Twitter Thread by Ian Dunt

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Commons debate of the Brexit deal kicks off in a bit and lasts until 2:30pm, when it goes off to the Lords. You can follow here.

I'm going to tweet along to the Commons bit because fuck it, what else is there to do. Just to eat and drink and be merry and relaxed, and why would anyone want to do something like that.

In the mean time, I strongly recommend this blog by @Brigid_Fowler of the Hansard Society https://t.co/KaCt6BKeXT

"Parliament's role around the end of the Brexit transition and conclusion of the EU future relationship treaty is a constitutional failure to properly scrutinise the executive and the law."

The great irony at the heart of it all. This entire process was done to give parliament control. In reality, it is spending much less time scrutinising constitutional changes than when we were in the EU.

Taken together, this process represents an abdication of Parliament's constitutional responsibilities to deliver proper scrutiny of the executive and of the law.

These proceedings contrast starkly with those which took place on Bills to implement EU treaties when the UK was a Member State. For example, when the House of Commons considered the Bill to implement the Single European Act, which created the EU Single Market the UK is now leaving, it did so in five days over three months, starting two months after the treaty was signed and ending a year before it was to enter force.

The current process is a step backwards for scrutiny compared even with the Withdrawal Agreement, which some MPs have since complained has unsavoury details "buried in the fine print, unnoticed by many". The Withdrawal Agreement had at least been published for two months when the new House of Commons agreed in December 2019 to consider its implementing Withdrawal Agreement Bill in four days over a three-week period, still leaving three weeks for Lords consideration and Royal Assent before the treaty was to enter into force.

Incredible cynicism from Jacob Rees-Mogg. Says we've been discussing this subject for 50 years so no need for more than five hours debate on the deal.

Wonder how receptive to that argument he'd have been when there was a debate on the Single European Act.

Speaker doesn't select any of the reasoned amendments. Johnson is up. Stand by for an absolute torrent of hogwash.

"We now seize this moment to forge a fantastic new relationship based on free trade and friendly cooperation". In reality, the deal imposes barrier to free trade and replaces cooperation with arbitration.

Whenever Johnson says we're going to "take back control of our waters" https://t.co/xIMeuIevVD

The deal "should allow companies to do even more business with our European friends". Incredible.

Johnson implies that the deal shows we can "have our cake and eat it". That must explain the lorry parks in Kent.

It's been a few minutes and I am already considering slamming my face against this table.

Johnson celebrates his resistance to "calls for delay", because it would have gotten in the way of dealing with covid. And impenetrably stupid argument which contradicts all evidence and logic.

In reality, the NAO report found that the demands of covid (rightly) sucked capacity from UK government and business when it needed to ramp up preparations for January 1st.

I've always maintained a soft rule that I really shouldn't drink whisky when wearing a dressing gown but today will test that proposition to destruction.

Tory MP says the deal "goes beyond a free trade agreement". In reality, it goes under it. The deal, for the first time in modern history, aims to build obstacles between trade between partners, not bring them together.

I find it hard to be too irritated with Johnson today. He is what he is: a liar and a fraud. What's really infuriating is watching MPs allow a deal of this magnitude pass with such little scrutiny.

And that is not just about today. It's about when they failed to support Caroline Lucas' amendment to the Withdrawal Agreement Bill, which would have given time and space for this process. They created the circumstances in which the executive could bully the legislature.

When the adjustment period comes to an end there will be "no limit to our ability to make use of our marine wealth", Johnson says. He speaks as if the quota disappears after five years. In fact, the deal reads as if the increased quota is the new benchmark.

But of course that's five years later. Johnson is barely pulled up on the nonsense he said a week earlier, so it's no wonder he thinks he can get away with this.

After the five year adjustment period, we can fish every fish in our water "if we so choose" Johnson says. Yes, but you won't, for the reason you chose not to this time: that the ensuing tariffs would mean you couldn't sell any of them.

Look I think I do pretty well emotionally on this stuff but Johnson calling it "liberal" to end free movement, put up obstacles to trade, sabotage cooperation between nations and undermine the great post-war barriers to war is just a bit too much for me.

Dear lord the fucking....

Just the abject meaningless hypocrisy of it.

Johnson claims this is a moment for everyone to move on. If he had pursued any form of pragmatism, made any sort of offer to those on the other side, that might well have been possible. He did not.

He calls it a "historic resolution". And it is not that either. It is the start of the next phase of Brexit, which will only end when it is eventually reversed.

Right. Starmer. He frames this as a binary choice. If the Commons does not support a deal, it is no-deal, with catastrophic consequences and no "foothold to build a future relationship with the EU".

"This is a thin deal, it's got many flaws, but a thin deal is better than no-deal."

"There's only one choice today, to vote for implementing this deal or to vote for no-deal. Those who vote no, vote for no-deal." Starmer is right on voting against a deal - the position from the Lib Dems and SNP is simply not tenable.But this argument doesn't apply to abstention.

"With no further time for negotiation, when the default is no-deal, it's not a mark of how pro-European you are to reject implementing this treaty...

... It isn't in the national interest to duck a question or to hide in the knowledge that others will save you from the consequences of your own vote." That's very well put.

Starmer's question to an SNP MP is the right one: 'Do you want the result to go the way you're voting?' If the answer is no, you have a problem. And the answer is no. "He wants others to have the burden of voting for it to save us from no-deal."

I see a lot of attacks on Starmer right now - from Remainers Corbyn-remnants, Tories, Brexiters. What you're seeing him do right now is difficult. It's fucking hard. And he is doing what best can be achieved in the circumstances.

I'm wary of Starmer's position on Europe myself. But the gulf between him and those around him is noticeable: the lying, self-interested prime minister, the MPs voting in a way which contradicts their desired outcome, the Corbyn-ghosts obsessed with their own righteousness.

Starmer asks Johnson whether he will again say that the deal will involve no 'non-tariff barriers to trade'. Johnson of course doesn't answer, jibbering about tariffs. Starmer: "It's not true and he knows it's not true. And that speaks volumes about the sort of PM we have."

"Services is a gaping hole. We are primarily a services economy. What we've got in this text doesn't go beyond what was in Canada or Japan. The lack of ambition is striking."

"Either the PM did not try to get a strong deal to protect our service economy. Or he tried and failed. Which is it?"

Incredible. Starmer points out that UK businesses only get tariff free access if they abide by rule of origin requirements and the UK sticks to the level playing field. Johnson says: "Rubbish."

Starmer: "If the prime minister doesn't realise...."

It really is extraordinary. Johnson must know this is true, but he just hakes his head and says "rubbish". Then he tells Starmer to vote against it then.

Starmer: "As my wife says to our children: If you haven't got anything sensible to say, it's probably best to say nothing."

He points out the fundamental dynamic: you can cut standards, and then you'll get twatted by tariffs. Or you can keep standards high and then you maintain no tariffs. But Johnson's decision to define himself by sovereignty means he will be pushed into the first option.

He didn't say twatted.

Theresa May. She says she welcomes and will support the deal. She fights for her reputation. Says there was a "better deal" on the table in 2019.

Looks like an attack on Starmer, and indeed it is. But it mostly an attack on Johnson. Her deal was better by the way. It was still unutterably shit.

May says she's disappointed by lack of provisions in services. Interesting. She says she wanted to get a deal on financial services, which would have been ground-breaking. Mmmm. True, but then she did so much to create this situation by failing to stand up for the single market.

May really is a waste of time. Useless, mean-spirited and hypocritical as prime minister, now standing up for the values she did so much to diminish while in power.

She has a kind of hipster intellectual defend guard. But it is a weak and fruitless argument.

This is the woman who aped the culture war arguments of Vote Leave, made ending free movement the central aim of all British policy, tried to silence and sideline parliament and ruled out Soft Brexit.

Crucial thread here on Labour amendments today, most from the leadership. https://t.co/HT84J0sVSu

> In contrast to Starmer's reported comments in the @guardian interview, Labour clearly do have ambitions to improve the Brexit deal. They're laying 9 amendments today on issues including SIS II, economic impact, employment and environmental standards and Erasmus.
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> — Mike Buckley (@mdbuckley) December 30, 2020

None will pass. This is about seeing Labour's direction of travel on Brexit and specifically what changes it will pursue if it wins power.

It is clear that, unless something changes, Starmer doesn't want the EU to figure prominently in the next election. That's sensible. But what will he be aiming to do in terms of the European relationship, regardless of electoral prominence? Those amendments give an indication.

Ian Blackford speech, as usual, lacking in any kind of meaningful content. But he does get to the heart of the damage Brexit does to the Union. Scots were told staying in the UK allowed them to stay in the EU during the independence referendum.

That fundamentally changed after Brexit. Scotland was then ignored, its wishes dismissed, a blob contrary to the views of 'the people'. So don't be surprised now when Scotland turns away.

Bill Cash, Con, physically decaying in real time. Says Johnson is the "first citizen" of this country. He compares him to Alexander the Great, Churchilll, and Margaret Thatcher.

Yes he says all of it and for some masochistic reason I sit here and listen, my brain and moral capacity shrinking by the hour.

He says this moment "compares in peacetime only with the restoration in 1660". Man's a fucking fruitloop.

Sammy Wilson, DUP, doing a victory dance for his own annihilation.

His euphoria over Brexit "is tinged with sadness". We have finally reached the point where Sammy Wilson realises the self-sabotage of his own actions, like a four year car crash in bullet time.

2016: 'Sammy there's a fucking great big wall over there, you're driving towards a wall.'

2017: 'Sammy seriously the wall.'

2018: 'Sammy, the wall'

2019: 'Sammy....'

2020: Sammy Wilson realises there is a wall.

Among other things, Sammy does not understand how a wedge works.

Iain Duncan Smith. An endless parade of all the very worst people in the country. A hunkering mountain of disingenuousness and self-interest.

He always looks so sad, as if he were a better man watching what he has himself become.

IDS going on about how much he loves Europe, like Blackford going on about how much he loves England. I am so tired of people banging on about how much they love the thing they want to put walls against.

Hilary Benn, Lab, chair of Brexit select comittee. He's honourably produced a report at speed. like some old relic of parliamentary scrutiny.

Says he will vote for deal over no-deal. Makes the point, rightly, that if numbers were tight, those MPs voting against or abstaining would vote for the deal too.

Mocks Michael Gove's argument that the red tape of Brexit would get British business "match fit" for international trade. "Well that is certainly a novel economic theory."

Hilary Benn has had a very good Brexit.

Kevin Brennan, Lab: "I simply don't understand why it's necessary for those who believe this is a bad deal to vote for it and dip their fingertips in the indelible ink of this abject failure of national ambition."

On LBC for a sec chatting Brexit.

Neil Parish, Con. You look at him, listen to him, consider that he is an elected MP, and think: Something has gone terribly, terribly wrong in this country.

Ellie Reeves, Lab: "I cannot in good conscience sit on my hands and abstain on the biggest vote since my election in 2017 and in effect say I don't mind either way if we leave with a deal or not."

Bernard Jenkin pretending to care about the tampon tax is just some next level shit I swear to god.

Compares Brexit with the Glorious Revolution fuck it someone please save me the idiocy

"So may of those extra barriers and checks are being imposed by the EU as their choice." That's not how customs works Bernard.

"Our reborn nation". I swear he really says this shit.

Just watching this is basically an assault on your cognitive capacity. But there is a crucial element to it. In a few months, when it becomes clear what the deal actually does, the Brexit headbangers will turn against it.

Might be a year or two. Might be a few weeks. But they are going to turn against it.

The UK will pass a law, there'll be arbitration, tariffs. The Sun, which is currently celebrating the bill as some kind of fucked up Santa provision, will rail against European bureaucrats and judges.

And then suddenly all these nodding dogs will wake up and start shouting about SOVEREIGNTY again, which will mean no more in that context than it does now, or than it did before. It's simply a posh-sounding word which conceals their inability to grasp nuance or complexity.

So it is useful to carefully note what they are saying now, so that it can be held against them when they betray themselves later.

I know this is old fashioned. After all, just months ago they were saying we had to break international law because they hadn't read the small print of the last deal, which was also rammed through parliament in precisely the same way.

But what else can you do? You need to act like honour, honesty and consistency matter, or else you help bury them.

Frank Mancoir is up. "Perhaps Big Ben will bong for Brexit after all."

Nearly completely off his tits already, quoting the Prophet Isiaih.

"I and my Spartan friends should lower our spears too, but perhaps keep them to hand just in case one day someone - perhaps the leader of the opposition - tries to take us back in."

If these guys had been romantically successful in school I swear none of this would be happening.

"Mel Gibson once made a very entertaining film. But this is 'Cry Freedom' for real. And now finally it's true." Not a word of a lie. Each and every one of those words came from his mouth and in that order.

Imagine allowing people of such foolishness run a country.

David Davis fuck my life. Here to give us his expert commentary about the German car industry.

He is reminded that he once told the House that we would have the "exact same benefits" as EU membership. When he refused to put it in law, he said there was no need because he had given his word. DD darts away from that uncomfortable reminder of the past.

Ironically, DD is the first Brexiter to note what's actually in the deal - specifically the EU's power to suspend trade and transport arrangements in cases of divergence.

To be fair to him, that was the best speech by far from the Tory benches, because it had a glancing contact with reality. Of course, that is a very low bar.

Peter Kyle, Lab: "I have not gone into politics to be a politician who votes one way and secretly hopes the outcome will be another. I am not a member of a party which wants to let other parties do the heavy lifting."

Douglas Ross has no neck.

I also resent the direction of his nose.

Clive Lewis, Lab: "Let's put to bed that this vote is about deal versus no-deal. This is false framing in order to hold this House to ransom. Members are today tasked with democratic oversight of how a done deal which we can't amend will be implemented...

... Does the restoration of sovereignty not extend to democratic oversight by this House? Or is sovereignty only to be restored to the executive?"

Such a drab little day. The Brexiters in parliament desperately want it to be a moment of glory, hence the mad chatter about the Glorious Revolution and Alexander the Great.

Hence, I suppose, the deranged obsession with whether Big Ben bongs.

Hence Conor Burns just now saying "Today marks the day when the British dog finally leaves the federalist manger."

But in truth it just seems so quiet and pitiful. Brexit literally isn't even the main headline item on the news, covid is. The news tonight will probably cover the tiers statement in the Commons which follows this before it does the Brexit session.

The fact the proceedings are largely virtual doesn't help. But I suspect there is also a germ of reality ensconced in there somewhere: an awareness, admitted by even some of Brexit's proponents, that this timeframe for the debate is a grotesque, laughable farce.

That it betrays - obviously and undeniably - the values which Brexit is supposedly built on.

And perhaps a hesitation, now that it's finally happening, of knowing that Brexit will now be judged by the standards of reality rather than lofty dreams.

Who knows? Either way, it's fucking dull as fuck is what I'm saying.

Theresa Villiers talked a lot of over-excitable incomprehensible dimwit nonsense in case you were wondering.

Caroline Lucas: Brexit "turns Kent into a diesel-stained monument to hubris and political myopia."

I need a fucking sandwich.

If you want a picture of the future, imagine staring up at this face forever.



Redwood is the latest Brexit Mp to highlight how there is a battle coming over Scotland. Fucking incredible. I mean, really quite fucking incredible indeed. Was there any particular even in the last few years that might have created that battle do you think guys?

To suddenly see them now, the day before Brexit, act like they give a fuck about the Union is just a little too much to swallow I'm afraid.

If you gave one singular tug of a dog's cock about the Union you would haven't treated Scotland with such absolute disdain over the last four years.

Owen Paterson, Con, first so far by my count to say he won't vote for the deal.

"The worry for me is that Northern Ireland fails. I would love to vote for this today, but I really cannot vote for a measure which actually divides the UK, has a different regime on tax. Tonight, I'm very torn, I wish this well. I will be abstaining."

Classic from @KirstySNP: "The Brexiters offered the UK a malt whisky. They are now saying we will all die of thirst if we don't choose to drink this steaming mug of excrement. There is no way I am choosing to drink this shi... excrement."

You can make the argument about the lack of services in the deal without framing it in terms of trade surplus. That's as silly as when the argument was made by Brexiters on goods.

Gove to close.

He just said it was a good deal for data and for financial services, which is intriguing given that the decisions on data adequacy and financial services equivalence are yet to come.

What would a bad deal on financial services look like.

Gove just accused the SNP of being "prisoners of a separatist ideology which puts their narrow nationalism above our national interest". It's sort of fascinating to watch people say these things without any awareness of the degree of cognitive dissonance it implies.

Division. MPs will now vote on second reading.

I'll cover the vote then fuck off. These bastards took two and a half days of my festive break, they're not getting any more than that.

Johnson deal passes second reading by 521 votes to 73.

Now goes to the Lords. It should have royal assent by midnight.

Some closing thoughts. First, just what a sad, drab day it is. None of the triumphalism you might expect. That's mostly the empty chamber, the overshadowing of Brexit by covid. But I suspect it also something else, a nagging doubt in the face of things actually becoming real.

That's about blockages at the border etc, sure. But more than that, tomorrow is the moment Brexiters go from those advocating change to those justifying the status quo. And that is a much harder position to be in.

I doubt there'll be one huge moment of realisation that Brexit is a disaster. Most of its effects are long and slow. But it's useful to fast forward to 2024 and imagine those who threw their weight behind Johnson being asked: How have things improved for you?

Second: Johnson is a lying liar who lies all the time. I am aware this is not news. But the most striking moment in the debate was watching Starmer say to him that tariffs go up if you diverge or you fail to abide by rules of origin requirements. That is a simple fact.

It;s not controversial, it;s not a matter of debate. It is the thrust of the entire agreement. If Johnson isn't aware of it, he really isn't aware of anything. And yet he shook his head and said rubbish.

That's really remarkable, even after all this time. To just see the prime minister knowingly lie, and to do it so naturally, without even a hint of hesitation or doubt. We've had liars in No.10 before. We've never had one like this.

Third: Starmer voting for the deal. I get the arguments against this, I really do. But to see him struggle with the rock-and-hard-place choice he had to make against those easy answers of those around him was really quite impressive.

He looked like an adult among children.

But anyway, the central point is - the way non-Tory parties voted is a matter for today. But it will quickly be forgotten. This is Johnson's deal, like Iraq was Blair's war. The vote today won't change that.

The timing of that Guardian piece was unfortunate and frankly inexplicable.

But you get a better sense of where Labour is going by those amendments, which are exactly the kind softly-softly let's-not-make-a-big-deal-of-it reintegration with Europe we'd expect from Starmer for the next election.

As I've said before, the earliest you can realistically fight for Labour to have a proper go overhauling the relationship with Europe, or even trying to get back in, is in the election after next.

Fourth and final point: Brexit is a shit idea.

Right, I'm going back on holiday. If you liked this thread - in other words, if you are completely broken as a human being - buy my fucking book https://t.co/Q6QdLlL9Wo