

## A PEEK BEHIND THE CURTAINS

# Their future **their choice**

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According to a recent report published by *Our Future, Our Choice* (OFOC), a British youth movement campaigning for a People's Vote on the final Brexit deal, YouGov polls in September 2018 show that an amazing 84% of 18 to 20-year olds now back remain. We take a closer look at two remarkable millennials who have been fighting for their generation's right to a brighter future.



Madeleine Kay, definitely not pale, stale or male!

OFOC's *Young People & Brexit* October 2018 report estimates that the impact of **crashing out** of the EU could cost young people up to £108,000 each in accumulated lifetime earnings. But beyond this, what seems to be inspiring millennials to voice their concerns is the desire for a better future based on a liberal, multicultural and internationalist outlook. These are social attitudes that have been rarely reported on the TV and radio by the BBC (now commonly referred to as the Brexit Broadcasting Corporation) and are polar opposites to the values held by those curiously given the most air-time by *Auntie Beeb*, including Nigel Farage, Jacob Rees-Mogg, Boris Johnson or Michael Gove, to name but a few ... Amusingly, Madeleine Kay (alias EUsupergirl), who I interviewed for this article and briefly introduced in Espace Prépas n°178 along with Femi Oluwole, refers to this category of politician as "pale, **stale** and (mostly) male!" The **resourcefulness** and enthusiasm of the youth movements campaigning for their generation's future seems to **know no bounds**. In answer to Boris Johnson's big red 'Vote Leave' campaign bus and backed by 14 UK university groups, OFOC and Femi recently crowdfunded what they call a 'battle bus' to tour the country and focus the mind of the UK on the point that young people didn't vote for Brexit, and they shouldn't have to live with it. Madeleine has also been actively involved in another tour bus crowdfunding campaign that raised over £15,000 to take the anti-Brexit brand on her bright yellow sweatshirt in the photo above around the country in December (please don't show your teachers!).

You might have seen images of both our interviewees on the TV recently either **blowtorching** Theresa May's EU 'deal' report in Brussels (Femi) or singing dressed up as super woman in front of the European Parliament (Madeleine), but what does it take to do this and what is it like to be in the public eye at such a young age voicing your concerns on what has turned about to be one of the most divisive issues in the last 60 years for the UK since the Suez Canal Crisis back in 1956?

## "Nigel Farage hates me!"

What is interesting about Femi and Madeleine is that they have both literally put their lives on hold to fight for the Remain cause. In 2016, Madeleine was a student at Sheffield University and Femi, a law graduate, was already working at the European Court of Human Rights. He told me that even before the June 2016 referendum, he had realized the British government was heading down a really bad path led by David Cameron, so he started making some videos, graphics and recording things about what was happening. However, he really regrets not having acted immediately: "The irony is that if I had started my initiatives well before the June 2016 referendum, we really probably wouldn't be where we are now. With my legal background and advocacy skills, I'm able to rise to the level of institutions. After the vote I just wasted 18 months. I only quit in December 2017".

His **tipping point** happened one day in Birmingham city centre. He was walking through the shopping precinct and he got to the point where he went into Primark, bought a T-shirt and wrote on it in felt-tip pen 'EU Questions: Just Ask'. "I stood outside and people just stopped and started asking me questions!". Since then his work has been amazing – check him out at @Femi\_Sorry or @OFOCBrexit. Madeleine's tipping point came on the night of the Brexit vote in June 2016. "Pre-referendum I was not really involved although my thoughts on Boris Johnson and Nigel Farage were 'what a pair of **plonkers** - who believes what they are saying?'. But when the vote happened, I was shocked. The first thing I did was to write a protest song on the very same day and then I got more and more involved moving gradually from the local to the European scene". While Femi and Madeleine might have their political beliefs, their campaigning is more about using their own individual talents and strengths to fight for truth and a better future for young people and their country with exclusively youth-based arguments. Femi's legal background means he is **a good match** for any politician. "On Farage's LBC radio programme, I actually managed to get him to admit some stuff he did or didn't say during the referendum, meaning basically he lied!" Madeleine freely admits that "Nigel Farage hates me!", and she is indeed also a fearless campaigner who was even filmed on national TV **warding off** single-handed far-right protestors during the Peoples' Vote march in London, in October. As an artist, she has a

more creative approach putting her skills to good use to raise awareness in particular among children. She spends time in schools giving talks and has produced a series of '24 Reasons to Remain' booklets and posters especially for kids. You can see more of her work and campaigning at @MadeleinaKay.

Femi and Madeleina have tens of thousands of followers on Twitter, and their ability to **generate traction** for their campaigning with relatively limited resources is impressive. When we spoke, they both mentioned the importance of the backing of their communities. Given what is **at stake** and their highly colourful and public profiles, they have been subject to a stream of criticism and even abuse. Madeleina seems to be targeted more than Femi, ridiculed for dressing in '**ludicrous outfits**', championing a '**ludicrous cause**', writing '**silly books**' or singing '**daft songs**'.

### Giving back a voice to 2 million millennials

Her response to this is a typically pragmatic one of a Yorkshire girl, and underlines the amazing support they both get from people from all walks of life across the country: "About social media. You have to be able to deal with the trolling. People say things on social media that they will never say to you in person. Sexist and abusive things, but that doesn't really bother me. What does impact me is the people on your side who criticize *how* you do things. They accuse you of self-promoting, of wearing silly costumes and singing silly songs. Personal attacks on you and your work. The best strategy is to **call them out** and let your own community deal with them, they back you".

So, what's next for them both? I didn't get time to ask Femi, as we did the interview whilst he was on his way to a side event at the Tory Annual Conference and had to cut short our chat when he arrived, but from what he said I'm sure he'll end up pretty quickly working back in human rights. As for Madeleina, she has already had lots of offers of paid opportunities in campaigning work. "I've been able to develop lots of skills and experience over the last 2 years which appeals to potential employers. I'm open



Red bus or blue bus — who would you listen to?

to how things go, so **the world's basically my oyster!**". Regardless of the final Brexit result, she intends to continue campaigning for the EU and aims to campaign during the forthcoming European Parliamentary elections if Great Britain remains in Europe as she says this strengthens European democracy. "There will be important work to do in the future in order to repair the relationship. I want to be building these bridges in the future."

Certainly, a lot has happened since I spoke to them back in October. For me, the defining moments have been the outrage caused by Theresa May's EU "queue jumpers" comment and the resignation of the last two universities ministers Jo Johnson (Boris' brother) and Sam Gyimah — a strange coincidence that the politicians who actually talk to young people decided to resign to back a people's vote! As we go to press, it looks increasingly likely that the government's 'deal' will get voted down by Parliament and the Labour Party may be gearing up to call for a people's vote. It certainly seems that the EU has blocked all paths other than a hard-Brexit (which nobody really wants) or to stay in the EU. Could this all have been finely engineered right from the outset? Only history will tell, but this pure Erasmus product will be **glued** to the news in January come what ... may (sorry), hoping that at some point in 2019, the two million millennials who couldn't vote in June 2016 will sway the final result to create a country and future they deserve. ●



## Vocabulary

### To crash out

To be eliminated from a competition in a way that brings disgrace or embarrassment.

### Auntie Beeb

The BBC is sometimes affectionately called the Beeb or Auntie Beeb.

### Stale

If you say that a place, an activity, or an idea is stale, you mean that it has become boring because it is always the same.

### Resourcefulness

Someone who is resourceful is good at finding ways of dealing with problems.

### To know no bounds

If you say that a feeling or quality knows no bounds, you are emphasizing that it is very strong or intense.

### To blow-torch

A small burner that produces a very hot flame, used to remove old paint, melt soft metal, etc.

### Tipping point

The crisis stage in a process, when a significant change takes place.

### A plonker

If someone calls a person, especially a man, a plonker, they think he is stupid.

### To be a good match

If you meet your match, you find that you are competing or fighting against someone who you cannot beat because they are as good as you, or better than you.

### To ward off

To ward off a danger or illness means to prevent it from affecting you or harming you.

### Generate traction

Traction is a particular form of power that makes a vehicle move.

### At stake

If something is at stake, it is being risked and might be lost or damaged if you are not successful.

### Ludicrous

If you describe something as ludicrous, you are emphasizing that you think it is foolish, unreasonable or unsuitable.

### Daft

If you describe a person or their behaviour as daft, you think that they are stupid, impractical or rather strange.

### To call somebody out

To challenge (a person) to justify an action or statement.

### The world's my oyster

If you say that the world is someone's oyster, you mean that they can do anything or go anywhere that they want to.

### To be glued

If you say that someone is glued to something, you mean that they are giving it all their attention.