

Coming Together to do Better

Sir Peter Bottomley MP

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'MPs For A Deal' is a cross party group making clear that, if Prime Minister Johnson reaches a practical agreement with the EU27, there will be enough Labour and other MPs to outweigh the predictable opposition by the zealots for whom no deal would be supportable.

At a meeting, I said that describing simply the agreed objective would be clear and popular. Constituents have a range of views. I understand them. They know that I am part of the majority who accepted the result of the referendum, with the ambition to be part of the parliamentary majority needed to end the impasse, allowing businesses and individuals to make progress.

Life will not be uncomplicated afterwards. Being outside the EU Single Market might lead to differences in the United Kingdom market. Governments in Scotland and Wales (and in Northern Ireland if devolved government restarts) will have the authority and the interests to vary support for say lamb and sheep subsidies.

Wholesalers, retailers and farmers in and around the Worthing West constituency will face more choice and possibly lower prices. We knew when the UK joined the Common Market in 1973 that food prices would generally rise as we switched from deficiency payments (adding to farm incomes when market prices fell too low) to the Common Agricultural Policy which worked on different principles.

As always, government will be facing complex issues. Parliament has the dual responsibilities of allowing ministers to get on with their decision making while making them face the consequences.

Within six weeks Kenneth Clarke as the senior MP will sit in the Clerk's chair to hear nominations for the next Speaker. If he does not, Dennis Skinner has said he would not. Dennis became the longest serving Labour MP nearly two years ago; Dame Margaret Beckett was elected first but she had broken service. Dennis is 87, twelve years more mature than I am. He intends to stand again though his constituency has been thought vulnerable. After the next general election, I might be called to chair the election of the Speaker.

Some good points can be made about John Bercow as Speaker. We heard them during lengthy points of order when he announced that the 'up to nine years' he promised over ten years ago will end by Halloween. The good impression that may have created was challenged by the way the Lady Usher of the Black Rod was kept waiting while the Speaker declaimed and also appeared to shout repetitively at one MP. We must allow that it had been a long day for him and for the rest of us.

Events at Westminster are a contrast to the calm I experienced at the weekend from Rustington to central Worthing where I enjoyed the annual Christ Church fair. It is the church across the road from my local home. When I became resident 23 years ago the vicar was Canon Garry Guinness, responsible for four churches. Before retiring to Wareham in Dorset, he arranged for the repurposing of St Pauls and the project to replace the adjacent hall with specialist housing.

Dear forthright Mary Rosenberg, widow of popular Dr Henry, asked me to lead opposition to the rebuilding. I declined, saying that I would be a patron because we have the responsibility to meet special needs. I took the same view when Garry proposed a temporary Christmas wet-shelter nearby. I did not see why leaving a fellow human, perhaps affected by alcoholism, on the freezing street is preferable to making available a roof and medical help and companionship.