

Corbyn is a disaster on Article 50

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I put my apology up front: for whatever I did to help Corbyn get elected to the Labour leadership, I am contrite. Corbyn's stance on Article 50 shows why he whilst he remains Labour leader the party's position is a disaster for the country and its supporters. That's because even if Corbyn thinks he has to accept the referendum result (and there is no obligation on anyone to do so) there are three things he does not have to do.

The first is support us leaving the single market: no one said the vote meant that.

Second is leaving the customs union: that's just economic suicide and I really do not think people voted for that.

But third, and most importantly, nothing said he said he had to support the government, and yet that is precisely what he is going to do, come what may. And he will even sack shadow ministers for actually believing it is their job to be in opposition. And yet this opposition is absolutely vital now because even if Labour did believe in leaving (and I do not think most of it does) opposing a government that is doing it so badly is at the core of the job it has to do.

For those in doubt let me summarise Corbyn's apparent position as outlined in an interview this morning. Bizarrely he claimed Labour was succeeding on Article 50. The evidence, he suggested, was that there was now to be a vote in parliament. For the record, Guina Miller achieved that: Labour did not.

Then he claimed success in getting a white paper. Except we have not got one yet, and won't before he is committing his party to voting for Article 50, which makes it utterly meaningless.

After which he claimed it was essential that Labour's amendments to the government's bill be passed but when challenged whether he would impose a three line whip whether or not Labour's amendments were accepted or not agreed that he would. In other words, he has already conceded that all Labour's amendments are worthless. Incompetence on this scale would be sackable in any other job. It's actually

incomprehensible that any other Labour leader in history could ever have been this stupid, especially when there is a completely viable strategy available.

Heidi Alexander [has laid the groundwork for the first base of opposition](#). Her position is to call for the bill's demise on the grounds that the government has failed to "safeguard British interests in the single market" or offer proper guarantees on whether parliament or the electorate should decide on leaving the single market. Given that the government committed to staying in the single market in its 2015 election manifesto this is entirely reasonable.

When and if that fails the next defence is that no support can be offered until a fully costed white paper has been offered to the House. As that has not happened and it is not expected to do so until later in February to vote for Article 50 must be impossible: no one can be asked to vote for a plan whose content is not known. Labour can and should take this position to the country. To say that the government is not delivering Brexit because it has no plan to do so is a message that has the merit of being both simple and true, but Corbyn won't say it.

Then Labour's amendments have to be proposed. And Labour should look to support those of other parties. And if those amendments are not accepted then Labour is duty bound to vote against the government on exercising article 50: nothing else is sustainable when there is no indication at present of what the vote means.

So why won't Labour do this? First there is incompetence: thinking out a strategy appears to be beyond Corbyn's team.

Then there is fear. Labour is so petrified of UKIP it will ape it. As far as I can see that makes Labour largely irrelevant in many constituencies now. People might as well vote UKIP instead, and many MPs rightly fear that will happen. Stoke may just be the first.

Third, there is the possibility that Corbyn wants what the government is doing, which many have long felt to be his true position. But in that case it has under Corbyn no role left to offer the people of this country, so he should go.

I have [called for politicians to join together to oppose Brexit](#). I can't imagine Corbyn supporting any such call. So be it. Those who should be working together to save this country from disaster will have to point out in that case that the extremes of left and right are the real threat to our well being.

There is ample room for political disagreement in the centre ground of UK politics. But this is not one of those times. Pointing out that Corbyn is conniving in destroying the future prospects of people in this country is the job of those who believe that we must have real political and economic choices left to fight over in the future. Right now he's joining the right of British politics in destroying them.