

The Conservative leadership election.



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As I expected there was Boris and the rest. I voted for Boris as I agreed with his clear statements that we have to leave by October 31st, and that failure to quit would be deeply damaging to our democracy and to the Conservative party. Next week will be about deciding who should go forward to challenge Boris, who commanded enough votes in the first round to secure one of the last two places, assuming all his voters stick with him which is likely.

It is difficult to see Rory Stewart, Matt Hancock or Sajid Javid staying in contention. Dom Raab's votes are likely to drift away to Boris as the Get out candidate who can win. I expect Jeremy Hunt will extend his lead over Michael Gove and stay in second place. Michael Gove is trying to sell himself as another Leave candidate, but he was one of the most insistent advocates of the Withdrawal Treaty which was the opposite of leaving, and now says if necessary we should delay our exit beyond October 31. None of the candidates who rule out No deal Brexit have explained why the EU should negotiate a revised Withdrawal treaty, nor how they could negotiate anything without the leverage of just going if necessary.

The BBC takes free tv licences away from older pensioners

The BBC pocketed the higher licence fee but has now gone back of the idea that they should finance the free tv licences for the over 75s.

Should the government now decriminalise payment of the licence fee? Should it review BBC funding and spending to see why the BBC cannot afford to meet its obligations to pensioners?

Parliament makes a sensible decision at last on Brexit

Yesterday the combined forces of the Opposition parties united to try to hijack the business of the House in the future to delay or prevent our exit and to ban a so called No deal exit. By 309 votes to 298 votes this proposal was defeated. They wanted time to legislate to stop Brexit or to prevent the government counting the clock down to our exit on 31 October without allowing the Parliament yet another say on the Brexit options.

It is traditional for governments to control the business of the House. If a majority builds up in the House against what they are doing then the opposition forces have the right to table and vote on a motion of No confidence. If the Opposition wins that motion it ends the government's tenure. The Opposition is not afforded the right to have Parliamentary time to have its own alternative programme of new legislation or its own alternative foreign policy . As it does not enjoy a majority there would be no point in allowing this. It enjoys plenty of time to question, criticise, debate and comment on the government's approach which is its role. The Opposition is free to table any amendments it likes to government legislation, and free to try to persuade government MPs to join them in amending or opposing it.

The last time the Opposition tried a hijack to secure legislation it was to ask the government to seek a delay to our exit. As it happened Mrs May wanted to seek a delay anyway, so when the vote was won by just one vote it did not change anything as the government wanted to ask for a later exit date. As they found when trying to legislate then, all Parliament could try to do was to bind the hand of the UK government. They could not legislate to require a delay because that also required to consent of the EU.

It is good news that this time Parliament recoiled from allowing those MPs most hostile to our exit from the EU to take control of the Order paper. If they did so they would undermine the UK's negotiating position further, humiliate our country again internationally, and thwart the clear wishes of the British people by refusing to implement the Brexit we voted for.

Thanks to the IEA for a good event last night

The IEA had 100 acceptances for a full house last night to discuss my book "We don't believe you". (The book is available on Amazon) The questions went on for almost two hours . We discussed everything from the collapse of

traditional political parties to Brexit, from the Trump phenomenon to austerity economics, from the middle Eastern wars to the distrust in the media. I will draw on parts of the discussion in blogs to come.

Don't forget the middle

Labour claims to stand up for the poor, the dispossessed, the unemployed and the unfortunate. The Conservatives seek to show that many Labour policies would in practice damage them, as they would damage the economy as they memorably did in 1975-9, and in 2007-9. Fewer jobs, less growth and more unemployment as they produced do not cut poverty. Conservatives have sought to show that they too want to help those most in need, promoting work whilst supporting welfare. In government Conservatives have pursued higher minimum wages, less tax on those on lowest incomes and a range of other measures. In the leadership election there are furious bids by various candidates to set out what more can be done for the poorest in our community.

Amidst all this politics someone needs to stand up for the many who are not on higher incomes but who earn enough to get little or no benefit help and who have to pay substantial tax bills. Mrs May seemed to understand this in her early comments as PM about the "just managing", though there was a danger this language was a bit patronising and downbeat. What we need is a vision of how the many who work to provide for themselves and their families can aspire to higher incomes and better lifestyles feeling the government is on their side rather than seeing them as an audience to tax and regulate in pursuit of wider social goals.

I want the next government to take the taxes off aspiration. Why do we face such high taxes on buying a better home or on moving to a different location? Why do we have to pay such large taxes if we want to buy a new or better car? Why does the government charge VAT on various home improvements? Why does the government want to reduce the number of people working for themselves by claiming they are not truly self employed for tax reasons?

There are limited ways out of low income and no assets. To do it people usually have to buy a home of their own and spend time and money on improvement. The range of tv programmes about moving and home improvement point to the interest in this opportunity. People do need to keep a decent proportion of their work income, to reach the point where they can afford to save. Building your own business is one route to a better lifestyle with assets in your business. It should be feasible for the average person, not needing super human skills to run the gauntlet of regulatory compliance and tax challenge.

I would like the next government to make it easier for people with aspirations to achieve their aims, and for more of the freedoms and lifestyles of the better off to be available for the many. Instead of

government seeking to regulate our conduct more and tax success wherever it finds it as if it were a problem, I want a government that rewards those who want to do more for themselves and their families, and who given the chance will do the right thing.