

What if Henry powers don't happen?

Published: January 15, 2026, 11:48 pm

One day into debate on the EU withdrawal bill in the Commons and rumour has it that Tory MPs from both sides of the Brexit divide are willing to join opposition MPs in opposing the so-called Henry VIII powers that [would let ministers](#) amend up to 1,000 laws using little scrutinised secondary legislation. Whatever their reason, it seems Tory MPs may join Labour, Welsh and Scottish nationalist, Green, LibDem and independent MPs in wanting to 'take back control'.

I welcome that move. I hope it happens. But what then? What if all changes to UK law resulting from Brexit have to go to the Commons, as they should even though there is not a hope that there is time in the day to do that between now and March 2019?

The one thing we can be sure of is that there would be no agreement on this. The Brexit Tories are opposing these powers because they do not want the EU laws adopted. Others oppose because they do not want ministers to amend those laws inappropriately, as I suspect would happen. The consensus on the consequences of denying the powers will break down very quickly in that case.

So what's left? First, a withdrawal bill in tatters. Second, there will be a Brexit process that literally cannot be delivered. And third, there will still be a prime minister and Conservative Party determined to carry on nonetheless, knowing that they may not be legislate but that they are also unlikely to lose a vote of no-confidence.

It's hard to imagine a bigger political mess. And we are heading for a cliff edge because of it. This is increasingly looking like a nightmare in the making of greater proportion than I ever imagined.

But, I stress, that is no argument for the powers. It is, instead, the case for an entirely new approach. The time for a Progressive Alliance has arrived. But will Labour take the lead? I wish I could answer that.