

Conservative voters and the Brexit party

I read that members of the Conservative party are being warned not to vote for the Brexit party and not to recommend others to vote for it. It is curious the party leadership feel they have to brief out this statement and only apply it to one particular possible choice of an alternative vote. It implies they do think a lot of former Conservative voters and Conservative party members are thinking of voting Brexit. I trust they are also against party members wandering off to vote Labour or Green.

My advice to the leadership is to tackle the reason why they have this fear. I would love to see the Conservative party take action to stop the Brexit party advance. The solution is easy. The Prime Minister should this week announce the cancellation of the Euro elections. She has always said she does not want to hold them, so abandon them. In accordance with the extension Agreement with the EU we can then leave the EU around the time of the Euro elections, with or without an Agreement. That would be a great announcement. The Brexit party would have to stand down its candidates and loses its purpose in life. The EU might then make us a better offer, faced with the reality we will leave anyway. The Conservatives would shoot up in the polls. We would fulfil our promise to leave by the end of May and put behind us the unfortunate and unwelcome delay.

If the PM and Cabinet remain wedded to holding Euro elections the way to get former Conservative voters back who have said they will now vote Brexit is to have a clear and credible European Manifesto statement of how we are going to get out soon. This has to handle the case of Parliament not signing the Withdrawal Agreement, three times rejected, as well as the government's preferred case.

Recent government announcements

I paused yesterday when I read the latest Ministerial announcements that were being out to the press, public and MPs.

The Home Secretary announces an additional £4m spending on anti slavery prospects. I am all in favour of the UK doing what it can to stop modern slavery. Good border controls into the UK would be an important part of achieving results. The strange thing about the announcement was the small sum involved, the lack of progress reports on what has been achieved with spending so far, and the absence of any measurable change he expects to come from the £4m being committed.

I always think it a bad idea for Ministers to put out that they are spending so much, or so much more, without saying what the money will buy, and how it compares with what is being spent up to that point. We were told in this latest announcement that the government has spent £200 m on anti slavery over an unspecified time period. What successes has that brought us in this important battle against criminal activity? Why will an extra £4m make a lot of difference? As one of the two projects is better care for victims in Nepal, what action is being taken to avoid future victims? The main issue is not so much the amount of money, but what the money buys and how successful our spending programmes are. Has the Home Secretary taken more action to prevent human trafficking into the UK? That would be an important contribution to ending modern world slavery.

The second announcement was even more curious. The government is spending £4m on new computer games. It will make cash available to help “the creators of Peaky Blinders and Wallace and Grommit” “develop new games based around their famous creations”. Why does it need government cash for such a commercial prospect? Is this a grant or gift, or does it buy taxpayers any equity in the project? Why on earth is the government involving itself in difficult commercial questions of which game will be better and more popular than other games?

Ministers should be more strategic, and should concentrate on spending money where only government can take the actions. When talking about spending they should be more interested in the output, the quality and efficiency of the spending, rather than just headlining the amounts being committed. In a £700 billion budget there are 175,000 £4m packages to talk about, too many for individual Ministerial attention.

Parliament turns to other matters

It was a welcome development this week that Parliament avoided more Groundhog day debates on Brexit. We all know each other’s positions and have heard the arguments regurgitated all too often. Instead we talked of social care and schools, amongst other matters.

There was considerable agreement from all parties in the Commons that social care and schools need more generous financial settlements. The topic of school funding was introduced by a Conservative MP and drew warm support from the Labour front bench as you might expect. The Labour debate on social care also saw Conservative MPs accepting the need for better settlements.

The odd thing about this Parliament is it does not marry its wish to spend more on certain public services with its approach to Brexit. A large majority of MPs on both sides accept the idea that the UK should pay at least £39bn to the EU. Indeed many seem to welcome this, with large payments over the next two years. It is as if the referendum had never happened. I seem to remember day after day debates in that campaign about just how much money we might

save, with everyone agreeing there would be large savings but disagreeing over whether to use the gross or net amounts. The public certainly got the idea and by a majority voted to spend the money at home, whether it was £10bn a year, £12 bn a year or more. Why is that so many MPs in this Parliament are so casual with money for Brussels, when they agree we need it for something else?

There is no legal clause in the Treaty requiring us to pay after we have left. The large sum in the Withdrawal Agreement is not nailed down in numbers and would doubtless be bigger than the Treasury £39bn estimate. The Treasury seems to want to pay the money and says we would need to anyway. It is particularly difficult to know why we would have to pay for the next two year's membership if we just left, when that was a big element in the £39bn! Labour came up with a bank tax to pay more to our schools. The Chancellor has collected more tax than he expected, so he could just provide a bit more cash for schools out of that. It would be far better to have a Brexit budget, boosting the UK economy with better funded public services and tax cuts, all paid for from saving all that money to the EU. The Schools Minister was left explaining he and his colleagues were going to put in a good bid for the Autumn Spending Review. By implication he too thinks there is a good case for bit more cash.

Undemocratic MPs who want to reverse the referendum

Take back control of our money, our laws and our borders. It was a straightforward and very popular proposal. It received more votes than any other idea or party in our democratic history.

More than 82% voted for candidates in the 2017 General election who promised to implement the result. So why are there now so many MPs who will do anything to delay, dilute or cancel Brexit? What part of Leave did they not understand? Why do they presume that they now know better than the voters, and know better than they did themselves when they were seeking votes two years ago?

The TIG s or Change UK have set themselves up as an MP group to help thwart Brexit in the Commons. The BBC gives them plenty of coverage as our national broadcaster panders to the views of a tiny party with MPs as they seem to like their anti Brexit stance. These MPs do not want a general election any time soon and refuse to put themselves up for by elections despite changing the party they were elected to be part of. They get on well together looking down on the majority who voted for Brexit.

You couldn't make it up that Change UK tells us the public do not trust current politics and want change. They are right. The public does want

change. The change the public wants is for MPs like them to keep to their election promises and to back Brexit. They say they want a new and better democracy yet they refuse to accept and implement the people's choice. They are the opposite of democrats. They spend most of their time trying to thwart the wishes of the electors. The advocates of a people's vote refuse to accept the verdict of the huge People's vote we did hold.

<https://johnredwoodsdiary.com/>

[My contribution to the Backbench Debate on a Motion relating to School Funding, 25 April 2019](#)

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): I represent parts of West Berkshire Council area and parts of Wokingham Borough Council area.

Both councils face exactly the same problems with schools. In both cases, we receive very low amounts per pupil compared with the national average. That means we cannot provide as varied and as richly resourced a curriculum as schools that are better endowed.

But the biggest problem we face today, which I hope the Minister and his colleagues will address urgently, is on High Needs. High Needs should be the area that we are keenest to help on. The pupils that require that special support need to be properly supported financially from the centre as well as well supported by the local professionals.

In the case of West Berkshire, I am advised there will be 9% more pupils needing that support this year and their budget only gone up by 0.5%. So, I ask the Minister, how does he think we manage to pay for all those extra pupils who need that extra support when the budget is so mealy set?

And in Wokingham, too, there is quite rapid growth in numbers requiring support and very little growth in the money being made available. Wokingham has the additional problem that because we are an extremely fast-growing part of the country, taking a very large number of new houses, we are way behind in putting in the necessary educational provision for special needs so that Wokingham now has to find facilities for a 119 special needs pupils outside the Borough because nobody has bothered to make the money available so that we can catch-up. It would be better, and probably better value as well, if more of that provision could be made locally close to where the children and their parents live and this is not an option given the delay.

I have raised with the Minister before the issue about general school's funding which has been made more difficult by the rapid growth in pupil numbers. I am pleased to say that we now do have a new secondary school and three new primary schools that have gone in relatively recently to catch-up with the backlog in the provision of places for this very fast-growing part of the country. But that creates its own financial problems which the Minister and his system does not recognise.

The first problem we have is there is delay in getting the money in for the new schools as the provision goes in so the budgets of the other schools are squeezed. The next thing that happens is that when we have last got, for example, our new secondary school it makes a lot of places available all in one go because it establishes itself with a certain capacity and then pupils are attracted to that school, perfectly reasonably, and are taken away from other schools and those other schools then face an immediate cut in the amount of money they have because suddenly they don't have the right number of pupils to sustain the budget. It will would take time to slim down their offer and sometimes it will be very painful and difficult to do. Again, the system is simply too inflexible to recognise this is a basic requirement of the system.

And, if it means we have a few more places to give parents more choice I think that is good, but I'm a realist, you have to pay for it Minister and we expect the Minister to do so representing a Government which says it believes in parental choice and believes in high standards for pupils going to state schools, something which the Minister and I entirely agree about.

If I ever am tempted in to give a talk or to visit an independent school if I go to the really well-endowed ones I just see a different world in terms of the library resources, the range of curriculum on offer, the sporting facilities and the support they get because money does buy you something better. I want the pupils that go to state schools in West Berkshire and Wokingham to have access to the best and we simply cannot do that on the current budget.

So, Minister, this Government should stop trying to £39 billion to the European Union to delay our exit for two to four years when the public voted to get out. Let's go hold of the money Minister. Let's put it where it matters, let's put it into social care, let's put it into schools, let's have some tax cuts for hard pressed families so they can provide more for their own children. That is what the public want. Get on with it Minister.