

Hold on to your hats!

The terms proposed by the EU for a transitional deal, even if this had only lasted for 21 months, are totally unacceptable, as we have pointed out. Our fishing industry would be decimated. However, it seems that the government is now talking about this arrangement lasting more than 21 months.

Opposition to any transitional agreement on these terms is growing. Mrs May recently received a letter signed by 62 Tory MPs reminding her of the “red lines” in her own Lancaster House speech. These include:-

- Take full control of UK tariff schedules at the WTO with the power to change them without sign-off from the EU27
- Enjoy “full regulatory autonomy” with the ability to change British laws and rules unilaterally
- Be free to start trade negotiations immediately after leaving the EU, which may involve ensuring the UK has the power to discuss the division of the EU’s Tariff Rate Quotas with non-EU trading partners bilaterally
- Have the freedom to negotiate and sign other trade agreements during the implementation period in line with WTO principles

There has been a much greater level of disquiet about the EU’s terms among backbenchers, as these four points (and other vital issues, such as the end of any role for the ECJ) would not be permitted, but some other MPs were bought off by the assurance that it would only be for 21 months and then all would be well. The Cabinet meeting at Chequers today could be rather turbulent.

Now this is looking less likely, we could be entering a period of far greater political turmoil. It is hard to predict what will happen next. Although the majority of Tory MPs supported remain, real headbangers like Anna Soubry are a small minority

and most Tories know that they will face electoral oblivion if the government botches Brexit. The stakes are clearly getting higher. However, it may require some senior heads to roll if the transitional blind alley is to be averted. It is a case of holding on to your hats.

Perhaps rather ironically, the combination of the narrow margin of victory in last June's general election and the remainer-inspired initiative to give Parliament a vote on the final deal may work in our favour. Mrs May dare not force through the transitional deal relying on Labour votes, but she looks unlikely to get it through otherwise. Hopefully, a discreet change of tack will take place to avoid what would be an unmitigated disaster for the PM.

Meanwhile, Anti-Brexit campaigners are planning a six-week blitz in the Midlands and North of England, according to the Financial Times. Predictably, George Soros who was neither born in this country nor lives here, is involved. If anyone comes across such groups canvassing, we would ask them to be polite, even though it is very tempting to behave otherwise! Thankfully, although remainiacs have been trying to subvert democracy for over 18 months now, there is little evidence of any significant shift in public opinion. As one London street newspaper vendor said recently, most people are sick of Brexit.

In these troubled times, it is encouraging that a group of pro-Brexit academics have come together. We would commend their website Briefings for Brexit to your attention and you may, in particular, enjoy reading this piece by Professor Robert Tombs of Cambridge, which points out how ill-advised the remainers are and that far from being a position of stability, EU membership exposes us to considerable uncertainty. Perhaps one should add that the uncertainty may have increased still further next week with next Sunday's Italian General Election unlikely to usher in a government with much sympathy for the federalist vision of France's

Emmanuel Macron

Going back to the academics, these people are brave individuals, who have had to take far more flak than most of us here. They will need thick skins, says Dominic Lawson. He mentions one academic who said, 'I can't come out as pro-Brexit, it would make my life impossible here.'

How sad that in many of our once great universities, the very sensible and rational idea that we should once again be self-governing seems to engender such hostility.

But then this reminds us of one important reason why many of us voted to leave the EU. If successful, it could and hopefully will be the start of a massive and long overdue shake-up of our society, including politics, the media and our entire educational system. The latter will be a particular challenge, but it is encouraging to know that there are a few sane voices out there.

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