

No deal is better than a bad deal

Those simple eight words mean the UK has a good negotiating position when it comes to sorting out our future relationship with the EU. Without them the UK would be in a very weak position.

There are those in the EU who talk darkly of a punishment deal, seeking to make the UK pay for daring to leave. There are those who want to send us a large bill with no legal backing to it and expect the UK to pay. There are those who think it a clever idea to volunteer continental farm products up for high WTO tariffs in order to make a political point. That is why the UK has to make it clear we will not accept any such deal.

None of this means the UK negotiators should walk out in a huff at the first available opportunity if the EU's demands are silly. There is still a good prospect of reaching sensible conclusions. The UK intends to take back control of our borders, money and laws. It is happy to have extensive agreements on free trade, security sharing, academic collaborations, transport rights and the rest. We are leaving the EU's legal structures, single currency and budget, not leaving Europe. It will require a combination of friendly patience, stressing the advantages of many collaborations, and unbending clarity that we are taking back control of our laws, our money and our borders.

It is clear that many on the continent do wish to keep tariff free access to our lucrative market. It is obvious they like sharing security and Intelligence with us. The only way to get a good outcome for both sides is for the UK government to repeat that it makes no sense for us to take a bad deal. Nor would that in practice help them. It's a pity the other main parties contesting the General Election do not recognise this simple truth. If they understood negotiating they would also say with Mrs May , "No deal is better than a bad deal."

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The A329M and the M4

The decision of Highways England to alter the slip road access at the A329M and M4 junction has caused difficulties for those travelling on the A 329 M. I have been seeking a remedy ever since I first saw the plans, which decided to halve the road capacity on the A 329 M for through traffic in order to relieve pressure and back up on the M 4.

I was told that traffic models showed one lane was sufficient for the A 329 M

, and one dedicated lane for merging M 4 traffic would help the flow off the M 4. That did not seem likely to me. It hasn't worked out like that.

They did agree to undertake a study to see why people have been unhappy about the results of their works. As I expected this study has concluded that there is increased congestion on the A329 M following the works on the junction. They then seek to blame driver behaviour and look for solutions that will guide or direct drivers to get it to work. The truth is driver behaviour has been affected by the changes made to the road layout. Drivers do cut across from the M4 slip onto the fast lane of the A 329 M which is the single through lane because they see they have to merge with other cars on the slip. Cars have to pull out of the slow lane into the fast lane on the A 329 M because their lane disappears altogether. This can cause difficulties.

There may be modest improvements to be had from clearer signs and road markings to control where cars can switch lanes, but the real need is for more capacity which I will continue to press for.

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Enterprise for everyone

Time was when your late or cancelled train, your high energy bill, your rationed water or your delayed phone line was the direct result of nationalised industries. Privatisation especially when it involved competition offered more choice, better quality and lower prices. After privatisation electricity and gas prices fell in the early years of the policy. Water was available all summer without hosepipe bans. The long post war decline in rail travel ended and passenger numbers and journeys started to increase. Competition in phones meant instead access to telephony for those who wanted it, rather than a long delay for the state company to put a line in or requiring you to have a line shared with the neighbours.

Today when things go wrong or prices go up in several of these areas it is the result of actions by privatised companies as the public see it. This is not always true. The bulk of rail assets are nationalised, with public ownership of all track, signals and stations. So one if there is a delay or cancellation it is owing to signal failures, overhead track power systems, or physical problems with track and points. It is true Southern Rail has let commuters down and that it is a private company. The granting of near monopoly rights for train services is not ideal, but the franchise can be taken back, or the operator may lose it for poor performance when it comes up for rebidding. Energy prices may also be the result of EU renewables and energy policy, not the result of a company trying to up its margins.

Today people have issues with some large private sector companies. The

popular enthusiasm for new social media, new mobile phones and modern computing is obvious from the fast growth rates of these businesses. There is also some disquiet about the power and governance of some large corporations. Large banks have been hauled before courts and Regulators for misdeeds. Various companies have been accused of paying too little tax in various countries. Some companies have not been sufficiently customer friendly, have been too keen to push up prices or keep out competitors.

The new challenge is to provide a legal and regulatory framework for more enterprise, more choice and more competition. There is also the problem of some international and EU governmental interventions in policy which make energy dearer or prevent banks lending, or impede new transport investment. Going back to nationalisation which added monopoly to a lack of innovation is not the answer. Today we need more enterprise for all, to take advantage of the fast moving technologies for growth and improvement.

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[Fairer funding for schools](#)

I hear someone is saying on social media I was not involved in the Wokingham schools fairer funding campaign. As MP in the last two Parliaments I joined in the Parliamentary fairer funding campaign, lobbying Ministers in meetings and in debates and other exchanges. I was and am committed to the need for fairer funding and glad it is now government policy.

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[Why more nationalisation is a bad idea](#)

I was asked to explain why I do not favour nationalising the railways, the Post Office, the water industry and the energy utilities yesterday on the radio. It was a trip down Memory Lane to the arguments of the last century, when Labour made the case for continued or more nationalisation despite all the evidence of the damage their policies did.

Nationalisation was the best way to lose more employees their jobs, to charge customers more, and to sting the taxpayer to pay the losses. The coal industry lost most of its workers when nationalised. The workforce of 704,000 of the newly nationalised industry in the late 1940s had fallen to as few as

235,000 by the time of the election of the Margaret Thatcher government. Despite all the closures of mines and sackings, the losses mounted to be paid by taxpayers.

The railways under public ownership experienced continuous decline. In 1950 they employed 606,000 staff and had 19,471 miles of operating track. By 1976 then under a Labour government staff numbers had more than halved to 244,000 and route miles had fallen to 11,189. The market share of the railways halved, and the number of stations fell by two thirds. The nationalised steel industry too, under Labour and Conservative governments, spent most of its time discussing how to curb the losses by cutting back on capacity and jobs.

Labour say they wish to renationalise the railways. The truth is the main cost and the main assets of the railway are already nationalised. The tracks, signals and stations are owned by Network Rail, itself wholly owned by taxpayers and financed by the Treasury. Many of the delays which affect rail services are the result of signalling failures or other Network Rail caused events. It is Network Rail's job to expand capacity by improving signalling so more trains per hour can run on the railway.

I was asked why we did not buy shares in water companies whilst keeping in place current private sector management so we participate in the profits. I replied that we have other more important priorities for public spending. In the past government ownership of industries has not brought dividends and profits overall, but losses and the need for more subsidised capital.

The main way to improve service quality and bring down prices of utilities is to increase competition. That is what we need to do in some cases, as there is clearly room for improvement. What we do not want to do is to go back to a world where customers, employees and taxpayers all get a bad deal, which was the typical experience of our nationalised industries.

Labour's big nationalisation programme has not been costed and is unaffordable. From past experience it would lead to worse service and huge bills for taxpayers.

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