

Parliament makes a sensible decision at last on Brexit

Yesterday the combined forces of the Opposition parties united to try to hijack the business of the House in the future to delay or prevent our exit and to ban a so called No deal exit. By 309 votes to 298 votes this proposal was defeated. They wanted time to legislate to stop Brexit or to prevent the government counting the clock down to our exit on 31 October without allowing the Parliament yet another say on the Brexit options.

It is traditional for governments to control the business of the House. If a majority builds up in the House against what they are doing then the opposition forces have the right to table and vote on a motion of No confidence. If the Opposition wins that motion it ends the government's tenure. The Opposition is not afforded the right to have Parliamentary time to have its own alternative programme of new legislation or its own alternative foreign policy. As it does not enjoy a majority there would be no point in allowing this. It enjoys plenty of time to question, criticise, debate and comment on the government's approach which is its role. The Opposition is free to table any amendments it likes to government legislation, and free to try to persuade government MPs to join them in amending or opposing it.

The last time the Opposition tried a hijack to secure legislation it was to ask the government to seek a delay to our exit. As it happened Mrs May wanted to seek a delay anyway, so when the vote was won by just one vote it did not change anything as the government wanted to ask for a later exit date. As they found when trying to legislate then, all Parliament could try to do was to bind the hand of the UK government. They could not legislate to require a delay because that also required to consent of the EU.

It is good news that this time Parliament recoiled from allowing those MPs most hostile to our exit from the EU to take control of the Order paper. If they did so they would undermine the UK's negotiating position further, humiliate our country again internationally, and thwart the clear wishes of the British people by refusing to implement the Brexit we voted for.

Thanks to the IEA for a good event last night

The IEA had 100 acceptances for a full house last night to discuss my book "We don't believe you". (The book is available on Amazon) The questions went on for almost two hours. We discussed everything from the collapse of

traditional political parties to Brexit, from the Trump phenomenon to austerity economics, from the middle Eastern wars to the distrust in the media. I will draw on parts of the discussion in blogs to come.

Don't forget the middle

Labour claims to stand up for the poor, the dispossessed, the unemployed and the unfortunate. The Conservatives seek to show that many Labour policies would in practice damage them, as they would damage the economy as they memorably did in 1975-9, and in 2007-9. Fewer jobs, less growth and more unemployment as they produced do not cut poverty. Conservatives have sought to show that they too want to help those most in need, promoting work whilst supporting welfare. In government Conservatives have pursued higher minimum wages, less tax on those on lowest incomes and a range of other measures. In the leadership election there are furious bids by various candidates to set out what more can be done for the poorest in our community.

Amidst all this politics someone needs to stand up for the many who are not on higher incomes but who earn enough to get little or no benefit help and who have to pay substantial tax bills. Mrs May seemed to understand this in her early comments as PM about the "just managing", though there was a danger this language was a bit patronising and downbeat. What we need is a vision of how the many who work to provide for themselves and their families can aspire to higher incomes and better lifestyles feeling the government is on their side rather than seeing them as an audience to tax and regulate in pursuit of wider social goals.

I want the next government to take the taxes off aspiration. Why do we face such high taxes on buying a better home or on moving to a different location? Why do we have to pay such large taxes if we want to buy a new or better car? Why does the government charge VAT on various home improvements? Why does the government want to reduce the number of people working for themselves by claiming they are not truly self employed for tax reasons?

There are limited ways out of low income and no assets. To do it people usually have to buy a home of their own and spend time and money on improvement. The range of tv programmes about moving and home improvement point to the interest in this opportunity. People do need to keep a decent proportion of their work income, to reach the point where they can afford to save. Building your own business is one route to a better lifestyle with assets in your business. It should be feasible for the average person, not needing super human skills to run the gauntlet of regulatory compliance and tax challenge.

I would like the next government to make it easier for people with aspirations to achieve their aims, and for more of the freedoms and lifestyles of the better off to be available for the many. Instead of

government seeking to regulate our conduct more and tax success wherever it finds it as if it were a problem, I want a government that rewards those who want to do more for themselves and their families, and who given the chance will do the right thing.

Wokingham Post Office

I have received this letter from the Minister regarding the move of Wokingham Post Office. I will be taking up her offer of a further meeting.



Department for
Business, Energy
& Industrial Strategy

Rt Hon Sir John Redwood MP
House of Commons
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[10 June 2019

Dear Sir John,

Thank you for coming to see me on 7 May to discuss the franchising of the Wokingham post office, and for presenting me with the results of your petition showing the level of local concern about post office services in your constituency. I appreciate your ongoing interest in post office branches and the impact that they have on your constituents. As Minister for Postal Services, I am keen to ensure that Post Office Limited is providing the best possible service for citizens and responding to their concerns, while operating in a commercially sustainable way.

As I know you understand, while the Post Office is publicly owned, it is a commercial business. The Government sets the strategic direction for the Post Office – to maintain a national network accessible to all and to do so more sustainably for the taxpayer – and allows the company the commercial freedom to deliver this strategy as an independent business.

As we discussed, franchising is not a privatisation or closure programme. Post Office Limited's proposals to franchise or host its Crown branches are part of its plans to ensure a sustainable network in the face of unprecedented change on our high streets and in consumer trends. Franchising has helped the Post Office's Crown branches move from a £46 million loss in 2012 to break even today, thereby reducing the taxpayer funding that the Post Office requires from Government whilst maintaining, and in some instances improving, customer service levels. With over 11,300 branches (almost 98% of the total network) operating successfully on a franchise or agency basis, franchising is a tried and tested way of delivering key services.

Since we met, I have requested and received more information from Post Office Limited on the specific circumstances in Wokingham, as I was keen to understand how the issues that you and your constituents have raised would be addressed. I have also met with Tim Parker, Chairman of the Board of Post Office Limited, and Alisdair Cameron, Interim CEO of Post Office Limited, and raised your concerns with them. I also shared with them the results of your petition.

One of the specific concerns that you raised was about the level of service provision at the new site. You noted that there are sometimes long queues at the current Post Office branch. As you are aware, the new WHSmith branch will have three counter serving positions and two further self-service kiosks. I have asked Post Office Limited how they decided that this is the right level of provision. They have explained that they use a data

modelling system to establish the number of counters required. This system uses data from transaction logs and assumes that existing custom will transfer to the new site. The system is able to model usage down to 15-minute slots and it is on this basis that Post Office Limited are confident that the planned level of provision is appropriate for the level of service required in Wokingham.


Post Office Limited have also explained that queues at the current Wokingham branch are primarily due to the handling of undelivered mail collections for Royal Mail through one of the counter positions at the current site. That service will not be transferring to the new Post Office and so queueing should be notably reduced. The new branch will also be open an additional 15 hours a week, including all day on Saturday and for four hours on Sunday.

You raised a concern about accessibility for customers with wheelchairs or push chairs. Post Office Limited have assured me that as part of the conditions of appointment, WHSmith are required to maintain one aisle as the designated walkway to the post office. This will be marked by directional signage and the aisle will be wider (1500mm) and will be kept clear of obstructions.

Finally, we discussed how the franchised branch would handle increased footfall in future, as you noted that you expect the population of Wokingham to increase. Post Office Limited have clarified that the franchising plans for Wokingham are based on present customer habits and needs. However, as part of their broader approach to the network, Post Office Limited continually monitor demand and changing requirements in particular locations, taking steps to address these through network growth and other changes as required.

Let me assure you that Post Office Limited is committed to ensuring all branches across its network offer excellent customer service and has a strong history of working with its many franchise partners and agents to achieve this. Overall customer satisfaction levels with Post Offices across the network are good, with levels of satisfaction in relation to service performance and waiting times both consistently very high. Furthermore, a 2017 report by Citizens' Advice indicated that franchised branches are performing in line with or better than traditional branches on service quality and accessibility. Post Office Limited ensures that their franchising partners are experienced retailers who share the common desire to deliver a high level of customer service.

I hope that this letter provides you with some reassurance that you can take back to your constituents that the post office services available to them will be appropriate following franchising, and that Post Office Limited have given due consideration to the concerns that have been raised in this particular case. I am also pleased to note that in my meeting with Tim and Alisdair, they offered to arrange a further meeting for you with senior Post Office Limited officials if it would be helpful to discuss this further. They will be in touch with you separately to arrange this.

yours ever


KELLY TOLHURST MP

Minister for Small Business, Consumers & Corporate Responsibility

P.S happy to discuss further..

Mrs May's non EU policies



<https://johnredwoodsdiary.com/>

Mrs May set out a strong vision of a fairer and more prosperous UK in her initial statement of beliefs as she became Prime Minister. It hangs on the wall in 10 Downing Street as a reminder to visitors of what she intended. Unfortunately in office she was unable to make progress with it.

One of her mistakes was to appoint as Chancellor someone who did not buy into her vision, and who had no wish to use more public money to achieve some of the objectives she wished to set where state intervention was seen as part of the answer. The Chancellor did not conceal his wish to dilute and delay Brexit. He used Brexit as an excuse to withhold cash from public services or tax cuts on the grounds he wanted a "war chest" against a possible exit from the EU which he always wrongly thought of as damaging. The PM wanted more money for schools to help raise standards and give people a better start in life. She wanted more money for the NHS, which was eventually extracted after a long battle. She probably wanted or needed more money for social care, though that remains a series of problems in search of a policy.

She saw social care as a major issue. I remember being sounded out by the Downing Street Policy Unit on possible reform prior to the 2017 election. I advised a careful approach and suggested that first the government should issue a general document describing current policy and outlining the problems as they saw them, to invite responses and to trigger a national debate before trying to formulate answers. They said they were interested in how Margaret Thatcher had run things, and I reminded them I had helped Margaret approach welfare reform in this way with a big public conversation and enquiry before offering change. I was very aware from my work as a constituency MP that some people with no direct family experience of care homes did not know that the elderly person's home had to be sold to pay the bills in many cases, and this needed to be more widely understood to have a conversation on care.

Unfortunately advisers decided they could invent and land a major reform of social care using a General election as a brief period to sell their ideas to the voters. Mrs May accepted a scheme for the 2017 election Manifesto that sounded like the old death tax that Conservatives had rejected under Labour. It turned out to be a predictable disaster which the PM had to reject during the election campaign itself, as criticism of the social care policy drowned out other matters and came from many potential Conservative voters.

She was keen to encourage more housebuilding and put in place various schemes and directions to do so. There was progress in increasing the build rate as she hoped. She saw the need for improved standards in schools, building on the reform work of the previous government. It was not a smooth path given the antipathy of teachers to the Gove reforms, and the shortage of cash for

the lower funded schools around the country. She continued to develop and promote her agenda to curb modern slavery and to tackle discrimination.

The bold aim to narrow the north-south divide, one shared with many previous governments, made some progress with welcome acceleration of investment and modernisation in some of the great northern and Midlands cities.

The aim to develop a modern industrial strategy made little progress. The industrial strategy was damaged by the ever dearer energy which made it difficult to keep or expand energy using industries in the UK. The car industry strategy was damaged by the Chancellor's higher taxes on cars and the general government assault on modern diesel vehicles. The Business Secretary, like the Chancellor, was downbeat throughout about the opportunities and prospects after Brexit. The various car factory closures in the UK and rest of the EU and current state of the UK steel industry shows the failure of their so called industrial strategy.