

Wednesday's efforts by the Cooper-Letwin government

The debate on Wednesday failed to get to grips properly with the constitutional revolution some Remain MPs are trying to unleash on the UK. The approach was based on lightning legislation with insufficient time to consider and propose amendments. A majority of one vote from a coalition that have never stood together on a platform before sought to impose their will on the government. The result is a Bill that rushed on to the Lords, where they wish to do the same, with the government against. If the government had itself tried to put legislation through like that many of the advocates of this Bill would have been protesting strongly. MPs were having to cobble together handwritten amendments to give in just a short while before the debate, whilst also listening to proceedings. It is not a good way to behave.

The government now has to decide whether it wishes to try to get back control or not. It should assert that the Bill has large financial implications. It should refuse to move a Money resolution to cover the costs. Ministers should remind the House that international negotiations are vested in the government of the day to handle as they see fit. Only the passage of a motion of no confidence in the government should be able to stop their handling of these matters. The government in its turn where an international negotiation requires legislation to implement it needs to be fully aware of what the House will and will not pass before striking an agreement in principle.

The crucial votes on the Bill and the wish to the new coalition to control the Order paper again on Monday were knife edge with around 310 on each side. They lost the Monday business but won the Bill. Two of the other votes tell us more about the views of this Remain dominated Parliament.

Anne Main proposed that no delay should be permitted beyond the 22 May deadline for our exit. 123 of us voted for this, with a massive 488 against. This demonstrated that more than three quarters of the House are against a timely Brexit three years after the decision was made. It shows that a May/Corbyn coalition could have a large majority to railroad things through against the wishes of the minority who speak up for the 17.4m Leave voters.

The government proposed an amendment that in effect would have made delay easier for Ministers to arrange. That was defeated by 400 to 220, when many Conservatives voted against the government in favour of less delay. The Opposition decision to vote against was curious given their clear wish to delay.

What Wednesday showed in the Commons is the fate of Brexit hangs more in the hands of Mrs May than of Parliament. Despite the serious efforts to wrestle power from the government, it is still in Mrs May's capacity to allow us to leave on April 12 without signing the Withdrawal Agreement, or in her power to do a deal with Mr Corbyn to wound and delay Brexit for as long as they

like subject to EU approval.