

A Brexit that will work for nobody

“Brexit means Brexit,” Theresa May famously said on a number of occasions last year, “And I intend it to work for everybody.” With the half-way point between the referendum vote and Brexit day looming next month, current pronouncements from the Government suggest that on the contrary, we could end up with a Brexit that works for no one.

Our fishermen have good reason to be worried. Unless the Fisheries Regulation 1380/2013 is exempted from the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill – and there is no sign that this is the Government’s plan – we will end up leaving the Common Fisheries Policy only to revert to what is in effect a shadow CFP, including all the access arrangements which would continue to give away our nation’s resource to the EU. Last week, when asked about fisheries, the Prime Minister said,

“When we leave the European Union, we will be leaving the common fisheries policy. As part of the agreement that we need to enter into for the implementation period, obviously that and other issues will be part of that agreement.”.

While this “implementation period” may exist only in Mrs May’s imagination, she should instead have given an unequivocal statement that upon Brexit, we will not only immediately take full control of our Exclusive Economic Zone, but will not be running it on a quota basis.

At least as far as fisheries is concerned, there is hope that ultimately it will be Michael Gove who determines post-Brexit policy. He has shown himself sympathetic to the plight of our fishermen and his mention of John Ashworth in person during a fringe meeting at the Tory Party Conference is a recognition that the fishing community is running a well-organised

campaign that not going to take no for an answer.

Another area of concern is the reluctance of this government to disentangle ourselves from the EU's military machine. Our friends in Veterans for Britain were understandably critical of the Government's recent "future partnership" paper on defence, which would limit our independence. They also do not want to see us tied in to PESCO (Permanent Structured Cooperation) a key factor in the EU's military ambitions to create a defence union. It appears from an earlier briefing put out by VfB that many MPs are still in the dark about the very limited military autonomy with which government ministers plan to allow us. This is unacceptable. As an independent country, our political objectives will inevitably diverge from those of the EU. We will no longer be interested in its empire building in the Balkans or among the former soviet republics. Our defence policy must be disentangled from that of the EU before we leave. If Mrs May is planning a reshuffle, as is widely being rumoured, the appointment of a genuine Brexiteer to replace the most unsatisfactory Michael Fallon as Defence Secretary would be a very good move.

We also need to make a clean break with the EU on criminal justice matters. Torquil Dick-Erikson has raised the issue of the European Arrest Warrant on this website before. We agree with him that it is totally unacceptable for the Government to keep us as a signatory to the EAW and to be a member of Europol. More than that, Torquil has pointed out that the Government has also declared its willingness to allow "special intervention units" from the EU to set foot on British soil, and under a smokescreen of "ensuring security."

In these three areas – fishing, defence and criminal justice, Brexit must be as "hard" as possible and the Government's shortcomings will be highlighted over and over again on this website until there is a change of heart. This is not the Brexit we voted for. As last year's Vote.Leave slogan said so graphically, it was all about "taking back control". If our

fishing grounds are shared with the EU, our defence is bound up with that of the EU and EU judges still have the power to haul us off to any one of 27 member countries on the basis of unsubstantiated allegations, we are not in control at all.

What is more, these issues must not be swept under the carpet while all the media focus being on trade talks – or rather, the lack of trade talks. Thankfully, as far as trade is concerned, a number of senior figures from industry, supported by a small but growing number of MPs are expressing their concern that the “No deal is better than a bad deal” mantra is unrealistic and dangerous. Leaving the EU without a deal would be a calamity for our economy, even though one recent opinion poll suggested that as many as 74% of voters would prefer this to a supposed “bad deal”. Do they realise that planes would be unable to fly? That the M20 in Kent would be turned into a lorry park overnight?

Of course, it is possible that the Government is engaging in brinkmanship to try to twist the EU’s arm and get it to start trade talks before the three contentious issues of the Irish border, the “divorce bill” and the rights of EU citizens have been agreed, but it is a high-risk strategy and one that looks unlikely to succeed. It is based on a long-standing failure to perceive that the EU is first and foremost a political project, not a trading bloc.

This mistaken perception of the EU’s nature suggests that the transitional arrangement mentioned recently by Mrs May (where we would be able to trade seamlessly with the EU after Brexit in return for being subject to most of the EU’s rules and policed by the European Court of Justice) is mercifully a non-starter. It is an unsatisfactory pick-and-mix deal which violates the EU’s political integrity while being an extremely bad arrangement for the UK. It remains a mystery why the EEA/EFTA option is still being ruled out of court by all senior government figures when something far worse is being publicly advocated instead.

While no sane person would disagree with the statement by David Davis that Brexit is “the most complex peacetime operation in our history”, it is now nearly 14 months since the referendum vote and we do not yet have any indication that the Government has come up with a strategy which will deliver a satisfactory break with the EU. Thanks to David Cameron’s ban on allowing the Civil Service to work on any Brexit plan before the referendum, the Government and Whitehall have found themselves on a sharp learning curve, but some campaigners, such as John Ashworth have been active for 20 years or more and have considerable knowledge their specialist subjects. Why are their recommendations not being adopted? Why, after all this time, is the government still seemingly confused about the difference between the Customs Union and customs clearance agreements? Why has the defence integration continued since the Brexit vote without any consultation with the military, who actually understand the issues?

It does not help when anyone who dares to stick their heads above the parapet and suggest that we are heading for a disaster is labelled a “traitor” – as was the case with Philip Hammond last week. Of course, Mr Hammond supported remain during the referendum and some ardent Brexiteers refuse to believe that anyone who did not campaign for Brexit can possibly be genuinely committed to making it happen, in spite of our own soundings which suggested that most MPs, whatever side they took in the referendum campaign, have accepted the result and will not seek to be obstructive over Brexit. More worryingly, a veteran leave supporter like Christopher Booker, whose pro-Brexit credentials are impeccable, has been tarred with the same brush for expressing concern about the direction of Brexit talks. What is the point in saying things are looking good when there is every evidence that they are not?

There are two very big worries which force concerned Brexiteers like Mr Booker – and indeed, your author – to stick to their guns. The first is that a calamitous Brexit would be

grist to the mill of the hard-core remainiacs who have never accepted the result of last year's referendum. A spike in unemployment and inflation coupled with possible food shortages would lead to calls for us to start negotiations to re-join the EU, even though we would lose our opt-outs on the €uro and Schengen along with the Fontainebleau rebate won for us by Mrs Thatcher. This would be a disaster.

Secondly, it would lead to unprecedented political upheaval. Less than a year ago, some Conservatives were convinced not just that Jeremy Corbyn was unelectable but that the Labour Party was in its death throes. Last June's election was a rude awakening for the Tories, proving their optimism to be very wide of the mark. The mood at the Party conference was apparently very sombre indeed.

There is good reason for this, as today's young people in particular are far more likely to support Labour than the Tories, suggesting that far from Corbyn being unelectable, he is likely to become Prime Minister in 2022, bringing with him a team of MPs who are in the main, even more reluctant Brexiteers than the Tories. The best way – indeed, probably the only way – of avoiding this is for the Tories to deliver a successful Brexit. Analysis of voter intentions suggest that the most popular reason why voters opted for the Conservatives last June was a conviction that they would deliver on Brexit. To betray the voters' trust would not just hand over the keys of No. 10 Downing Street to Jeremy Corbyn in 2022; it would produce the biggest crisis in the Conservative Party since the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846.

As Anthony Scholefield, a CIB Committee member, pointed out in his 2011 critique of Cameronism, *"Too 'nice' to be Tories – how the modernisers have damaged the Conservative party"*, attempts by the Tory leadership since 2005 to reach out to urban touchy-feely politically correct types have served rather to alienate many traditional supporters. As I argued a few years ago, there are plenty of people who genuinely want

to vote for what Mrs May famously called a “nasty” party. I was wrong in predicting that Cameron wouldn’t win the 2015 election, but he only won it because he was forced to give in to the mounting pressure within his party to hold a referendum on our membership of the EU. It was the EU issue which also saved Mrs May’s bacon two years later. Given that a good few Tory voters (and indeed activists) still remain most uncomfortable about this move to the supposed centre ground since Cameron became leader, I believe that nothing else can save the Conservatives from calamity in 2022 except a smooth, well-managed and complete Brexit that will enable our businesses to keep trading while at the same time revitalising our fishing industry and freeing us from the clutches of the EU’s military and the EAW.

To put it another way, the Tories have a long list of EU-related sins for which they need to repent collectively, going back to the deceit of Edward Heath in the 1970s. This is their one and only opportunity to make atonement. They created the mess; it is poetic justice that they are being saddled with the task of getting us out of it. If they succeed, the country can move on after over 40 years in our unhappy relationship with Brussels and the party need never again “bang on about Europe”. If they fail, our country may well end up marking the centenary of the resignation in 1922 of David Lloyd George, the last ever Liberal Prime Minister, with the resignation of the last ever Conservative Premier. It really is as serious as that