

Walk with kings but do not lose the common touch

MPs need to be confident communicators, willing to talk to anyone and to learn from anyone. As Kipling might have said they need to walk and talk with Prime Ministers and Secretaries of State , with Presidents and Ambassadors, with Chief Executives and executive Mayors just as they need to listen to anyone in a low paid job, the student and the unemployed to understand how it feels for them .

MPs need to be able to speak truth to power. They need to understand fair criticisms of a government they usually support and work away for its correction. They need to warn Ministers of criticisms and threats to what they are seeking to do, and to support them when they are in need of assistance for a course of action which is in the national interest. Opposition MPs need to remember that the government did get elected and is not always wrong, concentrating their fire on the areas where the government is weakest, making a mess or most out of line with public opinion. An intelligent opposition preparing itself for government also needs to present a cogent policy choice and to oppose based on a feasible alternative.

In the UK system every MP must have a good sense of place, being rooted in the community they represent. One of the important roles is to show how local circumstances will be affected by national decisions, and to bring local examples to bear on national debates. Working with people in the local community, the MP can offer access to government and advice on how to develop public services.

My speech during the debate on the European Union (Withdrawal Agreement) Bill, 7 January 2020

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): I rise particularly to support clause 33. I think it is essential that we are finally out of the EU in every proper way by the end of this year. Some three and a half years have passed since the British people made their decision that they wished to leave. Many of us voted to leave because we think the world is going to be better once we have left. We do not regard it as some kind of disease or problem that has to be managed; we see it as full of opportunities. We want to rebuild our fishing industry under British regulations and British control. We wish to get all our money back and to spend it on our priorities in health and education. We

wish to make sure that we can make the laws we wish, and which the people recommend to us in elections and in the normal dialogue between constituents and Members of Parliament. We are extremely optimistic about our opportunities as a leader of free trade worldwide once we have regained our full vote and voice in the World Trade Organisation and are able to do our own deals with all those parts of the world that the EU has not got round to doing deals with all the time we have been a member.

We are very optimistic. We think we are going to be better off economically. I have always said that, and anyone who suggests otherwise is deliberately misrepresenting my position. I share the frustration of many leave voters that three and a half years on and with a new Parliament with a very clear mandate we are still facing demands that we are going too quickly and that three and a half years plus another year—four and a half years—is still not long enough, and why not six and a half years?

Daniel Kawczynski (Shrewsbury and Atcham) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that, unlike the Opposition spokesman, who seems to paint a very gloomy picture about our moving away from European regulations, this Parliament and this country are perfectly capable of regulating our own domestic affairs, and protecting the environment and workers' rights in the British way, without always acquiescing in EU laws?

John Redwood: I, in particular, think we can do a lot better on taxation. I do not want tax on all these green products that the EU makes us tax. I would not have thought that the Green party really wanted those. However, I suspect that if I or others moved amendments to the forthcoming Budget this March to take out those unnecessary taxes, we would be told we are still not allowed to because we are in the implementation period and have to accept European law. It has also interfered in our corporate taxes in a way that actually reduces the revenues we gain from big business. I would have thought Labour and the Liberal Democrats rather oppose that, but because it comes from the EU they are completely quiet on the subject. They do not seem to mind that the EU interferes with our revenue raising.

Michael Tomlinson (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (Con): Is my right hon. Friend as surprised as I am that the official Opposition and the Liberal Democrats, with their new clauses, are seeking yet further delays? Despite what the hon. Member for Sheffield Central (Paul Blomfield) says, that is the effect of new clause 4. It would mean a lack of the certainty that the British people voted for at the recent general election.

John Redwood: I do think it is almost unbelievable that the Opposition are talking about adding to four and a half years of delay, under the Government model—now, another two years—six and a half years. Six and a half years at £12 billion a year is a huge sum, and I would like to tease this out a bit more with those on our Front Bench because I think my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State misunderstood me. He thought I was talking about the cost to business, but I am talking about the cost to British taxpayers. This extra implementation period in itself—I really rather regret it, but I see it is a necessity from where we currently are, given the forces in this House—must be costing £11 billion or £12 billion, in tax revenue forgone, that we have to

pay.

I would like some reassurance from the Front Bench that once we are properly out at the end of December, under clause 33, there will not be further bills. I want us to be able to say to the British people, "We now do control our own money. We are not going to carry on paying for this show." I think it might be quite a good negotiating tactic to suggest to the EU that perhaps there is not a strong legal basis for some of the claims it wishes to make, because we need to put some countervailing pressure on the EU during this remaining negotiation period on the free trade agreement. I do not think we have to pay for a free trade agreement. I think it is massively in the interests of the rest of the European Union, because it sells us more than we sell it, but we have to be firm, otherwise it will walk all over us again and demand more concessions.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): Is not the lesson of the prolonged, tortuous seven years of negotiation on the Canadian deal the very fact that it was an open-ended process that did not come to an end? The effect of new clause 4 is basically to ensure, in providing for an extension, that it makes that extension certain, because the knowledge that the extension can take place will take away the very pressure to make an agreement within the time that is available.

John Redwood: Those of us who have had to study European Union affairs for all too long, because they affect our own country so much, have learned from bitter experience that deals nearly always happen at the last minute under artificial or genuine deadlines that the EU has often imposed on itself. All we are trying to do, in supporting a Government in doing this, is to say to the EU that there is a deadline on this negotiation: "If you, O EU, really want a free trade deal with us, as you have said you do in the partnership agreement, hurry now while stocks last." It is not all about us, it is about the EU as well. It needs this free trade agreement, and we need to keep the pressure up. Let us tell it that there needs to be significant progress by the middle of this year so that it is realistic to finalise the text.

I do think it should be relatively straightforward, if there is good will on the EU side as well as on our own side, because we have been party to its international negotiations. If we take the best of the Japanese deal and the best of the Canadian deal—it is already there in text—it should be relatively easy to say that we can at least have that. The EU has already offered that to non-members of the European Union, and we should be able to add a bit more because by being a member we already have agreements to things that are in our mutual interest to continue.□

I would be very optimistic about the negotiations, but I am quite conscious that if we negotiate as, unfortunately, the previous Government did before the change of leadership and the general election, we will end up making more concessions to get something that the EU has already promised in the political declaration. I do not want the fish at risk, and I do not want the money at risk. I do want to take full control of the money, the fish, the law making and the taxes from the beginning of next year, as we are promised by this Bill, and clause 33 is a very important part of trying to deliver that.

I wish the Government every success. I am optimistic on their behalf because of the promises the EU has made. My message to the EU is: "Do not underestimate the British people. You may have been right to believe that many of their political representatives in the last Parliament were on the EU's side, not on the UK's side, but the British people are altogether a more serious proposition, and the British people have spoken loud and clear." The British people have had enough of the delay, enough of the dither, enough of the concessions and enough of the idea that Brexit is a problem. We believe in Brexit, we want the freedoms, and we want to choose our own taxes, our own laws and to spend our own money. Bring it on—the sooner, the better.

Spreading prosperity around the country

I am all in favour of policies which promote growth and greater prosperity generally, and in support of any measures which can help catch up by the lower income parts of the UK. In many cases the policies required are the same.

The government is going to spend more and do more on infrastructure. Ensuring good broadband with high speeds in all parts of the country is essential to faster growth. Much of the investment can be private sector, as it should generate its own return. Where public sector pump priming is necessary there should continue to be clawback provisions in the investment agreements to protect taxpayers.

Investment in better transport is needed everywhere in the UK. London has needed substantial extra investment in the tube network because it is being impeded by its own success, with crowded tunnels and trains often leading to temporary station or platform closures to handle the numbers. London does not get much investment in new roads as there is so little space to include them. Outside London more road capacity is needed for buses and cars and more cycle lane provision. Commuter train services into many cities and towns need improving, with more trains, more comfortable trains and more reliable trains.

The government also needs to look at taxation. Too many taxes in the UK are set at rates that diminish the total revenue by deterring transactions and investments. High Stamp duties cut the volume of property transactions, which means sub optimal use of properties with people feeling taxed out of changing their property for one they can best use. IR35 is deterring self employment and losing the UK contracts. High Vehicle Excise duties have helped hit sales for UK made new vehicles, though they are greener and cleaner than the old ones they could replace. National Insurance and the training levy are taxes on employment when we want to promote more jobs. The current rate of Capital

Gains Tax puts people off selling assets they hold that could be better developed or used by others.

The Chancellor needs a budget for jobs and growth. That should include reducing tax penalties on work, on investment and on transactions.

More police for Wokingham and Bracknell

The local Police Commander has confirmed to me they are pressing ahead with recruiting and training an additional 17 police officers for our local area, out of the total increase of 183 for Thames Valley Police as a whole. I look forward to their arrival and wish the local force success in their work against crime.

What does an MP do?

There are 650 different ways of being an MP. It requires your presence in Parliament on many specified times including late nights, following the rules of conduct and Parliamentary process. It also affords each MP considerable scope to decide how to spend the many days and hours when the Parliamentary timetable does not dictate what is being done.

The main task of an MP is to scrutinise government actions, question Ministers, debate proposed new legislation and revisit old legislation that may be failing. This can be done in Parliament by a number of means, and outside through speeches, . blogs, media interviews and the rest. MPs lead a national debate to improve matters, and to expose things that need improving.

Some MPs follow the news and social media, intervening on whatever is topical. Some MPs specialise in particular subjects so their interventions come with more expertise and knowledge behind them. Some MPs allow the agenda to be driven by their party, others try to get changes to their party's stance on things. Some MPs campaign to get a change to a law or government policy. Many do this based on professional campaign lobby groups and organisations who supply them with research and back up. Some of us run campaigns for ourselves based on what our constituents are telling us and on our perceptions of what changes would improve public services or the economy.

The MP needs to get the right balance between listening and leading, between taking the views of the constituents to government to get explanation or

change, and explaining the views of government or Opposition to constituents. The MP also needs to find a good work balance between time spent in the constituency meeting people, attending events and dealing with problems, and time spent in Westminster putting the case of constituents to government and participating in the debates and law making for the UK as a whole.

Some MPs try to become a sort of super Councillor locally. This is difficult to make work, as the proper Councillors have the powers to settle local budgets, make planning decisions and guide local services. The MP has no powers in any of these areas and may be resented by those who do have the powers if he or she grandstands too much on what they should be doing. The MP is, however, often seen by many constituents as the Complaints department about any public service or planning failing they perceive, so each MP has to work out how to handle that perceived role and whether it is possible in particular cases to be a force for the good or for change in local matters. There is opportunity for joint working with local Councils as they often need government funding and approvals.

It does help to live in the local area so then your time spent shopping or being out and about is more time when you are available to constituents if they have something pressing they want to tell you. It also means they can see you are experiencing the same local problems they are if there are road works or flash floods or whatever nuisance comes to plague us.