

The Conservative Manifesto got it right in 2017, so the government should stick to it

I supported the Manifesto of 2017, as amended by the Prime Minister during the campaign. She rightly dropped the social care measures but kept the rest. On the EU the Manifesto made a lot of sense. It said

“As we leave the EU we will no longer be members of the single market or customs union

“We believe it is necessary to agree the terms of our future partnership alongside our withdrawal, reaching agreement on both within the 2 years allowed by Article 50 of the Treaty of European Union.

“We will not bring the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights into UK law.

“We continue to believe that No deal is better than a bad deal for the UK.”

It also confirmed that we will take back “control of our laws” and “We will control immigration”. “We will pursue free trade with European markets, and secure new free trade agreements with other countries”

It is difficult to see how an MP who supported this Manifesto can support the current Withdrawal Agreement. All MPs should remember the words of the government leaflet to all households before the referendum:

“This is your decision. We will implement what you decide”

A lack of ambition for Brexit

Listening to government Ministers presenting plans to ensure a smooth exit without signing the Withdrawal Agreement, I am struck by the lack of ambition and enthusiasm for Brexit. It is all presented in terms of damage limitation. Their wish is to ensure continuity. They exaggerate the worries and see none of the opportunities.

I am all in favour of Day One continuity of law, and voted for that in the EU Withdrawal Act. That should now all be behind us. There is no need for Parliament to make heavy weather of the Statutory Instrument changes, which are technical and not designed to change any policy or remove any legal protection. By now we should be debating the opportunities that running our own government and choosing our own laws can bring.

Lets take the case of medicines. The UK has a strong position in the global pharmaceutical sector. It accepted a European regulatory system whilst we

were in the EU, but has quite enough critical mass in medicines to be able to run our own well respected system as we used to. If we became a prime global regulator other countries would wish to use our system, and we could drive world standards forward. There is money to be earned out of being a centre of excellence for regulation and for research and production.

Lets look at the opportunity to rebuild our fishing industry, as long as we become an independent coastal state this year before more damage is done to our fishing grounds by a common policy which allows too many industrial trawlers from abroad to take fish from our seas.

Lets propose changes to tariffs and agricultural support that nurtures a larger home industry in temperate food, as we used to have before we joined the Common Agricultural Policy. There are too many food miles from the continent for products we could more easily grow for ourselves.

Lets look at how we could improve the data rules and regulations to foster more tec based new businesses in a variety of sectors.

Above all, lets spend some time debating how we wish to spend all the money we will save once we have left. This economy needs a boost from lower tax rates and from more being spent on some core public services. Brexit gives us the chance to do just that.

[UK citizens and terrorist organisations](#)

I attended the Home Secretary's statement about UK citizens seeking to return from Syria and other terrorist hotspots earlier this week. He made clear the government's displeasure that some UK citizens had left the UK to support or actively participate in terrorist movements. He reminded them that they chose to go to countries or territories where the UK warned they would have no Embassy or Consular support and where the UK state could not help them if they got into trouble.

He reminded us that he has powers to cancel a UK citizen's passport and citizenship if they are dual nationals who have joined terrorist organisations or murderous activities. If a person is only a UK national he cannot make them stateless, but if they wish to return to the UK they will face investigation and prosecution for crimes they may have committed during their period in support of terrorists. He can also impose restrictions on their passport and travel plans.

I asked him to tell me how the UK authorities will investigate and prosecute. So far it is a small proportion of returners from Syria that have been prosecuted. He agreed that it is not easy gathering evidence and sifting the

truthfulness of claims about what people may have done in a Syrian warzone. Given the mood in the Commons he was keen to say he would be investigating and seeking evidence, and could also legislate further where a sensible redefinition of the terrorist crime could help bring people to justice.

It is difficult to see how after the event the UK can satisfy itself about all the actions of citizens who deliberately put themselves in harms way and were probably on the side of a banned terrorist group that has threatened the UK as well as occupying parts of Syria. The government is working with allies we are told to try to collect more evidence as the conflict takes place, but this is still difficult where the UK is not involved on the ground in the war.

What do you think can and should be done? The UK state has every right to protect us from returners who have learned the crafts of terrorism and have ill intent towards us. It also needs to be fair to returners who were not terrorists and who may not harbour any evil towards us.

[Talks with Post Office management about Wokingham Post Office.](#)

Today I attended a meeting with Post Office Management organised by Wokingham Borough Council.

I explained to the Post Office that all three main parties represented at the Council, Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrats, were united in opposing the plan to close the existing Post Office counters. Our joint opposition reflected a substantial body of opinion in the Town that did not want to see the closure, and had been well represented in the Petition which they had seen. It was also clear from reports of the consultation held on Monday evening when I had to be voting in Parliament that the respondents were critical of the plan and wished to query the whole idea of closure.

I argued that Wokingham is a fast growing community, with considerable pressure on the existing counters at the Post Office. The present building would allow them to open further counters to deal with demand, whilst the proposal to have just 3 counters in WH Smith looks as if it threatens more queues and inadequate capacity. There are worries about access for pushchairs and wheelchairs through the Smiths store to get to the Post Office at the back.

When asked by the Post Office what new thing they could learn from the continuing consultation that might make a difference, I stressed the antipathy of their customer base to the proposal as well as the questions of access and the lack of ambition for the likely growth as housing numbers increase.

The consultation is still open, so all who want to try to get the Post Office to change its mind should write in.

Brexit talk and discussion

I will be talking about Brexit and listening to the points of view of others tomorrow at Three Mile Cross Church at 10.30 am