

Labour has bought time, and a bit more

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It's good that every now and again we have something to celebrate. If then I raise a glass to anything today it will be to Labour finally shifting off the fence on Europe.

As reported in [this morning's Observer](#), Keir Starmer has persuaded Labour to do three things. The first is to have a position on the single market and customs union after March 2019. Now Labour wants us to stay in both during a transitional period. The argument is not that we should now negotiate a complex transitional arrangement before a final deal is agreed with the other EU member states but that we should instead stay in the arrangement we have until such time as a final deal is agreed.

Second, this gives a clear indication that any final deal will be one that prioritises protecting the UK from the massive and dogmatically opposed economic and social shocks that Brexit threatens to impose, even if no further detail on what that might mean is disclosed.

Third this means that at long last Labour will be opposing the government on what has, unfortunately and wholly inappropriately, become the only issue of political significance in the UK.

Literally millions will be relieved as a result. Political sanity demands that Labour oppose a government so riven by incompetence, division and straightforward fear of what they're doing. This policy lets Labour do that. It so happens it also makes sense.

Pragmatically there is no realistic chance of a bespoke transitional arrangement because there is not a hint of one being put on the table as yet. Indeed, no one has even got near the table. In that case what Labour is suggesting is the only viable option there is. But at least it's claimed first mover advantage, at last, by claiming the only big political prize in town.

Then there is the obvious fact that it's right to set no end date for a transitional deal. That's not cowardice, or incompetence at work. It's just that there is no way at present that anyone can know how long it will take to resolve issues. In that case Labour has

claimed the consolation prize on this issue as well.

And there is a third factor. This policy lets Labour move over time, as Brexit becomes an ever bigger nightmare for the government, towards suggesting EU reforms that may well keep the UK in membership as other states begin to realise that compromise on some issues is also in their interests. Do not doubt the impact another economic downturn, which is surely coming, might have on this process.

Labour has taken a long time to get to a logical position. It may be, given that Brexit is such a disaster anyway, that the logic of the position remains only that it is streets ahead of anything the government has to offer. But that's progress. And I'll take that as cause for facing the day with a slight smile on my face. At least there's going to be a debate now. Hallelujah. Raise a glass, mug or anything else. Tea will do. There's some political progress this morning.