

What do free trade agreements add?

There are so many misconceptions in current debate about the nature and value of a Free Trade Agreement.

The first is, you do not need a Free Trade Agreement in order to trade with other countries. The UK in the EU has no free trade agreement with either the USA or China, the two largest economies in the world, yet we have a large trade with both of them.

The second is trading as we do under World Trade rules there is no WTO requirement to impose tariffs on imports. We do so because the EU tells us to impose tariffs on food and cars, not because the WTO makes us. Once we leave we can decide whether to remove those tariffs or not. There is no requirement to impose tariffs on say drugs, and the UK government has made clear it would not do so.

The main reason we can have a successful trade with the USA and China and can have one with the EU after we leave is the existence of WTO rules. A country cannot impose higher tariffs against us than they impose on everyone else. Free Trade Agreements are allowed under WTO rules for countries wishing to go further than the relatively low advanced country tariffs reached under WTO rules so far. The facilitation of trade Agreement ensures smooth borders for the transit of goods between WTO members. All EU countries are members.

Free Trade Agreements can add a bit to trade by removing the remaining tariffs and a few other barriers that still exist under WTO rules. They are nice to have but not essential. It would not be worthwhile making big sacrifices to get one. They are gently mutually beneficial and for that reason countries do not pay to get them.

It is odd that Remain campaigners both claim a free trade agreement with the EU is essential to our continuing trade with them, but try to prevent any free trade agreement with the USA. It's a typically contradictory position to adopt.

It's the economy

After the bogus forecasts that the economy would plunge immediately after the referendum vote, with major job losses and house price falls, we are now told from the same sources there will be a Remain bonus if we give up on Brexit! There's not a hint of apology for the wildly pessimistic and wrong forecasts of the short term after the vote. There is no intellectual curiosity as to why they got it so wrong. There was no post vote recession.

Brexit is an important political change. It is mainly about our democracy and how we chose to govern ourselves. It is not going to have a visible impact on the world economy. Our future economic prospects rest much more on what our economic and monetary policy is from here.

My view is we will be better off out of the EU. That does require the election of a government that handles the economy well and promotes growth sensibly. We need to ease the fiscal squeeze as the government is indicating it will do, and we need to ease the money squeeze as well.

The forecasts that think we will grow less quickly out of the EU have been deliberately misrepresented as meaning there will be a post Brexit fall in the economy. That is not what the long term forecasts say. They think there will be a bit slower growth over a 15 year period because they think trade will be impaired with the EU. I doubt anyone's ability to predict accurately how big the UK economy will be in 15 years time. The things you need to guess to put into the models will be mainly about technology, future government policies, future interest rates, tax rates and the like. The state of EU trade would not be the main variable affecting the outcome. That trade anyway can be conducted successfully under WTO rules with or without a Free Trade Agreement. With the right policies in fifteen years time we will have shown faster growth than if we had stayed in.

FreeTrade Agreements cut prices

What a bizarre idea that if we gave a Free Trade agreement with the USA drug prices will go up. The whole point of an FTA is it takes tariffs and barriers off to make things cheaper. If it didn't why would you sign it? The government has made clear it will not put the NHS at risk from an FTA.

MP service to the Wokingham constituency

Along with all other MPs my job as an MP ends with the dissolution of Parliament just after midnight on 5th November. All outstanding cases will continue to be handled, and I will work on them as needed in my new role after that date as Conservative candidate.

Anyone wanting help can of course contact me and I will do what I can in my new role. I can be contacted through the Conservative office in Wokingham.

Constitutional reform?

The UK has a written constitution. It is recorded in a range of documents including various Acts of Parliament, the Standing Orders of Parliament and the law. It is more flexible than countries that have a single written constitutional document that usually is difficult to amend or change. The supremacy of Parliament is such that sometimes a simple alteration of the Standing Orders of the Commons can effect changes that would otherwise take a long time.

The Parliament which dissolves at midnight has discovered imperfections in our current constitution, and has flexed it in ways that many think unreasonable. The next Parliament, assuming it has a majority government, would be wise to look at how the constitution could be improved in the light of the tribulations of the outgoing one.

The first recommendation I have is the repeal of the Fixed Term Parliaments Act. This has given us 3 elections in four years when there is meant to be a five year gap, but it has also held a minority government hostage and got in the way of allowing a PM defeated in the Commons taking his case to the country. The previous system gave scope for the government to call for an early election if need arose. If a PM tried to do this for party advantage with no other good reason there was always the danger of a public backlash against a needless election.

The second is to legislate to place some limits on the capacity of the Supreme Court to intervene in Parliamentary matters. The advice a PM gives to the Queen, and the decision to prorogue should be matters for Parliament, not for the law courts. It makes little sense for Parliament as the ultimate embodiment of the people's sovereignty to need to ask the courts permission over when it sits or how it transacts its business. That was the view of the English senior judges when the case came before them.

The third is to clarify in Standing Orders that major legislation requires a Money resolution and Queens consent where government prerogative is involved (as with international negotiations and Treaties). Government needs to ensure legislation fits with its budget and foreign policy. Opposition is there to oppose and amend, not to run an alternative government.