

Mrs May in government

Yesterday Mrs May's tenure as Leader of the Conservative party ended, though she remains as acting leader and Prime Minister until her successor is appointed. As her neighbour and friend I have sought to help her and give her positive advice in office. I wish her a good future however she wishes to develop her life as she stands down from the biggest political job in the country. She has given a lot of energy and determination to the job of PM, and has a strong sense of public service and duty.

Her tenure as Home Secretary from 2010 to 2016 was long lived, demonstrating her ability to avoid some of the pitfalls of life in the Home Office that had tripped up previous Home Secretaries who lasted for shorter periods of time there. The main promise she made that was an important part of the Conservative 2010 Manifesto was the promise to cut net migration from the high levels of the later Labour years to 100,000 or below, still double the typical figure under John Major. She never got anywhere near hitting this target. She stuck with it, recognising the importance of it to some Conservative voters. Her efforts to do so were hampered by membership of the EU at a time when freedom of movement rules required us to welcome a large number of migrants from eastern Europe. She did not, however, manage to control non EU migration as promised either. She did good work on highlighting and curbing modern slavery and on opposing discrimination against people on grounds of race and sex.

In 2016 after Mr Cameron's resignation she won the leadership when the second placed candidate from the MP ballot decided not to pursue her challenge through a ballot of the wider party membership. She commanded a clear majority of the MPs. Her tenure as PM began well, with all the party including those of us who had not voted for her willing her to succeed. With Nick Timothy as her adviser she listened to those of us who had backed Leave. We worked together well to craft the legal framework needed to get us out of the EU. This successful collaboration saw the government pass the EU Withdrawal Notification Act to send the letter of notice to the EU with big majorities. We went on to help her get through the EU Withdrawal Act itself, to take us out in UK law. Though we faced a united opposition from all other parties in the Commons apart from the DUP, and although there were some rebel Remain Conservatives, the co-operation worked and the government carried the Bill.

As soon as the Bill was passed Mrs May ceased co-operating with the large Leave group of Conservatives and adopted in secret what became the Chequers plan. She made a series of damaging concessions to the EU in the negotiations and trusted a few politicians and civil service advisers who shared her view that the UK needed a comprehensive partnership with the EU after leaving, and needed to accept a very disadvantageous Withdrawal Treaty. This entailed breaking the Manifesto promise to negotiate any withdrawal issues in parallel with the future relationship.

I and others urged her not to adopt or to pursue the Chequers proposals, and

not to attempt to agree or put through the draft Withdrawal Treaty. At crucial moments we urged her to refuse more concessions to the EU and to make more demands for the UK, but she did not want to. As we warned her, the draft treaty went down to a calamitous huge defeat. She also suffered an unprecedented run of Ministerial resignations over the same single policy. Instead of heeding the warnings and telling the EU the draft Treaty was unacceptable she spent her last months in a futile series of attempts to get it through the Commons. When she decided to delay our exit and fight the European elections she reached the tipping point where a majority of the Parliamentary Conservative party no longer had confidence in her approach and she had to resign. More importantly she lost the confidence of a large section of the Leave voting electorate, with dire consequences for the Conservative party in recent elections.

Tomorrow I will look at other parts of her legacy.