

## Parliament will be sovereign

Parliament can make mountains out of any molehill in the UK, once we have left the EU. It is curious that those most hostile to our departure from the EU now claim to be the most protective of the very Parliamentary sovereignty they so wantonly gave away. They need not worry. Out of the EU, Parliament can debate and vote on anything it wishes. It can hold government to account and change the law any day it likes.

The synthetic anger over the so called Henry VIII clauses in the Great Repeal Bill are just such a phoney war and a false tenderness towards the UK Parliament. The government has made clear that all substantive changes to EU laws, ranging from a new immigration policy to a new fishing policy, will of course need primary legislation. Parliament can shape and influence that to its heart content, in a way it could never do when the rules were laid down by the EU.

The so called Henry VIII powers, often used to drive through EU matters, will only be used for government to make technical changes to existing EU law to make sure it does still work as UK law! That surely is something the Remain people should like, as presumably they welcome the continuity of much EU law as UK law.

It is a curious feature of the modern debate that the Remain supporters in Parliament want us to talk about nothing but Brexit the whole time, and then complain that we do not debate and vote on it enough. As one who welcomes Parliamentary scrutiny and debate on the use of power I have no problem with Parliament doing this. Parliament does, however, need to have some sense of balance and proportion. We need to complement the many hours of debate and scrutiny of the UK's position on Brexit with proper use of our powers in many other areas, and more debate of the needs and tactics of the rest of the EU.

It is fine for the Opposition to criticise or demand more of the government. It should also be the loyal Opposition, recognising the impact its words may have on the UK's position in the EU talks.

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## More worries about diesels

Some good points have been made about diesels and air quality, and I am receiving constituents emails arguing against new penalties on owners of modern diesel cars.

One of the best points made is we need to take into account the amount of use made of various categories of dirtier vehicle. A typical privately owned passenger car spends most of its time parked. A motorist who averages 8000

miles a year, and averages 25 mph through a mixture of open road and congested town driving uses the vehicle for just 13 24 hour days or 26 12 hour days equivalent. A public service vehicle like a bus may well operate for more than ten times that amount of time, over 260 12 hour days a year. That means we will get a far bigger saving of dirty exhaust if we replace the old bus than the old car. The same is also true for many diesel trains that operate long hours, and for diesel delivery vans and lorries.

It is also important to recognise that congestion and delay cause far more pollution than allowing vehicles to make optimal progress at decent cruising speeds when the engine is not labouring, is in an economical gear, and not having to stop and start. This argues for the adoption of more policies that can reduce congestion, as have often been discussed here. Improving junctions is central to this. Parking more of the cars that are not in use off the highway is also an important aim, as often parked vehicles cause congestion and delay through straddling the highway.

Someone pointed out that vehicles often do not achieve the test specifications on emissions. This is because actual drive cycles are often different from test cycles. The more the vehicles have to slow down and speed up, and sit in traffic, the worse the emissions performance is likely to be. Older vehicles do not have cut outs at traffic light and other stops. Trains often keep their diesel engines running whilst waiting for considerable periods of time at terminus stations and to adjust service times. These are matters which newer vehicles and engines can help address.

A clumsy new tax is not the answer. Cutting emissions requires much detailed work on driving needs and conditions, road space and junctions, and ages of different types of vehicle. It is certainly important for the state to start by tackling public service vehicles, as they do so many more miles than the private car.

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## The Palace of Westminster

I was one of the MPs who needed persuading that the Houses of Parliament needs a thorough overhaul and refit such that we need to move out for several years and spend many billions of pounds on the buildings.

I understand that wiring, plumbing and other services need replacing or updating from time to time. These do not all have to be done throughout the Palace at the same time. It is true there is asbestos in the buildings, but most of it is stable and no hazard unless disturbed by builders. Many of the works drawn up for the large project might be nice to have modernisations or improvements, but are not essential to the functioning of the place. Of course there needs to be a regular programme of restoration of stone work and windows to keep the building water tight, and it is crucial to keep roofs in good repair to keep rain out. More of the work can be done in the summer

recess, and more can be done by builders taking over smaller sections of the Palace for a time period to do more fundamental work.

I read that following the recent terrorist incident there is some rethinking going on. One of the advantages of the present building is the presence now of a security strengthened perimeter. On the fateful day it is tragic that a policeman on duty was killed. I trust lessons will be learned about having the right support at entrances to deal with any violent intruder and to protect the police themselves before he does harm. It is also the case that the mass murders and injuries occurred beyond the perimeter. We should be more worried about pedestrian safety outside the Palace as a result of those events. The Bus and cycle lane open to the adjacent pavement allowed the murderer easier and faster access to the victims.

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## Good Friday

I attended the all Churches in Wokingham Good Friday service at the Methodist Church this morning. I went on with the congregation to see the Passion play in the town centre.

I would like to congratulate all involved in preparing it and performing in it, and all the helpers who provided hot cross buns at the end.

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## Cleaner air

There is a growing mood in favour of cleaner air. There is general agreement that the air in city centres like London needs urgent action to clean it up. In the centres of our Thames Valley towns there is also room for improvement. Some are already blaming the diesel car as the main cause and urging higher taxes or bans on diesel vehicles. It is a good idea first to examine what we know about the sources and causes of pollution.

The London Assembly researched the sources of Nox in London in 2015. This showed the following sources

Bus, coach and rail public transport      18%

Goods vehicles      17%

Gas heating systems      16%

Non road mobile machinery      14%

Diesel cars 11%

Petrol cars and motorcycles 8%

Aviation 8%

Industry 7%

The TFL study in 2016 showed a similar pattern, with gas heating and industry as the biggest source, and with both bus and coach and goods vehicles each a bit bigger than diesel cars.

The new Euro VI standards for engines require both petrol and diesel engines to emit less than 5mg per km of particulates. They allow just 80 mg of Nox for diesels compared to 60 mg for petrol, whilst allowing petrol engines to emit more carbon monoxide than diesels (100mg versus 50mg)

In order to clean up the air, especially removing particulates, requires replacement of a lot of older technology buses, trains, cars, and gas boilers. This will also allow the introduction of equipment which is more fuel efficient, also helping to drive down emissions and cut running costs.

Instead of working up a new series of penalties for owners of older diesel cars, government should work on a range of incentives to tackle the problem in a broad based way, removing the oldest buses, lorries, cars and boilers which would do the most to improve the position. it could also give a welcome boost to the home industries that produce these items.

We should not ignore the contribution replacing old heating boilers at home and work can have, with the added bonus of cutting running costs. Lets have better scrappage and financing schemes, so more people can afford to make their contribution to cleaner air, and can at the same time take pride in owning better machines.