

Retained EU Law

Brexit has delivered two important changes that get no mention. We no longer pay annual contributions to the EU – and have increased the NHS budget by more than the savings and by more than proposed on the bus. We no longer come under the large amounts of new law coming out of Brussels, leaving us free to decide if we want a law at all and if so what would be the best one for us. Many hundreds of pieces of legislation passed since we left do not apply in GB.

The PM promised to carry on with the Bill planned by his predecessors, the EU Retained Law Bill. He saw the advantage of tailoring law to our needs. The aim was to remove all those inherited laws from the Statute book that were no longer relevant to us, the ones we had opposed unsuccessfully as members, and the ones where we could put in place something more effective for us. Jacob Rees Mogg when Business Secretary got the civil service to produce a website or dashboard with all the pieces of relevant law listed.

When I set out to write this yesterday officials had taken the dashboard down and left a message saying this useful resource is “no longer available”. That was a chilling message. When I complained it reappeared. It seems to square with news leaks that the current Business Secretary wishes to dilute the legislation, turning it into a device to keep most EU laws instead of initiating the proper review we need. Officials were said to always have been reluctant to carry out the exercise and to recommend pruning EU law. Clearly some senior officials and some business lobby groups have forgotten the good reasons the UK had for trying to prevent or to modify endless EU legislative proposals when we were a member. My main recollection from my days as Single Market Minister were many discussions, lobbyings and meetings to try to stall or dilute unwanted legislation that mainly served to give the EU more powers over more areas of government and our lives. It was doing the detailed work as Single market Minister and seeing the damage to innovation, small business and enterprise that much of the regulation would do that made me consider changing our relationship with the emerging government of the EU.

The EU Retained law Bill passed the Commons with a large majority and little Conservative disagreement. It would be odd if Labour decided to use their peers to try to wreck one of the gains of Brexit close to an election, after they lost so many votes over trying to stop Brexit in the previous Parliament. I hope the PM tells the Business Secretary if she does want to dilute this to think again. We could be better for freeing ourselves of laws that cost too much and get in the way. Of course the plan was always to keep important employment, safety and environmental safeguards and where necessary to continue with our UK policy of going beyond the core standards laid down by the EU in those areas.