go out – and you saw Sadiq Khan and Frances O'Grady do this in the BBC debate two days before the referendum, by when it was too late – to make a sensitive but

positive case about migration in this country, which is actually where the majority of voters were.

What our polling showed was that 85% of people felt that if you came here, contributed, paid your taxes and worked hard, you should be welcomed. That was the common ground on the immigration debate. And we had a script that we wanted politicians to use, which Sadiq (Khan) and Frances O'Grady did use at the very end, making that more positive case on immigration.

The problem was the Conservatives, Cameron and Osborne, didn't want to go anywhere near that, and they were hamstrung by their commitment to reduce net migration to tens of thousands. I mean, that was so detrimental for them. So, all they wanted to do was go on and say, 'If we end free movement, we lose the single market, and that'll be an economic hit', so just pivot back to the core economic argument, not get bogged down on immigration. And what Labour wanted to do was have a kind of policy debate in public on free movement and self-flagellate about the 2004 accession arrangements. Hopeless, utterly hopeless. So, we had no message discipline on immigration at all, and what we, as the campaign, wanted our politicians to use just didn't get used.

UKICE: You didn't debate whether they needed to ring up Angela Merkel or the EU and get a better concession on migration?

WS: Totally. I wrote a memo to the No 10 team – Peter Mandelson was supportive, Gordon Brown was supportive – trying to get the equivalent of 'the vow' from the Scottish referendum. We were talking about, 'What's the vow moment? If we're going to win back the ground we've lost in the public argument about immigration, we've got to have a vow, we've got to have a break and a change'.

But Cameron wasn't willing to go there. He wasn't even really willing to ask the question. From what I understand, he didn't put the question to Angela Merkel. Certainly, his chief of staff would always say, 'We're just not going to get anywhere, there's no point raising expectations on this'.

UKICE: And was that because, at that stage, they were still convinced they'd win?

WS: I suppose so, yes. I mean, there's a text exchange I had with Andrew Cooper a few nights before the referendum, where I said how worried I was. I remember saying to some very close friends and family how I thought we would lose. We knew the Labour Party was very good at collating evidence from postal votes of where the vote is, and we were losing very heavily with postal votes.

You had to put on a brave front with the team. You don't want to tell your team that you think you're losing, with the donors, with everybody else. So we were putting a brave front on, but being very worried about it. And Andrew Cooper said 'Don't worry, we're going to win'. So, yes, I think they probably did think they were going to win.

UKICE: What did you make of the interventions of people like Tony Blair and John Major coming in and, particularly, warning about Northern Ireland, which didn't really raise its head in a very salient way during the referendum campaign?

WS: That was all coordinated and planned. That was a day in our grid devoted to going to Northern Ireland, with the idea of having Major and Blair as the architects of the peace process making the trip together. So, Tony Blair was very keen to be more involved, but a combination of Number 10 not wanting to go there and, frankly, his public opinion ratings not being great – I think they've recovered since then because of all his policy work. But he was still, at that stage, seen as being pretty toxic with large parts of the population.

However, he's a brilliant communicator and we wanted to utilise him, so we had him go on Marr and write a Sunday Times op-ed about the economic case. We felt that if he went into a foreign policy case, which was, perhaps, his more natural place, that it would just end up with everything being associated with Iraq again. Whereas him making an economic case, in his way of making a constructive argument, would be effective.

He was always highly conscious of the breakup of the union, and so that Northern Ireland day, which took a lot of management, and getting him and Major out together, but I think, worked really well and had some very, very moving pictures of the two of them together. So, those kinds of things had to be managed carefully, but there was a place for them.

The breakup of the union wasn't salient with the British public. So, it was another way of coming at the argument of Britain being weaker if we left, but it wasn't really a salient argument at that stage.

UKICE: Did you actually test it in your polling, whether that would be a salient point?

WS: Yes, but we just had a very high number of 'don't knows'. People just weren't engaged with it as a risk, and having one or two interventions in a short four-week period is not going to shift the dial on that. You have got to have a clear message in volume over time if you want to change people's minds on things.

And so going back to that fundamental point: could we have defeated the 40-year campaign by the Eurosceptics, aided by a whole series of structural things that stymied our campaign and supported them, not least the immigration figures dropping in the way that they did a month before the poll? We just did not have the time.

It's a hypothetical, but would we have had more success if we had had 18 months rather than four months? I like to think we would've had more success.

The result and the aftermath

UK in a Changing Europe (UKICE): What was your referendum night like?

Will Straw (WS): We had organised a watch party in the Royal Festival Hall, as our supporters and donors wanted to come together. We obviously hoped that would turn into a celebration, but we were very, very careful that we had to plan for both scenarios. The Messina team were absolutely clear about where we needed to be, local authority area by local authority area, to win by 50% plus one.

So, we knew that if we won by 50%, plus one vote, we would lose Sunderland about 60/40, and the result came in, and the commentariat shat themselves. It was actually very close to where we thought it would be, but we were just one point down. So you think, 'Okay, this is going to be close. We're behind them. We need to pick up in some other areas'. Then we started getting some

cricket scores in the London boroughs, so you're thinking, 'Okay, we're ahead in our areas, they're ahead in their areas'. But the Messina team are saying, 'The turnout's down. This is a very polarised result, but turnout's down in our areas'.

So, it became clear quite early on, with the very earliest results coming in, Sunderland and the London boroughs, that we were in for a rocky night. And much earlier than the broadcasters called it, which I think was about 3:30, at probably 1:30 or 2:00, we knew we'd lost. We knew that there was very little that could happen now. So, none of the Conservative inner circle wanted to do the broadcast interviews, so that was my job, so I went and did BBC News, ITV News and Sky before it had been called.

It's a very difficult thing to do, because you can't concede before they've called it, but you've got to start laying the ground for the lessons learned, and all the rest of it. I talked a lot about the smack in the face for elites in Britain, and all that sort of stuff, trying to reflect the mood of the night. But the head of comms, David Chaplin, packed me off home in a cab at about 5:00 in the morning. Of course, I couldn't sleep. And my wife and my kids, my wife's American, so they'd gone over to America a few weeks before to give me the space for the campaign, so a totally empty house.

The team in our head office had reconvened with the team at the watch event in a pub ironically called 'The Hope', so we went there and we drank a lot of Guinness and watched the events unfolding that morning as Cameron resigned and Nicola Sturgeon made her renewed claim for a referendum, and all the rest of it. So, that was the night.

UKICE: Knowing what you know now, and given the line that you weren't willing to go over, was the campaign actually winnable?

WS: It was a close referendum and, but for half of the 1.3 million vote margin, we would have won. So, I think it is a good academic, political science exercise to think about what were the factors that could have changed the outcome, that were within our control as the Remain campaign. I firmly believe that it is right to have votes at 16. I've been a longstanding supporter of that. It's, obviously, a longstanding policy for a number of political parties.

I think because it affected them, there was a case, as in local elections, for EU citizens to have the franchise. Those were two things that we, as the campaign, argued for and which Cameron rejected. I don't know whether they would have made the difference, but a different franchise, certainly, could have made a difference.

Could a Labour Party being on the field have made a difference? I think it probably could. I made the points earlier about how we actually pretty much received the Labour votes that we were anticipating in a 51-49 victory, but could we have got to 70% or even 75% of Labour supporters? By the time we got into the 2017 and 2019 elections, I think 75% of Labour supporters were pro-Remain. So, with a more forceful Labour campaign, with (Andy) Burnham or Yvette Cooper at the helm, could we have carried more Labour voters? I think probably yes.

If Cameron had been able to do whatever he needed to do to keep Johnson on the Remain side, made him Chancellor or announced a leadership transition, whatever it could've been, would we have won? Yes, I think so. I think Johnson was worth that 2% in the end. So, I think there were quite big, structural things that could've happened that would've shifted the dial.

UKICE: You mentioned turnout being down in your areas. You saw the momentum building a bit around People's Vote, those big pro EU marches. Did you ever think either 'they're actually going to reverse this', or, 'If only we'd managed to capture a bit of that spirit, we'd have won'?

WS: I think in and around London, you got that buzz during the referendum. I'm a cyclist, so I'd cycle home from work, and in the last couple of weeks, you would see our volunteers outside tube stations doing a great job. I felt really moved when I'd see somebody on the tube with the 'I'm IN' sticker on their phone, or their bag, or their chest, or whatever. That was really good, and it showed the buzz, but that was quite limited to London and some of the other big metropolitan areas.

We managed to recruit about 50,000 volunteers, which was pretty good from a standing start, six-month campaign, to get volunteers to go out in the neighbourhoods, many who haven't ever volunteered before. And the pathways to getting involved were extremely efficient. We had some very, very

well-regarded field organisers involved, and actually outorganised Vote Leave in terms of that ground game.

One of the pollsters did some polling for the TUC afterwards, which showed that, in terms of voter contact, we were ahead of Leave. But there just weren't a million people who were willing to go and put their back into it, because most people in Remain areas who were strongly Remain thought we were going to win, and just were not warmed up to the idea that this was actually on a knife edge. Therefore, if they were really energetic, they went out and campaigned. But that was a smaller number.

So, yes, it would have been wonderful to have those supporters, but they just weren't there. Could we have remained in? British politics was then so volatile for three years, that I think anything was possible. Imagine if you'd had a different Labour leader than Jeremy Corbyn, who was willing, much earlier, to make a second referendum case. I think if the election hadn't been called in 2019, there was an increasing chance of the momentum for People's Vote building.

It had had the most positive support of any of those indicative votes – not the highest margin, but the highest total – and it was only 20 or 30 votes shy. You only needed a small number of additional Conservatives to come over. And I think there was an increasing view, and this is certainly what my former colleagues and friends working in the People's Vote campaign were saying, among Conservative circles that even some of the Leavers now saw a second referendum as a way of breaking the log jam. But, of course, there was a general election, and then Roland Rudd set the campaign on fire.