

Boris Johnson's Deal: What Now?

*Independence campaigners hold a range of views on Boris Johnson's new 'deal' with the EU. Some advocate it as the best on offer, despite its many faults. Others say "not an inch" until the basis is more secure. But all of these views are well intentioned and all are entitled to respect, writes **CIB chairman Edward Spalton**.*

Watching the disappointing, abortive emergency debate of 19th October in Parliament – the first Saturday sitting since the Falklands war – I was reminded of a conversation just after the referendum. I was talking to a farm labourer who has turned himself into a one-man gardening business and is in great demand. A highly intelligent man, he said that he doubted whether the referendum result would ever be honoured. He added that many of his friends were keen Leavers but he was telling them to be prepared for treachery. He was right and I was wrong.

At the time, I could only reassure him of promises which politicians of all parties had overwhelmingly given us and could not see them backing away from the most solemn commitments they had all made as individuals and on behalf of their parties. I particularly remembered the late Paddy Ashdown's thundering endorsement of democratic principle:

"I will forgive no one who does not respect the sovereign voice of the British people, once it has spoken. Whether it is a majority of one per cent or twenty per cent, when the British people have spoken, you do what they command. Either you believe in democracy or you don't."

That was when, like David Cameron, Paddy Ashdown was sure that

Remain would win. Once they had lost, he and his party ceased to be either Liberal or Democratic. Many others of all parties have ratted too. The Lib-Dems are at least open and honest in their frank contempt for the majority of their fellow countrymen and women.

As in subsequent sittings, others are more subtle. As Frank Field said, they are "Remainers in Brexiteers' clothing", pretending to support independence but frustrating by subtle stratagem and wrecking amendments the procedures which lead to it.

The chief amongst this parliamentary tribe must now surely be Sir Oliver Letwin whose 19th October amendment nullified in advance the whole purpose of the day's business. Of course, he could not have done it without the connivance of the Speaker, whose extreme Europhile partiality has become manifest for all to see. The accumulated respect, in which Parliament used to be held, has been greatly diminished by the conduct of the last two occupants of the Speaker's chair.

The Speaker enters Parliament in a solemn procession with the mace, the symbol of Parliament's authority, carried before him. Since he went off to Brussels for discussions with the President of the EU parliament, one wonders whether his loyalty is still with this country and this Parliament. Parliament is an institution of tradition, but not inflexible. To mark this change, perhaps we need another official carrying a white flag to accompany the mace. His title could be "The Lord High Surrenderer" or "Surrenderer General".

The transfer of loyalty has also reached the judiciary. The Supreme Court was a Blairite creation, part of what Labour said was to be "a continental style Ministry of Justice". So it is not surprising that it is staffed by "continental-style" judges. It was part of the Blair plan to ensure that traditionally minded judges would never be in a position to frustrate or reverse his project. It has worked! The judicial

coup d'etat is a fact.

For these reasons CIB decided to back the Brexit Pledge, supporting independence on 31 October with or without a deal. Given the subordination of our country's highest officers and institutions to foreign authorities, we felt that "Brexit delayed is Brexit denied".

Our members have various views about how it should be achieved. Many would prefer an orderly agreement to protect the jobs and businesses which depend on international trade, including that with our largest market and nearest neighbours. But we think an overwhelming majority would prefer "No Deal" to "No Brexit" – which is the likely outcome of any significant delay, as long as positions of high authority are held by those who wish to overturn the democratic decision of the referendum.

Long-serving independence campaigners hold a range of views, all of which are entitled to respect. Nobody, I think, wished the present situation. So we are where we are.

Some advocate Boris Johnson's deal as the best on offer – with all its many faults. If it were passed, things would at least start to move and a new atmosphere would be created. Others, like the DUP, say "not an inch" until the basis is more secure – even if it means their alliance with Labour which despises them profoundly.

In the meantime it is clear that the present Parliament will never willingly agree to a no-deal Brexit. Nor has it so far had the guts to pass the no confidence motion which would lead to an election. There is no enforceable reason why MPs should forego salaries and perks which are secure until 2022 under the Fixed Term Parliaments Act. Retribution from their constituents is likely to be on an epic scale. So we can understand why they will put off the day of reckoning with the people as long as they can.