

We've had enough indicative votes

Some MPs claim Parliament has been prevented from expressing a view on Brexit and needs a series of indicative votes on different options. Where have they been these last two years? Parliament has talked about almost nothing other than Brexit. The pro Remain MPs told us for years before the vote the EU had little power, it was not very important, there was no need to go "banging on" about it and the electors were not interested in it. Now these same MPs claim it is critical to our economic survival, that the EU has tentacles into so many things that matter and bang on about it to the exclusion of all else.

Parliament has had endless debates rerunning the referendum. In the referendum itself and since we have discussed the Norway model, the Swiss model, EEA membership, EFTA membership, Customs union membership, single market membership, and some combination of all the above memberships. We have had debates and votes on staying in the single market, staying in the customs union, and having a second referendum. Each of these proposals has been defeated. Why do we have to do all that again?

If Parliament has more debates and more votes they would only be indicative. The government need not accept them. The EU/EEA/EFTA etc may not wish to negotiate the answer Parliament wants should Parliament suddenly back one of these proposals above the others. The government may not agree with the proposal. A large number of Conservative and DUP MPs may not agree with the proposal. Parliament cannot make the government adopt a particular policy. All it could do is to vote no confidence in a government which refused to take its advice. It has tried that recently and the government won the vote. Why would the government wish to proceed with the least unpopular proposal, if that entailed continuous backbench rebellions on its own side in large numbers? Why would the Opposition MPs who favoured a different approach to Brexit then behave responsibly and help the government get it through against the wishes of many Conservative MPs? Wouldn't they see opportunity in defeating a government trying to implement their chosen policy against the wishes of many of its own backbenchers?

There is a reason why Parliament in our system lets government get on and govern, defining its task as stopping decisions and laws which it thinks are wrong but not as dictating to government what laws and decisions are right. That latter way anarchy lies. Parliament either has to put up with the government or sack the whole government. It cannot run it from the backbenches. The government's idea that it needs to appeal to Parliament generally for support means it has given up on finding a Conservative answer that the governing MPs will vote for. That is a strange conclusion for a PM whose job depends on being the Leader of the Conservative party.