

Postings to this site

I have been extremely busy for the last two days with a lot of activity in the Commons and many votes to attend to.

I am currently unable to handle the volume of postings from some people, and the length of many postings. Where people have posted many and long postings I am deleting some to reduce the backlog. Some people do get away with a lot of short postings, because I moderate the short ones first. I do not delete based on whether they are pro or anti. I do delete posts that make unfair or unproven allegations against anyone, whatever their politics.

In the customs doldrums – again

The House of Commons keeps returning to the issue of customs. Yesterday the Opposition decided to spend virtually the whole day once again rehearsing the same old arguments.

Labour presented its latest version of its policy. Apparently they want to be in a customs union with the EU but not in The Customs Union the EU already has. They want a “strong single market deal based on shared regulations and shared institutions” which sounds much like staying in The single market, but assume “freedom of movement will end”. Gone are all the fine words of the Labour Manifesto setting out how the UK will have a distinctive independent trade policy after Brexit. It is difficult to see how this latest view would ever be negotiable with an Institution which has always said belonging to the customs union and single market comes with the four freedoms attached, including freedom of movement. It also requires payment of budget contributions and acceptance of the European Court’s supremacy. It also led to a massive Labour rebellion on one of the votes.

Why has Labour changed its stance from the General Election, which was to back Brexit and set out on an independent path? We were told yesterday again that they are worried that manufacturers running just in time systems in the UK will not be able to import parts from the continent if we leave. How bizarre! UK manufacturers runs complex supply chains with just in time deliveries at the moment using parts from outside the EU, and that works fine! The continental suppliers would have every incentive to carry on supplying in time, as their jobs and income depend on it. Why do Remain MPs now pretend we did not know we were voting to leave the single market and customs union, when both official campaigns in the referendum told us just that and actually agreed on this point!

Meanwhile the government seeks to negotiate smooth border arrangements and sensible customs arrangements. It would be a good idea for the UK to offer

tariff free trade and see if the EU does want that or not. Some wrongly say they have not yet invented the computer systems to handle customs charges without stopping trucks at borders and working it out on a calculator there and then. They need to go and visit a large trucking firm and see that there are already smooth ways of paying customs dues on line with electronic filings which we and the rest of the EU use for the non EU trade which does attract customs dues.

Walk outs from Parliament over the EU

The SNP walk out today over an EU debate reminded some MPs of the previous walk out by Nick Clegg for the Liberal Democrats in February 2008. Then Speaker Martin refused to allow debate on one of their amendments which wanted an In/Out referendum on the EU. As Nick Clegg said "It is time to give the British people a real referendum on Britain's membership of the European Union" . That idea did not go too well for him or his party. I still treasure the yellow leaflet they sent out telling me it was vital the "British people have a say in a real referendum".

Remaining contradictions about Parliamentary sovereignty

I believe in Parliamentary sovereignty, subject to the ultimate sovereignty of the British people. In recent debates some have sought to suggest that those who favour Brexit, who made the case for restoring the sovereignty of the British people and their Parliament, now no longer reflect this view because we wish to limit Parliament's role in the Brexit process.

Nothing could be further from the truth. Parliament reasserted its sovereignty vis a vis the EU by offering UK voters a vote on whether to stay or to leave the EU. The government on behalf of Parliament made it clear in a leaflet to all voting households that we the people would make the decision. When we leave the EU Parliament will once again be able to exercise the people's sovereignty over all government issues, freed of the ultimate jurisdiction of the European Court and the EU Council.

When the voters made a decision which a majority of MPs did not agree with Parliament had to make a choice. Should it honour its promise to the British people, or should it seek to overturn the decision of the people? Wisely Parliament decided to implement the wishes of the people by voting strongly

in favour of sending the Article 50 letter notifying the EU of our intention to leave on 29 March 2019 in accordance with treaty law. In a General election voters reaffirmed their view on the EU by voting overwhelmingly for the two main parties who both promised Brexit and rejecting the main party that offered a second referendum or a stay in option. The Commons followed up by approving the EU Withdrawal Bill.

Some in Parliament seem to think Parliament can keep on changing its mind on this matter. They seek a further Parliamentary vote with the intent of overturning the decision of the British people and contradicting all the previous votes in Parliament on this topic. I urge Parliament not to do this. It would be difficult for the world to take the UK seriously if its Parliament kept changing its mind about whether to leave or remain in the EU. It is difficult to see why Parliament rightly thought it should honour its promise to voters in 2017, only to alter course in 2018. If after filing to leave and undertaking negotiations over the process of leaving the UK announced it wished to reverse this process, the EU would be entitled to be difficult insisting we stick to our Article 50 letter or they could demand a high price for agreement to rejoin. It would also drive a mighty new wedge between people and Parliament with people angry that their wishes had been ignored.

[The collapse of the Venezuelan model and the damage done by nationalisation](#)

There are today 79,900 Venezuelan bolivars to one dollar, compared with 10 last year according to the official rate. No-one can be sure how big the drop has been in national income and output because the government no longer produces figures. There are shortages of many basic items in the shops. An authoritarian government distributes items to those it favours and damages the right to vote for change. What we do know is that thanks to nationalisation, the Venezuelan oil industry has fallen on very hard times.

Venezuela has the largest known oil reserves of any country in the world. Before Chavez took power, Venezuela produced and sold 3.5 m barrels a day. This was modest output compared to the USA or Saudi at around 12 m barrels a day, and eminently sustainable. Under sensible management with private sector expertise, technology and investment it would have been possible to expand output substantially and add to state revenues. Instead today Venezuela struggles to produce just 1.5m barrels.

This came about by forcing oil companies that were producing good quantities for Venezuela into accepting very poor joint ventures with the state, or appropriating their assets. The people who knew how to run the enterprises were replaced. The state overtaxed the exports, leaving the nationalised

industry short of cash to maintain and modernise its production assets and to keep its fleet of tankers for export up to international standards. The nationalisation was meant to give the government full control to allow it to perform better and more in the interests of the state. Instead it has led to a sharp drop in output, in state revenues and exports. This is particularly worrying for the country as it is chronically dependent on oil exports for its failing balance of payments, and on oil revenues to meet the costs of government.