

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.