

UK citizens and terrorist organisations

I attended the Home Secretary's statement about UK citizens seeking to return from Syria and other terrorist hotspots earlier this week. He made clear the government's displeasure that some UK citizens had left the UK to support or actively participate in terrorist movements. He reminded them that they chose to go to countries or territories where the UK warned they would have no Embassy or Consular support and where the UK state could not help them if they got into trouble.

He reminded us that he has powers to cancel a UK citizen's passport and citizenship if they are dual nationals who have joined terrorist organisations or murderous activities. If a person is only a UK national he cannot make them stateless, but if they wish to return to the UK they will face investigation and prosecution for crimes they may have committed during their period in support of terrorists. He can also impose restrictions on their passport and travel plans.

I asked him to tell me how the UK authorities will investigate and prosecute. So far it is a small proportion of returners from Syria that have been prosecuted. He agreed that it is not easy gathering evidence and sifting the truthfulness of claims about what people may have done in a Syrian warzone. Given the mood in the Commons he was keen to say he would be investigating and seeking evidence, and could also legislate further where a sensible redefinition of the terrorist crime could help bring people to justice.

It is difficult to see how after the event the UK can satisfy itself about all the actions of citizens who deliberately put themselves in harms way and were probably on the side of a banned terrorist group that has threatened the UK as well as occupying parts of Syria. The government is working with allies we are told to try to collect more evidence as the conflict takes place, but this is still difficult where the UK is not involved on the ground in the war.

What do you think can and should be done? The UK state has every right to protect us from returners who have learned the crafts of terrorism and have ill intent towards us. It also needs to be fair to returners who were not terrorists and who may not harbour any evil towards us.

Talks with Post Office management

about Wokingham Post Office.

Today I attended a meeting with Post Office Management organised by Wokingham Borough Council.

I explained to the Post Office that all three main parties represented at the Council, Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrats, were united in opposing the plan to close the existing Post Office counters. Our joint opposition reflected a substantial body of opinion in the Town that did not want to see the closure, and had been well represented in the Petition which they had seen. It was also clear from reports of the consultation held on Monday evening when I had to be voting in Parliament that the respondents were critical of the plan and wished to query the whole idea of closure.

I argued that Wokingham is a fast growing community, with considerable pressure on the existing counters at the Post Office. The present building would allow them to open further counters to deal with demand, whilst the proposal to have just 3 counters in WH Smith looks as if it threatens more queues and inadequate capacity. There are worries about access for pushchairs and wheelchairs through the Smiths store to get to the Post Office at the back.

When asked by the Post Office what new thing they could learn from the continuing consultation that might make a difference, I stressed the antipathy of their customer base to the proposal as well as the questions of access and the lack of ambition for the likely growth as housing numbers increase.

The consultation is still open, so all who want to try to get the Post Office to change its mind should write in.

Brexit talk and discussion

I will be talking about Brexit and listening to the points of view of others tomorrow at Three Mile Cross Church at 10.30 am

The undemocratic few in Independent

Labour

The MPs that are defecting to the Independent group do not get on well with democracy. They all dislike the result of the People's vote in 2016. They now wish to change their views on big issues, compared to the Labour and Conservative Manifesto platforms they stood on in 2017. If they are keen on democracy and a People's vote, they should offer themselves for election in a series of by elections soon.

An MP who changes party allegiance is not obliged to resign to create a by election. Indeed, if an MP resigns from his or her party to be independent because he or she thinks their party is failing to carry out promises they jointly made at the last election there is not even a moral pressure to hold a by election. But if an MP wishes to change party, or to be a so called independent on a very different platform to the one they stood on for their original party, there is plenty of moral pressure to ask the electors their view.

When Douglas Carswell and Mark Reckless decided the Conservatives were not Eurosceptic enough they resigned to join UKIP. They did the decent thing, stood in by elections and won. It did not work out well for them personally, on the assumption they would have liked to carry on in Parliament. Mark lost his seat in the following General election, whilst Douglas ended up in substantial disagreement with the Leader of UKIP and also ceased to be an MP.

The media seem to think the Independent group will morph into a new party. As it does so there will be more pressure on its members to answer why they do not submit themselves to an electoral test of what they are doing. This is particularly apposite given the belief of many of them that the public should be offered another vote on the issue of the EU. Wasn't the 2017 General election another vote on the EU? I remember the election being dominated by the Brexit issue. 82% of the public voted for the two main parties who both said they would implement the result of the referendum. The Lib Dems made the case for a second referendum and slumped to 10% support.

I would be interested in what name you think would be most appropriate for this new grouping? Would it be unkind to suggest the We know better than the voters party, or perhaps the Not the Labour party.

**My intervention during the debate on
Exiting the European Union**

(Aquaculture), 20 February 2019

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): I seek to clarify my earlier question, which did not seem to get through. Is the Department working on a better regime for fishing in general, and for fish health in particular, for once we have left? This is a great opportunity, and fishing is an area that has been very badly damaged by EU membership.

The Minister of State (Mr George Eustice): My right hon. Friend will be aware that the purpose of these regulations is to ensure that we have an operable law book on day one after leaving the European Union, but he will also be aware that, separately, the Fisheries Bill is going through the House—it has completed its Committee stage and will return shortly on Report.

I can confirm that the Bill has a dedicated provision that gives the Government power to legislate in the area of fish health in particular so we can improve on the current regime and make any necessary changes. These regulations are simply about ensuring we make retained EU law operable, and I commend them to the House.