

Parliament thwarts the government again

As I thought, the government was not allowed to re run Saturday by tabling the Withdrawal Agreement for another vote today. The Speaker decided that Parliament had the chance to vote for the Agreement on Saturday and had voted instead not to support the Agreement in principle but instead to look at the draft legislation it would need first. That is what the government now wishes to do tomorrow. The votes the government lost on Thursday on procedure and on Saturday over consideration of the Agreement proved lethal to their idea that Parliament would approve the Agreement.

The task remains difficult for the government. It needs to get agreement to a tight timetable for the legislation. It needs the Bill to clear all Commons stages in just three days, so it can pass to the Lords to leave open the chance of completing it by the October 31 deadline. It also needs to secure the Bill without any amendment to the provisions of the Treaty it is seeking to replicate, as that would require the government to go back and seek change from the EU.

The Remain forces in Parliament may try to move a reasoned amendment to the second reading motion of the Bill to attach conditions to it. They may wish to move amendments during committee stage to add a second referendum or a full customs union or single market membership or one of the many other permutations they have argued for over the last long three years since the referendum decision they regret. Anyone of these if carried could be unacceptable to the government, and in some cases could require returning to Brussels for renegotiation were Parliament able and willing to proceed with the legislation despite the government.

The opposition may argue the three days are insufficient for a "long and complex constitutional Bill", and resist the government pointing out Parliament has talked about little else than this Agreement for almost a year. They could try to vote down the timetable, or seek to impose a longer timetable of their own. There is also the issue of how the Lords will behave if and when they receive the Bill, as it is more difficult to timetable the Lords.

Meanwhile the government may strengthen the Bill with a sovereignty clause to help with the problem of excessive EU powers during the so called Implementation period stretching to December 2020.