

Parliament and the people

Tomorrow Parliament has to decide whether it wishes to serve the people or defy them.

Parliament promised the electorate a referendum. It enacted one. It promised to enact the decision of the UK people. After much huffing and puffing it sent the Article 50 letter to leave the EU. After even more regrets and Parliamentary objections it passed the EU Withdrawal Act to confirm in UK law our departure on the 29 March 2019. If it wishes to serve the people it will now concentrate on making a success of our departure and do everything it can to use the new freedoms, money and controls we gain by exit.

Instead there are determined factions within Parliament who want to stop Brexit altogether, or who seek to delay or undermine it in the name of a having a so called soft Brexit, partial Brexit, late Brexit or half in half out Brexit. They have tried before to persuade the Parliament that we should stay in the Customs Union we voted to leave, and lost the votes. They have tried before to say we should stay in the single market or closely aligned to it though we voted to leave it, and again lost the votes. Both Remain and Leave made crystal clear in the referendum leaving the EU meant leaving both single market and customs union. The UK government sent a leaflet to every household telling us just that. The EU has always said that. The EU says you cannot cherry pick, you can't stay in the bits some like about the EU without accepting lots of rules, costs and laws you may not like.

The forces of Remain in the Commons now dare to say they are the defenders of Parliamentary democracy, by wanting further debate and more votes. The irony is crushing, as they only want more debates and more votes to stop us regaining control of our laws, our borders and and our money. They refuse to accept that their view has been given more than three years of air time in the referendum and in the endless repetitious debates they have required us to hold. It dominates the airwaves of the conventional media, where the Just Leave cause is given little time, always interrupted, and always bookended by "experts" saying we are wrong. A group of Remain MPs who spent our years in the EU telling us no one was interested in details of EU policy and did their best to stop Parliament talking about it now want to talk about nothing else. MPs who told us the EU had no significant powers over us now tell us what the EU does is wide ranging and crucial.

The public think it is time Parliament got on with it. The majority do not want Parliament to reverse its Brexit legislation and keep us in. The public have spoken. Parliament promised. Parliament must now let us leave. To do otherwise is to go to war with the people.

Fox Hill

This afternoon there was a meeting by worried residents about the possible naming of Fox Hill as a future development site. I checked that a local Councillor would be present to explain the long process the Council goes through before identifying possible new development locations as well as writing myself to one of the organisers about it.

The Council has a duty to consider sites proposed by landowners, developers and others, but it also has a duty to listen to the local community and to assess which of the possible sites are the best to meet housing targets that do least damage to the countryside, drainage system and environment. Any final decision on a site for inclusion needs to show how the development would fit in with local infrastructure and public service provision.

Anyone with views on this or any other piece of land should send their views to the Planning Department at Wokingham Borough Council. As MP I do not get a formal say or vote in these decisions, which are a matter within the power of the Council.

Questions for Remain

I am bored to tears with much of the conventional media, which simply recycle endless old Project Fear stories as if they were true, parades so called experts who always back Remain, and fail to ask any of these people the questions pro Leave would ask. The media interrupts and cross examines Leave supporters aggressively but rarely asks a difficult question of a Remain "expert" or supporter. So here's the sort of questions they should be asked, in the interests of balance.

1. Why do you want to give £39bn away to rich countries on the continent in return for 21 more months of talks with the EU?
2. Why do you think the EU will give us a good deal on a future relationship in 21 months of talks after March, when they have failed to offer anything in the 2 years 9 months before March?
3. Why will it be easier to get a good deal once we have given away the money than it is before we do so?
4. Why did Remain tell us that leaving the EU meant leaving the single market and customs union if you now say we could negotiate our way back in?
5. If you want to stay in either the single market or customs union what do you expect the EU to demand on freedom of movement, budget contributions and adherence to EU laws?
6. Why should there be any delays at UK ports where we import food and drugs, when the UK will be controlling the borders there and when

Customs and Excise have already said they can ensure a smooth incoming border?

7. Why didn't the UK economy collapse into recession and massive job losses as Remain and the government predicted for the first year after a Leave vote?
8. How would you afford the tax cuts and spending increases which Brexiteers plan from the big savings on the EU budget? Do you accept a Brexit bonus budget will boost the economy?
9. Would you like to see lower tariffs or no tariffs on tropical produce from emerging market poorer countries, as the UK can do that once out? Wouldn't removing all tariffs on imported components for manufacture be a great idea as well?
10. Wouldn't another 21 to 45 months of talks prolong the very business uncertainty you dislike and worry about?
11. What would you have said if Leave had refused to accept the 1975 referendum result and demanded a second referendum on the basis that Remain then lied by saying there would be no loss of sovereignty by joining the EEC/EU?
12. Why do you have such a low view of our country that you think we cannot govern ourselves?
13. Is there anything the EU has done that you think is wrong or damaging? If so why didn't you oppose or try to change it?

[Let me give a cheer for the Bank of England](#)

Regular readers will know I have been critical of the Bank for its tough squeeze on car loans and mortgages since March 2017. Some of you have written in to support the Bank, claiming with them that the build up of consumer debt and mortgages is worrying and they are right to rein it in.

So I was pleased to read the recent speech of the Deputy Governor Broadbent who has offered a more considered position by the Bank of England. They now acknowledge that there has been no worrying increase in consumer debt as reflected in credit card, overdraft and other borrowing. The main increase in consumer borrowing has occurred through an increase in student loans as more people graduate from universities under the loan system. As the Bank recognises, much of this debt will never be repaid, and it is more a state debt than a personal one as repayments are only made above certain income levels. It is more of a graduate tax on success. There has been a more modest rise in car loans, but as the Bank now accepts most of this is a kind of hire contract. There is no risk for the individual who would simply surrender the car. The individual does not own it. The Bank also accepts that the ratios and spread of these car loan hire contracts is sufficiently broad for there to be no great risk to the financing houses responsible.

I hope this more thorough analysis by the Bank will lead to a relaxation of policy on car hire contracts. I hasten to add I have no personal interest as I do not want one myself. There are however many people who would like to renew their car and buy a more fuel efficient and clean vehicle, currently restrained by the squeeze.

The Bank also points out that mortgage affordability is considerably above the levels that prevailed in the years before the banking crash. Whilst house prices are on average well up and a higher multiple of earnings than in the 1990s, the much lower interest rates means that mortgage outgoings are not up as a proportion of income on normal levels at the end of the last century. Again the Bank rightly confirms my view that there is no excessive mortgage debt problem out there.

Both our housing and our car market have been damaged by high and increased transaction taxes, by changes to other tax arrangements and by a credit squeeze. It is time to relax it a bit. I am glad I can now agree with the Bank's analysis, which seems thorough and convincing over this issue of debt.

Parliament and the Executive

For the Tuesday debate in accordance with the EU Withdrawal Act the government has tabled a neutral motion on our exit from the EU. The motion simply says Parliament has considered the matter of our withdrawal. Parliament after all has debated little else for the entire last two and a half years. It has also legislated twice to leave the EU on 29 March 2019. As I made clear to the Commons when we passed the EU Withdrawal Notification Act, that was the decision point. Parliament's wish to send the Article 50 letter should have been the end to the debate on the principle of leaving.

Some in Parliament have now decided they would like to move amendments to the government motion to undermine the legislation Parliament has put through to allow us to leave. It is true that passing a motion next week cannot of itself change the law, so unless the law is amended we will still leave. Some hope that if Parliament expresses a strong view that it has changed its mind it might get the government to think again. That would be unwise given the solemn promise made by Parliament and government that we would implement the decision of the referendum.

Some opponents of Brexit have therefore decided they wish to rewrite Parliamentary rules to try to legislate to stop Brexit against the wishes of the government. It has long been the practice agreed by all parties in government that government has three advantages over any other group in the House in order to allow it to govern. The first is that government leads over the choice of business in the Commons to allow it to get its legislative programme through. It still of course needs a majority for each proposal and may have to allow extensive debate and disagreement, often resulting in

compromises. It would not be easy or orderly for any group of MPs to propose a Bill and then to try to get it through against other groups competing for time and support. All governments have readily made time available for private members bills and for Opposition debates as part of the deal over cross party working.

The second is anything that requires taxes to be raised and public money to be spent should need Parliamentary consent based on a resolution put to the House by a Minister. The government has to take responsibility for the whole budget and needs to keep control of spending as best it can.

The third is where a power to be exercised is a so called prerogative or Crown power the PM and the government act for the Crown or seek the Crown's assent. Other groups of MPs cannot claim to act in the name of the Crown nor exercise any such powers. Government Ministers negotiate with foreign governments on behalf of the UK.

The wish of some to legislate to delay or prevent our exit from the EU comes up against all of these issues. The Cooper and Grieve amendments wish to alter the idea of government business motions, asserting that their proposed bills would take precedence over anything the government might wish to do, with guaranteed Parliamentary time. They argue wrongly that their bills do not have any financial implications so they do not need a Money resolution. They ignore the involvement of prerogative powers in negotiating and signing international treaties.

The government's strongest case in pushing back on these revolutionary constitutional proposals is that clearly any decision to extend our membership of the EU has substantial financial implications. Under the EU Withdrawal Act our payments to the EU cease on March 29 2019. The government has no power to authorise payments for contributions and programmes after that date. The so called £39bn of the Withdrawal Agreement would need new legislation to authorise it. All payments up to 29 March are legal under the European Communities Act, but this Act ceases to be on our Statute book after March 29th. Staying in for longer would doubtless be expensive and should need a government motion to approve the spending, with Treasury consent that it is affordable within the revised budget.

The government would also be right to warn that moving over to a new system of choosing how to spend Parliamentary time could make government very difficult. If a government cannot be sure of enough time to try to get its programme through it cannot govern effectively. Any government with a small majority will be especially at a disadvantage. Were this to be established as a new precedent then the next government with a decent majority would presumably legislate to stop Parliament having such extensive rights, and might make things less flexible and friendly to backbenchers and opposition than they are today under a settlement that has lasted for many years.

The government can also point out the EU has not offered us a few months delay on Article 50 and that would require negotiation with the EU over the terms. The EU would wish to negotiate with the government, not with a temporary alliance of MPs.