

Being in office does not mean a Minister is in power – My Article for Conservative Home

Being in office does not mean a Minister is in power. The present government has some attractive policies and ambitions, but it is finding it tough to get them adopted and implemented.

It wants inflation down as does the public but is caught up with the largely false doctrine that the Bank of England is independent. It appears boxed in by the past large mistakes of the Bank. This is a body owned by the taxpayer, whose Governor is appointed by the government and who reports to both the Chancellor and the Treasury Committee of Parliament. On its website it tells us that its dominant policy of the last 12 years, printing loads of money and buying bonds was one where it was merely acting as the agent of the Treasury. It is true that successive Chancellors from Alastair Darling to Jeremy Hunt signed off all the bond buying and selling and indemnified the Treasury against the entire predictable huge losses they will now make on these bonds they bought so badly. Unfortunately the Bank's independence over interest rates led to them being too low for too long and an inflation five times the level set out in their target and the instructions from Parliament and government to them. Ministers now need to get a grip on the losses and the policy moves to get inflation back to the 2% where government wanted it. The public will blame Ministers more than the Bank for the inflation and for any recession the Bank now wants to correct its past mistakes.

The government wants migration down but has just presided over a record number of new arrivals over the last year. The government looks powerless to stop the flow of illegal travellers across the channel most days. Ministers do want the numbers down. They have made that clear to their officials. They have put legislation through to toughen the rules. They have tipped more money into Home Office budgets. They have gone hoarse asking officials to speed up consideration of asylum claims, and asking legal advisers to ensure people cannot defeat a fair decision they are not an asylum seeker by frequent appeals and legal stunts. Instead of this working Ministers get briefed against and complained against for being impatient to demand a policy it appears officials do not like, and clever lawyers run rings round the current law designed to stop them. Some combination of new laws, better administration and fewer enticements to come are needed to bring a success. The PM needs to back his Home Secretary to get it done.

It wants more young people to be able to afford a home. I agree. Controlling numbers of new people coming to live here is the single most important thing the government could do to help. If every year we need to build the equivalent of a city the size of Portsmouth – or last year twice the size, a city like Liverpool – to house the new arrivals it is no wonder we are short of homes. Most of the new migrants need the lower priced homes and the social housing which young people also need. The government needs to end the cheap

labour model based on granting more permits to migrants to come and take low wage jobs. This is cheap for the employer but dear for the taxpayer, who is left with the bill for top up benefits, social housing, extra public service provision and the rest.

It wants to deliver the Brexit it promised to win a decisive victory in 2019 on the slogan of getting Brexit done. To do so it needs to persevere with the Northern Ireland protocol legislation and understand the EU has no intention of reaching a negotiated settlement that is fair. Their negotiating mandate never changes and does not allow flexibility. The Unionists will not re join the Assembly all the time EU law has to apply to Northern Ireland and all the time the ECJ rules over them. We need to restore the UK internal market as the Protocol promised but as the EU prevents.

It wants to deliver the Brexit wins that come from being independent, yet so often Ministers are talked out of them . Where are the VAT cuts? Where the generous Enterprise Zones and Freeports? Where the improved or removed EU regulations to allow business to flourish? Where are the plans and finance to rebuild our fishing industry? Where the grants and encouragement to reclaim lost market share by growing more of our own food again as we did before we joined the Common Agricultural Policy? Why can't Whitehall and Ministers review all EU law and decide what needs keeping over the next year. Each department knows the law concerned.

It wants to level up the country. The Conservative way is to spread the wealth and income more widely, helping those on lower incomes into better jobs and business opportunities. It is not based on increasing tax rates on the rich and on companies. It is about growing the pie so each person's slice can be bigger. Conservatism at its best gets out of the way of the many who can lead their own lives and get on in the world if taxes and regulations allow them, whilst helping those in need. It means helping people develop their abilities, not concentrating on disabilities and restraints. All so often policies to do this are delayed or overwhelmed by more of the high tax high subsidy public sector led approach which has failed over so many years to make lower income places as successful as we wish.

This government does not have long to motivate the official government and quangoland to achieve the greater freedom and prosperity people voted for in 2019. It must show determination and strong friendly persuasion to get change in Whitehall before Whitehall's resistance helps engineer a change of government.