

Retained EU law Bill

Yesterday the retained EU law Bill completed its Commons stages. The Opposition put up a barrage of absurd criticisms and false scares instead of debating the real issues. The government endlessly made clear it had no plans to revoke employment rights and environmental protections. It argued that the UK had often pioneered these laws before joining the EEC/EU, and had often gone beyond the minimum standards required by Brussels.

The main advance provided by the legislation is to take all retained EU law which was transferred en bloc on leaving as a separate category of UK law and to make it pure UK law through this measure. Once this is done the law falls to be interpreted by UK courts without reference to ECJ past judgements, and is in a form which allows amendment, improvement or repeal as Ministers and Parliament see fit. Ministers will not be able to do any of this without further Parliamentary processes. In practice any substantial change to a body of law is likely to need primary legislation in the UK Parliament.

The worry about the Bill should not be the wrong forecast that it will lead to wholesale cancellation of retained EU laws, but that it may not result in a thorough enough review of all this legislation followed by sensible amendment and repeal. We need a better debate on which of the many laws we opposed unsuccessfully at the time of their introduction should be revisited.

I wish to see early use of our powers to cancel VAT on energy, and to permanently remove it from green products. I wish to see greater use of our new powers in agriculture to promote more UK food production. I wish to see the Ports Directive repealed, the droit du suite removed to assist our art market, an improved Data Protection regime, strengthened controls against ultra large foreign trawlers in our fishing grounds, pro science rules to foster UK work in medical and pharmaceutical research, the suspension of emissions trading which is penalising our energy intensive industries at a time of high energy prices and strengthened policing of our borders amongst others.

I look forward to the government's list and would be interested in your thoughts on improving the inherited law base.