

New Year message

I look forward to 2020 full of hope and optimism.

The new government has a majority and has energy to make things better. I am delighted they have made Prosperity the main aim of policy, as I asked them to do. I am putting in plenty of ideas about the January budget to give our economy the boost it needs and to leave people with more of their own money to spend. I look forward to the arrival of the extra money for schools, surgeries and the police in our area that I have battled for in recent years.

The New Year makes many people reappraise and ask themselves if we can do things better than in the year just gone. In politics it would be difficult to do things worse than in 2019. A fractured and angry Parliament prevented government governing, accentuated the negative, and let the country down. It undermined our negotiating position with the EU and needlessly delayed our exit.

This year we not only want a positive policy to improve public services and quicken growth in the economy, but we need to try to bring more people together behind that common purpose. Our public discourse has been more rancorous than robust, often nasty rather than incisive or illuminating.

On the central issue of our membership of the EU we can learn from the past. As a young man casting one of my first votes I voted to leave the European Community in 1975. I was on the losing side. I accepted the verdict of the voters and resolved to do my best to keep the spirit of what the majority voted for, membership of a free trade area or common market. It was only two decades later that I started to think we needed another referendum, when our country was plunged into a deep recession by our membership of the European Exchange Rate Mechanism, a close commitment to the EU which was not envisaged in the original referendum. It is one of those unwritten rules of democratic politics that if you lose an election or referendum you accept the will of the majority. It is also an unwritten rule that the majority should be attentive to the worries and concerns of the minority and seek to allay their fears or deal with their problems.

In that spirit this government needs to ensure that as we leave the EU there is none of the economic damage some have forecast. I have always held the view that we can be better off out and have set out the policies we need to follow to achieve that. It will be a central task for me to make that case in the new Parliament. It is also important to show how we will still travel to the continent, have many trade, cultural and educational links with the continent, and enjoy the wider European culture.

I do not regard Remain voters any less favourably than Leave voters, and will judge everyone's case on its merits. All I ask in return is that passionate Remainers understand that we Leavers are motivated by our view of what is best for our country and communities. We wish to work closely with

all our fellow citizens to improve lives and promote happiness and prosperity. I have lived most of my life with the answer on EU membership I did not want, but have not let it embitter me. I have often had to live under a Labour government I did not welcome, but never challenged their right to govern when they had won the election.

So let us enjoy the freedoms of our democracy in the new year. Let us have robust and strong debate, but let us play down the nastiness and abuse which came to replace such democratic principles too often last year. Far from improving democracy shouting abuse is an attempt to close it down. It damages the very liberties which make this country great.

Tackling outdoor sleeping – more money for local Councils

I am glad the government has announced new measures and money to reduce sleeping on our streets. People should never have to sleep outside, especially when it so cold and wet. West Berkshire Council will receive £69,585 for Homelessness Support next year, and £104,834 to help homelessness prevention. Wokingham Council will receive £338,056 for Homelessness Support and £65,253 for Homelessness prevention.

These sums are proportionate to the level of rough sleeping we find in our area. It is a much greater problem in parts of London, where for example the Borough of Newham will receive £10.7m under the two headings to deal with their much larger problem. Other London Boroughs also receive several millions each reflecting their higher level of need.

I look forward to the local Councils adding these sums to their existing housing and social service budgets., Very often the underlying problem for a rough sleeper is wider than the immediate absence of a roof over their heads. It requires help to be offered to deal with addictions or to help them find work. The policy is for everyone to have the option of a hostel place or temporary accommodation, though of course the authorities cannot make someone take up such an offer. If you do meet someone with no shelter to go to please tell them that the Council is there with ways to help.

Can we discuss the performance of the

Bank of England?

Media commentary on the outgoing Governor and the new Governor hit a new low. We were told of the rock star Governor leaving, with silly mildly abusive comments on the alleged personality of the incoming Governor. There was no critical commentary of the failings of current Bank policy, nor comment on the huge opportunities to change things for the better under new direction.

Governor Carney leaves an economy stalled, pursuing a uniquely tight money policy at a time when all the other main Central Banks are rightly fighting slowdown and recession with a range of monetary tools at their disposal. He has been besotted by Brexit to the point where he has not understood the forces at work on the UK, which are largely the same as anywhere else in a globalised world economy suffering from sluggish growth and mercifully low inflation in the advanced world. All the time he has been Governor we have been full members of the EU, just as he wanted .

When he first arrived he promised reform. He told us he was going to use forward guidance to give markets a clearer steer of where interest rates and monetary policy were going. The first two occasions when he guided people to expect a rate rise he did not follow through with one, and after the third warning of a rate rise after a gap he actually cut rates. It was difficult to see how any of this helped.

During the referendum he politicised the Bank by producing a series of very pessimistic short term forecasts of jobs, unemployment, output and house prices which only Remain could accept. They turned out to be very wrong as I and other Leavers forecast.

After the vote he did nothing. A few weeks later he decided to cut interest rates, relaunch Quantitative easing and make money available to the banks. This stimulated activity and inflation, and pushed the pound down a bit. From 2017 onwards he then changed tack, withdrew necessary facilities from the commercial banks, put through two rate rises and slowed the economy markedly until over the last three months there has been no growth at all. This was needless and predictable.

He could have shifted UK policy in late 2018 to promoting more growth and activity as the Fed did. He could have done so this autumn when the ECB did. Instead he ignored the obvious signs of global weakness and tightened controls over commercial bank lending. On his watch the repair of the commercial banks has been completed so they are now robust and able to withstand bigger external shocks. They now need an LTRO or funding for lending scheme to access money to lend on to businesses who wish to invest and to people who want to buy homes and cars.

What kind of Brexit?

To Brexiteers there is just one kind of Brexit – taking back control of our money, our borders, our laws and our trade policy. It is about independence. The Conservative Manifesto confirms all of that. That was why I did not need to add to it or amend during the election, as I was happy with the clear statement that we will indeed be taking back control.

Staying in the Customs Union, legislating to ensure our rules and laws stay in line with whatever the EU wants, being an external member of the single market and having to accept all their Directives are not Brexit. The EU has been masterful in extending its reach ostensibly in the name of trade into a dazzling array of other governmental and legal areas. We end up with freedom of movement, large tax impositions and detailed laws on everything in the name of the single market.

We wish to trade with the single market, as many other countries from around the world do everyday. They do so without accepting freedom of movement, or all the laws of the EU or without making budget contributions. They do so under WTO rules, which are superior even to EU laws, and are designed to facilitate trade between fellow members.

I do not like the Implementation period. I wanted us to leave in March 2019, and again in October 2019. Instead the Remain Parliament and Mrs May prevented us doing so. We have ended up with an unsatisfactory period when we still have to obey EU laws and pay large sums of money. The new Parliament which will vote through our exit by December 2020 will not vote for our immediate exit this coming January. We will have to accept the costly legacy of the last Parliament was expensive delay to our exit.

The government is being urged to make sure all legal requirements and financial obligations end when we leave next December. They have also been persuaded to put in a Sovereignty clause to protect us against abuse of EU power during the Implementation period. The Committee stage of the Bill will give the government opportunity to strengthen the position, and in so doing strengthen its bargaining hand for the Free Trade Agreement they seek in the discussions ahead with the EU. There is no need or desire to make further concessions on things like fish to secure a FTA.

Labour's choices

There seem to be two main strands in leadership proposals for Labour. The first is to go back to the damaging topic of Brexit which has splintered them so badly in the last three years, and to present a stronger Remain view. The second is to let the Conservatives deliver Brexit and concentrate instead on

the radical social and economic agenda. Neither of these offers an easy route back to popularity.

Many of us see the result of the referendum followed by two elections where pro Brexit parties have won as a clear indication of the country's view. We decided and we should get on with it. Trying to do at a later stage what the Lib Dems failed to do in the 2019 election seems foolish. Dressing it up as a second vote when they want to have a vote between two kinds of Remain will not convince the Brexit majority. It is also a short term policy. The next General election should take place long after we have left the EU.

Those who want to stress the domestic agenda and develop the work of Corbyn and McDonald are right to think forwards to a post Brexit world. They also need to ask themselves why was there so much hostility to their generous large offer of "free" services and nationalised businesses in 2019?

The voters in the North and Midlands they lost did not just switch because of Brexit, important though that was. They also felt Labour had forgotten the needs and views of the many aspirational families who are not well off but who look to government to offer a hand up not a hand out. Labour constantly spoke out for the tiny minority that sleep rough, or the minority that still cannot find a job rather than for the many who pay taxes to pay the state bills and who want more of their own money to spend. Labour also speak for the migrants still to arrive, which worries those facing housing shortages or low wages.

If Labour take away the conclusion that free hand outs and nationalisations are popular, so they need more of them, they may well lose again. Labour last won under Tony Blair, when he tacked a long way towards Conservatism at a time when the Conservatives had messed the economy up thanks to the European Exchange Rate Mechanism.