

'Current Biology': Another Science Journal Goes Political



By Alex Berezow — August 10, 2016



[1] *The consequences of Brexit will include the collapse of science, the destruction of the environment, and uncontrollable pillow consumption.* (Credit: Shutterstock)

Other than the refusal to compromise, the most obnoxious trend in politics today is the belief that if any particular candidate loses, the world/country/economy/culture is going to implode. Traditionally, science has been a refuge from this hyperbolic nonsense. But no longer. More and more scientific journals are wading into partisan politics.

Last month, in the [Los Angeles Times](#) [2], I criticized the *Journal of the American Medical Association* for publishing a blatantly political fluff piece, written by President Barack Obama, that praised the benefits of his own healthcare plan. Whether or not the ACA is successful is beside the point; an internationally renowned medical journal is not the appropriate venue for such an article.

Now, another reputable journal has decided that exaggerated political posturing is a good public relations move. *Current Biology*, in its most recent issue, has published a [feature article](#) [3] by Michael Gross that is every bit as ghastly as it is incoherent.

"[The UK's] research excellence is built on collaborations with European partners and could suffer from the withdrawal from the EU. Moreover, UK scientists have been unusually successful in winning EU grants, meaning that, in this area, the UK got more out of the EU coffers than it paid in."

Yes, funding might be disrupted temporarily. However, the UK government will most surely not allow scientific research or funding to languish. The UK has a long and proud history of scientific

excellence, and Brexit will not change that. The [University of Oxford](#) [4] was established around 1096, and the [University of Cambridge](#) [5] around 1209. Given that the [precursor to the European Union](#) [6] was founded in the 1950s, it is probably a safe bet that science in the UK will survive just fine.

Mr. Gross continues:

"The environment is also likely to suffer from the impact of the referendum. There is a risk that Britain outside the EU will wind back the clock to a time before environmental concerns were recognised and acted upon. After all, the emotional appeal of the Leave campaign to its voters rested in a large part on misguided nostalgia for a time when modern issues like political correctness, sustainability, climate change, and equal rights for minorities were off the agenda."

This is truly an astonishing feat; rarely have so many non sequiturs been published in a single paragraph in a scientific journal. For any of that to be true, we would have to assume that, in 2016, Great Britain is primarily composed of knuckle-dragging racists who prefer to drink polluted water and dump trash in the streets. And the only thing preventing this dystopian future is the European Union. Does that sound even remotely logical?

Mr. Gross also frets over Prime Minister Theresa May's alleged "contempt for science" because she "voted against measures to... regulate fracking." Good for her. According to the [U.S. EPA](#) [7], "Natural gas plays a key role in our nation's clean energy future." And despite all the handwringing over greenhouse gas emissions from methane leaks, the [EPA](#) [8] says that U.S. methane emissions have dropped 6% from 1990 to 2014. Furthermore, the EPA writes, "[Methane] emissions decreased from sources associated with the exploration and production of natural gas and petroleum products."

Fracking for natural gas is a great transition to a future powered by solar, wind, nuclear, and other carbon-free sources of energy. Anybody who takes the environment and climate change seriously ought to be in favor of it.

Mr. Gross then fusses about politicians he dislikes in Poland, Germany, France, and Hungary, the latter of which he grills for their Syrian refugee policy. Then, he takes aim at the U.S. for "slavery, continuing discrimination of people with darker shades of skin colour, and various foreign policy disasters."

What any of this has to do with the UK or scientific research is beyond comprehension.

The only legitimate gripe that Mr. Gross makes is that uncertainty over immigration to the UK could hurt the country's ability to recruit and retain talented scientists from the continent.

Disappointingly, much of the rest of the article fabricates a dire forecast based upon the most pessimistic assumptions imaginable. Such unhinged bloviating might have made for a fine editorial in *The Guardian* or *Mother Jones*, but it was completely unfit for publication in *Current Biology*.

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