

HOUSE OF COMMONS HANSARD

European Union (Withdrawal) Act

14 January 2019

European Union (Withdrawal) Act

[8th Allotted Day]

Debate resumed (Orders, 4 December and 9 January).

Question again proposed,

That this House approves for the purposes of section 13(1)(b) of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018, the negotiated withdrawal agreement laid before the House on Monday 26 November 2018 with the title ‘Agreement on the withdrawal of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland from the European Union and the European Atomic Energy Community’ and the framework for the future relationship laid before the House on Monday 26 November 2018 with the title ‘Political Declaration setting out the framework for the future relationship between the European Union and the United Kingdom’.

18:27:00

The Secretary of State for International Trade and President of the Board of Trade (Dr Liam Fox)
As we take this debate into the early hours of tomorrow morning, I hope that we will be able to replicate the good humour, good manners and resilience that the Prime Minister showed during her two hours in front of the House this afternoon. [Interruption.] Yes, Mr Speaker, I understand that. As a doctor, I admire good bladder control.

Mr Speaker

I am able to stay in the House for many, many hours. We are not talking about two hours, for the avoidance of doubt. I will very happily be here for 12 hours, if necessary, because I take my responsibilities to the House of Commons seriously.

Dr Fox

It is a pleasure to open this debate on global Britain and the economy as we consider how to honour the decision made by the British people, in a democratic referendum, to leave the European Union. When Parliament made the decision to hold the referendum, it made a contract with the British people that said, “We are unable, or unwilling, to make a decision on this constitutional relationship. This will be decided by the British people and Parliament will abide by that decision.” We have a duty to honour our side of that contract, whether we ourselves voted to remain or leave in the referendum. When we, as members of Parliament, voted in that referendum, we did so in the knowledge that our vote carried an equal weight to that of other citizens of our country. For Parliament to attempt in any way to thwart or block Brexit by any means would be an act of vanity and self-indulgence that would create a breach of trust between Parliament and the people, with potentially unknowable consequences.

Toby Perkins (Chesterfield) (Lab)

The right hon. Gentleman is raising an important point about the obligation of Members of Parliament as a result of the referendum, but we have also had a general election since that day. That general election could have given the Government an overwhelming majority, which would have seen Brexit move one way, but it did not; it ended up with a very tight House. As a result, we have a Prime Minister who could have sought to bring all of us along with her, but instead seems to have taken a very tribal view. What advice has the right hon. Gentleman given to the Prime Minister?

Dr Fox

The advice I will give to the hon. Gentleman is this. The point was raised in the previous Session that no House can bind its successor, but 80% of Members of this House were elected on a manifesto that said they would honour the result of the referendum. We have a duty to do so if we are to keep faith with our voters.

Albert Owen (Ynys Môn) (Lab)

Will the Secretary of State give way?

Henry Smith (Crawley) (Con)

rose—

Dr Fox

I will give way to my hon. Friend, and then I will give way on a number of occasions later on.

Henry Smith

Is it not also the case that the Government spent more than £9 million of taxpayers' money on a leaflet to every UK household saying that the decision of the British people would be respected, so the claim that people did not know what they were voting for or what the outcome would be is nonsense?

Dr Fox

The very act of spending that £9 million, given the outcome of the referendum, shows quite how easy it is to waste Government money.

It is clear that there are three possible outcomes to our deliberations.

Albert Owen

On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I do not make points of order lightly, as you know. The Prime Minister was asked a question earlier about respecting the will of the people and referendums. A number of Members—including, I think, the Secretary of State—voted against the Government of Wales Act 1998 after the 1997 referendum decided the matter. That should be on the record when he lectures us about Brexit.

Mr Speaker

The hon. Gentleman has put his point on the record, and it is there for people to observe if they wish.

Dr Fox

The hon. Gentleman confirms my wisdom in not giving way to him.

It is clear that there are three possible outcomes to our deliberations. I want to say at the outset that Members will determine which route they choose, and while we may disagree, I do not doubt either their motives or their patriotism as they choose the course available to this country. The first option is to accept the deal that has been negotiated—and there is no other deal available. The second is to leave the European Union with no deal, and the third is to have no Brexit at all. Before considering the implications of those options, it is important to underline the fundamental strengths that underpin the UK economy, the changing patterns of our trade and the future patterns of global trade.

Dr Fox

I will give way in a moment.

The UK has an excellent economic success story to tell. Since a Conservative-led Government came to power in 2010, exports have grown by 38.1%, at around 6% per year, driven by an increase in services exports of 54.8%. We sold some £618 billion-worth of goods and services in 2017, up 10.9% on the previous year. New figures released last week by the Office for National Statistics revealed that exports of goods and services in the year to November 2018 were worth £630 billion, growing by £13.9 billion since the previous year. There have now been 32 consecutive months of exports growth.

As the UK considers future free trade agreements with the likes of the United States, Australia, New Zealand and the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership countries, goods exports to those countries continued to boom. To the USA, they were up to £54.9 billion; to Australia, up to £5.1 billion; to New Zealand, up to £869 million; and to CPTPP countries, up to £28.4 billion. There was other notable goods exports growth to non-EU markets—up 29.2% to Nigeria, up 27.3% to India, and up 18.5% to Thailand. That news comes as London retained its position as the top tech investment destination in Europe earlier this week. According to PitchBook and London & Partners, the capital received £1.8 billion-worth of tech investment in 2018—more than Berlin and Paris combined. So much for the failure that would result from a vote to leave the European Union.

Charlie Elphicke (Dover) (Con)

Is not the key prize of leaving the EU that this country will be able to do trade deals around the world? If we adopted the advice of the Labour party, which is not to leave the EU in any meaningful way, we would not be able to do any trade deals across the globe.

Dr Fox

I will come to the specifics of the freedom to negotiate free trade agreements and the Opposition's policy on that. The point I was making was that when we voted to leave the European Union, we were told that the very act of voting to leave would result in massive job losses, a loss of investment in the United Kingdom, a collapse in confidence and a recession in the UK economy. Nothing could be further from the truth. We have created jobs. We have seen record inward investment, and we have seen our exports rise to record levels.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab)

The Secretary of State said that there were three possible outcomes to our deliberations. Actually, the three possible outcomes to our deliberations today and tomorrow are: first, that the package is agreed; secondly, that the package falls; and thirdly, that the package is amended. The former Brexit Secretary—the middle one—told the Procedure Committee, on legal advice:

“if amendments were passed which purported to offer approval, but only subject to changes being made to the text of either the Withdrawal Agreement or the Future Framework, this would, in

effect, amount to Parliament not approving the documents that were put to it. In this circumstance, the Government would therefore not have the authority to ratify the Withdrawal Agreement.”

Does the Secretary of State agree that, if any amendment is carried tomorrow, it will not be possible for the Government to ratify the withdrawal agreement?

Dr Fox

As you well know, Mr Speaker, it depends what any amendment says, but the Government will seek to get approval for this agreement because there is no other agreement currently on offer from the European Union.

Mrs Sheryll Murray (South East Cornwall) (Con)

I have a lot of admiration for my right hon. Friend. He is a much more experienced Member of Parliament than me and has been in this place for a long time. Could he explain to me how we would have no Brexit at all? As I understand it, and as many people are saying, even if the withdrawal agreement falls, the date of 29 March is in the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018.

Dr Fox

As the law stands, were there to be no changes, we would automatically leave the European Union on 29 March. If that piece of legislation was, however, changed by one means or another, the picture could be very different.

Dame Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham) (Con)

I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for giving way, particularly as when we stood on our manifesto in 1997, our manifesto was so clearly against Welsh devolution. Does he agree that companies such as GE Healthcare, which is headquartered in my constituency and has just spent £12 million investing in the local economy, are right when they say that ratification of the withdrawal agreement would provide business with the certainty it needs? In contrast, an exit on no deal would present considerable challenges for their operations, supply chains and, most importantly, their customers.

Dr Fox

As usual, my right hon. Friend makes her point concisely. The argument has come from a wide range of business sectors that, while they can price in risk, they cannot price in uncertainty, and certainty is what they are looking for.

It is a matter of fact that the relative importance of the European Union as an export market for the United Kingdom has been declining over the last decade, falling from 48.9% of the total in 2010 to 45.2% in 2017. Of course, the importance of the UK to EU trade varies from country to country. Figures compiled by Japanese investment bank Nomura show that Belgium’s economy is the most reliant on trade with the UK, with around 8% of Belgian GDP dependent on trade with Britain. That is the highest level within the EU27. Belgium exports over £30 billion-worth of goods to the UK, which is Belgium’s fourth largest export market. Belgium’s Finance Minister has previously called for a quick trade agreement with the United Kingdom post-Brexit to protect thousands of jobs in that country. When trade is looked at purely in terms of exports, Ireland is the most exposed country—about 13% of all Irish exports end up in Britain—and the Netherlands also has a large reliance on the UK for exports and GDP.

At the same time as the proportion of Britain’s exports to the EU has fallen, we are trading more with other partners around the world. We export a huge variety of commodities—for example, we sold £22 billion-worth of food, feed and drink abroad in 2017. In the year to November 2018, we

sold £33.7 billion-worth of cars, £25.2 billion of medicinal and pharmaceutical products, and £24.6 billion of mechanical power generator products—from aircraft engines to gas turbines, and from steam generators to nuclear reactors. So much for Britain not producing anything any more; we are actually experiencing a renaissance in manufacturing in this country.

We also export a great many services. We are, in fact, the world's second largest services exporter. In the year to September 2018, we sold some £82.4 billion-worth of business services, £61 billion of financial services and nearly £38 billion of travel services. Here, across the sectors, the UK has huge comparative advantage. Services account for almost half of all our exports—42.4% going to the EU and 57.6% to non-EU countries.

Seema Malhotra (Feltham and Heston) (Lab/Co-op)

Will the Secretary of State give way?

Lucy Powell (Manchester Central) (Lab/Co-op)

Will the Secretary of State give way?

Dr Fox

I give way to the hon. Member for Feltham and Heston (Seema Malhotra), who was the first to stand up.

Seema Malhotra

The Secretary of State is making a very important point about our need to increase trade deals and trade relationships across the world. He has mentioned India, and on Friday I had a very good meeting with businesses in the Indian Business Network that are keen to increase trade with Britain. Does he agree with me that the relationship we have with the EU in trade is not just about our trade with the European Union? We use about 70 trade deals that the EU has negotiated with other countries for about £150 billion-worth of trade. Will the Secretary of State assure this House that there will still be access to those trade deals after we leave the European Union?

Dr Fox

I am grateful to the hon. Lady for raising a very important point. Yes, the Government's intention is, of course, that we will get this deal through, in which case, when it comes to an implementation period, we will have the opportunity for automatic roll-over. However, as the House would expect us to do, the Government are also preparing, in case there is no deal, to be able to have continuity of these trade agreements. A number of them are close to being signed, and when they are signed, the Government will put them to the House so that the House can make a judgment on them.

Andrew Bridgen (North West Leicestershire) (Con)

Will the Secretary of State confirm that when we leave the European Union we will be the biggest export market for EU goods? Probably something like 17% of all EU exports will be coming to us. Has he or his Department made any estimate of how many millions of jobs in the EU are reliant on this trade with the UK?

Dr Fox

That is why it is to our mutual advantage to get a free trade agreement with the European Union. I hear people say that it would be fine simply to leave purely on World Trade Organisation terms, but if WTO terms were so advantageous, we would not be looking to have a free trade agreement with the United States. It is very clear that free trade agreements are one of the ways in which we can overcome some of the restrictions on most favoured nation status. I imagine that it would be to the

advantage of both parties—both the EU27 and the UK—to come to a free trade agreement of some form after we leave so that we can maximise that trade between us.

Lucy Powell

Will the Secretary of State give way?

Wes Streeting (Ilford North) (Lab)

Will the Secretary of State give way?

Dr Fox

I will give way again in a little while.

World trade is at a pivotal moment. We are at the intersection of a series of major global trends—trends so seismic that they have transformed or will transform economies and societies across the world. Services are now a larger part of the world economy than ever before, and they are more easily traded across borders thanks to the internet and digital telecommunications. We live in an emerging knowledge transfer-based trading system, where an engineering report, a 3D printer design, or new advances in machine learning can be just as valuable as the contents of a cargo container.

The transfer of services and expertise in things such as product design and software engineering are becoming ever more important. A revolution in e-commerce is now under way. It is already a major component of world trade—from some of the world's largest corporations, such as Alibaba and Amazon, to the thousands of small companies that have never before been able to trade internationally. Major new opportunities are arising in the rapidly developing commercial and consumer markets of south-east Asia, Africa and Latin America, and it is essential that Britain leverages its unique strengths to realise them.

Lucy Powell

Will the Secretary of State give way?

Dr Fox

I will give way to the hon. Lady, if only because of her patience and tenacity.

Lucy Powell

I thank the Secretary of State very much. Shortly after the referendum, when he first took up the post, he said that the day after we left the EU, which is now only a few weeks away, he would have dozens of trade deals ready to go. How is that going?

Dr Fox

Perhaps the hon. Lady was not listening to the answer I gave earlier, but that process is getting to the point where we are likely to be signing some of those agreements in the very near future, at which point we will put them to the House of Commons.

Not only has there been a revolution in e-commerce, but Britain's consumers have embraced it, with about 20% of all goods in the UK bought online. At the same time—this is less well known—of all goods sold online, the UK is third globally behind only China and the United States. Last year, one in seven global online shoppers bought UK goods. It is therefore essential that we are able to operate an independent trade policy, allowing us to access the EU market, which remains hugely important to us, without tying our hands in relation to our ability to access markets in some of the world's fastest-growing economies.

This deal enables us to develop a trade policy that will mean we can make the most of the opportunities of new technologies and the changing shape of the global economy, striking a balance between protecting the markets we already have and tapping into new and rapidly expanding markets elsewhere.

Kirsty Blackman (Aberdeen North) (SNP)

Specifically on e-commerce, the Government promised that in early 2019, the new online service for overseas businesses sending parcels to customers in the UK would be available. Will the Secretary of State tell us when it is going to be available?

Dr Fox

The Department for International Trade is putting increased resources into improving the elements we have to enable businesses to operate online, and we will continue to do so.

We must have a policy that is flexible and nimble, with which we can make the most of the opportunities of new technologies and the changing shape of the global economy. We can boost productivity, raise living standards and promote competitiveness. Working with Parliament, business, civil society and the devolved Administrations, this deal allows us to have an independent trade policy for the first time in over 40 years.

Of course, we have not got everything that we want in this deal, but neither has the EU. There is give and take in any negotiation, and compromises have had to be made. Today, however, I would just like to emphasise what this agreement and the political declaration do. They give the United Kingdom the freedom to decide for ourselves who comes here, how to support our farmers and who fishes in our waters, as my right hon. Friend the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Secretary set out to the House the other day. They also give us the freedom to open up new markets to world-class British goods and services around the globe.

The political declaration sets out a clearly agreed vision for the UK's future relationship with the EU and provides instructions to negotiators. What the political declaration does is set out an unprecedented arrangement for UK-EU economic co-operation, provide ambitious arrangements for services and investment, and ensure that our relationship is far more comprehensive than any other free trade agreement the EU has signed to date.

Emma Little Pengelly (Belfast South) (DUP)

The Secretary of State has been a great champion for global Britain—or, as I would like to call it, global United Kingdom—but surely he must be disappointed by many elements of this withdrawal agreement, which ties our hands for the next number of years on the types of trade deals we can do. That situation is exacerbated and much greater in Northern Ireland, where we could, in the words of the Attorney General, be not permanently but almost indefinitely in a backstop that would prevent us from being part of a new UK trade deal situation.

Dr Fox

I will not go back over the ground that the Prime Minister went over extensively this afternoon, but I would say that we perhaps need to take cognisance of the wording of the letter that came from the two EU Presidents—of the Commission and of the Council. They have a very legalistic view, and when they say that something carries legal weight, it tends to do so. I share many of the reservations that many in this House have about the backstop, but I believe that the construction of the backstop and the relationship set out in the political declaration mean that the risk of getting to the backstop is much less than I fear the risk of our being unable to achieve Brexit is. For me, that has been one

of the key political balances; Members across the House will have to make that decision for themselves.

The political declaration will enable both parties to deliver the legal agreements that will give the future relationship effect by the end of 2020, covering an economic partnership, but also a security partnership and specific agreements on cross-cutting co-operation.

There has been much speculation about what the alternative to the agreement is—that point was raised by the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant), who is no longer in his place. Let me be clear: there is no alternative agreement to that which has already been negotiated. The EU and the UK have painstakingly thrashed out a deal that has been endorsed by our Prime Minister and the 27 leaders of the other EU member states. Failure to accept a negotiated deal will lead us, as I said earlier, to either no deal or, worse, no Brexit.

Toby Perkins

Will the right hon. Gentleman give way? [Interruption.]

Dr Fox

Why not? I will give way to the hon. Gentleman again. I am feeling extraordinarily generous.

Toby Perkins

I am grateful that the right hon. Gentleman could not find any better alternatives. Does he accept that the deal has been painstakingly negotiated on the basis of the red lines that the Prime Minister set out right at the start, and that if we had different red lines, we could end up at a different destination?

Dr Fox

The hon. Gentleman should not put himself down in that way; that is normally the business of those on the other side of the House.

It is clear that if we do not accept a negotiated deal, the two other outcomes would be no deal or potentially no Brexit, and I do not think that either of those are acceptable. The Government have been clear that we neither want nor expect a no-deal scenario, but of course the Government will continue to do the responsible thing and prepare for all eventualities in case a final agreement cannot be reached. However, the evidence is clear that the best way forward for our businesses, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Dame Cheryl Gillan) eloquently set out, and for jobs and for our collective prosperity, is to have a Brexit deal.

Some have suggested that it would be possible under article XXIV of the general agreement on tariffs and trade to maintain tariff-free trade as an alternative to the negotiated agreement in a no-deal scenario. There are two immediate problems facing that suggestion. The first is that it would require the agreement of the EU and be based on the expectation of a future trade agreement or customs union to be operable in WTO law. Although it might be argued, as I am sure many in the House would, that that would be in the economic interests of the EU27, we all know from experience that the politics of the EU can take precedence over economic pragmatism. In the political atmosphere of no deal, it would be difficult to cultivate the good will necessary for that to proceed. Secondly, that suggestion would not deal with all the regulatory issues—the non-tariff barriers—that are so important to many businesses.

Sir Oliver Heald (North East Hertfordshire) (Con)

My right hon. Friend will be aware that last week the Prime Minister met a group of Members from all parts of the House with manufacturing constituencies. There was concern coming through from all parts of the House and from both sides of industry that a no-deal situation would be disruptive and bad for manufacturing. Does he agree that, with the assurances that have come through today from the European Union, Members in all parts of the House who want to ensure that we avoid a no-deal situation could do a lot worse than vote for the deal that is on the table?

Dr Fox

I think that my right hon. and learned Friend, in making his points so succinctly, has just saved himself several hours of waiting. I believe that having a deal is preferable to no deal, but I am not one of those who takes the hyperbolic view that not having a deal would be cataclysmic to our economy. Yes, it may be disruptive, but it is entirely survivable for the UK economy. It is just not preferable, when it comes to the choice between having a deal and not having a deal, which is why I think it is advisable for the House to vote for this agreement.

There are, of course, Members of the House who want there to be no Brexit at all. I believe that would be a democratic disaster. It would be a betrayal of the commitments given by this House to respect the result of the EU referendum and, let me remind the 80% of the Members of the House who were elected on a promise to honour the result of the referendum, the manifesto commitments. There are many who say that democracy exists on the understanding that a voter can change their mind. That is undoubtedly true, but democratic consent by the people is also founded on the understanding that the result of the vote will be carried out. Failure to do so would undermine the trust of the people. Not only that, but it would be politically unacceptable, a betrayal of our principles and, potentially, a seismic and existential threat to our political system. We should not underestimate it. It would create a chasm of distrust between the electors and the elected of an unprecedented nature—a wilful destruction of the reputation of Parliament in the eyes of the people.

Boris Johnson (Uxbridge and South Ruislip) (Con)

I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his speech and particularly on his fortitude in his attitude towards a no-deal Brexit, which I think is entirely laudable. I know that he is a great admirer of the opportunities to increase our trade with the United States. Does he agree that it is a great sadness that the ambassador of the United States was forced to point out that, under this deal, we will be locked so closely into the EU customs union as to be unable to do a deep and thoroughgoing free trade deal with the United States, or indeed with any other significant economy?

Dr Fox

Our freedom to negotiate free trade agreements will be dependent on the level of alignment that we have. What is different about the political declaration, compared with the previous, Chequers proposals, is that there is no specific mention of a common rulebook or frictionless trade. Indeed, it sets out an ambition that we would determine the freedom that we would have by that level of alignment. We need to look, sector by sector, at what level of alignment we would want to have, in order to maximise our freedom. For example, there was a misunderstanding that the United Kingdom would not have control over tariffs on manufactured goods, which clearly we would have and which would be a very big ask in relation to, for example, the United States' automotive sector in any potential free trade agreement with the United Kingdom.

Dr Fox

I will make some progress. I am cognisant of the fact that some 80 Members are down to speak in tonight's debate.

In coming to these deliberations, the House should also be under no illusion that the United Kingdom could somehow retain the status quo of its EU membership. This is not possible. It was not possible even before the referendum was called, because the EU itself is changing. The EU is committed, let us remember, to ever closer union. Even since the referendum, there have been calls to move to qualified majority voting in areas from VAT to common foreign policy. These may indeed be right for those who wish to move towards greater integration, but they are not the right course for our country. Remaining in the European Union would be either to tie the United Kingdom into a more integrationist future or to create ever more tension and friction between ourselves and our European partners.

Sir Mark Hendrick (Preston) (Lab/Co-op)

Can the Secretary of State tell the House whether he believes that a deal with the United States would be one of the easiest in human history?

Dr Fox

No one who has ever done a negotiation with the United States would use the word “easy” to describe it. That is something that comes across rather quickly to anyone who has had to deal with the United States trade negotiators. It is different, however, from negotiating a trade agreement with the European Union, the difference being that if we are looking at a free trade agreement with the United States, we have to diminish the regulatory and legal differences to get closer to a trade agreement. With the European Union, we begin from identity of regulation and legislation on our trading relationship, which should technically make it much simpler.

What we do not want to do is introduce unnecessary friction and tension. Sadly, that is something that both the Labour leader and the hon. Member for Brent North (Barry Gardiner), the shadow Trade Secretary, as well as the rest of the Opposition, have failed to understand.

As has been made clear on numerous occasions, there could be no joint decision making on trade agreements if the UK is outside the EU in the way that the Labour party pretends there can be. There would be no fully independent trade policy as part of the EU customs union, and the Labour party has absolutely no chance—none, zilch, zero—of negotiating a better deal than the one we have now. There is no need to take my word for it. In response to accusations that Labour’s trade policy was “total fantasy”, Jean-Claude Piris, the long-serving former director general of the EU Council’s legal service, said:

“Obviously this is ruled out. It is contrary to the basic EU principle of autonomy of decision making. Don’t even think about it!”

The Labour party clearly has not thought about it to any satisfactory degree.

Labour’s policy, in so far as I understood it following the Leader of the Opposition’s interview yesterday on “The Andrew Marr Show”, is that Labour intends to hold a general election and potentially another referendum, including all the legislation that would be required for that, all within 72 days of tomorrow’s vote in order to carry out their fantasy policy proposals. It is a total shambles for an Opposition. If they think they could take that to the British public in a general election, they are even more foolish and naive than I had previously considered them to be.

Ruth George (High Peak) (Lab)
rose—

Dr Fox

I will give way to the hon. Lady in a moment.

Let me just say something briefly about two other suggestions. Some Members have raised the prospect of a so-called Norway or EEA option. Re-joining the EEA agreement would mean that we would have to accept all the four freedoms of the single market, including free movement of people. It would not on its own be sufficient to enable our commitments to Northern Ireland to be met, including on avoiding a hard border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. We would be stuck in the single market. If this were combined with staying in a customs union, which some have advocated, we would also be prevented from pursuing a fully independent trade policy. It would also leave our financial services industry, as the Chancellor has said, exposed to a rapidly evolving body of EU regulation over which we would have no influence. In many ways, it would be worse than remaining in the European Union, leaving us with many of the restrictions but, in perpetuity, unable to utilise any of the levers of decision making.

Ruth George

The Secretary of State is making a case against all the alternatives, but is it not the case, as he himself has set out, that there are no legally binding certainties in the future declaration? As he himself set out, we will be seeking to please both the USA and the EU on regulatory alignment. Those things are impossible to do. All this deal signs us up to is years more of uncertainty.

Dr Fox

But we will be taking those decisions. That is the whole point of leaving the European Union: those decisions will be in the hands of the British Government and the British Parliament for us to determine what level of regulatory alignment we want, if any, to maximise our access to trading markets.

Dr Fox

I will give way one more time in a moment.

There are also Members of this House who have advocated a second referendum, but there are three substantive problems with that suggestion: on practical grounds, democratic grounds and constitutional grounds. First, in practical terms, it would take time for this House and the other place to pass the necessary primary legislation. The Electoral Commission would also have to fulfil its statutory duty to assess the intelligibility of the question to be posed, a process that takes about 10 weeks. A further 12 weeks would be required between the question being determined and the referendum actually being held. It is therefore completely impractical to hold such a referendum before the United Kingdom leaves the European Union on 29 March. It is entirely possible to see such a process taking up to a year before it could be completed.

Secondly, there are clear democratic grounds to oppose a second referendum. This House voted overwhelmingly to hold the referendum to give the decision on Britain's membership of the European Union to the British people. A "people's vote" has already been held and it produced a clear, unambiguous instruction from the British electorate for us to leave the European Union. We are honour-bound to respect that.

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con)

My right hon. Friend is making a very impassioned speech in support of the Prime Minister's deal. I too am supportive of that deal. On a point of clarification and accuracy, when he talked about the Norway arrangement he said there would be no opportunity to influence the rules. Are there not the powers of co-determination for EEA nations within that body to be able to at least have a say at the initial stages when legislation is drafted?

Dr Fox

I have to say in all candour to my hon. Friend that having spoken to a number of my colleagues in Norway, their advice was to retain the ability to have our own free trade agreement and not restrict our freedom in the way that they have.

This House confirmed that we would respect the result of the referendum when we voted overwhelmingly to trigger article 50 and begin the process of negotiations.

Lucy Powell

Will the Secretary of State give way?

Dr Fox

I have already given way to the hon. Lady and I will not do so again.

This was further confirmed by the last general election in which the two main parties, comprising over 80% of the total votes cast, promised to respect the referendum result. Let us imagine that a second referendum were held in which the remain side won, perhaps with a narrow majority but with a lower turnout. Leave supporters like me could well begin demanding a third referendum, a best of three. Where would the process actually end? We have had a people's vote and we need to respect the people's vote. Another referendum would not settle the issue or heal our divisions—quite the opposite. It would further divide our already fractious country at a time when we need to come together.

There is also the constitutional issue. If we overturn this referendum result, we will be setting a precedent that could be applied to other referendums too. Furthermore, a second referendum would create prolonged, not diminished, political and economic uncertainty.

Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con)

Is not the point about the future trade relationship and the opportunities for global Britain that without this withdrawal agreement there can be no negotiation with Europe, whether to achieve a Canada-plus solution or any other solution? The danger with no deal is that without an agreement at the beginning, we would never be able to structure a future free trade agreement with the European Union.

Dr Fox

As usual, my hon. Friend makes a very good point very clearly. There are, across the House, a number of potential destinations that Members want to see: a Norway-type option, EEA-plus, a Canada-style agreement or FTA-plus. What they all have in common is one thing: there needs to be a withdrawal agreement before we are actually able to have any of them. That is why this particular deal is so important.

Dr Fox

I will give way one more time before I finish.

It is time to consign the divisions of the referendum to the past. It is time to raise our sights and acknowledge that there is a world beyond Europe and there will be a time beyond Brexit to build the economic opportunities that this country needs to thrive as a truly global Britain. The withdrawal agreement and political declaration are a way forward to achieve this model; to bring us together, to seize the new opportunities out there in the world economy and to lead our country to a more prosperous, stable and secure future.

While the UK is leaving the European Union, we are certainly not leaving Europe. This agreement provides a foundation on which to build our continued co-operation with our European partners on trading, political and security matters. It will enable us to play a full and active role on the global stage, working closely with friends old and new, and building an independent trade policy that caters to the strengths and requirements of the UK economy. The deal allows the UK to continue to participate in the EU's existing free trade agreements during the implementation period, as has already been mentioned. Crucially, it will also have the benefit of being able to negotiate, sign and ratify new trade agreements and lay the foundations for future relationships with our trading partners across the world. We need to take a balanced approach, acknowledging the continued importance of our EU partners while taking advantage of opportunities beyond the borders of our continent in the high-growth economies of Africa, Asia and South America, which I believe will be key to our economic success as a global Britain.

The deal will give us the freedom to implement our own trade remedies regime, to protect jobs and livelihoods from unfair trade, to set our own trade tariffs and to take up our independent seat at the World Trade Organisation for the first time in more than 40 years. That will be a key opportunity to further our support for the international rules-based trading system and ensure it delivers free and fair trade and, in particular, to pioneer the liberalisation of trade in services.

As I have outlined, there are fundamental changes in the global economy that simply did not exist when the Uruguay round was concluded, and it is right that we position the British economy to take advantage of them. Even as the information revolution continues to transform our world at a staggering pace with the system of free and fair international trade that uplifts it and underpins it, there is still much to do to reduce existing and emerging tariff and non-tariff barriers to trade that already pose a serious threat to global growth. Britain can play a key role in that.

We have an abiding duty to do what we believe is right for our country. Members will take different views, and, as I said at the outset, I respect their ability to do so. I do not in any way undermine their patriotism in taking different views. The agreement carries out the democratic will of the British people to leave the European Union, as expressed by the referendum. It allows the United Kingdom to take back control of our borders, laws and money and delivers a close and co-operative partnership with the European Union but, crucially, outside it. It delivers for the British economy.

No negotiated agreement is likely to deliver everything that anyone wants—perhaps no agreement ever could, but for our communities, our prosperity and for future generations, I believe this agreement is the right thing for the United Kingdom. I commend the Prime Minister's deal to the House.

19:12:00

Barry Gardiner (Brent North) (Lab)

For many months, we have been confronted with a series of choices and a series of false choices. The country had to choose whether to leave or remain. Those in the Cabinet had to choose whether to leave or remain in the Cabinet. For many Government Members, the choice has become whether to leave with or without a deal. For many Opposition Members, the choice has been whether to call for a second referendum or to accept the first.

Many famous figures have been quoted since we started our debate back at the beginning of December, but these are the words that keep coming back to me: it is not our abilities in life but our choices that define who we truly are. For all the heart searching and the division that these questions

have caused, I am convinced more than ever that the real divide in our country is not between those who voted to remain and those who voted to leave but, as the leader of my party said last week, between the many who do the work, create the wealth and pay the taxes, and the few who set the rules, reap the rewards and so often dodge paying the taxes. The real choice is choosing whose side we are on when we see injustice, unfairness and inequality. In answer to that question, my party—the Labour party—has always throughout its history had one and only one answer. As the party of the many, we seek to heal the appalling divide that we now see in our society.

The speeches that have moved me in the long course of our debate since December were those like that of my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent Central (Gareth Snell), who explained that his constituents were not interested in the processes and the amendments. He said:

“They want to know how they will feed their kids and heat their house, and how they will get to work if there is no bus. How will they make ends meet if they have to move from their current benefit on to universal credit?”

That view was intriguingly echoed from the Government Benches by the hon. Member for Plymouth, Moor View (Johnny Mercer), who said:

“The vote to leave was in no small part a *cri de coeur* from millions of people who feel that the powers that be in Westminster no longer know, let alone care, what it feels like to walk in their shoes...At every level, there was a direct correlation between household income and the likelihood to vote for leaving the EU.”—[Official Report, 6 December 2018; Vol. 650, c. 1144-1159.]

The social divide in our country is real. I agree with my colleagues who say, “That was not caused by the European Union.” That is true, but nor did the European Union provide a shield against it. It will not be solved if we become poorer by leaving the EU, but while our country has been a member of the EU, the experience of those millions of people has been the loss of secure jobs, the hollowing out of their communities, and years of austerity and harsh social policy. That is why remaining in the EU does not appear to them to be a solution to the inequality we face.

Cri de coeur it may have been, but those people will feel nothing but anger and disgust for us as politicians if we turn around now and patronise them by ignoring and reversing on the message they gave us in the referendum. My good friend the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne Central (Chi Onwurah) expressed that with an eloquence we rarely hear in the Chamber when she said:

“The right to be heard is a key battleground in the history of our country, and it is at the heart of the age-old division between those who labour in silence and those who speak from a gilded platform.”—[Official Report, 4 December 2018; Vol. 650, c. 832.]

My God, I wish I had said that.

When the referendum result came in, those who voted to leave finally felt that their voices had been heard. The House has to understand that despite the social chapter and the good will of our MEPs, the EU did not present itself as a champion of the voiceless. It was against that backdrop that the Prime Minister had an opportunity to put together a future that met the aspirations of those voters. She could and should have recognised that when our fellow citizens are divided 52% to 48%, it is the time not to go back in the political bunker but to reach out. She should have reached out and tried to build a consensus across Parliament that would have united our country. That would have been leadership, but instead she doubled down, put her party interests before the country and tried to appease the European Research Group.

I do not deny that the Prime Minister has shown steel and determination, but there is a point at which steel and determination become obstinacy and recklessness, and she has gone far beyond it. The Labour party consistently argued that before triggering article 50, Parliament must be properly consulted on, and fully involved in, the impact assessments, the right to a meaningful vote, the deal and the financial modelling. We argued that Parliament had the right to see the full legal opinion prepared by the Attorney General. The Prime Minister's refusal at every stage was a blunder that resulted in an achievement unique in 1,000 years of our history in this place: a Government being held to be in contempt of Parliament. That is ironic, given that Brexit was supposed to be about restoring the sovereignty of Parliament.

Charlie Elphicke

The hon. Gentleman talks about the importance of uniting the House. Will he unite with me in rejecting the idea of a second referendum? We need to honour the referendum mandate and leave the European Union.

Barry Gardiner

I will conclude on exactly the point that the hon. Gentleman raises, because it is at the heart of the conundrum facing the House and the country. If he gives me time, I will get there.

Dr Fox

I am grateful for how the hon. Gentleman is setting out his arguments, but if he feels that he was ill informed when article 50 was triggered, why did he vote for it?

Barry Gardiner

The Secretary of State makes a bewildering point, because I did not talk about being ill informed about the triggering of article 50, but he makes his own point and perhaps he understands what he means.

Now that the Prime Minister has finally brought her deal back to the House of Commons, it is hardly surprising that Members on both sides do not believe it to be in the best interests of our country. I know that she is now reaching out to her rather unlikely new-found friends in Unite and the GMB, and even to Opposition Members, but colleagues will recognise that this is a paradigm of too little, too late. Workers' rights and environmental standards and protections are a vital part of Labour's concern about the future relationship. We cannot agree that the UK should be in a situation in which we might fall behind our EU counterparts. The principle of non-regression from current levels makes it almost impossible to take action against the loss of a specific right but, as the TUC has made clear, what is required is not vague assurances but the binding long-term guarantees that working people need. These are not, even now, being offered.

On 10 December, the Prime Minister called a halt to the first part of the debate. She acknowledged that the package of the withdrawal agreement and the future political framework, as it stood, would not gain the support of the House. She undertook to change it and to come back with legally binding assurances on the backstop after listening to Members' objections. Indeed, the Secretary of State for International Trade went as far as to say:

"I think it is very difficult to support the deal if we don't get changes to the backstop... I'm not even sure if the cabinet will agree for it to be put to the House of Commons."

Well, here it is, and here he is, but the only thing that has changed is that the Prime Minister has lost yet more votes, and more of the confidence of Members and of the country. The letter from the EU

that she has brought back is a long way from the significant and legally effective commitment she promised last month. It is a reiteration of the EU's existing position. She has delayed proceedings in a futile bid to run down the clock but, once again, nothing has changed.

Before the intermission in our debate, when the Prime Minister was trying to press her Back Benchers to support her, she claimed repeatedly that there was no possibility of renegotiation, but then, when defeat seemed inevitable, she scrambled back to Europe in a vain attempt to do precisely that.

Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg (North East Somerset) (Con)

You are criticising—[Interruption.] I do apologise, Mr Speaker; Even Homer nods. The hon. Gentleman said that the Prime Minister told us that she could not renegotiate, but now criticises her for coming back saying she could not renegotiate, as she said. That seems a little unfair.

Barry Gardiner

The hon. Gentleman is extremely courteous and always punctilious about the truth of what is said in this Chamber. I simply stated the fact that the Prime Minister had said it was impossible to renegotiate but that, when she faced defeat, she tried to do what she herself had said was impossible.

The Government could have used some of this time to respond to the Treasury Committee by providing proper economic assessments containing an analysis of the Northern Ireland backstop and setting out the short-term economic impact of the Prime Minister's proposed deal. On 11 December, the Committee published its report on the withdrawal agreement and the political declaration. It concluded:

“The White Paper scenario, which is akin to the Chequers proposal, represents the most optimistic and generous reading of the Political Declaration, insofar as it is consistent with it at all. It does not represent the central or most likely outcome under the Political Declaration. Therefore, it cannot be used to inform Parliament's meaningful vote on the Withdrawal Agreement. The information provided includes no analysis of the Backstop, and there is no short-term analysis of any of the scenarios, including on public finances and on regional and sectoral job losses and gains. The Government has only provided long-term analysis, which does not show how the economy will transition to a new trading relationship, or the path taken by inflation and unemployment”.

The Chair of the Committee, the right hon. Member for Loughborough (Nicky Morgan), commented:

“The aim of this report is not to recommend how MPs should vote, but to ensure that MPs are as informed as possible when it comes to choosing a division lobby. Yet the Government has made this difficult to achieve. The Committee is disappointed that the Government has modelled its White Paper, which represents the most optimistic reading of the Political Declaration, rather than a more realistic scenario. The Committee is also disappointed that the Treasury has not analysed the backstop and fails to include short-term analysis of any of the scenarios, including impacts on public finances and on regional and sectoral job losses or gains.”

In the Chancellor's letter responding to the Committee, he revealed that

“there is not yet sufficient specificity on detailed arrangements for modelling purposes, and therefore the provisions of the backstop have not been included in the analysis.”

Indeed! Members are being asked to take one of the most important decisions for our country on the basis of inadequate financial information, and it is precisely this lack of specificity that has left Members across the House unable to have confidence in the Prime Minister's deal.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr Philip Hammond)

Will the hon. Gentleman acknowledge that the cross-Government modelling to which he refers looked at the situation 15 years out? Of course it does not reflect the inclusion of the backstop. The backstop, if it were used, would be a temporary arrangement, so it is completely irrelevant to the stable state 15 years out.

Barry Gardiner

Of course it was right to look at the 15-year long-term assessment. Nobody is disputing that. Indeed, I will quote later from precisely that analysis. The problem is—and this is not just my criticism but the all-party Treasury Select Committee's criticism—that these crucial elements of how we will transition to the future relationship have not been analysed or presented to the House.

Charlie Elphicke

As a member of that Committee, I share the hon. Gentleman's concerns about the modelling, and I do believe that the Treasury needs to get better at listening, but would he agree that Labour's various Brexit tests are not worth the paper they are written on? Indeed, I believe one member of the shadow Cabinet used a profanity in describing Labour's Brexit policy not so long ago.

Barry Gardiner

Oh dear, Mr Speaker!

It is precisely this lack of specificity that has left Members across the House unable to have confidence in the Prime Minister's deal. I probably should not call it a deal, because the future political framework document is no more than a placeholder for the future trade and security agreements that the Government hope eventually to conclude. It is both this lack of detail and the fact that the Prime Minister has wound down the clock that have significantly reduced the ability of Parliament to be properly involved in the most important decision facing our country.

When my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer), the shadow Brexit Secretary, fought and won the battle for a meaningful vote, which is now scheduled for tomorrow, he made it clear that the word "meaningful" must imply both a level of detail and clarity about what was proposed and a timeliness that would enable Parliament to amend the proposal and the Government to respond appropriately. We should not forget that originally the Government quite correctly wished to pursue the negotiations on the withdrawal agreement and the political framework side by side, but they agreed the chronology set out by the European Union.

That, I believe, was a mistake, but it made it all the more important that the negotiations on phase one be concluded expeditiously. The Government failed to do that. As a consequence, they ended up agreeing to everything that was vital to the EU in the withdrawal agreement and leaving everything about the future trade, security and political agreement that is vital to the UK to fall into a thin wish list, with words such as "the parties envisage", "the parties will explore", "the parties will use their best endeavours".

The truth is that the real negotiations that will affect our economic life and our citizens' future security have not yet properly begun. Look at the provisions for data protection: we have lost our place on the European Data Protection Board. The Prime Minister said in Munich that staying on it was one of her objectives so that we could continue to influence the rules and development of the

general data protection regulation regime that we had been so influential in setting up. We will still have to comply with the scheme, but under the political declaration the EU will “start the assessments” of whether it should recognise the UK as a fit regime and will endeavour to reach a decision by 2020.

It is the same with REACH and the chemicals regulations: these are areas in which the EU is leading the world and in which we were leading the EU. No longer—our chemicals industry has spent more than half a billion pounds registering more than 6,000 chemicals with the EU’s database. The Government are now asking it to re-register every single one with our own Health and Safety Executive because we will no longer have access to that EU database. It is the same for financial services, where we are talking about equivalence, not even mutual recognition: the EU will start assessing whether it can declare our regulatory and supervisory regime is equivalent only after the withdrawal date. Then it says that it will try to reach a decision before the end of June 2020. Well, how very good of it.

The hon. Member for East Surrey (Mr Gyimah) spoke with great clarity and from his own bitter experience of negotiating with the EU when he advised the House:

“We must be clear-eyed as we go into these negotiations because they have been set up for failure. The EU will manage the timetable, it will manage the sequencing of the negotiations, it will set the hurdles and it will tell us when we can progress to the next stage. That is what happened in the first phase of the negotiations and that is what will happen in the second phase. We will always be in a position in which we have to walk away or fold”.

The hon. Gentleman was clear about what he thought would happen, from his own experience of negotiating Galileo. He said:

“we will always fold because the clock will be ticking.”—[Official Report, 5 December 2018; Vol. 650, c. 920.]

I agree. If we give the green light to the Prime Minister’s proposals tomorrow, we will end up not with the unique agreement that the future framework dangles before us, but with a free trade agreement dictated to us by the EU. We will have a long and difficult road to a future trade agreement that will not solve the economic problems we face or heal the divisions in our society. In the weeks since the Government called a halt to this debate, the US ambassador put to bed any idea of a quick and massive trade deal with the Americans. I do not usually find myself in agreement with the Trump Administration, but the assessment made in Washington that there will be little scope for a major trade deal with the United States is one with which I wholly concur.

The future political framework sets out that

“the United Kingdom’s commitments on customs and regulatory cooperation, including with regard to alignment of rules, would be taken into account in the application of related checks and controls”.

There is nothing remarkable there, really—it is what we in the Opposition have been pointing out for a very long time. If we want a strong trade relationship, the facility of market access must be proportionate to regulatory alignment.

Ruth George

Does my hon. Friend agree that the problems of regulatory alignment with very different actors such as the United States of America and the EU, with which we will both seek to do a free trade

agreement, will make it extremely difficult for us to conclude agreements with both? We will have to prioritise one over the other. The USA has asked for access to our internal health markets and says that we will have to align our food standards down to theirs, so our having to choose might be a very good thing.

Barry Gardiner

I am pleased that I gave way to my hon. Friend, who has said what it is critical to understand on both sides of the House: we cannot simply have deals with everybody that are as good with everybody. We will have to pick and choose.

For my own part, I have never been star-struck by the prospect of a trade agreement with the USA; even under President Obama, it wanted us to weaken our food standards so that it could increase access for American agri-foods to the UK.

Boris Johnson

rose—

Barry Gardiner

I will give way to the right hon. Gentleman in a minute—and quicker than his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development did.

Ten days ago, I had the pleasure of attending the Oxford farming conference. It was clear that the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, who had spoken to them the day before, had got farmers seriously concerned. They were pleased that he confirmed that our food production standards in the UK would not be reduced, but incensed by his refusal to deny that food from the USA and elsewhere, which had been produced to lower standards, would be allowed access into the UK to undercut them in our domestic market. That, according to the Government, of course, is not a lowering of our standards in the UK but simply consumer choice and the pursuit of free trade. I now give way to the former Foreign Secretary.

Boris Johnson

I admire the tone in which the hon. Gentleman is making his remarks. May I ask him about the free trade deals that he says Labour would like to pursue? I am puzzled to hear that. It was my impression that Labour had abandoned its policy of coming out of the customs union and was instead preparing for us to remain in it as a paying, participating member, setting the same tariffs. Will he explain exactly how that is supposed to work?

Barry Gardiner

I am delighted to say that the rest of my speech will be doing precisely that; I hope it will satisfy the right hon. Gentleman.

Alignment of standards is key to trade. That was properly recognised by the Minister for Trade Policy himself—sadly, he is not in his place at the moment—when he said:

“If we come out of alignment with EU regulations in this area, then there is a penalty to be paid in terms of frictionless trade with Europe.”

Of course, the idea that this particular American President is not going to demand greater access for American healthcare businesses into our NHS is simply a fantasy. So yes—I would love to do more business with the USA. It is already our major bilateral trading partner as a country rather than a

bloc, but whatever benefits a trade agreement with it may bring must be weighed against the corresponding losses in our existing or any future trade agreement with the EU.

Lucy Powell

Is my hon. Friend aware that, before the referendum, the right hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson) said that staying in the single market was “essential and deliverable”?

Barry Gardiner

I am glad to say that the one thing that I can honestly claim I have no responsibility for are the words of the right hon. Gentleman.

When listening to some of the more extreme proponents of Brexit, it has often amused me to hear them say that trading with the European Union on World Trade Organisation terms would not be the slightest problem for us; in the same breath, they insist that to achieve our destiny we cannot possibly trade on WTO terms with the United States—and that that is why we need to break free from the EU.

The simple truth is this—I hope it answers the right hon. Gentleman’s question: it makes good sense to have good trade agreements with everyone, but to have the best trade agreements with our closest trading partners. For us, that is the EU, with which we do 53% of our trade and which takes 44% of our exports.

Boris Johnson
rose—

Barry Gardiner

No, I will not give way again to the right hon. Gentleman.

I move on to immigration, which was a key part of the referendum debate. Like many Members, I was outraged by the dog-whistle politics of the Vote Leave campaign’s very own “Project Fear”: that millions of Turkish citizens would be queueing up for entry into the UK. That was a lie, and those Members who associated themselves with that campaign should feel ashamed.

I also want to express my disgust at those who have sought to paint leave voters as ignorant racists; it is that sort of demonisation of our fellow citizens that is so damaging to the discourse around Brexit. It precisely obscures some of the real concerns that leave voters did express, and had every right to. Their concerns were about the lack of housing, the strains on the NHS, and being undercut in the workplace by unscrupulous employers who often exploited migrants and paid them less than the minimum wage. All those issues are about public services and domestic enforcement. They will not be solved by our leaving the EU, but they will also not be solved by our remaining. What is needed is a change of Government policy, or, better still, a change of Government.

Immigration is a vital element of our economic growth, and of our trade and trade negotiations. We need migration. The Government’s own economic assessment shows that European migration contributes 2% of GDP to the UK. The Government’s proposed £30,000 salary threshold would actually preclude three quarters of EU migrants. I am not referring simply to seasonal agricultural workers or careworkers; even some junior doctors do not earn more than £30,000 a year. The Government’s supposed skills threshold is really a salary threshold, and it would do serious damage to our economy.

The irony is, of course, that EU net migration is coming down. Statistics published just last month record the number as 74,000. The Government have been complaining that free movement gives them no control over those people. Presumably they mean the sort of control that they have always been able to exercise over migrants coming from the rest of the world. Is it not strange, then, that the figure recorded for net migration from the rest of the world is 248,000?

This is why politicians are not trusted. They tell people that we need to abolish freedom of movement to bring migration down to the tens of thousands when our own rules, over which the EU has never had any say, are allowing three times that number. What we should be explaining to people is that net migration should go both up and down in line with the needs of our economy. As long as we have fair rules and competent and reasonable management of migration, this country will be better off. The trouble is that we have had lies, arbitrary targets that bear no relation to our economy's requirements, and, frankly, administrative incompetence.

As with regulatory alignment, so with the exchange of people. The deeper the trade deal we want, the greater the need for an exchange of people. Foreign companies that invest in the UK want and need their indigenous workers to get visas, and the harder we make that process, the less investment we will secure. When the Prime Minister went to India two years ago to secure a trade deal, she was rebuffed on precisely that issue. The Times of India summed it up on its front page with the headline "You want our business. But you do not want our People".

David T. C. Davies (Monmouth) (Con)

Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Barry Gardiner

No. I have not spoken for as long as the Secretary of State and I do not intend to, but 80 Members wish to speak, so I will make some progress.

Our universities and colleges represent one of the greatest exports that our country has: education, which contributes hugely to our economy, not just through fees but through the industrial spin-offs from our world-leading research. That depends on our bringing top brains from all over the globe, and encouraging them to see the UK as their intellectual home. However, the bogus colleges scandal, and the way in which we have treated students whose colleges are closed down or go into receivership, has been a disgrace. They are victims of fraud because our system of certification has been so poor, but we treat them as if they were the criminals. They are given just 60 days to find another college, often in the middle of an academic year, and then to pay another full year's fees before they are classed as illegal overstayers. No wonder students from key future trading partners in China and India are now turning to Australia, Canada and the US as their first choices for higher education and research. [Interruption.]

The Under-Secretary of State for International Trade, the hon. Member for Beverley and Holderness (Graham Stuart), asks why I am running down our education service. If he had listened carefully, he would have heard me talk about our world-leading research and our top-quality universities. What I ran down was the incompetent administration of the certification of bogus colleges, and the incompetent administration of the immigration rules thereafter.

Mr Mark Prisk (Hertford and Stortford) (Con)

Give way.

Barry Gardiner

The hon. Gentleman may not have noticed, but I did give way.

Students should never have been part of our net migration figures, and immigration should be proclaimed loudly by every Member to be an important and hugely beneficial resource for our economy. Yes, free movement of people will end when we leave the EU, because it is a function of the treaties of the EU, but that does not mean that we should not operate a system of immigration controls with the EU that allows broad and reciprocal access to all our citizens in a way that maximises the benefits to all our economies. That is what our businesses need: access to skills.

For all that, however, some businesses are willing to accept the Prime Minister's deal. They have expressed grudging acceptance of it, and some have even written to their Members of Parliament asking them to support it. Well, there is the proof that "Project Fear" works both ways. The Government are holding a gun to business's head with the threat of no deal, and, given this Hobson's choice, some have been blackmailed into acquiescing in the Prime Minister's proposal. I am sure that their acquiescence will have been cemented by the cheery words of the Secretary of State this morning, when he advised the nation that he did not regard no deal as "national suicide", and that, although he grudgingly accepted that it would "damage our economy", he thought that it was "survivable"—and this from the man who once said that a trade deal with the EU would be

"the easiest in human history".

It is so good that the Secretary of State and the Chancellor are sharing the debate. I had some little hope that the Chancellor might have sat with him and taken him through the economic analyses. With no change in migration, no deal would see the UK's GDP 7.7% lower than it would otherwise be. According to the estimates of the Office for Budget Responsibility, that is £164 billion if translated into the current fiscal year. With zero net EEA worker inflows, no deal would see the UK's GDP 9.3%, or £198 billion, lower than otherwise. That is a heck of a lot of Brexit buses for the NHS: 565.

Unfortunately, during the first part of the debate, the Secretary of State told the House effectively to ignore all the Chancellor's carefully prepared scenarios and analyses. Back in December, he said:

"It is not realistic to expect that there would be no potential shift, if necessary, in Government fiscal policy, or in the Bank of England's monetary policy, or changes to what the Government will be able to do on tariffs. We have to be realistic and try to understand what those things are. To try to confuse forecasts and scenarios, intentionally or otherwise, is not helpful to the debate."—[Official Report, 6 December 2018; Vol. 650, c. 1203-4.]

Conor Burns (Bournemouth West) (Con)

Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Barry Gardiner

No.

Actually, what is not helpful to the debate is to dismiss the existing economic modelling without presenting any credible alternative, to fail to provide any analyses of the short-term consequences of the Prime Minister's deal, and to fail to carry out any analysis at all of the Northern Irish backstop arrangements—and then to have the audacity to expect the nation to blindly trust that no deal is not "national suicide".

Conor Burns

Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Barry Gardiner
I will.

Conor Burns

Will the hon. Gentleman concede that it is entirely possible that the current Treasury forecasts will prove to be as accurate as the ones that it made before the referendum?

Barry Gardiner

I think we should look at what actually happened, and it is relevant to the point that the Secretary of State was trying to make back in December. People are very fond of saying, “There were predictions of disaster and financial meltdown, but nothing happened.” Well, actually, something did happen: I think it was called “£70 billion of quantitative easing”, which the Treasury put into the economy in order to stop the problems.

Of course the Secretary of State once believed that his friends in the Anglosphere would be queuing up to do new trade agreements that would replace any lost GDP growth. The Bank of England has quantified the potential value of those deals at just 0.2%—not 2%, but 0.2%, or one fifth of 1%, or £4.25 billion. Nice to have, but by my reckoning the Secretary of State would still owe me about 533 Brexit buses.

The Prime Minister is fond of saying that her deal is the only one on the table. Well, of course it is; she is the Government, and only the Government are able to negotiate with the EU. That does not mean that there could not be a different deal. The Brexit negotiations have been constrained by the Prime Minister’s red lines. We know that had the red lines been different then the deal would have been different also.

The Father of the House the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke) reminded us in his admonishment of the Home Secretary that

“if we are maintaining an open border where there is a land border, it can only be done in a modern economy by having some form of customs union applying to both sides of the border”.—[Official Report, 5 December 2018; Vol. 650, c. 900.]

That is why we on the Labour Benches have been calling for a new permanent customs union with the EU in which we would have a say over future trade agreements.

When the shadow Chancellor mentioned this previously in our debate the Secretary of State was really rather rude and he reinforced that disparagement today. He reminded the House that under article 3 of the treaty on the functioning of the European Union the EU shall have exclusive competence with regard to the customs union. Of course it does: the treaty binds the member states of the EU and gives the Commission that right to negotiate the terms of any agreement with third-party countries. It does not stop the EU concluding agreements with third-party countries where there is joint control.

Greg Hands (Chelsea and Fulham) (Con)
Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Barry Gardiner
No.

Perhaps I can read from article 8 of the TFEU:

“The Union shall develop a special relationship with neighbouring countries, aiming to establish an area of prosperity and good neighbourliness, founded on the values of the Union and characterised by close and peaceful relations based on cooperation.

2. For the purposes of paragraph 1, the Union may conclude specific agreements with the countries concerned. These agreements may contain reciprocal rights and obligations as well as the possibility of undertaking activities jointly.”

Barry Gardiner

I will not give way as I am moving to my conclusion.

A new customs union in which the UK would be able to reject any agreement it believed was concluded to its disadvantage—however advantageous it might be for the 27 EU member states—is a vital way of securing the open trade border, avoiding the problems of the backstop and respecting the referendum mantra of taking back control. It should have been part of our negotiating mandate from the beginning.

So often it has seemed, on both sides of the Brexit divide, that the point of listening has been to prepare one’s counter-arguments and rebut what the other person is saying, rather than any genuine attempt to understand their fears and concerns, so I want to conclude by sharing with colleagues my own fears and concerns about the position we are in. It seems to me that we are caught between two competing and equally important principles: our responsibility to protect the economic wellbeing and livelihoods of our constituents; and our democratic responsibility to accept the result of a referendum where we promised to respect the result. The first principle is often invoked by colleagues who say, “Nobody voted to make themselves poorer or put themselves out of a job,” and that is true. The second principle is often invoked by colleagues who say that we will damage our democracy and increase cynicism about politics if we turn round and pat the electorate on the head and basically say “There, there! You didn’t understand. You were lied to. We will give you another chance to see it our way.”

I have found myself genuinely torn apart by these competing claims, as I know many colleagues have. It seems to me that it is simply not good enough to insist either that we remain or that we leave no matter the cost. Both these positions are absolutes, and while we may campaign in black and white, we must govern in shades of grey. Each absolute side of the debate must be able to have a credible explanation for the roughly 50% of their fellow citizens who profoundly disagree with them as to why they should not be taken into account.

I know what I promised my constituents at the last general election. It is right here in our manifesto:

“Labour accepts the referendum result”—

not that we would respect it, but that we would accept it.

“We will prioritise jobs and living standards, build a close new relationship with the EU, protect workers’ rights and environmental standards, provide certainty to EU nationals and give a meaningful role to Parliament throughout negotiations.”

That is the rejoinder to those who pretend that our Brexit position has not been clear. It has been there, consistent and unchanged in black and white, since the general election. That is what this

Government should have done; it is what we—[Interruption.] That is what this Government should have done; it is what we would have done and what a new Government now need to do.

And one thing more. We said that we would

“seek to unite the country around a Brexit deal that works for every community in Britain.”

The Prime Minister’s deal does not, and that is why Parliament must reject it.

19:56:00

Mr Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green) (Con)

I recognise that time is short, so I will not go on for too long and I will not take too many interventions—but you never know, you might get lucky.

I appreciate the excellent speech of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, but, while I wanted to agree with it all, I have to tell him that I did not wholly agree with it, and I want to address a couple of points. I do not doubt for one moment his sincere desire to make sure that this country is able to strike trade deals around the world and thus make the greatest advantage from the big decision taken back in 2016. The question for me is: are we going to be able to do that, and what does this agreement do to help us—or does it help us?

Alignment is a very big and important issue in the agreement, and we have conceded too much to the EU, which will hamstring us in our future trade agreements. I think my right hon. Friend has actually said that elsewhere, and as he knows, the US ambassador also made that point clear recently. We may want to do financial services deals with other countries, but many other countries, including the United States of America, will want to do more on agricultural and mechanical exports. Agriculture is a big deal in the States and they would like to do that, but in our country there has been a rather supercilious and pointless debate about things like chlorinated chicken. We tend to get a bit arrogant and think that somehow we are fantastically superior—[Hon. Members: “We are.”] Well, on the issue of so-called chlorinated chicken, America has a lower level of death and illness from campylobacter or salmonella than us here in the UK. That is because some of our chicken imports come from way outside the EU and are less than great. So we should not be so arrogant about thinking our standards are higher than everyone else’s.

I want to make three main points about why I am concerned, and then I will conclude. The first concern is the backstop; the hon. Member for Brent North (Barry Gardiner) referred to it, and we have all referred to it. My concern about the backstop is twofold. First, if we go into the backstop it will trap us and take our ability to leave out of our own hands. It will be the first time that, as a sovereign nation, we will have agreed to let others decide whether we can stay in or leave an international agreement. We can leave NATO, we can leave the UN if we wish, and we can even leave the EU at our vote, but in this case we will not be able to leave; there will have to be a joint agreement about departure, and there is no time limit to it.

I was therefore very interested to see what the Prime Minister would come back with on the agreement. I see that the letter from President Tusk and President Juncker to her says, “It’s very, very good and important because it is in fact internationally legally binding,” but they know and we know that that is not the same as being bound in by the terms of the agreement. The agreement overrides every other purpose. It was interesting that when the previous Prime Minister was negotiating, prior to the referendum, he claimed the same about his agreement, but again, it did not override European law. The letter from the European Union actually says:

“As you know, we are not in a position to agree to anything that changes or is inconsistent with the Withdrawal Agreement”.

Even more important than that is what the Attorney General has said about this. There was a great moment here when the Prime Minister quite legitimately said that the Attorney General had spoken about the balance and said that we were now accepting that there was some kind of lock in legal terms, but what she did not do was read the last sentence of the paragraph in the Attorney General’s letter, which deals with the EU’s conclusions in relation to the withdrawal agreement, and states

“albeit they do not alter the fundamental meaning of its provisions as I advised them to be on 13 November”.

That fundamental advice was simply this:

“Therefore, despite statements in the Protocol that it is not intended to be permanent, and the clear intention of the parties that it should be replaced by alternative, permanent arrangements, in international law the Protocol would endure indefinitely until a superseding arrangement took its place, in whole or in part, as set out therein.”

That really reminds us that there is a fundamental flaw in this.

I do not fear us going into the backstop. My real problem is that, when it comes to negotiating our future trading arrangements, the European Union will have a very big stick to hold over us. President Macron made that clear recently when he talked about grabbing back some of the fishing rights that we may well have taken in the course of the early withdrawal agreement. He said that he would simply wait until we got closer to the backstop, because at that point we would do almost anything to avoid falling into it. I do not disagree with him. It would be appalling if we ended up in the backstop. The EU knows it and we know it, and that is the major problem.

That is in line with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State’s earlier remarks, on which I have already complimented him—I have no doubt of his determination to drive these points through. Also, it is small wonder that my right hon. Friend the Member for Chelsea and Fulham (Greg Hands) said in an interesting intervention the other day that he had carefully read many interviews in German and that Mr Selmayr had made it clear that the European Union had got all its objectives for the withdrawal agreement happily sorted out. Clearly that must mean that we did not do so. That is the major problem. It is important not to be in the backstop, but the most important thing is that not falling into it is what changes the pattern of the political agreement and of how we negotiate the trade arrangements. Therefore, with respect to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, it is a major problem.

My second point is that we have agreed to pay £39 billion. I am not against us agreeing to pay the European Union in order to stand by further agreements, if they exist. After all, I believe that the EU said £100 billion to begin with, and we have now come down to £39 billion, which suggests that there were not quite so many absolutes in the set of things that we were supposed to be engaged in. I do not want to be mealy-mouthed about this, but £39 billion is a lot of money. One section of that relates to the two-year interregnum, which I accept would cost us money. That is a total of £22 billion over the two years that we would owe the EU—that is part of the budget. The rest is about the future arrangements.

My concern is that, according to this arrangement, the EU would get that money regardless of whether we reached a satisfactory agreement. That is quite an important feature. Back in December, I said on record that I thought the Government would be mistaken to agree to both the backstop and the money without having any idea of what the trade position would be. The Government said, “Don’t worry, we will come on to trade immediately and it will open the door.” Well, it did not open the door, and we only got on to trade a few months before Christmas. We have given the EU the most important negotiating position we have, and it has left us with very little with which to drive the EU into the next element of this, which is the thing we really want—namely, trade.

I do not resile from the point that we want a trade deal with our nearest trading partner. Of course we do. We do not want to end up in some kind of spitting war with the EU; we want a decent, reasonable arrangement, but we also want other arrangements around the world. As it stands, the problem is that the £39 billion is hinged on nothing at all, and the EU will get it regardless. There is not much incentive for the EU to produce the sort of trade arrangement that we would want, and that is what worries me.

Rebecca Pow (Taunton Deane) (Con)

My right hon. Friend is making some good points, and he has a great deal of experience from his previous Department, the Department for Work and Pensions. I put it to him that this money is important for keeping our relationship with Europe going and for getting the negotiations that we want. I would not call £39 billion small fry, but I did a calculation last night and found that it equates to just 74 days of DWP spending. So in the grand scheme of things, it is not a huge amount of money for what we are getting out of it and for the relationship that we need to build.

Mr Duncan Smith

I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that intervention, and I know that it was well meant, but I speak as someone who eventually resigned because we had to make a £12 billion cut to the welfare budget, and we are now saying that we will spend £39 billion on something else. I think that those two bear a slightly different comparison. I will simply say that there is nothing small about £39 billion. I honestly believe that one of the reasons we voted to leave was to take back control and get most of our money back from the European Union, and to use it for the sort of things that my hon. Friend might well be suggesting. As I said earlier, in principle, and providing that we get something really good from the EU, I am not against meeting our requirements. However, I am against doing that without any commitment whatsoever. That is where my major, and I hope gentle, criticism of my hon. Friend lies.

My third point is about state aid. This issue has not really raised its head much, and those on the Front Benches might want to pay attention. A lot of people think that state aid is just about a few provisions stopping people giving their domestic industries a head start. I have always had a concern about this in democratic terms. I know that many on my side will say, “Oh, it’s terrible; we’re not in favour of giving industries a boost.” Well, we might not be, but we live in a democracy and in reality, others might wish to pitch for a different position. I accept that fully, but I really hope that the public never vote for that. I believe we have a better provision, but there is a democratic problem involved.

However, that is not my main issue, which is the width with which state aid is now being interpreted. I made a speech about this back in 1993 or 1994, in which I said that the Commission knew very well that no matter what it did and failed to get, the Courts would mop up after it because the Courts were bound by one thing and one thing only, which was always to find in favour of ever closer union. Of course they are; that is what they were set up to do. That is very clear, but many in this House do not seem to recognise that fact. The Courts always pick up the pieces. We

have only to look at social security spending on people coming into the UK under freedom of movement. Originally, that spending was never in the treaty. It is the Courts, through a whole number of cases, that have widened the provisions to allow those coming into the UK to claim benefits exactly in line with people living in this country. That was not done by the Commission or the Council; it was the Courts.

That is exactly what is happening now. The Commission has had real problems with tax harmonisation. That is its objective for the eurozone and generally for the European Union. The Courts are now entering this area and using the provisions on state aid to find against countries that find new tax advantages. That is where they intend to go, and when we read the summaries of some of the judgments, we can see that they are already moving into this area. I therefore say to colleagues who think that it is all right to sit back passively for two years that there is already a plan to drive that process harder. I have also heard that eight of the 12 people responsible for monitoring the EU's provisions on state aid have now been moved to cover the UK in the two-year period before we strike a trade deal. I warn my colleagues on the Government Benches that we should be careful what we wish for, because those state aid provisions will bite us on tax harmonisation and of some of the changes we might wish to make in future Budgets.

I will conclude now so that others may speak. We have had a series of scare stories about a whole series of problems that could arise if we do not strike an arrangement. I want to have an arrangement—don't get me wrong; I absolutely want it—and I think that the Government are in the right place to want to get it as well. I just do not think that this arrangement delivers on the minimum that we require to be able to negotiate and deliver a proper trade deal.

I say to my hon. Friends that we really need to pack up this idea about a total disaster that keeps being pumped around. As my right hon. Friend the International Trade Secretary said from the Dispatch Box today and has made clear before, he does not believe that a no-deal Brexit would be a disaster; he believes that we will manage our way through it one way or another.

The other day we were told that there would be huge queues at Dover because Calais, according to the contingency executive, will have to check every single lorry, taking 10 minutes each time. What did we hear from the man who runs Boulogne and Calais? He said, "We have no plans to and will not check every lorry. We will do nothing more than we are doing at the moment. Any phytosanitary checks will be done 12 km behind the border." Those on the continent do not want what we say we fear, because it would damage them and their business, and they know that they would lose it. That is just one example of some of the nonsense that has gone on with "Project Fear" over the past few years. It has been constantly banged on about. Far from making people concerned, however, it has made people angry about what politicians do to try to threaten and worry them. Let us treat the people like grown-ups and talk about matters properly instead of trying to frighten them.

Richard Graham

My right hon. Friend says that his concerns over supporting the Government's deal and the withdrawal agreement Bill relate to the position that they would leave us in for future free trade agreements. However, without the withdrawal agreement Bill, there can be no future trade agreements. What is his position on that?

Mr Duncan Smith

My position is that we go back and get a better deal. That is the reality, because I believe that that is how the EU works. The EU got everything it wanted first time round, but if it knows that we are not going to take this deal, it will have to discuss it. When I visited the European Commission and met Mr Barnier and Sabine Weyand and their team, it became clear, before we signed up to this deal,

that they were fully expecting to take things further once pressed hard—that is to say, they expected that this deal would not pass. They have been waiting for this vote to know exactly where they are going. I genuinely think that the Government will be in a better place to go and say, “Look, this stuff that you’ve given us and this stuff that we’ve got is simply not acceptable, and we will not get it through.” Therefore, if we genuinely want to reach an agreement—I believe that the EU does—we must strike a harder deal with them, and they have to accept that and will do so. That is where we are.

Back in 1992, I realised that the plans under the Single European Act and Maastricht were taking us to a place that we would never be in, because this country would never accept that it would eventually be fully locked into a supranational organisation that was taking powers away from individual Parliaments. That is why I feel upbeat about the referendum vote. I am tired of being told that it was some sort of disaster or accident. When I campaigned to leave, I genuinely and passionately believed that this country would do incredibly well whatever the arrangements. I just wish that many more in this House would stand up for those who voted to leave genuinely—not stupidly and not because they hated people, but because they wanted something to change. They wanted to take back control of their country, and that is what I want to do here.

20:12:00

Kirsty Blackman (Aberdeen North) (SNP)

It is an honour to speak for the Scottish National party on the second-to-last day of our second meaningful vote debate. The SNP positions on Brexit and the Prime Minister’s deal are probably pretty obvious to everybody in this House, but I will explain them just for the avoidance of doubt.

The Prime Minister said today that she wants to deliver on the result of the vote. The people of Scotland voted to remain in the EU. Therefore, the SNP will continue to fight for us to remain in the EU. We want to deliver on the vote that Scotland took in that referendum. The best future for us all is to remain a member of the EU. If we cannot remain a member of the EU, we need single market and customs union membership. I know that many Members from across the House believe that that would be the best way for us to go forward economically, and the Prime Minister needs to go away and extend article 50 so that we can have a people’s vote. We should give the people the choice to remain in the EU, because the SNP believes, as do many across the House, that they would make a different choice.

I want to talk about several things, many of which have been mentioned today, but I will start by discussing the economy, as the House would expect from the SNP’s spokesperson on the economy at Westminster. Mark Carney from the Bank of England said that Brexit has already cost each family £900. Given that we have had so many years of austerity, that is £900 that few can easily afford. The Chancellor himself said that remaining in the European Union would be a better outcome for the economy, and that is absolutely the case. We will be poorer as a result of the UK choosing to leave the EU, which is why organisations such as the CBI say that they are looking on in horror at the foreseeable economic catastrophe that the UK is choosing to bring upon itself and the ham-fisted way it is going about it.

An awful lot of people have come out with an awful lot of stats around Brexit, and I want to highlight a few of them. The Bank of England said that, with the Prime Minister’s deal, we are looking at a potential interest rate of 4%, and I want to unpack that a little bit. People who are my age, people who are a little bit older than me, and people who have been in the property market for a relatively short period of time have never seen interest rates anywhere like 4%. It is incredibly difficult for young people nowadays to buy property as it is. If we see a massive increase in interest

rates, it will be absolutely and completely impossible for the vast majority of young people to buy property—even more than it is today—because it will be difficult for people to borrow money. That will have an effect not just on individuals, but on companies that are looking to borrow money. Our small businesses will therefore be less able to trade and to grow as a result of the changes that are potentially coming.

Speaking of businesses, the University of Bristol said that the decision to leave has meant that the value of UK companies has already been reduced by 16%. We have not even left the EU yet, but the value of UK companies has been reduced by 16%, and we are continuing to go down this route. Jaguar Land Rover has already cut 1,500 UK jobs and is looking to cut another 4,500, most of which will be in the UK, and it has cited Brexit concerns as a major factor.

On the subject of car manufacturing, I want to talk about what just-in-time manufacturing actually means, because it is quite difficult for people to get that concept into their heads. Does it mean that the car production plants or factories have maybe a day's worth of widgets sitting there that can be put together to make a car or whatever is being made? No, it means that they have an hour's worth of widgets. If Honda wanted to have nine days' worth of stock for its Swindon plant alone, it would need a UK warehouse of roughly 300,000 square metres. It would be one of the largest buildings on earth, and that is for nine days' worth of widgets in order to make cars. It would be absolutely impossible for the UK to find enough warehouse space to store all the widgets that it would need for all the manufactured things that we produce. The Secretary of State for International Trade was talking earlier about all the brilliant manufacturing that is done in Britain, but a huge amount of that is done with components imported from the EU.

David T. C. Davies

In the early 1990s, I worked in the haulage industry as a lorry driver making just-in-time deliveries of brake parts for Lucas Girling across the whole of Europe—in and out of the EU. There was never a problem, because the paperwork could be turned around in the time it took to have a coffee and a cigarette. It was not a problem then, and we did not even have a computer in the office.

Kirsty Blackman

Things were a bit different in 1993 from how they are now. We have customs checks that are required to be done. We have these production lines, and the storage time is much shorter because we have frictionless movement. If frictionless movement is so unimportant, why have the Government been prioritising it in the potential future relationship with the EU?

This is not just about the EU. The UK Government have also failed to set out exactly what the future relationship with Turkey is going to look like, for example.

Will widgets still be able to come in from Turkey in the event of a no-deal scenario?

The Secretary of State for International Trade was pressed earlier on whether free trade agreements with third countries will roll over. The UK Government have absolutely failed to let us or businesses know which countries have agreed to sign up for their free trade agreement to be rolled over in the event of a no-deal Brexit. Given that the largest manufacturing companies are preparing for a no-deal Brexit, the Government need to be up front and honest about how many of those free trade agreements will actually roll over. I have heard that, potentially, only 10 of them are ready to be rolled over. If that is the case, the Government need to tell us which 10 so that the companies exporting to or importing from those countries can make plans.

Seema Malhotra

Does the hon. Lady agree it is surprising we did not have a clearer answer on that from the Secretary of State? This is of paramount importance for businesses like those in my constituency that are trading under multiple trade agreements and exporting across the world.

Kirsty Blackman

I agree that it is absolutely vital. It is interesting that the Secretary of State was unable to give that answer. I have a named day question on this subject and am expecting a response tomorrow. I am aware of at least one organisation that has been asking the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy for the list since November and still has not received it. If the Government intend us to leave the EU on 29 March, and if they intend that we leave with no deal if this deal is not voted through, they need to tell companies about the scenario in which they will be operating after we leave the EU in those circumstances. The Government are wilfully making the situation worse by their refusal to come forward with this information.

Chris Law (Dundee West) (SNP)

My hon. Friend is making a powerful speech. Following BMW-Mini and Toyota, the Honda plant in Swindon is preparing for six days of closure as a result of this Brexit deal. Does she agree this is complete chaos and that the Government now need to end any opportunity for no deal?

Kirsty Blackman

It is complete chaos. It is ridiculous that businesses are having to prepare for a no deal because the Government continue to hold it over us, which is why Members on both sides of the House have signed a letter saying that a no-deal scenario is completely unacceptable. As has been said previously, opposition to no deal is one of the few things on which there is a majority in this House.

On the subject of free trade agreements, and on the subject of fantasy economics, the Government's paper on the deal scenario, the no-deal scenario and the analysis of Brexit costs talks about the potential for signing free trade agreements with the US, Australia, New Zealand, Malaysia, Brunei, China, India, Brazil, Argentina, Paraguay, Uruguay, the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Qatar, Kuwait and Bahrain, plus rolling over all the FTAs on their current terms. The paper says that all the new free trade agreements will be signed on the basis of there being zero tariffs on everything in the scenarios that were modelled, and of all the FTAs being rolled over despite the bizarre assumptions that no sensible person would think are ever likely to happen. We are not going to have a free trade agreement with India with zero tariffs on everything within 15 years. That is absolutely not going to happen.

Despite all those bizarre assumptions, the UK Government still predict that our trade reduction will be 2.2%. So despite the most ambitious assumptions possible, which no realistic person would think could even vaguely happen, the Government still predict that our trade reduction will be 2.2% of GDP. I do not know how anyone who supports Brexit could stand up and say that we will benefit from increased international trade when it is absolutely clear that we will not, even in the best possible scenario.

One of the things that the Secretary of State for International Trade is very good at is talking about the increase in our trade with countries like South Korea, with which we trade through the EU's free trade agreement.

Stephen Gethins (North East Fife) (SNP)

My hon. Friend is making an excellent speech on the perils. I wonder whether the Chancellor would agree with a huge amount of what she says. It strikes me that the Scottish Government have

outlined their economic analysis of what will happen, yet the UK Government have tried to keep theirs secret. Does my hon. Friend have any thoughts on why that is the case?

Kirsty Blackman

I think the UK Government are trying to say as little as possible about the economic analysis because they know that Brexit will damage the economy.

I am specifically focusing on the economy, but I will talk about other things in a few moments. Investors have pulled \$1.01 trillion out of UK equity funds since the 2016 referendum. That is an eye-wateringly large figure, and it comes as a direct result of the referendum according to Emerging Portfolio Fund Research, a data provider.

The Scottish Government have said that our GDP would be £9 billion lower under a free trade agreement—that is not under a no-deal scenario—than if we stayed in the EU. Amazingly, the figure is significantly more than even the most Unionist of commentators said that independence would cost the Scottish people. We are stuck with the UK, which is making terrible decisions and cutting more off our GDP than even those least in favour of independence said that independence would cut from our GDP.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP)

My hon. Friend is making a fantastic point. Is not the core of her argument that nobody, however they voted in the 2016 European referendum, voted to become poorer? That is all the more reason to put this to the people again in a people's vote so that folk can have their say now that they know what the consequences of Brexit actually are.

Kirsty Blackman

My hon. Friend is absolutely right. People were told stories about unicorns and mermaids. They were told that there would be amazing economic largesse in the event of Brexit, and they have been told that for a huge number of years, and not just in relation to the Brexit vote. People have been told by politicians that those who choose to come to live and work in this country make us poorer, which is an absolute lie. Those people contribute to our GDP, they contribute to reducing our public sector net debt and they contribute to our economy, and that is without going into the cultural and social benefits.

Hannah Bardell (Livingston) (SNP)

It is interesting to watch the faces of Conservative Members as my hon. Friend lays out, in stark detail, the impact on the economy. I have met Hologic, a life sciences company in my Livingston constituency that does diagnostic testing, a number of times since the Brexit vote, and it has raised significant alarms. The company tests the safety of medicines for consumers not just in the UK but in the EU, and it has highlighted to me the catastrophic effect of the UK Government's plans. Does she agree that we are heading towards catastrophe if this Government continue going this way and their motion is passed?

Kirsty Blackman

My hon. Friend must have read my mind, because I was just about to move on to medicines. The Nuffield Trust has said:

“The longer term arrangements envisioned in the agreement and political declaration generally entail leaving the single market. Unless negotiating positions fundamentally change, this will produce extra costs for medicines and other supplies.”

Every single month 37 million packs of medicine travel from the EU to the UK, and 45 million packs of medicine travel from the UK to the EU. If we are outside the single market and the customs union, that medicine will take longer to travel across the border in both directions. That medicine will require extra testing in both jurisdictions. If we do not test it, when we are outside the single market and do not have a common rulebook, we would be putting individuals at risk by allowing them to use medicine that has not been tested and does not fit with our regime. A no-deal scenario would be disastrous and cannot be allowed to happen.

I wish briefly to mention a couple of things that will not be ready in the event of either a deal or no deal. I have mentioned the online system for those exporting from the EU to the UK via postal packages. It is important that the Treasury gets itself into gear and sorts this out. It promised to do so in a VAT notice that was put in place in August, but it needs to establish this online system so that individuals or companies exporting from the EU to the UK by post can do so. It was particularly telling that the International Trade Secretary talked about e-commerce, given that he proposes to take us out of the digital single market—that was unfortunate.

Let me move on to other things that are not ready. The postponement scheme for VAT does not appear to be ready, or if it is ready, companies do not know how to use it. Again, the Treasury and Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs need to get that scheme set up so that VAT that is changing from acquisition VAT to import VAT can be postponed, meaning that companies will not have to pay that money up front, because otherwise the situation will spell financial disaster for a huge number of companies.

Lastly, the customs declaration system is also not ready. It has not been widely rolled out—it has not been rolled out to everybody yet—but companies will have to use it. Some 145,000 companies have never exported outwith the EU and they will be reaching this system for the first time. It is important that they use it, and that everybody is able to use it before April so that any glitches in the system will be gone. It will not be a situation involving queues of lorries—we will not even be able to load the stuff on to lorries if this system does not work, so it needs to be fixed in advance.

I wish to talk a little more about the human cost. Last week, the British Retail Consortium announced more figures on the cost of food after Brexit. It has said that a no-deal scenario would see households in Scotland paying £55.30 more each week for food and that the least well-off 10% of households across the UK would be paying £38.50 more each week. That would represent a 6.4% increase in the amount of their income that they would have to spend on food. Given the Government's squeeze on families at the bottom of the pile, it is incredibly important that the Government do what they can to ensure that no deal is taken off the table. I do not know why we are even still discussing this. Why is no deal still on the table? Why does the Prime Minister not just say that if her deal gets voted down tomorrow, which it will, she will not have no deal happen to us and that 6.4% increase for people will not take place.

I have not yet touched on migration. The 2017 Red Book said that reducing net migration by 20,000 would increase public sector net debt by 0.2% by 2022—that is a fact. Presumably the Government stand by the fact that it is a fact, because it was in their Red Book. People who choose to live and work in this country—on these islands—are net contributors to our economy. As a group, they are net contributors to our economy. They make a contribution, so we will be poorer—economically and fiscally—if net migration is reduced by any significant number. The hospitality sector needs 100,000 new EU entrants per annum—some people go away, so that is not a net figure. If we are to be a global Britain and a country that wants people to come to enjoy it as tourists, we need people to work in that sector. Given our ageing population in Scotland, we need people to come to live and work in our country even more. That is why the UK Government must change their plan on the

£30,000 cap and the cap on numbers. If they are unwilling to do that, they must devolve immigration to Scotland. If they do not devolve immigration to Scotland, they make the case for Scottish independence ever stronger.

There are EU workers in our care, manufacturing and agri-food sectors, and those sectors rely on them. Today, NFU Scotland said:

“We cannot feed our nation without this labour.”

That is incredibly serious. If we do not have enough people coming to work in our agri-food sector, we will lose the ability to be the world-leading country that we are. We will lose the ability to feed even people who live here, let alone to export and to bring in the tax revenue that we get from exporting.

Free movement of people is a good thing—a brilliant thing. People my age and younger have benefited from it. We have been able to live and work in EU countries. People from those countries have been able to come to live and work next door to us, and we have benefited from that. It is devastating to think that this Government propose that my children should not benefit from the same rights of freedom of movement as we have had. I do not believe that any Member should reasonably be celebrating the end of freedom of movement, as its end costs us our rights and money in the Government’s coffers. As the Archbishop of Canterbury said, proceeding with Brexit caused a moral issue, and the biggest place where that moral issue stands is that politicians—not all, but some—have done what they can to demonise immigration and people who are born in other countries. We would not be in the place we are today if that had not happened.

This situation is an absolute shambles. I was pleased to see that the Financial Secretary was in the Chamber earlier. I hope he managed to find some food, given the note he had saying “No food” and “No channel tunnel” when he left the earlier Cabinet meeting. I hope that those things are slight exaggerations, but given the increase in the cost of food in the event of no deal, no food would be a reality for many families. We cannot operate like this. As the CBI said, businesses are watching in horror. The Prime Minister needs to remove the threat of no deal. The Government are limping on and the whole world is watching in horror. There is no good being done in this place just now. No other things are being done here—we are entirely focused on Brexit. We are not able to do the things that a global Britain should be doing. We are unable to have any kind of positive impact on the world because we are so unbelievably inward looking, fighting in this place.

The word “thrawn” is used in the north-east of Scotland—it sounds slightly different depending on where you are in the north-east. Someone who is thrawn is determined to proceed with something, in the face of all opposition and all sanity, and despite all evidence to the contrary and every expert telling them that they are wrong, because they have said they are going to do it. Someone who is thrawn is trying to go through with it because they cannot bear going back on something they have said. I have said a number of times that the Prime Minister needs to remove the threat of no deal. When she comes to speak to us tomorrow, she needs to say that in the event that her deal is voted down, she will go to the EU to ask for an extension of article 50 in order for a people’s vote to be held, so that we can remain in the EU and we will not have this economic, social and cultural catastrophe put upon us.

Mr Speaker

Order. A further 72 right hon. and hon. Members are seeking to catch my eye in tonight and tomorrow morning’s debate, on account of which there will have to be, with immediate effect, a

five-minute limit on Back-Bench speeches. I counsel colleagues that that limit will, in all likelihood, have to be reduced in due course.

20:38:00

Joseph Johnson (Orpington) (Con)

I had never rebelled against the Government before this month. I wish to use the brief time I have to set out four reasons why I shall vote against the deal tomorrow.

First, I believe that the Government are selling this package to the House on the false premise that we are somehow going to have a trade deal in place by the end of 2020. As Sir Nick Macpherson, the former permanent secretary to the Treasury, made clear last week in a tweet, that is a highly unlikely scenario. A deal even by the end of 2022—the possible period by the end of which we will have finished the transition period—is exceptionally unlikely. In his view, it is conceivable that we will have a deal in place by the mid-2020s. It really is, as the former permanent secretary to the Treasury said, “time for some honesty” from the Government. Forget all the flowery letters that have been exchanged today. Were the Government really being straight with the House and with the country, they would come clean and admit that we will have many years of the purgatory of the backstop ahead of us.

Secondly, any trade deal that we eventually strike will be worse for the economy than our current arrangements. As the Bank of England has noted, Brexit is a unique experiment. There is no precedent for an advanced economy anywhere in the world withdrawing from a trade agreement as deep and complex as the EU. Although it is not legally binding, the political declaration does set a direction of travel for the negotiations, reflecting the Prime Minister’s red lines of ending freedom of movement and securing an independent UK trade policy. Those red lines necessarily mean that we have to leave the single market and any form of customs union, as foreshadowed by the Chequers White Paper. The political declaration accordingly prioritises “comprehensive arrangements” for goods, and scandalously neglects services, on which all we are aiming for is in effect bog-standard third-country market-access terms. We are fundamentally a services economy and our services sector is being thrown under a bus.

Let us take financial services—one of this country’s few globally competitive sectors and one that is very important to many families in Orpington. The Centre for European Reform reckons that a free trade agreement would reduce financial services exports by almost 60%. The consultancy Oliver Wyman reckons that will mean a hit to the Treasury’s revenues of around £10 billion. So much for the Brexit dividend.

Thirdly, this package leaves the deck heavily stacked against us in the negotiations that will come. The political declaration starts by giving the EU most of its goals on its strong point, which is goods exports, for which the EU had a surplus with us of £95 billion in 2017, but it offers very little to our crucial services sector, in which we had a surplus of around £28 billion. Given that we have necessarily already conceded the £39 billion financial settlement in the legally-binding withdrawal agreement, we now have little leverage left with which to secure concessions from the EU in the months to follow. If the EU chooses to play hardball with us, it will simply let the UK enter the backstop in December 2022 then wait until our services sector pressures the Government into accepting a deal—any deal—that will remove the EU’s feet from our windpipe and restore some measure of privileged market access to a sector that is so important to our economy.

Approval of this deal will lead to many years of excruciating trade negotiations—talks that will trigger waves of fury from Brexit campaigners and leave voters throughout the country at each

inevitable UK concession on issues such as fisheries, Gibraltar and eventually, of course, freedom of movement itself. The package that the Prime Minister has negotiated simply sets us up to fail as a country. It is better that we all realise that now, before it is too late.

Finally, this deal is bad for our sovereignty. During the referendum, some implied that they were prepared to let Britain suffer economic damage in return for greater sovereignty and greater control. Of course, one of the great paradoxes is that the deal is remarkable in offering a double whammy: both economic harm and a loss of British sovereignty. That is one reason why many prominent Brexit campaigners are saying that this deal is worse than staying in the EU. There is now no single Cabinet position on what to do next, let alone one backed by the Conservative party or Parliament as a whole. Such is the farce that this has become that I believe we have no choice now but to go back to our constituents and ask them, reluctantly, to provide further guidance.

20:43:00

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op)

I hope the House will forgive me if I speak to the global context; after all, we are debating the European Union (Withdrawal) Act.

I come from the generation that was stung by Dean Acheson's saying in 1962:

“Great Britain has lost an empire and has not yet found a role.”

I was lucky enough to get into the House when a generation was still here of people like Denis Healey and Ted Heath, who had actually fought on the beaches at Anzio and in the Normandy invasion against Hitler. Those people were still here. That generation had seen two world wars, and they created, not just in Britain, but across the western world, the United Nations, NATO and the European Coal and Steel Community that became an integrated Europe, and they did so to keep the peace, to keep the prosperity and to face up to the challenges of that global environment.

In my time in this House, I have seen that global environment becoming more challenging, more frightening and more terrifying. Indeed, it is the most terrifying time to be a Member of Parliament. We are responsible for looking after our constituents when their jobs are being undermined by different kinds of contracts and uncertainties, and when the old certainties are being swept away for us in the United Kingdom.

I believe passionately that our country has to be part of that global community and to be leading that global community. When we joined the European Union in 1975, it was thanks to the bravery of people such as Ted Heath who led the Conservative party and changed it from being anti-Europe to pro-Europe. His generation was one that, cross party, I admired. It produced a breed of politicians who, for their time, stepped up to the plate and showed that leadership.

What I am very concerned about is that we are now entering into an unknown world. Our withdrawal from the European Union has implications for our membership of the United Nations and there are questions over whether we will hold on to a seat on the Security Council and whether our impact or our force in the world will be very substantial at all. The fact of the matter is that we had found a new role in the world—as an active member and leader of the European Union. I judge this debate today on whether, as I want, our country is successful—successful in terms of meeting the challenges economically and meeting them politically. We can do that only through very close-co-operation across Europe in the European Union. That is why I cannot support anything that takes

us out of the European Union. I campaigned to remain and I remain convinced that we should be in the European Union.

On a micro-level, on a bottom-up level, my sacred duty as a Member of Parliament is to come to this place to make sure that the health, welfare and prosperity of my constituents are not harmed in any way—that they are improved. Every piece of evidence that I have seen from the Bank of England, the London School of Economics, and the independent think-tanks convince me that I was right when, as Chairman of a Select Committee for 10 years, I believed that evidence-based policy was the best kind of policy. All the evidence shows that my constituents, on any deal, will be worse off and poorer out of the European Union than in the European Union.

This deal does not deliver what we need or want. The Chancellor is looking at me carefully. He has criticised me in the past for synthetic passion. This is not synthetic, Chancellor. This is me with a heartfelt plea about our global position as a nation. I am speaking from a Parliament that should be representing the people from our constituencies. I do not want a poorer Britain. I do not want poorer constituents. This deal will deliver both those sad outcomes, and I urge the House to vote down the motion.

20:48:00

Dr Sarah Wollaston (Totnes) (Con)

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 the Member for Orpington (Joseph Johnson) and the hon. Member for Huddersfield (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 (Elmet and Rothwell) (Con)

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.

Dr Wollaston

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 Brendan MacNeil (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)

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.

Dr Wollaston

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 Brendan MacNeil

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

Dr Wollaston

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?

20:55:00

Ms Karen Buck (Westminster North) (Lab)

The result of the 2016 referendum left me absolutely devastated, but I hoped that we would be able to find a consensus for the way forward. It left me devastated because the whole backdrop to my

adult life has been the positive internationalism that the European Union represented, for all its flaws. That stood in contrast to the history of depression and conflict that had scarred Europe for the first half of the last century. In a new era of instability characterised by the behaviour of Putin and Trump, that hopeful internationalism seems to be even more important than it has been in recent decades. I regard the freedoms of the European Union, including the freedom of movement, as a triumph of modern politics—something that we should celebrate rather than fear. I understand the frustration at messy compromises and sclerotic decision making within the EU, but I fear that future trade negotiations will be characterised by many of the same frustrations and compromises on sovereignty.

I represent a constituency that not only voted overwhelmingly to remain but is one of the most diverse, international and outward-looking communities not just in Britain but probably in the world, and which has one of the highest proportions of EU nationals. It is an area of arrival that has, over centuries, accommodated waves of new communities, done so with extraordinary success, and helped to build a capital city and a country of creativity, cultural openness and economic success. Westminster, like London and many other parts of the country, has drawn on the contribution of EU nationals who have started businesses, contributed, and staffed our public services.

When my constituents write to me, as they do in their thousands, the overwhelming majority frame their arguments in those terms, often doing so with movingly personal stories of their lives not as separate communities but as husbands and wives, sons and daughters, fellow employees and business partners of British nationals. There is disappointment, anxiety and pain expressed every day, and bafflement as to how we could choose to close down rather than open up our options and our freedoms, and complicate our relations with our closest and largest trading partner.

It is also worth saying, because so often the remain argument is presented as one of middle-class affluence posited against the poorer communities that voted leave, that my constituency is the 15th poorest in the country on working-age poverty. Of course, I hear, as a result, the voices of some leavers too—the minority but none the less there. I agreed on one thing with the Secretary of State, which is that we should not patronise leave voters by saying that they did not know what they voted for. People did know what they voted for, but none the less a range of destinations was expressed in the leave vote.

That is why it is so important that, as the Brexit debate unfolds and the options have become clearer, we give people a further choice to express their opinions. Just as the EU was not responsible for many of the grievances that drove leave voters, leaving the EU will not rectify those grievances. Above all, it will not do so if this country is made poorer as a result—and it would be the poorest communities and individuals who had to carry the consequences of that.

There is no point in speculating about whether a different Government could have bridged the gulf. We can only deal with the reality of what we have. There is no point in speculating about whether the Government could have brought about a different outcome with more imagination, openness and generosity than they have shown over the last two years. That did not happen. It may have been possible early on to negotiate a compromise built around the customs union and the single market, possibly with the Norway model, but that door has now shut.

We have only the deal in front of us, which is the start of an agonising process stretching as far as the eye can see. We have only a deal that is worse than membership of the EU and will leave us poorer, with reduced influence. I will not rule out any option to avoid the worst possible consequence, of crashing out with no deal, but I believe it is time to seek an extension of article 50 and put the decision back to the British people, so that we can hear their views.

21:00:00

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con)

The hundreds of constituents who have written to me demanding that I vote down this deal divide into two kinds: those who urge me to reject it so that we can leave the European Union without a deal—their preferred option—and those who urge me to reject it so that we can stay in the EU. They both cannot be right. There will have to be some management of expectations.

I have made my own dislike of this deal plain, and it is based largely on the fact that we do not know what we will be getting. The political declaration might deliver anything from Canada-minus to Chequers-plus, and where in that spectrum we might land depends upon the negotiations that will follow. There will be no end to the uncertainty for some time.

We have delivered ourselves into the weakest possible position during those negotiations, first by making the financial settlement up front, and secondly by abandoning one of the most important principles to any negotiating position—the ability to walk away—because we have agreed that we will agree and that we will stay in a state of limbo until that agreement is reached. Such is the toxic nature of that limbo that I fear we would probably agree to anything in order to avoid getting there in the first place.

I disagree passionately with my correspondents who say that this deal is worse than staying in the European Union. I have campaigned to leave since the referendum of 1975, and I am not prepared to see that opportunity lost. This deal is better than staying in the European Union. We will be out of the common fisheries policy, out of the common agricultural policy and out of the relentless momentum for political integration. I am very much aware that the events and votes of last week pose a present danger to Brexit, and I will have to consider carefully over the next 24 hours whether I want to share a Division Lobby with those who are there because their strategy is to prevent Brexit.

21:03:00

David Simpson (Upper Bann) (DUP)

It is good to follow the right hon. Member for New Forest West (Sir Desmond Swayne). I want to speak about a number of issues in relation to Northern Ireland. Members will be well aware of my party's position.

In February last year, I asked the Prime Minister a question that was referred to last Wednesday by the shadow Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. I said:

“I ask the Prime Minister to reinforce her earlier comments, given the imminent publication by the EU of the draft legal text arising from December's joint report. Will she confirm that she will never agree to any trade borders between Northern Ireland and the rest of the United Kingdom?”

The Prime Minister's answer was:

“We continue to stand behind all the commitments that we made in December, and my negotiating team will work with the Commission to agree how they should be translated into legal form in the withdrawal agreement.”

Emma Little Pengelly

In line with what my hon. Friend has said, just after the Joint Report back in December 2017, I asked the Prime Minister in this Chamber whether, although the statement said that there would be unfettered access from Northern Ireland to GB, she could clarify for the House that there would also be absolutely unfettered access from Great Britain to Northern Ireland for goods, and she confirmed on the record of this House that that was the case. Yet we now have 68 pages in an annexe of further checks that would put a border within this United Kingdom and sever our single market.

David Simpson

My hon. Friend is correct.

I will continue with the Prime Minister's answer:

“The hon. Gentleman is right: the draft legal text that the Commission has published would, if implemented, undermine the UK common market and threaten the constitutional integrity of the UK by creating a customs and regulatory border down the Irish sea, and no UK Prime Minister could ever agree to it. I will be making it crystal clear to President Juncker and others that we will never do so.—[Official Report, 28 February 2018; Vol. 636, c. 823.]

I do not know what happened from that time to now, but as we say in this country, we are where we are.

Northern Ireland and the people I represent in my constituency feel very despondent. They feel that they have been made the sacrificial lamb to placate the Irish Republic and the European Union. That is exactly how they feel. If we are to believe everything we read or everything we hear, EU officials have been quoted as saying that Northern Ireland is the “price” that the UK will pay for Brexit. I am a Unionist—and a proud Unionist—and I listen to some of the comments in the media and to the scaremongering from Ministers and Government officials when they go out to proclaim the doom and gloom, but my constituents are concerned about the Union of this Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

Kevin Hollinrake

I guess the question I have for the hon. Gentleman is this: what is the alternative? Michel Barnier said on 11 October last year that, in the event of no deal, there would be checks at the border for all live animals and produce of animal origin. What effect would that have on Northern Ireland and on the integrity of the United Kingdom?

David Simpson

I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention, but it is very interesting that, a week or 10 days ago, the papers released from the European Union and from the Republic of Ireland never mentioned the words “border checks” and never mentioned the land border in Northern Ireland. They mentioned the ports and the airports, but they did not mention this hard Brexit or this hard deal. We hear so often about this hard Brexit and this problem with the border. Who is going to implement this? The British Government have said they are not going to do it, the Irish Government have said they are not going to do it and the European Union is not going to do it, so who is going to enforce this hard border and this hard Brexit?

Kevin Hollinrake

Specifically, Ireland is part of the European Union, and the European Union has said very clearly that it would implement those checks at the border.

David Simpson

With the greatest respect to the hon. Gentleman, he has been long enough about this House to know that what the Europeans say and what they do are two different things. We have seen the history of the whole of the European Union, although when it comes to the midnight hour, things may change.

My constituents in the Upper Bann constituency voted to leave, and they are very clear that they want a deal, but they want the right deal for the best of the whole of the United Kingdom—and that is the bottom line. Certainly as it stands at this moment in time, I could not support this deal tomorrow, and neither can my party. I think that the way that the European Union has treated the fifth largest economy in the world is an insult, and I cannot support it.

21:10:00

Boris Johnson (Uxbridge and South Ruislip) (Con)

I will be as brief as I possibly can be; these points must be made. When people around the world look at the debate that we have been having, there is one big question that they always ask me, and will particularly ask after the interventions that we have heard this afternoon. They ask, “Is Britain really going to leave?” Do we really have the courage and the self-belief to deliver what people voted for and seize the opportunities—independent, democratic self-government, real free trade deals, pioneering regulation that maximises the strengths of our economy, and an open and outward-looking economy that attracts people and investment from around the world on the basis of laws made in this country and not in Brussels? Are we really going to embrace that future, or are we going to be intimidated by the kind of speeches that we have heard this afternoon?

I fear that if we vote for this deal, we will be blatantly negating many of the potential benefits of Brexit, because as a result of the backstop trap, we will be faced with an unthinkable choice: sacrifice Northern Ireland, as we have just heard, or stay locked in the customs union and regulatory alignment, so that we cannot do free trade deals but remain rules takers and end up disgorging £39 billion for nothing in return, and without even the certainty that is claimed. As my hon. Friend the Member for Orpington (Joseph Johnson)—my brother—rightly said, we have yet to begin the negotiations, and the only certainty is that the EU will keep us locked in the backstop until we comply with its wishes, and the whole debilitating wrangle will go on for years, which is why we have to get it right now.

The answer is not to have a second referendum. The answer is not to clamber back, or to attempt to clamber back, into the EU, because all this while it has been evolving in an ever more federalist direction. As we have been agonising about Brexit, it has been talking about more tax harmonisation and creating a Euro army—precisely the moves towards a United States of Europe that may attract some Opposition Members, but which have been decisively rejected by the British people and which are not right. We cannot go for the Norway option, for reasons that have been extensively chewed over in this House—we would end up taking even more rules from Brussels.

I do not think we can seriously contemplate delaying article 50, because after two and a half years of procrastination, the public would accuse us in this place of deliberately setting out to frustrate their wishes. They would conclude that there was some plot by the deep state to kill Brexit, and that is precisely—[Interruption.] That is what many people would conclude, and that is precisely why we cannot now treat the public as idiots and get snarled in delectable disputations about Standing Order No. 14, because they will see this stuff for what it is: public school debating society chicanery designed to get round their wishes.

If and when this deal is voted down, let us not continue to flog this dead horse. I am sure we are all grateful to Monsieur Juncker and Monsieur Barnier for the various comfort letters that they have

provided, but we know that they are legally worthless. Instead of another fig leaf from Brussels, I hope that the Government will come back to this place with a plan that is in fact the Prime Minister's original plan, as it would go back to her principles outlined at Lancaster House, banking that which is sensible in the withdrawal agreement, scrapping the backstop, agreeing an implementation period in which to negotiate a zero-tariff, zero-quota free trade deal, holding back half the £39 billion at least until such a free trade deal is concluded, pledging what is obvious to all—that there is no plan, intention or need for a hard border in Northern Ireland—and getting on now, with zeal and enthusiasm, with preparations for no deal.

I am sure that whatever the bureaucratic, technical or logistical difficulties there may be, as Monsieur Puisseuseau of the Calais-Boulogne ports has pointed out, they can be overcome with a spirit of optimism and determination. That is the spirit we should now be applying to Brexit.

We can mull it. Yes, of course we can mull it. We can flunk it. We can vote for this deal, thereby confirming the worst suspicions of the British public about the cynicism of the elite, or else we can get it right and seize the opportunities before us. When we look ourselves in the mirror we can say that when this House came centre stage again, four years after we asked the British public to settle this profound question of their destiny, we did not miss our cue and we answered their request.

21:15:00

Gordon Marsden (Blackpool South) (Lab)

If this Brexit debate does not cover the bread and butter issues for my Blackpool constituents and for all our constituents—decent jobs, maintaining living standards, enough food on the table to feed their family—it will be for the birds. The truth is that they are already paying the price for the Prime Minister's botched negotiations. Her deal would make those bread and butter issues worse: there no safeguards over employment and environmental rights—unenforceable under her Brexit deal—and her last minute, panicked, fig leaf approach to our trade unions and Labour MPs will fool very few.

The Government's own statistics show the Prime Minister's deal reducing the size of the UK economy by at least 3.9%—a £100 billion hit compared with 2016, with jobs lost and growth stalled, a grim prospect for us in Blackpool and for other small towns; no Brexit dividend for public services or the NHS, which that mendacious bus promised; and now the British Retail Consortium points out, as we have heard, that no deal could lead to price rises in Blackpool, for example, ranging from at least 9% to mid-20%. No one in my constituency voted to be worse off from this scenario or for the no deal she is already wasting millions of pounds on.

Our major north-west industries, such as BAE Systems and its ongoing supply chain, with hundreds of jobs in and around Blackpool dependent on them, would suffer from no deal. On top of that, the Government have failed to secure any deal beyond 2020 for the tens of millions of pounds and hundreds of jobs dependent on university research programmes within the EU. There are no opportunities for our students and apprentices to continue to benefit from the Erasmus programme, and an end to EU social and regeneration funding, which has benefited us strongly in the north-west. The universities closest to my constituency—Lancaster, Central Lancashire, Edge Hill and our own excellent Blackpool and the Fylde College—would be put in severe jeopardy.

It takes a rare sort of political genius to disappoint almost all sides of opinion across the United Kingdom, but by goodness the Prime Minister has managed it—everyone from the Mayor of London to the Democratic Unionist party. Instead of reaching out to heal the scars and divisions of failed austerity, she has been obsessed by the divisions in her own party. The huge irony is that her deal is now unwanted by two out of three Tory party members. Not since Chamberlain went to meet

Hitler at Munich and came back waving a piece of paper saying “Peace in our time” has a British Prime Minister had so inept or ignoble a conclusion to negotiations.

This deal undermines the aspirations of the young and the security of the old. It has let down our NATO friends and allies in central Europe and the Baltics, when this country supported them so strongly to access a democratic 21st century Europe. And then there is the future of peace and prosperity in Ireland. The Prime Minister’s failings over the backstop and other elements have stirred up suspicion on all sides. It is no surprise the DUP fears being shunted into an endless groundhog day on the backstop. The Government’s bungling threatens to undermine the Good Friday agreement. Have we so soon forgotten the terrible price the whole of the UK and the communities of Northern Ireland paid through the troubles? As a young man, I remember the Birmingham bombings, hearing a bomb going off round the corner from my London office, and a press trip to Northern Ireland being cut short by worried checkpoint guards after the murder of two British corporals in Andersonstown. Given all that suffering, how could this Prime Minister take a chance that jeopardises the Good Friday agreement?

The Prime Minister talks up global Britain, but as a result of her bungling must we end up, instead of being a linchpin for Europe between our allies, north America and the Commonwealth with all the soft power that gives us, being reduced to being an offshore island with her deal that satisfies no one’s aspirations? This has come about because she lacked the leadership or ability to look through the other end of the telescope, a similar failure to that which led the Roman historian Tacitus to put into the mouth of a Scottish chieftain the bitter words:

“They make a desert and call it peace.”

That is what she will create if her deal is accepted: a desert for those who want Brexit to be a new start, but also for those who wish to reform the EU; a desert for those on all sides of the House proud of our international achievements; and a desert of sterility to which we shall be chained for years to come.

I accept that the Prime Minister has displayed stamina in pursuing her deal, but that does not compensate for the lack of foresight or empathy. As one of her own MPs told her, stamina is no substitute for strategy, but so boxed in has she become that she is convinced she is some form of 21st-century Joan of Arc, hearing voices instructing her what to do. She is not Joan of Arc, however. She has not heard heavenly voices, and if she is walking to a Brexit stake, it is one of her own construction. If she cannot see that, this House should remember another occasion when the national interest overrode a Prime Minister, when Leo Amery challenged Neville Chamberlain by quoting Oliver Cromwell’s words:

“You have sat here too long for any good you have been doing...In the name of God, go.”

21:20:00

Mrs Helen Grant (Maidstone and The Weald) (Con)

There are two particular matters that I would like to raise. First, I will refer to the vast international opportunities that await our nation if we deliver Brexit. Secondly, I will touch on what I see as the responsibility of all Members of this House to ensure that we grasp those opportunities.

I am in no doubt that a great future awaits the United Kingdom after we have left the EU. I saw that myself when I led a trade mission to Nigeria at the end of 2017. Being the country of my father’s birth, Nigeria is very close to my heart, but it is also a nation of huge opportunity, rich in history

and culture with vibrant and charismatic people. It also has a growing service industry and manufacturing sectors. While there, I had numerous meetings with large and small businesses, Government Departments and agencies. They all expressed a massive willingness to do more and huge excitement about the opportunities that Brexit will bring, allowing our two nations to trade more closely. It was a glimpse of global Britain in action, spreading the rule of law, boosting prosperity, sharing our expertise and engaging fully with Commonwealth friends and international partners.

Grasping those opportunities as we leave the EU is not inevitable, however. Our future success is not a given. It will require effort and spirit from us all. Such effort and spirit should be burning brightly like a beacon in this Chamber right here and now, but it is not. On day one back in Parliament last Monday, colleagues returned to ugly discord in this House and on the streets surrounding it. My right hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe (Anna Soubry) was subjected to abuse and harassment by a mob outside on College Green. The night ended with a viewing of the Channel 4 production, “Brexit: The Uncivil War”. That title says it all. It was a reminder of the horrible referendum campaign and how the tactics of both sides whipped up dangerous anger and division.

This week, we have a chance to stop the madness. We must be more respectful towards each other. We have got to work harder to be more understanding of different viewpoints. I regret the fact that pragmatism and compromise seem to have become dirty words. In fact, they are crucial ingredients to success. For those of us who have spent significant periods of time in the outside world prior to entering politics, compromise is perhaps more highly valued. In any negotiation where there is a reasonable balance of bargaining power, no one ever gets everything they want when they want it, and it is our duty and responsibility as parliamentarians to find the solution to the Brexit deadlock. We were elected to find answers to difficult problems and to make difficult decisions in the best interests of our country. We cannot shirk the issue and we cannot avoid it; we have to play the hand we have been dealt.

The answer is not a second referendum with ghastly division and uncertainty, and the answer is not no deal, which threatens to bring havoc to so many. The answer is certainly not kicking this most important of cans ever further down the road. The nation needs us to stand up and deliver and really be together. We owe it to the electorate, who we will be failing if we fail to do that. The answer, therefore, has to be a compromise solution—a solution that honours the referendum result by providing greater control over our borders, laws and money, a solution that preserves our economic and security partnerships with the EU, a solution that delivers for all our constituents. Despite the obvious imperfections, the withdrawal agreement on the table delivers for this country, and, for that reason, I will vote for it.

Mr Speaker

Order. Just before I call the hon. Member for Scunthorpe (Nic Dakin), I must point out what some Members will have noticed—namely that, most unfortunately, the timer display to my right is not functioning, which is gravely to the disadvantage of Opposition Members. I have been advised, I am afraid, that it cannot be repaired while the House is sitting, so I would encourage Members to—

Greg Hands

Come over here.

Mr Speaker

No, not to cross the Floor of the House—it was a nice try by the right hon. Gentleman, and I do not blame him for making the attempt, although whether they will be inspired by the prospect of sitting

near him is a matter for legitimate speculation and conjecture. I was saying that Members should try to take account of exactly when they started speaking, and they may be assisted by their Whip as well. I know that it is imperfect, and I am glad that the right hon. Gentleman has kept his sense of humour at this time of night, but we will have to keep going to the best of our ability.

21:25:00

Nic Dakin (Scunthorpe) (Lab)

Last year, we commemorated the centenary of the end of the first world war. It was a sombre remembrance. Last month, we celebrated 100 years since the first election in which women and working-class men voted. Both anniversaries remind us of the progress we have made, but progress is not inevitable. This year, we remember 80 years since the outbreak of the second world war—just 21 years after the war to end all wars. It is a shocking reminder of the fragility of peace. The last 70 years have been ones of peace, freedom and prosperity driven by positive relationships with our partners in Europe. The 70 years before were ones of war, oppression and economic depression driven by negative relationships with our European neighbours. Peace, freedom, prosperity—things worth having, things we take for granted when we have them but whose loss we regret when they are gone.

We had a second referendum on our relationship with the EU in 2016. Many in this debate have reminded us of its outcome—17.4 million, or 52%, for leave and 16.1 million, or 48%, for remain—but there is another way of looking at the result that helps to explain why we are finding it so difficult to deliver the will of the British people: 62% of eligible voters, or 29 million people, did not vote leave. No wonder we are struggling! People voted to come out, not to lose out.

Northern English industrial, commuter and market towns such as Scunthorpe, Bottesford and Kirton, which I represent, voted overwhelmingly leave—2:1 in my area—and it is no wonder. They are fed up with the change to their communities, as migrant workers take jobs in agriculture, food production and small manufacturing. They see this as depressing their wages. They see their high streets change and shrink. When things close—the courts, the banks, the shops—it always seems to be ours that close. When investment is made—in roads, in rail, in shiny new projects—it always seems to be the big cities, London and the south-east that benefit.

Communities such as the ones I represent are right to feel neglected because they are, despite our best efforts. There is a growth in the number of those just about managing and people using food banks. We saw that over Christmas. There are cuts to real incomes and welfare support as a result of the ideological pursuit of austerity. We used to sing that things could only get better. At the referendum, people said things could not get much worse. They wanted change and to take back control, and they still want that. They want to be listened to, they want their NHS to deliver consistently for them, they want to see their schools funded properly and they want to see investment in local jobs, and they are right to want these things.

Brexit is the magic bullet that'll do the trick—fingers crossed! We are told that Brexit means Brexit and that nothing is agreed until everything is agreed—meaningless drivel! Like the Emperor's new clothes, it looks wonderful until you see through it, and that is where we are now—the point at which the clothes are properly looked at and the Prime Minister's deal properly examined. Pretty much nobody likes it. That is what my email traffic says. British Steel, the largest local private sector employer, is desperate for certainty, horrified at the prospect of no deal and urging me to vote for the Prime Minister's deal, but there is little support for this. Although the deal would get us over the current bump in the road, it would not be long before the other bumps and new uncertainties came into view. That is the problem.

The PM has not listened to the people. In 2017, she asked for a larger majority to push through a hard Brexit and the people said, “No thank you!” Afterwards, she should have reached out to all the Opposition parties, not just the Democratic Unionist party, in the interests of national unity to find a way forward. Instead, she has dug into her bunker, behaving as though she has a huge majority even though she leads a minority Government. That is what has got us to today: a Government of headless chickens running round in ever-decreasing circles of Dante’s “Inferno”.

We need to protect the Union of the United Kingdom by preserving the Good Friday agreement. We need to be in a customs union and have access to the single market while restricting freedom of movement. We need to listen to the 62% as well as the 52% and take positive action to address regional inequalities. If we do that, the next 70 years will build on the legacy of peace, freedom and prosperity of the last 70 years through strong and positive relationships with our European neighbours and the rest of the world.

Mr Speaker

I am afraid that the limit has to be reduced to four minutes.

21:31:00

Suella Braverman (Fareham) (Con)

I am grateful to be able to speak in this historic debate before what will be one of the most important votes of my career, if not my lifetime. It brings me no pleasure whatever to make this speech: I have never rebelled against the Conservative party and I have never taken a stance against my leader. But my duty to my constituents and my contract with the nation mean that I must speak frankly and vote with my conscience against this deal. It is the reason why I resigned as a Minister from the Department for Exiting the European Union in November.

The simple truth is that this deal is not Brexit. It is neither what a majority of voters in Fareham voted for in the referendum nor what 80% of voters backed at the general election. But we are being told that, yes, it does honour the referendum and take back control of our laws, our money and our borders. Call me a pesky lawyer, but that does not stand up to scrutiny. I have been called worse: a jihadi, an extremist, a racist. Most recently, I was referred to—by, it has to be said, my very good friend the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs—as a swinger at a party waiting for Pierce Brosnan to arrive. Mr Speaker, you will know that I got married about a year ago; I have to inform you that our relationship is going well and we have not quite got to that point.

The legal reality is very different from the slogans. The deal continues our subjugation to EU laws during the implementation period and the backstop: the UK will have no say whatever on those rules and regulations. After the backstop, we have no guarantee whatever that the UK will be able to diverge. The jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice will persist thereafter and our courts will not have the final say on many matters.

There have been pledges to end the free movement of people, but I do not believe that they stand up to scrutiny either. After exit day in March 2019, the free movement directive and its principles will substantially continue to apply. We have no promise, again, that free movement will categorically end after the implementation period—merely the promise of a labour mobility agreement. Mr Speaker, if you know what that means I would be grateful to hear your thoughts. I certainly do not—and that is after having worked for a year at the Brexit Department.

After we technically leave the EU in March, we will be legally bound to pay £39 billion for many years thereafter. For what? Nothing. We have failed to secure any guarantee that we will get a free trade agreement in return for the very large price we are paying.

My parents emigrated to the UK from Kenya and Mauritius in the 1960s. They were born under the British empire and admired the United Kingdom. The UK that inspired them was confident in the world—pioneering in statecraft, and fearless in the face of adversity: a Britain that led the way for others and contributed so much good to the world. That is the vision of Britain that I have inherited, and in which I profoundly believe. At this crossroads in our history, we are being fed a diet of doom and pessimism—a choice between surrender and catastrophe—but our nation is greater than that. We can salvage Brexit before it is too late. We can ditch this deal: we can honour the British people for our great nation.

21:35:00

Danielle Rowley (Midlothian) (Lab)

I have received hundreds of emails, letters and calls from constituents over just the last few weeks, as other Members on both sides of the House will have done. Some have been from people engaging with their Member of Parliament for the very first time. That is at least one positive thing to have emerged from the last two and a half years of chaos, but I find it sad that people are becoming engaged in politics through anger, disbelief and frustration rather than through hope or positive change.

A large number of my constituents have urged me to vote against the deal. They think that it pleases no one. It does not protect jobs or the economy, it does not preserve key protections and rights at work, it is bad for the environment and for consumers, and it is bad for standards for our food, our health and our safety. It puts our country's future and prosperity at stake. One of my constituents recently told me:

“What I think is immoral, is the idea that somehow British people have given their consent to a process that will cause huge economic hardship to large sections of the population.”

I agree with him. We have a critical responsibility in this place, not least to the poorest and most marginalised in our society, to protect our economy and public services. However, that does not mean telling people that their choice was wrong. We need to look at the reasons why people voted as they did, explore the root of those problems, and then work to secure genuine change for people while protecting them and respecting their choice at the same time. That is their duty, as was highlighted perfectly by my hon. Friend the Member for Brent North (Barry Gardiner).

A number of constituents have also expressed concern about the rights of EU citizens. People who have contributed so much to this country are feeling unwelcome, and some have left as a result. A local business told me:

“We employ skilled engineers from around the world and see dangers ahead if we close our doors”.

The Government's proposed immigration policy measures skill, and therefore visa type, by pay level. Given that those involved in research and technology are often highly skilled but poorly paid, that is not fair.

The Tories say that they have given clarity to EU nationals, but my European constituents do not agree. One told me, “I am worried about my future”, saying:

“As an EU national who has lived in Scotland for over thirty years... I feel that the explanations as to what 'settled status' entails in practice have been lacking in clarity”.

The Prime Minister must think again and do better by people who are have worked here, lived here and contributed so much.

In many ways, this deal would undermine opportunities for young—especially working-class—people. Youth services in the UK have been disproportionately slashed, and have experienced the impacts of austerity over the last eight years. Over that time, EU funding has significantly helped to plug gaps, but there is a real lack of provision to protect those funds. The findings of a panel of young people in Scotland brought together by the organisations Children in Scotland and Together raised the need for continued contribution to Erasmus with an extra grant, and the need for workers’ rights to be protected. It seems to me that young people have a clearer view than the Government about what we need as a country.

We cannot have a no-deal Brexit—we absolutely cannot—but we also cannot be held to ransom and forced into choosing a bad deal. Labour is the only party that is trying to heal the divisions in our deeply divided country. In contrast, the Government have only made those divisions worse. Brexit has shaken the establishment. We need to listen to what people are telling us, but we also need to protect them, and to protect and restore public services and our communities. On behalf of the people of Midlothian, I will not be voting for this deal.

21:39:00

Dr Phillip Lee (Bracknell) (Con)

The task before Members of this House is simple: we must deal with reality not fantasy; we must be honest with ourselves and our constituents; we must decide to lead, not be led; and, above all, we must each make judgments about what is in the best interests of our constituencies and our country without fear or favour. The issue at hand is too important to do otherwise.

I cannot vote for this withdrawal agreement for many reasons, but this evening I will concentrate on just one: neither this Brexit nor any other practical form of it measures up to what was promised in 2016. The fact is that people voted to leave because they were told that by doing so the country would be richer. They were told about £350 million for the NHS, easy access to the single market and easy, deliverable trade deals with the rest of the world. They were told that there would be less immigration, specifically fewer Muslims, as evidenced by the use of a false position on Turkey in the accession process. Finally, they were told that they would regain sovereignty.

I have not been even remotely persuaded that any of these Vote Leave promises have been shown to be deliverable, and neither have an increasing number of my constituents, if recent sophisticated polling is to be believed. Also, I am convinced that our countrymen and women chose leave without really knowing many of the implications. To be honest, I was one of them. I was one of those ignorant people who did not understand the implications, and I point Members to our lack of membership of the European Medicines Agency and the impact that would have on access to new drugs.

If we had gone out and said to the public, “Vote for this deal,” do we really know for sure what the result would have been? I suspect our people would have been less than enthusiastic. In fact, I suggest that the response would have been, “Up yours,” and rightly so. That is why I strongly believe that it would be a supreme act of political fraud to proceed with any practical or legally

deliverable form of Brexit without first getting the legitimacy of public consent. Hence I want no part in this act of self-serving political chicanery, or indeed any other future attempts to deliver softer forms of Brexit.

This deal does not do it for me. However, neither does so-called Norway-plus. Norway does not control its borders, Norway pays into EU programmes and Norway is not at the table when the rules are drawn up. Hands up those who think that not controlling immigration or regulations, and paying for the pleasure, was what won the referendum for Vote Leave? For any responsible parliamentarian to contemplate supporting a no-deal Brexit without giving ourselves at least a decade to adjust to that reality is beyond reckless.

Dr Wollaston

Does my hon. Friend think that any responsible Government could in all conscience inflict no deal on their people?

Dr Lee

No, I do not, to be blunt.

There is only one way out of our mess: ask the people to decide and have the final say, and, unlike in 2016, give a choice between two legally and practically deliverable options. It is to say, “We know you wanted to leave and we respect that. However, leaving means this—is that okay?” This time, there should be no tortuous process of subsequently trying to interpret a result. This time, there should be a decision that will be acted on within 24 hours of the result. The clinical equivalent would be to say, “I know you wanted an operation, but having done some further tests, we’ve now realised there is a significant risk that you will be harmed. Do you still want it?”

The Government have clearly worked hard to respect the 2016 referendum vote and to deliver a workable Brexit, but their mandate is exhausted. They need the legitimacy of a new vote. In response to the argument of some colleagues, it is not true to say that the public will never forgive us if we do not deliver Brexit, but it is certainly the case that if we deliver a bad deal, the public should never forgive us. If the public vote for this Brexit, fine, but I am not voting for it, because there has not been informed consent to it, it is not in my constituents’ interests and it is not in my country’s best interests.

21:44:00

Sir Mark Hendrick (Preston) (Lab/Co-op)

The Prime Minister, in interpreting the outcome of the referendum and handling negotiations with the EU, has fought to keep everyone in the dark for most of the past two years. It was only late on in the process, when beginning to look at negotiating the withdrawal agreement, that she came forward with the so-called Chequers plan. The plan was clearly meant to strike a balance between what her Brexiteer Back Benchers would accept and what she felt she could successfully negotiate with the European Union. The final outcome clearly satisfies the latter—hence the deal, which has enraged a large proportion of her own party and certainly the vast majority of Opposition Members, who want a much closer economic and political relationship with the EU. That is not currently on offer.

If the Prime Minister had sought to engage with Parliament over the past two years rather than simply saying what she felt the referendum meant to her, and if she had informed Parliament towards the end about what she was doing, we would not be in the mess we are in today. Any progress on this matter will require consensus across the House, and not the take-it-or-leave-it approach amounting to blackmail that the Prime Minister is trying to pursue. The political

declaration following the withdrawal agreement is deficient in terms of its commitment to the UK and the single market, and it also contains no mention of the customs union. To vote for this deal tomorrow would be to approve an approach to the negotiation of a trade deal in which the likely outcome with regard to the single market is unknown and in which the customs union has clearly been ruled out. This is clearly leading to a hard Brexit.

As other Members have said, the clock is running down and we have little time to come up with an alternative before 29 March. It is therefore essential that the Government seek an extension to article 50 to give us more time or, if necessary, even revoke article 50 until Parliament or the people of this country have finally decided what sort of an arrangement with the European Union this country should have. The people of this country who voted in the referendum in June 2016 could not have known all the consequences of their vote at the time, or the likely impact on jobs and prosperity in this country. Any politicians who tried to warn them of this were described as scaremongers or pursuers of “Project Fear”. Much of what the remain campaign said at the time has either become true—including a heavily devalued pound, the flight of capital from the country and job losses in key industries—or it is on the way to becoming true, should we leave on 29 March.

When the Prime Minister’s deal is rejected at the end of this debate tomorrow evening, we will be in a situation in which, in the past, a Prime Minister would have considered resigning or calling a general election. I do not expect either of those events to take place, because this Prime Minister’s track record is one of stubbornness and disregard. However, I do expect her to come forward sometime soon after with her plan B, which must include either the extension or revocation of article 50. In addition, there must be a genuine attempt to involve Parliament in finding a way forward that can form the basis of further discussions with the European Union around realistic arrangements for UK access to the single market and membership of a customs union. The European Union has said that this deal is the final deal and it will not negotiate another one, but it would say that, wouldn’t it? If Parliament can come to a consensus and the Prime Minister can respect that consensus, the EU must give serious consideration to that consensus. The Prime Minister should continue to work on that basis. If she cannot do so, she should call a general election and let the people decide.

21:48:00

Sir John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con)

I want to speak about the exercise of political authority, the character of entitlement and the nature of expectations. Political power has one virtuous object: the defence and welfare of the people, and the advancement of their interests. For that to be true in practice, the exercise of power must be accountable. The European Union is esoteric, obtuse and obscure, so far as most of our constituents are concerned—they neither hold people to account nor understand how it works. I barely understand it myself, even after all those years in government. What I do know is that in every single Government Department in which I served, at some point a civil servant would come to me and say, “It’s bad news! There is a directive from Europe. How can we get round it? How can we get out of it? How can we dilute it?” Never did anyone come to me to say, “This has arrived from the European Union and it is good news for Britain.” Because the British people knew that, they voted to leave.

There are those in this place who have a deep sense of entitlement. They believe that they were born to rule. More than that, they believe that they are entitled to dictate the views of all those around them and to proscribe views that do not fit in with their globalist, liberal establishment preoccupations. They neither understand the British people nor truly care about them. They are

determined to frustrate Brexit and to use every process to corrupt every possible method to do so. We must stand in their way: for the people against that liberal establishment.

I know that the Prime Minister has done her best. I am not one of those who thinks that she has failed, but she must do more. She has the national interest at heart, but the backstop cannot be sustainable, and the reason is straightforward—it could continue in perpetuity. It could create a contractual, treaty-based relationship with the European Union that we could not get out of even if this Parliament believed that it was in our national interest. The Attorney General told us so in December when he said:

“There is therefore no unilateral right for either party to terminate this arrangement. This means that if no superseding agreement can be reached within the implementation period, the protocol would be activated and in international law would subsist even if negotiations had broken down.”— [Official Report, 3 December 2018; Vol. 650, c. 547.]

That brings me to my third and final point. We now stand ready to deliver the expectations of the British people or to frustrate them. Our power in this place and power in government arise from the legitimacy conferred on us by those people who elect us and to whom we answer. If we frustrate them and let them down, I would be reminded of the words of Benjamin Disraeli, who said:

“Duty cannot exist without faith”,

and if we breach the faith of the British people in our integrity, we will do a disservice not only to this Parliament at this time, but to our very democratic system of government. I am not prepared to do that, and I know that Members across the Chamber are not prepared to do that, so I ask all my colleagues—wisdom does not reside on one side of the House or the other, by the way—to live up to what the people ask us to do. Do not support the deal tomorrow night, but back Brexit and ensure that we leave the EU lock, stock and barrel.

21:52:00

Peter Kyle (Hove) (Lab)

There was nothing inevitable about reaching this impasse. In reality, the Brexit we have before us in this deal is the Prime Minister’s creation and hers alone. The Prime Minister’s approach to the Herculean task of negotiating Brexit has been astoundingly out of touch with the needs of both Parliament and the public. The crucial first step of when and how to trigger article 50 hardwired acrimony into Brexit from the outset—acrimony between Parliament and the Executive and within and between the communities we represent. It set us on a course on which failure to command a majority within Parliament or among the public was inevitable. The Government spent £10 million of public money going all the way to the Supreme Court to stop us in Parliament having a say on the triggering of article 50. Do we imagine, had the Prime Minister won that case, that her intentions were to be more inclusive of Parliament, to be more consultative, or to be more driven to listen, learn and engage? Of course not.

I voted against triggering article 50 because there was no evidence that the Government were prepared for the negotiations—and they were not. What followed was 18 months of negotiations within the Tory party, all the while pretending that that had the same effect as negotiating with our partners in the EU. There was no Chequers moment for the EU, because its negotiating principals were signed off by all 27 nations, the European Parliament and the European Commission three months after article 50 was triggered. Our Government—the ones who started this process—spent three quarters of the negotiating time rowing among themselves. The Prime Minister survived every

row by telling each side exactly what they wanted to hear and never putting anything in writing. It is an unholy coalition held together by smoke and mirrors, so it was no surprise that the wheels came off the moment she published her deal in legally binding text. It need not have been that way.

When the Prime Minister took office, giving that remarkable first speech on the steps of Downing Street, she had the opportunity of a lifetime to reconcile our country and heal our politics. She could have toured our nations to listen to people from all areas and all backgrounds. She could have established ways to include the public in solving the Brexit challenge.

The Prime Minister said that she pulled the vote at the last minute because she had listened to this House and needed to rework the backstop, but even that fails the truth test. If she had truly listened to this House, she would have heard that concerns about security were raised more frequently than the backstop, as were immigration and citizens' rights. And the most heavily mentioned concern in those debates, raised three times as often as the backstop, were economic security and trade. What has she done to deliver on what Members demanded last time? Nothing. Another wasted month of precious article 50 time.

The Prime Minister says we must not let the great be the enemy of the good when it comes to a Brexit deal, and there we have it. With this deal, she has literally taken the "great" out of Great Britain. There is no plan B to unite the House if the motion fails to secure agreement tomorrow. The very fact that no single option has galvanised a majority in this place is the perfect guide as to whom we should turn to help solve it. The Government may be paralysed and Parliament gridlocked. It is time we turned outwards to ask the people to guide us on the way forward.

On the steps of Downing Street, upon taking office, the Prime Minister told the nation that her Government

"will do everything we can to give you more control over your lives."

If now is not the moment to make good on that promise, when is?

21:56:00

Sir Henry Bellingham (North West Norfolk) (Con)

It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Hove (Peter Kyle), who voted against article 50 and is in a stronger position than his Front Bench. It is also a pleasure to follow hot on the heels of my neighbour, my right hon. Friend the Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Sir John Hayes).

My constituency, like the constituencies of my right hon. Friends the Members for South Holland and The Deepings and for South West Norfolk (Elizabeth Truss), voted overwhelmingly to leave—68% on a massive turnout. I voted leave myself, and I stood at the last election on a pledge to honour the referendum. I think it is my duty to deliver on that pledge.

Would I prefer a perfect, clean Brexit with no backstop, no ongoing role for the ECJ and a chance to break away in one swoop? Yes, of course I would. I was in my constituency a lot before Christmas and, like my right hon. Friend the Member for New Forest West (Sir Desmond Swayne), I had many conversations with constituents. I was struck by how much support and respect there is for the Prime Minister and her tenacity and determination in difficult circumstances.

One chap said to me, “Henry, would you like a 100% Brexit?” And I said, “Of course I would. I voted for Brexit. Wouldn’t you like a 100% Brexit?” He said, “Yes, I would, but we actually got 52%, so it was always going to be a compromise.” After 46 years of ever-closer integration, after spending 10 years negotiating our entry into the EU, a 100% Brexit was never a realistic expectation.

The agreement before us is the result of many months of incredibly diligent work. Yes, it is easy to criticise a lot of it, and I am far from satisfied, but if one looks at some of the plus points in the agreement, 80% of the key elements on research, skills, education, cultural links, citizenship, security and intelligence were agreed with little fuss as a result of our negotiating team.

I do not accept the idea that the EU is somehow indifferent to the outcome of this agreement and whether it gets through the House. If it fails, the EU would see it as an appalling indictment of EU diplomacy, having put so much into it. As my right hon. Friend the Member for New Forest West points out, the agreement stops the vast payment, closes down free movement and gives us control again of our fisheries and agriculture, and we will no longer be bound to implement future EU legislation. Above all else, it gives us a crucial stepping-stone to the next stage, which is the most important part of all—our future trade agreements and the future political relationship. Frankly, if I had been offered this agreement in 2016, when I campaigned with my right hon. Friend the Member for South Holland and The Deepings and many other colleagues during the referendum, I would have taken it.

Unfortunately, this is not a binary choice between this deal and a no-deal Brexit. I could live with a no-deal Brexit, but I am concerned that we have not properly prepared for it and that it could lead to a constitutional stand-off between the Government and Parliament. A second referendum would be a complete disaster. People would say to us, “We voted in the referendum, at your request. We then spoke and we asked you to implement it. You then asked us again at the last election and 82% of you campaigned on a platform to implement the result, and now you are coming back to us to ask us again.”

I am going to vote reluctantly for this agreement tomorrow night, but I am also reminded of what a lot of constituents have said to me—

Mr Speaker

Order. The hon. Gentleman has the benefit of the clock. I am sorry to stop him, because I enjoy listening to him.

22:00:00

Preet Kaur Gill (Birmingham, Edgbaston) (Lab/Co-op)

In May, I gave a speech in this place calling on the Government to put aside their differences and their rigid ideologies, overcome their stubbornness and focus on what matters: a deal that works for people, families and businesses in the west midlands and across the country. It is clear that what this Government have put in front of us does not do that. This deal presents a threat to the three universities in my constituency; across the west midlands, we attract more than 8,000 students from the EU each year and employ about 5,000 academics who are EU citizens. The universities in my constituency are concerned about the impacts of this deal. What does it do to their ability to attract students and staff, and to their continued ability to collaborate with other institutions in Europe? This deal does not answer those questions.

Having spoken about those universities, I am pleased to reference the report ‘The NHS and Health Law Post Brexit’, written by the academic group The UK in a Changing Europe’, which includes researchers from the University of Birmingham. The report was launched in Parliament in December 2018. So what does this Brexit deal mean for the NHS? The report raises fears about the likelihood of medicine shortages taking place across the UK and its authors are rightly worried about the lack of a guarantee of continued access to European Union-wide public health networks and vigilance systems which facilitate the protection of patient safety. The Government have not adequately addressed any of those things, and the damaging effect of this deal on the NHS will be felt around the country if it goes through.

According to analysis commissioned by Birmingham City Council’s Brexit commission, one in 10 registered nurses in the west midlands is from the European Union. In a sector that already has a high level of vacancies and a low retention of nursing staff, they fulfil vital roles, working in older adult nursing homes, and providing help and support for some of our most vulnerable citizens. I ask for a guarantee from Ministers that those so called “low skilled” or “unskilled” workers will still be able to come from the EU.

Despite the much delayed White Paper, which finally slipped out just before Christmas, we still have a Cabinet and Government at odds over their future immigration policy. So let me say that blindly following an ideological desire to severely cut EU migration will damage our economy and leave vulnerable industries, already heavily hit with large numbers of vacancies, like social care, even closer to breaking point. Charities and civil society groups have come to me worried about the Government’s intentions of replacing the EU structural and investment funds with a shared prosperity fund. The lack of detail, coupled with indications and rumours about how the funds will be distributed, is worrying, and these vital organisations are hesitant to plan for the medium and long term. This anxiety about the future is also true of these organisations and aid agencies based in the UK but operating abroad. They are already experiencing the impact of the Government’s lack of clarity over Brexit, with currency fluctuations resulting in funding shortfalls for overseas work. There are also serious threats to their future programmes and jobs that this Government have not addressed.

The Greater Birmingham chamber of commerce evidence showed that almost a quarter of west midlands-based businesses export exclusively to the EU. These businesses need continued access to the EU, and this deal does not guarantee this. Meanwhile, small and medium-sized enterprises have already experienced problems as a result of the failure of the Government’s negotiations. According to the Federation of Small Businesses, one in five small businesses employs someone from the EU and seven in 10 small employers rely on mid or low-skilled staff, so there is a real danger of Brexit making the current skills gap much worse. These SMEs do not trust this Government to get it right; according to the research done by Ed Balls and Peter Sands, they are

“deeply dissatisfied that this was the choice they were being offered”.

That is because the deal does not

“provide the detail, certainty, and guaranteed future proximity to the EU that most businesses want.”

Just last week, we witnessed the negative effect that the Government’s mishandling of Brexit is having on businesses in the west midlands, with Jaguar Land Rover’s announcement that further job cuts are expected. It cites post-Brexit uncertainty and a lack of clarity as one of the reasons for these

proposed redundancies. This is a serious concern for many of my constituents who are employed by Jaguar Land Rover and also for the region as a whole.

22:04:00

Dame Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham) (Con)

Representing a constituency that voted mostly remain, but having voted leave myself, I have been particularly careful to listen to the hundreds of representations that have come in to my office. Over the past few weeks, the variety of views that have been expressed to me have not either crystallised opinion behind one course of action or another or, indeed, delivered a cohesive picture, but they have indisputably confirmed that the constituency remains divided, as do the country and this House. It is sad that my correspondence has also reflected the unedifying spectacle of people who are trying, by hook or by crook, to reverse the decision of the electorate, or who are pursuing some perfect exit outcome, and in the course of so doing are dragging down people's opinion of this place and the people who work here.

Two themes have emerged. First, almost everyone I talk to wants MPs to stop setting procedural tricks and traps for their perceived opponents and just get on with leaving the EU, as was promised. Secondly, they recognise the Prime Minister's Herculean feat in bringing back a deal for us to vote on at all, but it has proved to be one that cannot be unequivocally backed by a large number of people in this House. For example, the backstop provides a great barrier for me in making my decision.

I voted to leave because it is quite obvious to me that the EU is going in the wrong direction for this country. It intends to subjugate this country and its other member states. It wants a European army and ever closer political union, it would like to drag all its members into a common currency, and its leaders are still unelected. I cannot continue to advocate membership of a grouping that will undermine NATO and would further diminish this Parliament and our democracy, which we all claim to be champions of.

I really want a country that is led by Queen and country, not by people from abroad. Quite frankly, I would like to have walked out the moment the referendum result had been declared. That is actually what most people think should have happened. However, I have to make a risk assessment of my decision, based on the options that are on offer. For me, to honour the referendum result is vital; anything less is a betrayal of the electorate. I cannot agree that moving the article 50 date is going to help us in any way whatsoever—it will only perpetuate divisions in this House—and a second referendum will divide this country even more.

I have talked to businesses that do not have a vote but provide the prosperity and jobs in this country that are so important. My local businesses, including The Entertainer and GE Healthcare, have all advocated support for this agreement. I cannot gamble with our country's future. If I do not support this withdrawal agreement, I feel that I will be gambling with the country's future in a reckless fashion. After last week's shenanigans, it is obvious that there are people in this House who would frustrate a no-deal position, and that that is now a huge risk to Brexit itself. That is not something I can countenance while still keeping faith with the electorate. I will therefore support the Prime Minister in the meaningful vote, as this deal appears to me to be the best option available to deliver the next stage of Brexit successfully.

This is not the end of Brexit; this is the beginning. There are negotiations to come, and this will provide a firm foundation for our future negotiations, in order to secure our economy and realise the opportunities that Brexit truly does offer this great country of ours.

22:08:00

Deidre Brock (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP)

The UK Government seem to be repeating on a loop cycle after cycle of inane attempts to pacify their own party and satisfy some rabid newspaper owners, with no consideration given to the best interests of the people the Government are supposed to represent. There has been trip after trip to Brussels to tell the other member states what the UK wants out of its resignation from the EU; return after return, trying to explain why there has been no advance made, no advantage gained, no real progress at all; statement after statement made in this Chamber, blaming the other states for having the audacity to stand up for their collective and individual best interests and for the interests of their people.

Time after time, we have been treated to demonstrations of just how little understanding of the EU there is in the Government ranks. The last trips have been shining examples of just how impotent the UK has become, how out of touch with reality the Government have become and how much influence has been lost in the past couple of years. A Prime Minister went looking for help with domestic problems to find that there were no longer helpful faces around the table. Her inability to articulate an argument in favour of clarification of terms already agreed on is the dirty mirror to the long and pointless succession of meetings held by her Ministers who also managed to walk out of the room with nothing.

It is just a few weeks before the UK leaves the EU and the new imperialists of Brexit are having to face up to the uncomfortable truth that the UK is now, at best, a middling power in the world. No longer does Britannia rule the waves; these days she is queuing up for a ticket for the ferry. Shorn of the muscle of the EU, there will be some serious reckonings to come, not least of which will be the WTO shocks. It is repeated so often that it has become a political meme: we can trade on WTO rules and all will be well in the world. There is a fond imagination that WTO rules are like the rules of a club. They are rules that everyone obeys, like gentlemen should, and no one would think of going outside the letter and the spirit of those rules.

The truth is that the WTO is a bear pit of contrasting interests and competing economies. The sacred rules are little more than guidelines for the battles in the WTO panels, dispute settlement body and appeals process. It is economic muscle that matters in these consultations and political muscle that counts in the dispute resolution. We are losing both by leaving the EU, so the WTO will become a far less welcoming place for us to take trade disputes. It will become a place where we will learn to take defeat, a place where the Brexiteers' dreams of adequacy will come crashing down.

Let me just illustrate that with an example: hormone-treated beef that the United States wanted to sell into the EU. The US complained in 1996 and the WTO ruling was in its favour, but horse-trading of quotas and tariffs between the EU and the US has meant that we have been able to keep our food chain free of that adulterated beef. The UK simply does not have the strength to resist that ruling. It has no way to offer the quota for high-quality beef without harming our own farmers and it does not have the economic resilience to soak up the tariffs.

The WTO is the dystopia of free trade, a baleful and distorted place where profit is king. Yet there we head, this ramshackle handcart gathering speed, driven by a Prime Minister who cannot control her own Government, far less her own party, egged on by a Labour party leader who has a similar lack of control over events on his side. A Tory Prime Minister deferring defeat for a month and a bit in the hope of finding some magic beans over Christmas was watched by a Labour Opposition leader frightened to bring her down in case he has to face up to some of those issues.

22:12:00

Conor Burns (Bournemouth West) (Con)

In common with many others on both sides of this House, I sent out an email on the eve of the referendum to thousands of my constituents, not to tell them how I thought they should vote—they knew well enough how I thought they should vote—but to urge them to participate in this referendum where every vote would count. I said in that email:

“There are men and women of goodwill and common decency on both the Leave and Remain sides. Many I disagree with are my friends, and we disagree in goodwill and with good faith. When it is over the result must be respected. For it will be the collective judgment of the British people. As democrats that demands our respect.”

After the referendum, all parts of the House lined up to tell the public that they would respect the result, but as the urgency of that instruction of June 2016 has faded with the passage of time, people have now started to come out of the woodwork to indicate that they do not actually respect it. There is an undercurrent here of people saying that those who voted to leave were perhaps a bit thick or mildly racist and that it was impossible to comprehend that someone could be international and global in outlook, liberal, tolerant, decent and pro-immigration and be in favour of leaving the European Union.

Then we got the calls for the so-called second referendum. We have already had the second referendum. We had the first referendum in 1975 and the second one in 2016. If people want to articulate the case for a third referendum, I say bring it on, but let 41 years elapse between the second and the third, so stick the date in your diaries. We will have the third referendum in 2057. We cannot make a once-in-a-generation decision every three years. The agreement itself is fundamentally flawed.

Richard Drax (South Dorset) (Con)

The agreement is flawed in many ways, not least because we would be subject to the binding rules of the ECJ, despite what we are told by those on the Front Bench.

Conor Burns

My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We were clear during the campaign that the areas over which we wanted to take back control were our laws, our moneys and our borders. This withdrawal agreement fails in many ways, not least regarding the backstop, which is absolutely toxic for our friends from Northern Ireland.

Part of the problem is that we sort of approached these negotiations as if we were renegotiating the terms of our membership, not trying to agree the terms of our departure. We have been led by so many people in this process who fundamentally cleave to the messages they put out during the campaign—that it was a disaster and that there were no merits in leaving the European Union. I saw that up close and personal when I was a Parliamentary Private Secretary at the Treasury and latterly in the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy. This must be the first time in history that the terms of the peace have been written by the losing side.

This House has focused for too long now on the process of Brexit. I would like to say a word about the causes of Brexit, and I agree with so much of what the shadow Secretary of State said on this. Yes, the slogan was, “Take back control.” Yes, it was about leaving the European Union. Yes, it was about the opportunities beyond our shores to sign global trade deals, and the recognition that

the EU's share of world GDP has fallen from 23% in 1980 and is likely to fall to 15% by 2020. It is not that the EU economy has shrunk in size, but that the rest of the world has grown faster and will continue to do so.

I think Brexit was a great cry from the heart and soul of the British people. Too many people in this country feel that the country and the economy are not working for them, and that the affairs of our nation are organised around a London elite. They look at the bankers being paid bonuses for the banks that their taxes helped to rescue. They look at our embassies in the Gulf that are holding flat parties to sell off-plan exclusive London properties, when they worry about how they will ever get on to the housing ladder. They worry that they may be the first generation who are not better off than their parents, and they want to see a system back that spreads wealth and opportunity.

Brexit was a challenge—a rebuke to this place—but it represents an opportunity to take this country on a different path. I passionately believe that this nation is yearning for us to get back on to the domestic agenda. The people voted to take back control, and they want us to use that control to help them improve their lives and enrich this country.

22:17:00

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab)

The referendum in 2016 was an event that I assumed would be followed by the new Prime Minister reaching out to the losing side across party boundaries to obtain its acceptance of and consent to the result. But that did not happen, and it became clear to me that the Prime Minister had no intention of pursuing that approach. It is deeply ironic that, just today, she tried to invoke the close 1997 devolution referendum in Wales in her Stoke speech, claiming that all parties accepted and backed the result at the time, when the Prime Minister is one of many on the Government Benches, including the Secretary of State for International Trade, who now say that a second referendum would be an abomination but who voted against implementing that referendum decision back in 1997.

The problem is that today's faux pas is so typical of the approach that the Prime Minister has taken. Right from the start, she failed to seek to embrace the 48% who were on the remain side and instead sought to pander to the most extreme Brexiteers in her party. In doing so, she characterised the negotiations with Brussels as a sort of poker game. I am afraid that that was always a false analogy. I voted against triggering article 50 because it was clear to me that this was not going to be like a card game at all. A better analogy would be a football match, where the other side is leading and all they need to do is to take the ball to the corner flag and hold it there until the final whistle blows.

We wasted the time available on internal Tory squabbling when the Prime Minister should have been seeking and securing consent. The definitive proof of that was a snap election, called for party political advantage in the middle of the process, that backfired spectacularly. The new Commons arithmetical reality meant that the Prime Minister would have to reach across the Chamber for an agreed way forward, but she did not—well, except to the DUP, but on purely transactional terms—and so she continued on. No effort of real substance was made, until desperation set in, to appeal to voters who supported remain. All those who questioned the wisdom of taking this road were to be labelled as traitors, saboteurs, remoaners or elitists, and today the Prime Minister talked of a subversion of democracy.

When there was a narrow victory in the Welsh referendum, a real effort was made to reach across to those who voted the other way to ask them their ideas, to build safeguards for the new institutions, and to assuage concerns—to the extent that a decade later a second referendum was held in which

people voted overwhelmingly to increase the Assembly's powers. The Prime Minister, in contrast, regarded a narrow referendum result as permission to interpret Brexit however she wanted. As a result, we have a leadership that has led us into a constitutional crisis.

Over the weekend, I read reports of a 64 metre long fatberg in Sidmouth in the county of Devon. I apologise to hon. Members for this analogy, but what we are facing here is a sort of political fatberg that has to be dealt with. It will be unpleasant and smelly to do so, but it has to be cleared up. It is increasingly clear to me that clearing the blockage may require putting the options, including the option to remain, back to the people for a final say—if we are not to have a general election. Nothing has changed in the Prime Minister's approach in all this time. That is why we need a new Prime Minister and a Labour Government to clear up this mess.

22:21:00

Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg (North East Somerset) (Con)

The problem with the withdrawal agreement is that it does not do what the Conservative party said we would do. In our manifesto, we said we would leave the customs union, but annex II, under the backstop provisions, would keep us in the customs union. We have had endless guarantees that the United Kingdom would not be divided, but the whole appendix divides Northern Ireland from the rest of Great Britain—something that Unionists are opposed to in principle, not just as the details of a treaty but because it seeks to divide our country.

The Conservatives and those who campaigned for Brexit always said that we must be free from the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice. Why? Because it is a political court as well as a legal court, and because, Mr Speaker—I know you think this is very important—it could overrule this House and overrule our democracy. It could make laws for us that could not be stopped by Parliament—unless of course we withdrew altogether, which is what we are doing, with the purpose of taking away its authority to rule over us. For all this—for potentially being locked in a customs union, for dividing our nation up, and for allowing the European Court of Justice to continue—we are going to pay our European friends £39 billion of taxpayers' money. For that we get nothing in return—no guarantee of any trade deal in future, but a vacuous political statement that could mean anything to anybody.

In the detail of this treaty and its failures, and its inability to deliver the Brexit that people voted for, perhaps we forget the economic benefits that come from making decisions for ourselves. We know from our own lives that the decisions we make for ourselves are likely to be better than those made for us by other people, but that is true as a nation as well, because any decision made in this House is accountable to the British people. The aim for us as politicians in all parties is to see the standard of living of the British people improve generation after generation, as my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth West (Conor Burns) said. That is something we seek to do. In the Conservative party, it was one of the founding principles that Disraeli followed—the “condition of the people” question.

The advantage of leaving the European Union is that we can once again make these decisions for ourselves. We can have a trade system that opens us up to the world, rather than being the fortress that the European Union has created to try to maintain its standard against the winds that blow from the rest of the world and have made the rest of the world grow so much faster than Europe has managed in recent times—a Europe that is mired in recession and economic failure.

Mr Steve Baker (Wycombe) (Con)

I can reassure my hon. Friend that if he takes just a minute longer, he might persuade me to join him in the Lobby.

Mr Rees-Mogg

I am delighted to hear that. I think there will be a cascade of Members going into the Lobby to vote against this bad deal, because it denies us the opportunities that will make Brexit a success. It takes us further away from the ability to open up our economy to the benefits of free trade and the benefits that would allow the prices of food, clothing and footwear to be reduced, increasing the standard of living, most particularly of the least well-off in society. Instead, we are tied into a protectionist racket that keeps prices high and makes our economy less efficient. The rest of the world is overtaking us and the whole of Europe because it becomes less competitive as it seeks an outmoded, anti-competitive system, thinking that it can simply protect itself.

In this withdrawal agreement, there is no end in sight to the backstop—it could go on for generations. How long did the backstop turn out to be for Norway when it voted not to join, before it got a fully-fledged deal of its own? Over 20 years. “Temporary” in European terms is, for most of us, a generation. Of course, “temporary” in parliamentary terms is even longer, as we remember with the Parliament Act 1911 and the Liberal promise never delivered on to abolish the income tax—typical of the Liberals, you might say, Mr Speaker.

We risk denying ourselves these extraordinary opportunities and, in doing so, taking ourselves away from the electorate, for whom we promised to deliver on Brexit. Ultimately, whatever we think, surely we owe it to our voters to deliver. Otherwise, why should they ever trust us again?

22:26:00

Rosie Duffield (Canterbury) (Lab)

How on earth do I sum up in the little time I have my feelings and grave concerns about the biggest issue to dominate our political landscape since the second world war? How on earth do I represent the outpouring of emotion and the sense of division, anger, confusion and disenfranchisement experienced by the citizens of our country and my constituency?

People are angry with us. They are angry for so many different reasons—angry because they were led to a cliff edge wearing a blindfold by a privileged and reckless few and told to jump, without knowing how soft or hard the landing would be or whether they would survive the fall; angry because of the distortion, propaganda and wilful manipulation of facts for political gain; and angry because Parliament is currently unable to function and politicians debating the issue repeat the same hollow soundbites ad infinitum, like a broken record.

Some of the few who led us here are long gone or, indeed, have never graced these green Benches themselves. They are safely and comfortably sitting back, enjoying vast private wealth reserves and watching from a distance as others are left having to untangle their legacy. Let us remember that millions of ordinary people out there have done exactly what successive Governments have always encouraged them to do—worked hard, paid their taxes and kept going when times were tough. There are families who have built and lost businesses, seen jobs come and go and watched as their communities felt the tightening grip of recession and then the nasty, strangling hands of relentless austerity. People like them feel betrayed by us, the politicians.

I am here to speak honestly for and on behalf of the people of my constituency of Canterbury, who have written to me in their thousands. I would struggle to find a single comparable constituency in terms of the direct impact that could be caused by Brexit. In Canterbury we have the University of

Kent, also known as “the European university”. The University of Kent and Canterbury Christ Church University are the biggest employers in our area. They rely on their close links with Europe. Strong academia relies on exchange programmes, European partner campuses and freedom of movement for those who teach the next generation of British workers.

Tourism and hospitality is the biggest employer of under-30s in my area. Canterbury is often the first place that EU visitors stop when they come into the UK via our Kent terminals. Our beautiful cathedral receives about 1 million visitors every year, and our whole constituency welcomes over 7 million visitors. Those visitors stay in our hotels and B&Bs, use our restaurants, visit our independent retail businesses and study in our language schools. They drink in our pubs, enjoy our apples, and eat our local oysters and chips on Whitstable beach. They wonder at the English vineyards they drive past in villages such as Barham and Chartham, which are now producing and exporting some of the best wines in the world. Major employers such as Kent brewery Shepherd Neame, based in Faversham, and the Whitstable Oyster Company tell me that seamless import and export is vital to any post-Brexit future in our area.

Our hospitals have research departments benefiting from close, borderless co-operation with their EU partners, and local businesses in the Canterbury and Whitstable area rely heavily on the relatively easy, free flow of traffic to and from the port of Dover. Economic success is wholly dependent on there not being huge problems caused by Operation Stack or Operation Brock, with tailbacks for miles and miles down the M26, M2 and M20. One example is Barton Marine, an award-winning manufacturer of bespoke, specialist equipment used in sailing and also the theatre industry. It employs about 30 local, highly skilled people in its Whitstable factory, and the chief executive officer tells me she is uncertain of their future.

22:31:00

Julian Sturdy (York Outer) (Con)

I believe that, ultimately, the final Brexit settlement has to be a compromise between leave and remain, while fundamentally delivering on the decision of June 2016. Remainers have to accept that the country clearly voted to exit the European Union, having been assured the Government would implement the decision of the referendum and, accordingly, that we have to leave. Leavers, like me, have to accept that the vote to leave was not overwhelming, as nearly half of our fellow citizens voted to remain, and the Brexit that is enacted therefore has to reflect their preference for a close partnership with Europe. This attitude of give and take is the foundation and lifeblood of any successful democracy.

Looking at the Government’s deal, there are some merits: providing for an orderly exit with a transitional period, securing the rights of nationals on both sides and pointing the way to a UK-EU free trade agreement. However, like many Members, I have significant concerns about the backstop. I appreciate that this is only meant as an insurance policy, but I fear that it will be in the EU’s interests to push the UK into the backstop, in which we could then be held against our will, with Northern Ireland split off from Great Britain, as there is no mechanism for us to leave without the EU’s consent.

Most importantly, agreeing to the backstop risks placing our country at a significant disadvantage in negotiations on a comprehensive trade agreement with the EU. I very much want a trade agreement with the EU, but we would risk going into those talks with one hand tied behind our back and compelled to agree to almost anything it proposed either to avoid going into the backstop or to escape from it. There is a real risk of an open-ended negotiation while we remain trapped in the backstop or in an extended transition period. The deck will have been stacked in the EU’s favour,

making a satisfactory final relationship very difficult. Almost unbearable pressure could be placed on the UK side. A simple example of that has to be the French President's comments on maintaining current access to UK fishing waters.

Ultimately, I believe that agreeing to the deal represents a leap of faith, and that is why, currently, I could not vote for it. However, having said that, I do not believe that no deal or no Brexit are unacceptable alternatives. In delivering a second referendum, we would just continue, and even deepen, the division and uncertainty with what would be an abdication of our responsibility as elected representatives to deliver a workable solution. I also have grave concerns about no deal. I believe it would lead to an economic correction. No one knows to what extent or how severe that correction might be, but there is a lot of crystal ball gazing—a gamble that could cost growth and jobs. I think it is reasonable to ask whether that gamble is worth taking.

I hoped that the Prime Minister would be able to present an agreement to the House after the pause with a formal guarantee and a mechanism that would give us power to leave the backstop. There are amendments that might be able to achieve that, and if that is the case, I will be prepared to change my position, but ultimately, as it stands at the moment, the agreement is unacceptable with the backstop.

22:35:00

Gerald Jones (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney) (Lab)

Despite significant inward investment in our area, my constituency voted to leave in 2016, and I respect that result. We know that membership of the European Union has been and continues to be a deeply divisive issue, dividing communities, political parties—some more than others—and even families. We also know that the EU referendum was an attempt by some to try to settle a division within the Tory party—something that has obviously backfired spectacularly.

Brexit has become the main focus of our Parliament and our country. In many ways, that is as it should be, because it is the most important issue of our time. It is something that will impact on this generation and the generation to follow—another reason why 16 and 17-year-olds should have been given the chance to vote in 2016. However, I am sure that I am not alone in finding it incredibly frustrating that we cannot focus as much attention as we should on the many other important issues of the day.

I, along with many other hon. Members, voted to trigger article 50 to allow the Prime Minister to start negotiations on a deal to honour the result of the referendum. The deal that the Prime Minister has negotiated does not do that. As we are aware, the current deal has succeeded in uniting leavers and remainers in opposition to it. Indeed, only 6% of constituents who have contacted me since 1 December support the Prime Minister's deal. The deal that the Prime Minister has negotiated does not protect jobs, workplace rights or environmental standards. It will not ensure frictionless trade for UK businesses and provides no certainty about our future relationship. It provides no guarantee that the UK will continue equivalent arrangements with key EU programmes and agencies, and the Government's own economic analysis shows that the deal will make the country poorer, with GDP falling by around 3.9% and every region of the UK being worse off.

I know that if that is the case, poorer areas of our country and communities such as mine will fare worse still. I cannot vote to support a deal that will do that to the people I represent. These are not just people I represent; they are my family, my friends, people I have grown up with and local businesses that serve the communities I have grown up in. I cannot vote to inflict greater pain and hardship.

I first got involved in politics as a 14-year-old during the miners' strike in 1984. The reason I did was that I witnessed an uncaring Government rip the heart out of my community and many others around me, and I could not stand back and do nothing. The Tory Government then destroyed whole industries and left many workers on the scrap heap because they had no plan B. History does repeat itself if we do not learn the lessons of the past. It is clear that the Tories have learnt absolutely nothing from the damage that they did in the 1980s and '90s or the damage that their austerity has done over the past eight years.

I fully acknowledge that people in my constituency voted to leave, and many still believe that leave is the best option. There are many others I have also spoken to, including individuals, small business owners and community groups, who have deep concern about the unfolding Brexit situation. EU citizens who have made my constituency their home face uncertainty, and students face uncertainty over programmes such as Erasmus+. If we get this wrong, our country will live with the consequences for decades to come.

I will vote against the Prime Minister's deal. I will also continue to vote against any attempt to take Britain out of the European Union without a deal, as I believe that this would prove a disaster for our country and for the people of my constituency. When the Prime Minister's deal is defeated, I hope that she will listen to Parliament, come back and try to remedy what she has done. If she cannot or will not do that, she should step aside and make way for a general election.

22:39:00

Andrew Bridgen (North West Leicestershire) (Con)

I would be the first to concede that the Prime Minister did not inherit the best hand in the negotiations, with her predecessor making no preparations whatever for a leave vote in the referendum. The referendum in North West Leicestershire was not close: it was 61% to 39% to leave the European Union. In the east midlands, it was 59% to 41%.

Leave the European Union we must, but this withdrawal agreement is not the way to do it. It will not deliver the Brexit that 17.4 million people voted for. At least when we are in the European Union we can leave, whereas I think that if we get this withdrawal agreement we will never be able to leave. We will be handing over our major bargaining chip, £39 billion of taxpayers' money, for what? For the bulk of the divorce payment during the transition period, with vague promises of a future relationship which is in no way legally binding.

Many of my colleagues rightly pointed out their concerns about the backstop to prevent a hard border on the island of Ireland: a hard border that was already dismissed before it became a political issue by HMRC Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland customs and excise, when they stated that the existing infrastructure was quite sufficient to deal with the border on the island of Ireland; a border that all parties concerned—the EU, the Republic of Ireland and the UK—said they would never implement; and a border that the WTO stated is unnecessary for security concerns.

We are told that neither the UK nor the EU wishes to use the backstop, and that the EU would be uncomfortable with the backstop. Reading through the agreement, however, it looks like the deal of the century for the EU if we sign up to it. Not only will they get to keep the £100 billion in trade deficit we have with them, but they will have an agreement that prevents us from partaking in free trade deals that allow our people to access cheaper goods and services. That effectively makes the Department for International Trade redundant. No country with an existing EU free trade agreement

would need to deal with the UK, and any country that does not have an existing free trade agreement would be subject to tariff rates set by the EU.

All the agreement will do is prolong the uncertainty. We could go into years of negotiations over a free trade deal. I campaigned to leave, and leave we must on the basis of sovereignty. This agreement would see our country not getting back control, but losing control and losing sovereignty. Even the Prime Minister's own Brexit adviser Olly Robbins is reported to have warned her that there is was no guarantee that Britain will be able to exit the backstop, which risks leaving us trapped in the EU's customs union indefinitely.

I am of the very strong opinion that the final relationship that the European Union has in mind for the UK, if we ever get to that point, will be very similar to the backstop. Let us remember that under this withdrawal agreement we would be subject, if we got to a final agreement, to the veto of the remaining EU27 on the final deal. We already know that the French will want our fish, Spain will want at least joint sovereignty of Gibraltar and everybody else will want a piece out of it.

This is a bad deal. It will not get back control of our money, our borders or our laws. It will not regain our sovereignty, but lose our sovereignty. I am not walking away from the Prime Minister; she walked away from her Mansion House speech. I cannot support this withdrawal agreement. I will be voting against it. Quite honestly, my chairman rang me last night and said, "Don't bother coming back to North West Leicestershire if you vote for it—you'll be deselected."

22:43:00

Lucy Powell (Manchester Central) (Lab/Co-op)

I also rise to speak against the deal, but it is clear that the House now needs an opportunity to show what it is for, as well as what it is against. I hope that in the coming days we will have the opportunity to do that.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Hove (Peter Kyle) so eloquently and brilliantly put it, the Prime Minister's last-ditch attempts to reach out across party lines were too little, too late. Unfortunately, the Prime Minister has shown yet again a tin ear to Parliament. It is a real shame, because we did not need to be here now. She could have taken up the offers from the Leader of the Opposition to have cross-party talks. She could have taken the temperature of Parliament long before we got here. Maybe if she had done so we would not be here now.

We now face deadlock in the Commons while the country is crying out for us to deal with Brexit. I fear that entrenched positions are getting wider, divisions are getting deeper, and our political discourse is getting more and more toxic. Absolutism is ruling, when reaching out and building a compromise and consensus is what is needed. My sense, which I think is reflected in this debate, is that we are now reaching a point where there is a growing appetite for a consensus to be reached. However, there is clearly no majority in Parliament for the Prime Minister's deal and there is no majority in Parliament for no deal. While I fully respect those who advocate for remain, there is equally no majority in Parliament for a second referendum. I fear that the strategy of all those concerned is to run out of road so that one of the options becomes the last one standing.

That is why I have come to the view that we need a plan B for when the deal is defeated tomorrow. I came together with my friend, the right hon. Member for Harlow (Robert Halfon), to co-author a report seeking a common market 2.0 option with the backing of the cross-party Norway Plus Group. I completely understand that many people want us to remain in the EU—we are better off economically and politically in the EU, and I used to be the director of Britain in Europe, for

goodness' sake—but I understand the sentiment that led to the Brexit vote in the first place, and I respect it. Part of the reason behind the vote was a deep scepticism about politics and politicians, so we cannot ignore or seek to overturn the result. We really cannot say, “Sorry, we cannot reach an agreement. Back to you guys.” What is more, referendums do not give rise to rational decisions on complex matters, either.

“Common Market 2.0” makes the case for a Brexit that delivers on the result of the 2016 referendum while protecting the economic interests of working people by becoming part of a new common market with the existing EU. It would create a long-term partnership that keeps us closely aligned and offers us real frictionless trade through full single market access and a new customs union. It would guarantee workers' rights and provide new controls over free movement in certain circumstances. It would allow more money for public services, as our contributions would be significantly lower, and would give us a voice over the regulations that govern the single market. I know it is not a lot of people's first choice or ideal, but it is an option for a plan B that we all need to consider.

Ministers and the Prime Minister have said many times that they want to know what Parliament is for, not just what it is against. I hope that over the coming days, we will be given the opportunity to say what we are for, and to come together and decide that sometimes we cannot get our ideal, but we need to have a plan B.

22:46:00

Rehman Chishti (Gillingham and Rainham) (Con)

It is a real pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Manchester Central (Lucy Powell), although we disagree about how to deliver on Brexit, because while we may have differences of opinion, we are all among equals in this place.

Some 65% of my constituents voted to leave the European Union in 2016. From holding street surgeries and public meetings across the constituency, I can say that that figure has not changed. When this matter was last discussed in this place, I was disappointed not to have been called and that the vote was pulled. The question is this: what has substantially changed between then, when the question was going to be put, and tomorrow, when the matter will be put before the House? The answer is nothing.

I refer Members to the words of the right hon. Member for Belfast North (Nigel Dodds). He said:

“Despite a letter of supposed reassurance from the European Union, there are no ‘legally binding assurances’, as the Prime Minister talked about in December...In fact, there is nothing new. Nothing has changed.”

That comes from DUP colleagues who help to keep us in government. We talk about 3 million extra jobs, 3 million apprenticeships and 1.9 million more children going to good and outstanding schools in our great country. That is happening under a Conservative Government who exist because we are supported by the DUP. We have to take its views and concerns into account.

I face a difficult decision in that I have never voted against the Conservative party in my nine years in Parliament. I had to resign as a vice-chairman of the Conservative party, as well as a Government trade envoy to Pakistan, where I was born before coming to this great country at the age of six, not speaking a word of English. It was this great party that stood for aspiration and said, “You can work hard and be whatever you want to be. You can be a Member of Parliament at the age of 31 and

represent your home town.” When I had to step down as a trade envoy, trade had increased by 10%, and I am grateful to my right hon. Friend the Member for Chelsea and Fulham (Greg Hands), a former International Trade Minister, for his brilliant support in achieving that. Our manifesto commitment—it was on page 36—made it clear that leaving the EU meant leaving the single market, the customs union and the jurisdiction of the ECJ. What we have here does not achieve that at all.

The opportunities that our great country will have to secure those brilliant trade deals with partners around the world will be limited. I was in the United States over Christmas for the 116th congressional opening session, and our parliamentary counterparts were very clear. They want to negotiate a trade deal, but they understand that if we have European regulation intertwined with this trade deal, it will limit our opportunities to do that great trade deal with them. Apart from being our key trading partner, the US is our No. 1 country for security, whatever our relationship in relation to Brexit. For me, security is the No. 1 priority for our great country, and the US is a key partner in delivering that.

I do not think it is right at all to have another referendum. No Member of Parliament who won their seat by one vote would ever say they should not take up their seat, so we should honour and deliver the public mandate. In my constituency, it was about sovereignty: British people electing British Members of Parliament to have the final say on our laws and how our country is governed.

22:50:00

Dr David Drew (Stroud) (Lab/Co-op)

I am eternally grateful, Mr Speaker, that you have called me slightly earlier than I thought you might. I am delighted to follow the hon. Member for Gillingham and Rainham (Rehman Chishti).

There can be few times in the history of Parliament when MPs have faced two such difficult issues as Iraq and Brexit. There are parallels. Those of us who voted against the invasion of Iraq were continually leaned on by the Executive and told that if we knew what they knew, we would vote for the invasion. That turned out to be one of the biggest foreign policy disasters that this country has known, and I fear that Brexit will become one of the biggest domestic policy disasters this country has known.

The right hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Sir John Hayes) quoted Disraeli, but I think that if Disraeli came back to the House now, he would be struck not by differences but by similarities. There are huge divisions in the country. Two of the great novels of the 19th century, “Sybil” and “Coningsby”, explained those huge divisions and what they meant to this country and the poor of this country.

I disagree with the hon. Member for Bournemouth West (Conor Burns), but I share his analysis. Why did people vote for Brexit? They did so because of austerity. They felt that they had been left behind and ignored. And it did not have to be that way. Other countries in the EU chose a different route. The Portuguese, in particular, under the Government of António Costa, chose to take on the troika, which went in and told them they were bankrupt, and would have to cut and cut and cut more, and they chose not to. They took on the troika, and Portugal has recovered more quickly than any other southern European country.

That is why Brexit is such a poisonous debate. I believe that the Prime Minister’s deal is the wrong deal. As I said earlier, we are being given a false prospectus. The idea that it is “my deal or no deal” is completely wrong. We should reject this deal and recognise that this is a race to the bottom. The

hon. Member for Edinburgh North and Leith (Deidre Brock) was right about this magical idea that WTO rules will be great for our economy. We know what they involve. We need to look at the economic underpinning and what it would require us to do. It is not our salvation.

That is why we must rule out no deal, but also vote against the Prime Minister' deal and come back with something substantive, and then test it electorally. Personally, I want that to be via a general election, but if we are driven towards a referendum, much as I hate referendums, it is something we will have to face up to in order to bring this country back together again, because the divisions have been made so great. We need to recognise that our policies are wrong and do something about it.

22:54:00

Greg Hands (Chelsea and Fulham) (Con)

I am not an ideologue on Brexit; I campaigned hard to remain in 2016, and do not regret having led the “Stronger In” campaign in my constituency. My strong family and other links to the continent mean that I have never been what is called a “Brexititeer”. But like my right hon. Friend the Member for Mid Sussex (Sir Nicholas Soames) and unlike my hon. Friend the Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston), I strongly believe that the referendum in 2016 was a legitimate exercise, with huge voter participation. It did not get the result that I wanted, but the result needs to be respected. I have spent the last two and a half years believing that, with the right deal, Brexit could work. Indeed, the ability to leave the EU is in the treaties themselves.

My view, however, is that as it currently stands, this agreement is one of the worst possible combinations. I am stating today for the first time that, as the deal currently stands, I will vote against it tomorrow night. Brexit is a set of challenges and opportunities, but this deal fails to address the challenges. It kicks the can down the road on EU trade until at least December 2020. It closes down the opportunities: most prominently, there is not going to be an independent trade policy of any consequence.

Some say that there are merits. The Prime Minister lauds and promotes some of them. For example, the deal ends free movement but for me and my inner London constituents, free movement has never been a particular issue. Some 11,000 nationals of EU countries in Chelsea and Fulham are all very welcome to stay—one is even my wife. The Prime Minister's achievement in ending free movement is not much of one at all for me and my constituency.

The three principal reasons why I oppose the agreement are, first, that it treats Northern Ireland very differently from the rest of the UK; secondly, there is the backstop itself. Both those reasons have featured quite heavily. My third reason is this: I believe that embedded within the agreement is being in a customs union with the European Union for the long term, not just in the backstop. That is the stated goal in the future partnership. It is a myth that the withdrawal agreement plus the future partnership opens up all possible future trade outcomes. No: the economic partnership will

“build and improve on the single customs territory provided for in the Withdrawal Agreement which obviates the need for checks on rules of origin.”

It “builds and improves on”—that is unacceptable. There is not going to be any independent trade policy in a customs union or in any single customs territory. Indeed, Sabine Weyand, Michel Barnier's No. 2, briefed EU ambassadors that the future partnership

“requires the customs union as the basis of the future relationship”.

That gives rise to all kinds of problems: trade agreements, the Turkey trap, and the contracting out of trade remedies to Brussels, with the effect that will have on key UK industries such as steel and ceramics. The UK will lose its say and contract out that policy to Brussels. Then there are trade preferences. How we treat the developing world is incredibly important. Those will now be a matter for Brussels. That will be a huge loss for UK influence in foreign policy.

I talked earlier today about some of the comments made by some senior EU officials. I will not repeat those now, but it is always worth while for us to study what somebody we are negotiating with is saying. Most, maybe all, of the alternatives are preferable to the agreement as it currently stands. Brussels needs a deal too, and Barnier's mandate is to achieve a deal. Unless the deal can pass the House of Commons, it is not a deal at all.

22:58:00

Sarah Champion (Rotherham) (Lab)

Rotherham voted overwhelmingly to leave the EU, and I take very seriously my job to represent my constituency. I want to support this deal, but I cannot currently as it has fundamental flaws—not least, that it omits protections of workers' rights. The political declaration is vague and non-binding. It is not a framework for a future trade deal.

To vote for the deal, I would need some assurances that are in the Government's gift and do not require extending negotiations with the EU. My principal concerns are about women's rights, equality and human rights. What will the Government do to ensure that those are protected?

Let me give some examples of the EU rights that we need to see. Under the working time directive, 2 million workers gained entitlements to paid annual leave and many were women working part-time. There are the pregnancy and maternity rights at work and the work-life balance directive. I turn specifically to violence against women and girls: how will the UK replicate the VAWG protections and sustained funding currently provided by the EU? European protection orders grant victims of violence equivalent protection orders against a perpetrator across the EU. Those will no longer automatically be available to the UK after Brexit unless the Government commit to opt in to the protection after 2020.

When will the Government actually ratify the Istanbul convention? Fundamentally, what measures will they take to ensure that we are keeping pace with the EU in maintaining gender equality? There is a precedent. We are currently members of the United Nations convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women, under which each member state reports on the progress that it has made in respect of implementation targets. Will the Government agree to monitor and report on our standing on equality and human rights in relation to EU legislation? The House could then debate the report, and a commitment could be made to update our legislation if that was the will of the House.

Let me now say something about human rights, and specifically about the charter of fundamental rights of the European Union. On the Government's current terms, as the UK leaves the EU the charter will no longer have effect in UK law, and the rights for which it provides are therefore at risk. I know the Government do not think that removing it will affect substantive rights, but the Equality and Human Rights Commission disagrees. Last year its chair said:

“The Government has promised there will be no rowing back on people's rights after Brexit. If we lose the charter protections, that promise will be broken. It will cause legal confusion and there will be gaps in the law.”

The reason the charter is so important is that it gives rights to us all. It gives us the right to dignity, and the right to the protection of personal data and health. It gives protections to workers, women, children, older people, LGBT people, and disabled people. I understand why the Government do not want to adopt the charter—it has the potential to override Acts of Parliament—but we should not be afraid of that. As we have seen in the case of universal credit, it is possible for the Government to get things wrong, and the safeguard provided by the charter is an excellent safety net from which we should all seek comfort.

There are a number of charter rights for which UK law does not provide equivalent protection. They include articles 20 and 21, on “Equality before the law” and “Non-discrimination”, and article 24, on the right of children for their “best interests” to be “a primary consideration” in all actions taken by a public or private institution. The charter also contains an explicit prohibition of discrimination based on someone’s sexuality. I urge the Minister to take that point seriously.

23:02:00

James Morris (Halesowen and Rowley Regis) (Con)

It seems many years ago that I was one of the 81 Conservative rebels who voted for an in/out referendum in 2011, when the then coalition Government were opposed to it. I did some work in the last Parliament to ensure that the 2015 Conservative party manifesto contained a commitment to an in/out referendum, and we did indeed have such a referendum in June 2016. I happened to be marginally on the Remain side in that referendum, but as a result of the outcome, I have consistently said that I will vote to ensure that we deliver Brexit for the people whom I represent in the Black country and the west midlands and for the country more widely, and I have continued to vote in the House to achieve the objective of Britain’s leaving the European Union.

In tonight’s debate and tomorrow, the House faces a real choice: a choice about the direction in which we want to take our country. Before I came to the House, I was an entrepreneur. I worked in business for nearly 20 years. I have always been a pragmatist, looking at how we can get things to work. On the balance of what I see before me on the political landscape and in the House, I will reluctantly support the Prime Minister’s deal tomorrow, because I think it incumbent on us now to put the divisions and the debate about Brexit behind us.

What the Prime Minister’s and the Government’s deal delivers is the centre ground. On one hand—and I have great respect for my hon. Friend the Member for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg)—we have what some would call the ideological fantasy of a pure Brexit; on the other, we have an Opposition who are obsessed with tactical manoeuvring to try to force a general election. If we do not make the right decision now, we will potentially face a constitutional crisis and years of debate in this country about the direction of Brexit. That would do profound damage to our economy because of a long period of uncertainty, and profound damage to the fabric of our democracy as those who voted in the referendum will potentially see their wishes not implemented by this Parliament, which would be a profound wound to our democratic process. I also fear that Britain’s reputation in the world—Britain’s reputation as a permanent member of the Security Council and as one of the world’s most effective military powers—will be undermined at the very time that we should be grasping the opportunities of the future. Britain can lead the way as we leave the EU and shape our future relationship with the EU, and grasp those opportunities and exert our enduring power in the world, which has always been the British way.

We must do the right thing. We must be pragmatic. I will support the deal in the Lobby tomorrow night and I urge my colleagues to do the same.

23:06:00

Vernon Coaker (Gedling) (Lab)

As we reflect on this debate and those of the last few days, weeks and months—and indeed for the day or two to come—the question the public will ask and for us to ask is this: how have we got ourselves into this mess? We are weeks away from leaving the EU if the current timetable stays as it is, and we have a Government determined to carry out a vote tomorrow which by all accounts they will lose substantially, yet we carry on in a parallel universe as if that is not happening, which does no service to our country or this Parliament.

The Chancellor is to respond to today's debate, and it is incumbent on somebody to start talking about what is going to happen. Across this House we have been speaking to each other, but who has changed their mind? We are in a constitutional crisis; our country is facing a national emergency. As the Chancellor himself knows, a no deal would be a complete catastrophe, yet we cannot among ourselves decide where we should go, as my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester Central (Lucy Powell) and others have said.

Who is going to get what they want? My honest view is that nobody is going to get exactly what they want. Everyone in here has fundamental principles that they feel strongly about. We have heard some brilliant speeches, including from people I fundamentally disagree with, but at the end of the day the question is: how are we going to resolve this in a way that benefits our country? We have as a Parliament only at this very late stage woken up to that question.

If I wanted, I could say that this person or that person was responsible, but for goodness' sake, does the Chancellor not think that a Government facing such a national emergency should have reached out to Opposition Front Benchers? [Interruption.] The hon. Member for Dudley South (Mike Wood) is chuntering, and that is exactly what I am talking about. [Interruption.] There we go; let's shout at each other. What I am saying is that we need to reach a point where we seek consensus and seek to work in the national interest.

That is why there is a majority in this House for Parliament taking control and trying to deliver that. That is why Members of Parliament from all parties across the House have said that we are going to have to come together to resolve this matter. We cannot carry on talking to each other through loudhailers. We cannot carry on just saying, "I am right and you are wrong." The people of this country are fed up with it. They want this Parliament to act. They want us to reach consensus on an agreed way forward that is of benefit to this country, and they expect us to act in a mature way to deliver that.

23:09:00

Mrs Sheryll Murray (South East Cornwall) (Con)

A majority of the voters in my constituency voted leave in the referendum, and they have told me in large numbers that they feel insulted by the comment that they did not know what they were voting for. Many of my constituents have urged me not to support this withdrawal agreement. Indeed, some of them have told me they voted to remain but would vote to leave in another referendum. Opposition Members might like to know that some of them are lifelong Labour supporters. One emailed me to say:

"I implore you to vote against the current deal being presented to Parliament on Tuesday. Voting for it would be a betrayal of all the promises made".

The vote was not a mandate for a second referendum. It was not a mandate for delaying article 50. It was not a mandate for cancelling Brexit. However we vote tomorrow, we must leave the European Union as promised on Friday 29 March. The only question is whether we do so with an agreement or on World Trade Organisation rules. Some have implied that the closeness of the referendum result justified another vote or a compromise on leaving. This morning, the Prime Minister gave the example of the Welsh devolution referendum in 1997, when people voted by a tiny margin of 0.3% to create the Welsh Assembly, arguing that this was accepted by both sides. We can learn from that.

I want to know why Northern Ireland should be the price we have to pay for Brexit, as Martin Selmayr has said. Why have experts warned that the UK-US alliance and the Five Eyes alliance are at risk if we sign up to this withdrawal agreement? Why should we cough up the £39 billion of punishment money without any indication of a trade deal? In my view, that is unacceptable.

The fishermen of south-east Cornwall, whom I have represented in various ways for around three decades, are already struggling from the EU landing obligation without adequate bycatch to compensate them for having to bring untargeted, over-quota fish ashore. Just yesterday, I received a text message from a local fisherman with a photo of a deck full of bass. He said that this was

“another failure of the CFP...How many tens of thousands of tons”—

have been—

“thrown back since November only for it to rot on the sea bed. An absolute joke!”

Brexit promises great opportunities for an outward-looking global multicultural nation—the home of engineers, scientists and artists. Our future success will be to the benefit of all our European friends, but we cannot seize those opportunities if we are trapped in backstop limbo, like in “Groundhog Day”. The referendum was a wake-up call to the establishment, but the establishment keeps pressing the snooze button. It is time to wake up. I cannot support this deal.

23:13:00

Seema Malhotra (Feltham and Heston) (Lab/Co-op)

I am grateful for this opportunity to speak in today’s debate, because the prosperity of our country, our regions and our nations is at stake. I will be voting against the Prime Minister’s deal tomorrow for two main reasons. First, on the Government’s own analysis, it will make every region and nation of this country poorer, and that is not what people voted for. It is set to give less opportunity to our young people than we grew up with. The economic assessment of the Prime Minister’s draft agreement with Brussels estimated that the British economy would shrink by 3.9%, which is equivalent to the loss of £100 billion by 2030. Trade barriers could equal 10% of the value of trade in services, meaning that the economy’s biggest sector would suffer to the tune of more than £44 billion a year.

Secondly, it is a blind Brexit. We have no idea what the future will look like. No one leaves their home on the promise of a great new home with no guarantees about where it is, what it looks like, how many rooms it has or what condition it is in. However, that is what the Prime Minister is asking us to do, like an estate agent who then scarpers, leaving us standing with our suitcases. The political declaration gives no certainty or clarity about the direction of our future relationship with the European Union, and it is a gamble that I will not take.

Hundreds of residents—young and old alike—and businesses in my constituency have contacted me over the past few weeks and months. Businesses report stockpiling and concern for the future—perhaps not the immediate future, but the medium and longer term—and they should be planning production, not employee leave during April, May and June while they work out what the future looks like. Some 60% of those who have contacted me back a people's vote, and a further 20% back remain in some form. Only 10% say that we should vote for the deal or leave with no deal.

All too often I find myself scratching my head in disbelief at where we are and at the Government's kamikaze attitude towards no deal. For generations, we have had an assumption of progress—a promise as a nation about what the next generation should have and that they should do better than the last—but we find ourselves now breaking that promise. The Government are set to take our nation's prosperity backwards while turning to the country and saying, "This is what you voted for." Contrary to the "sunlit uplands" of the most eloquent speech of the hon. Member for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg), under the deregulated, free-market future that many hard Brexiteers will look to, we know that the rich will get richer and the poor will see less and less of the wealth of their nation.

We cannot take progress for granted. It is something that we in politics have a duty to fight for and to protect. However, time is running out and we have choices to make. It would be my preference to remain and reform, and I would support a second referendum between remain and a deal as agreed by this House. If we are to leave, we should do so in a way that delivers on the referendum, but with the least damaging economic impact, such as a single-market and customs-union solution—a common market 2.0—as a base from which to build our future relationship.

23:17:00

David T. C. Davies (Monmouth) (Con)

The remain campaign had everything going for it. It had the endorsement of all the political parties. It had money from big business. It had £9 million of taxpayers' money for a propaganda sheet. It had celebrity endorsements from luvvies, actors, singers and one overpaid football commentator. It had the churches and the charities. It even managed to enlist the Treasury to carry out "Project Fear" and still it could not win.

The people of this country voted to leave, but the remainers were not satisfied, because they then decided to deride and sneer at leave voters, describing us as racist, xenophobic, bigoted little-Englanders, too stupid to understand what we were doing. The remainers did every they could to undermine the result. They tried to overthrow it in the High Court. They tried to thwart it in the unelected House of Lords using a hereditary peer. They have used big business, with Starbucks, I believe, announcing yesterday that it would support a second referendum. Now, in this very Chamber, they are using Members of Parliament who were happy to stand on manifestos committing themselves to the delivery of the referendum result.

It is true that the deal before us is not the one that the millions of us who voted to leave would have hoped for, but some of the blame for that lies with the Members of Parliament who loudly announced from day one of the negotiating process that Britain could not possibly leave the European Union without a deal. What sort of a negotiation is it when people say that we cannot walk out of the room? They suggested that Britain, with the fifth largest economy in the world, was unable to govern without the guiding hand of Juncker and others in the bloated bureaucracy in Brussels. Having made it harder to get a decent deal, they are now making it impossible for the Prime Minister by voting the whole thing down. Frankly, I cannot believe that some of them sat as

Ministers in a Conservative Government—some of them rather second-rate Ministers in my opinion—and used the Whips Office to demand the loyalty of Back Benchers when they were imposing rather questionable policies.

Having made it much harder for the Government and the Prime Minister, they now seek to vote the whole thing down, not because they want a second referendum, a Norway deal or something else, but because they do not want any kind of Brexit at all. They will, of course, be joined in voting down the motion by principled, decent Members of Parliament, like my hon. Friend the Member for South Dorset (Richard Drax), who believe in Brexit and believe that this deal will not deliver it. All I would ask my hon. Friends, whom I respect and admire, is do they really want to be sharing a Division Lobby tomorrow with Conservative MPs who have done so much to thwart the will of the British public?

Nobody knows what is going to happen if and when this compromise deal is voted down. What will happen then? Some people say that we will get a hard Brexit, which I would fully support, but others will be doing their very best to stop any form of Brexit. All I would say is that I am not a gambler, so I will take the compromise in front of me. It is time to settle this matter once and for all, but Britain did vote for leave, and Brexit must happen.

23:21:00

Tracy Brabin (Batley and Spen) (Lab/Co-op)

It is estimated that 63% of people in Batley and Spen voted to leave the EU. Since then, if the recent YouGov poll is accurate, there has been a slight shift from leave to remain of about 10 percentage points, which obviously does not give either side a substantial majority. We are like so many other communities we have heard about tonight in that we are divided. That is broadly reflected in my mailbox, with revoking article 50, leaving with no deal and a second referendum all receiving significant support, and a smaller number of emails supporting the deal on the table. What is clear from all my correspondence is that the sense of feeling and emotion attached to our exit from the EU is substantial.

I have met people who have never voted before the referendum or since, but they were asked for their opinion and they gave it, not because they were resentful or racist but because they wanted a better future for themselves and their families. Our community has suffered disproportionately because of globalisation. Austerity, falling wages, insecure jobs and poor infrastructure have been the norm in our community, and those people saw a chance to make a change. For once, their opinion mattered and, whatever the outcome, the Government would implement it—to take back control, if you will—but restrictive red lines were put in place before common negotiating ground was found, and we have had one arm tied behind our back ever since.

The truth is that this House of Commons is too sensible to let us crash out, and the EU needs a relationship with us based on co-operation and sharing. Out there, away from the Westminster bubble, in a school hall in Batley and Spen, I received some testing and refreshing questions on Brexit. Clever young women such as Suffiya, Hannah, Jamila and Faezah wanted to know what the relationship with the EU will look like and how it will affect their future education, their families' small businesses, the curriculum and their opportunity to move around Europe. More troublingly, they wanted to know whether democracy is now officially dead. The fact is that too many of those questions, and many others, cannot be answered by the deal before us.

I will not be supporting the deal, but that does not give a green light to what a no deal would bring: lorry parks, a lack of cancer treatments and the stockpiling of drugs and food. Who does stockpiling

hit the hardest? The poor. They cannot afford to stockpile food, and stockpiling by others means that prices rise. My food bank has seen a 50% rise in numbers due to austerity, and homelessness has doubled locally.

Those “ifs, buts and maybes” scenarios cannot distract us from the substantive issues before us and from what we know. An economic downturn is almost inevitable. An employer of over 600 people in my constituency—PPG paint—is facing concerns on more than one front. It imports raw materials, exports to the EU and works on a fast turnaround, and it needs support.

In this febrile atmosphere, we must lead from the front with calm and purpose. If we do not, the tensions I feel in community halls and pubs across my constituency will only get louder and angrier. With religious hate crimes up fivefold in the last five years, Batley and Spen is at a tipping point. For some in Batley and Spen, Tommy Robinson is a welcome visitor. We know that the far right is increasingly emboldened by this worst of all deals. The future of our country and our democracy is at stake. With the gap between leave and remain not definitive, we must compromise for the good of the nation and call a general election.

23:25:00

Alec Shelbrooke (Elmet and Rothwell) (Con)

There is a lot of opposition to the deal in the Chamber, and most people recognise that it is probably going to go down to defeat tomorrow night. This is the first time I have taken part in the debates on this issue; I have been involved in statements and urgent questions, but this is the first time I have spoken in the debate.

When I have looked around the Chamber and listened to the speeches, I have realised that a lot of the opposition is based on so many issues other than the actual deal on the table. It is based around whether people can get a general election, a second referendum or a reversal of the deal, or perhaps on whether it will help somebody’s leadership hopes. Only a few people in here are ideologically opposed to the idea of any deal, and I respect them because it is a position they have held for a long time. They have a view that I disagree with and will try to argue against, but at least it is an honest position. The trouble is that when I talk to my constituents, I find that about 90% of them just want to get on with this. They just want the deal done and for us to move forward. Some 5% definitely want no deal, as they want nothing to do with Europe whatsoever, and 5% definitely want to reverse the deal, as they think it was terrible that we had a referendum in the first place. So 90% just want us to get on with it, and I believe that is what this deal delivers.

Do I like the backstop? No, I do not, but it is a compromise. I am willing to make the political judgment that we can move this forward, get to 29 March and leave the EU. We would be delivering on what I believe are most of the reasons why people voted to leave and, crucially, be protecting the economy while seeking the new trade deal. We can thus move things forward. I think that is roughly where most of my constituents are, too; they want to move things forward. I take issue with my right hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson) for writing in *The Daily Telegraph* that hard Brexit was what people voted for when they voted for Brexit. He said they voted for no deal, but that is not true, as people were told, from the Brexit side, “You will be able to get a trade deal.”

Three areas concern me, with the first being no deal. I do not believe no deal works for this country. I look at small manufacturing organisations in my constituency, which feed up the supply chain to the big organisations that export and that need the frictionless trade and the ability to move goods freely in just-in-time scenarios that have been built over many decades. They know that the knock-

on effect will affect them directly. I honestly believe that if this decision was to be reversed, there would not be an international business in the world that would say, "Great, it is all over and done with. Let's invest in Britain." Surely the question would be, "When are they going to change their mind again?" I also do not support a second referendum, because I do not see what it would actually deliver. This evening, I have probed Members who are supporting a second referendum and they have said it will have only two options: remain or take the deal. As I pointed out, the genie is out of the bottle. I do not think we can reverse the decision and remain; we need to get a solid trade deal and move forward.

Let me build on the comments made at the end of the speech by the hon. Member for Batley and Spen (Tracy Brabin), for whom I have great respect. She is right to say that there is a growing far right sentiment, which has been uncovered, given a platform and empowered by this. A second referendum would surely be one of the most divisive and evil campaigns we have seen. It would be far worse than the last one, because we are seeing that raise its head; we are seeing it out on College Green, and it is being exploited by tendencies with no respect for democracy. So I fear that not only would we have a very nasty campaign, but we would not solve anything. If the second referendum came back in favour the deal, we would still be having some similar arguments in here. By backing the deal, as I will do tomorrow night, I hope we will start to move the agenda forward and we can move on to the second stage of Brexit. I believe this deal delivers for about 90% of my constituents, and I wish this House would support it tomorrow night.

23:29:00

Wes Streeting (Ilford North) (Lab)

When people in Ilford North and throughout the country voted to leave, they did so for many reasons, but always with the promise and expectation of something better. So when this House votes tomorrow, there is only one question that we should ask of ourselves and the Government: will this deal leave us better off than the deal that we enjoy today?

It is abundantly clear that the promises made by the leave campaign cannot be kept. That campaign was never honest about the choices, compromises and trade-offs involved in leaving the most sophisticated political and economic alliance that the world has ever seen. The hubris of that campaign was astonishing, with claims of only upsides, not downsides; that we would hold all the cards and could choose the path we wanted; and that this would be the easiest trade deal in human history. Well, political gravity came to bite just as quickly as leading leavers left the Cabinet, faster than rats fleeing a sinking ship.

The Prime Minister claims that this is the best deal on offer. She tells us it is a better deal than any other third country enjoys with the European Union. She may be right, but what she cannot say is that this deal will make us better off than we would otherwise be as a member of the European Union. Every single analysis suggests that we will be worse off than we are today. This is not what people voted for, which is why a constituency as divided on Brexit as mine is overwhelmingly united against the Prime Minister's deal.

It is time to stop pretending that there is a better deal to be had at this eleventh hour, and it is time for the Prime Minister to stop threatening Parliament and the people with the catastrophic consequences of no deal and to stop squandering billions of pounds on a prospect that she admits would bring catastrophe and ruin to this country, even as our public services are creaking and crumbling as a result of the cuts inflicted by her and her predecessors. It is reckless, irresponsible and beneath the office of Prime Minister.

It is also time for my own party to face up to some hard choices. There is no better Brexit. There is no jobs-first Brexit. There is not a Labour Brexit. Whichever way our party turns, we risk upsetting some of our voters. I do not envy the position in which the Leader of the Opposition and the shadow Cabinet find themselves, but with our Parliament and our country still divided, the Labour party has a responsibility to lead, not simply follow, events. So let us speak now with clarity and conviction: our internationalist party has never believed that our country would be stronger, safer or better off outside the European Union. The bitterness and division that we have seen in recent weeks, months and years is only a taste of things to come as we face the prospect of years, if not decades, of wrangling about the future relationship that we may or may not have with the European Union. People throughout the country are demanding bigger answers on the housing crisis, on the national health service, on the future of our education system and on the future shape of the economy—an economy in which everyone genuinely has a stake, not just the privileged few.

The no deal demanded by the most hard-line leavers does not have the support of this House, and it would leave the poorest paying the heaviest price. It would be a painful Brexit. Although I respect those arguing at this late stage for a closer relationship through the single market or the customs union, that would be Brexit in name only, and it would not heal the divisions, either. It would be a most pointless Brexit.

I say particularly to Conservative Members who are cowed by constituency association chairmen what Winston Churchill said:

“What is the use of Parliament if it is not the place where true statements can be brought before the people?”

We were lied to. The promises that were made cannot be kept and will not be kept. It is time to put this issue back to the people. Let them decide between our future outside the European Union, now that they know what that looks like, and a people’s vote to remain. I know which one I would choose, and I know which one I want my party to back.

23:33:00

Nigel Mills (Amber Valley) (Con)

With regret, I cannot support this agreement, so I will vote against it tomorrow evening. That is not because I have ever been an ideological hard Brexiteer who advocated a clean break—I have always accepted that Brexit would lead to some compromises and a trade-off between a clean break and how close a relationship we wanted with the EU—but I do not believe that this deal is in the national interest, not least because I do not see or hear any sign of any commitment to what the future relationship for which we are trading our control will be.

This deal does not actually achieve any part of Brexit. The people who voted to leave in the referendum—as two thirds of my constituents who voted did —gave us an instruction to leave. Parliament’s triggering of article 50 and approval of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act took back control. The question before us in the withdrawal agreement is how much of that control we give away again in return for the sort of relationship that we want with the EU, but the problem is that we do not have that relationship set up. We are giving away whole chunks of control—for the next two years we are giving away almost all the control that we are taking back—and, more crucially, through the backstop that we are signing up to we are giving away our control over choosing the future partnership.

At the moment, we have a unilateral right to leave the EU. Once we approve the agreement, with that backstop in place, we will not have that choice any more. My fear with the backstop is not that we will not get a deal with the EU, but that the EU will only offer us a deal that involves much too close a relationship. It will almost certainly mean a stronger customs union than the backstop has, and more single market, and that will not be the Brexit that my constituents and this country voted for.

I agree with the Prime Minister when she says that we must deliver Brexit, and that not to do so would be a betrayal of the popular vote. My fear is that if we approve this agreement, we will not be able to deliver the Brexit that people voted for, and that is the real problem with it.

Two years ago, I would not have believed that this Government would bring to Parliament a deal for us to vote on that involved our paying £40 billion and giving away some of the control that we are taking back without having a future partnership in place. I would never have conceived of voting for that or of this House voting for that, and I suspect that, tomorrow, we will not. However, I recognise that we must find a way forward. To all those who will be in discussions over the next weeks on how to take this matter forward, I say that the only way forward is to reform the backstop so that we have an exit date, or to take the backstop out of the deal completely.

It is a ridiculous situation: something that is meant to be an insurance policy for the Irish may actually be the trigger for the hard border and the no-deal Brexit that they desperately do not want. Let us all be sensible about how we avoid whatever hard border that would be. I have been through the draft withdrawal document—all 500 and something pages of it—and there is still no definition of what a hard border is so that we can work out what we have to satisfy to get out of the backstop. I spent the early part of 2018, after the joint agreement, asking everybody I could to define the hard border that we had ruled out. Over the past year, I asked the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. We even went to Brussels to ask Michel Barnier to define the hard border that we were ruling out, and nobody would ever define what it was that we were guaranteeing not to have. That is the problem. How can we trust that we will ever get out of the backstop if we do not know what the requirements to get out of it are?

I say again that if this is meant to be an insurance policy, it would be a perverse situation if it brought about the calamity that it was trying to insure against. As I see it, the only way forward for us to leave the EU in an orderly manner and to avoid that so-called hard border is to fix the backstop or remove it. I urge the Government to try to negotiate that and the EU to agree to it, as that is the only way forward out of this.

23:37:00

Stella Creasy (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op)

In the past two years, Brexit has become that unspeakable subject. This Christmas, most of our constituents will have had a no-politics rule at their Christmas dinner table. We are now a divided nation—a nation where talking of shooting politicians, of violence and of traitors has become commonplace and normalised. The violence is matched with the arrogance—the arrogance that everybody is right and that, eventually, everybody else will realise that they should give in because the others were right all along. We caricature each other: the middle class liberal elites and the northern working classes. For the past two years, this has become a country talking but not listening, and Brexit is at the heart of that. We claim that each other thinks the other is stupid, yet all the while no progress is being made. Little common ground is being found, and the public think that they hear little common sense.

There is one thing that we will all unite around. Tomorrow, the worst-kept plot twist in British politics will finally happen: we will have the vote on the Prime Minister's deal and it will not pass this place. With all the heckling that will come, all the briefing to the press, and all the WhatsApp messages, hostilities will not be suspended by that agreement; they will be escalated. Moreover, respect, the urgent virulent potion that this country so badly needs for its people and for its politicians, will be found nowhere. What effect will there be? We vote tomorrow against this deal, and nothing will change. I will be voting against this deal, but we will be no further forward as a country. Our precious time has been wasted at every single stage of this process. The can has been kicked so far down the road that it is in the rest of Europe. We have fudging, fixing, and knighthoods being promised and still the British public see the truth. They see medicines already being stockpiled, the ferries being bought, the EU citizens being made to pay to stay, the lorries being parked and the jobs being lost.

No wonder this was doomed from the start. The red lines that the Prime Minister set made getting a deal that could have a positive outcome impossible for anybody. There is no way of being outside institutions that can abolish borders without creating them ourselves. Of course there was going to need to be a backstop. The Prime Minister says that this is the best deal possible; it is really not. The entire shape of this deal has been defined by the desperate desire to end freedom of movement and leave the single market accordingly, but I know from the Chancellor's own figures what leaving the single market will do for my constituents and I know what not having freedom of movement will do for our public services and our economy. These red lines might have been red meat for the Brexiteers, but they will lead to many more of my constituents simply being in the red.

The truth is that I understand and respect everybody in this House for the views they hold and the responsibility that we all bear in finding what happens next. George Bernard Shaw said:

“Progress is impossible without change, and those who cannot change their minds cannot change anything.”

It is not enough for all of us to believe that we know what is right and think that will do.

Tomorrow we will vote against this deal, Chancellor; that is a given. But the day after and the day after that, the British public deserve that we find ways to listen and to work with them and hear their voices in finding a better deal. I believe that that comes from a people's vote and a citizens' assembly—I want to work with colleagues to look at those options—but above all I know that we have to work together. This country needs and deserves nothing less.

23:41:00

Gillian Keegan (Chichester) (Con)

It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Stella Creasy) in this historic debate.

The process of leaving the European Union was designed at the outset to be extremely risky for any member state wishing to exit. Article 50, whether we like it or not, is our starting point. It is what has made this negotiation difficult and it is what makes this decision difficult. In deciding how to vote, I have spoken to constituents at public meetings and consulted many businesses. I have also used my own judgment, which is informed by 30 years of experience working in the car manufacturing, banking, technology and travel industries. But as somebody who voted to remain, I have also sought to honour the decision to leave. I am not of the view that the British people chose the wrong answer; they rarely do. We may be the House of Commons, but they are the true home of

common sense. They can see what we all know, which is that the European Union is not perfect. It is unwilling to listen, unable to change and has been slow to react to major crises at our borders.

This deal delivers on the result of the referendum, but at the same time does not risk the jobs of my constituents. The largest employers in Chichester are Rolls-Royce Motor Cars, and farming and horticultural businesses. They, alongside employers across the UK, have invested based on the rules of the customs union and single market, and this has driven our strong economy. They have said loud and clear that switching to WTO rules at the end of March would be a disaster. Having spent 30 years working in these industries, I believe it would be highly irresponsible. The bodies representing large, small and medium-sized businesses, plus sectors including manufacturing, technology, education, science, farming, defence, retail and many others support this deal, as it enables them to continue to invest in the UK and protect jobs. These bodies represent more than half a million businesses and we ignore them at our peril.

This deal is a lower-risk Brexit, but is not without risk. We still have to turn the political declaration into a trade agreement, and this seems to be where many opponents to the deal lose their nerve. The United Kingdom has conducted these negotiations in good faith, in a way that does our country credit. There is a worrying trend of countries walking away from international agreements and commitments. We are not one of those countries.

The Government have secured a pragmatic way to proceed that we can build on, and we still have a strong negotiating hand; we always have had. We have a lot to offer any trading partner, not least one with which we have worked so closely for 45 years, including a large consumer market, innovative businesses, the City of London, a highly trusted legal system, security and intelligence capability, our armed forces, a nuclear deterrent, brilliant scientists and top universities—to name but a few. It makes sense to sell to us, it makes sense to partner with us and it makes sense to trust us.

It is difficult to find an alternative that does not pose huge risks to the economy or break faith with the result of the referendum. There are no alternatives that either do not outsource our trade policy to a third party or require us to continue with uncontrolled freedom of movement. Why would we give up now when we have a deal on the table that is better and more ambitious than all the others?

The Brexit debate has been dominated by those who have sought to admire the problem rather than try to solve it. The Prime Minister, by contrast, has achieved a balanced and sensible way forward. We are a divided country, but this deal charts a careful path to deliver on the referendum result without damaging our economy. This deal resonates with my experience. There are no easy answers, no silver bullets, no superhuman negotiators waiting to ride to the rescue—just a long, hard road ahead to deliver on what the British people voted for. Almost nobody in the UK regrets the decision not to join the euro. I believe that in years to come we will not regret our decision to leave the European Union.

23:45:00

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP)

The Glasgow Central constituency voted 71% to remain, and we certainly did not vote for this Government's deal and this tawdry Brexit that the Government are pursuing. I have constituents from the EU who come to my surgeries, come to my constituency office and stop me in the street, some who have been here for only a short time and some who have been here for decades. They are all deeply upset at how they are being treated by this UK Government, and they do not want any part of this. I am heartened, as well, by the numbers of constituents who are not originally from the

EU—they are from Glasgow—but seek solidarity with those who are from the EU. They do not want to lose what we have gained in the city of Glasgow.

Glasgow won city of culture status in 1990, and over the decades the city has changed hugely. It has become a European city, and proudly so. Last year, in partnership with Berlin, we hosted the European championships, building on our sporting success from the Commonwealth games. We are proud to play our part in Europe. The culture of our city has been hugely improved as a result of our links with Europe. Scottish Ballet, our national company in Scotland, celebrates its 50th birthday this year, and we have many European dancers enhancing the company. Also based in my constituency is the Royal Scottish National Orchestra, which is over 125 years old, and, again, has many who come to it from around the world. They do not only bring talent to Scotland—they tour and share the glory that we have within our arts sector in the city with the rest of the world. We also have in my constituency the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland— one of the top five institutions in the world—and the world-renowned Glasgow School of Art. Both of those institutions would struggle without access to European staff and European talent to come and share with other students.

We have Strathclyde University and Glasgow Caledonian University, which also make a huge contribution to the economy of Scotland and to wider culture within the city. There are 1,230 EU nationals working in higher or further education in Glasgow, and that is a huge bonus to our city. However, if the UK gets its way, we will struggle to continue to achieve this because there will be an 80% reduction in EU nationals coming to our country due to the thresholds in the immigration White Paper. The impact of that will be absolutely devastating for our city in so many ways.

I want to speak about the impact on young people in Glasgow. I am very proud that many organisations—youth organisations and others in schools—contribute through the Erasmus+ project. I spent some time with Pollokshields Primary School in my constituency. The pupils had more links with Pakistan than with Europe, but over the years the school has worked incredibly hard to build up its European links. I heard very passionately from pupils who had already been on exchanges with their partner school, Colegio Hernández in Valencia, about what that meant to them—how it had broadened their horizons and meant that they could go out into the world and try new things, learn new things and have new experiences.

I do not forgive this Government, and I will never forgive this Government, for making the future so much greyer for our children in the years ahead. This Government want to make this country smaller, whereas Scotland wants to look outwards to the world, to participate in the world, to send our people outwards and to bring people inwards. We want to celebrate the things that we hold dear and the things that we have in common. Scotland wants to be a part of that world. We want no part of this insular, devastating Brexit that will cause so much pain.

23:49:00

Bim Afolami (Hitchin and Harpenden) (Con)

I rise in support of the Prime Minister's withdrawal agreement, and I do so because I believe in compromise. That word is not very popular in our current politics. As the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Stella Creasy) said, everybody believes that they are right all the time and refuses to see where we can find common ground. In a 52:48 nation, the Prime Minister needed to find common ground and a balanced compromise, and this deal reflects that.

For those who voted remain, like me, this deal gives a two-year transition period, an unprecedented partnership on security, agreement on citizens' rights and the pathway to a deep trading

relationship. For those who voted leave, this deal means that we are leaving the European Union, the common agricultural policy and the common fisheries policy and ending free movement. If we want high alignment with the European Union, we can choose that, and if we want low alignment, we can choose that too. Many Government and Opposition Members who do not want us to be part of the European Union would have bitten David Cameron's arm off if he had offered them this deal a few years before the referendum. We should all consider that.

In the time remaining, I would like to examine what happens if we end up with no deal. We have heard from many Members about how devastating that would be. I urge anybody who thinks that no deal is not necessarily a good idea but will not be that bad and is manageable to speak to manufacturing businesses, retail businesses, agricultural bodies such as the National Farmers Union and the Country Land and Business Association, and the many senior civil servants who have worked on these issues in Government and know the parlous state of things.

We must also examine what "WTO rules" really means. The tariffs and quotas would need to be negotiated individually, country by country, and we should not expect every single country to accept those unilaterally. There would be a negotiation, and that would take time. All the countries are watching this debate. They would see the difficulty we are in and may seek to take advantage of that. It would not be straightforward. Some people say, "We'll just have zero tariffs on everything to make things easier." We could do that, but if we did, we would need to have zero tariffs for every single country, because to do the contrary would be against WTO rules. What would that do to manufacturing in various parts of the economy and to agriculture, which would be suffering from the consumer shock of a no-deal Brexit? There are other areas not covered by WTO rules. I am sure that we could work those out over time, but they would need to be negotiated with the European Union, and how easy would the negotiation be if we had walked away from the withdrawal agreement and refused to pay the money and fulfil our agreed obligations?

Some suggest that this agreement puts us in a poor negotiating position, and I think it is fair to say that it will be a difficult negotiating position. We are one country against 27. That will be difficult. It will also be difficult to get the 27 to agree, because they will have divergent interests, but that was always going to be the case, whether it is a WTO exit or a negotiated exit such as this. In my last seconds, I would like to urge the Government to speak to Members across the House if this deal does not succeed and consider—

Mr Speaker
Order.

23:53:00

Christine Jardine (Edinburgh West) (LD)

It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Bim Afolami). I rise to oppose the Government's motion and to give largely the speech that I was due to make a month ago, when the vote was pulled. My stance has developed over the past two and a half years, during which my party has campaigned consistently in Parliament and in communities across the country for the people, not the politicians, to have the final say.

As we approach the denouement of this Brexit drama—or perhaps it is a tragedy—my thoughts drift back to 24 June 2016. What prompted the country to vote for Brexit? I agree with the hon. Member for Bournemouth West (Conor Burns). An entire generation faced the prospect that their children and grandchildren would not be as well off as they were, having been left behind and failed by

globalisation. More than two years later, I do not believe that this Government have provided either any solutions to those issues or a coherent way ahead.

We have heard a lot this evening, mostly from Conservative Members, about delivering on Brexit. May I plead with them that actually we have something more important in this House to deliver, and that is the wellbeing of the country? When the electors go to the ballot box and send us here, it is not simply to follow an instruction; it is to have the courage to do what we believe is right for us, for them and for the entire country. That is where we are just now.

While I remain implacably opposed to any EU departure, I believe that on this decision—possibly the most important decision any of us will face politically—it was important to take the time to seek the advice and listen to the views of my constituents in Edinburgh West. My constituents voted remain, and their minds have not changed. If anything, they are firmer in their resolve that this chaotic, uncertain shambles of a Brexit is not what they wanted or deserved.

This deal, the best deal the Government could negotiate, will, even according to the Government, leave us less well off than staying in the European Union. Our constituents deserve better. All of those people who voted leave deserve better. They voted leave believing what they were told—that it would benefit the NHS—and now they discover that the NHS will lose vital staff. In Edinburgh, we have Scotland’s highest concentration of non-UK EU citizens: 39,000 people who are vital to staffing our universities and our tourist industry. Some 50% of those who work in hospitality in Edinburgh come from elsewhere in the European Union.

We have talked before about stockpiling medicines and food and about lorry jams. When I ask this Government for reassurances, I am worried not just about my health or the health of all my friends who are worried about the medicines they need, but about the health of the country. That is why, when the Prime Minister called on us earlier this evening not to block Brexit because that would be a “subversion of democracy” and not say to the people whom we were elected to serve that we were unwilling to do what they had instructed and would go against it, I say to the Prime Minister that that is not why they sent us here. They sent us here to have the courage and the wisdom to stand up for what we believe is best for the country—and that is not this deal.

23:57:00

Rebecca Pow (Taunton Deane) (Con)

I am pleased to follow the hon. Member for Edinburgh West (Christine Jardine).

The outcome of the referendum in Taunton Deane reflected exactly the national average—52% leave, 48% remain—and I am committed to respecting the outcome. However, I believe this means not just who won and who lost, but the balance of the vote. I hear the leave side saying there was a roar for change, but if 17.4 million people represent a roar, I put it to hon. Members that 16.1 million must represent a loud growl.

I voted remain, but I have never been fearful of leaving. In fact, I am astonished by how many people agree that this was a very difficult decision, with many shades of grey, but then suddenly seem to find it so absolutely black and white. For two and a half years, I have listened to the same dominant voices, many of great intellect. Among these I put my hon. Friend the Member for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg) and my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve), but look how polarised their views are. No one has a monopoly on wisdom, and no single person on either side has all of the answers.

I came into Parliament after a long career working as a team member. I believe that party politics can function properly only if we act as a team, and I am saddened that not everybody seems to see it this way. Extricating ourselves from the tentacles of a 40-year relationship with 27 other countries is no mean feat. The negotiations have been long and complex, but certainly not inept. I have yet to hear a speech in this House that convinces me that anyone would have made a better fist of it than our Prime Minister. It is clear to me, however, that we must find a way through this with good will and compromise.

My view is to support a deal that gains the most for the most people, respecting the balance of the vote—in other words, leaving—while, crucially, respecting the needs of business. Business in Taunton Deane has been at pains to point this out to me at every stage and to urge that we get on with the deal so that we can move on, while at the same time keeping close links with the EU and frictionless trade. That was stressed to me vehemently by the head of Pritex, a company in Wellington that makes soundproofing for cars. It has also been stressed by food manufacturers, the main industry in the south-west, and sheep farmers in particular, who rely almost entirely on the EU for their exports.

While the deal works for those people, it also works for the many companies that are already trading on the world stage. Many of them, such as Somerdale cheese and Sheppy's cider, want to go many steps further, and this deal also works for them. Our nine trade commissioners are at this very moment forging opportunities that we can sign up to once the deal is over the line. For me, one of the most exciting opportunities that the deal offers is the chance to leave the common agricultural policy and the fisheries policy and to recreate our own land use strategy. That is a real opportunity, and we have already started, through the Agriculture Bill and the Fisheries Bill, so let us get it right.

This deal may not be perfect, but it does enable us to move forward. I believe that I have personally moved a great way towards to this deal, because I was originally a remainer, and would urge other colleagues to move forward too. Let us do it not just for the people in this House but for the young people out there too, like my son, who has just gone to university. I promised him that when he gets out in a few years' time, this will be done and dusted. He and his generation will be part of the generation that will forge a new era, for which we are paving the way right now. I urge colleagues to support the deal.

00:01:00

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab)

Seventy per cent. of my constituents voted remain in June 2016. From my inbox of about 5,000 letters and emails, over 90% take the same view. Indeed, more than 20% of Hammersmith and Fulham residents are EU27 citizens, which is the third largest proportion anywhere in the UK.

That helps to make Hammersmith a very good place to live, but also to do business. At Christmas, Novartis announced that it was moving its UK headquarters to the new Imperial College life sciences campus at White City. L'Oréal has its UK and Ireland HQ in Hammersmith Broadway. West London is the European centre of commercial broadcasting. If I take SMEs, we are proud to have Charlie Bigham's at Park Royal, employing 500 people in the UK's fastest growing ready meals business, and Jascots wine merchants, importing wine for the restaurant trade and employing 50 people in Old Oak. These are very different enterprises with one thing in common: a fear of a chaotic Brexit. Whether it is the need to stockpile drugs, planning for a weaker UK market, offshoring to meet EU licensing rules, higher trading costs, skills and labour shortages or border checks, Brexit is a disaster for UK business.

It should not be necessary to go beyond economic arguments in rejecting the Prime Minister's deal, or no deal or all the halfway houses that will make our country poorer by an act of our own will. However, there are equally compelling social, cultural and political reasons for wanting to stay part of a great project that has in a few decades transformed one of the most conflicted regions of the world into one of the most harmonious and which gives more opportunities for the next generation than any before. The EU has been an agent for peace, democracy and security within its own expanding borders. Following the collapse of dictatorships in Greece, Portugal and Spain, the EU offered an alternative and more attractive path, as it has for former Warsaw pact countries. This is a job half-finished, however, as recent events in Poland and Hungary have shown. It is one in which the UK has a leading part to play, not one from which we should retreat. In an increasingly dangerous age for democracy and human rights, when the demagogues are in charge even in the United States, the EU can be a force for rationalism and liberalism. We weaken that struggle, but we also put ourselves at risk, if we abandon our position on the international stage.

I do not believe that a majority of the British people voted to make their families poorer, to weaken employment rights, environmental standards and Britain's place in the world, to alienate 3.5 million of their fellow citizens or to deny to succeeding generations the freedom to travel, live and work freely across our continent. If the Prime Minister will neither lead in the interests of the country nor hand over to someone who will, we must ask the public to save us from ourselves, call a people's vote, and have confidence that this self-harming will end and we will make an informed choice to remain in the European Union.

00:04:00

Neil O'Brien (Harborough) (Con)

I spent eight years campaigning against European integration. I worked for the successful campaign against joining the euro and I ran the campaign for a referendum on the European constitution. If, during those eight years, I had been told that I could have this withdrawal agreement I would have jumped at the chance. This is a deal that means we take back control over immigration, we stop paying £10 billion a year into the EU, we no longer have to follow new EU laws, and, above all, we get out of the process of ever-closer union and we stop giving away more and more powers every year.

What is the alternative to this deal? I believe that if the withdrawal agreement is voted down tomorrow we will end up with no Brexit. A majority in this House will vote to keep us in the EU, as many people have argued for this evening either overtly or in a thinly disguised form. I do not like it, but that is what will happen if the deal is voted down.

Some people I respect are worried about the backstop. It seems to be something that our friends in Europe should be far more worried about using than we should. Under the backstop, we would be able to access the EU market with no taxes or tariffs, and unlike any other country in the world we would be able to do that without having to follow new EU laws. No wonder that, according to the Financial Times:

“EU diplomats are nervous because they fear Britain would have ‘one foot’ in Europe's market, enjoying tariff-free access and no rules of origin, while ruthlessly undercutting the standards of the EU's single market.”

In other words, the backstop would take us back to the idea of a basic common market and away from the political union that the EU has become.

The last two years of negotiations have been very painstaking, but the Prime Minister has delivered some clear successes. The EU originally said that the four freedoms could not be divided and there was no chance of accessing the EU market without having free movement. She has won on that. Spain originally said that it wanted to get back control of Gibraltar, but as the First Minister of Gibraltar told me in person this is a deal that protects Gibraltar absolutely. The EU then wanted to have a customs backstop only for Northern Ireland and to put a customs border down the Irish sea. Again, the Prime Minister has seen off that threat. Those are three good, big successes.

It is very striking to me that all the main national business groups in this country support the deal: the Federation of Small Businesses, the British Chambers of Commerce, the CBI, the EEF, the National Farmers Union and the Scottish Fishermen's Federation are all backing it. The voice of business is clear: they want us to get on and back the deal. But there is more to the deal than keeping business moving, so let me finish with a bit of history.

I believe it was a mistake by Ted Heath to say there would be no loss of sovereignty when we joined the European Economic Community. In the 1980s, it was a mistake not to see the revolutionary consequences of the Single European Act, which Mrs Thatcher came to regret. In the '90s and the '00s, it was a mistake for successive Governments to push through the treaties of Maastricht, Amsterdam, Nice and Lisbon without ever putting them to the people in a referendum. If we turn down this deal, it will be another historic mistake: a mistake for those of us who oppose European integration, because the trap will snap shut and the majority in this House who want to stop Brexit will do so and we will have snatched defeat from the jaws of victory; and in the longer term I think it will also be a mistake for those on the other side, too. Imagine the bitterness of a country where 52% of people feel that their wishes had been overridden. They will feel that this country is not really a democracy anymore.

It does not have to be like that. This is a good deal. It gives us full control over immigration; stops us paying in billions every year; gives us control over future laws; and gets us out of ever closer union. On the other hand, it keeps trade flowing and gives us a framework to keep co-operating with our friends in Europe on science, culture, security and the environment. The withdrawal agreement, or something like it, is the only thing that can unite and move this country forward. I support it in the strongest possible terms.

00:08:00

Melanie Onn (Great Grimsby) (Lab)

Like all colleagues, I have been inundated with emails from my constituents about the withdrawal agreement vote in December and the one coming up later today. For those who worry that MPs do not read their emails, I would just say: Chris from Scartho wants to remain; Pete on the Willows wants a closer deal than is offered by the current deal; I hear that Sue in Yarborough wants a clean break regardless of Northern Ireland, jobs or wages being impacted; and Christopher in the same area is telling me that I should reject this calamitous Chequers betrayal and we should just leave. I hear all those views. I hear the 70% of the people in my borough who voted to leave. I understand that, but just 11 of all the emails I have received tell me to back the Prime Minister's deal.

I would like to touch on two specific issues and why I am disappointed by the Prime Minister's approach with her parliamentary colleagues. On Friday, I wrote to her asking why, less than a week before her vote on the withdrawal agreement, she was apparently considering accepting an amendment that asserted an increase in assurances over workers' rights. That consideration tells me that her agreement fails to protect people's rights at work. In that letter, I pointed out that I gave her the opportunity two years ago to quell any fears or concerns that colleagues might have about

reductions in protections for workers by adopting a Bill I had put forward. At that time, I was repeatedly and patronisingly told by Government Members that I did not need to worry, because domestic rights are greater than those in the EU and apparently the Tories are the party of and for workers. That is quickly to forget their voting against the introduction of the national minimum wage, their retrograde trade union legislation, the Beecroft report, which proposed being able to fire staff for any reason whatever, and the introduction of tribunal fees, which saw a 70% drop in employment claims.

People might see those practical examples alongside some of the comments the Prime Minister's colleagues have made about wanting a bonfire of red tape or about workers' rights being unsustainable or a burden. That would cause anyone to question how she could have the brass neck to suggest that her party is one for ordinary working people, let alone one to trust once the protection of overarching, worker-friendly EU legislation is removed.

Despite the best intentions of my colleagues with their proposed amendment, I fail to see how a passing reference of just a few lines can substitute for the detailed considerations and fully worked out suggestions of the full Bill that was put forward. If the Prime Minister is genuinely committed to the protections, how is it that not one person from her Government has ever sought to discuss any of those principles with me or Labour Front Benchers? It has taken until this week for her to go and talk to the TUC and the major trade unions.

I have said to my constituents that the deal is a vague, worst-of-both-worlds Brexit that satisfies neither leave nor remain supporters. Worse than that, it fails to convince people like me, who despite campaigning for remain have said that they will respect the outcome of the referendum and are committed to getting the best possible deal for our constituents, protecting jobs, job opportunities and their rights. For my constituents in Grimsby, part of that is about seeking support for fish processing. When I last asked the Chancellor about his discussions with Norway and Iceland, he was incredibly dismissive and talked about the UK becoming an independent coastal state and failed to answer questions around the trading relationships that Norway and Iceland have, which will impact on their ability to have any kind of free negotiations with us. We will be listening from the other side of the door when they are negotiating, waiting to see what kind of scraps will be thrown to us through the transition phase.

00:12:00

Richard Drax (South Dorset) (Con)

It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Melanie Onn). Perhaps I just need to remind the House that we voted to leave the EU, and "leave the EU" is a very simple instruction that somewhere along the path has lost its clarity and intent. I am saddened by those who seem intent on sabotaging Brexit within this place, resorting to any tactic to achieve their aim. I am utterly confident that you, Mr Speaker, will ensure that the rules and procedures of this place are maintained and honoured.

We are potentially witnessing parliamentary anarchy from those who somehow think that their vote was more important than other people's votes. I think they feel that those who voted to leave the EU are simply wrong, deluded, xenophobic or even stupid. They are not; they are far-sighted, courageous and aspirational. They have a vision for the United Kingdom that will once again place us in charge of our destiny. I tend to feel that remainers operate from a place of fear, apocalyptic warnings of doom and gloom spilling from their mouths at regular intervals, but I must tell them that the Brexit genie is out and will continue to roam our island nation until we eventually leave the EU, even if that aim is thwarted in the short term.

Can we not forget that we voted by 554 to 53 to allow the people of this country to decide our fate in or out of the EU? They decided, and we invoked article 50, and that has brought us here. All this did not happen by accident. Today, many of those same MPs are doing their best to thwart that vote. What a pyrrhic victory it would be for those remainers to see this place trash its reputation, integrity and honour, simply because—let me repeat it—they think their votes are more significant than anyone else’s. Trust in politics, already at an all-time low, would evaporate. Why would we bother to canvass at the next election? Who in their right mind would believe a word we said?

The Prime Minister is wrong now to threaten no Brexit at all. It used to be “my deal or no deal”; now it is “my deal or no Brexit”. Sadly, this is another example of why we are in this mess. It is disingenuous to claim that there are only two choices. As we have heard, the deal is, I regret to say, a dog’s dinner. We would remain a vassal state, facing a serious threat to the Union itself, in the backstop, and subject to binding rules from the ECJ. Let us not forget either the £39 billion we would raid from our challenged Treasury safe, and for what? If the Prime Minister’s deal is voted down tomorrow night, she must return to the EU and attempt to negotiate a better one, for we do want one—we really do want a deal. At the same time, leaving the EU on WTO terms must be given top priority. Do I need to remind the House that this is the current legal default position?

Unless we honour the referendum result, politics in this country will suffer demonstrably.

00:16:00

Chris Stephens (Glasgow South West) (SNP)

Good morning, Mr Speaker. I, too, was hoping to catch your eye on 10 December, but the Prime Minister saw to that when she cancelled the debate. When I saw there was a prime ministerial statement today, I wondered if it was Groundhog Day.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen North (Kirsty Blackman), and the hon. Member for Brent North (Barry Gardiner) who spoke from the Front Bench from the Labour party, on their speeches about the benefits of immigration and being pro-immigration. I hope that the Chancellor, too, will congratulate both hon. Members, because there is a real concern about the Government’s direction of travel on immigration. We have already heard of individuals applying for universal credit who have lived here for 20 or 30 years, and worked and contributed to the economy, but who, because they were born outside the UK, are being denied universal credit or are receiving questions from the Department for Work and Pensions. I hope the Chancellor will take that back.

I hope the Government will also look at the advertisements for the EU settlement scheme. It seems quite inappropriate that they are seeking to charge people to retain rights and benefits they already have. I am very concerned, too, about what the deal would do for the protection of workers’ rights. As Opposition Members have said, there are too many vague assurances, when what we actually need is a binding agreement. We need to look at the EU’s direction of travel. It is now seeking to introduce changes to improve the work-life balance of parents and to help those in the gig economy. It is far better than the timid approach adopted here in the UK. We are seeing in Europe a real determination to put in place transparent and predictable working conditions.

While the EU is going in that direction, there is a fear among trade unions here about the lack of enforcement, particularly during the transition period, when disputes will be brought to a joint committee. The difficulty with that is that individuals and trade unions will not be able to take those complaints directly to the disputes committee or the European Court of Justice.

We have heard many Conservative Back Benchers talk about the benefits of trade agreements. What will happen for individuals in trade unions, who under international trade agreements are often excluded from bringing challenges under those agreements to enforce their rights at work? It is clear to me that the Government, who spent years challenging in court the trade unions' argument that tribunal fees should not be put in place, who were responsible for the anti-trade-union Act, and who take a timid approach and refuse to ban zero-hours contracts, cannot be trusted on workers' rights and protections and the EU protections currently in place.

Finally, some argue that the EU is a neoliberal institution, but a no deal would lead to even more neoliberalism. The answer to that criticism of the EU is not more neoliberalism. We saw that in the financial crash, when there was criticism of neoliberalism. We do not need more of that; we need less, and we need far more protections at work and elsewhere.

00:21:00

Peter Aldous (Waveney) (Con)

Like most of coastal Britain, Waveney and Lowestoft voted to leave. There was a variety of reasons why individuals made that choice, but I sense that many were sending an overarching message down to us here in the Westminster bubble. Yes, economically, Britain as a whole has done well over the past 40 to 50 years, but during that time coastal Britain has struggled. In Lowestoft, the fishing industry is a pale shadow of its former self. The canning factory has closed, the coachworks have gone and the Sanyo TV factory—the last major TV manufacturer in the UK—was shut down in 2009.

The message that Brexit sent from towns such as Lowestoft is that they have not done well in this period and we need to do something different. As the negotiations and debates drag on, we must never forget that message. When it came to those negotiations, there was always going to be a need for hard bargaining, making difficult choices and, yes, making concessions. The negotiations on fishing have not been straightforward. I had hoped that the UK would resume its role as an independent coastal state from December 2019; instead, we hope to do so by the end of December 2020. That said, as matters stand, we shall control access to our waters, deciding who can access them on what terms. That is something that the EU—the French and Dutch, in particular—do not like, but the Prime Minister has steadfastly refused to compromise and it is important that she continues to do so to provide the opportunity to revive the East Anglian fishing industry.

Ultimately, I ask myself whether the deal delivers Brexit. From a pragmatic perspective, on balance, I believe that it does. I look at the alternatives. They are not particularly palatable. Leaving the EU with no deal in place has many risks. There is a push for a second referendum. To my mind, that would be very wrong. It would significantly undermine the very ethos of democracy and the very many people who voted for Brexit would lose all confidence in the democratic process.

Something missing from the Brexit debate since before the referendum is the vision for the UK in the future. This country has many immediate challenges to address such as welfare reform and housing, but there is an exciting future ahead and we must set out how we will deliver it for the benefit of all our citizens. To deliver such a vision, we need a Brexit deal in place. The one in front of us—it is the only one—is, I believe, on balance, acceptable, so I will be voting for it. That said, I sense that tomorrow it will be defeated. But it is the nearest we have to delivering Brexit, to delivering a deal, and to honouring our pledge to the British people. In the next few days, people need to be pragmatic and work together to get the deal over the line.

00:24:00

Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab)

This is the issue on which I—and, I am sure, most other Members—have been contacted most by constituents. They have all asked me to represent their views, but in the time available it will simply not be possible to do all of them justice, especially given the contradictory and incompatible messages that I have received.

Wherever it ends up, this process will cause a huge group of people to feel disenfranchised and disconnected from the political process. The binary nature of the referendum has created a schism in society, splitting families and friends in a way that will take years to fix. The longer the process continues, the wider those cracks become, and many issues are not receiving the attention that they need because Brexit, and many of the causes of Brexit, are not being addressed. Those are the big issues that I want us, as a country, to tackle. Brexit has sucked the life out of all other political debate in the country, and has toxified dialogue in the process. The danger is that the position could become even worse if we cannot be seen to be trusted—if democracy is no longer seen as something that works—and my starting point is what this process means for democracy.

I voted in favour of a referendum, and I did so in the expectation that the result would be binding. I campaigned to remain, so of course I was disappointed by the result, but as a democrat I accepted it. Moreover, along with many other Members, I had been re-elected on a manifesto that had confirmed that I would abide by the result.

Plenty of constituents have expressed their frustration and anger at the posturing that goes on here. Their perception is that too many Members are using Brexit as a vehicle for their own ends. I have no issue with Members who have been honest from the start about their wish to stop Brexit—especially when that represents the overwhelming view of their constituents—but there is an undercurrent that implies that unless Members unquestioningly accept the Government's interpretation of Brexit, they are really trying to stop it. I find that insulting, I find it puerile, but, most seriously, I find it dangerous, because it says to people out there that we are insincere, that we are playing games, and that we are too wrapped up in our own egos to govern effectively. Some people say that the vote was for Parliament to take back control. That does not mean that MPs should always do what the Government want; in fact, it should mean that MPs are free to do the opposite.

We are in this mess because there was a division in the Tory party and a referendum was seen as the way to heal that division, but rather than bringing people together, it has pushed them further apart. The division has seeped out into the rest of the country, and political dialogue has become so polarised that many people with different views have stopped listening to one another. Of course, the irony is that many who voted leave and remain alike are opposed to this deal, but the reasons that they give are so diametrically opposed that any consensus will not last endure past what is now today.

A few of my constituents have said that I should support the Prime Minister's deal, but if the best arguments are about what might happen if Members vote against something rather than giving positive reasons for them to vote in favour of it, it must be accepted that the offer cannot stand on its own two feet. I am not falling for the bluff of a no deal, and I refuse to be threatened by something that I know no responsible Prime Minister would allow.

We must restore trust, and the first step towards doing that is to be honest. We cannot pretend that this agreement is anything other than a desperate fudge, the embodiment of weak leadership, and a

mish-mash of contradiction that needs radical revision if it is to be passed. It does nothing to address the fundamental issues that we need to address in order to create a society that works for us all. We must be candid and recognise that whatever route we take now, it will come at a cost. Some of the costs are easier to quantify than others, and none are certain. We will probably also need more time to sort ourselves out. However, it is up to us, here in Parliament, to show leadership and find a solution that brings people back together, protects our national interest, and restores faith in the democratic process.

00:28:00

Robert Courts (Witney) (Con)

It is an honour to speak for a brief few minutes in this historic debate, and an honour to follow the passionate speech of the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders).

As someone who has travelled throughout the glorious continent of Europe and can be described as a member of the easyJet generation, I believe deeply in the values of international co-operation. I have long wished to be a member of a reformed EU, but when the United Kingdom tried to renegotiate the terms of its membership, it became very clear that this was an inflexible, undemocratic body that was not going to reform in the way that we would like. I therefore decided to vote to leave, on the basis that the EU was heading for an undemocratic federalism that the UK has never desired, and, above all, because I wanted to see our historic democratic parliamentary freedoms preserved.

Having become the MP for west Oxfordshire after the referendum and with 17.4 million people nationally having voted to leave, I am keen to ensure that Brexit reflects the best long-term interests of this country to ensure that our country remains open, democratic and free. I passionately want to ensure that when constituents from all parts of the country go to see their MP, that MP sits in a Parliament that is able to make change, and that we are a functioning democracy where the laws that govern the country and the country's destiny are made here by elected politicians.

The withdrawal agreement has much to commend it. There are a multitude of technical but important points that govern interconnected peoples, such as the resolution on citizens' rights, but I have decided, with the greatest pain, that I cannot support it in its current form.

The backstop is the headline act. We are all tired of hearing about it, but we must consider what it means. The backstop would see the UK remain in a hybrid customs union with the EU, whereby the UK would fully align itself to the EU's customs regime, including its external tariff schedule, and we would be unable to sign meaningful trade agreements with other countries. The UK's home market, let us not forget, is the fifth largest in the world and would become a bargaining counter for EU negotiators to exchange for benefits for their own countries, because they would not be required to reciprocate on their trade deals. It seems to me unthinkable for a country of our standing and proud history to surrender control of our trade policy to an organisation of which we will no longer be a member and which will have no regard for our interests.

I know I will be told that this is all temporary, but even if technically temporary, the backstop has every likelihood of being indefinite, with the EU effectively holding a veto over our ability to leave. Even under article 50 we have a clear, legal, sovereign right to exit our arrangements, but not here. There is no unilateral exit mechanism from the backstop, nor is it time-limited. This is almost unheard of in international relations.

I cannot emphasise enough that I do not criticise this deal on the basis that it is not ideal, or that it is not perfect, or that I want more. This is no objection based on some ideological purity; I am a pragmatist and I want to see a deal and a compromise as much as anybody. But I cannot agree to just anything, and I feel it is best if we in this place speak our minds. We should be able to tell the British people that sometimes a compromise becomes a compromise too far. This deal gives £39 billion without serious commitments in response, divides our Union and leaves the UK at the mercy of the ECJ in practice if not in name.

We should never be ashamed to say that it is noble for a country to seek democratic, accountable self-government and live in amity with its neighbours. It is for that that we must strive.

00:34:00

Ruth George (High Peak) (Lab)

It gives me pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Witney (Robert Courts).

The debate on our relationship with the EU has been dominated today by slogans and emotion, but it is actually about our trade arrangements, which are a very practical matter. It is business that is most affected, and what amazes me is that this Government, who constantly preach to those of us on the Opposition side of the House about not being on the side of business, never sat down with businesses to work out what they needed from our deal with the EU.

I have sat down with the businesses in my constituency, both individually and at business summits, to see what they want from our deal, and they have a wide variety of concerns. The biggest is regulatory divergence, the threat of which is already preventing companies in my constituency from tendering for contracts. They are worried about tariffs and import duties, which raise their costs, and about losing EU funding in grants and loans from the European Investment Bank, which have already reduced from £7 billion a year to just £2 billion in 2017 and will restrict investment in our businesses even more. They worry about the cost and paperwork of visas, making it harder and more expensive to access skills and for their people to move around Europe. They worry about access to the single euro payments area and the VAT information exchange system. These may be boring issues, but they are very real and very practical for all our businesses. They worry about losing their access to free trade not just with the EU but with the 65 countries to which they get preferential free trade access, with a further 25 agreements due to take effect. They also worry about friction at our borders, which will make just-in-time production impossible and lead to late payments if contracts cannot be fulfilled in time.

It is no wonder that the small and medium-sized businesses in my constituency are in despair. Several have already had to set up offices in, and transfer jobs to, EU countries to continue bidding for contracts. It was also reported last week that the banking sector has already moved almost £1 trillion out of the UK, equating to 10% of its assets. The longer we go on with no practical deal in sight, the more businesses will continue to move. So far, we have been cushioned against the full economic impact of the leave vote by the drop in the value of the pound, but we have started to see inflation creeping up and things are becoming more expensive.

Our deal with the EU affects not only businesses but people. Yes, a majority of people voted in 2016 to leave the European Union, and I respect that, but this Government did not respect those people enough to ask them what they wanted from that deal. I asked all the voters in High Peak what they wanted, and half of those who voted leave wanted to stay in a customs union and half wanted access to the single market. The Government have not listened to them, and we have ended up with a deal that is not a deal. It is simply a stopgap until the end of next year and provides no

certainty for the future. The only certainty is years of wrangling over a final deal, as the Conservative party wrangles over who its next leader will be and the potential leaders offer alternative versions of our final deal. The Prime Minister can give us no commitments about that deal. She has opted out of leading us into it.

00:36:00

Jack Brereton (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Con)

The choice is stark: we can either follow the wishes of the majority and deliver Brexit, as my constituents overwhelmingly voted for, or we can fail and risk holding them in contempt. We must not fail. We must deliver. However, there are now very few realistic options open to the House. I fear that there is now a growing risk of no Brexit at all, especially following the passing of a number of amendments in the past month in the name of my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve). The fact that those amendments were passed shows that there is an appetite among Members to ignore and frustrate the will of the British people. Either they would leave us saddled with a horrific Norway-style deal or, shockingly, they could mean that we do not leave at all.

As an MP representing a predominantly leave seat, I can tell the House that no Brexit is not an option. It would hold the electorate and our democracy in total contempt, yet that is precisely what supporters of a second referendum are asking us to do. They are asking us to delay Brexit by at least a year, and they want to prevent us from leaving on 29 March. That is not a choice that I could contemplate, as it would involve deepening divisions instead of healing them and going back on our word instead of respecting the people's choice. It is concerning that we are seeing a rise in extremist views on both the far left and the far right. It was not easy to see off the British National party in Stoke-on-Trent, as we had to do, and I would not be so cavalier as to assume that that threat has gone away.

I will vote tomorrow to secure the Brexit that people in Stoke-on-Trent South want to see: an end to free movement, and control over our own money and laws. Essentially, that means leaving the single market and the customs union. Indeed, anyone who does not accept that Brexit means leaving the single market and the customs union is deluding themselves. Staying within the customs union would tie us permanently to the trade policies of the EU, preventing us from forging stronger links globally.

I agree that a managed no deal could be beneficial and would not have the apocalyptic impact that some have predicted, but I fear that delivering no deal in an orderly way is now far from certain. Given what has been witnessed here over the past week, the numbers in this House are quite likely to be stacked against allowing no deal. Members could obstruct the necessary legislation for managing the process, thereby frustrating Brexit. The worst case would be a disorderly no deal—crashing out of the EU—and according to a number of my local businesses, that would be incredibly disruptive for our local economy and jobs in Stoke-on-Trent. That is not what the people of Stoke-on-Trent voted for, so I am left to consider what is before us. The withdrawal agreement delivers much of what my constituents voted for: control of immigration at our borders; the protection of manufacturing; the ending of vast annual transfers of money to Brussels; and a commitment to the creation of a new free trade area with the EU, building on the global opportunities for forging new trade.

However, the backstop is what really worries me, and concerns expressed many times throughout the House must be addressed. We cannot get trapped in something that is indefinite and challenges the very being of our sovereignty. I look to support the amendment in the name of my hon. Friend

the Member for South West Wiltshire (Dr Murrison), which would time-limit the backstop. The Government need to be sure that safeguards are in place.

I have consistently voted for measures to ensure that this House enacts Brexit. I must make a choice, as we all do, based on weighing up the risks on both sides, and I have spent many weeks determining my decision. The vast majority of my constituents are fed up with politicians and want us to get on with delivering Brexit. They want us to get on to pursue the fantastic new opportunities for global Britain that will benefit every community throughout our Union that has felt left behind until now. They want us to deliver the leave that they voted for, honouring the result of the referendum and regaining control on 29 March.

00:40:00

Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD)

We have come a long way since June 2016. There is no more hiding from the fact that any Brexit will leave us worse off and that the best that any post-Brexit Government can do is damage limitation. If we go ahead with Brexit, we will have to find new ways of stimulating the economy. No longer bound by EU rules, those who argue for slashing regulations will quickly gain the upper hand. The race to the bottom will soon begin.

Among the first regulations on the bonfire will be those that protect the environment. The European Court of Justice, so hated by Brexit fanatics, has been an outstanding protector of environmental laws and regulations. The Government's recent draft environment Bill does not include a watchdog with anything like the power of the ECJ, and climate action will lose out. There will be an increased incentive to support fossil fuel companies for short-term economic gain. Green energy projects are becoming increasingly affordable and promise long-term economic gain, but they still require up-front investment and will therefore be the first victims. Who would provide such investment in a struggling post-Brexit economy? Once more, climate action will lose out.

A post-Brexit Government will be under huge pressure to sign off new trade deals quickly, which will be a great opportunity for any country to take advantage of our weakened position. A trade deal with America, for example, will most likely involve opening up our economy to fracking companies. Even if we tried to build environmental protections into such deals, the reality is that commercial interests will be dominant. The case of Lone Pine Resources v. the Government of Canada shows what awaits us when we enter into trade deals with more powerful nations. The Government of Quebec put a moratorium on fracking in 2011, but Lone Pine Resources has sued for over \$100 million of lost profits under the terms of the North American free trade agreement. Outside the EU, our power to protect ourselves against the interests of large global companies will be much diminished.

The European Union is an international heavyweight when it comes to striking trade deals, but it has not struck a trade deal with America precisely because it refuses to give up its own standards in areas such as environmental protections. Thanks to its power as the world's largest and most successful trading bloc, the EU has the economic clout to walk away from trade negotiations that are not in its interest. On our own, we will have nothing near the same clout. Even if we tried to protect our environment, our resolve would quickly collapse as the urgency to find new trading partners would force our hand.

No form of Brexit will halt that race to the bottom—not the Prime Minister's blind Brexit deal, which offers no legal guarantee against future deregulation, not a no-deal Brexit, and not even the softest-of-soft Norway-plus Brexit deals. Brexit is a fundamentally right-wing project. It seeks to

deregulate our economy and hand the reins to powerful vested interests. It is political fantasy to think we can go ahead with Brexit and mitigate its worst effects. In the light of the right-wing Brexit agenda, the only option for all of us who are progressive is to oppose Brexit as a project. There is no point in tinkering with it.

Climate action has always been about social justice. In the 21st century, the battle to save our planet is inseparable from the battle to limit the power of big business and build a better world for all. I call on all progressive politicians in this House to see Brexit for the right-wing project it is. We can stop Brexit, and the democratic path to it is a people's vote with the option to stay in the European Union.

00:44:00

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con)

It is a pleasure to speak after the hon. Member for Bath (Wera Hobhouse).

Too often in this place, when we talk about the implications of Brexit for business, we speak about multinationals—our car manufacturers, our pharmaceutical companies and our banks—but perhaps not often enough do we talk about small and medium-sized enterprises. I draw the House's attention to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests.

The people behind SMEs are real people with real lives who have worked a lifetime to build a business, often risking everything they have to build something for themselves and their family. I violently agree with those who see a bright future outside the European Union. Despite being a remainder, that is what I believe, too, in the longer term. In the short term, as we have been trading in a certain way for 46 years, it is unfair and irresponsible to trample businesses underfoot in a headlong rush towards the exit door. We simply cannot look at these businesses and these businesspeople as collateral damage. When we talk about ideological concepts, the more important concept to a businessperson is finding the money to pay the bank loan, to pay the suppliers and to pay the wages.

This is not about "Project Fear." I think a no-deal Brexit has real risks, particularly for those sectors that have time-dependent supply chains. Cash flow is the key element for any business. Businesses do not have weeks and months of cash flow sitting in the bank, waiting for a rainy day. For a business with a time-dependent supply chain, such as a business exporting shellfish to France, a consignment delayed by 12 hours loses 50% of its value, and a consignment delayed by 24 hours loses 100% of its value. If a business loses one or two of those consignments, it may well be out of business.

Of course some would say that there will be no delays at ports, but that is not consistent with the facts of a no deal. Michel Barnier has been very clear that, in a no-deal situation, there will be 100% checks on animal produce and livestock at the border. Even "Fact—NOT Friction" accepts that the EU may impose checks.

For Northern Ireland, in particular, this is a huge risk. A simple cottage pie ends up on a shop shelf in Northern Ireland having passed over the border in different forms—from livestock to end product—seven times. Each time it would have to go through a border inspection post. It is one of a number of cattle conundra that would have to be solved in a no-deal world.

A no deal could have significant and perhaps irreversible consequences for Northern Ireland and for the integrity of the United Kingdom, which is why I support the Prime Minister's deal. The deal is a

stepping-stone to the future. Yes, there are risks, but clearly we have negotiation advantages, too. For an SME, hope is not a strategy. We should support this deal, and I urge all hon. Members to do so.

00:48:00

Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con)

It is a great honour to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake), and I agree with absolutely everything he said.

Before Christmas I spoke in the debate on this motion and in the debate on no deal, and I outlined my position in favour of the agreement, so I will concentrate on two aspects relating to today's subject: exports and the finance of our business more generally.

The Secretary of State outlined clearly the success of British exporting over the past few years, with exports up by 38.1% since 2010, to £630 billion in the year to November 2018. This is happening when we are within the EU; I do not see that the EU has shackled us in our export performance in the past few years. I fully accept that there are areas where we could do still better, but we need to build on what has been achieved under the coalition Government and the most recent Conservative-led Governments, because it has clearly been successful. We need more emphasis on supporting SMEs into exports and on promoting our trade links and our trade network. I declare an interest, as one of the Prime Minister's trade envoys. We need to see a greater emphasis on the already increased amount of UK export finance, and we need to see that going to the smallest possible businesses. I ask the Chancellor and the Secretary of State to ensure that as we leave the EU we redouble our efforts on exports. Of course our businesses, particularly SMEs, will face challenges as we move into the new situation under the Prime Minister's deal, but with that support they can do very well.

The second point I wish to make is about the financing of our businesses more generally. We often hear of the great amount of inward investment we have in the UK, and that is to be welcomed, but one reason why we have so much inward investment is that we do not invest in our own businesses. The City of London is not as good as it could be in providing capital to British-based businesses so we do not see the kind of businesses that we see in Germany with the Mittelstand or in Italy with its equivalent—I do not know its name—where family businesses have turnovers of billions of pounds, euros, dollars, because they get the finance from their capital markets. We have pretty much the biggest capital markets in the world, but, with a lot of noble exceptions, they do not support British-owned businesses as much as they could. So as we leave the EU, I want to see this from our capital markets and the British Business Bank. It has been excellent in the work it has done but it could do five times more than it does, perhaps along the lines of the German Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau and other development banks. I want to see British institutions support British-owned businesses.

Along with that, we have to be absolutely sure that we invest in innovation and research, which is where the role of our universities is so vital. I declare an interest, as a trustee of one of our universities. It is vital that universities are supported in whatever way possible. If they are going to lose some research funding, that needs to be replaced—and more.

00:52:00

Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con)

Our duty in debating the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018 this evening is not to focus on what we do not want, but to work out what we will support, in order to ensure that we respect the

result of the referendum to leave the EU, but in a way that does not inadvertently cause damage and that can identify and realise future opportunities. The Act is the end of the beginning—what the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster called the “unavoidable gateway”, whether to a Canadian, Norwegian, Chequers or any other destination. It resolves crucial human issues of citizen rights, obligations and Northern Ireland, on which I have co-authored an amendment with my right hon. Friend the Member for East Devon (Sir Hugo Swire). The Act can also lead to stronger legislation on issues precious to many of us, including colleagues such as the hon. Members for Rotherham (Sarah Champion) and for Great Grimsby (Melanie Onn): human rights; gender equality; workers’ rights; and environmental standards, where pledges have already been made. It means that this House will be able to decide whether we stick with EU manufacturing standards, go further or deviate, understanding the potential impact on frictionless trade. In the future, it will be we who decide whether to take more REACH—the registration, evaluation, authorisation and restriction of chemicals—legislation or further insurance sector rules. We will decide on immigration; as the Home Secretary said, there will be no limits on skilled labourers and there will be seasonal arrangements for agricultural workers. Those are the opportunities that this deal gives us, alongside a transition that provides for certainty before future change. It will not be easy—we have surely learned that already—but there can be advantages for these stubborn, independent-minded islands that are used to maintaining the balance of power in Europe against centralist tendencies.

Some of my colleagues prefer a no-deal solution. They believe that there is a way, as an invitation this evening put it, to open up the political space to take a different approach, but the nation’s employers simply do not agree. I have spoken to manufacturers big and small, to retail and services companies, to the university in my constituency and to many other traders and investors as the longest-serving of the Prime Minister’s trade envoys in the House of Commons, working with one of the fastest growing regions in south-east Asia, and not one has told me that no deal is the best way forward. Instead, they tell me that fear of uncertainty is holding back investment, jobs and apprenticeships and beginning to lose them contracts. Are they all scaremongering—the FSB, Business West, the NFU, Gibraltar, the Falklands, or even a family-owned Gloucester SME, which told me on Friday that

“customers and jobs will go elsewhere, and we are 14 weeks away from the most damaging impact on our economy for at least a generation”?

They, plus the supply chains of the aerospace, automotive and cyber sectors, cannot all be wrong. I do not believe that, faced with this evidence, any Government could take the risk of no deal, or that this Parliament would ever vote for no deal.

If we are to succeed in legislating for the withdrawal agreement—a genuine Brexit—Conservative and DUP Members, and others on the Opposition Benches who, like the hon. Member for Ilford North (Wes Streeting), realise that there is no magical, better Labour Brexit to be negotiated, will all have to pull together and support this pragmatic compromise. If we cannot do that, as the hon. Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker) said, some cross-party grouping will come together for a solution to gain a majority, but in all likelihood that will be a deal less attractive to those who voted leave and to those who compare it with staying in the EU, and that could lead to an even more divisive second referendum. To paraphrase Churchill on the USA, I hope that this Parliament will do the right thing after exhausting all other options over the next few days and support and pass the withdrawal agreement.

00:57:00

Anne Marie Morris (Newton Abbot) (Con)

I am delighted to be the last Back Bencher standing to conclude the debate before the Front Benchers have their say.

I thought the referendum result was a great tribute to the British people. It was a vote for opportunity, it was a vote of aspiration, and it was a vote for freedom. Many in this Chamber would absolutely support that. My real frustration is that this withdrawal agreement does not deliver on that opportunity. It does not deliver on returning sovereignty to the British people. We will not gain sovereignty over our laws, over our borders or, indeed, over our sea. Most importantly, we will not have the freedom to trade with countries around the world, outside Europe, where the opportunity most certainly lies.

So, what to do? To support this deal is clearly not the way forward, but we must preserve that opportunity and aspiration. Should we extend article 50? No. Is a few more months or even a year going to change two years of inactivity? I do not think so. We already have the deal that everybody is searching for: the World Trade Organisation deal. That is the deal that is well formed and well prepared for. It is not the dropping out or going over a cliff edge that people talk about; it is something that will deliver the opportunity. It is what the Government, without telling anybody, have actually been working on for more than a year, as has Europe, including France. Calais is ready and Dover is ready. There are many things that we could do to make it perfect, but it is the safe option and it will deliver what British business has been crying out for: certainty.

When we have WTO rules, we know what we get. What it says on the tin is what is inside it. That is what we absolutely need. Of course, we also get the benefit of not paying £39 billion, because at the end of the day that was in effect in large part payment for that two-year extension, during which we were going to endeavour to work our way towards a final deal that was not actually Brexit. We will stay as a United Kingdom, too, which is absolutely key for me.

People say, “How will you manage to take forward that opportunity?” If Australia can negotiate three trade deals in 13 months, I think that we are certainly up for a jolly good future. We should not believe those scare stories. I have sat on the Public Accounts Committee and scrutinised what the Government Departments are doing. Those planes will fly; those trains will cross the channel; those lorries will be able to get their goods from A to B; the IT infrastructure is largely there; the food is in place; and the drugs are in place, so let us not be put off by these scaremongering stories. Better still, let us consider article 24 of the General Agreement Trade on Tariffs and Trade. Let us consider remaining with zero-rate tariffs until such time as a final deal can be agreed. What I am not saying is that WTO is necessarily the end place, but it puts us in a much better bargaining position from which to move forward to look potentially at Canada plus, plus. We will already be out and in a much better position to achieve a proper deal with Europe. At the same time, we will not have lost the opportunity of striking trade deals with the rest of the world.

For those who say that we risk no Brexit at all, I have to say that, sorry, that simply does not equate. The Executive will still control the legislature. It is not Parliament’s job. At the end of the day, when we look at the detail with regard to money resolutions, Third Readings, and, finally, at the possibility of prorogation, the Executive has control. Members should not be put off; we will deliver Brexit as a Government.

01:01:00

John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington) (Lab)

I congratulate all the contributors to today's many faceted debate. It has been a healthy and straightforward debate where people have been honest with one another and straightforward, and I welcome that.

Mr Speaker, I also congratulate you on your typical display of dedication to the democratic process of this House. You have sat through every hour of every day of this debate, and, as always, you have assiduously performed your duties and done so with fairness, good grace and good humour and I am grateful for that.

In many of the recent vox pops in the media, people have expressed some frustration with the way that Members of this House have been dealing with the response to an implementation of the referendum decision. I say mildly—very mildly at this hour of the morning—that it has not helped that some of the Executive have ascribed false motives to Members across the House with whom they disagree and have accused them of playing games. I do not believe that Members have been playing games; they have treated this matter with the seriousness that it deserves. The vast majority of hon. Members have lived up to the adjective in their title and have behaved honourably. In this debate, hon. Members are asserting the very role ascribed to them: to represent their constituents and to do so to the best of their ability; to exercise their judgment in the long-term interests of their constituents, yes, but, as we have seen from speaker after speaker today, in the long-term interests of this country as well.

For too long, Parliament has been taken for granted by successive Executives. What we are witnessing at the moment is not a coup, as was reported in one newspaper, but an overdue redressing of the balance between the Executive and Parliament and within our democratic system. It is a simple and not a very radical rebalancing and, as we have heard in this debate, the overwhelming majority of Members are seeking not to ignore the referendum result, but to make sure that we do not have imposed on us a Brexit that undermines our economy, costs people their jobs and threatens their livelihoods. Members here are seeking to do their best by their constituents and by the country. They have done that tonight with candour and, in many instances, with some courage.

Let me just turn to some of the many excellent contributions in this debate—there were so many that I will not be able to refer to them all. There are Members on the Government Benches who, with straightforward honesty and, yes, with some courage, expressed their views in opposition to their own party's position.

The right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith) expressly set out his views and concerns about the impact that this deal would have on his constituents, and his view that there is a need to go back and get another deal. The hon. Member for Upper Bann (David Simpson), on behalf of the DUP, honestly expressed the concerns of his party with regard to the backstop. He said clearly that nothing has changed in recent weeks from the promises that there might be some legal assurances that could be provided. I have some disagreement with the right hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson); I do not believe that this is some plot by the deep state.

We have heard from Government Members who have resigned their positions to stand firm on their principles, including the hon. Member for Fareham (Suella Braverman). We have heard from the hon. Member for Bournemouth West (Conor Burns), who explained very honestly that, in his view, this is a fundamentally flawed deal. The hon. Member for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg) extremely eloquently demonstrated that, in his view, the political declaration in particular is a

vacuous statement. The hon. Member for York Outer (Julian Sturdy) expressed his grave concerns, saying that this could be a gamble that could cost growth and jobs.

We heard from the hon. Member for North West Leicestershire (Andrew Bridgen), who is in his place, as well as the hon. Member for Gillingham and Rainham (Rehman Chishti) and the right hon. Member for Chelsea and Fulham (Greg Hands), who gave us the expertise that he has garnered over the years, particularly with regard to European relations. We heard from the hon. Members for South East Cornwall (Mrs Murray), for Amber Valley (Nigel Mills), for Witney (Robert Courts) and for Newton Abbot (Anne Marie Morris), all of whom expressed their honest views that this deal will not provide the certainty that they or their constituents want.

A number of my hon. Friends, with some emotion, expressed their understanding of the motivation for a number of their constituents who voted leave. We heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool South (Gordon Marsden). This is the first time I have heard Tacitus quoted in this House; that was a breakthrough in itself. In fact, he quoted not only Tacitus, but Oliver Cromwell and Joan of Arc. In addition, my hon. Friend the Member for Scunthorpe (Nic Dakin) expressed very clearly how his community felt left behind in the overall processes of investment. Similarly, my hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders) spoke about the divided society. My hon. Friends the Members for Midlothian (Danielle Rowley), for Preston (Sir Mark Hendrick), for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Preet Kaur Gill), for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Gerald Jones) and for Stroud (Dr Drew) all explained the impact of austerity on their constituents that had motivated people in those constituencies to vote leave.

Other Members expressed their concerns about the need for more assurances, including my hon. Friend the Member for Rotherham (Sarah Champion), who made a clear point about the need for assurances over human rights provisions. My hon. Friend the Member for Batley and Spennings Dale (Tracy Brabin) mentioned that the levels of deprivation in her constituency may well have motivated her constituents to vote leave. My hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker) explained to us all what our responsibilities are now—to come together, take this matter seriously and seek, as best we can, a way forward so that we can take as many people with us as possible.

We heard from others about the social consequences. I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Aberdeen North (Kirsty Blackman), who set out the economic consequences. The hon. Member for Orpington (Joseph Johnson) was extremely clear about the impact that this deal would have on the financial services of this country, and said that we need further assurances on protections. The same is true of my hon. Friend the Member for Huddersfield (Mr Sheerman), the hon. Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston), my hon. Friend the Member for Westminster North (Ms Buck), the hon. Member for Bracknell (Dr Lee), my hon. Friend the Member for Hove (Peter Kyle) and the hon. Member for Edinburgh North and Leith (Deidre Brock), all of whom explained in detail the social, cultural and economic consequences that this deal would have in their particular areas.

We heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff West (Kevin Brennan), and my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury (Rosie Duffield) spoke about the impact on her community, particularly on the university. There were others, including my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Stella Creasy), the hon. Members for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss) and for Edinburgh West (Christine Jardine), and my hon. Friend the Member for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter), who went beyond the economic consequences to discuss the social and cultural consequences in his multicultural constituency.

I thank those Members who have brought their ideas forward including those who have supported the “Common Market 2.0” proposals such as my hon. Friends the Members for Manchester Central

(Lucy Powell) and for Feltham and Heston (Seema Malhotra). But I also thank those Members who, yes, have been very honest and straightforward about their view that there should be another public vote, including my hon. Friends the Members for Ilford North (Wes Streeting), for Huddersfield, for Hove and for Feltham and Heston, who all expressed our own frustration—what has been happening over the last two years in these negotiations that has brought us to this situation?

This debate has been an exemplary demonstration of this legislature performing its constitutional role. It has confirmed for me, and I believe for many other Members, the belief that the deal we will vote on tomorrow is not supported by a majority in this House, and possibly—

Dr Fox

What is Labour's plan?

John McDonnell

I will come on to that—[Interruption.] I will come on to that, if the right hon. Gentleman will allow me to finish. We have maintained a level of respect in this debate so far—let us try and keep it like that.

I believe that this deal will not go through tomorrow—it will not have the support. But I think we have increasingly found tonight that we recognise that our first responsibility is to avoid the catastrophe of a no-deal Brexit. The House spoke clearly on this only recently when voting on the amendment to the Finance Bill tabled by my right hon. Friend the Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper). Let me remind the House of some of the assessments that motivated that vote at that stage. We have had some reference to them tonight—it is about the impact of no deal. The Government's own economic analysis put the potential cost of a no-deal Brexit at nearly 10% of GDP. The Bank of England said that it could cause more economic damage than the financial crisis of 10 years ago, including unemployment of 6% and a 14% hit to house prices. The CBI has warned—

Andrew Bridgen

The shadow Chancellor says that the prediction is that a no-deal Brexit could cost the UK economy 10% of GDP. Would he bear in mind that total trade—import and export—with the European Union comes to only 9.5% of our economy altogether?

John McDonnell

The consequence predicted by the Bank of England is about the long-term impact over time. Yes, we can treat some of these assessments with scepticism, but it is not just the Bank of England—it is the Treasury itself, the CBI and other representative organisations, and the National Institute of Economic and Social Research as well. The concerns they have expressed have been flooding in. The CBI has warned of a “lost decade”. We can be in no doubt about the likely consequences of a no-deal Brexit, and we cannot say that we were not warned. I believe that this House will act accordingly and reject a no-deal Brexit.

The Prime Minister repeatedly warned that no deal is better than a bad deal. She may now be regretting saying that as she tries to persuade Members of this House, including those on her own Benches, to vote for a bad deal. Because let us be clear on one thing, and it seems that the House is very likely to be clear on it tomorrow: this deal is a bad deal. The cross-party Exiting the European Union Committee—

Mrs Sheryll Murray

Perhaps the shadow Chancellor would like to tell us exactly what his deal would be.

John McDonnell

I will come on to that.

We believe that this is a bad deal because of the advice we have been getting. Some of that advice came from the cross-party Exiting the European Union Committee, which unanimously warned that the deal

“fails to offer sufficient clarity or certainty about the future.”

I quoted Mervyn King in the debate a month ago. Let me remind Members of what Mervyn King, a former Governor of the Bank of England, said. He described the withdrawal agreement as incompetence of the highest order.

The result of that incompetence is that jobs are being lost and livelihoods are already being threatened. As has been mentioned, Jaguar Land Rover, citing factors including uncertainty around Brexit, has announced 4,500 job cuts. Ford is planning to cut 1,000 jobs in Bridgend. Honda will stop production at its Swindon plant for six days in April. Government Ministers are fully aware of the consequences of their actions. We recently debated the Government’s own analysis of something approximating to the Prime Minister’s proposals. The Government themselves admitted, as has been mentioned, that the economy would be 3.9% smaller as a result of us agreeing to this deal. To put that in context, that is a cost of over £80 billion. In the long term, the damage is even greater. The Government analysis also estimated that the impact of trade barriers alone could mean an average drop in wages of 3%—£800 a year in today’s terms.

I believe that this House will not vote for a deal that damages so badly the living standards of our constituents. We must also be aware of the political damage that would be caused by forcing through an agreement that clearly does not have the support of the people of this country and that contains a backstop which, in the words of the Attorney General,

“would endure indefinitely until a superseding agreement took its place, in whole or in part, as set out therein. Further, the Withdrawal Agreement cannot provide a legal means of compelling the EU to conclude such an agreement.”

None of that has been changed by what the right hon. Member for Belfast North (Nigel Dodds) described earlier today as “meaningless letters”.

Let me be clear what Labour is proposing. Our negotiating priorities would differ from this Government’s. We would prioritise a permanent and comprehensive customs union with a say in future trade deals. We would deliver a strong, collaborative relationship with the single market, and we would guarantee that the UK does not fall behind the EU in rights for workers, consumers and the environment. Tomorrow it will be clear that the Government’s deal does not have the confidence of the House, and that a new approach is needed.

Neil O’Brien

The former head of the European Council’s legal service, responding to the shadow International Trade Secretary’s call for a customs union in which the UK would have a say, has said:

“Obviously this is ruled out. It is contrary to the basic EU principle of autonomy of decision making. Don’t even think about it!”

Does the right hon. Gentleman think he knows better?

John McDonnell

The hon. Gentleman clearly has not been listening. My hon. Friend the Member for Brent North (Barry Gardiner) explained how we would, as a third country, be able to negotiate a deal that would give us that say. [Interruption.] If Government Members doubt that, they should give us the opportunity to start the negotiations.

Tomorrow this deal will go down, and it is now time to put the mistakes of the past two years behind us and clear away the debris of this deal and the Government's failed negotiations. It is clear that, to break the deadlock and deliver a clear mandate for a new approach, we need a general election. It is time to let the people have their say.

If that is not achievable, this House will need to work together to secure the best compromise to protect our country, and the Executive need to recognise that Parliament must rule on this matter, not the Executive. At that stage, Members may want to confirm that new deal with the people in a public vote. People will be looking to us to judge whether we have the maturity, good sense and commitment to our country and the national interest to secure a deal that protects jobs and the economy. I believe we can live up to that, and we must.

01:17:00

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr Philip Hammond)

This has been a wide-ranging and interesting debate that has exposed clearly the different and passionately held views on all sides of the wider argument about Brexit. In my contribution to this debate on 6 December, I set out the economic case for a deal, the damage that would be likely to result from disruption of cross-border supply chains in a no-deal scenario, and how a deal would deliver a dividend for the UK economy in terms of both economic growth and the public finances. Those arguments remain valid, and you will be relieved to hear, Mr Speaker, that I do not intend to repeat or elaborate on them.

We have heard arguments in favour of the full range of options for both exit mechanics and the future relationship between the UK and the EU. Indeed, I think I heard pretty much the full range within the speech of the hon. Member for Brent North (Barry Gardiner). At one moment, I thought he might be on the brink of applying for associate membership of the European Research Group.

A large group of my hon. Friends recognised in their contributions the logic of the Prime Minister's deal and the need for a compromise so that we can move on as a country. My hon. Friends the Members for Stafford (Jeremy Lefroy), for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake), for Harborough (Neil O'Brien), for Chichester (Gillian Keegan), for Waveney (Peter Aldous), for Gloucester (Richard Graham), for Hitchin and Harpenden (Bim Afolami), for Taunton Deane (Rebecca Pow), for Elmet and Rothwell (Alec Shelbrooke), for North West Norfolk (Sir Henry Bellingham), for Maidstone and The Weald (Mrs Grant) and for Halesowen and Rowley Regis (James Morris), and my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for North East Hertfordshire (Sir Oliver Heald), all made that point. I think my right hon. Friend the Member for Chelsea and Fulham (Greg Hands) was in that category as well.

My hon. Friend the Member for North West Norfolk probably summed it up best when he said that he himself would like "a 100% Brexit" but recognised that only 52% voted for it, so that to unite the country we all have to compromise. This is a time for individual sacrifice in the greater good.

Two of my hon. Friends were a little more blunt in their contributions: my hon. Friend the Member for Monmouth (David T. C. Davies) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Dame Cheryl Gillan) recognised explicitly that their motive for voting for the Prime Minister's deal was a fear that the alternative might be no Brexit at all.

Peter Kyle

The Chancellor is praising other people for compromise, but if the deal is defeated tomorrow, will he stick to that principle and will he compromise further with other people who are expressing other views, particularly those of us who think that the public should be brought back into this discussion?

Mr Hammond

The deal that the Prime Minister has presented to Parliament very clearly is a compromise between the views of people on both sides of this argument. It will not deliver 100% of what anybody wants, and the Prime Minister herself has recognised that only this afternoon.

I want to mention my right hon. Friend the Member for New Forest West (Sir Desmond Swayne), because I think he summed up what is still a dilemma for many—that the middle is being squeezed from both sides—and I wish him well in his consideration of these important issues over the next 24 hours.

Opposition Members made many points. A group of them—the hon. Members for Rotherham (Sarah Champion), for Gedling (Vernon Coaker) I think, for Blackpool South (Gordon Marsden), for Scunthorpe (Nic Dakin) and for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Gerald Jones)—while clearly rejecting the Prime Minister's deal, which I acknowledge, were all I think signalling that they would wish to be able to support a deal and to find a way forward, explicitly recognising that no one is going to get everything that they want.

I listened carefully to the contributions and the concerns that were expressed, and I believe that the architecture of the Prime Minister's deal is capable of accommodating such concerns if that is what we as a nation want to do. It is in that spirit that the Government have accepted the amendment proposed by the hon. Members for Bassetlaw (John Mann) and for Don Valley (Caroline Flint). However, we must distinguish between adjustments to the negotiated future relationship and seeking to renegotiate the withdrawal agreement—something that is simply not deliverable. I shall return to that theme later.

A number of hon. Members on the Opposition Benches—the hon. Members for Bath (Wera Hobhouse), for Aberdeen North (Kirsty Blackman), for Midlothian (Danielle Rowley), for Edinburgh West (Christine Jardine) and for Huddersfield (Mr Sheerman)—simply wished to turn back the clock and pretend that this whole thing had never happened. I urge hon. Members expressing that view to consider carefully the wider consequences for our political system if that were to happen. I would say to Scottish colleagues who expressed that view that their arguments would be more powerful if they could show an ability to consider the consequences for the UK as a whole, as well as the consequences for Scotland.

I thought the hon. Member for Manchester Central (Lucy Powell) made a crucially important point, which is that the House needs to find a way to show what it is for, not just what it is against. She went on to make, I think, the sole pitch of the evening for the Norway model.

Joseph Johnson

Has the Chancellor by any chance read the powerful letter in today's Financial Times from the former EU Financial Services Commissioner, Jonathan Hill? He said that he had yet to meet anybody who felt that the Norway model would work for the UK's financial services industry. In fact, he felt that EEA members had so little influence on the EU's rule making for financial services that they were grateful if anybody even replied to any of their correspondence.

Mr Hammond

I have been making effectively the same point myself for about the last year. We concluded that the EEA model would not work for Britain's most important sector, financial services. The deal that the Prime Minister has negotiated has within it good and strong provisions for financial services and will be a much better result for the financial services industry than the EEA model would be.

Lloyd Russell-Moyle (Brighton, Kemptown) (Lab/Co-op)
rose—

Mr Hammond

I will give way briefly to the hon. Gentleman and then I must make some progress.

Lloyd Russell-Moyle

Will the Chancellor explain to us, then, how this deal gives our country more say in how Europe defines its financial services, which we will want to continue to trade with, compared with what we currently have as members?

Mr Hammond

Without wishing to digress too far, the simple point is this. Under an EEA model, the whole of the UK financial services sector and all its sub-sectors would be subject to European Union regulation in perpetuity, without any ability to opt out. Under the model that we have agreed with the European Union under this deal, we will be able to seek equivalence where it is right for us to do so and not to seek equivalence where it is clearly not in our interest to do so, for example in the insurance sector.

A group of my hon. Friends—my hon. Friends the Members for North West Leicestershire (Andrew Bridgen), for Bournemouth West (Conor Burns), for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg) and for Fareham (Suella Braverman)—made the case for what I will call an ideological Brexit: leaving with no deal and without any fear of the consequences. I profoundly disagree with them, but I respect their arguments. They are sincerely made and genuinely held.

A further group of my hon. and right hon. Friends—my right hon. Friends the Members for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith) and for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson) and my hon. Friends the Members for York Outer (Julian Sturdy), for South Dorset (Richard Drax) and for Amber Valley (Nigel Mills)—made the case for getting a better deal and, implicitly, if that was not achievable, leaving without a deal. I have to say that getting a better deal is not a realistic outcome at this stage in the process. I will return to that theme in just a moment.

Finally, the argument was made by my hon. Friends the Members for Orpington (Joseph Johnson), for Bracknell (Dr Lee) and for Totnes (Dr Wollaston) and by the hon. Members for Ilford North (Wes Streeting), for Walthamstow (Stella Creasy), for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter), for Stroud (Dr Drew) and for Westminster North (Ms Buck) for a second referendum. Most of those Members were clear that, in arguing for a second referendum, what they are hoping to achieve is a reversal of the Brexit decision.

With just 73 days left before we leave the European Union, we have to recognise the basic architecture of the process we are engaged in, the constraints within which we are operating and the nature of the decision we are faced with. We in this Parliament have essentially three routes open to us over the next few weeks: a negotiated deal where both the divorce arrangements and the future relationship, as well as how we manage the process in an orderly way, are agreed with the EU, with an implementation period guaranteeing a smooth transition; an exit with no deal and no transition, where key elements of the divorce such as the financial settlement will ultimately be determined by the courts, where protections for citizens will be unilateral, with an abrupt end to single market access and other privileges of membership for both businesses and citizens, and where there will be no agreed framework for managing the process of resolving disputes, with all the attendant risks of disruption that that will bring; or the third option, a revocation of the article 50 notice and no Brexit at all.

Wes Streeting

I am grateful to the Chancellor for giving way. Throughout this process he has been far and away the coolest head around the Cabinet table, constantly advocating for the economic interests of the deal over some of the hotheads, many of whom left the Government. So why on earth, at this late stage, is he still countenancing the prospect of no deal? How can he justify spending billions of pounds on preparing for a no deal that he does not want, that the Prime Minister does not want, that this House does not want, that the country does not want and that businesses do not want? It is fuelling uncertainty, it is adding to anxiety and it is costing the taxpayer. It is reckless and irresponsible. Why on earth is a serious person such as the Chancellor still persisting with this absolute fantasy? It is a disgrace. Rule it out!

Mr Hammond

Mr Speaker, we are engaged in a debate here and, whether the hon. Member likes it or not, a number of my colleagues have advocated the merit of a no deal exit. I have made it very clear that I do not agree with them, but I respect their position because it is a sincerely held position, consistently expressed. While I do not agree with them, I will vigorously defend their right to express their point of view.

Those are the three possible outcomes from where we are now.

Stella Creasy

Will the Chancellor give way?

Mr Hammond

I will not give way; I need to make some progress.

It is clear to me that the majority of this House is opposed to no deal, for very good reason in my view. When the British people voted narrowly to leave the EU, they did so at the end of a campaign that had emphatically promised them a better life outside the EU. Like the vast majority of us in this House, I won my seat at the general election on a manifesto pledge to deliver on that referendum decision. So although I did not make those promises, I feel bound to ensure that we not only deliver Brexit but do so in a way that makes good on the promise of greater prosperity. A no-deal Brexit would not do that and would therefore, in my view, be seen as every bit as much a betrayal as no Brexit at all.

Stella Creasy

I thank the Chancellor for giving way. He has just said that it is right for this country to do Brexit in a way that would bring prosperity. Will he say which of the Brexit scenarios, which his Department has done the figures for, show this country being better off?

Mr Hammond

It is very clear, and I have had the discussion in the Chamber many times, that the closer our relationship with the European Union, the closer the trading partnership we are able to maintain and the less friction there is in our trading relationships, the greater our prosperity and our economic growth will be. A no-deal Brexit would not do that.

I believe we have an obligation to deliver Brexit, and to do it through a negotiated deal that protects Britain's jobs and Britain's businesses. At the other extreme, a revocation of article 50 would indeed be seen as a betrayal. It would reinforce disillusion with the political system and it would seriously risk fuelling populism at a time when we in this country can least afford it.

David T. C. Davies

Will my right hon. Friend confirm that all the statistics, which are being thrown around somewhat inaccurately by some in this Chamber, show that under every and any scenario Britain will be better off? It is simply a case of how much better off—that is what we are arguing about.

Mr Hammond

My hon. Friend is of course right. A number of hon. Members have appeared to suggest in their remarks that we might be absolutely worse off in certain circumstances. The analysis the Government have published shows that that is clearly not the case. The country will be better off. The economy will grow in every modelled outcome. The question is merely by how much.

I believe the great majority of right hon. and hon. Members have either come or will come to the same conclusion as me: that the only Brexit that will protect our economy for the long run while honouring the referendum decision is a negotiated, orderly agreed Brexit, with an implementation period to allow a smooth process from our membership of the EU to a future close partnership with the EU that protects the vital trade, economic security and cultural links between the UK and our neighbours—in short, a deal.

Lucy Powell

I thank the Chancellor for his generous comments earlier about my contribution. To be clear—I say this to offer an olive branch to the Government—the EEA, Norway-plus, common market 2.0 option would involve us voting for the withdrawal agreement, but with a different political declaration that would more closely align us with the single market and the customs union. He might want to think about that before dismissing it.

Mr Hammond

The hon. Lady acknowledges something that the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster said in his contribution a couple of days ago. It is important for us to remember that any form of negotiated solution requires a withdrawal agreement, and that has to include provisions around the financial settlement, citizens' rights and the Irish border. The EU has made it clear that it is not prepared to renegotiate the withdrawal agreement that has already been negotiated.

I am not suggesting that all those who recognise the need for a deal support the Prime Minister's deal. I know that that is not true, but I want to make the case that this deal can provide a way forward for all those who support a deal. I want to explain why those who call for a deal, but not this deal, as a number of Members from all parts of the House have done—people who dream of a

negotiated arrangement without the Irish backstop or of single market access without the entry fee and without free movement of people—are simply dreaming, because the deal that is on the table represents the high water mark. A withdrawal agreement is a necessary precondition to any negotiated deal with the EU and to any form of transition or implementation period. Without a withdrawal agreement, the EU will not negotiate any form of future relationship.

On citizens and money, we have reached good outcomes in the withdrawal agreement. On the Irish protocol, clearly none of us is comfortable with the temporary backstop arrangement, which is why all of us—the UK Government, the Irish Government and the EU—will be seeking to avoid its use under any circumstances and have committed to using our best endeavours to ensure that it will never be used and that in the unlikely event that it is, it is replaced by new arrangements as rapidly as possible. It is not a trivial point that the backstop fundamentally challenges the EU's core principles.

We should be in no doubt, either, that the EU means what it says about the withdrawal agreement not being open for renegotiation. If we want a negotiated future relationship of any kind—I say this to the hon. Member for Manchester Central—it will be based on the withdrawal agreement that is before the House tonight.

Sir John Hayes

We have heard once again that the backstop is undesirable and no one wants it. We have heard that it is temporary and an insurance policy. Every insurance policy is time-limited. If neither side wants it and everyone acknowledges that it is temporary, why can we not put a date on it and end it at a particular time? Surely that is not unreasonable.

Mr Hammond

I do not know how much engagement my right hon. Friend has with the insurance industry, but it would baulk at the notion that an insurance policy is time-limited. If someone is covered by an insurance policy against the acquisition of some terrible disease, such as asbestosis, it may be 10 or 20 years later that they discover they are a sufferer. They would expect the insurance put in place to cover them. The European Union and the Irish Government are very clear that the withdrawal agreement is negotiated on the basis that the backstop provides an absolute reassurance that in every circumstance, the Irish border will remain open.

The Prime Minister said earlier this evening that her deal is a compromise, and she was clear in her Lancaster House speech at the outset of the process that achieving an agreement would require compromise. The political declaration that has been achieved has exceeded our expectations in the commitments that the EU has made: an agreement to construct the closest economic relationship between the EU and any advanced economy in the world; a free trade area for goods with no tariffs, no fees, no charges and no quantitative restrictions; a commitment to an ambitious relationship on services and investment, including financial services, building on the most ambitious achievements of EU trade deals; and agreement to further co-operation across a wide range of sectors, from transport to energy and data. It provides a strong basis on which to negotiate the legal text of our future partnership agreement, and the Prime Minister has made it clear that we expect Parliament to play a prominent role as we shape the political declaration into a legally binding text.

Alison Thewliss

Despite what the Chancellor has just set out, the reality is that nothing he has described tonight will be as good as the situation we have now as an EU member state.

Mr Hammond

It is a balance, and I have personally come to the conclusion that the damage that would be done to our political system, the resulting instability and the economic consequences mean that the economic cost of going back would outweigh the economic cost of going forward. I am sorry if the hon. Lady does not agree, but I can assure her that I have thought very long and hard about this.

Those who believe, as his tests suggest the Leader of the Opposition does, that it is possible to have the exact same benefits of being in the EU while being out of it—[Interruption.] I know that the shadow International Trade Secretary agrees with me, because he wrote so in *The Guardian* this morning. Those people are simply wrong. I recognise that there are people on the Conservative Benches who have a principled objection to the Prime Minister's deal. I respectfully disagree with them, but I recognise that their motives are honourable.

I wish that I could be as charitable about the Leader of the Opposition and the shadow Chancellor. They say they reject the Prime Minister's deal because they want a strong and collaborative future relationship, but the Prime Minister's deal delivers that. They say they want fair management of migration in the interests of the economy and communities, but the Prime Minister's deal delivers that too. They insist on measures to defend rights and protections and to protect national security and on the capacity to tackle cross-border crime and to deliver for all regions and nations of the UK, but the Prime Minister's deal does all those things already. The only one of the Labour leader's tests that the Prime Minister's deal does not meet is the demand that Britain should receive, as a non-member, the exact same benefits of membership—[Interruption.] I did not say the same thing. Even the Leader of the Opposition must be able to work out that such a demand could never be delivered, and of course that is why he made it. I say to him that it is time to put the national interest first, to stop chasing unicorns and to start engaging in the real debate.

The deal before the House honours our pledge to implement Brexit, delivering control of our borders, laws and money, while also fulfilling our vision for a future partnership with the EU that will support Britain's prosperity and security in the years ahead. In short, it delivers the Brexit promised in the referendum. That makes it a remarkable achievement—a compromise that everyone in the UK can get behind, however they voted in the referendum. The ability to compromise and find a way through is, after all, one of our great strengths as a nation—it is what gives our society its resilience. It is a characteristic that has been less in evidence in the Brexit debate over the last couple of years, but one that we need to rediscover as a matter of urgency.

No one is going to get exactly the Brexit they want, but in this deal we have a way forward that everyone can live with. Time is not on our side. We as a House now need to move swiftly and decisively to get behind the deal, to make the tough choices needed to simultaneously deliver the Brexit people voted for, protect our economy and our national security and give people the brighter future they were promised. Neither no deal nor no Brexit will allow us to come together as a nation and move on. Both would leave a sizeable proportion of the population feeling cheated and betrayed. The deal is the compromise that can bring the whole nation together, and I commend it to the House.

01:45:00

Ordered, That the debate be now adjourned.—(Jo Churchill.)

Debate to be resumed tomorrow (Order, 9 January).