

My speech on the European Union (Withdrawal) (No. 5) Bill

edited speech

Many people outside this House are losing confidence and trust in us and our proceedings. Tonight is another plunge in how they see us, because we are behaving collectively so badly. My right hon. and hon. Friends who have complained about the lack of time for debating both the Bill and the amendments are quite right. This is a serious constitutional matter. We have not been given time to construct proper amendments and there is no time in this brief hour to do justice to the complex issues raised by the Lords amendments. We had but a short debate on the original consideration of the Bill, when I was able to set out some of the constitutional difficulties involved in groups of MPs seizing the agenda and taking over money resolution and Crown prerogative matters. We are not allowed proper time tonight to consider exactly how all that fits with this Bill.

What we do know, however, is that the very slim majority who have got the Bill this far through this House intend to go against the clearly expressed wishes of the British people in the referendum. All those who voted to leave, two years and nine months ago, had every reason to suppose that all Labour and Conservative Members elected on their 2017 manifestos would see through our exit in a timely way. They should also have expected that from the promises made by both the leave and the remain campaigns in the referendum, the legislation put through in granting that referendum, and the clear statement of the Government at the time, who said that we would implement the wishes of the British people. The Opposition did not dissent from that particular view when the Government put out their leaflet. Indeed, during the remain campaign many Labour MPs endorsed the Government. That is why tonight is another sad night. This Parliament is breaking its word, breaking its promises and letting down 17.4 million voters, but it is also letting down quite a lot of remain voters.

A lot of remain voters are good democrats who fully accept the verdict of the British people. Quite a lot of people in our country were only just remain voters or only just leave voters and are prepared to live with the judgment of the majority. They too are scandalised that this Parliament is insisting on a second needless delay when we have had two years and nine months to prepare for exit and when our Government assure us that they are fully prepared for exiting without signing the withdrawal agreement.

I find it very odd that Members of this House think that the withdrawal agreement is, in itself, Brexit or in any way helps Brexit. The withdrawal agreement is a massively long delay to our exit, with the added problem, which the Opposition have rightly identified, that it entails signing up to a solemn and binding international treaty to undermine our bargaining position in the second part of the negotiations envisaged by the EU's process.

Sir William Cash (Stone) (Con): My right hon. Friend is making an extremely good speech. Is he aware that, as I have been informed today, the withdrawal agreement and implementation Bill, which is supposed to put this appalling withdrawal agreement into domestic law, is around 120 pages long? That is what we are heading for in the next couple of weeks.

John Redwood My hon. Friend is right. The nature of that solemn and binding treaty will be to lock us in, for 21 or 45 months, to every feature of the European Union without representation, vote or voice. It might mean that we end up in large sections of it—the customs union and single market alignment—in perpetuity, thanks to the Irish backstop.

It is a massive delay, and I say to my hon. and right hon. Friends on the Front Bench that, if they are offering the public either a guaranteed delay under the withdrawal agreement or a shorter delay that they wish to negotiate, a lot of leave voters would rather have the shorter delay. All of us leave voters do not want any delay at all. That is why people will be scandalised by what this House is rushing through again this evening.

The shortage of time is completely scandalous. This is a massive issue that has gripped the nation for many months. It dominates the news media, it sucks the life out of this House on every other issue and now, when we come to this big crunch event and when leave had been led to believe that we would be leaving the European Union without an agreement if necessary, they are told at the last minute, for the second time, that all their hopes for their democratic outcome will be dashed again. This Parliament does that with grave danger to its reputation.

I urge all those who wish to get this lightning legislation through again to ask themselves what they are going to say to all their leave voters, and what they are going to say to their remain voters who are also democrats and who join leave voters in saying, "Get on with it. Get it over with. Why do we have to sit through month after month of the same people making the same points that they put to a referendum and lost?"

This Parliament needs to wake up and get real. It needs to move on. It needs to rise to the nation's requirements and deal with the nation's other business, and it needs to accept that this was decided by the public. It is our duty to implement it. Leaving without this agreement is going to be just fine. We are prepared for it. Business is ready for it. Business has spent money. Business has done whatever it needed to do and, in many cases, feels very let down that it is not able to use all its contingencies, on which it has spent good money.

I would say this to all Labour MPs, particularly those with a majority of leave voters in their constituency: understand the damage you are doing, understand the damage you are doing to this institution, understand the damage you are doing to our democracy and vote for us to leave the European Union.

Who now doubts the power of the EU?

Before the referendum pro Remain commentators and MPs delighted in telling us we were a free and independent country whilst still in the EU. They explained that the EU did not have much power over us, just a few necessary details to allow trade to take place. Since we voted to leave some of these same people have explained how crucial EU laws and controls are, and how they penetrate most features of our public life and law codes. They now claim the control is so wide ranging we cannot live successfully without it.

The supremacy of EU law over domestic law has been at the centre of recent disputes over the matter of delaying our exit. The Prime Minister requested a delay of Brussels at the last Council. She wanted to leave on 30 June. The EU Council instead gave her the ultimatum of a delay until April 12th, unless she could carry the Withdrawal Agreement which could hold up our departure until May 22nd. These different delays had not been agreed by Parliament or even explained to Parliament. As soon as the PM said Yes to the Council we were told they were good EU law which trumped all that Parliament had enacted to get us out on 29 March. After a legal wrangle the government decided to put it beyond doubt by legislating in the UK as well, whilst claiming the supremacy of EU law.

The upcoming Council on Wednesday raises the same difficult issue again. The Prime Minister is requesting a delay until June 30th for a second time. If the EU grants it she will tell Parliament we have to put up with it whether we like it or not. Treaty law is superior to UK law, and apparently a mere written statement by the EU Council can flex this Treaty.

The question is how will the EU want to respond this time to a request for yet more delay? The EU minus the UK has big plans to press on with greater political, monetary and economic integration. Many of its members will be pleased to see the end of UK resistance to these centralising plans, as the UK has for years been trying to slow down the movement to greater integration. France may be tempted to get rid of the UK more quickly so she can press Germany harder for a closer union. Germany may be more attracted to delay so the UK has to pay in money for longer which helps Germany most as the biggest paymaster, and dilutes French and other centralising influences as well.

What will be clear is that once again our future will be settled by the rest of the EU, probably under the influence of Germany and France. They will decide whether the UK can delay, and if so on what terms. They after all have encouraged the Commission to settle the penal terms for long delay that are represented in the Withdrawal Agreement at great cost to the UK. The UK public has been too wise to fall for that so the EU does need to think again. The UK government is humiliating our country by putting us through this repeated begging to the European Council.

Issues from the doorsteps

On Saturday in Shinfield the main preoccupations understandably were the pace and scale of new development and the impact this was having on the road network and other public services.

I have offered to work with the Council who say they want to scale back future development rates as they come to revise the current local plan. It is also important to ensure there are enough school places and surgery capacity for the newcomers as well as for the settled community, and for the Council to regulate roadworks to keep traffic flowing.

My letter to the Financial Secretary about the Loan Charge

I have written to the Financial Secretary on behalf a number of my constituents who have asked for a six month suspension of the Loan Charge until a full review is conducted. They would like the review to assess the full impact this may have on individuals in respect of loan arrangements when a proper declaration of affairs was made at the time and the Treasury did not then think tax was owing. I will post his reply when I receive it.

The Rt Hon Mel Stride MP
Financial Secretary
HM Treasury
1 Horse Guards Road
London SW1A 2HQ

5 April 2019

Dear Mel

I am writing to you on behalf of a number of my constituents.

They would like a six-month suspension to the introduction of the Loan Charge until a full review is conducted. They would like the review to assess the full impact this may have individuals in respect of loan arrangements they declared at the time and believed to be legal.

My constituents think it is entirely unreasonable for the Treasury to require payment of tax for many years ago when a proper declaration of affairs was made at the time and the Treasury did not then think tax was owing. It also

seems wrong that interest will be charged on top of these payments. People naturally plan their lives and spending around their net income, and do not expect retrospective tax bills many years after the event.

I trust such a review will pay due attention to the cases of people who did declare what they were doing and who relied on the then tax assessment as further proof that their arrangement was legal.

I would appreciate your comments.

Yours ever

Just Leave

When I fought the last election as a Conservative candidate I believed in the words of our Manifesto, echoed by our Leader. We said we would leave the EU 2 years after sending the notification letter. We said No Deal is better than a bad deal. We said we would leave the single market and customs union. We set out a new UK trade policy. We pledged to take back control of our borders, our laws and our money.

Now the Prime Minister tells us we can either support a Withdrawal Agreement which does none of these things for at least 21 months or maybe for 45 months, or support a delay which puts off all these things. Indeed, there is little difference between the two options, save that the Withdrawal Agreement makes the delay a minimum of 21 months and takes away much of our bargaining position as we try to negotiate a future partnership and some kind of exit from a position of weakness. The Irish backstop is but one of the dreadful features of the Agreement. It means we might never get out of the customs Union or shake off alignment with all the laws they deem to be related to the single market. There are clearly those in government who have wanted to stay in the customs union and much of the single market all along, and have been looking for ways to achieve this.

I do not agree with being faced with this pair of options which offers no real choice. I have no wish to tear up the promises I made along with the national party in 2017. I think we should try harder to implement what we promised. The way to do so is as I have often set out, to leave on April 12th (needlessly delayed from March 29th), and aim to initiate trade talks with the EU as we exit. There is a big backlash from party members and Conservative voters to what the Prime Minister is trying to do. The country has decided by a large margin according to the polls that the Withdrawal Agreement is a bad Treaty to enter. Far from allowing us to sort out Brexit after signing, it would lock us into massively expensive financial and legislative commitments and prejudices our future badly.

The government needs to keep its word. From day to day now we do not know

what the government is going to say next, nor who in the government is going to push a different line from the Prime Minister. We wait to see what more of our election promises are discarded by the Cabinet. We are on running 3 line whips all this week including Friday in case the government wants to do something. It is clearly making it up as it goes along, and failing to tell the MPs who are meant to support it what the government wants or why. I am all for going to Parliament to do good things for our constituents, but so far there are general debates on Wednesday and Thursday. As there are no votes on those two days in the current business and nothing to do on Friday why the 3 line whip? If you want to get MPs to respect the whip more, it has to be applied for good reason.