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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

Friday 29 March 2019

House of Commons

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The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE (TODAY)

Ordered,

That, at this day's sitting, the Speaker shall put the questions necessary to dispose of proceedings on the motion in the name of the Prime Minister relating to the UK's withdrawal from the European Union not later than 2.30pm; such questions shall include the questions on any amendments selected by the Speaker which may then be moved; the questions may be put after the moment of interruption; and Standing Order No. 41A (Deferred divisions) shall not apply.—(*Mr Cox.*)

United Kingdom's Withdrawal from the European Union

Mr Speaker: Order. Before we get under way with the debate, I would like to ask the House to join me in thanking, extremely warmly, Graeme Cowie and Vaughne Miller, brilliant members of staff in the Library, for producing, under extreme pressure of time, a comprehensive and informative brief for this debate, not least in response to the representations of colleagues yesterday afternoon. They are wonderful servants of the House and we say thank you to them. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."]

We now come to the motion on the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the European Union. I inform the House that I have not selected amendments. I remind the House that under the terms of the business motion just agreed to, the debate may continue until 2.30 pm, at which time the question will be put.

9.35 am

The Attorney General (Mr Geoffrey Cox): I beg to move,

That this House notes the European Council Decision of 22 March 2019 taken in agreement with the United Kingdom extending the period under Article 50(3) of the Treaty on European Union, which provides for an extension to the Article 50 period to 22 May 2019 only if the House of Commons approves the Withdrawal Agreement by 29 March 2019; notes that if the House does not do so by that date the Article 50 period will only as a matter of law be extended to 12 April 2019 and that any extension beyond 22 May 2019 would require the UK to bring forward the necessary Day of Poll Order to hold elections to the European Parliament; notes that Article 184 of the Withdrawal Agreement refers to the Political Declaration between the UK and EU agreed on 25 November 2018, but that the EU has stated it remains open to negotiating changes to the Political Declaration; notes that the House is currently undertaking deliberations to identify whether there is a design for the future relationship that commands its support; notes that even should changes be sought to the Political Declaration, leaving the European Union with a deal still requires the Withdrawal Agreement; declares that it wishes to leave the EU with an agreement as soon as possible and does not wish to have a longer extension; therefore approves the Withdrawal Agreement, the Joint Instrument and the Unilateral Declaration laid before the House on 11 March 2019 so that the UK can leave the EU on 22 May 2019; notes that this approval

does not by itself meet the requirements of section 13(1)(b) of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018; and resolves that it is content to proceed to the next steps of this process, including fulfilling section 13 of this Act.

May I begin by thanking all Members for coming to the House on a Friday, and by apologising for the fact that we have had to convene today? The reasons we are convening today are partly to be found in the fact that today is 29 March, and as this House voted some months and years ago, it was today that should have been the day on which we left the European Union. However, we are—

Mike Gapes (Ilford South) (Ind): Where we are.

The Attorney General: Precisely: we are where we are. I intend not to review how and why we have arrived at this point, but to explain the motion that the Government have placed before the House.

On 21 March, the Council agreed a decision that if the withdrawal agreement is approved, we have a legal right as a country to an extension to 22 May 2019. If this withdrawal agreement is not approved, that extension will expire on 11 April. That means that any other extension that this House might desire to be agreed by the Union would be at its discretion, subject to the veto of 27 leaders. Therefore, by this evening, if the 11 o'clock deadline expires and the agreement has not been approved, that legal right will expire with it.

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): Will the Attorney General give way?

The Attorney General: I will in a moment, but not now.

This is, therefore, the last opportunity to take advantage of our legal right. The Government have taken the view that it would have been wrong to allow that time and date to expire without giving this House the opportunity to consider whether it should avail itself of the legal right or whether it should move into a position where any further extension will be at the discretion of the 27 leaders.

Stephen Doughty: Will the Attorney General give way on that point?

The Attorney General: I am not taking interventions at the moment; I will in due course. [*Interruption.*] I do not intend to take long. I want to set out clearly the choice before the House today.

The minimum necessary in order to secure this right, which is ours as a matter of law, is that the withdrawal agreement is approved. All negotiated exits from the European Union will require this withdrawal agreement to have been approved. The Union has made it abundantly clear, and the decision—

Stephen Doughty: On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: I hope this is a genuine point of order.

Stephen Doughty: The Attorney General refused to accept my intervention, Mr Speaker. I believe that he may be inadvertently misleading us. He spoke very importantly about the date, the significance of today and the importance of the deadline this evening. However, I know that the Government approached those of us working on the indicative votes process asking us whether

[Stephen Doughty]

we would reschedule our indicative votes business for today. If that is the case, why is there this significance? Surely the Attorney General is misleading us about the significance of holding the vote today.

Mr Speaker: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, but that does not require adjudication by the Chair. The Attorney General will have heard the point of order and it is open to him to respond to it or not, as he thinks fit.

The Attorney General: I will take interventions. I did not refuse the hon. Gentleman's; I was just asking whether he would be patient. Let me deal with his point now. The Government were considering asking that the indicative votes process continue this morning, so that we could have brought a motion this afternoon or this evening. That is exactly what the thinking was. There is no desire on the part of this Government to interfere with the process that the House is currently undergoing—on the contrary, the motion acknowledges it and notes it. I will come to it, if I may, in due course.

The minimum necessary to secure our legal right to an extension, therefore, is that this withdrawal agreement be approved. All negotiated exits that any Member of this House might conjecture or dream of will require this withdrawal agreement. Therefore the House has before it a clear choice this morning: it can either approve this withdrawal agreement, knowing that by doing so it secures its right to an extension; or it can decline to do so and know, in doing that, that by next week there will be no right to an extension, that any extension applied for will require some clear indication of the pathway forward and a stable majority behind it, and, thirdly, that it will be subject to the veto of those 27 member states.

That brings me to the motion before the House. This motion sets out clearly that it is not a meaningful vote pursuant to section 13(1)(b) of the Act. It is designed solely to give the opportunity to this House of taking advantage of the right that we have in international law. Indeed, it could not be a vote under section 13(1)(b) precisely because, Mr Speaker, you have ruled—a ruling that the Government fully respect—that a meaningful vote cannot be brought back while it poses the same or substantially the same question to this House.

Therefore, this motion has been designed to comply with your ruling, Mr Speaker, and in complying with that ruling, it cannot comply with the requirements of section 13 of the withdrawal Act. We put before the House the choice that the House faces today. What this choice will bring is certainty to thousands of businesses and millions of individual citizens throughout this country and to 1 million citizens of our country residing in the European Union. That is a not inconsiderable benefit. That certainty will be because, by taking the step of approving the withdrawal agreement today, the House will set out a clear and certain pathway to our departure from the European Union.

Let me come now to the political declaration.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

The Attorney General: I will not give way now, but I will give way to Members in due course. I want to set out the choice before the House.

As the motion acknowledges, the political declaration is open to change. The Union has accepted that it is open to negotiating change and that it will consent to discuss it, and so the House is undergoing a process at the moment of seeing whether a stable majority can be found for any political solution for the future. Of course, the Government respect that process: they acknowledge that it is continuing and they accept therefore that further steps will be necessary to approve the political declaration in this House.

This House will have to ratify not only the withdrawal agreement, but the political declaration. So the Government will give consideration as to precisely how the full package will be approved with the political declaration. One option will be to introduce the EU withdrawal implementation agreement Bill before this House. If this agreement is approved today, the Government will introduce the Bill within the next few days.

Ian C. Lucas (Wrexham) (Lab): I am grateful to the Attorney General for giving way. Does he agree with me that the motion today flatly contradicts the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018, which specifically provides that both the political declaration and the withdrawal agreement must be in place before we comply with the Act?

The Attorney General: As the motion notes, this is not purporting to be a section 13(1) vote. This is simply designed to afford the House the chance of taking advantage of the legal right established by the Council decision. It is not a vote under section 13. There is nothing unlawful and certainly nothing procedurally improper about it. It is done to afford the House this chance.

Hilary Benn (Leeds Central) (Lab): I am grateful to the Attorney General for giving way. I want to ask him about the consequences for any further extension of this motion passing today. If we get until 22 May but in the week leading up to that it becomes clear that we have still not reached agreement on a political declaration, and if we ask the EU for a further extension, is it not likely to say, "I'm sorry—you can't have one because you did not take part in the European Parliament elections"? Therefore, defeating this motion today will at least give us the chance to make that choice with an extension until 12 April, when we could get a longer extension. We could not get that if we go to 22 May.

The Attorney General: I understand the right hon. Gentleman's point. I say straightaway that the answer is that this is the only right we have to an extension. If we move into next week without securing it, we take the chance that among those 27 leaders there will be vetoes.

The right hon. Gentleman asks me about European parliamentary elections. Plainly, the stated position of the European Union is that we would have to organise and stand in those elections if we went beyond 23 May. Some lawyers, of course, disagree with that stated position and say that it would not be necessary, but that is the stated position of the Union. The point, however, is that we have the opportunity here to embrace certainty.

What the right hon. Gentleman's prescription would have us do is take a chance on the good will of the 27 member states of the European Union granting us

another extension. The withdrawal agreement—everyone knows; the right hon. Gentleman knows—is an essential prerequisite for our departure from the European Union. That may be why he does not want to vote for it. The official Labour position is that it does not disagree or object to a clause or article of the withdrawal agreement. The country looking on must judge this. The Opposition do not object; they have not emitted a peep of disagreement with a single clause or article of that agreement, and their position today is that they intend to vote it down. What kind of cynicism is that?

The opportunity now is for us to embrace the certain legal right of an extension to 22 May. That will give us the opportunity to give certainty to the country and allow the process of reconsideration of the political declaration to take place.

Mr Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield) (Con): I am most grateful to my right hon. and learned Friend for giving way. I entirely agree that, of course, apart from the dates of 12 April and 22 May, any other extension for a longer period would have to be agreed with the other 27 member states, but was it not made quite clear when the Prime Minister was at the last European Union summit that an extension to 22 May was what was described as a “technical” extension for the purpose simply of bringing about what had been agreed fully and completely in this House? If we extend to 22 May without reaching that conclusion now, we run the serious risk that we will not be able to extend further at that date if we have not completed all parts of both the withdrawal agreement and the political declaration, but if we were to go back now and ask for longer, it would be given to us if we wanted to consider other options.

The Attorney General: My right hon. and learned Friend is a very distinguished and able lawyer, but I never knew that he had a crystal ball. The fact of the matter is that the European Union has not agreed to grant any longer extension. It will be subject to the veto of any of the 27, and it would certainly be subject to clear signs in the House that there was a stable majority for an alternative solution, and a stable way to deliver it.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

The Attorney General: I must make progress, but I will give way, particularly to the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant).

The reason for the motion today, and for the form of the motion, is that it enables the House to secure this legal right. It is the case that the Government make that the agreement is required in any event. Members on the other side do not dispute the requirement for the agreement to be passed, so we invite the House to secure the certainty of the extension; to continue the process of the political declaration reconsiderations; to enable us, by 22 May, to ratify the domestic implementing legislation; and to conclude discussions on the political declaration.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): The Attorney General's argument is basically that this is a way to guarantee certainty for business in the country. However, if today's motion is carried, there will be no certainty. The Government will not be able to ratify the treaty—I think that he accepts that they will not be able to do so—and a proper motion will still have to be introduced

in this House, and the other House, including both sides. There will still have to be a Bill, which will be the subject of contentious dispute. There is no certainty—if anything, today throws more uncertainty into the process.

The Attorney General: There will certainly have to be a Bill. There will have to be a process of ratification in the House, which is why, if it votes for the withdrawal agreement today, it would be surprising if it did not vote to implement the withdrawal agreement. This is the step that we need to take.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

The Attorney General: May I move on to the withdrawal agreement? First, I will give way briefly to the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Frank Field).

Frank Field (Birkenhead) (Ind): If we pass the motion, given that we have business on Monday to continue to express our preferences, and if Mr Speaker were willing, could we not introduce a motion that captured what we decide today—if that is to accept the divorce settlement—with the motion that the Father of the House, the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke), put to us to vote on this week, which came the nearest to being passed, so that we would have the divorce settlement and alternatives, including the customs union?

The Attorney General: Plainly, that would be open to the House to do. The problem is that we would have lost the legal right to the extension, so we would apply to the discretion of the Union for it to be granted.

Let me come back to the political declaration, because it is important that I should say a few more words about it. The process that is—

Sir William Cash (Stone) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I am seeking to catch the attention of the Attorney General, and wondered whether he might have a loss of hearing or something.

Mr Speaker: In my experience, the hon. Gentleman is both noticeable and audible.

The Attorney General: I will give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Sir William Cash), but let me complete my remarks on the political declaration. The process is being undergone by the House at the moment. The Government recognise that process and will in due course make decisions on how and if we can implement anything that might emerge from that. The whole point of the political declaration is that it cannot be negotiated with the European Union now.

What the Government are saying—and some amendments were tabled, I think, by the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent Central (Gareth Snell)—in connection with the next stage of the political declaration and its negotiation with the European Union is that there will be new mechanisms and new procedures so that the House can be properly consulted and have a role in the manner in which the political declaration, once it is finalised in the House, will be negotiated in that second stage. I can say to the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent Central—I shall give way to him in a moment—that the Government would have accepted the amendments that he tabled, with others standing in his name.

Gareth Snell (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Lab/Co-op): I thank the Attorney General for giving way. The amendment that I tabled with colleagues today was very clear. Any process for the House would have to be underpinned by legislation—it would have to form part of a withdrawal agreement implementation Bill, and there would have to be a clear role for the House to agree the future relationship before it was signed off with the European Union. Can he give confirmation at the Dispatch Box, if he introduces the Bill next week, that those measures will be in clear text, in that Bill, in black and white?

The Attorney General: We would have accepted the hon. Gentleman's amendments. Clearly, in terms of the detailed working out of those amendments, in discussion—[HON. MEMBERS: "Ah!"]. No, no, no—hon. Members can table an amendment. If it requires amendment to that legislation, we would obviously consider the detail carefully, but we would be minded to accept such.

Sir William Cash: I am most grateful to the Attorney General for giving way. He has referred on a number of occasions to the withdrawal and implementation Bill. He knows, as do the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union, the Prime Minister and others, that the European Scrutiny Committee has asked repeatedly over the past month for a draft or a copy of the withdrawal and implementation Bill. He has just said that if the withdrawal agreement goes through, the withdrawal and implementation Bill will follow. If the withdrawal agreement is not approved today, will the withdrawal and implementation Bill come to this House and be introduced in any event?

The Attorney General: What I can say to my hon. Friend is that we would certainly give it very careful consideration. We have taken the view up till now that, before the withdrawal agreement is approved, it is premature to publish the Bill. There are certain elements of it that still remain to be finalised. However, as I have said to my hon. Friend privately, the moment we are in a position to publish it, he, as Chairman of the Committee, will be among the first to see it.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

The Attorney General: I must make some progress. I am very conscious that it is Friday and that we need to move forward as swiftly as we can.

The House can take a single, decisive step today to afford certainty to the millions of people throughout this country who are waiting for it and to have a short—not prolonged—extension that will bring our exit from the European Union to 22 May. There will be no further uncertainty. The political declaration can be resolved in that time. The ratification of the Bill can proceed with any amendments that might be forthcoming in connection with the subsequent negotiating stage.

I submit to the House the responsible thing. I ask the House to consider and reflect carefully, because what we have before us today is the legal right to extend. No other extension is guaranteed; every other extension would require European parliamentary elections, as the right hon. Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn) said. We are therefore at an important crossroads for the purposes of this nation's future and its history, and I urge all Members of his House to embrace this opportunity now, when this withdrawal agreement, in its substance,

is in no way objectionable to any Member willing to consider moving forward with it. In those circumstances, what conceivable point can there be now in not embracing this agreement, subject to further discussions on the political declaration? I urge the House to vote for this agreement.

10.2 am

Nick Thomas-Symonds (Torfaen) (Lab): Members of this House secured a proper meaningful vote for a purpose. It was so that this House would be able to make an informed judgment on the future of our whole country. The point was to know not only the terms of the withdrawal but what the future relationship would look like—a future relationship that would shape our economy and our constituents' jobs and livelihoods for decades to come. To consider those two things together is vital; it is what this House should rightly expect, and what has always been promised, because it is central to the whole process.

Article 50 itself says:

"the Union shall negotiate and conclude an agreement with that State, setting out the arrangements for its withdrawal, taking account of the framework for its future relationship with the Union."

If we look at the withdrawal agreement, article 184 specifically refers to the political declaration and even identifies the particular document.

In their letter to the Prime Minister of 14 January, Presidents Juncker and Tusk said this:

"As for the link between the Withdrawal Agreement and the Political Declaration, to which you make reference in your letter, it can be made clear that these two documents, while being of a different nature, are part of the same negotiated package. In order to underline the close relationship between the two texts, they can be published side by side in the Official Journal in a manner reflecting the link between the two as provided for in Article 50".

It is also what the Prime Minister herself has always said. On "Sophy Ridge" on 21 November last year, this was her view:

"we agreed the withdrawal agreement in principle last week, the withdrawal agreement goes alongside the future relationship, it's the future relationship that actually delivers, if you like, on people's concerns in the withdrawal agreement."

Neil O'Brien (Harborough) (Con) *rose*—

Nick Thomas-Symonds: I will give way in a moment. I will just finish this part of my speech.

The Prime Minister continued:

"Getting that future relationship right is necessary but nothing's agreed until everything is agreed."

She is not known for her flexibility, so, unsurprisingly, on 14 January in the House, she said again:

"the link between them means that the commitments of one cannot be banked without the commitments of the other."

Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con) *rose*—

Nick Thomas-Symonds: Let me finish this section.

The Prime Minister went on:

"The EU has been clear that they come as a package. Bad faith by either side in negotiating the legal instruments that will deliver the future relationship laid out in the political declaration would be a breach of their legal obligations under the withdrawal agreement."—[*Official Report*, 14 January 2019; Vol. 652, c. 826.]

How many times have I heard the Attorney General argue from the Dispatch Box, when we have spoken about the backstop and the future relationship, about

the importance of reasonable endeavours and good faith in ensuring that we secure a future trade agreement in good time? Yet the Government have now decided to remove from our consideration in the motion today one of the documents against which we can judge bad faith.

Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con): The fact is that the withdrawal agreement would be accepted by the European Union—that is the first point. The second point is that it sorts out the implementation period and the money and, crucially, that it guarantees citizens' rights for my constituents, EU nationals and Brits abroad. Which of those factors does the hon. Gentleman actually disagree with? The answer is none.

Hon. Members: Answer!

Nick Thomas-Symonds: I will answer. We used to say that the political declaration was so vague that it was a blindfold Brexit. However, we also now know, because the Prime Minister has made it clear that she intends to leave office, that rather than this just being a blindfold Brexit, the Tory party is asking us not only to be blindfolded but to be led into a different room by a different Tory Prime Minister. Let us be clear: this will be a Prime Minister ultimately chosen by Conservative party members, who constitute a tiny part of the wider electorate. The Tory party can talk about the national interest, but it is not in the national interest for the future of our country to be decided by a Tory leadership contest.

Mary Creagh (Wakefield) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend for giving way. He is making excellent points and, in the process, demolishing the premise of the Attorney General's request to the House today. The Attorney General did not take my intervention, but in his speech he promised mechanisms and processes to Parliament to guarantee a future say. We acted in good faith on section 13 of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018, which put both these things together. With the Government today undermining that mechanism, why should we trust a word the Attorney General says?

Nick Thomas-Symonds: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Let me be clear: Labour Members will never leave a Tory Prime Minister free to rip up workers' rights and protections and to put the jobs and livelihoods of our constituents at risk in a Brexit that would be driven by ideology. As my hon. Friend set out, the motion before us today is clear, and the Attorney General is clear, that it does not even pretend to meet the requirements of section 13 of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act.

Martin Whitfield (East Lothian) (Lab): In the cul-de-sac of certainty that the Government are announcing today, is it not possible that they might seek to appeal or revoke section 13 at some date, which would get them out of their problem?

Nick Thomas-Symonds: Given the Government's conduct in negotiations in recent years, who knows? We can rule very little out.

James Cartlidge (South Suffolk) (Con): I am grateful to my five-a-side colleague for giving way. Will he kindly tell us: which bits of the withdrawal agreement does he disagree with?

Nick Thomas-Symonds: We have always been clear: the two documents—the declaration and the withdrawal agreement—have to be taken together. The chicanery of this Government in trying to separate them does them no credit whatsoever. The Government can seek to blame others because they cannot carry out the statutory approval process in their own legislation, but we are here today because this Government have manifestly failed on their central policy over the past two years. The handling of the negotiations has been frankly disastrous.

The Prime Minister took office in July 2016. It was then that she could have tried, after the referendum, to build a cross-party consensus on the way forward. The Prime Minister did not. She called a general election in June 2017; she lost her majority. Knowing then that she was leading a minority Government, again, she could have reached out across this House, and she did not.

Gloria De Piero (Ashfield) (Lab): People outside this Chamber will rightly wonder what on earth is going on today, so can my hon. Friend confirm, for the benefit of my constituents and the rest of the country, that the Labour party has voted repeatedly for Brexit, but for a different deal—for a Brexit that supports and protects jobs and workers? If the Conservatives would move their red lines a bit, we could honour the result of that referendum, as we all want to do.

Nick Thomas-Symonds: For months and months, my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition, the shadow Brexit Secretary and many, many others have made it clear to the Prime Minister that if only she would change her red lines, we could reach a consensus on the way forward.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that what we have heard today from the Attorney General is an attempt to dress up political shenanigans as a requirement to secure legal certainty, when in actual fact what the Government are trying to do is solve the Tory party's political problems so that they can usher in an unelected right-wing Prime Minister to negotiate—[*Interruption.*] Shut up! [*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order. Every hon. and right hon. Member of this House must be heard. No attempt should be made to shout someone down, and if it is made, be in no doubt: it will fail.

Joanna Cherry: Perhaps hon. Members on the Government Benches would like to go and join the mob outside. What this is about today is an attempt to solve the Conservative party's political problems and usher in a right-wing, unelected Tory Prime Minister to negotiate a Canada-style free trade agreement and a workers' rights-free Singapore-style economy.

Nick Thomas-Symonds: We talk about political chicanery today, and the hon. and learned Lady is absolutely right. Remember, as well, that today's was a non-binding motion. I appreciate that you have not chosen any amendments, Mr Speaker, but even if you had, they would not have been binding in any event and the Government could have wriggled out of them in due course.

Jim McMahon (Oldham West and Royton) (Lab/Co-op): I will take no lectures from the SNP, who failed to vote for a customs union that could have created the conditions for a compromise. Can my hon. Friend confirm that it is entirely conceivable—*[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. There is far too much noise. The hon. Gentleman must and will be heard.

Jim McMahon: It is entirely conceivable that the motion could be voted through today, but then when we are required to bring forward the meaningful vote, the exact same legislation could be voted down. What type of constitutional crisis would that create?

Nick Thomas-Symonds: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. This is promoting uncertainty rather than providing certainty.

Simon Hoare *rose*—

Nick Thomas-Symonds: I will give way to the hon. Gentleman, but then I must make some progress.

Simon Hoare: I am very grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way. It was the EU Council itself that separated these two strands of the process. Both strands have to be delivered. The letter that he referred to from Presidents Tusk and Juncker, while referring to both parts of the package, in no way suggested that they had to be voted upon on the same day or simultaneously. May I put it gently to the hon. Gentleman that he is dancing on the head of a pin to provide a fig leaf?

Nick Thomas-Symonds: The hon. Gentleman should read section 13 of the EU withdrawal Act, which he voted for and which is very clear that the two documents have to be approved together.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Nick Thomas-Symonds: I am going to make some progress; I have given way a number of times.

The Prime Minister signed off the withdrawal agreement and the political declaration in November. She was originally supposed to hold the meaningful vote on 11 December. Since the day she took the decision to abandon that vote—the day before it was due to take place—109 days have passed. She knew then that the deal was going to be defeated by a substantial margin, but she ploughed on. On 15 January, the Government suffered the biggest defeat in parliamentary history, by a margin of 230 votes, on the first meaningful vote. Two weeks later, on 29 January, the Prime Minister promised the House that she would change the withdrawal agreement:

“What I am talking about is not a further exchange of letters but a significant and legally binding change to the withdrawal agreement. Negotiating such a change will not be easy. It will involve reopening the withdrawal agreement”.—*[Official Report, 29 January 2019; Vol. 653, c. 678.]*

At this late stage in negotiations, any withdrawal agreement would have required the backstop. It was always totally unrealistic for the Prime Minister to pretend that she could drop the backstop entirely or make substantive changes to the withdrawal agreement, yet she wasted weeks and weeks on this fruitless pursuit, including voting for the amendment in the name of the hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale West (Sir Graham Brady), which required the Northern Ireland backstop

to be replaced by “alternative arrangements”. Those arrangements have not been secured and they could never have been secured.

On 12 March, the Government suffered the fourth largest defeat in parliamentary history, by a margin of 149 votes, on the second meaningful vote. And now the Government are trying to carve out the withdrawal agreement, in a last-ditch attempt to save a botched deal that has failed to even come close to commanding the support of a majority of this House. This Prime Minister has recklessly run down the clock. She knows that her deal is unacceptable and she has failed time and time again to listen and to change course.

Too often this Government have ignored motions of this House. It took Parliament to fight for a meaningful vote on the two documents, the withdrawal agreement and the political declaration, to be considered together. To suggest that they should be considered separately now is to go back on what the Government have been saying about the importance of the link between them for months and months.

Gareth Snell: I thank my hon. Friend for giving way. As always, he is giving a fine performance at the Dispatch Box highlighting the Labour party's position, but could I seek from him two points of clarity? As was made clear by my hon. Friend the Member for Ashfield (Gloria De Piero), the Labour party has on numerous occasions put forward what we consider to be an acceptable form of Brexit. If the Prime Minister were to relent on her red lines and accept that form of Brexit, and the Labour party were to consider that acceptable, can he confirm for me whether the Labour party would still consider that deal as requiring a confirmatory public vote? Secondly, when this deal fails this evening, our choice on 12 April will be no deal or a lengthy extension. Can he outline for me what length of extension the Labour party will be seeking and for what purpose?

Nick Thomas-Symonds: The purpose of the extension is always the critical issue. Let me just say, in respect of the issue of a—*[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. Mr Seely, calm yourself. Your attempt to intervene was politely rejected. Do not holler across the Chamber, man. Calm yourself—Zen.

Nick Thomas-Symonds: I say to my hon. Friend that we have raised the idea of a comprehensive customs union for months and months. That has not been properly considered because of the Prime Minister; it is nothing to do with the Opposition. Let me be clear: we will never mortgage all our futures on the outcome of a Conservative party leadership contest which most Members have no control over at all and would have to sit back and watch.

Without the clarity and protections that we need in the political declaration, we should not approve this withdrawal agreement. Today's vote is a shoddy gimmick from a desperate Government trying to hide away from the reality that a meaningful vote on the political declaration and the withdrawal agreement still needs to be brought back to the House. For months and months, the Prime Minister's deal has simply created division and discord when we needed consensus on the way forward. The national interest is in building consensus for a future that protects the jobs and livelihoods of all our constituents. That is why the House should reject this motion.

10.20 am

Sir William Cash (Stone) (Con): We have heard a great deal—*[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. I understand the hubbub and air of excitement in the Chamber, for which I am sure the hon. Gentleman is suitably grateful, but the House must hear colleagues deliver their speeches—in the first instance, that of the Chair of the European Scrutiny Committee.

Sir William Cash: Thank you, Mr Speaker. We have heard a great deal about the process and the underlying reasons for this motion this morning, but we are really dealing with whether the withdrawal agreement should be passed and approved today, and if not, why not. The first point I make in that respect is quite simple and straightforward: under article 4 of the withdrawal agreement, we will, for a significant period, lose control over the lawmaking conferred on the House by virtue of our election as Members of Parliament according to the wishes of voters in general elections. It is unconscionable that, for whatever reason, the House should be politically castrated by the arrangements set out in article 4. For that reason alone, it is therefore unthinkable that the withdrawal agreement should be passed.

I just refer to the state of affairs within the German constitutional court, which takes precedence over all EU laws. That court often expresses rulings insisting that the EU can only operate or legislate in accordance with what the Bundestag has given it, and that EU actions are illegal if they depart from the terms in which the Bundestag gave that power. If that is good enough for Germany, it is good enough for this country, is it not?

I asked the Attorney General whether there will be a withdrawal and implementation Bill even if the withdrawal agreement goes down this evening. I got no answer, just as I received no answer from the Prime Minister to several questions I put to her about whether the Attorney General had given legal advice in accordance with the ministerial code. One characteristic of this debate is that, when we ask difficult questions, we tend to get no answer. That is not good enough, in terms of the accountability of the Government to the House. That is point No. 1, regarding control over laws. It is unconscionable.

Mr Richard Bacon (South Norfolk) (Con): I am grateful to my hon. Friend, with whom I have regular discussions. He makes an interesting point about Germany, and the fact that the Bundesverfassungsgericht has often made that point. However, is it not true that that actually amounts to no more than, to coin a phrase, a political declaration by a court? Were it tested in front of the European Court of Justice, it would be shown that German law is inferior to European law in the same way as for every other member state. That is why we in the United Kingdom have to have legal exit and stop being a member state, however painful the route to get there.

Sir William Cash: I understand my hon. Friend's point, but I have to point out to him that, under EU law, it has been made abundantly clear in several cases regarding the constitutional orders of member states—van

Gend en Loos, Costa and similar cases—that the European Court asserts superiority over the internal constitutional orders of the country in question. The reality is that the question he and I raise demonstrates a conflict over competence, because, as I have stated, the German constitutional court will not countenance direct contradiction of its own lawmaking.

The next point I wish to make regards the Northern Ireland backstop. I know that many Members are more than familiar with this; we have justifiably spent an enormous amount of time on this question. However, it really boils down to the constitutional status of Northern Ireland within the United Kingdom. The European Communities Act 1972—*[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. I am sorry to interrupt, but I think, if I may say so, that we should reflect on the fact that the debate is being widely viewed. It is rather discourteous when a Member is addressing the House for there to be a hubbub. Let us listen to the hon. Gentleman.

Sir William Cash: I add to that, Mr Speaker, that if Members are so blind that they do not want to listen to these points, it makes no difference to me. The points I am making are significant to the question of whether we agree to the withdrawal agreement.

Mr Bob Seely (Isle of Wight) (Con): My hon. Friend makes a series of powerful points, but is not the problem that he is letting the perfect be the enemy of the acceptable? Today we have the chance to leave the European Union, but he and others are preventing that from happening.

Sir William Cash: I of course want to leave the European Union, but the problem with the withdrawal agreement is that it does not, I assert, represent Brexit, in terms of repealing the 1972 Act. As I was saying, that is an Act of Parliament not only of Great Britain but of Northern Ireland. The constitutional status of Northern Ireland is therefore at stake, with respect to the question of the Northern Ireland backstop. There is no doubt about that.

Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP): Is it not the case that the withdrawal agreement would cause irreversible and lasting damage to Northern Ireland and our precious Union?

Sir William Cash: I heard the Prime Minister repeatedly mention our precious Union. The Northern Ireland backstop drives a coach and horses through the precious Union—that is the problem. As I understand it, that is precisely why the Democratic Unionist party will vote against the withdrawal agreement today—because it puts the Union at risk.

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): Is it my hon. Friend's view that we are not being shown today the Bill to implement the withdrawal agreement because it would reveal that we have to remove the repeal of the 1972 Act, or reintroduce all the European Union powers, proving that this is not leaving the European Union?

Sir William Cash: That is exactly the point. I see the Solicitor General chuntering a little. He is a good friend of mine, but I have to say that he knows this is a serious

[Sir William Cash]

point—the Attorney General referred to private conversations I have had, and I will now refer to one that I had with both him and the Solicitor General—and he acknowledges that it would need to be sorted out, because there is a serious worry.

What happened can be very simply stated. On 26 June last year, we passed the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018, section 1 of which states that the European Communities Act 1972 is to be repealed on exit day. Exit day operates in lockstep with whatever exit day turns out to be. However, the reality is that, because of the saving provisions, and under article 4, on the capacity of the Court to disapply enactments, it is just conceivable—indeed, it is highly possible—that issues of interpretation could arise.

We need to discuss this properly, but we cannot do so until we see the implementation Bill. I know that the Solicitor General agrees. In fact, some Secretaries of State—I will not disclose which—have told me that they think we should see a copy of the Bill, because until we see the drafting, we will be unable to judge its impact on the repeal of the 1972 Act, which itself is the anchor of the referendum. I repeat the point that the referendum was itself endorsed by a sovereign Act of this Parliament that transferred the decision to the British people, and the British people make that decision, in line with the wishes of the electorate.

Sir Bernard Jenkin (Harwich and North Essex) (Con): I am perfectly clear that whatever the public voted for in the referendum, or at the last general election, nobody had a clue that they would be voting for a withdrawal agreement anything like the one before the House today. May I ask my hon. Friend about a matter of good faith? I interpreted the Attorney General's remarks to be a suggestion that we should perhaps approve the agreement today in order to satisfy the technical terms of the extension agreed by the EU27, on the basis of some kind of ruse to get a further extension, even though we have not actually approved the withdrawal agreement and the political declaration in the terms that we said we would. Is that an act of good faith with our European partners?

Sir William Cash: I very much agree with my hon. Friend. Indeed, I will go further and say that the change of gear between 26 June, when the withdrawal Act received Royal Assent, and 12 July, when the White Paper that followed the Chequers proposals was published, demonstrated bad faith, because it must have been pre-planned while the withdrawal Bill—which I thoroughly agreed with and gave the Government every conceivable assistance in getting through—was going through Parliament. The reality is that it was produced only 10 days later, so we need only ask how the Government could write an 80-page White Paper without planning it some months in advance.

Mr Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green) (Con): My hon. Friend knows that I revere him when it comes to constitutional law. I wonder whether, in the course of his argument, he is not slightly making the case that we need to get to the implementation Bill, because only when we can debate that Bill will we be

able to decide what protections are left. I would love to hear him speak to the Bill, because I will certainly support his amendments.

Sir William Cash: My right hon. Friend makes a very good point. That is why I have just asked the Attorney General for an assurance—he did not answer my question—that if the withdrawal agreement is not approved today, the Government will bring in the Bill anyway. A lot of people are telling me, as Chair of the European Scrutiny Committee—I am pleased to see the Leader of the House shake her head—that if this agreement is rejected, it will not be followed by a Bill. Is that crystal clear? I look to the Leader of the House for confirmation. Is it quite clear that there will be no Bill if this agreement is rejected? She does not answer.

The European Council decision is yet another example of the manner in which this great country has effectively capitulated to the demands of the European Council. That is one of my greatest objections to the motion. Last March—a whole year ago—the European Scrutiny Committee produced a report stating that we should never have accepted the sequencing or the terms of reference laid down by the European Union. That was capitulation, not compromise. It is so important that the House recognises that in the vote today.

Lady Hermon (North Down) (Ind): I am enormously grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way—my patience has paid off. Let me take him back to his remarks about Northern Ireland. May I gently remind him that the DUP does not speak for the majority of people in Northern Ireland? May I also reflect on the fact that the Prime Minister cares deeply about the United Kingdom? She cares so deeply about the United Kingdom that the Good Friday Belfast agreement and the consent principle are protected in black and white in her withdrawal deal, and therefore the constitutional status of Northern Ireland remains the same: it remains in the hands of the people of Northern Ireland voting in a border poll.

Sir William Cash: I have great respect for the hon. Lady. I will only say that we have had this debate before and we differ on the matter. Of course I want to see the Good Friday agreement retained, because it has been a tremendous triumph, and I in no way wish to disparage that. However, there are very serious questions about the constitutional status of Northern Ireland as a result of the backstop. I have heard hon. Friends—good friends of mine—who themselves may have changed their minds on whether to support the withdrawal agreement, repeatedly objecting to the backstop. We have had the distinguished Attorney General and Solicitor General opining on the subject. We have had some very interesting outcomes. However, the reality is that the backstop is an insuperable impediment to the House agreeing to the withdrawal agreement.

James Cartlidge: My hon. Friend talks about opting back into the European Communities Act, which we all know is what will happen in the transition, but there is a key word there: “transition.” Does he accept that the risk of defeating the withdrawal agreement today is that we will stay in the European Communities Act forever?

Sir William Cash: No, because I have heard no suggestion, from either side of the House, that the repeal of the 1972 Act would itself be repealed—there is no question about that. The reality is that, because that is an Act of Parliament and therefore set in stone, I do not believe that will happen. Furthermore, the consequences of our moving on to the next phase will reinforce that. I can only say that the British people will be incredibly angry—devastated—if they find that the repeal of the 1972 Act is repealed. That would be a massive breach of faith with the British people.

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): I understand that my hon. Friend opposes the motion on the basis that he wants a clean break with the European Union, but does he not realise that he will be walking through the Lobby with people who want a very soft Brexit or no Brexit at all? Either he or they will be very disappointed.

Sir William Cash: I have witnessed over the past few weeks members of my own party, tragically, repeatedly going through the Lobbies with the Opposition. I even saw the Prime Minister going through the Lobby with the Leader of the Opposition on a certain motion. That is because of the enormous issues that are at stake in relation to the question of who governs us. That is really why this entire debate is so vital for our future. That is why repeal of the 1972 Act is central to that question.

Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con): I particularly appreciate my hon. Friend's remarks in respect of Northern Ireland, but the hon. Member for North Down (Lady Hermon) is precisely right. Will he reflect on the fact that bastions of Unionism such as the Federation of Small Businesses, the CBI, the Ulster Farmers' Union and Ulster chambers of commerce are all in favour of the withdrawal agreement?

Sir William Cash: I know that, and I have heard it, but so has the DUP.

Nigel Dodds (Belfast North) (DUP): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir William Cash: I simply say this before giving way to the right hon. Gentleman. The reality is that DUP Members sit in this House having been elected on a proposition. This issue is all about democratic decision making. It is about the honesty with which we approach it. It is to do with the trust inherent in our taking the instructions of the British people in accordance with the sovereign referendum Act.

Nigel Dodds: The Democratic Unionist party has never pretended that it represents the majority or everyone in Northern Ireland, but it represents more people than anybody else. The fact of the matter is that no party in this House that is in government in Scotland, Wales or here represents a majority. We have the same proportion of votes as the SNP in Scotland.

Let us be very clear. As the hon. Gentleman pointed out, never mind individual voices or business groups, every single Unionist party in Northern Ireland—the Ulster Unionists, the Traditional Unionist Voice, the Progressive Unionists—agrees that this is a problem for the Union. Let not people pretend otherwise. That is

why we have worked hard with the Prime Minister to try to get changes to the backstop that would have allowed us to vote for the withdrawal agreement. That is why we backed the Brady amendment. That is why we work with her. Sadly, we have not made sufficient progress, but let no one pretend that we do not speak for the Unionists of Northern Ireland.

Sir William Cash: I agree with every word that the right hon. Gentleman said. That is true. It is not good enough to talk about our precious Union and then to damage it. It is not good enough to say that we will not truly leave the European Union unless we regain control over our laws, which the Prime Minister said in the Lancaster House speech, and then for us to arrive at a point where we are politically castrated, precisely because for a number of years we will be put at the mercy of our competitors—for example, in relation to state aid. That is the key issue. It is not just the question of sovereignty in its own right; it is the practical impact.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Sir William Cash: It is important now for me to end my remarks—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear!"] I expected that from the rabble across the road. That does not trouble me one bit.

I have done my best over many years to ensure the democracy and sovereignty of this House, and I will never give way on that point. For me, this is a matter of principle. The record speaks for itself. I wish I could vote for this withdrawal agreement, but for me, it comes down to a simple question of integrity and principle. Anyone who wants to question me on that can do so, but I am doing this for the best of intentions, as a matter of conscience and as a matter of record.

10.43 am

Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): It is disappointing that, as I stand to speak on behalf of the Scottish National party and the Scottish Government, the Prime Minister has already walked out of the Chamber. I regret that that is the response we get from her, and it is all too common.

On the day that the Prime Minister told us the UK would leave the European Union with a deal, she has come to Parliament defeated and desperate. This is a Prime Minister who is willing to break every promise she has made to this House and to the people of the United Kingdom. This is a Prime Minister who has had to offer her own resignation to get her own party to support her bad Brexit deal. This is a Prime Minister obsessed with power but powerless. Instead of serving the interests of all these islands, this Tory Government are seeking to serve the interests of no one but the Tory party, and even that has not worked. The Prime Minister cannot pull her fractured party together, and we in this House and the rest of the UK will pay a price for that failure to seek a broader consensus. It is time they were stopped.

I take no credit for pointing out to the Prime Minister that at no time has she sought to reconcile the 52% who voted to leave and the 48% who voted to remain. All we seemed to get was the constant refrain that "Brexit means Brexit" and that we were leaving on 29 March. There was no attempt to go beyond the soundbites and to engage across this House or with the devolved

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Administrations. It has always been her way or the highway, and all she has done is sought to meet the demands of the European Research Group.

Neil Gray (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): My right hon. Friend sets out well the game-playing that has gone on. There is no doubt game-playing going on with the motion today, but it appears that some Labour MPs may be getting bought by that game-playing, in spite of the cost of this terrible Brexit and the damage it will cause for our poorest constituents, and the fact that passing the motion will usher in a right-wing Tory Prime Minister who is even worse than the disaster we have right now. Will he reflect on the damage that will be caused to the Labour party in Scotland if the motion is passed by Labour votes?

Ian Blackford: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. We are at a dangerous juncture. I appeal to Members on the Labour Benches to think very carefully about where we are today. If the Government somehow or other manage to get this motion through on the back of Labour MPs voting for it, we know that the Prime Minister will depart, and we will all be left in the hands of Tory MPs, who will appoint a new Prime Minister—a Prime Minister who, in all events, is likely to be a Brexiteer. I appeal to Labour Members: do not give that authority to the Conservative party. Do not be the midwives of Brexit. Do not allow this Tory Government, on the backs of a few Labour MPs, to deliver a hard Brexit that will imperil all our constituents.

Jim McMahon: Can we have a bit less of the holier-than-thou grandstanding from the SNP on this issue? Let us be honest: the SNP would be completely happy for the current deal—with all its faults and the danger to Northern Ireland—to be on the ballot paper in a people's vote, with the possibility that people could vote for it. Where is the integrity in that?

Ian Blackford: My goodness! This is a serious moment for all of us. I applaud the 1 million-odd people who marched in London last weekend and the 6 million people who want to see revoke on the ballot paper. I appeal to Labour Members: if you go through the Lobby today with the Conservatives, you are delivering a hard Tory Brexit, and you will pay a price economically for that. Thank goodness, in Scotland we have the opportunity to defend ourselves, and we will not allow ourselves to be dragged out of the European Union. It will usher in the day when the thing that so many Members tell us they want to preserve—the Union of the United Kingdom—will be over, because Scotland will and Scotland must become an independent member of the European Union.

Ian Murray (Edinburgh South) (Lab): The first thing I will say is that the SNP does not speak for Scotland. Secondly, the right hon. Gentleman needs to remember that everyone on the Opposition Benches—with the exception of a few, who are standing up for their constituents—is on the same side. His entire speech so far has attacked the Labour party, which tells us all we need to know about the nationalists. Rather than using his speech to attack the Labour party, when we will all be in the same Lobby later, will he tell us why he was not

in the Lobby with us for the vote on the customs union on Wednesday night, so that we could have got out of this mess?

Ian Blackford: I say to my hon. Friend—he knows I have respect for him—that I want us to unite. I am not attacking the Labour party—[*Laughter.*] They can laugh, but I am saying to Labour Members: do not be duped by voting for the Conservatives today; have some backbone and let us make sure that all of us are united. That is what I am appealing for. The Labour party has to reflect on the fact that in 2014 in Scotland that is exactly what it did—it joined with the Conservatives in Better Together. You would have thought that by now Labour would have learned the lesson that its members have become also-rans in Scottish politics because time after time they side with the Tories. One of these days the Labour party has to understand that it should be standing up with the people of Scotland. [*Interruption.*] Let me say to hon. Members who I can see gesticulating wildly, that that day of the referendum—[*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order. I am sorry, but there is a very disorderly atmosphere in the House, with sustained barracking and finger-pointing of the most unseemly kind. Please, let us try to lower the decibel level and treat each other with respect.

Ian Blackford: Quite right, Mr Speaker. I say to the Labour party that the day will come when there will be a referendum on Scottish independence. I hope that next time Labour decides to stand with the people of Scotland and we can get that safe passage towards independence and Europe.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Ian Blackford: I am going to make some progress.

There has been no attempt to engage across the House and no attempt to engage with the devolved institutions. It has always been the Prime Minister's way or the highway. There has been no appreciation that, rather than being sucked into reconciling herself with the European Research Group, the Prime Minister should have sought to work across party. Last Wednesday, the Prime Minister met Opposition party leaders. Many of us set out our positions, but crucially, when we extended an olive branch and sought to work with the Prime Minister, it was rejected. It was the Prime Minister who would not budge: transfixed, repeating the same old mantra and caught in a trap of her own making. Leadership brings responsibility. It has been sadly lacking in this case. It is little wonder that we are left in this situation where the Prime Minister is isolated: isolated from the other parties in this House and leaving the UK in a position of division.

Anna Soubry (Broxtowe) (Ind): I thank the right hon. Gentleman for giving way. I am really delighted that he is now looking at the substance of the Government's motion, because it is really important that all of us who see this motion for what it is and who are going to vote against it stick together and do not turn against each other. Can he help us with this? Has he had the opportunity, and would he welcome the opportunity, to speak to the Attorney General—I am sure the Attorney General is going to come off his phone in a minute, if somebody could give him a prod. [*Interruption.*] Thank you.

Hello. Has the right hon. Gentleman had the opportunity to speak to the Attorney General? Would he take that opportunity to speak to the Attorney General to discover whether it is the Government's intention to revoke section 13 of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act that we passed last year?

Ian Blackford: My right hon. Friend is absolutely correct. We have had no clarity from the Attorney General on that issue. Let me applaud her, Liberal Democrat Members, Plaid Cymru Members and the Green Member of Parliament, because we have all sought to work together. We have all sought—

Anna Soubry: And Labour.

Ian Blackford: And those on the Labour side as well. We have all sought to work together to bring unity to the Opposition and to present a credible alternative. I hope that on Monday we do that; that we can coalesce around a motion that we can support which sends a very clear message to the European Council ahead of its meeting on 10 April. We say to the European Union, on the basis of the Government being able to achieve a consensus across the Houses of Parliament, trust the Members. It is in that spirit that I say to all colleagues in this House—I plead with you—under no circumstances vote with the Government today. Do not make it easy for this Government to deliver us into a blind Brexit.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Ian Blackford: I am going to make some progress.

Mr Speaker, I do not think I will forget the Prime Minister failing to take responsibility for her own failings and blaming Parliament for the impasse, in so doing seeking to pit Parliament against the people in a quite shameless way. She made a catastrophic error of judgment, yet we are still waiting for an apology. Where is that apology, Prime Minister?

Today, we must close the door on the Prime Minister's proposal and move on. Parliament today must reject this shambolic proposal before us.

Colin Clark (Gordon) (Con): It is very kind of the right hon. Gentleman to give way. Does he agree with the Scottish Fishermen's Federation, the National Farmers Union, Scotland, the Scottish CBI and the Federation of Small Businesses that what is important today is that Scottish MPs, and all the MPs of the United Kingdom, vote for jobs and businesses in their constituencies? Voting against the motion makes no deal more likely and Scotland is watching the SNP.

Ian Blackford: I am very grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. I ask him to reflect on the fact that every local authority area in Scotland voted to remain. The people of Scotland can reflect on the fact that the 13 Conservative MPs have failed time and time again to stand up for the people of Scotland. When I hear the hon. Gentleman raising the unicorn of no deal, it becomes very simple. What he must do, along with his colleagues the so-called Scottish Conservatives, is to vote with us on Monday to support the motion on revocation and stop this Conservative Government driving Scotland out of the European Union. That is the way to protect jobs in Scotland.

Joanna Cherry: I am very grateful to my right hon. Friend for giving way. I am sure Scotland, unlike the Prime Minister, is watching and listening to him. Is he aware, like me, from talking to businesses in his constituency and businesses across Scotland, that the foremost consideration of businesses is preserving freedom of movement, for the benefit of the Scottish economy and because of Scotland's demographics? Is that one of the main reasons that SNP MPs cannot vote for this withdrawal agreement, because it ushers in the end of freedom of movement?

Ian Blackford: My hon. and learned Friend is absolutely correct. We have been enriched by freedom of movement. We have been enriched by those who have come to live and work and contribute to life in Scotland. It is perhaps the most shameful aspect of this whole consideration that we are turning back, that we are turning inwards and that we are closing the door on those who would come to Scotland and help us grow our economy. Our population has barely grown over the course of the past 100 years. It started to increase over the past decade. The Conservatives want to put on that handbrake, and to stop those who want to come and live and work in our beautiful country. We want them to come in and that is why not only must we reject this motion today, but, yes, we must stop Brexit.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Ian Blackford: I am going to make some progress, because I am aware that other people wish to speak.

We were promised another vote on the Prime Minister's deal, but because the Prime Minister knows she has no support for her deal she comes here to play games, to trick MPs into backing her disastrous deal. Yet it is still the same deal that the House voted against not once but twice. Mr Speaker, this deal should be dead. Before us are the terms by which the Prime Minister wants us to agree to withdraw from the European Union without any clarity about our future. This is a blindfold Brexit.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): I am very grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for giving way, but I beg him. I am standing in front of a plaque that says that we have more in common than divides us. He knows that on many issues we have put aside party and, sometimes very subtly, worked together. I beg him today, as he ends his speech, to come back a little bit. All of us believe that this is not an honest debate today, but a confidence trick—to trick us into misleading our constituents. We are nearly there. We can defeat this. Let us stay together.

Ian Blackford: I applaud the hon. Gentleman for that intervention because I agree with him, and that is precisely what we are seeking to do. I hope that all his colleagues—every single one of this colleagues—stay with us today, and we can defeat this Government.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Ian Blackford: I am conscious of time and I have been generous with interventions, so I now want to make some progress.

How can any MP agree to sleepwalk in behind a deal when they have no idea what it means for the future of our countries, our constituents and our communities. It

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is incomprehensible that anyone could even consider simply taking the Prime Minister's word for it, especially a Prime Minister who cannot even be truthful about living up to her word. Like her predecessor, the Prime Minister will ride off into the sunset after delivering crisis, chaos and further uncertainty for the UK. She has committed the ultimate betrayal: she is abdicating all responsibility. How humiliating, how reckless! History will remember her premiership as one defined by cowardice, falsities and negligence. I cannot believe that any leader could take us to this place. It is a disgrace.

There were constant promises to find consensus and to find a way forward, yet the Prime Minister has done as expected: she has run down the clock—only to ignore the wishes of Parliament and the wishes of the people, and engage in a game of blackmail and trickery to win support. It is an absolute outrage that those who go through the Lobby in support of the Prime Minister and the Government will be responsible for aiding and abetting the greatest act of self-harm in the United Kingdom.

The arguments against the Prime Minister's plan do not need to be rehearsed. They are well known in this House and they are well known to every household in the country, but it is not only the substance of the plans the Prime Minister has put together but the disgusting treatment the Prime Minister and the Tory Government have displayed towards the people of Scotland that need to be known in every household in Scotland.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): Some time ago, the right hon. Gentleman talked about the enrichment of free movement. Is it not the fact that the greatest enrichment of free movement enjoyed by Scotland has been free movement between the nations of the United Kingdom? Is it not ironic that he talks about the Prime Minister not paying attention to the 48% when he absolutely fails to pay attention to the 55% who voted to stay within the United Kingdom? When will he acknowledge that he is a Member of the Parliament of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, not just a Scottish Member?

Ian Blackford: My goodness, I was almost expecting the hon. Gentleman to burst into a chorus of "Land of Hope and Glory". Is he really suggesting that people from Scotland will not have the right to come to live and work in the rest of the United Kingdom? Is that what he is suggesting? Quite frankly, if he is, he should apologise because that is a disgrace. It is what we see from so many Tory Members—seeking to threaten the people of Scotland with sanctions—and it really lacks any degree of dignity.

The Tories really think they can do whatever they want to Scotland and get away with it. So much for the partnership of equals! We have been ignored, silenced and sidelined, with the futures of citizens across Scotland and the rest of the UK held to ransom by right-wing Brexiteers and the DUP. The Prime Minister has no mandate from Scotland and has no right to assert that her version of Brexit is the only version of Brexit. Lies brought the country to vote for Brexit in the first place, and people certainly did not vote to become poorer and be faced with the prospect of troops—troops—being

mobilised to manage basic services. How extraordinary that a Prime Minister of the United Kingdom is threatening us with troops on the streets, because that is the reality.

With one internal confidence vote and one parliamentary confidence vote, with the Government being held in contempt of Parliament for the first time in history, with scores of her Ministers resigning and with her flagship policy in ruins, the Prime Minister has no legitimacy or authority left to carry forward her policy or to speak for the country. The Prime Minister certainly does not have any authority, nor will she ever have authority in Westminster to tell the people of Scotland what to do. The people of Scotland will decide what is best for the people of Scotland. Now more than ever that reality needs to sink into the minds of politicians across this Chamber.

Bill Grant (Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock) (Con): Does the right hon. Gentleman have a kindly word for businesses in Scotland and for the over 1 million people in Scotland who voted to leave the EU?

Ian Blackford: Yes, of course I do, because businesses in Scotland know that the best way to protect their interests is to stay in the European Union. Every economic analysis of any substance that has been published has shown us that we will be poorer. I say to those in Scotland who voted for Brexit, "Of course we understand why you voted the way you did, and of course we will listen to your concerns." However, our obligation is to speak with everyone and to have an open conversation and dialogue about what is in the best interests of the people of Scotland—how do we grow prosperity in Scotland and how do we deliver a fairer Scotland?—and that is why independence offers the best option for us all.

Westminster clearly has no interest in doing what is right for Scotland if it votes for this motion this afternoon. Westminster has no authority over the rights and the freedoms of the people of Scotland, and Westminster will never—not ever—be an authority over the sovereign right of the Scottish people to determine our futures and to choose to be a European nation.

Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West) (SNP): Is it not interesting that while my right hon. Friend is talking about Westminster not being interested in the people of Scotland, Conservative Members are gesturing to him to sit down and be quiet? Other people have spoken, and the Front-Bench leader of the SNP here has a right to speak in this Chamber the same as every other Member.

Ian Blackford: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, and she is absolutely right. We are sent here as 35 SNP MPs to stand up for our constituents—the majority in Scotland. At a time when this House is threatening to take us out of the European Union against our will, I can absolutely guarantee that the voice of Scotland and the voice of remain will be heard in this Chamber, and no Conservative MP is going to shut Scotland down.

This Tory Government have wasted £4 billion on investing in no-deal preparations. This money should never have been spent, and we should have ruled out no deal as a possibility long ago. Why did the Prime Minister not do that? The PM regularly says that all

MPs have a duty to deliver Brexit. Above all the duties mandated to the SNP, we are elected to stand up for Scotland's interests and Scotland's voice. It is clear that no one else will, and we are making it absolutely crystal clear: we will never accept Brexit on behalf of the people of Scotland.

The Prime Minister has prescribed her Brexit deal to Scotland, despite decisive and unanimous analysis that this will be bad for our country and do irreparable damage to our key relationships. Even some of her Cabinet seem to agree. Some 100,000 jobs could be lost from Scotland if Westminster backs the Prime Minister. The EU workers needed to grow our economy will be denied to Scotland if the Tories get their way. Our economy will be smaller, our people poorer and our country isolated. The SNP will not—not ever—do that to Scotland. We will not back the Prime Minister. We will always stand up and put Scotland's interests first.

I am angry and I am frustrated, but I am, too, deeply saddened that we have reached this point. Imagine how people think up and down the United Kingdom. They are ashamed of this Parliament, ashamed of British politics and embarrassed by the laughing stock we have become in the world. I want to say to people watching at home that we in the SNP are embarrassed, too. We are appalled at the behaviour of Government Members and many official Opposition Members as well. They have let you down. They have broken Britain and now they have no idea how to fix it. While the Tory and Labour parties scramble on a race to the bottom, I say to them listen up: the people are watching.

One million people marched to demand a second EU referendum, and 6 million signed a petition to revoke article 50. Are we listening to their voices? The answer has to be no. Yes, the SNP is here to stand up for Scotland. We are proud to represent the voices of Scotland and to stand up for the democratically expressed will of our people and our Parliament. But, Mr Speaker, we also care about the rest of the United Kingdom—about our friends and our neighbours. I deeply question the motives of the Tory and Labour leaderships. The power is in all our hands—let us use it.

My plea is for Members to vote down the Government's proposition this afternoon, and let us put the question back to the people. The Prime Minister has lost control. The Government are out of control. The Leader of the Opposition is unwilling to exert control over his party. Let us give the power back to the people, end this stalemate and give certainty back to business and assurances to EU workers. Let us salvage our bonds with our European neighbours. It is not too late. We cannot give up. Take back control, and give power back to the people.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. An eight-minute limit on Back-Bench speeches applies with immediate effect.

11.11 am

Mr Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford), but he will forgive me if I do not follow him completely, as we would never finish this debate.

I wish to apprise the House of my view of this motion. As my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney General said, it is not the motion we have already voted on; it is a different motion. [*Interruption.*] I will make no excuses about that—it is a different motion. Opposition Members agreed that, so I do not know how they can laugh.

Today, I will support the Government for the very simple reason that I think nothing huge has changed in the nature of the Bill that is likely to be presented, or even in the withdrawal agreement. What I do think has changed, however, is the balance of risks, and as politicians—not lawyers—we must apprise ourselves of what that balance amounts to and to what degree we owe it to ourselves to make those decisions.

Since we had the two-week extension we now face a choice about what is likely to happen. Some of my colleagues genuinely believe that if we vote down this agreement we will go to 12 April, and we will not get an extension from the EU. I find that difficult to believe. If we consider what the EU has already said—Mrs Merkel and various others—we see that they really want to keep the UK inside the EU. One way or the other, they would rather have us in, even if it is troublesome at this stage. I genuinely believe that by 12 April we will be offered—or it could even be demanded of us—an extension of at least two years that will require us to fight the European elections. I do not know how I can go on to doorsteps, having campaigned to leave the European Union and support 17.4 million people, and tell them not to worry because even if we are not leaving right now, we might leave a little bit later. That is simply inexplicable, and I genuinely do not believe that that is what I campaigned on or for.

Some people have said that an extension does not really matter because we will be able to stay in the EU, make those negotiations and get those changes, and we will be in control because we will have votes and an ability to take that control. All I say is that I voted against the Maastricht treaty 26 years ago, and I have always maintained that we have never had real control. If we have had so much control for 40 years, why are we now trying to get out of a European Union that has extended its power and competence year in, year out?

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab) *rose*—

Mr Duncan Smith: I hope the hon. Gentleman will forgive me but I want to finish my point. I will give way just once because, as Mr Speaker says, we want to try and keep this short.

I believe that the way to stand up for the 17.4 million is to get to the Bill. As I said to my hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Sir William Cash), whose knowledge of constitutional law I revere, Bill needs to get to the Bill. We will then look to see which of the issues raised by the Attorney General are in the Bill and how they protect us. What can we ensure is in the Bill? We can then make a judgment about whether it represents the way that we believe we should leave the EU, and my hon. Friends need to consider that issue immediately.

Kevin Brennan: On 3 March the right hon. Gentleman stated on his website:

“British Governments have lied about the EU for decades. This deal is the final deceit”.

Yet he is going to vote for it.

Mr Duncan Smith: My simple point is: absolutely. There has been a trail of deceit on both sides of the House and by different Governments. The judgment I make today is about the balance of risks. I believe that the one saving grace of this process so far is that we will repeal the European Communities Act 1972, and that means we will have left the European Union. That is the single issue I accept because, as my hon. Friend the Member for Stone said, we must get to the Bill and figure out how that provision is protected. Is it the default mechanism?

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Duncan Smith: I will not give way because others wish to speak.

Is the Attorney General's comment correct that this is the right place to be? I want my Government not to be deceitful and to own up about whether the Bill will protect those rights and for my right hon. and hon. Friends to make that judgment when we have seen the Bill.

This is an opportunity for us to get that process going. If we do not, we go to 12 April, and in that case we have only the simple statement that we will extend the date for leaving the EU. An extension is death in terms of our voters—the people who put us here and who wanted us to get this through. I ask my right hon. and hon. Friends to look around. Every one of the speeches made, even the interventions, has demanded an extension to 12 April because people know we will get that extension. This is important. We are in a Chamber of people who really do not want to leave the European Union at all.

I know and honour my hon. Friends who have fought and campaigned to get this agreement changed, but we must recognise that we need to take hold of the one element that gets us out of the European Union, leaves us out and shuts down the debate about future referendums. That will allow us to be confident that, under a new leadership, we can go forward to change the nature of this process.

In conclusion, I say to my colleagues that for me this is not an easy decision. There is a lot about the withdrawal agreement that I do not like, and I stand by that position. However, if we do not go forward to consider the Bill, we will rue this day because we will end up having to accept what I believe will be a damaging and destructive extension that means we never leave the European Union. If we say that we stand up for 17.4 million people, we must get those people what they asked for, which is to leave the European Union, and this is now the only way.

11.18 am

Meg Hillier (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op): What a shambles this has been, Mr Speaker. Today we see desperate measures by a desperate Government. We hear that the Cabinet is riven, and Government Members are at loggerheads. To add insult to injury, this hugely important constitutional issue—the biggest issue of my lifetime—is now the centre of a Conservative party leadership contest. That tells us what we need to know: this stopped being about the

2016 referendum or the British people a long time ago, and it is all about the party that purports to be in government today.

We have seen repeated mistakes. A referendum was passed with no rules and no planning—not even half a dozen civil servants in the basement of the Treasury or the Cabinet Office working out what might happen if the vote went the way it did. The Prime Minister triggered article 50 in March 2017 to rush into a process, again, with no plan. She then recklessly called a general election a month later and lost even the fig leaf of a majority. Now we see a Prime Minister who has been incapable of negotiation over that two-year period and a Government who were secretive.

I am Chair of the Public Accounts Committee, and my Committee has worked hard, along with other Committees, to try to get information about what was happening to prepare for Brexit, and answer came there none. I met the late head of the Cabinet Office, and he said it would damage our negotiating position if the Government revealed that information—information that is flowing around Brussels like there is no tomorrow, information that sectors of industry and the community know about.

Mary Creagh: My hon. Friend is making a powerful and important speech. Just a week ago, the Environmental Audit Committee asked the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps he would take, in the event of a no-deal Brexit, to protect British farmers. He said that a package of funds would be available but that he could not tell us—as MPs, we are accountable for taxpayers' money—how the money would be spent, how much would be spent and where it would be spent. Does my hon. Friend agree it is the most incredible abuse of a Government's power to commit funding to farmers and not to tell MPs how much is going to be spent?

Meg Hillier: My hon. Friend makes an important point. My Committee has repeatedly said that businesses and people need to know what is happening, yet the Government advised businesses only in October 2018 about some of the preparations they would need to make for a no-deal Brexit. We estimate huge costs for businesses, billions of pounds—I do not have time to go into it today—just to prepare for a potential no deal alone.

This deal was unveiled last November with none of that information, and it would have been easy, sensible and proper government to be talking to sectors about what might happen. Had the Government done that, they might have heard the reality for people on the ground. Yet we are here with this desperate last-ditch attempt by the Government to rescue themselves, and this country, from a disaster of their own making. We are being asked to agree the withdrawal agreement with no guarantee of what comes next. The little certainty that gives is cold comfort for businesses out there. We are being asked to take a leap of faith, but I have no faith in this Government to deliver on this or any further stages of Brexit. We are being asked to vote for this withdrawal agreement with no knowledge of what will be in the political agreement. It is a leap into the dark, and I am not prepared to take that leap and put my constituents in that position.

The Public Accounts Committee has highlighted, in 10 reports, the problems, challenges and costs of preparing for no deal. Of course, the civil service has had to prepare for both a no deal and a deal simultaneously, double the cost. The cost is high in pounds, but it is huge in the confidence of this nation. This has been an utter failure.

Luke Graham (Ochil and South Perthshire) (Con): I had the honour of serving on the Public Accounts Committee with the hon. Lady when I first entered the House. She is talking about risk and, knowing what she does through the Public Accounts Committee, does she not recognise that the greatest risk is not passing this withdrawal agreement and not having that certainty on data and customs so that the United Kingdom can move forward? She is right that there is a big discussion to be had about the future, but we have to do this first before we get to that discussion.

Meg Hillier: The hon. Gentleman served honourably on the Public Accounts Committee, of which he was an assiduous member, and we both know that, yes, we need certainty, but to jump into the dark by passing this motion today without any of that detail is too much of a leap of faith. My point is clear: the Government could have shared and discussed a lot more.

If we remember back to the 2017 general election, the discourse we were having then was remarkably different from the discourse we are having two years later. It is for that reason that I now think we need to have a deal that goes back to the people, because we are now three years on from the original referendum and the people are now seeing that there is no certainty in what is being proposed. That lack of certainty is hitting prices in our shops, and our constituents are having to pay more for the basics. It is hitting businesses, which are stopping me in the street to tell me about the challenges they face as they prepare for a potential no deal. The cost of preparing for that no deal is very real for them.

Every time we speak about this, the exchange rate falls and there is uncertainty. It is utter recklessness for Her Majesty's Government to lead the country into this uncertainty. We need to accept that we need a longer extension both to reach agreement and to pass the relevant laws. It has been oft-quoted today, here and elsewhere, that we should not rush into European Parliament elections. I say that we should not let the tail wag the dog. If that is what has to happen for us to have a longer extension, so be it.

Understandably, many in this House feel that is not ideal, and the right hon. Member for Esher and Walton (Dominic Raab) talks about renegotiation with the European Union. He had the privilege of serving as the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union and he knows, as I know from the three years I spent negotiating in Europe for the last Labour Government, that we cannot negotiate the changes that would need to be negotiated in two weeks, or even up to 22 May. While we are still a member, we rely on working together with the other 27 nations in the European Union, so we need to make that change. We have been very good at this. Our diplomatic skills and the talents of successive Governments of different colours have achieved a lot in the European Union, so it is in our power to achieve a lot, but not in two weeks.

Mr Sheerman: Does my hon. Friend agree that Members on both sides of the House heard the voice of the people in the referendum and are absolutely committed to getting a decent, good deal for the people in our constituencies? We have not turned our back on them and we are listening, but we want to give them a chance to decide whether the deal is good enough for them.

Meg Hillier: I completely agree but, above all, we must rule out no deal. We have voted in this House, yet a no deal remains a risk. No responsible Government should lead us over a cliff edge and put up fig leaves.

Caroline Flint (Don Valley) (Lab): I certainly do not want to see us crash out with no deal, either. I do not support a second referendum but, if we had one, it seems only fair that the people should decide between a deal, a no deal or remain.

Meg Hillier: If we were to propose and pass a Bill for a second referendum, the reality is that this House would have to vote on at least five separate occasions to frame that legislation. I will not talk about such hypothetical situations.

We need to rule out a no deal. There is consensus here, and the Government need to make that absolutely clear. Parliament is coalescing, as the indicative votes process shows, around certain options, on which we will have a chance to vote on Monday and, potentially, Wednesday, yet the Government have made no commitment that they will take any notice. The votes are not binding, but I hope we will get some comfort from Ministers today about how the Government will react to those votes.

Mary Creagh: My hon. Friend is making a powerful speech and is being very generous in giving way. Was she as dismayed as I was to hear the Secretary of State for International Trade on the "Today" programme this morning saying, in terms, that he does not support a customs union? That is what this House will be voting on on Monday if the deal falls today.

Meg Hillier: Of course, it is up to the Government of the day to set out their position, but I would hope that, at the point at which Parliament debates and votes on this again on Monday—that is happening only because the Government have failed so abysmally—the Government might have the courtesy to have their listening ears on and be prepared to hear what Parliament may be willing to support.

I have said my piece. The Government need to listen, and they must rule out a no deal. We need to make sure we are moving forward. We need a longer extension and, ultimately, we will need to go back to the people, because we are now three years on from the referendum. Things have moved on. The public are not fools, and they can see when things are not working and when this Government have let them down. I rest my case.

11.29 am

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): I know that numerous Members, particularly on the Conservative side, are finding this a very difficult decision to make, so perhaps I could briefly explain how I have gone about trying to reach my difficult conclusion.

[John Redwood]

The first thing I asked myself was: what do my voters in Wokingham want me to do? Where they have a very strong majority for a certain conclusion, I would need an extremely good reason to disagree with them, and it is quite clear from all those who have communicated with me—talked to me, sent me emails—that there is a very big majority in Wokingham against accepting this agreement. It has brought together people who voted remain and people who voted leave. They have come to the same conclusion—they would like a different outcome afterwards, but they have come to the same conclusion: this is not an agreement that the United Kingdom should in any circumstances sign up to. The national polling reflects this, so this is a matter of interest to all Members. The agreement has somewhere between 15% and 25% support—on a very good day in a favourable poll—meaning that roughly four out of five people have considered it and think it a very bad idea. I would urge all to bear that in mind before they cast their vote this afternoon.

The second thing I asked myself was: what have I and my party promised my electors in Wokingham and the wider electorate in the United Kingdom whom we serve? I and the national manifesto in 2017, which gave me my mandate, said that we would see Brexit through, that it would take two years after the formal notification had been received, that no deal was better than a bad deal, but that of course we would do our best to get a really good deal, which was our preference. The manifesto of the national Conservative party wisely said that the Government would negotiate both parts together—that any withdrawal issues would be negotiated in parallel with the future trading arrangement and future partnership.

How wise that was! At that point, the Government and our leader understood that compromises would be made and that, if they were to make concessions in the withdrawal bit, they would want the good news in the partnership bit to be nailed down at the same time. Unfortunately, the Government changed their mind about that shortly after the general election, and that has let the public down, because it means that we have not used the purchase of all the concessions they made in the withdrawal agreement to nail down what they thought was needed in the future partnership agreement. I feel very bad about that. I have to say to my electors that in order to get closer to what I and the Government promised, I have to say no to half the total agreement as it is so obviously weighted very strongly against the United Kingdom and our interests.

Then I come to the third thing. My electors elected me to exercise my judgment. They expect me to read all the documents, understand the background and study major matters for myself. On this happy occasion, their view and my view coincide. I have studied all the documents and closely followed the negotiations. I have offered a great deal of advice to the Prime Minister and her team—much of it, I am afraid, has not been taken, and thus we are where we are, as the Attorney General said. My study of the documents tells me that the withdrawal agreement is not leaving the EU. Were it to pass, it would be followed by an extremely bad piece of legislation recreating all the powers of the EU and applying them to us for a period of between two and four years—we will not even be told for how long because that is in the gift of the EU and the negotiations.

We might also have to accept lots of rules and trading arrangements in perpetuity because of the most unfortunate Irish backstop, which has been placed in the agreement. Since none of us wants to break up our country, the only way to fulfil the requirements of this solemn treaty would be for the whole United Kingdom to stay in all the arrangements the EU demanded. The agreement would mean that for at least two years, and maybe four years, the EU could negotiate in any way it saw fit over an extremely wide range of issues—not just relating to business and trade—and this House of Commons would have no voice, no vote and no right to do anything other than implement it faithfully and fully without our amending it or even complaining through a reputable mechanism.

I do not see how anyone could possibly inflict that upon a great country that has recently voted to be sovereign and take back control. I do not see how this House could possibly vote for this agreement when it has opened financial commitments on an enormous scale. The Treasury has—optimistically, I think—priced them at a pretty big £39 billion, but there are no numbers in the agreement, no agreement about the bills that would be set. There is also a mechanism that allows the EU to send us bills under very broad headings and a referee system to deal with disagreements that is heavily weighted in favour of the EU and under which any legal matters would be resolved by the European Court of Justice.

Who on earth would agree to pay unlimited unknown bills without genuinely independent arbitration over their purpose? When will the Government give us any purpose for offering to pay all this money? They are in this absurd position because of the way they have handled the negotiation, of having decided to pay the money without securing any goods or services in return. When I go shopping, I do not put £39 on the counter and say to the shop owner, “That is your money whatever happens next. Now can we for the next 21 months discuss whether you will let me have anything in return for my £39?”, but that unfortunately is what we are being asked to approve in this agreement this afternoon.

In conclusion, for me it turns out to be an easy decision. I am sorry that for a lot of my right hon. and hon. Friends it is not so easy. I never find it easy to vote against the Government I want to support—in this Parliament, I have very rarely done so—but on this issue I have voted against the Government before and will vote against them again this afternoon, because it is a dreadful agreement. It is a fully binding treaty with no exit clause. We would not be able to get out of it. There would be requirement after requirement. We will have subcontracted our legislation to someone we cannot control and would have to obey and we will have offered to pay them a lot of money for no obvious good reason.

11.36 am

Hilary Benn (Leeds Central) (Lab): I will be voting against the motion not because I do not believe we owe the money—I disagree with the right hon. Member for Wokingham (John Redwood)—or because I disagree that we need to protect EU and UK citizens, or that we need a long transition and an Irish backstop, but because the motion is a transparent attempt by the Government to avoid another meaningful vote, under the terms of section 13(1) of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018, for which the House fought long and hard in the summer of 2018.

The Attorney General: Will the right hon. Gentleman tell the House how, compliant with the Speaker's ruling, he would have brought a vote that fulfilled the conditions he has just set out?

Hilary Benn: I will readily tell the House—although I will come to this very point later in my speech: the Government could choose, if they wished to, to seek to change the political declaration with the EU. It is because of the Government's consistent failure to do that, because of its consistent failure to reach out across the House, that they find themselves in the difficulty they have created today. But I shall return to that point a little later.

We cannot separate the withdrawal agreement from the political declaration because both parts are essential to the process. It is like selling your house without having any idea where you are going to live afterwards. We would not have the withdrawal agreement without the political declaration. Article 50(2) refers to

“setting out the arrangements for its withdrawal, taking account of the framework for its future relationship with the Union.”

My hon. Friend the shadow Solicitor General in his brilliant speech quoted the Prime Minister's statement on 14 January. I will repeat one small bit of it. She said:

“One cannot be banked”—

referring to the withdrawal agreement and the political declaration—

without the commitments of the other.”—[*Official Report*, 14 January 2019; Vol. 652, c. 826.]

Yet the motion before the House today explicitly tries to bank the commitments of one without the commitments of the other. I do not see how that can in any way be consistent with what the Prime Minister told the House of Commons on 14 January.

The second reason why I shall vote against the motion is one of the consequences of passing this motion. The aim—the Attorney-General was frank about it—is to gain an extension to 22 May rather than 12 April by satisfying the requirement of article 1 of the European Council decision of 22 March, which stated:

“In the event that the withdrawal agreement is approved by the House of Commons by 29 March 2019 at the latest, the period provided for in article 50(3) of the Treaty of European Union is extended until 22 May 2019.”

The problem, and my intervention on the Attorney General was trying to address this, is that if we passed this motion and got that extension, by the time we got to the week beginning 20 May, if at that moment we have not yet resolved the question of our future political and economic relationship and the UK decided that it needed to apply for a further extension, the EU is almost certain to refuse any such extension on the grounds that we have failed to take part in the European elections. That is because paragraph 10 of the decision of the European Council, which said:

“If the United Kingdom is still a member state on the 23-26 May 2019”—

which we would be if we asked for and were granted an extension beyond 22 May—

“it will be under the obligation to hold the elections to the European Parliament in accordance with Union law. It is to be noted that the United Kingdom would have to give notice of the poll by 12 April 2019 in order to hold such elections.”

Since it would be impossible on 20 May to give notice to hold elections on 23 May, it would be impossible to comply with this requirement. Therefore, what the motion before the House today means is that, if it were carried, it would in effect rule out any possibility of a further extension under article 50 beyond 22 May. So if, at that point, we have not reached agreement on the withdrawal agreement and the political declaration, this motion would mean the UK leaving without a deal on 22 May. The House voted this week by 400 votes to 160 to reject for the third time leaving with no deal. The only other way forward would be to revoke article 50 to buy ourselves a little bit more time, but the Prime Minister has repeatedly told the House that she would refuse to do so.

Mike Gapes: Does that not mean that the motion before us should be called not the Withdrawal Bill proposal but the Prevention of the Right of the British People to vote in a European Election Bill proposal?

Hilary Benn: That would indeed be the consequence if the motion were passed. I will be perfectly frank with the hon. Gentleman. If there were a way round the problem of participation in the European elections, I think many people in the House would seek to find it, but it is clear that the EU in the form of the Commission and the Council and the legal advice has said that that is not possible, and therefore, in effect this is a no-deal motion.

The Attorney General indicated dissent.

Hilary Benn: It is, and for that reason alone it deserves to be defeated.

The last point I want to make is that this Bill is displacement activity on the part of the Government. The Government should be turning their effort and attention to the real issue, which is our future relationship.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Mr Robin Walker): I have great respect for the right hon. Gentleman and the work that he does on the Select Committee, but he just described what we are voting on today as a no-deal motion. We are voting today on an agreement that has been agreed by the UK and the EU and that his Committee will recognise provides vital protections for citizens. I think he should reconsider that argument about a no-deal motion.

Hilary Benn: I reciprocate the respect for the Minister, who is doing a very good job, I have to say, in extremely difficult and trying circumstances. But this is half an agreement.

The Attorney General indicated dissent.

Hilary Benn: It is. Half an agreement is being presented to the House. The Government should be focusing all their attention on the real problem, on this side of the House, which is the content, or to be more precise the lack of content, of the political declaration.

Mary Creagh: I thank my right hon. Friend for giving way. He is making a powerful and important speech. Does he agree that, if the withdrawal Bill ends up being

[Mary Creagh]

put through Parliament, it is likely to be highly contentious, not least because it will have to reverse the previous European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018 in order to pass?

Hilary Benn: Indeed, and it has always been the case, because of the withdrawal agreement, that it would have to reverse the—

Chris Bryant: It cannot, because it is the same session.

Hilary Benn: That is an interesting question, but I am being diverted from the final point that I want to make.

I listened to the Attorney-General's kind reference to the indicative votes process. I almost forgot that the Government voted against it happening this week. If they were taking it seriously, they would indicate a willingness to compromise if the House is able to find a way forward.

The deal has been defeated twice because it offers no clarity or certainty for our future. If businesses come to me in my constituency and say, "Hilary, I know how it works today. I export. Tell me how it will work with this political declaration in three, five or 10 years." I have to look them in the eye and tell them the truth: I have absolutely no idea. So is it right to ask the House to take us out of the European Union on that basis, especially when a new Prime Minister may be coming?

On "Newsnight" last night, it was reported that a Cabinet Minister was asked why the Government were going ahead with this vote and they replied, expletive deleted:

"I'm past caring. It's like the living dead in here."

I will not comment on the language, but that is the problem and it has always been the problem.

Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Hilary Benn: No. We have a divided Cabinet, a divided Parliament, a divided country and people are feeling very passionate out there, but this vote will not solve the problem. Monday's votes might offer us a way forward, and I hope that the House will seize it.

11.47 am

Mr Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield) (Con): There may be one thing that unites most of us on both sides—the utterly wearying quality of the debate on which we have engaged for so long. As a consequence, when we find ourselves presented with an opportunity that might bring that debate to a conclusion, there is always a temptation to look at it and think that it could be a way out. That is particularly the case, because for many of us, although I accept not all, the sword of Damocles of a no-deal Brexit hangs over us and that sword is a matter of huge anxiety. I happen to believe that it would be catastrophic for this country.

Sir Christopher Chope (Christchurch) (Con): Will my right hon. and learned Friend give way?

Mr Grieve: In a moment.

The issue that we have to consider today is whether the offer that the Attorney General and the Government have made to this House goes any way towards resolving the problem. In my view, it cannot and does not. The origin of the problem lies, as has been so rightly said—and here I find myself in agreement with my hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Sir William Cash) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (John Redwood)—in the fact that the Government set out on an enterprise and said that at the end of it this House would be able to vote not only on a withdrawal agreement but on a future relationship. Indeed, page 36 of the Conservative party manifesto, which I am sometimes accused of not following, said:

"We believe it is necessary to agree the terms of our future partnership alongside our withdrawal, reaching agreement on both within the two years allowed by Article 50 of the Treaty on European Union."

The Government's problems started to multiply when it became clear that that was not happening.

Whatever the motivation of different Members of this House in rejecting the Government's deal, the truth is that at its kernel was the fact that we did not have any ability to make that assessment. That is why the Government lost twice on section 13 motions, and in truth I suspect that even if a section 13 motion could be brought back, it would again be rejected for the same reason.

Now, the Attorney General and the Government say to us that there is a way out of this, by which we can agree the withdrawal agreement, get a technical extension until 22 May—I will come back to that in a moment—and expect, in the intervening period, to resolve the outstanding issues to the satisfaction of this House.

In the past week this House, in its frustration, finally took control of the Order Paper, because it wanted to debate the alternatives that the Government did not want us to debate. One thing is clear from that debate: the alternatives need time to be agreed, time to be worked up, and time to be negotiated with our EU partners. How can that be done in the context of a technical extension that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister stated at the Dispatch Box would be there if we reached an agreement merely to implement it?

At an earlier date, I explained to my right hon. Friend the Chief Whip that if this House reached an agreement, I would not, even if I did not like it, seek to use the passage of the withdrawal agreement Act for the purpose of wrecking it. That is a self-denying ordinance on my part. I am afraid, however, that it is perfectly obvious that some of my hon. Friends and other hon. Members intend to use the withdrawal agreement Act to wreck the passage of any agreement. I have to say, speaking personally, that if I cannot vote on a clean motion to approve a deal, I will be constrained on the passage of the EU withdrawal Act to be much freer in my opposition.

The truth is that it is most unlikely that between now and 22 May we have any possibility of reaching that sort of consensus. That is why I have been of the view for some time that we ought to seek to extend article 50 further if we cannot come to an agreement by 12 April, and I believe that our European Union partners have understood that and would be willing for us to do it.

Mr Charles Walker (Broxbourne) (Con): I do not say this with any sense of rancour; I say it out of frustration and concern for this country. It seems to me that the

losers do not know how to lose and the winners do not know how to win, and that is why we are at this juncture, which seems almost insurmountable for this House.

Mr Grieve: I greatly respect my hon. Friend; indeed, I respect the views of all my hon. Friends and others on this matter. Compromise is a very important part of the political process. Compromise happens when people come together to accept an outcome that they are prepared to endorse and respect, but it is manifestly obvious—I only had to listen to one or two of this morning's speeches from this side of the House—that that is not what is going to happen. There is no compromise, and that is because there is nothing to compromise on in terms of a future relationship. There is no settled will. I share my hon. Friend's desire to get this over with, but the siren song being sung to us will just take us further on to the rocks, and in mid-May we will end up scrabbling around with the catastrophe of no-deal Brexit, without any ability to rectify it when currently we are in a position to do so.

Some of my hon. Friends showed great courage in supporting the indicative vote process and, in doing so, essentially rebelling against the Government's position. I say gently to them that, having had the courage to do that, they are now abandoning it completely for something that cannot progress the debate on how we get out of our current impasse. It just will not happen.

For those reasons, however tempting it might be, and however much the calls of loyalty are made—and heaven knows, I feel them keenly—I am afraid that I cannot vote for something that, in my judgment, is not going to deliver the benefits that are claimed. Furthermore—and here I agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham, not for the first and not for the last time—our constituents, whether they voted leave or remain, are being delivered something that is utterly, utterly different. The vote we take today will determine whether we end up in chaos or not.

Mr Seely: If we want to avoid chaos, can we not vote for the deal? My right hon. and learned Friend says that he is not willing to compromise and that other people are unwilling to compromise, and he bases his own lack of compromise on other people's unwillingness to compromise. If he is willing to compromise, he will find that many people in the House are also willing to compromise. That compromise is the withdrawal deal.

Mr Grieve: I am always willing to consider compromise, but, as I said before, compromise has to come from a settled intention to respect an outcome. I have to say that there is no such settled intention, certainly among many Members on the Government side of the House. I listened to the speech of my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith). It was quite clear from what he said that his purpose will be to use the passage of the WAB to re-order entirely the future relationship in the way he wants. I do not disagree with that—it is his right—but it highlights why separating the two is plainly, in my judgment, impossible. Yet that is what we are being asked to do.

Mr Duncan Smith: I hope that my right hon. and learned Friend is not asserting that it is wrong to want to amend or debate the Bill. But getting to the Bill is of vital importance—there is nothing sinister about that, surely.

Mr Grieve: But the Bill was intended to implement the agreement for the future relationship on which we had voted. It has now been transformed into something entirely different: as I understand it, a free-for-all opportunity—although I suspect that the Government do not really intend that—for MPs to pile in their ideas as to not only the future relationship, but caveats in respect of Brexit which, in my view, are incompatible in many cases with the withdrawal obligations themselves.

We have to be clear about these things, and here I speak as an ex-Law Officer. Of course there will be differences of view in this House, but we have to be honest in our purposes. I do not intend to sell my constituents short, however tempting it might be for party political advantage. In any case, if we ultimately fail the country, we as a party are not worth existing. The national interest in this matter must come first.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: Order. After the right hon. Member for East Antrim (Sammy Wilson), the next hon. Member to speak in this debate, the time limit on Back-Bench speeches will be reduced to six minutes in an attempt to accommodate the maximum number of colleagues.

11.58 am

Sammy Wilson (East Antrim) (DUP): I do not intend to spend a long time referring to or looking at the political and parliamentary skulduggery and chicanery that we have had to go through to get this motion here today. Suffice it to say that we are breaking and ignoring the legislation that this House passed, to comply—on the day when we are meant to be leaving the European Union—with a deadline that has been imposed on us by the European Union. There is certain irony in that.

As far as the withdrawal agreement and motion before us are concerned, our position has not changed. Over the past number of weeks, we have sought to work with the Government, to try to find a way of getting either legal assurances or legislative changes that would enable us to move this process on. Of course, we want to see a deal because we want out of the European Union and we want a clear path to how we do that, but that has not been possible because the withdrawal agreement itself so ties the hands of the Government that it is impossible to find a way to secure the kind of assurances required to make sure, first, that the United Kingdom is not broken up and, secondly, that we have a clear way to ensure that the Brexit that many of us expected to see delivered will be delivered. It is our regret that that process has reached an end.

In the Alice in Wonderland world in which we now live, the Attorney General said today that this was not a meaningful vote. It is a meaningful vote to many people who want the delivery of our exit from the EU. It is meaningful to the people of Northern Ireland, because if this goes through, the people of Northern Ireland will find themselves stuck with a legally binding agreement that puts Northern Ireland outside the United Kingdom, and it could be there forever at the insistence of Brussels.

Lady Hermon rose—

Sammy Wilson: I know that the hon. Lady wants to intervene, but she has done so time and again. Despite what she has said, she tries to cover and dress up her pro-EU prejudice, with the justification that this agreement has no implications for the political consent—

Sir Hugo Swire (East Devon) (Con): Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that those of us who consider ourselves passionate Unionists believe passionately in Northern Ireland being a fully-fledged member of the United Kingdom? We do not like this deal at all, and do not like any part of it, but we feel on reflection that it is the best way to proceed in the best interests of the United Kingdom.

Sammy Wilson: I understand the dilemma that many of my hon. Friends on the other side of the Chamber face. The dilemma for me as a Unionist is that I cannot—and we as a party cannot—put our hand to an agreement that would have Northern Ireland treated differently, with the difference between Northern Ireland and the rest of the United Kingdom imposed on us forever by the EU, and that breaches the principle of consent in the Belfast agreement, because it would change irrevocably the constitutional position of Northern Ireland, as we would have our laws made in Brussels, instead of London.

Kate Hoey (Vauxhall) (Lab): Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that as a result of having absolutely nothing changed about the backstop since it was first introduced, the people of Northern Ireland—the pro-Union people of Northern Ireland—whichever way they voted, remain or leave, will see anyone who votes today for the agreement, whether they mean it or not, as not supporting the right of people in Northern Ireland to be part of the United Kingdom?

Sammy Wilson: That is the judgment that we have made. For us, having been through a terrorist campaign of 40 years, if people try to remove us from the United Kingdom, we are not prepared to see our constitutional position altered by Brussels in a fit of pique against the United Kingdom for daring to leave the EU.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Sammy Wilson: Let me make another point. I oppose the agreement for a second reason, because I believe that it betrays the wishes of the vast majority of people who voted to leave the EU. The hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry), who is not in the Chamber, has described those who voted to leave and who are standing outside today protesting as a mob. That is the kind of disdain that those who voted to leave—[*Interruption.*] They are being treated with disdain in this withdrawal agreement.

Mr John Baron (Basildon and Billericay) (Con): Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that if we vote for this deal this afternoon, we will, for the first time in almost 300 years of our constitutional history, be drawing a line between Northern Ireland and the rest of the United Kingdom? It may only be a trade barrier, but that is how these things start, and that will be under the direct control, in many respects, of the EU.

Sammy Wilson: And, of course, whether or not it is just a line down the Irish sea, as described by some people, it will have serious implications for the economy of Northern Ireland. We are told that, even when the

Bill goes through, we will still not know the nature of those barriers. Not until statutory instruments are presented to this House, or Ministers use their Henry VIII powers, will we know the kind of restrictions that would be damaging the—

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Sammy Wilson: No, I will not give way anymore. I have only a few minutes remaining.

The third reason why I will vote against the motion is that one of the fundamental reasons why we opposed this agreement was that it leaves us as part of the EU, but without having any say, subject to EU rules during the implementation period and any extension, subject to the European Court of Justice, and able to break out of it only if and when the EU decides it has screwed as much out of us in negotiations as it possibly can. That is not the kind of agreement that anyone should sign up to.

There is only one thing that has changed. This week, the Irish Government and the EU have let the cat out of the bag. The premise on which the withdrawal agreement is based was that there would be a hard border between Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic and that that would somehow give terrorists targets to hit and would break the peace in Northern Ireland. We have been told—this is even in their written preparations and their legislation—that the Irish Government have said that no such thing will happen in the event of no deal. We have argued that all along. We have argued that this agreement is based on a con trick. Why would we vote today for a con trick that breaks up the United Kingdom, that ties us into an arrangement with the EU that we cannot get out of without its assent and that will be the basis for any future trade relationships we have with it? The EU has made it quite clear that the agreement will be the basis of any future relationship, so we will go handcuffed into any negotiations. I do not believe that that is an agreement worth voting for. We voted against it the first time; we voted against it the second time; and we will vote against it this time.

I do not know what the outcome of this vote will be, but I assure the House that, whatever means there are available to us, should this agreement go through, we will continue to oppose it, because we will not allow Northern Ireland's position in the United Kingdom, Northern Ireland's economy and the will of the people of the whole United Kingdom to become a plaything in the hands of bureaucrats from Brussels.

12.8 pm

Mr Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield) (Con): I draw the House's attention to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. It is a great pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for East Antrim (Sammy Wilson), whom I first met more than 25 years ago, when he was the mayor of Belfast.

I want to speak up today for compromise. I find myself very much drawn to the arguments put by my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith)—I was of course his Whip more than a quarter of a century ago, during the Maastricht debates. Today, we are in absolute agreement, and I think he spoke extremely well in the cause of compromise.

I voted against the Prime Minister's deal in January because I thought there was time for the overall deal to be changed in the best interests of those I represent in the royal town of Sutton Coldfield. However, I voted for it earlier this month, because I thought the options and the opportunities had narrowed significantly, and I will be voting for it today.

I do not like the deal. I have concluded that it is the least worst option. I am particularly worried about the backstop, but above all the central point that I am worried about, which my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (John Redwood) mentioned, is that the way that we have gone about this has breached the fundamental rule, which certainly applied when I used to go to ministerial meetings in Brussels, that nothing is agreed until everything is agreed. It is the failure to endorse that cardinal principle of negotiating with the EU that has let us down so badly.

The Government have found a way to keep themselves compliant with your directions from the Chair, Mr Speaker, but today we are essentially discussing and voting on the Government's deal. I will vote for it. If it goes down tonight and the Government fail, this House must accept that we are back, fair and square, in the process set out by my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Sir Oliver Letwin), which I supported. It was no surprise at all that the House did not make a decision on Wednesday this week and effectively voted no to everything, but if the Government fail today, the House must recognise that the votes on Monday will be extremely important. In my judgment, it is likely that the House will vote yes to at least two of those options.

Matt Western (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab): The right hon. Gentleman is making an important point. Was he not also in some way inspired by the process a couple of days ago, in that on Monday we have an opportunity to vote for something for which there could be a majority? In fact, just two days ago, three options achieved more votes than the Prime Minister's withdrawal agreement did in two previous votes.

Mr Mitchell: The hon. Gentleman makes an interesting point in his own way, but my point is that on Monday the House will need to choose. If the Government cannot do it, the House must do it, and we must remember that in spite of some of the things that are said, including from the Government Front Bench, the Government are accountable to Parliament and not the other way round. No two colleagues agree entirely in what they say in this House, but in my view there will be a result on Monday, and the Government must honour it.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP) *rose*—

Mr Mitchell: I am so sorry; I do not have time to give way.

I hope very much that the Prime Minister will agree that members of the Cabinet—all Ministers—can vote freely on Monday. Otherwise, senior Members of Parliament will be disenfranchised from this process. There should not be a Whip. If we come to this on Monday, it will be a House of Commons occasion. The House of Commons must seek to sort it out.

I find myself in a minority in the House of Commons. I think the House overstates the dangers of no deal. I do not believe there is such a thing as no deal. I think that, were we to leave with what is called no deal, there will be a whole series of smaller deals, some temporary and some more permanent, and some stops, so I do not worry as much as many of my colleagues do about the dangers of no deal.

Equally, I think that the House massively underestimates the dangers of advancing towards a second referendum. The anger, irritation and annoyance of our constituents will be palpable, and in my judgment, it would be very likely to solve nothing at all. Imagine the nightmare of the country reversing the earlier vote and voting 48:52 to remain. What would that mean for our democracy? What would that mean for the votes of the people in both those referendums? For this House to advance down the route of another referendum would in my view be a very serious mistake indeed. However, if the Government cannot do a deal that the House of Commons will accept, and if the House of Commons cannot come to an agreement in the way that I have described, the ineluctable logic of that position is that it will have to be referred again to the British people, and in my view that would be an absolute disaster.

I end on this point. This is an important negotiation. I think that we have been out-manoeuvred as a country by the European Commission and the 27 standing absolutely firm, as they said they would, which many of us did not believe. However, this is an important negotiation, and they have interests and we have interests. In my judgment, unless the European Union and the Commission can show a little bit more of a sense of compromise on what the Government have been saying, it will leave a profound legacy of bitterness across the channel between the European Union and this country. They are our friends and partners. We will trade with them, do business with them and work with them over the coming years and generations. We also have huge security interests that bind us together. I obviously hope that the Government are successful today, but if they are not and we move into those further processes—the unknown—the Commission will also bear in mind its interest in trying to reach a deal that is good for both parties and is not imposed on one of those parties.

12.14 pm

Ian Murray (Edinburgh South) (Lab): I am grateful to be called to speak in this important debate. I say at the start that I will do this afternoon what is in the best interests of the country and my constituents by not supporting this deal. I have to say that I was disappointed by the contribution of the right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford). We agree on 95% of everything in this particular EU debate. To attack the Labour party, rather than the Government for the deal in front of us, perhaps shows where SNP Members' thought processes are at the moment.

Let us not forget that the House voted for this process, against the Government's wishes. One thing we can all say with great certainty is that, since mid-November last year, nothing has changed, either in the withdrawal agreement or in the political declaration. The only thing that has changed is the Attorney General's legal advice. If you ask a lawyer for the conclusion that you want, and you pay them, you are likely to get what you are

[Ian Murray]

looking for. There is no trust in the Government in this place. We tried to do everything we could as a Parliament, and we had to drag the Government through hedges, to get to a place whereby we could have even this proper debate.

Jim Shannon: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Ian Murray: I will not, because it would mean that my Back-Bench colleagues will not get a chance to speak.

Today is 29 March—the day we should have left the European Union—so it is a good day to look at the report cards for the Government and the leave campaign on where we should have been by today. Where is the £350 million Brexit bonanza for our NHS? It is not there. Where is the easiest trade deal in history? Not only is it not the easiest in history, but the Government have had to take it out of this particular debate to get their deal through. Where is taking back control? Indeed, we are ceding control. Where is the promise of no border on the island of Ireland? The solution cannot be found by the Government because of the red lines they set themselves. Where are the 40 bilateral trade deals that we should have just rolled over by midnight tonight? Where is the cap and the reduction in net migration? It cannot be met. Where is more money going into our public services, when £4.2 billion is being spent on no deal? Those are not just broken promises; they also broke the law. There are no sunny uplands in this process. Today we should all say loud and clear that we are slaying the unicorns once and for all.

This is not meaningful vote 3, it is meaningful vote 2 and a half. The Government are not complying with their own legislation, and they know it. My right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn) was absolutely right: there is nothing wrong with somebody selling their house, but they have to know where they will go next. The Government are asking us to sell the house without knowing where we go next. It is not only that we do not know where we will go next with the political declaration, but that we do not even know who will do that negotiation. This is a blind Brexit with a blind Prime Minister and a blind Government. My hon. Friend the hon. Member for Torfaen (Nick Thomas-Symonds) made a wonderful speech from the Front Bench, and he was absolutely correct: the entire debate on our future relationship with the European Union will be conducted after a Conservative leadership election that could provide a Prime Minister who will rip up the political declaration and take us into territory that we do not want to be taken into.

What happens if the motion passes today but the political declaration—or, indeed, the implementation Bill—does not pass? My right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds Central was absolutely correct that, come 22 May, we will again end up in the situation in which it is the Prime Minister's deal or no deal, with no opportunity to extend the process.

In this process, the Prime Minister is the shopkeeper in the “Monty Python” sketch involving the dead Norwegian parrot, and Parliament is Mr Praline. It is quite clear that her deal is no more. It has ceased to exist. It is bereft of life. It rests in peace. It is a deal that has been nailed to its perch. It is an ex-parrot; it is an

ex-deal. Interestingly, at the end of that sketch, the shopkeeper says, “this is getting silly”, and the sketch gives up. Prime Minister and Government: this is getting silly. Give up and listen to the House.

We might end up having to revoke article 50 come 22 May if we pass this motion but have no opportunity to do anything else. I suggest that the Government now listen to the indicative vote process that happened on Wednesday, act with dignity and respect this House as that process continues next week. They should also listen to what the public are saying. It is completely unfair that the Prime Minister can keep flogging the dead horse of her deal as many times as she likes in this House yet the public got one chance three years ago, with all the sunny uplands and broken promises they were given in 2016. Let us give the British people a confirmatory vote and let them back into the process to break the impasse in Parliament. If they still wish to leave the European Union, and if the Prime Minister is so confident about her deal, she will go to them and get them to back it. If they do not, we can maintain the best deal we have at the moment, which is to be a fully-fledged member of the European Union.

12.20 pm

Priti Patel (Witham) (Con): This debate is quite extraordinary. There is no doubt that the British people feel anger, resentment and a great deal of disappointment towards this House and politicians over Brexit. They expected us to be leaving the EU today. I do not think we need to go over old ground, which has already been articulated, on why we have had to postpone our leaving by legislating through statutory instrument in this House.

The motion is yet another disappointment to everyone who voted to leave the EU. It follows a demand from the EU, made through the European Council decision of 22 March, to agree to extend the period under article 50. Under the provisions of that decision, the UK will be bound into staying in the EU until 22 May, if the motion is agreed to. Of course, agreeing to the motion also means accepting the withdrawal agreement in full and as drafted. Paragraph 11 of the preamble to that decision makes it clear that, by agreeing to the motion, the withdrawal agreement as drafted would be locked in, with no change possible. It binds the United Kingdom into accepting the withdrawal agreement, stating that it

“excludes any re-opening of the Withdrawal Agreement. Any unilateral commitment, statement or other act by the United Kingdom should be compatible with the letter and the spirit of the Withdrawal Agreement.”

Jim Shannon: I thank the right hon. Lady for giving way and commend her for the stance she has taken so far. May I say very gently to her and to the House, and to the Government in particular, that my party has been consistent in its stance over the past two years? A legally binding, time-limited backstop is what we have always asked for; that has not changed and we have not deviated. My right hon. Friend the Member for East Antrim (Sammy Wilson) has referred to that. Does she too hold to that stance?

Priti Patel: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend. Of course, the purpose of today's motion—he and I have commented on this—is that once the withdrawal agreement is agreed, there is no turning back, because

the UK will be bound into an international agreement with the EU. As right hon. and hon. Members will know, that means there will be no chance to change the withdrawal agreement, no chance to change the Northern Ireland backstop, no chance to put safeguards in place to protect our democracy from the harmful laws that will be imposed on us, no chance to freely negotiate new trade deals with the rest of the world, and no chance to change in any meaningful way the legislation coming forward to implement the withdrawal agreement, because seeking to amend the legislation would risk putting the UK being in breach of our international obligations.

Agreeing to the motion means facing a Brexit deal that is dreamed up, drafted and decided by the EU. Once the motion is passed, we will be forced to comply with the EU's demands. That is not what the country voted for, when 17.4 million people voted to leave the EU in the greatest show of democracy this country has ever seen. However, once again we will see the EU's will being imposed on the British people. Of course, the withdrawal agreement represents a legally binding treaty, which will deny the British people and our Parliament the sovereign right to choose our future and be in control of our destiny.

I was elected to the House of Commons with a mandate to deliver Brexit, and the withdrawal agreement does not give this country the freedoms, independence, democracy and control that people voted for. It is becoming increasingly clear that MPs elected on a mandate to take Britain out of the EU and the customs union are—we have to be honest—going back on those pledges and want to impose a customs union on this country. The withdrawal agreement already includes a single customs territory, which is a form of customs union, and we know that many MPs want to go further. That would prevent Britain from negotiating its own trade deals with the rest of the world and effectively keep us as a rule taker.

Mr Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that, since the referendum, we have had a general election, where the Labour party and the Conservative party both said in their manifestos that they would deliver on what the people voted for, and the customs union simply is not that?

Priti Patel: My hon. Friend is right.

Members now have to ask themselves whether they have faith in our democracy and our ability to govern ourselves. We should all be doing everything possible to respect the referendum mandate and stick to the fundamental commitments that brought every single Member of Parliament to this place. Those Members who are committed to keeping their promises to the people are now being forced to make a difficult choice between taking a risk with this motion or taking the risk of giving others in the House who simply do not want to deliver Brexit or the commitments we stood on to get us here in the first place the opportunity to sabotage Brexit. That is the problem we all face, and it is a difficult challenge.

I do not take the decision on how I vote today at all lightly. There is grave disappointment. Nothing upsets me more today than listening to Members of Parliament who want to renege on the very commitments that brought them here. Ultimately I will be judged on the

choice I make, and rightly so, by the people of the Witham constituency—a constituency that voted overwhelmingly to leave the European Union.

Leave means leave. That is exactly what the British public voted for. They did not vote for motion after motion coming forward in this House. They did not vote for Members to say one thing to their electorate and do something else in this House. Members will have to make their own judgments today and not listen to the what ifs, buts and everything else. As many colleagues have said, it is a balance of risk and probabilities, but ultimately we should all be judged on how we vote by the very constituents who elected us. Is it any wonder that trust in British politics is broken given some of the extraordinary contributions today? The fact of the matter is that many of the pledges we have made to our electorate are now being moved away from.

12.27 pm

Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD): Today is a sad day—not because we should have left the EU but have not, but because today signifies the pinnacle of a process in which a Government have for months refused to respect and listen to Parliament. We live in a parliamentary democracy. The sovereignty of our Parliament is a cornerstone of our democracy, but today MPs are being handcuffed, blindfolded and threatened to approve a deal that Parliament has overwhelmingly refused twice. If anything signifies the death of our parliamentary democracy, this is it.

This is the desperate last attempt of a Government and a Prime Minister who have lost control. For anybody who is a passionate supporter of democracy, Parliament and sovereignty, this is an outrage. For that reason alone, MPs should vote against today's motion from an arrogant Government who have attempted to bamboozle, arm-twist and vilify the very representatives of the will of the people. The Government have lost not only trust but the last morsel of good will, and this is no way to get consent. Who buys the argument that voting for today's motion will provide certainty? It will do nothing of the sort.

Sir John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con): Will the hon. Lady make it absolutely clear whether she and the Liberal Democrats want to honour the result of the referendum and leave the European Union, or whether they want to frustrate the will of the people and keep us locked into it?

Wera Hobhouse: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for that contribution and for the opportunity to say this again. If it was 100% clear that 17.4 million people voted to leave without a deal, or if it was 100% clear that 17.4 million people voted for the Prime Minister's deal—which is what he should discuss with his own Prime Minister—then I would agree. But we do not know that, which is exactly why we need to test the will of the people. It was not clear.

Anna Soubry: Does the hon. Lady find it somewhat ironic that there are those on the Government Benches who are changing their mind on how they are going to vote, and indeed have already changed their vote in relation to the EU (Withdrawal) Act, but, for some reason, they will not allow the British people the opportunity to change their mind and change their vote?

Wera Hobhouse: I could not agree more. It is ultimately the arrogance of individual Members who claim that they know exactly the will of the people. I do not know the will of the people in 2019. I am happy to ask them.

Mr Seely: I am grateful to the hon. Member for giving way. I understand that she is making the argument, eloquently, that people did not necessarily vote for a tick-box of what sort of leave they would want. But does she accept the basic principle that 17.4 million people voted to leave and that the best way we can leave in an orderly way is to vote for the deal?

Wera Hobhouse: I absolutely agree with the principle that 17.4 million people voted to leave the European Union, which is exactly why the most democratic way going forward is to ask the people in 2019 once we know what the choices are. To me, the real lie of the leave campaign was that it was not a clear choice. That was the betrayal of the people. Now, in 2019, if we had a referendum we would give people a clear choice between a Brexit deal—I do not mind which one it is—and staying in the European Union. That would be a much more honest referendum this time around.

There is a very easy way for the Government to get a deal through: to agree to put it to the people. The Government have, unfortunately, made their position clear. They do not support a people's vote. However, the great strength of the indicative vote process is that it can test the sentiment in the House and start the combining of choices. Combining choices is how the indicative vote process can move towards a majority view. Not all choices can be combined—we cannot combine leaving the EU with not leaving the EU—but we can combine leaving the EU with a people's vote.

The indicative vote for motion (M) on Wednesday, for a people's vote, achieved the highest number of votes. So the question for today is this: why does the Prime Minister not offer a people's vote on her deal to get it over the line? I have a strong suspicion that if the House was to vote on a combined motion to vote for the Prime Minister's deal subject to a people's vote, the Prime Minister would vote against her own deal.

We keep coming back to the question of our democracy. I and many others in this House have pointed out that democracy did not end in 2016. It is now over two-and-a-half years since that date and it is increasingly absurd for Members to argue for implementing the will of the people in 2016, while simultaneously refusing to ask the people what they think in 2019. If we have the right to change our minds, why do we not give that democratic right to the people of this country? Prime Minister, you can get your deal over the line by combining it with a people's vote. I hope very much that, moving on into next week's indicative votes, we can all compromise and agree to combine some of our options. The ultimate thing has to be that if we are changing things in this place, that change needs to be put back to the people.

12.34 pm

Dominic Raab (Esher and Walton) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Bath (Wera Hobhouse), even though I take a fundamentally different view.

Last November, I resigned from the Cabinet because I could not support the Government's Brexit deal, and I tell the House that I still believe it to be a bad deal. With

the Government purporting to take no deal off the table and their acquiescence in the extension of article 50, I recognise that we potentially now face an even worse alternative that could reverse Brexit and betray our democracy. In extending article 50 and signalling that they were taking WTO exit off the table, the Government rather weakened their own negotiating position in Brussels, and I am afraid heartened some of those in Parliament who are seeking to frustrate Brexit. I believe that decision, which was a choice, was a mistake. As a direct result of that political choice, we now face a very real risk of the UK being forced to accept something akin to single market membership—losing control over our laws, our borders and an independent trade policy.

Meg Hillier: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Dominic Raab: I will make a little progress.

The course the Government have taken gives rise to the very real concern that they would acquiesce in a further long extension, which on both sides of the channel would be used to try to exhaust the UK into revoking Brexit altogether. That is something that I believe we must not entertain or allow. In fairness to the Government, I also recognise that they have provided some additional assurances at the domestic level that Northern Ireland will not be forced, alone, to follow EU regulations. That is of some value, although I well appreciate the concerns of those—not just on the Opposition side of the House—who are concerned that those assurances are not contained in the withdrawal agreement and therefore are not binding at the international level. Until we see the Bill, it is impossible to assess the strength of those safeguards.

Beyond those assurances, the unilateral declaration and the joint instrument relating to the exit from the so-called backstop do not change our international obligations. Frankly, they offer scant political comfort either. In all this, however frustrating, I believe we need to proceed with some realism. The choice now is between the risk of being held in the backstop by the EU for a period without being able to control our exit and, on the other hand, a significant risk of losing Brexit altogether. Neither is palatable, and both could have been avoided if the Government had shown the requisite resolve and will.

I appreciate that, for many colleagues, this presents a very finely balanced judgment call. I share the deep frustrations many feel at being presented with two such unsavoury alternatives, but anger is not a political strategy, and in this fast-moving and fluid landscape, I believe we must assess the specific and tangible decision before us at this point in time. The motion today explicitly does not satisfy section 13 of the EU withdrawal Act so it is not, in practice or in law, a third meaningful vote. However—and the right hon. Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn) made this point rather well—the vote on its own terms does have significant legal and practical implications. First, it is necessary to satisfy the EU Council decision on 22 March to avoid and indeed prevent the Government returning to the EU to seek an even longer extension. I regard that as essential. The second implication of the motion, by virtue of that, is to avoid the UK holding European elections in May. I regard that as absolutely essential to avoid the very dangerous and corrosive effect on public trust in our democracy.

Mr Baron: May I urge my right hon. Friend to think again before deciding to change his mind and support what to all intents and purposes is a meaningful vote? We do not know what the future holds for sure, but we do know for sure that we can only decide on the facts that are before us, and we know this is a bad deal that could lock the UK indefinitely in a backstop for a very long time. When deciding to vote against Iraq, I, like many others in this place, could only judge it on the facts at the time, not on threats involving weapons of mass destruction. Will he please consider that before he finally makes up his mind?

Dominic Raab: I always listen attentively to my hon. Friend. He posits the dilemma correctly, and this is a finely balanced judgment of risk. My problem is that I cannot countenance an even longer extension, or holding European elections in May.

The third implication of the motion is that under section 13 of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018, a duly constituted third meaningful vote will have to return to the House for a vote, presumably on Second Reading of the withdrawal and implementation Bill. That will buy the Government a little more time and room for manoeuvre, which in my view they should use to revert to the EU and seek an exchange of letters that can provide legally binding measures that give effect to the Brady amendment. *[Interruption.]* Some Opposition Members are looking on in disbelief, and I listened carefully to the hon. Member for Hackney South and Shoreditch (Meg Hillier) when she spoke. Why is the EU's position treated as immutable and unmovable, but the UK is always expected to bend? The House is succumbing to that mindset, which is precisely what led us to this predicament in the first place.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Dominic Raab: I will not give way because of the time.

The risk of a WTO departure is growing because of the position of the EU, as well as what we do in this House. I believe we should continue to collaborate with the EU—not just on aviation and lorries, where progress has been made—and seek to mitigate the risks to jobs, livelihoods and businesses that arise on both sides. That is the responsible thing for all sides to do, and I hope that the Government are engaged in that. Of course, if the EU rejects those offers and overtures, it must take responsibility for what follows and the consequences of its political intransigence.

On that basis, I will vote for the motion. I do so without prejudice to my position on the section 13 meaningful vote, and to achieve two essential outcomes: to stave off a longer extension, and to prevent European elections from being held in May. I hope that the Government can more vigorously pursue the reassurances that we need on the withdrawal agreement and political declaration to make them more acceptable to this House.

12.42 pm

Liz Kendall (Leicester West) (Lab): I will vote against the withdrawal agreement today. It is not what people were promised and it will lead to a worse deal than we have now. Far from sorting Brexit, the uncertainty facing our country will continue for years to come.

Many people, including those who aspire to be the next Prime Minister of this country, want to sweep the promises that they made during the referendum under the carpet. They say that those promises are not relevant, and they hope that people will forget. However, Labour Members remember that our constituents were promised that when we leave the European Union we will hold all the cards, that agreeing our entire future relationship with the EU would be the easiest deal in human history, and that we would have the exact same benefits as now. Mr Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth.

Despite that, I am acutely aware that many people just want Brexit to be sorted; they want it to be over. They are fed up with the incomprehensible twists and turns, with the arguments and anger, and they want us to get on with it. They want us to deal with the issues that matter in their daily lives. But we must speak the truth: this withdrawal agreement and political declaration, which cannot be separated, solve none of the fundamental questions that we face about our future relationship with the EU, and the huge consequences that that will have for jobs, businesses and public services. If we do not get those choices right, dealing with issues such as housing and the future of our public services will be even harder, if not impossible.

The grim truth is that if this withdrawal agreement gets through today, we will be taking a huge leap into the unknown. Worse still, none of the fundamental questions and choices will be made by Opposition Members—they will be made by the winner of the next Tory leadership election. I have looked on with what I can describe only as growing disgust as certain members of the Tory party, who for months have opposed the withdrawal agreement, are now flipping to support it. They do so not out of any principle, but purely for their own personal and political gain. We cannot allow the future of this country to be held to ransom by the never-ending internal Tory psychodrama and by people who want to put their own jobs and ambitions before the jobs and ambitions of people in this country.

I close on something that may not be the main focus of today's debate but, just as with the financial crash, I fear that Brexit and the subsequent political crisis will have long-term consequences for both main political parties, for faith in our parliamentary democracy and political process, for our sense of nationhood and national identity, and for Britain's standing in the eyes of countries throughout the world.

We will not deal with any of those problems and challenges by voting for the withdrawal agreement and just hoping they go away, or by putting the future of this country in the hands of a hard-line Tory Brexiteer who will never be satisfied until their ideological purity has been achieved at the expense of everyone in this country except themselves. We will deal with these issues and challenges only by facing them head on.

We need a longer extension so that we can build a lasting consensus on the best way forward, not just within this House but, crucially, with the British people. For that reason, I hope all Opposition Members will join me in voting against the withdrawal agreement today.

12.46 pm

Sir Christopher Chope (Christchurch) (Con): I will be joining the hon. Member for Leicester West (Liz Kendall) in voting against this agreement. Despite the best interests of so many of my colleagues, I fear they are falling for the Government's siren song that is threatening no Brexit or an even softer Brexit as the only alternatives to voting for the agreement today.

Do my hon. and right hon. Friends not realise that, if the agreement were to be approved today, they would be powerless to prevent the ensuing legislation from being amended to keep the United Kingdom in the single market and the customs union without our having the ability to control immigration? We will have given up £39 billion and our unilateral right to leave the European Union, and we will be held to ransom by those in this House who do not wish to honour the Conservative party manifesto or, for that matter, the Labour party manifesto, both of which committed to implementing the will of the people as enunciated by the referendum.

I associate myself absolutely with the words of wisdom of my right hon. Friends the Members for Wokingham (John Redwood) and for Witham (Priti Patel) and the right hon. Member for East Antrim (Sammy Wilson), who accurately sum up my mood. The Attorney General sought to make a virtue of the new legal right to stay in the European Union until 22 May, but I am more concerned about enforcing and delivering our existing legal right to leave on 12 April.

Leaving on WTO terms on 12 April, although two weeks later than we hoped, will bring certainty. Those two weeks can be used further to reduce the short-term problems. Let us also remember that, in the indicative votes, the overwhelming majority of the Conservative party in Parliament voted in favour of the no-deal option. Let us not forget that.

We also know, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham said, that there is very little support across the country for the Prime Minister's deal. Indeed, there is growing support, and much greater support, for the no-deal WTO outcome. We should listen to those people and expect more support for the no-deal option, which of course remains the default option. If we vote against this agreement today, we will be leaving on 12 April, as we could have been leaving today had it not been for the way in which the Prime Minister unilaterally decided to stand against the will of the people.

Some of my hon. and right hon. Friends are holding their noses in voting for a withdrawal agreement they despise. Why would anyone want to hold their nose and vote for something so much against their own instincts and the interests of the British people?

We are having this debate on the basis of the European Council decision on 22 March to provide an extension of article 50 to 12 April, and to the 22 May if we approve the withdrawal agreement. I fear that our European colleagues were rather misled into thinking that the reference to the withdrawal agreement included the political declaration. In her letter to Donald Tusk on 20 March—not that long ago—the Prime Minister asserted:

“The UK Government's policy remains to leave the European Union on the basis of the Withdrawal Agreement and Political Declaration agreed in November”,

yet the Front Bench are clearly indicating that they are minded to change the content of the political declaration through further negotiation.

In the same letter, the Prime Minister also said that “the House of Commons rejected the deal for a second time” and that she had intended to bring it back in the week to 20 March but that this had not been possible because of your rulings, Mr Speaker. In respect of those rulings, she said:

“Some Members of Parliament have interpreted that this means a further change to the deal”

is necessary—distancing herself perhaps from that interpretation. She then said that

“it remains my intention to bring the deal back to the House”

—not “part of the” deal, but “the” deal—and that

“I intend to put forward a motion as soon as possible under section 13...and make the argument for the orderly withdrawal”, and so on.

The Prime Minister has not come back with “the” deal, and she has not put forward a motion under section 13, so I suspect that our European friends might find, when they look at the detail, that they were gravely misled into their Council decision. We know they are angry at the way the Prime Minister negotiated a deal that she then sought to renege on by, for example, supporting the Brady amendment. We might find out more next week, once we have defeated this motion today, but I suspect that the Prime Minister now needs to deliver the will of the British people and allow no deal on 12 April to proceed.

12.52 pm

Anna Soubry (Broxtowe) (Ind): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Christchurch (Sir Christopher Chope). I do not agree with much of what he says, but I will say this in his favour: at least he is consistent with the arguments he has made repeatedly in this place for why this is a bad deal. He and I will be in the same Lobby tonight—for different reasons—and actually I agree with much of what he says about the deal.

Apparently hon. Members now decry consistency. It is quite bizarre—forgive me, Mr Speaker, for repeating comments I made only a few days ago—that hon. Members think it entirely proper and honourable that they should be allowed to change their vote and their minds but that the British people should be denied exactly the same right on this matter. *[Interruption.]* The right hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Sir John Hayes) is one such person. He voted against the Prime Minister's deal, then he voted for it, and he will again vote for it today.

In all the shameful shenanigans that have embraced Brexit, we have sunk to real depths today, and I want to explain why. It is not good enough for people to stand up and say, as we have heard, that they will now vote for the deal, not because they think it might be good for our country or our constituents, but because it will stop an extension—even though the Government have made it clear that no further extensions would be allowed. It is perverse for hon. Members to say they will now vote for the deal because it prevents our taking part in European parliamentary elections. These are not good reasons.

Other Government Members have said they will vote for the Prime Minister's deal on the basis that the Prime Minister will stand down. That is not acting with honour; that is not acting with principle. I will vote with the right hon. Member for Witham (Priti Patel)—she remains my friend and always will be. At least she has been true

to her principles. She stands and says that she will not vote for the deal and rightly says that she will be held to account by her constituents. I congratulate her on that. We do not always agree—we do not agree on this issue—but on many points we do agree about why this withdrawal agreement is bad for our country.

I pay tribute to the Democratic Unionist party. *[Interruption.]* The Minister of State, Ministry of Justice decries that. He has not even let me finish my sentence. As a grouping, I have grave difficulties with the DUP, as individuals I find most of them pleasant, but at least they have been consistent, and on this I absolutely agree with them. This withdrawal agreement is a genuine threat to the Union of the United Kingdom. I genuinely believe that. It is one of the reasons why I am in fear of this agreement. I believe that it is a threat to Northern Ireland and its relationship as part of our United Kingdom. I believe that the same is true of Scotland. I believe that Brexit will increase the desire of the Scottish people to break away from the Union and strike out by themselves, because they will see a future as a member of the European Union denied them as part of the United Kingdom. In Wales, too, we know that the number of remain voters continues to grow.

I agree with the comments made by the right hon. and learned Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve), the hon. Member for Leicester West (Liz Kendall) and the right hon. Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn) that the division between the political declaration and the withdrawal agreement will make the certainty that British businesses are crying out for even less achievable. It is so regrettable, given that we have started finally on a process of indicative votes—something that, as you know, Mr Speaker, many of us were crying out for at the beginning of this process to bring unity; to bring the 48% and the 52% together to form a consensus. We have begun that process and we are making good progress in it, and I think that there will be some good and reasonable outcomes that will heal the divide and take us forward in the way that we need to go.

What sort of country have we become post the referendum? Are we a better country? Are we a happier country? Are we a more united country? Or is the absolute reality that we are not just as divided as we were in June 2016 but even more divided? Change will come because change has to come, because British politics is broken. We are seeing that change. I have left the Conservative party along with two others. I think more will follow. I think we will see the break-up of the two parties, and I am delighted today that the group that I have joined with former Labour Members has today formed itself into a new political party that will change the face and direction of British politics. That is why we call ourselves change.org—*[Interruption.]* I believe that that is what the British people are crying out for—leadership, honesty, integrity and a new way of doing politics. That is the only good thing that will come out of the Brexit chaos.

Mr Speaker: A four-minute limit now applies.

12.58 pm

Mr Owen Paterson (North Shropshire) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Broxtowe (Anna Soubry). I admire her consistency, but she will not agree with what I am about to say. I am afraid that I did not agree with what she said.

This is a simple question of democracy, sovereignty and accountability. That is why 17.4 million people voted to leave. They were told, “You are sovereign. You make a decision. The Commons, as elected, will interpret that.” They trusted us to deliver what they voted for. They will be bitterly disappointed. At 11 o’clock tonight, we should be leaving, and we will not be leaving, and that is a terrible blow to integrity and their trust in us. The Conservative manifesto was very clear that we would interpret leave to mean leaving the single market, leaving the customs union and leaving the European Court of Justice. The Labour party pretty well said the same thing. More than two thirds of Members of Parliament represent seats that said leave, and 444 and 498 Members voted for the Second and Third Readings of the Bill to trigger article 50. At that stage, perhaps Opposition Members were stunned by the effect of the referendum, but now I am amazed by the nature of these debates. There is a sense that that enormous vote—that enormous expression of popular demand—has faded into the past. It is seen as a bit embarrassing and bit like a bad smell at a dinner party

Chris Bryant *rose*—

Mr Paterson: Other Members want to speak, so I must push on.

The issue is live. Those people are out there and they believe that it should happen and that we should deliver it. It is not going back. It cannot be put back in the bottle, with the top screwed on, and then hidden in a cupboard or put in the fridge. That huge vote will continue to dominate our politics. The issue is not going away.

It is extraordinary that the fifth largest economy in the world is proposing to have laws imposed on it by 27 other countries, many of which are competitors that have no incentive to pass law in our interest. We will not be present when the law is made and we will not be able to amend or repeal it, and if we do not apply it to the satisfaction of the European Commission and, ultimately, the European Court of Justice, we will be subject, as we heard during last week’s urgent question, to unlimited fines—“disallowance”, in EU-speak.

We have the horror facing Northern Ireland. The whole basis of getting the Unionist population to vote for the Belfast agreement was the principle of consent. There was an extraordinarily successful campaign by Lord Trimble; it was an amazing effort to get Unionists to vote for it. The basis was trust that the status of Northern Ireland could not be changed, yet we are going to have something horrible called UKNI, which is actually in breach of the Acts of Union of 1801.

Lady Hermon *rose*—

Mr Paterson: I am sorry, but others want to speak. This is about trust and democracy.

Finally, the absolute key point is that what we are seeing today does not deliver. It does not deliver on the referendum, the manifesto commitments or the promises made throughout all the debates. When it comes to trust, I represent a leave constituency and I was clear to my constituents about what I was going to do. Given that I have voted twice against this agreement, they all think it would be perverse if I, under pressure, changed my mind today. Why on earth would I do that? I will

[Mr Paterson]

maintain my integrity and reputation, with the intention of continuing to campaign. We may lose this battle, but ultimately, we will get back the sovereignty of this country so that people can make decisions.

1.2 pm

Ian C. Lucas (Wrexham) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for North Shropshire (Mr Paterson), with whom, he will not be surprised to hear, I disagree. I did, however, vote with him to trigger article 50 two years ago. In my speech during that debate, I told the Prime Minister that she needed to reach out across the Chamber to create consensus on Brexit. I also told colleagues in the Labour party that they also needed to reach out to find consensus on Brexit. Since that day, the Prime Minister has achieved no consensus at all, which is why we are having this debate today, 29 March, the last day.

I commend the right hon. Member for West Dorset (Sir Oliver Letwin) for the procedure he started and that we managed to get through earlier this week. I think that it took us forward, for the first time in a long time, in trying to find a solution to this hugely difficult problem.

There are questions about democratic legitimacy and there are important issues that divide fundamentally all our constituents, and we know that Brexit means different things for different people. Parliamentarians on both sides of the Chamber must seek consensus. For me, that meant supporting, for the first time, the proposal suggested by the Beckett motion earlier this week, which is for a referendum. I had been very reluctant to do so because I had come around to the position adopted by the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke)—on which he has been sensibly consistent for a very long time—that referendums are very bad things.

We do not have a solution before us today. What we have is something that, I must confess, I contemplated at one stage. In fact, I discussed it with our shadow spokesman for Brexit, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer). *[Interruption.]* Please do not interrupt me. I did consider this myself, but then I looked at the law. What the law says in the European Union (Withdrawal) Act is that these issues have to be considered together. Furthermore, the Prime Minister consistently said until she reached the last day that these issues must be considered together.

We have also seen a beauty parade of cynical individuals seeking personal advancement within the Conservative party, reversing their position today because their competitors have reversed position. The honest challenges that we are seeking as Members of Parliament are not being supported. What we need to do, and what I will do, is vote against the motion today. Then, on Monday, I will be looking for consensus, so that this Parliament can begin to take back control and act responsibly, as the Prime Minister has singularly failed to do. We could have achieved consensus across these Benches months—even years—ago. The Prime Minister has not sought it. Parliament needs to do it now.

1.6 pm

Rebecca Pow (Taunton Deane) (Con): I rise to support the motion. I have not spoken in many of these debates, but I have been driven to speak. We have heard time and

again from all the same people, but not much from what I call the voices of reason. I am speaking because I am exasperated and fed up with the bickering that has gone on in this House. It cannot be beyond the wit of the men and women of this great place to come to a decision that puts the good of the nation first.

Every single day, obfuscation—I cannot say the word very well because I am so exasperated—causes more difficulties for the businesses of this country. We rely on those businesses to fuel our economy and give us jobs so that people can work and pay taxes and we have the public services that we need. A recent straw poll that I undertook of businesses clearly highlights that they want a decision, they want it now and they do not want it in a year's time.

Many individuals confess that they do not understand half of what we are debating in this place and many wish they had never heard of it all. I do not profess to be legal, but I do know that we have to make a decision. Some 52% of people in Taunton Deane voted out, while 48% voted to remain. I said that I would respect that decision. I have moved from supporting remain and I am putting the country first.

Rehman Chishti (Gillingham and Rainham) (Con): Others have said that there is a cynical reason for people moving their position. I resigned in November from all Government and party positions when I saw the legal risk of the backstop. However, now there is a bigger risk: not delivering Brexit at all. The country's interests come first. Does my hon. Friend agree?

Rebecca Pow: I absolutely 100% agree. Yes, 17.4 million people voted to leave and yes there was a roar for change, but more than 16 million people gave a yell to be noticed as well. That indicates that we need compromise. We have had nearly three years of debate in this place. I ask colleagues this: how many people have really changed their position? The polarisation is frankly disturbing.

Today, let us demonstrate that we can take one small step for Parliament and one giant step for the UK and the men and women of this nation by passing the withdrawal agreement—the legally binding agreement that sets out the UK's departure from the EU bloc, that fits with EU rules and that involves the longer extension to 22 May. That is a legal right, as the Attorney General clearly outlined, and it takes us straight to the Bill, which was also touched on by my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith).

Let us not forget that both Labour and the Conservatives committed to honouring the results of the referendum. I ask right hon. and hon. Members on both sides: can we really countenance voting against Brexit on the day when Brexit was meant to happen? I find that extraordinary. By separating the agreement from the declaration, which sets out the framework for the future relationship, we can go on and continue to discuss what type of Brexit we really want, and it has to be something that we can all live with. I still firmly believe the PM's deal was a good one. She has fought doggedly and determinedly—I do not think anyone can disagree with that—and I believe that she has come up with a very comprehensive deal, which fundamentally is good.

I voted in the indicative votes and did what people may think is a strange thing: I voted aye to two completely contrasting things—a closer relationship with the customs

union and a relationship with the European economic area and the European Free Trade Association—because I felt that I had to indicate that we needed to reach consensus in the House. Neither was my favourite, and neither was as good as the Prime Minister's deal. Today, at least let us get this over the line. Let us discuss all the other permutations later. Let us demonstrate to the nation that we can all work together, at least today. Let us make it, step by step. I say this to my children and to my husband, who is not very well and who is watching this at home: step by step, all things are possible. As the sun shines on a glorious spring day in Taunton Deane, let us bring some of that sunshine to the rest of the nation and vote for this today.

1.11 pm

Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): It is an honour to follow the hon. Member for Taunton Deane (Rebecca Pow). Another day, another Brexit vote, which is not quite the Brexit vote that we need and does not quite have the numbers that it needs to win. It does not quite give constituents, companies or our four countries the certainty that they require, yet here we are again.

The British state is beset with a Tory Westminster Government behaving like Olympian gods, as if our constituents, many of whom have livelihoods that depend on our relationship with Europe, and we were mere pawns in their chess game. They insist on bringing forward meaningful vote after vote after vote, knowing that they produce absolutely nothing, but pretend that they are doing something. This is nothing more than deceit, duplicity and deception from a Government acting in desperation. Then the Prime Minister has the audacity to go on national television and blame us, Members of this House, for her failure as Head of State to govern.

We are ensnared in a morass of procedural minutiae, with twists and turns of byzantine complexity—a six-volume Gibbon's "Decline and Fall of the British Empire"—played out in painfully tedious slow-motion in what used to be held in respect as the mother of Parliaments. We cannot discuss the failure of this House without turning to the Benches on this side. We were helpfully reminded this week—everyone was reminded—that Labour is "not a remain party", and don't we know it. If the Labour party had done its sole job and opposed any of the disastrous moves by the Government, not simply closed its eyes and wished upon its negotiation-free Brexit, we would now have a clear way forward and we would not be clinging to the whims of the European Reform Group and the intransigence of the Democratic Unionist party. Alas, as long as we stick to this archaic, dysfunctional Westminster system, we are stuck with Her Majesty's Opposition, complicit with Her Majesty's Government.

Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg (North East Somerset) (Con): The right hon. Lady mentioned the ERG. If Her Majesty's Government had followed the whims of the ERG we would be in a much better position today.

Liz Saville Roberts: The ERG does what suits it best and, as we see, many of its members are allowed to change their opinion. If only the people of the nations of the United Kingdom were allowed as much.

I would say to Labour that if Wales leaves Europe because of Labour Members, Labour fiefdom in Wales is at an end. If Labour abandons the interests of Wales, Wales will abandon Labour. This House, at the behest of both the Brexiteering Unionist parties has so far failed to make any decisions about our future relationship with the European Union. The blame is at their door. We have suggested ways forward to marshal decision making, with my hon. Friend the Member for Carmarthen East and Dinefwr (Jonathan Edwards) suggesting indicative votes using an alternative voting system to decide how we proceed. That was first raised weeks upon weeks ago, long before the Government lost their first meaningful vote. If the Prime Minister had pulled her fingers out of her ears and listened to anyone other than the privileged elite of the ERG and the DUP—the elite of the Brexiteers—we could have used the last two and a half months to make some progress, to decide what the House thinks is the best way forward and to simply get on with it.

It cannot be said often enough: how often is the Prime Minister going to game democracy for her own purposes? How many ERGers will switch their votes and their previous principles on the most spurious of thin reasons? Will they not open their eyes and see that representative parliamentary democracy in this place has stalled? If it is good enough for the Tories to have multiple shots, how do they have the nerve to argue that the people are somehow unworthy of a final-say referendum? Bring on a people's vote—our salvation in public democracy.

To close, we are where we are because of this tin-eared, time-wasting and timorous British Government, who are hell bent on putting their own interests before the interests of farmers, factory workers and families across the UK. If this is the best the Commons can cobble together, we are in serious trouble. Britain is broken, and Westminster is simply not working. The people of Wales deserve better than this failed empire of a Union. The timbers of this ship of state are rotten, and we in Wales must look to Europe and to ourselves for salvation.

1.16 pm

Mr John Baron (Basildon and Billericay) (Con): I voted against meaningful votes 1 and 2, and I will be voting against meaningful vote 3 this afternoon. Let us be absolutely clear: no matter how it is dressed up by the Government, this is a vote on the Prime Minister's withdrawal agreement. I think it is a very, very bad deal. Part of the reason why we have arrived at this point, where the House cannot support the deal, is that the negotiating team saw Brexit as a problem to be solved rather than an opportunity to be seized. Furthermore, they never convinced the EU that we were prepared to walk away. In any negotiation, if the other side really does not think that you are prepared to walk away, it makes for a worse deal.

I sympathise very much with my colleagues—particularly those who voted Brexit—because this is a very difficult decision. To choose between the devil and the deep blue sea is never easy, but I have decided again to vote against this meaningful vote, because this is such a disastrous deal. It is a disastrous deal on two fronts—

Mark Pawsey (Rugby) (Con): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr Baron: No, I am going to make progress. If I finish beforehand, I will take the intervention, but a lot of Members want to speak in the debate.

There are two central questions the Government have continued to fail to answer. The first was raised by our friends in the DUP, who made it clear that the meaningful vote would put in place an internal border within the United Kingdom. It is not just the DUP that believes that; it is all the Unionist parties in Northern Ireland, and we should not take that lightly. This would actually threaten our United Kingdom.

However, there is a further reason why we should be wary of this agreement, and that is that it is very possible—

The Minister of State, Ministry of Justice (Rory Stewart) *rose—*

Mr Baron: I am not going to take an intervention from the Front Bench, who have negotiated a disastrous deal for us. It is as simple as that—I am sorry.

Richard Graham: Will my hon. Friend take an intervention from me?

Mr Baron: I did promise my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby (Mark Pawsey).

Mark Pawsey: My hon. Friend says this is a bad deal. Why does he think that, at a time when business investment is at its lowest, all manufacturing industries believe this is a good deal that should be supported?

Mr Baron: Because my hon. Friend will remember, as I do, the dire predictions if we voted to leave in 2016, which never materialised. They were so poor that the Bank of England and many others had to publicly apologise, and since then we have seen record low unemployment, record high manufacturing output and record investment, and those decisions in recent years have been made on the basis that we could be leaving on no-deal, WTO terms.

Richard Graham *rose—*

Mr Baron: I am sorry, I will not give way. I am going to continue for a little bit.

The second reason why I will vote against the agreement this afternoon is the indefinite nature of the backstop. I fully agree with those who say that there is a need for compromise. I do not like the transition arrangement, but I can hold my nose to it, because in a sense it is no worse than being in the EU, but what I find very difficult to swallow is the indefinite nature of the backstop. I cannot imagine that there is anybody in this place who would enter into a serious legal arrangement—an agreement—that gave the key to exit only to the other party. We could be locked into the backstop indefinitely. That is not delivering on the result of the EU referendum, the triggering of article 50 or the result of the general election, in which both parties committed to honouring the referendum result in their manifestos.

In conclusion, we triggered article 50. The legal default position of that triggering, which we passed by a majority of 384, is that we would leave with or without a deal. Monday's motion will address the central issue of whether

we leave on WTO terms if we cannot pass the Prime Minister's deal today, and I would encourage the House to give it consideration.

1.21 pm

Sir Mark Hendrick (Preston) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Basildon and Billericay (Mr Baron), who I have jousting with on many an occasion in the Foreign Affairs Committee. As you would expect, Mr Speaker, my views are very different, although we draw the same conclusion on this deal today. I will be voting against the deal today because I believe it is a trap—a final attempt by the Prime Minister to leave us in a situation where it will be her deal or no deal. That is the situation that she wants to create on 22 May, should the deal pass today, but hopefully it will not.

During the last two years, 18 months has been wasted because the Prime Minister would not discuss with Parliament, nor with her Government, what was being discussed and negotiated with the EU. After 18 months, the Prime Minister produced the so-called Chequers plan, which was roundly rejected by many of her own MPs as well as other Members. That plan formed the basis for negotiations, leading to the resignations of Cabinet Ministers and deep divisions among Conservative Members. The stubbornness of the Prime Minister in running down the clock has left us in the embarrassing position that we are in today. Still we are debating this on the day that we were due to leave the European Union.

Let me discuss the separation of the withdrawal agreement from the political declaration. The way that this has been put forward today would appear to mean that if the motion is passed, it would give the new Conservative Prime Minister a blank cheque to put through what I would regard as a hard-right Brexit deal in the future. We can already see the leadership candidates trying to out-right each other in the run-up to a competition that I believe started from the moment that the Prime Minister issued her resignation at the 1922 committee. What we will see, whatever is agreed by the Government and a new Prime Minister, is a hard-right version of Brexit, and possibly a Canada-style international trade agreement.

I am now a member of the Select Committee on International Trade, and I have seen the International Trade Secretary talk about roll-overs. The EU currently has something like 40 international trade agreements. At the moment, only eight look in any way, shape or form as though they could be rolled over, and they are with minor countries, none of which are of the size or mass of the European Union market. Even though we will leave, the European Union will still be our major trading partner, irrespective of what many Brexiteers and flat-earthers on the other side of the Chamber will say.

To consider this motion in isolation from the political declaration is to give the power to any new Conservative Prime Minister to make a mess of our trading relations with the rest of the world. In investment decisions, location is key, and this will upset a lot of businesses, irrespective of what the Attorney General said earlier. It is not just about when we leave, but about how. The deal is key, which is why the indicative process we have already started is important. What we do on Monday

will be key, so along with other colleagues, I will vote down the deal today in the hope that we can get a good agreement on Monday.

Mr Speaker: A three-minute time limit now applies.

1.25 pm

Mr David Jones (Clwyd West) (Con): Today's debate is proceeding for one reason only. It is not being held, as my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney General acknowledged, with a view to delivering a positive meaningful vote for the purposes of the withdrawal Act. Indeed, it is hard to see how another meaningful vote could be held, since there has been no change whatever to the withdrawal agreement, which was so convincingly rejected by the House only two weeks ago.

The European Union has made it clear that the withdrawal agreement cannot be reopened, and you have made it absolutely clear, Mr Speaker, that you would not countenance the rejected motion being put to the House again. The motion before us does not fulfil the statutory requirements of the Act. We are being asked to approve it for one reason only: to keep the clock ticking, to ensure that that can that has been so repeatedly kicked does not complete its progress down the road on 12 April but bumps along a bit until 22 May. To be fair to the Government, they openly acknowledge that that is the case. However, they also say, ostensibly and illogically, that we are today considering the withdrawal agreement separately from the political declaration. That is not the case, and it is illogical to say that it is, because the political declaration is incorporated by reference into the body of the withdrawal agreement. It is there in black and white, in article 184. In reality, we are considering the political declaration today. In reality, we are considering the whole package that we rejected by 149 votes only a few days ago.

This was to be the day when we celebrated—or lamented, depending on one's point of view—the departure of the United Kingdom from the European Union. It could have been the moment when we put the travails of the last three fractious years behind us, but it is not. Humiliatingly, we are going through today's exercise because the Government have been told by the European Union that we have until 22 May to sign up to the withdrawal agreement, but only if it is approved by the House by 11 pm tonight. If anything had changed, I would possibly have been inclined to consider supporting the motion today. If it had changed, like Keynes, I might have been prepared to consider changing my own mind, but nothing has changed, and therefore I will not.

The truth is that we are being asked to approve this agreement to buy the Government another 40 days. What a dreadful 40 days that would be—40 days of increasing frustration for the British people, who wonder why the steeple bells are not pealing out this evening. It is time to bring this miserable business to an end. It is time to deliver Brexit. I therefore urge all hon. Members to oppose the motion.

1.28 pm

Deidre Brock (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): There was a time when Brexit meant Brexit. These days it seems to mean chaos. This grand plan to demonstrate that the UK has been Gulliver imprisoned in Lilliput for the last 46 years has fallen apart and is broken. To

deal with that burach we have a Government so dysfunctional, so bereft of talent and so lacking in trust that the Prime Minister has given up trying to appoint Ministers. Their only saving grace is that they are opposed by an official loyal Opposition who seem incapable of doing anything that might actually help and who seem completely at odds with themselves.

We have a Prime Minister who thinks that no will turn to yes if only half the question is asked, served by a Cabinet including one Minister who thought it appropriate to tell a journalist:

"I'm past caring. It's like the living dead in here."

I suspect that might have been the Prime Minister herself, but it is an insult to the living dead.

Worse is to come, though, if the Prime Minister ever manages to muster enough support to resign, only to be replaced by a more vicious version of the Bullingdon club. Something worse than the current Government is lying in wait and could be about to be ushered into office by some useful idiots in the Labour party, who have stood in this Chamber and preached about principle and about how damaging the deal is, but who now pretend to have found some substantive change that makes it the best possible deal of all possible worlds. They stand on the wrong side of history, and on the wrong side of the interests of the people they were paid to represent.

I represent a constituency that is opposed to Brexit, and I am proud to say that I agree with my constituents. We want to keep our links with the EU, because we understand the benefits of our membership, especially the benefits of freedom of movement. Some 10% of the population of Edinburgh North and Leith are non-UK citizens of the EU, which is more than twice the UK average. We also have higher than average numbers of people from elsewhere in Europe, and from elsewhere in the world. We also have a higher number of immigrants from England than the Scottish average. Every one of them is welcome. We understand the benefits of immigration and the cultural and economic value that immigrants bring. We understand just how damaging Brexit would be, particularly a chaotic Brexit.

This deal—this pile of manure that we are being offered as an appetiser for the slurry to come—would harm my constituents. It is offered by a Prime Minister who has run out of road and has no other ideas. That is no basis on which to recommend anything to anyone, far less a future to our country. It is time to go back to the people and say, "This is what Brexit actually is, so would you like to go through with it or would you rather revoke article 50?" and let them have a choice with at least some idea of what the choice actually is.

1.31 pm

Steve Brine (Winchester) (Con): It is not that challenging to follow that speech. It is a shame to be back on the Back Benches after three years as a Minister. It might have been on the Front Bench, but I have sat through a lot of these debates, and it seems to me that the hon. Member for Edinburgh North and Leith (Deidre Brock) is about to prove my point: Members of this House have spent far too much time listening in order to respond, rather than listening in order to understand. The entrenchment of positions, as my hon. Friend the Member for Taunton Deane (Rebecca Pow) said, is part of the problem.

[Steve Brine]

Many of my constituents voted to remain—probably the majority—many voted to leave, and many were not old enough and decry the fact that they could not take part. However, their view is that if we must leave, we must do so with a withdrawal agreement. If that is one's position—it has been mine since day one—one cannot wish away no deal. That is why I have supported the Prime Minister's withdrawal agreement twice. However, I came to the conclusion that we cannot just keep hoping that the agreement gets over the line—from the speeches we have heard, I think it is unlikely to do so today.

We therefore needed to have a plan B and a parallel process, and earlier this week I left the Government in order to support that process. It was never going to produce a conclusive result; we never expected it to. If the withdrawal agreement falls today, Monday's process will become more important than ever. If Members do not believe in leaving without a withdrawal agreement, as I do not—and I believe the Prime Minister does not, along with a big majority in this House—it is because they want to respect the result of the referendum, whether or not they regret it, in a safe way that produces a safe exit from the European Union. People write to me all the time to say that handing the matter back to the people will solve the situation. It might produce an outcome, but it will not be consequence-free. As with voting against the withdrawal agreement the second time and tonight, whatever the House decides this afternoon will have consequences.

I am clear that voting for the withdrawal agreement is the right thing to do. It would move us forward, out of the constitutional arrangement with the EU and into a treaty arrangement. My hon. Friend the Member for Cheltenham (Alex Chalk) put it very well when he said that the key point is simplicity. It is about a financial settlement—because this is a country that honours our financial settlements—citizens' rights, which matter greatly to me and to my constituents, and the implementation period, which business has been crystal clear it needs to deliver a safe exit.

1.34 pm

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): I commend the hon. Member for Winchester (Steve Brine), and I very much hope that he will now join the all-party parliamentary group on acquired brain injury, since he has some spare time.

Round and round and round we go. It is not so much a stuck record as a record played at the wrong speed, and frankly it is about time we changed direction. I am going to vote against the motion—[*Interruption.*] The Minister of State, Ministry of Justice, the hon. Member for Penrith and The Border (Rory Stewart) looks depressed and upset as if I have let him down terribly.

The truth is that this is a ludicrous attempt at a body swerve by the Government. This House decided in this parliamentary Session the proper process for proceeding: first, a meaningful vote on the withdrawal agreement and the political declaration, all in one—that is what the House decided and enacted in this Session—and secondly, an Act of Parliament to implement them. I feel that the Government actually intend to use the withdrawal agreement and implementation Bill to repeal

section 13 of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018, and yet we have already made a decision about the proper process in this Session of Parliament. I do not think that they will be able to do so, which is why our passing the motion today does not provide more certainty, as the Attorney General argued. It provides more uncertainty, because we will still have to go through the process of a full meaningful vote.

Until this moment, the Prime Minister has always agreed that the political declaration and the withdrawal agreement must be taken together. Her party's manifesto expressly says it; she is always preaching to us about manifestos, so I am preaching back to her. She also said repeatedly, "Nothing is agreed until everything is agreed." I agree with the hon. Member for Stone (Sir William Cash) that we should never separate out the divorce settlement and the custody of the children. The whole thing has to go together. That is an intrinsic, fundamental principle.

There may be good reasons for voting for the motion, and I fully accept that many Ministers adopt those, but it worries me that so many have said that they loathe this deal but none the less intend to support it today. That is not a good reason. The European Research Group said of the agreement:

"we will become a 'vassal state' many of whose laws will have been created abroad and over which we have no influence."

How can they possibly vote for this?

This is a constitutional crisis. We need a settlement that will last for generations. There is a deep wound in the body politic, and a sticking plaster will not suffice. We need to stitch the nation back together, and we can only do that if we proceed in good order, with no more parliamentary shenanigans, no more partisan jiggery-pokery and behind-stairs work and no more subjugating the national interest to private ambition.

1.37 pm

Mrs Anne Main (St Albans) (Con): They say that in life there are only two certainties: death and taxes. Well, I would like to add one more to the list: the certainty that this is a remainder House and that it will resist, kicking and screaming, every opportunity to take this country legally out of the European Union.

I have listened to every speech, so I am pleased to be called, and I have made a note of some of the comments made. The right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford) said that

"the voice of remain will be heard",

that "we must stop Brexit" and,

"we will never accept Brexit".

Those sorts of comments—I have heard other versions of them today—have changed the context for people like me who voted against the withdrawal deal on both occasions.

It is deeply undemocratic that the method put in place by my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Sir Oliver Letwin) means that we are expected to vote in a half-an-hour slot on eight or more options that we have not debated or tested in this House, that we have not had any legal information on, that we have not had the Attorney General's view on and that we have not run past the European Union to see whether they are acceptable to it. We are supposed to say that this is a democracy and that that method will deliver a consensus,

but it will deliver a bogus consensus. On Monday, we may end up having preferential votes, as it is an amendable motion.

Despite having two years of debate about this particular withdrawal agreement and having examined the minutiae of its flaws, of which there are many, there is the potential that we will go to something far, far worse. So, for me, the context has changed and I know it has for some other hon. Members. This is a very, very difficult decision for many colleagues. There have been plenty of siren voices from the Opposition Benches. I have had hundreds of emails, as many do, on this topic alone. Most of those emails—all bar 80—are from the remain side of the argument, because they see that the withdrawal agreement, with all its flaws, is the one way that they can stop Brexit.

So today, I am changing my vote, because I am not going to be cowed into a process that means on Monday I am expected to make a choice on somebody else's selection of what they think Brexit should mean. I am not going to choose, on behalf of my constituents and the country as a whole, based on something that has had no debate and no scrutiny, and because a remainder Parliament is hoping against hope that this deal, which is the best of the ugliest of sisters, will be struck out today in the fervent hope that they can bring something far softer or not at all. And for all those talking about a second referendum, I hope they can explain to the British people on the doorstep how, by the time they get one, it is current.

1.40 pm

Mr Pat McFadden (Wolverhampton South East) (Lab): This is the third time that we have considered this issue. The Government say that this is not meaningful vote 3 and they will not count it as meaningful vote 3 if they lose today, but they would certainly count it as meaningful vote 3 if they won today.

A number of right hon. and hon. Members have said that they have changed their minds between vote one, vote two and vote three. There will be many people in the country asking themselves why is it that MPs can vote three and maybe four times, and are entitled to change their minds, but it would be the greatest democratic calamity of all, according to the Prime Minister, to give the public one vote on this deal and give them the right to change their minds.

Two things are different about how we are doing this today. The first is the separation of the political declaration from the withdrawal agreement. The second is the starting gun being fired on a Tory leadership contest. The political declaration was already vague, but separating it out from the withdrawal agreement makes this the most blindfold Brexit. We are being asked to vote to leave with no idea at all of what the future relationship between the UK and the EU will be and no attempt to answer the fundamental question that Brexit poses: do we want a more distant economic relationship where, in all likelihood, Northern Ireland will have to be treated differently from the rest of the UK; or do we want a close economic relationship where we continue to obey the EU's rules, yet give ourselves no say over them? That question must be answered.

Now, we are being asked to mortgage all this to the outcome of a Tory leadership contest, where the battle will be between candidates trying to prove that they are

the truest believer of all. The question will be "Mirror, mirror, on the wall, who is the most right-wing nationalist of them all?" That is what the candidates will be asking.

If the Prime Minister wins tonight, I contend that the battering ram approach to parliamentary democracy will still not bring the country together. This has not been good enough as a process. If she loses, she will have a decision to make. This House has made clear its opposition to no deal, so the Prime Minister will have to decide on the future, a longer extension and a recasting of the process, if this goes down tonight.

1.43 pm

Gareth Johnson (Dartford) (Con): I was rather hoping tonight to be able to crack open some champagne and celebrate the United Kingdom leaving the European Union. Sadly, I am more likely to be reaching for the anti-depressants. We are not leaving the European Union because Brexit has been treated as a problem and choreographed by people who do not have their heart in it, rather than as an opportunity to be grasped. My vote on this issue has always been to implement Brexit and it will continue to be so.

We need to restore the sovereignty that we have lost to the European Union over last 40 years. That is why I voted against extending article 50, to keep no deal on the table and twice against this deal, which has so many fundamental flaws. We have all witnessed how this House has voted to take over control of the Order Paper. We have seen how it has wanted to extend article 50 and to rule out no deal, as well as to consider a customs union and even no Brexit. I believe that we will witness it implement the softest of soft Brexits, if it implements Brexit at all, if this deal falls today.

There are some who still believe that, if this deal falls, no deal can somehow happen—that instead of accepting £1 billion a month off us, the EU will refuse to accept an extension of article 50—but I simply cannot see that happening at all. On the contrary, I believe that if we vote against the Government today, the European Union will extend article 50 for a lengthy period of time. We therefore have a choice today: to accept this deal and all its faults, or to risk losing Brexit completely. There is no certainty in either direction; it is a balance of risks, as has often been said on both sides of the House. However, my fear—my greatest fear—is that we will lose Brexit entirely if we vote this down today, and that is exactly what could happen.

I agree with many of the criticisms levelled against this deal, such as the impact it will have on Northern Ireland and the UK's lack of ability to leave the backstop unilaterally. My decision to vote for this is in some ways harder than the decision I took to resign from the Whips Office. However, the circumstances have changed; I have not. We are now between a rock and a hard place. It is an unenviable situation in which we find ourselves, and we should not have been put in this position. It is this deal today, or we submit ourselves to a customs union and the potential of losing Brexit forever. I believe passionately that Britain's best place is outside the European Union, and that is what I will be voting with the Government for.

1.46 pm

Vernon Coaker (Gedling) (Lab): On reflection, having sat here listening to the debate this morning and this afternoon, let me say what a catastrophic strategic

[Vernon Coaker]

failure of leadership we have seen from the Government that has led us to reach this position—a position where we remain divided as a Parliament and where we remain divided as a country.

I was extremely disappointed by the reaction to the indicative votes that took place the other day. The Government could have looked at them and responded, “Does that offer us a way forward, and is there a way of bringing some together in a way that would actually command a majority of this House and command a majority of the country?” Instead, we got the Government crowing from their Front Bench that no particular option had got a majority. That is no way to bring the country together or to bring the Parliament of this country together.

I say to the Government that, even at this late stage, they should be seeking to look at what would command a majority in this House and what would actually command a majority in the country. Instead of that, what do we get? We get a motion that this House is asked to pass today—I will be voting against it, with many of my colleagues—which sets aside section 13 of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act. It sets aside the British law: it sets aside the law of this country that says the withdrawal agreement will be passed with the political declaration and will be passed with the consent of the House of Commons and the House of Lords.

Let me say this to the Minister and to the Government: I think the British public will be astonished—that in order to push through their withdrawal agreement, even though it has been defeated twice, they have come up with a ruse that allows them to say, “We will separate out the political declaration and, for our purposes, we will set aside the British law”. They will not understand it and, frankly, neither do I.

Let me say this about the political declaration. If the withdrawal Act motion is passed today, the people of this country should know that there is no certainty about what that means for the political declaration. There is no certainty about the single market, a customs union or many of the other things that matter to the people of this country. As I said at the beginning, this is a catastrophic failure of leadership by the Government and a continuing failure by the Government to seek to bring Parliament together and this country together.

1.49 pm

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (The Cotswolds) (Con): I am grateful to catch your eye in this important debate, Mr Speaker, and I am sure my constituents will have noted my assiduousness in having been here for more than four hours to speak for three minutes—that is an improvement, because last time I spoke for two minutes after four hours.

Listening to this historic debate I had hoped to see right hon. and hon. Members of the House honouring their manifestos from the last election, and honouring the result of the referendum on leaving the European Union. Having listened to the debate, however, it sounds as if that is unlikely. We are therefore likely to move to indicative votes on Monday, when I suspect that a common consensus will emerge for some form of customs union. Many hon. Members believe that that may be a way out of this whole conundrum, but it most certainly

is not. It will not eliminate the need for customs checks, and there will still be checks on plants, animals, regulations and standards. The UK would be similar to Turkey, and we would need movement certificates for all goods exported to the EU.

David Tredinnick (Bosworth) (Con): Like me, my hon. Friend was here during the Maastricht debates. Is there a political judgment to be made today, because if we do not vote for the withdrawal agreement, we may never leave the European Union at all?

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown: My hon. Friend reads my mind, and I will come on to precisely that subject in a minute. Above all, the EU will require checks at the Northern Ireland border, so I say to my good friends in the DUP that a customs union will not solve the Northern Ireland problem. Crucially, if the customs union is accompanied by closer alignment with common market 2.0, or EEA, EFTA, or Norway+, we will have to honour EU competition laws, laws on state aid, and customs legislation. That means that Labour policies on nationalisation will be illegal under EU law, and they will be facing two ways at the same time.

If we vote for the withdrawal agreement today, we can come to full trade agreements with high-growth countries in the rest of the world, none of which, sadly, is in the European Union. All the withdrawal agreement does is take us to the next stage and the withdrawal and implementation Bill, which can then be fully scrutinised by the House and fully amended. My hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Sir William Cash) outlined the problems regarding the repeal of the European Communities Act 1972, but all those things could be rectified in that Bill. However, if we do not get as far as that, we will go back to the indicative process.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Bosworth (David Tredinnick) said, the alternative to not voting for this withdrawal agreement is to risk a long delay to implementing article 50 after 12 April. Crucially, that means that we will fight European elections, almost three years after the British people voted to leave the European Union. My prediction is that we will finally have a long extension to article 50, during which time everyone will say that we must revoke it. Our trust with the British people will be broken, democracy and faith in this Parliament will be severely damaged, and I urge all colleagues to vote for this agreement today.

1.53 pm

Stephen Timms (East Ham) (Lab): Britain can leave the European Union in one of two ways. It can choose to reject EU regulation altogether, and the downside to that is severe damage to our economy, as highlighted by Honda's closure of its Swindon plant, and the cancellation of Nissan models in Sunderland. Recent votes have showed that the House rightly recognises the danger of a no-deal scenario and is not willing to go down that road. The alternative is to protect the economy and stay close to Europe, but the problem with that is having to apply EU rules while no longer having any say over what they are. That is the Brexit choice: move away from the EU and take the economic hit, or stay close and reduce that economic hit, but have no say over the rules. One of the reasons why we have this problem today is because we do not know the Prime Minister's choice. We do not know which of the two she favours. The political declaration was supposed to tell us, but it

does not. Even if we knew the Prime Minister's choice, she is stepping down, so someone else will have to make the choice.

I understand the Prime Minister's unwillingness to choose. Both options have severe downsides, which is why many of us opposed leaving the EU in the first place, but how can we sign off the deal without having some idea of where we will end up? All we know is the Prime Minister's choice for the initial transition period, which is to stay close. We will gain control of migration from the EU, but we will lose our influence on the rules we will have to adhere to on data privacy, financial services and product standards in a whole host of areas. Some who worry about migration from the EU may think that a reasonable exchange, but I cannot see that it is.

To illustrate the problem, we conscientiously implemented the general data protection regulation. The UK played a key role in drawing it up, and the Prime Minister rightly recognises that we will have to continue following those rules so we can carry on exchanging data easily with the EU. She announced that she wants to keep our place on the European Data Protection Board, which oversees GDPR, but she could not achieve that in her negotiation. Under the withdrawal agreement we will lose our place on the day we leave the EU, and we will no longer have any say on the rules, but we will still have to comply with them. Writ large, that is the position in which we will find ourselves across the board.

We need a longer extension. We need a consensus-building process, which will take time. I urge the House to reject the deal today.

1.56 pm

Sir Mike Penning (Hemel Hempstead) (Con): I have sat through today's debate, and I will not take any interventions because I want other colleagues also to have the chance to speak.

We need to talk about trust. The British public are fed up with Brexit and are fed up with us. The vast majority of us in this Chamber stood on a manifesto to honour the referendum result. I respect those who did not stand on such a manifesto, but the majority of us did. This House, whether or not we like to admit it, is a remain House. The Labour party would like to bring down the Government, and it clearly sees this as an opportunity to do so. I understand that that is the Opposition's job, and we were in opposition long enough, but it is fundamentally wrong for a party to stand on a manifesto saying it will honour the referendum result and then do everything it can in this House to delay, change or make it a soft Brexit, or whatever other language we might use.

Richard Graham: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Sir Mike Penning: I have already said that I will not give way.

We can rebuild trust among the British public, but we can only do so if we compromise—not, as the Scottish National party suggests, by not leaving, and not by saying we want to be in the European Union—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear! Hear!"] Yet again, I am so popular.

I am pleased that the Prime Minister is here, because this is fundamental. Those running leadership campaigns to replace her should, for God's sake, put it on the back

burner until we get this through. We are not voting today on the Bill. We are voting to get on to the Bill so we can consider the amendments that so many colleagues wish to make, including my friends from Northern Ireland.

Colleagues stood for election on a piece of paper that said, "I will honour the referendum." They have to go back to their constituencies and say, "I have honoured the referendum result, as I promised you." I will have to go back and say I have compromised, because I do not like the agreement. Most of us do not like the agreement, but it is a damn sight better than sticking two fingers up to the British public and saying, "We are going to ignore you."

That is basically what is happening. Our constituents voted to leave, and not with caveats or with bits and bobs attached, and leave is what we should do, but I am petrified that this House is going to block the will of the British people, which is why I will support the motion today.

1.59 pm

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Lab): The Government have run down the clock in an attempt to blackmail MPs at every turn. The Government are in chaos, the country is in chaos, and the responsibility is the Government's, and the Government's alone. The Prime Minister pulled the meaningful vote in December because she knew it would fail. Since then, in more than three months, nothing has changed—not one single word in the 600 pages of the withdrawal agreement, not one single word in the 26 pages of the political declaration.

Today, the Government are trying to bounce the House into voting for a damaging deal that we have twice rejected, but, as ever, the Prime Minister refuses to listen. Today's vote—third time lucky, she hopes—is an affront to democracy and this country. She has separated the withdrawal agreement from the future relationship, despite having told us that the two were indivisible. On 14 January, she told the House that

"the link between them means that the commitments of one cannot be banked without the commitments of the other."——[*Official Report*, 14 January 2019; Vol. 652, c. 826.]

Today, she is asking us to take a punt on the withdrawal agreement and hope for the best for the political declaration. It is not good enough; the two are linked.

Nothing demonstrates that linkage better than the backstop. The political declaration is incredibly vague, containing as it does a spectrum of possible outcomes, and nothing is even close to being resolved. That makes it even more likely that the UK would fall into the backstop, which would create regulatory divergence between Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK, as the right hon. Member for East Antrim (Sammy Wilson) said. We also know that it endures indefinitely, thanks to this Parliament prizing the Attorney General's legal advice out of a very reluctant Government. Labour will not vote for a blindfold Brexit, and passing the withdrawal agreement today without the political declaration would be just that.

The Prime Minister said at the end of November, when she signed off the deal, that

"we won't agree the leaving part, the withdrawal agreement, until we've got what we want in the future because these two go together".

[Jeremy Corbyn]

As my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh South (Ian Murray) said, it would be like selling your house without knowing where you are moving to, although, unlike me, I am not sure he is old enough to have watched “Monty Python”.

Lady Hermon: The Leader of the Opposition should be enormously proud of the achievement of the Labour party in the Good Friday/Belfast agreement, and I am extremely upset and disappointed that the Labour party today will vote against the Prime Minister's Brexit deal, which protects the Good Friday agreement and the consent principle.

Jeremy Corbyn: We in the Labour party are very proud of the Good Friday agreement and the peace achieved in Northern Ireland as a result, and nobody in the Labour party wants to do anything to undermine this great achievement.

As the shadow Solicitor General, my hon. Friend the Member for Torfaen (Nick Thomas-Symonds), said, article 184 of the withdrawal agreement commits the Government to negotiate expeditiously on the terms of the political declaration. That would be a deal based on a very wide range of potential outcomes for the country, and who would decide which direction we go in? Now that the Prime Minister has announced her own departure, we do not know if the future is to be chosen by the right hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson), the hon. Member for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg), or maybe even the jobbing Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for West Dorset (Sir Oliver Letwin). The Labour party will not play roulette with this country's future, especially when the roulette wheel is rigged by the Conservative party.

Labour respects the result of the referendum—we reiterated that in our manifesto and again in our party conference last year—but the Prime Minister's approach to Brexit has been nothing short of a shambles. The choices facing our country post Brexit have been decided solely by what is in the interests of the Conservative party, not the country. The Prime Minister announced her red lines and went to negotiate without any consultation with the House, without any attempt to build consensus. Those red lines were opposed by the representative bodies of workers, businesses and industry, who are now tearing their hair out in exasperation at the Government's incompetence and the uncertainty that they face.

The first Brexit Secretary said that he would get a deal that would deliver the exact same benefits as now. The current Brexit Secretary obviously felt that that was far too good for the country because, only two weeks ago, he went into the Lobby to back no deal and oppose an extension. That would leave the UK crashing out in just 10 days with no preparations and chaos at our ports and airports, leading to a crisis in factories, shops and hospitals.

What did the Government forecasts say about the Brexit Secretary's preferred no-deal option? That it would make the economy not 4% worse off, but nearly 10% worse off. So it is no wonder that, faced with a choice between the Prime Minister's bad deal and a disastrous no deal, this House has given a clear no to

both, repeatedly. The Government suffered the largest defeat by any Government ever in parliamentary history in January. The Prime Minister said then:

“It is clear that the House does not support this deal.”—[*Official Report*, 15 January 2019; Vol. 652, c. 1125.]

So what was the Government's response? They tried begging, bullying and bribery, and still they were defeated by the fourth largest majority in parliamentary history.

The Prime Minister told us that we must leave on 29 March, and even wrote it into primary legislation. She herself then voted against leaving on 29 March. She then went to Brussels to negotiate an extension and, almost unbelievably, even turned that into another negotiating failure. This Government's Brexit negotiations have been a litany of failure, culminating today with a Prime Minister who has been forced to announce her own departure tabling only half the deal she has negotiated. This really is a half-baked Brexit.

When she became Prime Minister two and a half years ago, she said that it was her mission to deliver Brexit. She has failed. She also stood on the steps of Downing Street and promised that her Government would tackle burning injustices. Since then, she has failed on every test. Homelessness is up. Life expectancy is falling. Infant mortality is rising. Crime is rising. Police numbers have fallen. This year, the NHS had its worst ever month—people waiting longer in A&E, for an operation and to start cancer treatment—and just yesterday, we learned that more children are in poverty and the scourge of pensioner poverty is increasing again.

The job of Government is to make people's lives better, and this Government have failed. A botched and half-baked Brexit deal like the one before us today would compound that failure. On Wednesday, the House sought to find an alternative—a new negotiating deal for the Government. Labour's plan, I believe, provides the best compromise for a deeply divided country and a deeply divided House. It is backed in large part by major organisations in industry and business and by trade unions. It is based around the certainty of a permanent customs union, close alignment with the single market and a dynamic alignment on rights and protections.

Labour urged support for four of the options tabled by members of different parties on different sides of the House. We did so not because we would be equally happy with each of those outcomes but because we recognise that we have to compromise to get this resolved. The whole House knows that the current uncertainty is damaging businesses, reducing investment and costing jobs now and in the future. The stress of people in work is palpable as we travel around the country and talk to people in all parts of the country.

I hope that on Monday, when the House retakes control, parties and Members on both sides will enter into those debates and votes in the spirit of trying to find an acceptable compromise. We need to get a better deal, the country deserves a better deal, and I am convinced that a better deal can be negotiated and, if Members decide, a chance for people to have a final say. If we cannot do that on Monday, I will say—and many others will agree with me—that ultimately there will be no alternative other than to have a general election to decide who rules this country in the future.

To enable the Prime Minister to have sufficient time to respond to the debate, I say this in conclusion. I urge Members to act in the best interests of their constituents and to vote down this unacceptable deal. There are many people who fear for their jobs, for their industry and for whether they and their friends have a future in this country. That is causing immense stress to many people. However they voted in the 2016 referendum, they are united in their stress and concern about their future and that of their communities.

We need to rebuild our country and invest in our communities, too many of which have been neglected, ignored and underfunded for years. A botched and half-baked Brexit deal such as the one before us today would only deepen those problems and divisions. This deal, even the half of it that we have before us today, is bad for our democracy, bad for our economy and bad for this country. I urge the House not to be cajoled by this “third time lucky” strategy and to vote it down today.

2.11 pm

The Prime Minister (Mrs Theresa May): This has been another impassioned debate on Brexit. I have stood here on many occasions over the past few months, answering questions and taking interventions from right hon. and hon. Members. What I want to do in the minutes remaining is to set out the serious choice that faces us.

Today should have been the day that the United Kingdom left the European Union. That we are not leaving today is a matter of deep personal regret to me, but I remain committed to the United Kingdom leaving the European Union, and that is why I brought this motion to the House today.

There are those who will say, “The House has rejected every option so far. You’ll probably lose, so why bother?” I bother because this is the last opportunity to guarantee Brexit. I say to all those who campaigned to leave, who voted to leave, who represent constituencies who voted to leave and, indeed, to all of us who want to deliver on the vote to leave: if we do not vote for this motion today, people will ask, “Why did you not vote for Brexit?” By voting for this motion today, we can send a message to the public and to the European Union that Britain stands by its word and that we will leave the European Union on 22 May.

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): I listened very carefully to the Prime Minister’s message to all those who voted to leave. What has she said to the 48% who voted to remain?

The Prime Minister: The deal that we have agreed and the arrangements and proposals that we have put forward absolutely apply to the 48% who voted remain, because they recognise the necessary balance between delivering on the result of the referendum and doing so in a way that protects jobs, livelihoods and people’s security.

Last week the EU Council agreed that article 50 could be extended to 22 May if the House approved the withdrawal agreement this week. That would give us enough time to take the withdrawal agreement Bill through Parliament, we would not have to hold European parliamentary elections, and we would leave the European Union. It also agreed, however, that if we did not approve the withdrawal agreement by tonight, the extension would be only until 12 April, which is not long enough

to ratify a deal. So anyone who wants to leave with a deal would have to support seeking a further extension. Any such extension would probably be a long one, and that would certainly mean holding European elections. So approving the withdrawal agreement today avoids a cliff edge in two weeks’ time; it avoids European elections; it avoids a long extension that would at least delay and could destroy Brexit.

To secure this extension and to give us a firm exit date, we do not need to agree the whole deal today—just the withdrawal agreement. I believe that there is an overwhelming majority in this House for the withdrawal agreement. Three quarters of Conservative MPs backed it in the last meaningful vote, and Opposition MPs I have spoken to tell me that their problem is not with the withdrawal agreement, but with the political declaration.

So I want to address the central argument put forward by the Leader of the Opposition again this afternoon: that voting for the motion will enable a blind Brexit. It will not, and for three reasons. First, if you want to leave with a deal, then, whatever future relationship you want, it needs to sit alongside this withdrawal agreement. The withdrawal agreement is fixed. It is part of any deal.

Second, agreeing this motion today is not ratifying the whole deal; that will only happen once the withdrawal agreement Bill has passed through all its stages, in this House and the other place, and has received Royal Assent. What this motion today does is give us the time we need to pass the necessary legislation and complete the current debate that the House is considering about our future relationship. The Government stand by the current political declaration, but we are not asking the House to approve it today. Nor does today’s vote pre-judge or pre-empt the outcome of the process run by my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Sir Oliver Letwin). In fact, for those options being considered, approval of this withdrawal agreement is a prerequisite.

Third, in the next phase of negotiations, we have committed to give Parliament a significant and ongoing role in the process. Mr Speaker, if you had selected the amendment in the name of the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent Central (Gareth Snell) and others, the Government would have accepted it. If this motion carries today, we will bring forward a withdrawal agreement Bill that will include commitments to implement that amendment and we will discuss the specific drafting of that with those who supported the amendment.

So by voting for this motion, Members are not closing any doors. They will still have the ability, through the withdrawal agreement Bill, to influence that future relationship. Today’s motion is not about a blind Brexit; it is about a guaranteed Brexit. Today we can give the public and businesses the certainty they need. Today we can show that we stand by our word. Today we can show that we can come together in the national interest. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. There is far too much noise in the Chamber. The Prime Minister is addressing the House and must be heard.

The Prime Minister: Today we can show that we can come together in the national interest. Today we can take a step forward together.

[The Prime Minister]

This is a difficult day for Members right across the House. I am asking Members to take a hard decision, and I know that.

Geraint Davies (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op): In her heart of hearts, will the Prime Minister accept that this Brexit will make Britain poorer, weaker, more divided and more isolated? The door that she should not shut is the door of democracy. She should allow the people to have the final say on whether they want this shambles. The leavers in my area certainly do not.

The Prime Minister: Can I say to the hon. Gentleman, as I have said to the House before, that if he looks at the economic analysis and the different types of Brexit that could take place, he will see that the deal that delivers on the result of the referendum and has the best economic outcome for this country is the deal that the Government have put forward?

As I said, I know that this is a difficult day for Members right across the House. I am asking them to make a hard decision, and I know that. I am asking some hon. Members to vote for a Brexit that is less than they hoped for, which is not easy. I am asking other hon. Members on the Opposition Benches to help me deliver on the instruction of the British people, and that is not easy either. There are good Labour Members who are as determined as I am to deliver the Brexit that their constituents voted for, and as willing as I am to make a compromise to move our country forward. At this historic moment for our country it is right to put aside self and party; it is right to accept the responsibility given to us by the British people, and that is what I have done. I have said that I am prepared to leave this job earlier than I intended. [Interruption.]

Mr Speaker: Order. Our proceedings are being widely watched. Please let us treat one another with respect. The Prime Minister is winding up the debate and must be heard. The Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister: I have said that I am prepared to leave this job earlier than I intended to secure the right outcome for our country. When the Division bell rings in a few moments' time, every one of us will have to look into our hearts and decide what is best for our constituents and our country.

Wes Streeting (Ilford North) (Lab): I am grateful to the Prime Minister for giving way. She is right to say that she has sacrificed her own position to try to get her deal through. Does she appreciate that in doing so she is asking us to place our trust in whoever follows her? Looking at the likely candidates, I have to say sincerely to her that she may have sacrificed her career to put the country first, but there are plenty of people who aim to follow her who have always put themselves first, above the country.

The Prime Minister: The numbers in the House will not change. The numbers across the House will be the same. The desire of the House to be able to have a greater role in future will not change. I have made the commitment that I have in relation to the legislation in the withdrawal agreement Bill, and in relation to the amendment tabled by the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent

Central. In the next stage, it will be important for Parliament to have greater involvement, to be able to ensure that as we move forward together we get that right result for our country.

This is about our country. It is about our national interest. As I say, everyone will have to—[Interruption.] I will give way one last time.

Yasmin Qureshi (Bolton South East) (Lab): I thank the Prime Minister for giving way. She says that this is about the country, but with respect, that is not how it is seen. Brexit—the withdrawal agreement and the referendum—has always been about the Conservative party.

The Prime Minister: This House, across all parties, voted for a referendum. This House, across all parties, voted to trigger article 50.

Several hon. Members rose—

The Prime Minister: I am sorry, I forget of course that the Scottish National party always has a different view on this, because it wants to stay in the EU, it wants to stay in the common agricultural policy, and it wants to stay in the common fisheries policy—no good for Scottish fishermen and Scottish farmers. I had said that I had given way one last time, but as I have just referenced the SNP I will give way to the hon. Member for Glasgow South (Stewart Malcolm McDonald).

Stewart Malcolm McDonald (Glasgow South) (SNP): Well, that is some way to build compromise, but why did the Prime Minister never come to the Scottish Government and the Scottish National party and offer wide, sweeping reforms and devolution on employment law and welfare, for example, to give Scotland the power it needs to protect itself from the measures in her deal that it does not like? Instead, she stuck her head in the sand, and that is why she has got nowhere with the Scottish Government or the Scottish National party.

The Prime Minister: The Government have given the Scottish Government extra powers, and they are not using them—except, of course, the power to increase taxes in Scotland more than in the United Kingdom.

I say to Members this: if you want to deliver Brexit, this is the moment. If you are passionate about making sure that the United Kingdom leaves the European Union, back this motion. If you care about our Union and want a deal that protects it, back the motion. If you want to honour the referendum, but want Parliament to shape our future relationship, back this motion. It is the right thing for our country, it is the right thing for our constituents, and with all my heart I commend this motion to the House.

Question put.

The House divided: Ayes 286, Noes 344.

Division No. 395]

[2.26 pm

AYES

Adams, Nigel
Afolami, Bim
Aldous, Peter
Allan, Lucy
Amess, Sir David
Andrew, Stuart
Argar, Edward

Atkins, Victoria
Austin, Ian
Bacon, Mr Richard
Badenoch, Mrs Kemi
Baldwin, Harriett
Barclay, rh Stephen
Barron, rh Sir Kevin

Bellingham, Sir Henry
Benyon, rh Richard
Beresford, Sir Paul
Berry, Jake
Blackman, Bob
Blunt, Crispin
Boles, Nick
Bottomley, Sir Peter
Bowie, Andrew
Bradley, Ben
Bradley, rh Karen
Brady, Sir Graham
Brereton, Jack
Brine, Steve
Brokenshire, rh James
Bruce, Fiona
Buckland, Robert
Burghart, Alex
Burns, Conor
Burt, rh Alistair
Cairns, rh Alun
Cartledge, James
Caulfield, Maria
Chalk, Alex
Chishti, Rehman
Churchill, Jo
Clark, Colin
Clark, rh Greg
Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth
Clarke, Mr Simon
Cleverly, James
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
Coffey, Dr Thérèse
Collins, Damian
Cooper, Rosie
Costa, Alberto
Courts, Robert
Cox, rh Mr Geoffrey
Crabb, rh Stephen
Crouch, Tracey
Davies, Chris
Davies, David T. C.
Davies, Glyn
Davies, Mims
Davies, Philip
Davis, rh Mr David
Dinenage, Caroline
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
Docherty, Leo
Donelan, Michelle
Dorries, Ms Nadine
Double, Steve
Dowden, Oliver
Doyle-Price, Jackie
Drax, Richard
Duguid, David
Duncan, rh Sir Alan
Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain
Dunne, rh Mr Philip
Ellis, Michael
Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias
Elphicke, Charlie
Eustice, George
Evans, Mr Nigel
Evennett, rh Sir David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, rh Sir Michael
Field, rh Frank
Field, rh Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flint, rh Caroline
Ford, Vicky

Foster, Kevin
Fox, rh Dr Liam
Frazer, Lucy
Freeman, George
Freer, Mike
Gale, rh Sir Roger
Garnier, Mark
Gauke, rh Mr David
Ghani, Ms Nusrat
Gibb, rh Nick
Gillan, rh Dame Cheryl
Glen, John
Goldsmith, Zac
Goodwill, rh Mr Robert
Gove, rh Michael
Graham, Luke
Graham, Richard
Grant, Bill
Grant, Mrs Helen
Gray, James
Grayling, rh Chris
Green, Chris
Green, rh Damian
Griffiths, Andrew
Hair, Kirstene
Halfon, rh Robert
Hall, Luke
Hammond, rh Mr Philip
Hammond, Stephen
Hancock, rh Matt
Hands, rh Greg
Harper, rh Mr Mark
Harrington, Richard
Harris, Rebecca
Harrison, Trudy
Hart, Simon
Hayes, rh Sir John
Heald, rh Sir Oliver
Heapey, James
Heaton-Harris, Chris
Heaton-Jones, Peter
Henderson, Gordon
Herbert, rh Nick
Hermon, Lady
Hinds, rh Damian
Hoare, Simon
Hollingbery, George
Hollinrake, Kevin
Howell, John
Huddleston, Nigel
Hughes, Eddie
Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy
Hurd, rh Mr Nick
Jack, Mr Alister
James, Margot
Javid, rh Sajid
Jenrick, Robert
Johnson, rh Boris
Johnson, Dr Caroline
Johnson, Gareth
Jones, Andrew
Jones, Mr Marcus
Kawczynski, Daniel
Keegan, Gillian
Kennedy, Seema
Kerr, Stephen
Knight, rh Sir Greg
Knight, Julian
Kwarteng, Kwasi
Lamont, John
Lancaster, rh Mark
Latham, Mrs Pauline

Leadsom, rh Andrea
Lefroy, Jeremy
Leigh, rh Sir Edward
Letwin, rh Sir Oliver
Lewer, Andrew
Lewis, rh Brandon
Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
Lidington, rh Mr David
Lloyd, Stephen
Lopresti, Jack
Lord, Mr Jonathan
Loughton, Tim
Maclean, Rachel
Main, Mrs Anne
Mak, Alan
Malthouse, Kit
Mann, John
Mann, Scott
Masterton, Paul
May, rh Mrs Theresa
Maynard, Paul
McLoughlin, rh Sir Patrick
McPartland, Stephen
McVey, rh Ms Esther
Menzies, Mark
Mercer, Johnny
Merriman, Huw
Metcalfe, Stephen
Miller, rh Mrs Maria
Milling, Amanda
Mills, Nigel
Milton, rh Anne
Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
Moore, Damien
Mordaunt, rh Penny
Morgan, rh Nicky
Morris, David
Morris, James
Morton, Wendy
Mundell, rh David
Murray, Mrs Sheryll
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Neill, Robert
Newton, Sarah
Nokes, rh Caroline
Norman, Jesse
O'Brien, Neil
Offord, Dr Matthew
Opperman, Guy
Parish, Neil
Pawsey, Mark
Penning, rh Sir Mike
Penrose, John
Percy, Andrew
Perry, rh Claire
Philp, Chris
Pincher, rh Christopher
Poulter, Dr Dan
Pow, Rebecca
Prentis, Victoria
Prisk, Mr Mark
Pritchard, Mark
Pursglove, Tom
Quin, Jeremy
Quince, Will
Raab, rh Dominic

Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob
Robinson, Mary
Ross, Douglas
Rudd, rh Amber
Rutley, David
Sandbach, Antoinette
Scully, Paul
Seely, Mr Bob
Selous, Andrew
Shapps, rh Grant
Sharma, Alok
Shelbrooke, Alec
Simpson, rh Mr Keith
Skidmore, Chris
Smith, Chloe
Smith, Henry
Smith, rh Julian
Smith, Royston
Soames, rh Sir Nicholas
Spelman, rh Dame Caroline
Spencer, Mark
Stevenson, John
Stewart, Bob
Stewart, Iain
Stewart, Rory
Streeter, Sir Gary
Stride, rh Mel
Stuart, Graham
Sturdy, Julian
Sunak, Rishi
Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
Swire, rh Sir Hugo
Syms, Sir Robert
Thomas, Derek
Thomson, Ross
Throup, Maggie
Tolhurst, Kelly
Tomlinson, Justin
Tomlinson, Michael
Tracey, Craig
Tredinnick, David
Trevelyan, Anne-Marie
Truss, rh Elizabeth
Tugendhat, Tom
Vaizey, rh Mr Edward
Vara, Mr Shailesh
Vickers, Martin
Walker, Mr Charles
Walker, Mr Robin
Wallace, rh Mr Ben
Warburton, David
Warman, Matt
Watling, Giles
Whately, Helen
Wheeler, Mrs Heather
Whittingdale, rh Mr John
Wiggin, Bill
Williamson, rh Gavin
Wood, Mike
Wragg, Mr William
Wright, rh Jeremy
Zahawi, Nadhim

Tellers for the Ayes:
Andrew Stephenson and
Craig Whittaker

NOES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane
Abrahams, Debbie
Afriyie, Adam

Ali, Rushanara
Allen, Heidi
Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena

Amesbury, Mike
 Antoniazzi, Tonia
 Ashworth, Jonathan
 Bailey, Mr Adrian
 Baker, Mr Steve
 Bardell, Hannah
 Baron, Mr John
 Bebb, Guto
 Beckett, rh Margaret
 Benn, rh Hilary
 Berger, Luciana (*Proxy vote
 cast by Mr Chris Leslie*)
 Betts, Mr Clive
 Black, Mhairi
 Blackford, rh Ian
 Blackman, Kirsty
 Blackman-Woods, Dr Roberta
 Blomfield, Paul
 Bone, Mr Peter
 Brabin, Tracy
 Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
 Brake, rh Tom
 Braverman, Suella
 Brennan, Kevin
 Bridgen, Andrew
 Brock, Deidre
 Brown, Alan
 Brown, Lyn
 Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
 Bryant, Chris
 Buck, Ms Karen
 Burden, Richard
 Burgon, Richard
 Butler, Dawn
 Byrne, rh Liam
 Cable, rh Sir Vince
 Cadbury, Ruth
 Cameron, Dr Lisa
 Campbell, rh Sir Alan
 Campbell, Mr Gregory
 Carden, Dan
 Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
 Cash, Sir William
 Champion, Sarah
 Chapman, Douglas
 Chapman, Jenny
 Charalambous, Bambos
 Cherry, Joanna
 Chope, Sir Christopher
 Clwyd, rh Ann
 Coaker, Vernon
 Coffey, Ann
 Cooper, Julie
 Cooper, rh Yvette
 Corbyn, rh Jeremy
 Cowan, Ronnie
 Coyle, Neil
 Crausby, Sir David
 Crawley, Angela
 Creagh, Mary
 Creasy, Stella
 Cruddas, Jon
 Cryer, John
 Cummins, Judith
 Cunningham, Alex
 Cunningham, Mr Jim
 Daby, Janet
 Davey, rh Sir Edward
 David, Wayne
 Davies, Geraint
 Day, Martyn
 De Cordova, Marsha

De Piero, Gloria
 Dent Coad, Emma
 Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
 Docherty-Hughes, Martin
 Dodds, Anneliese
 Dodds, rh Nigel
 Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.
 Doughty, Stephen
 Dowd, Peter
 Drew, Dr David
 Dromey, Jack
 Duddridge, James
 Duffield, Rosie
 Eagle, Ms Angela
 Eagle, Maria
 Edwards, Jonathan
 Efford, Clive
 Elliott, Julie
 Ellman, Dame Louise
 Elmore, Chris
 Esterson, Bill
 Evans, Chris
 Farrelly, Paul
 Farron, Tim
 Fellows, Marion
 Fletcher, Colleen
 Fovargue, Yvonne
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Francois, rh Mr Mark
 Frith, James
 Furniss, Gill
 Fysh, Mr Marcus
 Gaffney, Hugh
 Gapes, Mike
 Gardiner, Barry
 George, Ruth
 Gethins, Stephen
 Gibson, Patricia
 Gill, Preet Kaur
 Girvan, Paul
 Glindon, Mary
 Godsiff, Mr Roger
 Goodman, Helen
 Grady, Patrick
 Grant, Peter
 Gray, Neil
 Green, Kate
 Greening, rh Justine
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Greenwood, Margaret
 Grieve, rh Mr Dominic
 Griffith, Nia
 Grogan, John
 Gwynne, Andrew
 Gyimah, Mr Sam
 Haigh, Louise
 Hamilton, Fabian
 Hanson, rh David
 Hardy, Emma
 Harman, rh Ms Harriet
 Harris, Carolyn
 Hayes, Helen
 Hayman, Sue
 Healey, rh John
 Hendrick, Sir Mark
 Hendry, Drew
 Hepburn, Mr Stephen
 Hill, Mike
 Hillier, Meg
 Hobhouse, Wera
 Hodge, rh Dame Margaret
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon

Hoey, Kate
 Hollern, Kate
 Hollobone, Mr Philip
 Holloway, Adam
 Hosie, Stewart
 Howarth, rh Mr George
 Huq, Dr Rupa
 Hussain, Imran
 Jardine, Christine
 Jarvis, Dan
 Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard
 Jenkyns, Andrea
 Johnson, Diana
 Johnson, Joseph
 Jones, Darren
 Jones, rh Mr David
 Jones, Gerald
 Jones, Graham P.
 Jones, Helen
 Jones, rh Mr Kevan
 Jones, Sarah
 Jones, Susan Elan
 Kane, Mike
 Keeley, Barbara
 Kendall, Liz
 Khan, Afzal
 Killen, Ged
 Kinnock, Stephen
 Kyle, Peter
 Laird, Lesley
 Lake, Ben
 Lamb, rh Norman
 Lammy, rh Mr David
 Lavery, Ian
 Law, Chris
 Lee, Karen
 Lee, Dr Phillip
 Leslie, Mr Chris
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
 Lewis, Clive
 Lewis, Mr Ivan
 Lewis, rh Dr Julian
 Linden, David
 Little Pengelly, Emma
 Lloyd, Tony
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 Lopez, Julia
 Lucas, Caroline
 Lucas, Ian C.
 Lynch, Holly
 Mackinlay, Craig
 MacNeil, Angus Brendan
 Madders, Justin
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid
 Mahmood, Shabana
 Malhotra, Seema
 Marsden, Gordon
 Martin, Sandy
 Maskell, Rachael
 Matheson, Christian
 McCabe, Steve
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McDonagh, Siobhain
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
 McDonald, Stuart C.
 McDonnell, rh John
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat
 McGinn, Conor
 McGovern, Alison
 McInnes, Liz

McKinnell, Catherine
 McMahon, Jim
 McMorris, Anna
 Mearns, Ian
 Miliband, rh Edward
 Monaghan, Carol
 Moon, Mrs Madeleine
 Moran, Layla
 Morden, Jessica
 Morgan, Stephen
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, Grahame
 Murray, Ian
 Nandy, Lisa
 Newlands, Gavin
 Norris, Alex
 O'Hara, Brendan
 O'Mara, Jared
 Onasanya, Fiona
 Onn, Melanie
 Onwurah, Chi
 Osamor, Kate
 Owen, Albert
 Paisley, Ian
 Patel, rh Priti
 Paterson, rh Mr Owen
 Peacock, Stephanie
 Pearce, Teresa
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Toby
 Phillips, Jess
 Phillipson, Bridget
 Pidcock, Laura
 Platt, Jo
 Pollard, Luke
 Pound, Stephen
 Powell, Lucy
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Rashid, Faisal
 Rayner, Angela
 Redwood, rh John
 Reed, Mr Steve
 Rees, Christina
 Reeves, Ellie
 Reeves, Rachel
 Reynolds, Emma
 Reynolds, Jonathan
 Rimmer, Ms Marie
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Robinson, Gavin
 Robinson, Mr Geoffrey
 Rodda, Matt
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Rowley, Danielle
 Rowley, Lee
 Ruane, Chris
 Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
 Ryan, rh Joan
 Saville Roberts, rh Liz
 Shah, Naz
 Shannon, Jim
 Sharma, Mr Virendra
 Sheerman, Mr Barry
 Sheppard, Tommy
 Sheriff, Paula
 Shuker, Mr Gavin
 Siddiq, Tulip (*Proxy vote cast
 by Vicky Foxcroft*)
 Simpson, David
 Slaughter, Andy
 Smeeth, Ruth
 Smith, Angela

Smith, Cat
 Smith, Eleanor
 Smith, Jeff
 Smith, Laura
 Smith, Nick
 Smith, Owen
 Smyth, Karin
 Snell, Gareth
 Sobel, Alex
 Soubry, rh Anna
 Spellar, rh John
 Starmer, rh Keir
 Stephens, Chris
 Stevens, Jo
 Stone, Jamie
 Streeting, Wes
 Stringer, Graham
 Sweeney, Mr Paul
 Swinson, Jo
 Tami, rh Mark
 Thewliss, Alison
 Thomas, Gareth
 Thomas-Symonds, Nick
 Thornberry, rh Emily
 Timms, rh Stephen
 Trickett, Jon
 Turley, Anna
 Turner, Karl

Twigg, Derek
 Twigg, Stephen
 Twist, Liz
 Umunna, Chuka
 Vaz, rh Keith
 Vaz, Valerie
 Villiers, rh Theresa
 Walker, Thelma
 Watson, Tom
 West, Catherine
 Western, Matt
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Whitfield, Martin
 Whitford, Dr Philippa
 Williams, Hywel
 Williams, Dr Paul
 Williamson, Chris
 Wilson, Phil
 Wilson, rh Sammy
 Wishart, Pete
 Wollaston, Dr Sarah
 Woodcock, John
 Yasin, Mohammad
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Noes:
Thangam Debbonaire and
Nic Dakin

Question accordingly negated.

The Prime Minister: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I think that it should be a matter of profound regret to every Member of this House that once again we have been unable to support leaving the European Union in an orderly fashion. The implications of the House's decision are grave. The legal default now is that the United Kingdom is due to leave the European Union on 12 April, in just 14 days' time. That is not enough time to agree, legislate for and ratify a deal. Yet the House has been clear that it will not permit leaving without a deal, so we will have to agree an alternative way forward.

The European Union has been clear that any further extension will need to have a clear purpose and will need to be agreed unanimously by the Heads of State of the other 27 member states ahead of 12 April. It is almost certain to involve the United Kingdom being required to hold European parliamentary elections.

On Monday this House will continue the process to see whether there is a stable majority for a particular alternative version of our future relationship with the EU. Of course, all the options will require the withdrawal agreement.

I fear that we are reaching the limits of this process in this House. This House has rejected no deal; it has rejected no Brexit; on Wednesday it rejected all the variations of the deal on the table; and today it has rejected approving the withdrawal agreement alone and continuing a process on the future. This Government will continue to press the case for the orderly Brexit that the result of the referendum demands.

Jeremy Corbyn: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. This is now the third time that the Prime Minister's deal has been rejected. When it was defeated the first time, she said:

"It is clear that the House does not support this deal".—[*Official Report*, 15 January 2019; Vol. 652, c. 1125.]

Does she now finally accept that the House does not support the deal? She seemed to indicate just now that she will return to this issue again.

On Monday this House has the chance and—I say to all Members—the responsibility to find a majority for a better deal for all the people of this country. The House has been clear: this deal now has to change. An alternative has to be found. If the Prime Minister cannot accept that, she must go—not at an indeterminate date in the future, but now—so that we can decide the future of this country through a general election.

Ian Blackford: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. We should all be aware—[*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order. The right hon. Gentleman must be heard.

Ian Blackford: Thank you, Mr Speaker. We should all be aware of our responsibilities in this House and the seriousness of the situation we are in. I say respectfully to the Prime Minister that she now has to accept that her deal has been defeated three times. I applaud the Members of Parliament on both sides who voted against the Government's proposition. It is a bad deal, and we have to find a way out of the crisis that we are in; all our constituents would expect that. We must give ourselves time, and I suggest to the Prime Minister that we must now look seriously at the option of revocation. We need to apply the handbrake to this process. Quite simply, the Prime Minister has failed to take this deal forward. She does not have the confidence of the House. She has indicated her departure. She should now go, and we should have a general election.

Sir Vince Cable (Twickenham) (LD): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. On Monday, it is perfectly possible that the House may indicate a preference for one of the options, such as a customs union or a confirmatory vote, which are compatible with the withdrawal agreement. If that is the case, will the Prime Minister be open to listening to the view of the House and considering how we might have a longer extension to explore them?

Mr Speaker: I think that the question was to some degree a rhetorical inquiry. The right hon. Gentleman has made his point, but further debate on these important matters will follow next week.

Heidi Allen (South Cambridgeshire) (Ind): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. The Prime Minister must now recognise that this deal is over, and the House has a serious responsibility on Monday to find a solution to this impasse. Jobs and livelihoods across the country are at stake. There is a way out of this impasse, as many of us have been saying for months and months: we must have a people's vote now.

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. It beggars belief that the Prime Minister still seems not to recognise a dead deal when it is right in front of her. It has now been defeated three times, in spite of the procedural games that have been played. Does she realise just how grotesque it looked to appear to be willing to sell out the country's future for the price of some Tory MPs' careers? The idea that it was sensible for Conservative MPs to suddenly

[*Caroline Lucas*]

change their minds about a deal they had been against for months because they thought they might have some career advantage from it is wrong, and it is contemptuous of this country.

Mr Speaker: There is a degree of latitude on these occasions, but the hon. Lady has stretched it excessively. If she had wanted to speak in the debate, she might well have caught my eye, but she did not seek to do so.

Nigel Dodds (Belfast North) (DUP): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. May I urge the Prime Minister now to look seriously at what the right hon. Member for Esher and Walton (Dominic Raab) said earlier about

the backstop? She knows that that remains the problem. She knows that Michel Barnier and Leo Varadkar have said this week that in a no-deal scenario, there will be no hard border. Please, Prime Minister, even now, as the right hon. Gentleman said, use the time constructively to get that matter sorted out.

Mr Speaker: Thank you.

ADJOURNMENT

Resolved, That this House do now adjourn.—(Jeremy Quin.)

2.49 pm

House adjourned.

Written Statements

Friday 29 March 2019

BUSINESS, ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY

Joint European Torus: Fusion Contract

The Minister for Universities, Science, Research and Innovation (Chris Skidmore): Having made my first speech at Culham, I know how hard-working and dedicated UKAEA staff are, which is why I am pleased to announce that on 27 March 2019 the European Commission and the UK signed a new contract extension for the Joint European Torus (JET) facility in Culham, Oxfordshire. JET is the world's biggest operational fusion reactor, undertaking research in technology aimed at providing clean, safe, inexhaustible energy. JET is operated by the UK Atomic Energy Authority and is funded primarily (87.5%) by the European Union; this contract extension will secure at least €100 million in additional inward investment from the EU over the next two years. Crucially, the contract extension will last until the end of 2020 regardless of wider EU exit negotiations, safeguarding this world-leading facility and over 500 high-skilled science and engineering jobs at Culham.

The UK Government previously (27 June 2017) agreed to guarantee the UK's fair share of JET funding to the end of 2020 should this contract extension be agreed.

This latest outcome is the natural culmination of that open and collaborative approach and underlines the strong and enduring partnership between the EU and the UK in science and research.

[HCWS1467]

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

EU-Vietnam Free Trade Agreement

The Minister for Trade Policy (George Hollingbery): I am pleased to announce that my Department will today publish an impact assessment for the EU-Vietnam free trade agreement (FTA). I have separately written to the EU Scrutiny Committees in both Houses of Parliament such that they can consider this evidence as part of their important scrutiny of this agreement.

A copy of this impact assessment will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

The European Union and Vietnam agreed on final texts for an EU-Vietnam free trade agreement and an EU-Vietnam investment protection agreement in July 2018. Proposals for council decisions on signature and conclusion of the agreements were published on 19 October 2018, therefore kick starting the process of parliamentary scrutiny.

The Government remain committed to transparency in trade matters both under current EU parliamentary scrutiny processes and under future UK bilaterally negotiated agreements.

[HCWS1468]

Ministerial Corrections

Friday 29 March 2019

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS State Aid (Agriculture and Fisheries)

The following is an extract from the Twentieth Delegated Legislation Committee on the draft State Aid (Agriculture and Fisheries) (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019.

Mr Goodwill: Indeed, one nugget that we did spot was the change that is under way in the European Commission to increase the de minimis fishing limit from €25,000 to €30,000 and we have managed to include that.

[Official Report, Twentieth Delegated Legislation Committee, 19 March 2019, c. 8.]

Letter of correction from the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

An error has been identified in my response to the hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Luke Pollard).

The correct statement should have been:

Mr Goodwill: Indeed, one nugget that we did spot was the change that is under way in the European Commission to increase the **agricultural** de minimis limit from **€15,000 to €20,000, with an optional higher limit of €25,000**, and we have managed to include that.

European Structural and Investment Funds Common Provisions

The following is an extract from the Sixth Delegated Legislation Committee on the draft European Structural and Investment Funds Common Provisions (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019 and the draft European Structural and Investment Funds Common Provisions Rules etc. (Amendment etc.) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019.

Mr Goodwill: Yesterday, I said that we spotted that the European Commission was increasing the de minimis payment level for fishing communities, and we made that correction before the matter came to Committee.

[Official Report, Sixth Delegated Legislation Committee, 20 March 2019, c. 11.]

Letter of correction from the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

An error has been identified in my response to the hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Luke Pollard).

The correct statement should have been:

Mr Goodwill: Yesterday, I said that we spotted that the European Commission was increasing the de minimis payment level for **agricultural** communities, and we made that correction before the matter came to Committee.

WRITTEN STATEMENTS

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