

Exchanges between Philip Booth IEA, and Richard North

1. From: RAENORTH@aol.com
To: pbooth@iea.org.uk
Sent: 06/04/2014 19:44:46 GMT Daylight Time
Subj: Brexit judging - etc

Dear Philip

It may come as no surprise to you that some of us who entered the Brexit competition do not think it was fairly or properly conducted. And while I concede that the IEA had every right to set up the competition in any way it thought fit, I do not believe it had any right to ask competitors to submit against what were, in effect, undeclared conditions.

To that extent, it struck me that we should make a formal complaint, except that an organisation that could not, in my view, organise and undertake fair judging of the competition is hardly in a position to carry out a fair and impartial investigation of its own conduct. Thus, for that reason, and only that reason, I do not intend to submit a formal complaint.

However, I have my own reputation to protect - and for my submission not to make the final six is very damaging to me professionally, and indeed to the anti-EU campaign as a whole. Had I known that my paper had no chance of being accepted, for reasons which were not declared at the time, I would not have submitted it. Your treatment of my work has severely diminished it.

Thus, in an attempt to reduce the damage your organisation has done to me, I am publishing my own observations on the contest. For your reference, my current blogpost on the matter is here:

<http://www.eureferendum.com/blogview.aspx?blogno=84852>

I doubt that this will be my last word on the subject.

Yours sincerely

Richard North

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2. From: RAENORTH@aol.com
To: pbooth@iea.org.uk
Subj: Why the IEA launched the Brexit prize

P

Philip Booth: The founders of the IEA had different views about the European Union, but they would all have been agreed that any international economic arrangements should promote economic freedom and free trade. Should Britain leave the European Union, it's absolutely essential that any organisations, any arrangements that we enter upon leaving the European Union should promote those objectives. That's why the IEA launched the Brexit prize.

<http://www.iea.org.uk/multimedia/video/iea-brexit-prize>

The only minor problem is that you forgot to tell the competitors.

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3. From: pbooth@iea.org.uk
To: RAENORTH@aol.com
CC: mlittlewood@iea.org.uk
Subj: RE: Why the IEA launched the Brexit prize

Dear Richard

I may reply to your other email in due course as it makes some serious allegations which I wish to consider before responding - though it is possible that the final part of this deals with those issues (albeit briefly) and that may not be necessary. I would also ask that any correspondence between us remains private.

Regarding your point about the video, I am afraid the point you make is simply not true. The conditions clearly stated: "vis-a-vis the remaining EU and internationally, in order to promote a free and prosperous economy?"

I suppose that you are trying to make the point that it is possible to have a free economy without free trade: I would certainly differ. This condition about a "free economy" was stated in the scenario paragraph and it is why we launched the competition.

It would of course be possible for somebody to believe that free trade could be best promoted by remaining within the EU (though the competition was clearly not inviting such a proposal!), within the single market, and so on and my statement in the video does not in any sense stand against a range of alternative positions so it is not an additional condition. Indeed, that is why I

prefaced my statement by pointing out that all the founders of the IEA had different views about the economic arrangements we should adopt with regard to Europe whilst all believing in a free economy.

I am probably beginning to respond to your other email now. It should also be noted that, having selected the judging panel, they independently made their judgements according to the remit the IEA set. I played no part in determining the winner or shortlist (as was made clear on the website - we have stood scrupulously by the rules).

As for Mark, he did not have any communication about the entries with the judges whatsoever. As such, even if you disagree with my interpretation of the meaning of a "free economy", this is irrelevant for the judging of the competition - it is the judges' interpretations that have determined the outcome. The judges come from a range of backgrounds and have a range of views.

Best wishes

Philip

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4. From: RAENORTH@aol.com
To: pbooth@iea.org.uk
Sent: 07/04/2014 13:27:08 GMT Daylight Time
Subj: Re: Why the IEA launched the Brexit prize

Dear Philip

I think all you have done is confirm to me (and doubtless many of my thousands of readers) why it would have been an entirely fruitless exercise complaining to the IEA about what was quite evidently a rigged competition, judged by a partisan panel to criteria which were not disclosed to the competitors in advance.

If you cannot see the difference between the statements: "in order to promote a free and prosperous economy" and requiring competitors to "promote economic freedom and free trade", then there is no hope for you. Not least, "free trade" is a value-laden term, for which there are many different interpretations, and no agreed definition nor standard model, and to which there are many hurdles and barriers.

As much to the point, even though your phrase "to promote a free and

prosperous economy" is different in not specifying "free trade", it does not appear in the entry requirement. It appears is the scenario, clearly posited as the eventual objective but not necessarily the immediate outcome of the Brexit plan. And you, of all people, should understand the difference between objective and outcome.

If you had wanted competitors to "promote economic freedom and free trade" as an essential precondition then you should have said so, and then defined (or given guidance on) what you meant by "free trade". You should then have made it absolutely clear that this was an essential precondition, without which competitors stood no chance of winning.

You didn't do any of this, and no amount of sophistry can conceal the fact that you didn't.

Best

Richard

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5. From: pbooth@iea.org.uk

To: RAENORTH@aol.com

Sent: 07/04/2014 13:38:08 GMT Daylight Time

Subj: RE: Why the IEA launched the Brexit prize

Dear Richard

I find your answer baffling. The fact that "free trade" is a term for which there are no (absolute) models or definitive interpretation is the whole point. No submission that proposed (for example) remaining in the single market, joining the EEA etc could, in my view, be excluded on the ground that it was proposing a model antithetical to free trade. That is precisely the point I am making. If, on the other hand, a submission suggested that we should leave in order to put up tariff walls and inhibit free trade then, if I were a voting judge, I might have a problem.

However, the second point is that I was not a voting judge. It is not my view on whether "a free economy" implies "free trade" or whether a belief in a workable model of broadly free trade was essential for a winning entry that matters. It is the judges view that matters. I was explaining why we launched the competition. We launched the competition, appointed the judges and the judges then decided the winner.

There is no sophistry whatsoever. At worst you might say that the scenario

could confuse an entrant who believed that not mentioning the words "free economy" elsewhere wondered whether the words were irrelevant. However, though I had much correspondence from people asking for clarification, nobody asked me to clarify that issue.

Best wishes

Philip

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6. From: RAENORTH@aol.com
To: pbooth@iea.org.uk
Sent: 07/04/2014 15:37:05 GMT Daylight Time
Subj: Re: Why the IEA launched the Brexit prize

Dear Philip,

Isn't that precisely the point? The IEA was expecting a "free trade" solution, but did not specify that in the entry requirements. There is no mention of "free trade" at all. Had there been a reference to free trade, you would have had to explain what you had in mind.

If then the entry requirements had specified that the objective of the prize was to "to find the best blueprint for a free-trading, successful Britain if we decided to leave the EU", equally, you would have had to explain what you meant by "free trading". There was no reference, so there was no explanation.

Had you specifically set out a requirement for a "free trading Britain", I most certainly would have asked what was meant by that and, if the answers had not been satisfactory, I would have withdrawn.

However, after the competition has closed, and the submissions were in - and only then - we have two officials of the IEA variously tell us, in effect, that any submission "should promote economic freedom and free trade" and that the competition was looking "to find the best blueprint for a free-trading, successful Britain if we decided to leave the EU".

Post event, we have four powerful submission which are based on EEA solutions, four out of 16. One might expect at least one of those to be in the last six. All our indications are that you have blown EEA-based submissions out of the water.

At the very least, given the comments from you and Mr Littlewood, you have some explaining to do.

Best

Richard

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7. From: pbooth@iea.org.uk

To: RAENORTH@aol.com

Sent: 07/04/2014 16:21:45 GMT Daylight Time

Subj: RE: Why the IEA launched the Brexit prize

Dear Richard

I have already explained my position very clearly. Nobody asked me (as far as I can remember) what we meant by "free economy" and, if they had, I would have included "free trade" in my explanation whilst making it very clear that I could not bind the judges to my understanding of the term. I am afraid that there are many reasons why I believe your complaint to be unreasonable. Any one of these reasons would be sufficient, I think, but all hold.

1. The IEA appointed a panel of judges and set up the scenario etc, etc. It was for the judges and entrants to interpret the scenario further and for the entrants to ask me (as the confidential point of contact) for any interpretation. However, I was not going to provide interpretations that would bind the hands of seven people over whom I had no control - so my advice would always have been hedged.

2. Had we said "free trading" rather than "free economy" and you had asked me for clarification of whether EEA solutions were fitted within the definition of "free trade" I would probably have replied that, in my view, they did but that I could not second guess the views of the judges on the matter. I am puzzled that you quote the guidance for the second round on your blog as evidence of the problem you are complaining about because that guidance given after the initial submissions were provided implies that EEA-type solutions were acceptable. If the judges have said that, then why are you suggesting that they are ruling out EEA-type solutions? They clearly were not.

3. It is you who seems to be using a rather narrow definition of the term "free trade" to exclude EEA approaches and yet below you say that "free trade" can have a variety of interpretations.

4. You keep referring to me having blown EEA-type solutions out of the water (and similar language). This is absurd. Anybody who knows me would appreciate two things. Firstly, if I had said that I did not participate in

choosing the short list, then that would be the case. Secondly, that I have an extremely open mind on the whole issue of the EU, whether to exit and how. The judges have taken the decision as to who should win. In the video, I was saying why we launched the competition.

5. As you are aware from earlier correspondence, the short list (16 or 17 I think) that reached the second stage were actually chosen by the two judges (who did not include me) who had association with the IEA (though not without discussion with the rest of the panel first). It therefore seems that the situation in reality is the opposite of what you suppose - there was no obstruction by the IEA members of the judging panel to your proposed solution. The judging panel as a whole then dealt with moving from 16 down to 6.

I am afraid that, as with academic refereeing for journals (and I have had plenty of experience on both sides of that particular divide), one gets sharp differences of opinion between people in these situations. That is the simple explanation for what happened. It is no slight on your professional merit as you imply. I am afraid that you are looking for a complex answer when there is a simple one - a difference of opinion between the judging panel and yourself on the merits of the different entries.

Best wishes

Philip

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8. From: RAENORTH@aol.com
To: pbooth@iea.org.uk
Sent: 07/04/2014 17:45:44 GMT Daylight Time
Subj: Re: Why the IEA launched the Brexit prize

Dear Philip

You will perhaps recall that I have not made a formal complaint to the IEA, on the very grounds – which are now becoming self-evident – that we did not think the IEA was capable of carrying out a fair and impartial review of its own conduct. Instead, I chose the route of making my complaints public, and letting the "court of public opinion" decide.

The reason for this is that, in the words of its director general, the IEA has been engaged in an undertaking, "to find the best blueprint for a free-trading, successful Britain if we decided to leave the EU". That, we must take as an

official representation of the view of the IEA and, however much you evade that point, this is not what the competitors were told.

I can go further. Had I been told that the purpose of my submission was to set out a "blueprint for a free-trading, successful Britain", without further and very detailed clarification, I would not have submitted and/or withdrawn my submission.

Your further reference to a "free economy" is disingenuous. I have already pointed out that the reference was in the background scenario, not in the explicit "entry requirements". It is not part of the entry requirements. You should not pretend that it is.

In that context, it can only be assumed that the competition organisers expected the eventual outcome of the Brexit plans to be a "free economy", whatever that actually means. But, as to Mr Littlewood's "free-trading Britain", what we were actually asked to provide was very different, and very explicit. Let me remind you. We were asked to:

... compose a Blueprint for Britain outside the EU, covering the process of withdrawal from the EU and the post-exit repositioning of the UK in the global trading and governance systems, covering, inter alia:

The legal and constitutional process necessary for the UK to leave the EU and set up, if desired, alternative international relationships. This would include not just the process within the EU itself but the changes to UK law and regulation that would be desirable or necessary.

Negotiation of the UK's post-EU-exit position to settle the UK's relationships with the remaining EU and other interested parties and, crucially, with the rest of the world, in respect of trade, supranational governance, immigration, the environment, financial regulation, defence etc.

Now, Philip, the above is not a press release. Nor is it a casual statement. It is a specification, against which you were expecting people to write 20,000 words, taking as long as four months, in expectation of their submissions being judged impartially against the possibility of a prestigious award and a very substantial amount of money.

Please, in that very specific context where you might expect the competitors to study the words very carefully indeed, tell me where it says that the IEA (or the judges) were looking for a "blueprint for a free-trading, successful Britain", or that the essential part of the plan was to "promote economic freedom and free trade"?

Where in your specification does it say this?

The point then that emerges is that the IEA and ultimately the judges were looking for a free trade solution, and although the secondary guidance did mention the EEA, it now appears to be the case that an EEA solution did not conform with whatever the judges believed to be a free trade solution, whatever that might actually be.

I do not then assert that there was complicity between the judges and IEA staff – simply that you all had in mind general requirements which you did not communicate to the competitors. I then assert that the judges applied criteria which had not been made clear to the competitors, and based their decisions on those.

Either that is the case or you and Mr Littlewood are misrepresenting the nature of the competition – for what he and you are saying is certainly not one I recognise or one for which I wrote my submission.

As to your rather patronising little homily about "academic refereeing", I cannot begin to agree with you the findings of the judging panel "is no slight on [my] professional merit". It is precisely because it is that I take such very grave exception to what you [collectively] have done.

You have called for me to make a submission against clearly defined criteria, and then publicly identified criteria which were not made known to me prior to my submission, against which my work appears to have been judged, the judging panel then claiming to have found six better submissions than mine.

I am afraid that this is not, as you would wish to portray, a difference of opinion between the judging panel and myself on the merits of the different entries. This is in my view a grave error on the part of the IEA, occasioning serious misrepresentation and grave damage to my professional standing.

You had the opportunity to address this, even without a formal complaint, but we are sadly aware that bureaucrats – whether private or public sector, and even the IEA – are all very much the same. They are never wrong about anything - especially when they are wrong.

Philip, I really don't see the point of continuing this correspondence. You obviously don't begin to see the points I'm making, and never were going to. To coincide with your presentation tomorrow, therefore, I will be publishing this correspondence on my blog to give my readers the opportunity to draw their own conclusions.

Then, and subsequently – at every reasonable opportunity – I will be pointing out that the IEA has neither sought to find and nor has it actually identified the "best Brexit plan" but a very different thing: a bastardised, "blueprint for a free-trading, successful Britain", as defined by a singularly unimpressive IEA panel.

This I will do because I must protect my reputation and the standing of my work which your Institute has so carelessly traduced.

Best

Richard