

## Leaving the EU: European Union (Withdrawal) Act

Sarah Wollaston Chair, Health and Social Care Committee, Chair, Liaison Committee (Commons)

This deal simply does not deliver on the will of the people—it cannot do so mathematically. It is unwanted by the 48% who wanted to remain, and it is unloved by a very significant proportion of the loudest voices for leave. More importantly, it does not have the valid consent of the people. To give consent to an operation, people need to understand and have set out for them what the procedure involves, so that they can weigh up the risks and benefits. I am afraid that it is only now that we truly know what Brexit looks like out of the very many versions of Brexit that were presented during the referendum campaign. And I am afraid that it looks very far from the sunlit uplands with which we were presented at that time.

We cannot say that there is valid consent until people have had the opportunity to weigh up the risks and benefits of this deal—of Brexit reality—and we should take the time to pause in order to give them the chance to give that consent. The Secretary of State said that that would take a year, but that is not the case. This could be done in 24 weeks, and we know that the European Union is prepared to suspend article 50 to allow that process to go ahead. I do not agree with the often stated claim that this would somehow be a travesty that would somehow let down our democracy. Since when was democracy a single, one-off event? No one said it was a travesty when we had a further general election in 2017, just two years after the 2015 election. Surely the worst argument of all for refusing the British people the opportunity to give their valid consent would be to say that it might upset the far right—a group of thugs outside the gates of Parliament. Since when did this House give in to the demands of fascists?

We have heard powerful speeches by my hon. Friend Joseph Johnson and Mr Sheerman about the scale of the harms this deal will inflict on our constituents. All Members in this House have a duty to say it as it is. In an age of populism and fake news, we owe it to our constituents to tell them how it is and not to bow to that populism.

We should be very careful if we are going to ignore the very real concerns that have been set out regarding the conduct of the original referendum campaign—concerns that part of one of the biggest donations in British political history could have come as laundered money from abroad. We have also heard about the serious concerns and the fines imposed by the Electoral Commission for cheating; we are talking about more than half a million pounds diverted to support the murky activities of AggregateIQ. These are very serious concerns. If, in the years to come, there is a public inquiry looking back on the conduct of the campaign, it will ask why those concerns were not taken more seriously at the time.

Alec Shelbrooke Conservative, Elmet and Rothwell

I know that my hon. Friend is a supporter of a second referendum, so let me take this opportunity to ask her what she believes the question would be in a second referendum.

Sarah Wollaston Chair, Health and Social Care Committee, Chair, Liaison Committee (Commons)

My hon. Friend makes a valid point, but the point is that if this House agreed to a referendum Bill, those decisions would be made by this House. My feeling is that it should be a choice between, "Is this what you meant by Brexit? Do you want to proceed on the terms of this deal—the only realistic deal on the table?" and "Do you want to remain?" It would be up to this House to decide whether a further option was included, but what would be wrong would be to deny people the opportunity to discuss that.

Angus MacNeil Chair, International Trade Committee

But effectively the deal will be dead tomorrow, so the premise of the people's vote will be dead tomorrow, leaving only a hard Brexit or revocation of article 50. That is what we are down to now.

Sarah Wollaston Chair, Health and Social Care Committee, Chair, Liaison Committee (Commons)

As it happens, I do not agree, but I do not think that any of us should pretend that it is for us, right now, to decide what the referendum question would be. We now know what the deal is. This is the only realistic deal on the table. It would be unconscionable for members of the Government to impose no deal. We have heard what the consequences of no deal would be, and I am afraid that they would be highly damaging for all the people we represent. It would not be damaging so much for big interests; it would be the most disadvantaged in our society who would pay the highest price.

Angus MacNeil Chair, International Trade Committee

If Parliament voted down the deal tomorrow, the deal could be resurrected again for the people's vote. That is a perplexing situation.

Sarah Wollaston Chair, Health and Social Care Committee, Chair, Liaison Committee (Commons)

If the deal does come back to this House—and once the Labour party has gone through its processology and is able to deliver on the wishes of its own members to back a people's vote—then many former clinicians, including me, will be bringing forward an amendment to make it conditional on informed consent and obtaining that through a people's vote. That would be the right thing to do, in recognition that, as we can all see, this House has reached an absolute impasse. That is the simple truth of the matter. There is no consent for any of the versions of Brexit. Now we have reached that point, absolutely the right thing to do, and the ethical thing to do, is to be honest about it and take the decision back to the people with a simple question: is this what you meant by Brexit or would you rather remain on the deal that we already have?

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