



My Party's No Deal Disaster

By Baroness Altmann

The referendum result did not specify any particular Brexit date and does not give the Government a mandate to leave without a Deal. The Leave campaign leaders regularly assured voters that we would get a good deal with the EU, plus more free trade deals and more money to spend on our priorities. They did not suggest leaving without any Deal at all, nor that leaving would cost the country many billions of pounds, and put jobs and businesses at risk.

The Government has been respecting the 2016 Referendum result for the past three years, but Parliament is unable to approve the terms for departure and has consistently rejected leaving without a Deal. Therefore, forcing the country to leave on 31st October without a deal would be riding roughshod over the express will of Parliament and undermining the Parliamentary sovereignty that the Referendum was supposed to restore.

Extreme Brexiteers claim the British people must accept leaving with or without a deal, to honour the 2016 Referendum result. But that would not be democratic at all - 17.4million people did not vote for No Deal, they were not asked about their views on that.

All official forecasts and business pronouncements indicate No Deal Brexit would cause chaos and disruption and be extremely damaging to the economy, business and jobs. Why would any responsible Government spend huge sums on a project that will make our country poorer, especially when Parliament has voted against it?

MPs who have accepted the 31st October deadline, with or without a Deal, as essential to the future of the Conservative Party, are right to be concerned about the threat of a Corbyn Government. Marxist, pro-Russian, pro-terrorist, racist leadership would certainly be a disaster for the country. But surely forcing a No Deal Brexit, with all the damage that would cause, is risking a Labour Government anyway, as the Tories' reputation as the responsible party of

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business, which can be trusted with the economy would be in tatters and voters might be attracted to a redistributive alternative.

In January, March and July 2019 MPs voted against No Deal Brexit. Ignoring the express will of Parliament is more like dictatorial authoritarian rule, rather than a Parliamentary democracy. A minority group must not be allowed to over-ride the Commons.

As the impacts of No Deal Brexit were not presented to the public, we do not know how many people might support such an outcome. How many would have voted to leave if it meant losing all our free trade agreements, damaging national security, reneging on the Good Friday Agreement, or breaking-up the United Kingdom? How many would have supported undermining for the automotive, agriculture, food, aviation, transport and services sectors? MPs have rejected No Deal and so have the majority of British voters in successive elections since the 2016 Referendum.

In the 2017 General Election, 53.2% voted for Parties that opposed a No Deal Brexit. Only 45.1% voted for the Conservatives, DUP or UKIP who might support it.

In the 2018 Local Elections, parties that would accept a No Deal Brexit lost 158 council seats, while those parties clearly opposed to leaving without a deal gained 162.

In the 2019 EU Elections, 54.4% of voters supported parties opposed to No Deal Brexit and only 44% backed the Brexit Party, Conservatives or UKIP.

The truth is that No Deal threats are more of a game of bluff than a serious policy choice, hoping to frighten the EU into last-minute concessions. But the EU will not drop the backstop unless we can prove that there are workable, realistic alternatives that will keep the Irish border open and protect the integrity of the EU Single Market.

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So far, the real-world evidence is that the Single Market and Customs Union are the only realistic means to protect the frictionless border without checks to prevent illegal goods, services or immigration entering the EU. If the Brexiteers really do have proper ‘alternative arrangements’ or a technological solution that can be introduced, the backstop will not be a problem.

Without a democratic mandate to leave without a Deal, the Government must find an alternative democratic solution.

One such solution would be to go back to the British people in a new Referendum to check what the majority want now. The Conservative Government would be respecting the views of the nation while allowing people the chance, as any democracy should be able to do, to change their minds in light of new information. That would ensure democratic authority for our future relationship with our nearest neighbours and main trading partners, before making irreversible and potentially catastrophic unilateral decisions.

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