

## Knife crime

I went to the Urgent Question on knife crime on Monday. MPs all round the Commons are concerned at the escalation in these crimes of violence in various communities in the UK and keen to see more done to reduce and control it. I asked the Home Secretary what action he is taking to spread best practice from those towns and cities that are making progress with prevention to those with the worst problems, and what can be done to ensure extra money and personnel going into policing and responding are being targeted in the right way to tackle this trouble.

During the exchanges there was a general feeling that the Glasgow approach has had some success. Some favour wider use of stop and search powers to remove knives from young people, including random searches without grounds for suspicion. Some think more police in general is what is needed, whilst the Prime Minister has suggested that there is no correlation between police numbers and knife crime.

Clearly having an active police presence in areas of our towns prone to knife crime attacks at times of the day and night when they are most likely must be an important part of the response. We also need to see that this is not a problem which the police on their own can solve. All the young teenagers caught up in this violence have parents or guardians, teachers, adult wider family members, youth and sports club organisers and others who know them and take an interest in them. Any one of these adults could say or do the right thing to reduce the chances of that young person carrying a knife or being drawn into gangland activity.

Some young people are drawn into gangs out of a sense of adventure. Some are groomed by older gang members. Some end up in a gang out of fear. Whilst young people do not want to be subject to home detention, adults in the family do need to take an interest in how much time their children spend out on the streets and what risks that might bring to them. Young people that have been looked after by the authorities or are the products of a broken home are particularly vulnerable to gang grooming according to the Children's Commissioner. The gang culture can lead to drugs and other criminal activity. Once lines have been crossed the young person can be forced into continuing with a way of life they would not have chosen had they known how it ended, or if they had enough support at the beginning to say No.

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## No more regular tests for PIP payments

## to pensioners

The government has announced that in future 270,000 disabled pensioners who receive Personal Independence Payments from the state will no longer face a regular test to check their continuing eligibility. PIPs are amounts up to £145 a week as a supplement to pension and other income made available to people with disabilities and long term health problems following medical examination, and other checks. Some recipients have found it worrying that they have needed follow up tests once they have qualified for the benefit, so this announcement helps them.

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## De selection and staying true to your party and Manifesto

Both parties are prey to de-selection motions against sitting MPs. This has been brought about by changes of mind or stated belief by Conservative MPs over EU exit, and by a combination of factors over the style, policy and direction of the party in Labour. The imminence of a no confidence or de-selection motion is one of the drivers of recruitment to the so called Independent group of MPs. The 8 Labour and 3 Conservatives so far recruited by this new organisation shelter together from such moves by their old parties. The Conservatives and Labour in turn can get on and choose replacements for them for the next election in their seats now they have gone.

On the Conservative side I read that Sarah Wollaston and Heidi Allen were likely to face action by their former Executives or wider Associations. Anna Soubry had defeated one no confidence move, but faced a petition of others protesting about her perceived change of approach to Brexit. It is put out in the press that at least five MPs all face significant opposition within their Conservative Associations. I do not know whether these stories are true. It is true that some local Conservative parties are angry with MPs who have deviated from the Manifesto position on leaving the EU. That said we would leave on 29 March 2019, with or without a deal, and stated that No deal is better than a bad deal. All Conservatives fought the last election opposing the second referendum on the EU which the Lib Dems championed. It is always difficult if an MP changes his or her stance on crucial matters like these after an election but does not carry his or her local party members and electors with them for that change.

On the Labour side there is the added issue that the party leadership has now changed the party stance on the second referendum. Labour was in agreement with the Conservatives in 2017 at the election that there should be no second

vote and we should get on and implement the decision of the People's vote in the summer of 2016. Maybe as many as 70 Labour MPs are said to be unwilling to support the new referendum policy, as they represent heavily Leave voting areas and promised to support getting out in their election literature. This includes a dozen or more Shadow office holders. Labour too is riven with disputes over anti-Semitism, over the tough style of the leadership towards non-believers in its project, over the general drift to the left. Recent flare-ups over whether Labour is anti-Semitic have not helped relations between members and MPs, nor between different local party organisations.

The party leaderships face a dilemma. If they encourage de-selections of people who clearly have drifted from the leadership line they could end up creating a bigger Independent Group, thereby nudging it towards forming a proper party and fighting elections. The more risk of de-selection the more likely an MP is to jump first. If they do not impose some discipline over the party line and leave people alone within the party who have little or nothing in common with the rest of the party they encourage poor discipline within the Parliamentary party and have a battle with the local associations. Whipping breaks down and the leaderships are left looking weak and less important. There should be a big difference in treatment for an MP who occasionally votes against a 3 line whip to keep in line with the party's Manifesto and in line with the membership who supports him or her, and an MP who regularly votes against a 3 line whip in order to deviate from the Manifesto. If an MP has used a popular Manifesto set of proposals to get elected and then unilaterally tears up those promises it causes understandable stress within the party.

Both leaderships are likely to muddle forward on a case by case basis, with events often under the control of local parties rather than under national direction. The Conservatives have far fewer MPs seeking to deviate far from the Manifesto line, but more at risk as they need to keep up their stated party numbers in order to qualify as a coalition government with a majority of votes in the Commons. The Conservatives will have a problem if the leadership seeks to deviate from the Manifesto line itself on the issue of leaving the EU. The overwhelming majority of party members and a significant number of MPs want to stick with it and keep pledges made to voters about no deal being better than a bad deal and taking back control by leaving the EU, its single market and its customs union on 29 March this year. Labour's leadership too is moving away from the Manifesto, and that is splitting their party.

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## [Letter to Geoffrey Cox about the draft Withdrawal Agreement](#)

Dear Geoffrey,

I am glad you are seeking to replace the unacceptable Irish backstop which is written into the Withdrawal Agreement which was vetoed in the recent Commons vote.

There are other features of the Withdrawal Agreement which I and other MPs cannot accept which also need attention in the national interest.

Under the draft Withdrawal Agreement the EU will enjoy of period of at least 21 months, and up to 45 months, when it can legislate for the UK under the wide ranging competencies it has from the Treaty. This would permit the EU to enact laws and regulations banning or requiring changes to the way we do business, control the environment, treat people, offer business support and organise trade which could be against our national interest. It could require the transfer of business into the Eurozone at our expense. We will no longer have the power to veto or to create blocking minorities to prevent measures that are damaging.

What action are you taking to prevent abuse of these wide ranging powers and to ensure we are indeed taking back control of our laws?

The EU is moving to impose and alter more taxes by qualified majority with a view to increasing the range and incidence of EU taxes. As we will have lost our veto over tax anyway, what powers are you seeking to avoid the imposition of new taxes and additional taxation on us via the Withdrawal Agreement?

It is most important no additional tax can be imposed without UK consent.

The Withdrawal Agreement sets out under a general heading where it reserves to the EU the right to send us big bills in the future. The £39 bn cost of the Withdrawal Agreement is a low estimate of what it might mean compiled by the UK Treasury. It is not an EU accepted cash limit. What safeguards are you seeking to ensure the bills do not escalate and to ensure the UK can refuse to pay unreasonable bills submitted under the general powers of the EU? Spending our own money on our own priorities was a big part of the reason to leave.

I will make these questions public as they are of considerable national interest, and look forward to your reply. I assume you are pursuing these matters as part of seeking a fair deal, and in order to reassure the many MPs who cannot currently support the Withdrawal Agreement.

Yours ever

John Redwood

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# Why a second referendum would be a disaster

Labour has adopted its new policy with all the enthusiasm of a group of naughty children deciding how to tell their parents of their misconduct because they have been rumbled. They successfully kept opposing the government on Brexit without having a clear position of their own. They implied this was somehow compatible with fighting the 2017 election on a pro Leave ticket. Under pressure they opted for the idea that it needed a General election to resolve matters, which served their own interests and kept them united for a bit. Once they lost a vote of no confidence the internal arguments forced a change of line.

I am spending time on their views because their votes matter in the Commons in the next few weeks. They have said only the public can now decide because Parliament is unable to. This ignores the fact that Parliament despite their opposition has passed the EU Withdrawal Act which means we leave on 29 March without a deal unless Parliament changes its mind and repeals or amends the legislation. Labour's proposed second referendum clearly cannot happen before we leave, so it implies they now want to delay our exit and wish to amend or repeal the legislation about our departure.

It also implies that they expect the EU to acquiesce in a delay to allow a referendum to take place. It would take most of the rest of this year to legislate for a referendum if Parliament was willing and then to hold the vote. It would require the consent of all 27 member states to the delay. If they wanted to change the terms of our membership or relationship that would need further UK legislation. If the EU were happy for us to continue our current membership then we would need to field candidates in the European elections, which no-one has proposed in any motion before the Commons.

If an opposition party wishes to show it is ready for government and wants to propose positive policies then it has to draft the relevant documents and propose the necessary motions. The absence of a Labour motion to fight the European elections brings their wish to delay into some doubt. The absence of draft legislation to handle the delay period with the EU also shows some sloppiness or hesitation. Even more surprising is their inability to tell us what question they would want the referendum to ask.

Mr Starmer seems to want a referendum for Remain voters. It would ask do you want to remain or to accept Mrs May's Agreement. There would be no option for the 17.4 m who want to Leave, as most of us do not see the Withdrawal Agreement as being any kind of Leave. Some Leave voters willing to compromise might accept a vote on would you like to leave without a deal or accept Mrs May's deal? This is unlikely to assuage Remain campaigners for a second referendum. Some now say they want a three way, asking between No deal, the Withdrawal Agreement and Remain.

This three way has two fundamental objections. The first is it is primarily

a re run of the first referendum, so what is the point of it? People are likely to say the same again, with more probably voting to leave out of anger with the political classes for failing to do as promised the first time. The second objection is the winning answer might only get 34% of the vote, with almost two thirds of the country unhappy with the outcome. That would be more divisive than the first referendum.

Some in Labour want to put their different approach to Brexit negotiations on the ballot paper as an option. This is itself a bit vague but probably entails membership of the customs union with some kind of shadowing of the single market and acceptance of EU views on movement of people and citizens rights. There seem to be different versions of whether Labour accepts or wants to end freedom of movement, and whether they want us in effect under the ECJ for many of our laws to stay compliant with the single market. There would need to be a written down detailed version of this to be able to ask people about it. More importantly it would need the EU to sign off in principle that they would agree to it, as otherwise we would be voting on a nonsense which was not negotiable.

I think it unlikely there will be a Commons majority for a second referendum. It is a spectacularly bad idea, guaranteed to split the country more, frustrate good government for longer and undermine the UK's stature and reputation abroad. Leave voters do not want a second referendum and see no need for one. Were a second referendum to give a different answer why would that answer be better than the answer properly given to the first one?