

Just Leave

When I fought the last election as a Conservative candidate I believed in the words of our Manifesto, echoed by our Leader. We said we would leave the EU 2 years after sending the notification letter. We said No Deal is better than a bad deal. We said we would leave the single market and customs union. We set out a new UK trade policy. We pledged to take back control of our borders, our laws and our money.

Now the Prime Minister tells us we can either support a Withdrawal Agreement which does none of these things for at least 21 months or maybe for 45 months, or support a delay which puts off all these things. Indeed, there is little difference between the two options, save that the Withdrawal Agreement makes the delay a minimum of 21 months and takes away much of our bargaining position as we try to negotiate a future partnership and some kind of exit from a position of weakness. The Irish backstop is but one of the dreadful features of the Agreement. It means we might never get out of the customs Union or shake off alignment with all the laws they deem to be related to the single market. There are clearly those in government who have wanted to stay in the customs union and much of the single market all along, and have been looking for ways to achieve this.

I do not agree with being faced with this pair of options which offers no real choice. I have no wish to tear up the promises I made along with the national party in 2017. I think we should try harder to implement what we promised. The way to do so is as I have often set out, to leave on April 12th (needlessly delayed from March 29th), and aim to initiate trade talks with the EU as we exit. There is a big backlash from party members and Conservative voters to what the Prime Minister is trying to do. The country has decided by a large margin according to the polls that the Withdrawal Agreement is a bad Treaty to enter. Far from allowing us to sort out Brexit after signing, it would lock us into massively expensive financial and legislative commitments and prejudices our future badly.

The government needs to keep its word. From day to day now we do not know what the government is going to say next, nor who in the government is going to push a different line from the Prime Minister. We wait to see what more of our election promises are discarded by the Cabinet. We are on running 3 line whips all this week including Friday in case the government wants to do something. It is clearly making it up as it goes along, and failing to tell the MPs who are meant to support it what the government wants or why. I am all for going to Parliament to do good things for our constituents, but so far there are general debates on Wednesday and Thursday. As there are no votes on those two days in the current business and nothing to do on Friday why the 3 line whip? If you want to get MPs to respect the whip more, it has to be applied for good reason.