

Labour can't be taken seriously if it's going to play f...

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Labour is in turmoil over Brexit today. It did not take long for its post election euphoria to end. Labour's Queen's Speech [amendment said](#) (in part):

“but respectfully regret that the Gracious Speech fails to recognise that no deal on Brexit is the very worst outcome and therefore call on the Government to negotiate an outcome that prioritises jobs and the economy, delivers the exact same benefits the UK has as a member of the Single Market and the Customs Union, ensures that there is no weakening of cooperation in security and policing, and maintains the existing rights of EU nationals living in the UK and UK nationals living in the EU.....”.

I stress there is lots in the rest I can agree with. The amendment was lost, which was predictable, but it is the issue on Brexit that matters because Chuka Ummuna, for whom I usually have little time, tabled another amendment that said:

At end add ‘but respectfully regret that the Gracious Speech does not rule out withdrawal from the EU without a deal, guarantee a Parliamentary vote on any final outcome to negotiations, set out transitional arrangements to maintain jobs, trade and certainty for business, set out proposals to remain within the Customs Union and Single Market, set out clear measures to respect the competencies of the devolved administrations, and include clear protections for EU nationals living in the UK now, including retaining their right to remain in the UK, and reciprocal rights for UK citizens.’.

Fifty Labour MPs voted with Ummuna. They did what the Labour front bench has not done and will not do, which is say where it stands on Brexit. I am well aware Corbyn had a good election campaign: I said so. But he continued to duck Brexit. He has since early 2016, quite deliberately, and now the form of wording the official Labour amendment uses is no longer adequate.

The reason should, I think, be obvious. To demand that the UK have the exact same benefits that membership of the single market and customs union provide without actually signing up for them and accepting the consequences is obviously ridiculous. It's the equivalent of saying you want to see a team called Manchester United, made up of

their existing players, play at a place called Old Trafford in Manchester, with all their usual supporters present but that you neither want to pay for doing so or to actually admit you support the club. It is to ask for the impossible. This is fantasy politics. It's in the realms of Boris Johnson 'cake and eat it' absurdity.

Ummuna, on this occasion, got it right. If the single market and customs union are in the best interests of the UK (and they are) then Labour has to say so. It has to say it is doing so because that is what a policy for the young people, the working people, and the vulnerable in this country demands. They have to take a stand. Asking for the impossible is not taking a stand. And it simply demeans the important other demands Labour made to then also demand what is clearly not deliverable. If Labour wants to be taken seriously it cannot undermine the seriousness of its agenda in this way.

I have very little time for the right wing of Labour. But if Jeremy Corbyn is serious about delivering change he has to make up his mind, make deliverable demands that prove he is a PM in waiting, and say what he really wants on Brexit. Further ridiculous fudges on this issue can only harm Labour, and that's not in the country's best interests, let alone Corbyn's.