

My speech during the debate on the European Union (Withdrawal) (No. 2) Act 2019 (Rule of Law)

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): Of course the Government and all Members of Parliament must obey the law, but Parliament must also pass wise laws and pass them according to our traditions, practices and rules. I wish to concentrate briefly on the question of the wisdom of the law and urge those who sponsored it to think again in the national interest.

This is no normal law. A normal law applies to everyone in the country equally, there are criminal penalties for those who break the law, and we wish to see the law enforced. This is not that kind of a law. This Act of Parliament is a political instruction to our Prime Minister about how he should behave in an international negotiation. Normally, this Parliament takes the view that international negotiations are best handled in detail by the Government, and we the Parliament judge the result by either approving or disapproving of it.

I urge colleagues to think again, because two things follow from Parliament instructing the Prime Minister in the way it has sought to do over this negotiation. The first is that the EU, the counterparties to the negotiation, can see that this Parliament has deliberately undermined the position of the lead negotiator for our country. It will take note of that, and instead of giving things it will say, "There is no point in giving things." The second thing—even worse—is that the EU will take note that our Prime Minister under this Act is to seek an extension on any terms the EU cares to dictate. How can anyone in this House say that is good law or justice or makes sense for the British people? Those of the remain persuasion, just as those of the leave persuasion, must surely see that this is not the way to treat our lead negotiator—putting our country naked into the negotiating chamber with the EU. It puts the country in a farcical and extremely weak position.

I thought that the Labour party wanted us to leave the EU. Labour Members did not like the withdrawal agreement—I have sympathy with that—but they do not like leaving without the withdrawal agreement—I have less sympathy with that—so they are looking for a third way. They presumably think they could do some other kind of renegotiation, but they have never explained to us what that renegotiation would be like, and they have never explained how the EU would even start talking about it, given that it has consistently said we either take the withdrawal agreement or just leave.

Adam Afriyie (Windsor) (Con): The Opposition have taken a really bizarre position. They have said that, even if they did manage to negotiate a new deal with the EU, they would campaign against it. It is a really odd position for this nation to be in.

John Redwood: That is even more bizarre. Normally, Governments do their best

negotiation and then come back and recommend it to the House of Commons. It would indeed be fatuous if we ever had a Government in this country who negotiated a deal they knew they wanted to reject. They should not waste everybody's time and just say, "Let's leave without a deal."

We are wandering a little from the point of this debate, which is about the rule of law. This House of Commons should think again. This is an extremely unwise law. It undermines the Prime Minister, but, more importantly, it undermines our country. It makes it extremely unlikely that those remain-supporting MPs who could live with our exit with a variant of the withdrawal agreement will get that because they have deliberately undermined the pressure our Prime Minister may place on the EU in the negotiations he is trying to undertake. Even worse, they have invited the EU to dictate terrible terms for a few months' extension, and why would the EU not do it? Please, Parliament, reconsider. Parliament has a duty to put through wise laws and to represent the national interest. This miserable Act is an act of great political folly and is undermining our country in a very desperate way.

How pro EU are you

We did not hear from the usual pro Remain contributors to this site what kind of Remain they wanted. So let's try another approach to get them talking about the EU. Here is a simple test of how pro EU membership you really are.

1. Do you want the UK to join the Euro soon?
2. Do you want the UK to join Schengen and have common borders with the EU?
3. Do you want the common EU defence and security identity to develop, so our forces typically are deployed for EU led missions?
4. Do you want a larger EU budget, with more transfers to the poorer countries?
5. Do you think the UK should reduce its current special abatement of contributions, to help the wider EU?
6. Do you welcome the long term aim of the EU's ever closer union which is political union?

If you answer Yes to all six then you are indeed a keen advocate of EU membership and understand its full implications. If you say No to all these then maybe you should accept the UK cannot remain in the present EU, with so little in common with the aims and aspirations of the other members. Given the direction of travel and the legal form of the EU disagreeing with any one of these propositions makes the UK's position difficult and means we cannot be at heart of the project. Nor can we claim to be a leading influence on the EU if we disagree with these common strands of EU thinking.

What kind of Remain did Remain voters vote for?

Throughout the referendum campaign Remain advocates refused to discuss the current state and the future path of the EU. Many of those I debated with declined even to defend the current EU, saying it had its faults and they wished it to be reformed. I found few willing to defend the Common Fisheries Policy, the drift to common taxation through EU VAT, company tax rules and special taxes, the policy on animal husbandry, the Maastricht budget rules and austerity and much else of the current EU. Had we enjoyed a proper debate on the current and future EU I suspect more would have voted Leave. For those passionate Remainers who write in here I am offering them a chance today to write about their favourite subject, why we should stay in the EU. Here are some possible futures of the EU. Which did they have in mind when they voted to keep the UK in membership?

1 "Ever closer union". Do they accept the main aims of the EU, to create a full monetary, social, economic and political union? When do they think the UK should join in properly, by joining the Euro, the core of the current Union? Do they accept that the Euro with or without UK membership will need a bigger and better transfer union to help the poorer countries in the Euro? Do they support a bigger EU budget to bring that about? Do they welcome more EU based taxes to pay for Union policies? Do they welcome a common defence and security policy? Should UK armed forces be part of European forces and accept command from the EU?

2. If they wish to avoid some features of ever closer union, how would they secure the necessary opt outs as the Union proceeds with a fuller budgetary and political union? How realistic is it for the UK to be round the budget table for the general EU budget but not round the table for the Euro area budget? At what point does the opt out from the currency cease to be an opt out from the budgetary consequences of the Euro? What would the UK have to do if there were another financial or banking crisis in the Euro area? How far can the UK allow defence industrial integration go before it is no longer an independent nation for defence purposes?

3. Are there any limits to government expansion and legal creep which characterise the advance of the EU? Do advocates accept that the more ECJ decisions there are, the more regulations and directives there are, the more we are governed by the EU institutions and the less scope our Parliament has for independent action and lawmaking. The EU has a doctrine of the occupied field. Once it passes a directive or regulation, it then has power in that area and can override national parliaments. Recently the EU has for example taken over much of the regulation of the new social media and digital industries which are crucial for our future. Surely at some point there has to be greater recognition in the democratic system of the big transfer of

power which is occurring, with strengthened democratic control over the EU Commission and the European Court of Justice, which is an activist court with a political mission.

No deal is better than a bad deal

Various people are spreading the lie that they were not told No deal is better than a bad deal before the 2017 election. Not only did Mrs May often say it but it was on p36 of the Conservative Manifesto.

Meeting over the closure of the Reading driver licensing test centre

I met with concerned driver instructors over the planned closure of the Reading test Centre. The Licensing Agency has said it is seeking an alternative site, as they seem to agree with local opinion that we do need an accessible driver testing centre in our area. Reading is a central location for Wokingham and the villages in most of my constituency. There could be an acceptable alternative, but so far the Agency has not shared with us its thoughts on where that might be. Clearly any new location should also take into account local opinion about the suitability of the chosen site.