

How do the whips persuade people to vote their way?

We should expect plenty of stories about how the whips try to reduce the numbers of Conservative MPs planning to vote against the Withdrawal Agreement. I was surprised to be contacted by a journalist on Monday who asked me if I had changed my mind about voting against the Agreement, and who went on to ask what the whips had offered me to change my mind. I was able to say I did not plan to change my vote and I had not been offered anything.

Let me reassure some readers who take a low view of what goes on. I have never been offered an honour or some other gift by the whips on any occasion to get me to change my mind and vote for the party line. There have been various times over the last 8 years when I have not supported the government on EU matters, as I took seriously the promises we made in each Manifesto not to transfer more power to the EU. If anyone in future did suggest I might receive an honour to switch my vote I would say No and explain why that would be an abuse of the system. Honours are not tools for whips to use to secure a vote.

There have been some suggestions in the press that maybe others are being offered honours or inducements. It is difficult to see how this works for the government were they to be susceptible to such bad practice. Once they have announced an honour they cannot withdraw it, and the individual in receipt of it cannot be contracted to behave in a certain way thereafter. There have been plenty of cases where MPs have received honours, only to be very critical of the government and leadership shortly afterwards, as the two issues are not related and should be unrelated.

I have even seen it claimed some are offered peerages. That sounds ludicrous. If anyone were to be offered an immediate peerage they would of course have to resign from the Commons and create a by election. I can't think of any example when it has been alleged an MP was offered a peerage to get through a particular Commons vote.

So how do whips try to get MPs to vote the party line? The first round is to put the government's case in more detail and more strongly to the MP to consider. This may include inviting the MP to have a meeting with the PM or relevant Minister, to hear directly why they want them to vote a certain way. Junior and ambitious MPs may well be told that their path to Ministerial appointment will be easier and smoother if they travel the loyal road, though history shows some rebels also have to be given jobs to provide some balance in the team and to bring some rebels into line by accepting the discipline of Ministerial office. Then there are arguments about the political consequences for government and party from defeat, use of friends of the MP to try to persuade them, and threats of consequences for the policy/party/government if the proposal is defeated. Good whipping is ad hominem. Different MPs respond to different types of pressure or appeal.

The PM seems to want to try to put pressure on MPs by seeking to persuade the party and the voters to back her deal, over the heads of the MPs. This is a route fraught with difficulty. MPs resent fellow MPs trying to whip up their constituents against them, whilst it looks as if the Conservative party membership is more strongly against the Withdrawal Agreement than the MPs on average.

Wokingham Post Office

I am told the Consultation over the future of Wokingham Post Office is delayed until the new year. Only then will we be told what they have in mind and why they think an alternative will be better. I will study the proposals and put in a response to the Consultation when they get there.

More false forecasts

Remain return to their Project Fear like moths returning to the heat of a light which might destroy them. Prior to the referendum they forecast big job losses, house price falls and a recession in the first winter after a No vote. We now know this was completely wrong. Using their language, these were "Catastrophic" forecasting errors. They took themselves "off the cliff edge" of bad forecasts.

This time they have decided to play it safer by going for long term forecasts. That means they cannot be proved wrong any time soon. It also means many Remain spokesmen and women will misrepresent what these new studies show. They all show us better off in ten years time, with or without Brexit. The so called losses are lower forecast gains, not actual losses. It also means if they assume marginal shortfalls in growth from Brexit, they add up over a long period of time to larger sums. Remain should understand this, as our growth rate throughout our time in the EEC/EU was slower on average than in the post War years prior to entry. They got their long term forecasts wrong when we entered, expecting faster growth. If Leave supporters played back their approach we could show substantial long term losses from membership. The big losses thanks to the Exchange Rate Mechanism disaster in the middle of our membership were particularly costly and were actual losses or declines in income and output, not just slower growth.

Instead of parroting imprecise long term forecasts from people who got their short term forecasts wrong in 2016-17, they should be trying to make amends. Journalists should cross examine them about how they can possibly know what

our economy and the rest of the world will be like in ten or fifteen years time. If we leave and take back control properly next March we could pursue an economic, trade and spending policy that would give a good boost to our economy and its output. These forecasts concentrate on seeing negatives for our trade, without thinking about all the positives from saving the money we send to the EU, substituting home production for imports, and lowering tariffs in general when we set our own schedule. The main reasons they think growth will be a bit slower is assuming a net increase in trade barriers, and assuming much lower inward migration.

Project Fear did not work first time round for the Referendum. Each time it is tried it is even less effective, as we saw through the lies the previous time. It reminds us that Remain never have a positive case for membership of the EU or for a close economic partnership with it. They just bang on about what could go wrong, and assume the rest of the EU will behave as badly as possible towards us.

Tree planting in Mortimer

On Friday I joined Councillors and local residents for a tree planting in land adjacent to the Fairground Car Park. This is part of the national forest scheme. I am grateful to the Councillors and John Bull who organised this and found a suitable place for the planting.

Is this the EU's best offer?

The EU's bad offer to the UK has been conditioned by what the Prime Minister asked for. Mrs May and her team were trying to cherry pick in the way the EU told them not to, so they have ended up with no deal at all about the future relationship after two and half years of talks. If she had asked for a Free Trade Deal along the lines of Canada plus, with various arguments about how the Irish border would work we would be in a much better position. There are plenty of technical and practical ways of handling the border on existing technology, so we would have found out if these issues had been pressed whether the EU was up for a Free Trade deal or not. The Prime Minister's refusal to table a free trade agreement, and her long delay over pressing more practical solutions for the Irish border has led to the current impasse with the UK Parliament and the complete lack of a Future Partnership Agreement other than a few pages a vague aspirations and plenty of negotiation to come.

Once Parliament has voted down the Withdrawal Agreement – as MPs currently say they will – the UK government needs to return to the EU with the individual detailed issues that are best resolved prior to just leaving, and to table a full Free Trade Agreement. We will then find out for sure whether the EU is serious about an FTA or not, and can in the meantime get on with fulfilling the pledge to leave. Immediately anyway the UK government should publish its tariff schedule for March 29 2019, set out details of how we will run our own borders from that date, and provide the necessary permissions for continuing trade and activity.

Mrs May rightly says the country wants shot of all the arguments and delays about Brexit. That is another good reason why we must veto the agreement she has come up with, because it sentences us to an indefinite future of endless talks about our future partnership, shorn of our bargaining position by all the concessions made in the Withdrawal Agreement.