

ALL THAT MATTERS NOW TO SAVE THE UK: THERESA MAY HAS TO GO

OCTOBER 21, 2018 MELANIEBREXIT, EU, NO DEAL, THERESA MAY

It's only fair to share...

Credits and copyright © to Melanie Phillips

According to the [Sunday Times](#), Theresa May has 72 hours to save her premiership before a crucial back-bench 1922 Committee meeting on Wednesday. In my view, that should read 72 hours to save the country.

Let's cut to the chase. Forget the Irish backstop, transition extensions, the role of her chief Brexit official Oliver Robbins and all the other interminable details and lurches involved in this process. If the UK is actually to leave the EU, May has to go. If she stays as Prime Minister, it won't.

It is only now apparently [dawning](#) on her Conservative colleagues that May will not be diverted from a deal which will keep the UK tied up with the EU for the foreseeable future.

That was always entirely predictable from the start and for this reason. The EU's red lines – particularly its need to keep the UK attached in some way to the customs union, and its need to be seen to punish Britain severely in order to prevent other member states from attempting a similar exit – were real red lines. They were therefore non-negotiable.

May's ostensible red lines – no single market or customs union, “Brexit means Brexit” – were not her real red lines at all. In reality, she had one very different red line. That was leaving the EU with no deal being done. That was what she was not prepared to tolerate.

So she handed victory to the EU from the start. She was not only negotiating with a non-negotiable agenda but she made it clear – not least by the shocking absence of any preparations for “no deal” – that whatever she said in public, a bad deal would be preferable to “no deal”.

The logic of this was that she would have no option but to accept the EU's red lines. The EU understood that elementary logic. She did not.

When she said she would stubbornly hold firm to her red lines and uphold the British

people's decision and the best interests of the country, this meant she would stubbornly hold firm to her real red line which meant betraying the British people's decision to leave the EU and undermining the interests of the country.

Those of us who always understood this – the supposedly “hardline” or “extreme” Brexiteers in BBC-speak – are in fact **the only ones** who have called this correctly.

The British people have been subjected to a ferocious scare campaign based on the premise that “no deal” would be an unmitigated disaster for the country. Of course, “no deal” would be worse than an advantageous deal. *But that was never going to be on offer.*

“No deal” would undoubtedly have a downside. Not only, though, would this be manageable but, as outlined [here](#), it would be offset by greater potential advantages. These depend on the UK's freedom to negotiate its own bilateral deals unshackled from EU constraints that have prevented it from acting in its own best interests until now.

Those who portray “no deal” as jumping off the cliff without a parachute fail to acknowledge the impact of this shock on the EU itself. EU member states would hardly think it's in their interests for their planes to be unable to land at Heathrow or for their goods lorries to be stuck at Dover because of gridlock caused by customs checks.

With the balance of trade in Britain's favour, not to mention intangibles such as intelligence co-operation, the global primacy of the English language, London's pre-eminent status as the world's financial hub and so on, the EU has always stood to lose more from Brexit than the UK will lose from departing.

Few Brexiteers can have believed that the immense challenge of disentangling the UK from the EU would be achieved without any pain. But most undoubtedly believed this would be a price worth paying for the priceless long-term political, social and economic gains.

And that's what a proper national leader should be saying right now to the British people and should have said from the start. A national challenge on the scale of Brexit requires above all leadership of a high order. Yet Theresa May has provided no leadership at all.

What's held her colleagues back from getting rid of her is the absence of a credible candidate to replace her as Prime Minister. Transfixed by the superstar phenomenon of Boris Johnson but distrusting his flaws, they have been paralysed by timidity,

head-in-the-sandery and institutionalised mutual knife-in-the-backery.

At this 59th minute of the eleventh hour, they must now all re-focus with ruthless self-discipline. Britain does not at present need a new person to govern the country because there is no actual government going on. All serious government business has been subsumed by the great Brexit agony.

What's needed now – and it's the *only* thing that's needed – is a leader who will take the UK out of the EU. Not “out” in name only while leaving the UK half-in, half-out and therefore not out at all because it remains tied up with EU laws and processes. Unequivocally, indisputably, unalterably *out*.

Once the UK has safely left the EU, only then can the discussion start about who would make the best Prime Minister to govern the country. Because, if the UK does not unequivocally leave the EU, then it will never again become an independent nation able to govern itself in its best interests. In those circumstances, the question of who becomes the leader of a government that doesn't actually have the power to govern becomes of no real consequence, since the UK will itself become of no real consequence as a nation that isn't really a nation at all.

Only if the UK leaves the EU will the occupant of No 10 Downing Street actually matter. If the UK doesn't leave, the Prime Minister won't matter much at all. At this historic moment, all that matters is that the UK actually leaves the EU. That's why Theresa May has to go.