

## Reforming our prisons – consultation

Last week's damning report from the Chief Inspector of Probation makes it clear. **We need a radically new approach to rehabilitation.**

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## Happy not-Brexit day!

**Nigel Farage must be fuming.**

Today was supposed to be his day of victory, but it's a damp squib. Thanks to almost 3 years of Lib Dems fighting, **we're closer than ever to a People's Vote.**

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## Celebrating 5 years of same-sex marriage

Most people meet and get married within a few years, but not us. We got married on our twentieth anniversary. We had to wait 20 years before we could tie the knot, not because we didn't want to, but because **to do so before 2014 would have been unlawful.**

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# The Leader – vol 6: May's embarrassing week

## Brexit Latest

This week parliament moved into the uncharted territory of 'taking back control' from an arrogant and incompetent executive. Apart from making an **unholy mess of Brexit**, Ministers have operated for far too long as though the sole purpose of government is to serve the Conservative Party. The absence of a majority finally came to bite them as the Commons wrested control of the business.

What follows is a two-stage process: a 'straw poll' of options yesterday, followed by a definitive choice next Monday. This is a novel procedure, and according to constitutional buffs, like Bill Cash, revolutionary: bringing back unhappy precedents from the days before the Civil War and the beheading of Charles I.

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I am sure it was coincidence, but, on the same day, Theresa May announced her own political exit (if she gets her deal through; if she doesn't, a potentially worse fate awaits her at the hands of the Tory party).

In the event, Parliament did not discover a majority yesterday for any of the 8 options on offer.

But doing so was never the point of the exercise. Instead **the purpose was to find which of the options commanded greatest support.**

Two did well: Ken Clarke's Customs Union amendment, which also narrowly failed to get a majority, and Margaret Beckett's **amendment for a People's Vote which at 268 got the largest number of votes in favour and comfortably more than the 242 for Theresa May's deal when it was last tested.**

What we now have to do is to achieve on Monday the basis of a cross party consensus which has the Withdrawal Agreement subject to a referendum, together with a commitment that any final deal continues a Customs Union.

This will not be music to the ears of Theresa May and much of her party. But it has to happen otherwise on April 10 an irreversible decision will be made by the EU to proceed without the UK. The EU is absolutely clear that it doesn't want a rupture with the UK, let alone a No Deal Brexit, but time is now running out. To be precise there are two weeks left, and a clearly defined cliff edge.

**Theresa May will use this real threat to try to force her deal through one**

**more time tomorrow.** She may even make a further, fourth attempt next week, if she can circumvent Speaker Bercow's ruling on not bringing back a repeat proposition. A cynical u-turn by Brexiteer colleagues like Boris Johnson and Jacob Rees-Mogg could yet see her succeed but I am more optimistic than for some time that it is our side that has serious momentum.

The march last weekend was not just a political duty but a family occasion

**The optimism was fired up by the big march in London on Saturday.**

It wasn't just a political duty but a family occasion. One of my grandsons joined me at the front and managed to upstage the celebs. My other grandson appeared, for the first time, with a girlfriend (who happens to be French). And I feel further reinvigorated by the 6 million, so far, who have signed the petition to revoke Article 50 and stay within the EU, including 20% of all residents in my Twickenham constituency.

My conviction we are pursuing the right course was reinforced by a visit to Brussels last Thursday, during the European Council Meeting, when I met the liberal heads of government and heads of the various liberal parties across Europe.

Though their patience is being severely tested, **there is a great warmth towards Britain** and sadness that the UK is preparing to leave. Guy Verhofstadt asked me to speak to the gathering and I received the loudest applause when I mentioned that there is still every chance we could remain.

None of us know where the next few days will lead. The Prime Minister is threatening to ignore parliament: a very dangerous step for her, her party and the country. She may not survive the week.

**And finally**

No book recommendation this week – too busy with Brexit late nights. But I do recommend an absolutely stunning film: White Crow.

The film is the story of the brilliant Russian ballet dancer, Rudolf Nureyev, who defected to the West from the USSR in the 1960s when the Cold War was at its height. The production is clever, pacy and utterly authentic. There is some superlative acting from Ralph Fiennes, as his Russian mentor; and [Adèle Exarchopoulos](#) playing his Chilean friend Clara who helped him escape at Paris airport, and [Oleg Ivenko](#) playing Nureyev himself, who is portrayed as supremely gifted but utterly selfish on a personal level.

Having travelled to the Soviet Union a couple of times at the end of the Krushnev era, I recognised the style of the Soviet minders: weeding and threatening in equal measure; trying to inspire fear of authority in a system, Post-Stalin, already losing its capacity to terrorise. Nureyev was entirely non-political and never attempted to politicise his defection.

He just wanted to be free, artistically and personally.

Nureyev himself died (sadly as a result of AIDs) but, even for those of us who are not great enthusiasts for ballet, there is, in the film, enough to recognise one of the artistic legends of my lifetime.

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