

Parliamentary votes on Brexit

The decision to leave was effectively taken when Parliament approved the sending of the Article 50 letter. The Commons approved the legislation by 461 to 89, with most Labour MPs joining the Conservatives and DUP to vote it through in accordance with their Manifesto.

When it came to vote on the important Clause 1 of the EU Withdrawal Bill, the clause which repeals the 1972 European Communities Act to confirm our exit in UK law, the Commons passed this clause by 318-68, with most Labour MPs abstaining.

Last night the Commons approved the EU Withdrawal Bill on Third reading by 324 votes to 295. Most Labour MPs joined the SNP and Lib Dems in opposing, which was interesting given their Manifesto position of backing Brexit. 4 Labour MPs voted for the Bill, and 8 abstained from the vote. Some or all of these were abstentions on principle as I saw the MPs there. There were three Conservative abstentions I think for reasons other than opposition to the Bill and no Conservative votes against the Bill.

The SNP and the Lib Dems have consistently opposed the main measures to put through Brexit.

Mr Macron, migrants and a tapestry

Mr Macron today comes with a rare gift. He is willing to loan the Bayeux tapestry to the UK. This fine and ancient work of art chronicles the misery and violence of war, showing the deaths of men and horses in battle and the torching of someone's house. It celebrates the victory of Duke William of Normandy over King Harold of England.

I am sure the offer is well meant, and many would like to see this most famous of tapestries which many of us have seen in illustrations many times. I will pass over the unfortunate truth that it depicts an invading French army killing England's King with the deaths of many in the English army, before taking over the government of our kingdom. It was the last time England was defeated in war by a hostile continental invasion, though many more attempts were made at enforced political union with the continent.

Mr Macron comes to talk about the immediate issue of economic migrants, and the longer term issue of Brexit. We read in advance that he wants the UK to take more economic migrants, and that he wants to reduce the migratory pressures in and through France. It is difficult to see how these two aims are compatible, as any indication that we would welcome more economic migrants will presumably just increase the pressures on France as more seek

to come. We also read that he wants more UK cash to help with the border arrangements. It makes every sense, as both sides agreed in a Treaty, that the UK border with France is in the French Channel ports, and their border with us resides in the UK Channel ports. Why allow people to make a journey that entails them arriving as illegals in each other's country? Of course the UK must pay its fair share of policing the shared borders.

I trust when he turns to Brexit Mrs May will reaffirm that any deal must be better than No Deal. That means it must secure us control again over our money, our borders and our laws. The principle issue for the EU to resolve is how many new barriers would they like to erect against our mutual trade, as the UK is happy to carry on with no new barriers. The UK should not pay for the privilege of importing more than we export to the rest of the EU, but should not wish to make it more difficult for them to sell things to us unless they wish to impede our exports. The UK needs to set out a strong and clear position and then let the EU consider how to respond.

[Carillion – what should employees and suppliers do now?](#)

Anyone working for Carillion or for one its suppliers or contractors should go to the PWC website, as they are now in charge as the special managers to the Liquidation.

Their website makes clear that employees should turn up to work as usual and will be paid from the introduction of the Liquidation. Suppliers should carry on under their existing contracts, and they will be paid for goods and services delivered to the company in liquidation. They will be contacted in due course once the Liquidator has reviewed their contracts. The website gives the contacts if people need to clarify these statements or wish to have reassurance about the financial position from here. There are some stories in the media that the position for suppliers and sub contractors may be more difficult than this implies.

The website says to employees: "Notwithstanding the liquidation the company will continue your employment on the same terms and conditions as before. You should continue to attend for work and you will continue to be paid as normal."

It says to suppliers and sub contractors "Unless otherwise advised, all agents, sub contractors and suppliers should continue to work and provide goods and services as normal, under their existing contracts, terms and conditions. You will get paid for goods and services you supply from 15 January 2018".

So please check with the Liquidator via the Special Managers on

Inflation is falling

Yesterday's announcement that inflation on the government's preferred measure, CPIH, has fallen to 2.7% was welcome confirmation that inflation is falling again. The annual rate fell despite the boost to inflation from higher home energy costs, higher prices for petrol and diesel, Council tax rises and higher taxes on alcoholic drinks from the Autumn budget. Dearer electricity featured as an upwards pressure, which is the result of the big switch away from cheaper carbon based generation.

The feared big surge in inflation from weak sterling has not taken place as some predicted. Just as lower sterling in 2016 did not do much to boost shop prices, so it appears higher sterling against the dollar and yen is not doing much the other way either. Shop prices have remained under competitive pressures, with strong internet rivals keeping many prices keen. That same internet also helps retailers source better value product from around the world to keep their prices down. Core inflation is at 2.5%.

There is no need for the Bank to worry about the current inflation rate. It is true there is a bit more energy price inflation to come through with oil now trading at \$70 a barrel for Brent crude. There may be further Council tax rises to come as Councils seek more money for a variety of spending programmes. There is no sign of a general wage/price spiral about to break out in the way that was common in the last century.

Once again the extreme forecasts of a big surge in inflation based on a weaker pound have not come true, just as industrial output and the general growth of the economy has surprised the Treasury and other forecasters on the upside. The government itself would like a bit more wage inflation, and has sought to get wages up at the lower levels with its Living Wage policy.

Tackling Plastic Waste and Protecting Our Environment

David Attenborough's Blue Planet II has done much to focus public attention on the estimated 1 million birds, and 100,000 other sea mammals and turtles which die every year from eating and getting tangled in plastic waste.

In the UK alone, during its recent Great British Beach Clean Up, the Marine

Conservation Society found 718 pieces of litter for every 100 metre stretch of beach surveyed, and of this rubbish from food and drink made up at least one fifth.

The Government's 25 Year Environment Plan addresses this most pressing problem. The measures include extending the 5p carrier bag charge to all retailers, working with supermarkets to encourage them to introduce plastic-free aisles in which all the food is loose, and investing new money in plastics innovation.

The Government will also encourage manufacturers to take responsibility for the impacts of their products and rationalise the number of different types of plastics they use.

Indeed, one major supermarket chain has just announced it will go plastic-free within five years. The current plastic packaging would be replaced with paper and pulp trays and paper bags, which would be recyclable through domestic waste collections or in-store recycling facilities. It can only be a matter of time before other supermarket chains follow suit.

However, the Government recognises that tackling the use of plastic cannot be done in isolation. The sustainable development of our oceans will be on the agenda when it hosts the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in April. It will work to create a Commonwealth Blue Charter and push for strong action to reduce plastic waste in the ocean.

In addition, the Government will direct its development spending to help developing nations reduce plastic waste, increase our own marine protected areas at home, and establish new Blue Belt protections in our Overseas Territories.

The solution to this global problem will require change and effort from all countries around the world, which the UK will work to achieve.