

This is no deal – this is just a very bad Withdrawal Agreement to make us pay and bind us in

So the Cabinet took much longer to discuss the deal than the PM wanted. The news conference was cancelled and the statement at 5pm happened more than two hours late. The awaiting EU Ambassadors in Brussels lined up to welcome the Cabinet decision were stood down. Maybe a dozen Cabinet members expressed grave misgivings about the deal and whether it could be sold to Parliament and the public. The Prime Minister had to say it was the collective view of Cabinet to press on, unable to say it was the unanimous or united view.

The Parliamentary arithmetic is clear. The Withdrawal Agreement could only pass into law if Labour wish that to happen. If they oppose as they say they will, there will be the DUP, and around 100 Conservative MPs unlikely to vote for it. Of the Conservatives 51 are Eurosceptics who have made public promises to oppose against a 3 line whip, and around 12 Remain Conservatives also likely to be against. Labour has said it does see it as a good deal worthy of support.

The legal position is also clear. A motion of the House could not strike down legislation. Parliament has already legislated to leave on 29 March 2019. It would require new legislation to amend and repeal the EU Withdrawal Notification Act and the EU Withdrawal Act to stop us leaving next March.

There are four main arguments against the Withdrawal Agreement. It is far too dear, buying us nothing for the money. It binds us back into the customs union and single market we promised to leave, with no guarantee we can get out again. It damages the Union by treating Northern Ireland differently, leading to demands for Scotland also to have different treatment. It stops us negotiating new trade treaties with the rest of the world. I will comment in more detail on the text in due course when we have completed analysis of it, but the main outlines of the so called deal are clear. This is not a deal – it is a Withdrawal Agreement which keeps us in and costs us a fortune.