

The Leader – vol 6

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 beheading (if she gets her deal through; if she doesn't, a potentially worse fate awaits her at the hands of the Tory party – the modern political equivalent of being hung, drawn and quartered).

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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Indicative Votes

After months of deadlock, on Monday night Parliament voted to take control of Brexit away from the Government.

Today we will be going through a process of “indicative votes”. This might be a normal way of doing things in just about any other walk of life but in Parliament it is novel and I wanted to share with you a few thoughts about how we shall approach these votes and what we want to achieve.

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14 progressive Lib Dem policies the government don't want you to know about

Many of these private members' bills simply fell off the parliamentary order paper this week – the Tory government failed to give us to debate these vital issues. Others were outright blocked. We must demand better than this broken government, distracted by their Brexit mess.

Here are our 14 progressive private members' bills the government doesn't want you to know about.

Cutting down plastic pollution

We need radical action to cut down on plastic pollution. Alistair Carmichael's bill does just that.

His bill would require the government to commit to ambitious targets to reduce plastic pollution and report back on progress annually. It also aims to get rid of single use plastics by 2025.

If we are to truly confront climate change and pollution, our ambition must match the enormity of the challenge ahead.

Providing end of life care for the homeless

We must do much more to help those who are rough sleeping or homeless. That means a new approach to low cost and social housing, as well as scrapping the odious Vagrancy Act that criminalises the homeless.

It also means we do more to ensure those who are terminally ill, and living on our streets, have appropriate medical care and housing support. Ed Davey's bill would do just that.

Ending the gender price gap

It's a travesty that women have to pay more than men for basic products like razors when there is virtually no difference in the product. It's just not fair.

Christine Jardine's bill to end the gender price gap seeks to end this malpractice.

Immigration armed forces bill

Serving in our armed forces is a statement of pride and commitment, and we are lucky to have members of the Commonwealth in our military. Why, then, do we levy fees on those men and women who then seek to make Britain their home after serving?

Ed Davey doesn't think this is right. His bill would remove the £2,389 per person fee for ex-service men and women to make Britain their home. Almost £10,000 for a family of four to move to the UK after their parent has served our country? It's simply wrong.

Improving access to radiotherapy

A cancer diagnosis places a tremendous amount of stress on an individual or a family. It is one of the difficult things to face, and the government must do more to help.

Tim Farron's bill seeks to make it easier for patients to access vital radiotherapy for cancer treatment, including a maximum travel time of 45 minutes for patients to travel.

Parental leave bill

Each year 54,000 women are forced out of their jobs due to pregnancy and maternity discrimination in the UK.

It's time to get serious about workplace discrimination against new mothers and pregnant women. Jo Swinson's bill would compel employers with over 250 people to publish information about parental leave, and their pay during the course of such leave.

We must demand better for families across Britain and tackle this fundamental injustice.

Making it easier for asylum seekers to find work

Why are we making it harder for asylum seekers to find work? For those people forced from their homes, we should be welcoming them into Britain and giving them the opportunity to start contributing to society.

That's what Christine Jardine's bill would do. Everyone deserves the right to work and play their part. If you agree, join our campaign [here](#).

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The fight against Brexit is not over. We showed we're closer than ever to a People's Vote

Alongside other pro-Europeans, we showed the fight against Brexit is not over. We showed we're closer than ever to a People's Vote.

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A message from Vince

I'm on the train returning home from Brussels after a day speaking to European liberal leaders, ahead of the European Council, and then briefing the gathered media on the Liberal Democrat campaign for a People's Vote, to stop Brexit.

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