

My speech during the debate on the UK's Withdrawal from the European Union, 13 March 2019

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): Some 17.4 million people voted to leave. They were told by both the Government and the remain campaign that that meant leaving the customs union and the single market. They were told that many things would be damaging or wrong if we left. There was a series of very bad short-term forecasts for the first year after the vote, and the public said to the experts, "We don't believe you", and they were right about the short-term forecasts: jobs figures went up, not down; growth went up—there was no recession; and house prices performed reasonably well. This was a specific forecast for the year after the vote and before we could conceivably have left.

Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): rose—

John Redwood: I give way.

Mr Speaker: Order. Any interventions from now on are perfectly legitimate, but if Members intervene, they will be preventing others from speaking. I just want them to know that.

Patricia Gibson: Will the right hon. Gentleman explain how anyone can trust this Government? We were long told it was the Prime Minister's deal or no deal, but that is clearly not the case because the House could revoke article 50 if it so chose.

John Redwood: I do not agree. I think that that is exactly where we are: either we leave with the withdrawal agreement, or we leave without the withdrawal agreement. That is what the House voted for when it voted to send the article 50 letter, and that is what the House voted for when it enacted the withdrawal Act.

I am not here to recreate the arguments of the referendum. The public are heartily sick of Parliament's going over and over the same arguments in which we have engaged for three or four years now, in the run-up to the referendum and subsequently. They expect us to be purposeful, serious and sensible, and to sort out the issues and problems arising from the decision to leave the European Union. That is exactly what we should be doing, and I come here in that spirit. I understand that remain voters have real concerns, although I think that some of them are exaggerated. It is up to us, working with the Government, to show that all of them can be managed and that there are many upsides, to which we are looking forward and which leave voters clearly had in their minds.

I want to reassure the House. Calling certain views certain names is not helpful to a grown-up debate. It is not a no-deal exit that we are talking

about; it is a many-deals exit. As we have just heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe (Mr Baker), a series of measures have been enacted recently in the European Parliament. On both sides of the channel, serious work is being done to ensure that lorries can move and planes can fly. Goods will move across borders, and there will be an understanding about what happens in relation to customs and other checks. The drugs will come in, and the food will come in.

I think it is quite wrong to scaremonger and frighten people by pretending that none of that work has taken place—that German pharmaceutical companies will refuse to send their goods any more, or that the workers at Dover will get in the way and block them from coming in. It is not going to happen. We have heard very good news from Calais and Dover about all the work that has been done at both ports to make things work.

So let us come together and be practical, and let us understand that certainly all Conservative and Labour MPs were elected to this 2017 Parliament to get Brexit through. We all stood on national manifestos that said we would do that. The public cannot believe that so many Labour Members in particular are now saying, “We did not really mean it; we do not care about that; we want to stop it; we want to delay it; we want to redefine it in a way that means it is no longer Brexit.”

Brexit means taking control of our own money and then being able to spend it on our priorities, and the sooner we do that, the sooner we will have the boost to our economy which taking that measure would bring about. It means having tariffs that make sense for British industry, and for importers who might like some tariffs to be removed. I am very glad that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has slashed tariffs from a load of imported goods that do not involve our competing actively in the United Kingdom. That will be better news for all the consumers who will not have to pay those tariffs any more once we have our own tariff schedule.

I have a big idea for the Government. I entirely understand that very many people in this Parliament want a bigger deal, or more deals, than what is currently on the table. My idea is that, even at this late stage, the Government should offer the European Union a comprehensive free trade agreement based on the best of EU-Canada and EU-Japan, perhaps involving more services, because we already have alignment with services. If the EU would agree just to talk about that—as I suspect it would—we could leave on 29 March without having to impose any new tariffs or non-tariff barriers on each other, and proceed, under GATT 24, to negotiate a free trade agreement. That, I should have thought, would unite a lot of moderate remain voters with most leave voters, and I strongly recommend it to the Government. Parliament must allow us to leave on 29 March, otherwise it will be the people against the Parliament.