

Mrs May keeps us guessing

It would have been a futile exercise to report every twist and turn in the recent debate about “hard” and “soft” Brexit. Far better to wait and see what Mrs May and her colleagues actually plan to do.

Yesterday, we were given some inkling as to her future plans, although it didn't amount to as much detail as many would have liked.

There were, however, some encouragements in other areas. She made it quite clear that there was to be no second referendum and that those who wanted to challenge the result needed to wake up and smell the coffee:- *“But come on. The referendum result was clear. It was legitimate. It was the biggest vote for change this country has ever known. Brexit means Brexit – and we're going to make a success of it.”*

This has been one of Mrs May's stock phrases since taking office. Yesterday, we came a little nearer to knowing what it actually meant. *“There will be no unnecessary delays in invoking Article 50. We will invoke it when we are ready. And we will be ready soon. We will invoke Article 50 no later than the end of March next year.”* Fair enough. This is a confirmation of what had widely been expected. Thankfully, business will have less than six more months of uncertainty, for as well as a date being set, it is looks likely that by then, our exit route will have been determined.

But what will that route be? We were told what it would not be:- *“It is not going to a “Norway model”. It's not going to be a “Switzerland model”. It is going to be an agreement between an independent, sovereign United Kingdom and the European Union.”* Furthermore, alongside repealing the 1972 Accession Treaty, she intends to convert the *Acquis* into UK law when the Article 50 period is complete, so the WTO route

looks to be off the table too.

So what does that leave us with? How is she planning to square the circle between trade and immigration control? There was not a great deal of detail:- *"I know some people ask about the "trade-off" between controlling immigration and trading with Europe. But that is the wrong way of looking at things. We have voted to leave the European Union and become a fully-independent, sovereign country. We will do what independent, sovereign countries do. We will decide for ourselves how we control immigration. And we will be free to pass our own laws."*

On the one hand, she was quite clear that some restriction of freedom of movement will have to be part of any deal:- *"We are not leaving the European Union only to give up control of immigration again"* yet at the same time she insisted, *"I want it to give British companies the maximum freedom to trade with and operate in the Single Market – and let European businesses do the same here."*

Still a bit opaque. The Liechtenstein compromise would fit all the criteria she listed. Another possibility would be the Australian model. In 1997, Australia's government signed a joint declaration on EU-Australian relations, followed two years later by a Mutual Recognition Agreement. The UK could do likewise, or make a unilateral declaration, up to and including a commitment to full regulatory harmonisation. There don't seem to be many other choices.

Mrs May is deliberately not giving too much away on the negotiating tactics, but she didn't mince her words about the irreconcilable Remainiacs:- *"When it legislated to establish the referendum, Parliament put the decision to leave or remain inside the EU in the hands of the people. And the people gave their answer with emphatic clarity. So now it is up to the Government not to question, quibble or backslide on what we have been instructed to do, but to get on with the job."*

Because those people who argue that Article Fifty can only be triggered after agreement in both Houses of Parliament are not standing up for democracy, they're trying to subvert it. They're not trying to get Brexit right, they're trying to kill it by delaying it. They are insulting the intelligence of the British people."

In summary, there were some good things in the speech and not a lot to cause major concern, although Richard North takes the PM to task for claiming we would make our own decisions about how our food is labelled, as those regulations originate with the World Trade Organisation, to which (presumably) she would still wish us to belong. That apart, it was a speech which certainly did not deserve the put-down in the Daily Mirror, suggesting that Mrs May was a prisoner of "ideological Tories who get out of bed every morning to wind back the clock to a bygone age." Such garbage is typical of those people who do not accept that it is the EU which is a relic of a bygone age. On the contrary, Mrs May wasn't anyone's prisoner. She was spelling out her own positive vision for our future in that speech. The Sun called her a "capable PM we can be proud of." Well, she is continuing to win over the doubters and you could sense her genuine enthusiasm as she talked about her "ambitious vision" for post-Brexit UK and it's good that she isn't letting herself be rushed, but a little bit more detail about how we are going to get there would be welcome. Hopefully, we won't have too long to wait.