

My Questions in the debate on the Product Security and Telecommunications Infrastructure Bill

Rt Hon Sir John Redwood MP (Wokingham) (Con): Will my hon. Friend confirm that operators still need to get the agreement of the landowner or someone else who is empowered to grant that right, so that there is no muddle or confusion?

Julia Lopez, Minister of State for Cabinet Office: Yes. They will be allowed to take out a new agreements, but they still have to be under the existing regime.

To be clear, this will not let an operator unilaterally change, or ask the court to impose a change to, the terms or duration of their current agreement. It allows an additional code right to be conferred on the operator via a new, separate code agreement.

...

Rt Hon Sir John Redwood MP (Wokingham) (Con): I certainly support the Minister in the belief that the more competitive the industry, the better the results that we will get. Has she had representations from people who would like to enter the market about whether the change would make them more likely to do so?

Julia Lopez, Minister of State for Cabinet Office: Most of the people I have spoken to are already in the market and believe that the change will make a big difference to how they roll out. It is a very competitive market with many new entrants. I am not aware of anybody who is just dipping their toe in the water; because it is so competitive, people are already aggressively in the market. We think that the change will really help to accelerate the roll-out to our constituents of fantastic digital infrastructure of the kind that we all understand is fundamental to driving productivity gains, and to reducing the divide between areas that do and do not have that connectivity.

From the contribution of my right hon. Friend the Member for New Forest West on Second Reading, I understand that his concern relates to the effect of clauses 61 and 62 on landowners who already host telecoms apparatus on their land. I recognise that, ultimately, these changes are likely to lead to reductions in the rent received by landowners with a tenancy protected by the Landlord and Tenant Act 1954 or the Business Tenancies (Northern Ireland) Order 1996. I appreciate that that might not have been expected by those entering into such tenancies at the time they were created, but it is also fair to say that market values change over time, and there is never any guarantee that rents received by a landlord will remain constant or increase.

We have also given careful consideration to the effect of clauses 61 and 62,

and have balanced the impact that they might have on landowners with the wider, substantial public benefits that we are pursuing. It is also important to recognise that the changes will not happen until any ongoing agreement expires and comes to be renewed. Furthermore, clauses 63 and 64 introduce separate provisions allowing the landowner to recover compensation for any damage to their land, reduction in its value or reasonable expenses resulting from an operator exercising their code rights.

Clauses 61 to 64 ensure that the 2017 framework will apply to all future agreements. It must be remembered that the code has an underlying purpose, which is to support the delivery of robust digital networks. Our constituents increasingly rely on those networks for critical digital services. Only recently, the National Farmers Union's digital technology survey found that poor mobile signal and unreliable internet access are hampering farming businesses. We know that rural connectivity is a problem for many organisations, and addressing it is one of our priorities as a Government. The Bill, including clauses 61 and 62, aims to address those issues.

I am sure that my right hon. Friend had only noble intentions when tabling his amendments, but although they may benefit some landowners, they have the potential to penalise entire communities by keeping network costs unacceptably high. Clauses 61 and 62 will help to reduce the digital divide between different parts of the country, as they will help to prevent deployment being cheaper in one area than another.

Finally, I turn to amendments 9 to 11 tabled by my right hon. Friend, which would require a party to use alternative dispute resolution processes before making certain applications to a court under the electronic communications code, including where an agreement granting rights under the code is being sought. The provisions on ADR processes in the Bill aim to create more collaborative discussions between landowners and telecoms operators to ensure that litigation is used only as a last resort. I suspect that that is what the amendments seek to ensure as well. Although I sympathise with the intention behind these amendments, the Government oppose them—first, because they are unnecessary; secondly, because ADR is not appropriate in every situation; and thirdly, because they would be counterproductive to the amendments' overall intentions.

The Bill requires operators, when requesting rights under the code, to inform the landowners of the availability of ADR. Crucially, it also creates a requirement that if an application is made to a court, the court will be required to take into account any unreasonable refusal to engage in ADR when awarding costs. Those requirements strongly incentivise the use of ADR without the need to make it mandatory. The Government therefore believe the amendments to be unnecessary.

It is also important to note that ADR may not be suitable in certain cases, such as where a disagreement is based on differing interpretations of the law. Such points of law must be resolved in the courts, and mandatory ADR would add cost and time to that process without offering any benefit.

The Government also believe that the amendments would be counterproductive to

their own goals. If ADR were compulsory, some parties would be compelled to participate in an ADR process they do not want to be involved in, and so would be less inclined to actively engage in the process. That would increase the risk that ADR would fail, which would mean that parties would have to go to court anyway. If that were the case, all that compulsory ADR would have achieved is to add an additional layer of time and costs for landowners, such as charities, sports clubs and farmers. It should also be noted that, when consulted, a clear majority of stakeholders were not in favour of compulsory ADR. I hope that I have given my right hon. Friend assurance that the provisions regarding ADR in the Bill already represent the most effective way of encouraging its use, and I hope that he will not press his amendments to a Division.

[A Written Answer from the Treasury](#)

I have received the below answer from the Treasury to my Written Question:

Treasury has provided the following answer to your written parliamentary question (2336):

Question:

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what discussions he has had with Cabinet colleagues on fiscal plans to tackle potential supply shortages of (a) energy and (b) food. (2336)

Tabled on: 16 May 2022

Answer:

Helen Whately: Arrangements are in place to ensure security of supply of electricity and gas. We are confident that the UK's energy security will be maintained.

The UK food supply chain is highly resilient and our food import dependency on the Eastern Europe region is very low. We do not expect any significant direct impact on overall UK food supply as a result of the conflict in Ukraine. The Government continues to keep the market situation under review through the UK Agriculture Market Monitoring Group, which monitors UK agricultural markets including price, supply, inputs, trade and recent developments. We have also increased our engagement with industry to supplement our analysis with real time intelligence.

The answer was submitted on 23 May 2022 at 09:42.

Why does the Commons fail to argue over money printing?

For the last 14 years the main instrument of monetary policy has been the creation of many more pounds by the Bank of England to buy up government debts. This has occurred under Labour, Coalition and Conservative governments. No opposition has ever opposed it or any part of it. The Bank has now created a massive £975bn of new money to buy bonds. This swamps the sums we normally debate around budgets.

Some MPs ignorantly say they do not challenge this because it is the actions of an independent Central Bank. If they read the documents they would discover that the Chancellor has to approve and sign off every pound so created. More importantly he is also required to take all the risk on the bonds, indemnifying the Bank of England against any losses, as the sums involved are large in relation to the size of the Bank and its capital. The fact that taxpayers are now the proud owners of £975bn of bonds liable for losses via the Treasury should you would have thought concentrate the minds of MPs and lead to debate.

Some MPs say they did not need to debate it because they agreed with the policy. Now, however, many MPs are angry about the high levels of inflation we are currently experiencing. They should re examine their past support for the money printing which is one of the reasons we now have the inflation we are experiencing. It seemed clear to me and few others last year that the Bank and Treasury were continuing with more money printing than was sensible well into the recovery. I did back the money printing in 2020 as a necessary part of the offset to the deeply damaging economic impact of lockdowns .

Today Parliament needs to consider how it should handle these issues in future, given the problem of inflation from past Treasury/Bank monetary policy. How much money will taxpayers lose on the bonds that have been bought? As interest rates go up, so the value of the bonds held usually goes down. Does that matter? The deal the Treasury gave the Bank means there will be no trouble for the Bank, as in addition to the guarantees there is the promise of top up capital if ever the Bank's free capital falls too low.

In these conditions it is difficult to see why so many MPs including the Opposition think the Bank is independent. They also need to ponder the significant power the government has when it comes time to choose a new Governor.

The MPC and the current Chancellor added £200bn to QE in March 2020, £100bn in June 2020 and £150bn in November 2020, with payments under each programme spread out over the months that followed through to end 2021.

Why we must legislate on the Northern Ireland protocol to save the Good Friday Agreement.

[Bernard Jenkin Chair, Liaison Committee \(Commons\) 12:22 pm, 15th July 2021](#)

I beg to move,

That this House

supports the primary aims of the [Northern Ireland Protocol](#) of the EU [Withdrawal Agreement](#), which are to uphold the Belfast ([Good Friday](#)) Agreement in all its dimensions and to respect the integrity of the EU and UK internal markets;

recognises that new infrastructure and controls at the border between Northern Ireland and the [Irish Republic](#) must be avoided to maintain the peace in Northern Ireland and to encourage stability and trade;

notes that the volume of trade between Great Britain and Northern Ireland far exceeds the trade between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland;

further notes that significant provisions of the Protocol remain subject to grace periods and have not yet been applied to trade from Great Britain to Northern Ireland and that there is no evidence that this has presented any significant risk to the EU internal market;

regards flexibility in the application of the Protocol as being in the mutual interests of the EU and UK, given the unique constitutional and political circumstances of Northern Ireland;

regrets EU threats of legal action;

notes the EU and UK have made a mutual commitment to adopt measures with a view to avoiding controls at the ports and airports of Northern Ireland to the extent possible;

is conscious of the need to avoid separating the Unionist community from the rest of the UK, consistent with the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement;

and also recognises that [Article 13\(8\)](#) of the Protocol provides for potentially superior arrangements to those currently in place.

The House approved this motion with Labour supporting when Bernard and other MPs including myself proposed it. What the UK government is now proposing by way of legislation is pursuing the policy laid out in this motion. It is important to avoid bringing into effect the many additional controls between NI and GB that the EU envisages. As the motion says there is no evidence of harm being done to the EU's single market by the failure to impose these extra controls on GB to NI trade.

More importantly, as the motion stated, the Good Friday Agreement takes precedence over the Protocol and that Agreement is now visibly damaged and undermined by the EU actions over the UK's internal market. Whilst the Protocol promised to respect our internal market the needless controls the EU has already imposed on internal GB/NI trade have done damage to our trade and more importantly have lost the support of the Unionist community for the Assembly and political process which lies at the core of the Good Friday Agreement.

The government should proceed swiftly with the necessary legal measure to restore UK internal trade. Labour would be wise to remember their support for this policy when they helped the Commons pass this motion. If they do so they help to restore cross community support for the Good Friday Agreement. Visiting US Democrats would be wise to read both Agreements and to grasp how the Protocol is currently undermining the Good Friday Agreement thanks to the heavy handed and wrong implementation by the EU.

A budget to ease the squeeze

Here's an idea. Take the surge in extra tax on energy higher prices have brought, and give that money back to struggling taxpayers. The Treasury is collecting a mighty windfall. extra revenue from North Sea oil and gas already paying double Corporation Tax. Some say that's £8 bn extra so far. Extra VAT on inflated home energy bills. More tax at the petrol and diesel pumps.

This may amount to say a total £15 bn. That would mean the government could

Abolish the extra National Insurance imposed

Suspend VAT on fuel

Increase the Warm Homes discount

Increase Universal Credit

Cut Income tax by 5% off the rate, taking it to 19%

Carry the cost of some of the renewable obligations on fuel prices for a period whilst gas prices remain elevated.

It is a bad idea to collect much more tax from producing and buying energy when the price of energy has just rocketed.

It is not the windfall tax that is so popular but the thought the money from it could be given back to customers of energy companies. the sum involved is much smaller than the extra tax the government is already taking off us, so give that money back instead.