

My speech during the EU Exit Day Amendment debate, 27 March 2019

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): The mood outside the House is overwhelmingly that we should get on with it. The nation heard the Prime Minister and the Government promise on countless occasions that we would be leaving on 29 March 2019, with or without a deal. It is true that the Prime Minister always said that she wanted a deal and expected to get a deal, but she never ruled out leaving without a deal, and she was right not to do so. Indeed, for many months she used to say, "No deal is better than a bad deal," leaving open the possibility that what was on offer would be so bad that it would be better just to leave.

I am not someone who thinks that we should just leave. I think that we should leave with a series of deals, and I am pleased that the Government have put in place the essential deals that we need in order to leave. Of course we needed an aviation deal, a haulage deal, a Government procurement deal and all the rest of it, and those things have been sorted out, I am told, over the long two years and eight months that have elapsed since the original vote. I am also pleased that the Government, in parallel with constantly telling us that they would get an agreement and an agreement that we would like, continued their so-called no-deal planning, which, as I have said, is actually many-deal planning—that is, planning a series of lesser deals to ensure that things worked smoothly and that we were in a good position and had options.

Anna Soubry (Broxtowe) (Ind): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

John Redwood: I wish to develop my argument a little.

The Government put us in that position. What we have not heard, either from the Minister or, more importantly, from the Prime Minister, who is responsible for this, is the case for the delay that we are now being asked to approve in United Kingdom legislation. It seems to be mainly geared to the idea that the House will accept the withdrawal agreement after we should have left, rather than before we were going to leave, but we now learn that the deal that was actually offered did not allow the Government until May or early June to put the thing through. The EU was very tough on the Government, saying, "You must get the withdrawal agreement through before the official leaving date of 29 March, under the previous understanding," which leaves the Government with only a couple of days in which to do so.

The question to the Government must be, "Why has it taken so long to get this agreement into a shape that the House would pass, and why have you been so dilatory about presenting, or re-presenting the agreement?" or, even better, "Why did you not renegotiate it to get it into a form in which it might be worth considering again?" The question that you have rightly posed to the Government, Mr Speaker, is whether there is any point in constantly bringing the same thing back time and again when the answer continues to be negative.

The Government have not really explained today, in the context of their wish for a delay, why the outcome would suddenly be different after they have left it for so long and why they left it so long if it was so time-critical. They have had plenty of months between the original Chequers disaster, when they first adumbrated this policy and there were mass resignations from the Government and the Conservative party and today, when—many more resignations later—there is still a considerable reluctance on the part of sections of the governing party to vote for the withdrawal agreement.

I fear that I am not free to support this proposal. I do not think that a good case has been made for delay, and I do not think that the Government have made a case to the public for why we have to be let down when such a clear promise was embedded in the law—in the withdrawal Act that this Parliament passed. I suggest to the Government that they should think again about how they wish to use the time that they are trying to buy.

I have a lot of sympathy with my hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Sir William Cash) over the crowning irony of the position the Government have placed us in. They are claiming superior European law to do something the leave majority in this country does not want them to do, but they are not so sure of their legal ground that they want this House to actually endorse it, because they know otherwise there might be legal difficulties, but to do it on the very piece of legislation that is taking back control. It is almost unbelievable.

This House has rightly decided to back the vote of the British people and by a solemn statute say that we are taking back control and from the day that that comes into effect all laws and matters relating to Government and public business will be settled in this House of Commons and not by the EU. And we are now told that the Prime Minister can have a conversation in an evening Council meeting in Brussels and be pushed off her request and given something completely different from her request, and we are told that trumps anything the UK Parliament does. Well, if we wanted to sum up why 17.4 million people voted the way they did, we could not do better than take that example. We do not want this House sidelined or presumed upon; this House should decide when we leave the European Union and that should not have been settled in that way.

Those indicative votes

It was no surprise that there was no majority for any of the proposals put to the vote. That was highly likely and reminds us why Parliament works best when government proposes and Parliament approves or modifies.

Three of the options I supported were not put to the vote. One was a constitutional proposal to avoid this kind of Parliamentary chaos. The second was a set of proposals to ensure just leaving takes place with a range of

sensible agreements on things that need agreement. The third was a general proposal which had plenty of names on it to reaffirm Parliamentary support for leaving the EU, designed to get majority agreement by reminding most MPs they were elected to get us out. Nor was there any ability to vote for the comprehensive free trade proposal I and others have been putting to the government. One of the problems with not putting some first choice preferences to the first vote is it leaves MPs feeling unhappy that even their first vote had to be a compromise with what they really want.

It was another opportunity for Parliament to vote down the bad idea of a second referendum and to vote down yet again the idea of staying in the customs union. It is true Parliament also voted against No deal, but as the Prime Minister often reminds us the only way to leave avoiding no deal is to name a deal we want that the EU will grant. Once again Parliament failed that test. It is a pity Parliament was not allowed to highlight leaving with a range of deals without having to sign the Withdrawal Agreement, which could unite many voters if not MPs.

[Delay in Brexit](#)

Yesterday I and a few other MPs complained about the delay in Brexit and asked what it is for. Under the terms of the Statutory Instrument we now leave on 12 April unless the government has gained approval for the Withdrawal Agreement by Friday night. We are told the government may seek another debate and vote on it on Friday. I will post my speech in the debate later this morning.

[Contributions to this site](#)

There are too many long ones which I do not have time to check.

Given new laws pending from the EU over repeating other media items I will delete things that have long quotes or cross references to other sites as I have no wish to get entangled in any copyright issues.

Parliament today is in danger of losing control

The decision to have a series of indicative votes on certain backbench motions chosen by the Speaker may not produce the happy consensus its proponents wish. To many in the country it will look like a group of Remain voting MPs canvassing support for delay, dilution or cancellation of Brexit amongst themselves. MPs can vote for any number of the approved motions so the numbers will be quite difficult to interpret. Will any of the popular ones in Parliament be compatible with the Conservative or Labour Manifesto, with what the EU might accept, and with the overriding promise to implement the results of the referendum? If the options are mainly variants of staying in much of the EU, allowing MPs to vote for several of these options at the same time will give the impression of even more Parliamentary support for failing to implement Brexit.