

We are, after all, taking back control

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There did, at times of late, seem to be no way to prevent a no deal Brexit. The fact that legislation will be required appeared to be an insurmountable obstacle given the government's control of the business agenda of the House of Commons. Despite being a minority government, and riven by its own factions that it is, convention alone appeared to give it the right to ride roughshod over the will of the supposedly sovereign parliament.

And then came John Bercow, who has clearly decided that his last days as Speaker - which were already numbered - will be ones in which he will change history. It appears almost absurd to think that a simple change to a timetable motion could be so momentous. And yet, yesterday's decision by Bercow to let parliament decide the use of its own time was just that, because in a moment Bercow rebalanced power in a divided Commons, giving MPs a rare chance to exercise control over the country's executive.

I have three thoughts.

First, he was right to do so. Parliament must be sovereign, and in this rare situation we now witness that the handing of power to an executive that is clearly not able to command support was wrong in his view, and he was willing to do something about it. Given the problems for accountability created by the Fixed Term Parliaments Act, and May's obvious contempt for MPs wishes, he had no choice but act. He broke precedent, maybe, but the reality was that the ability of the government to survive despite its inability to govern because of its inability to win parliamentary support demanded that he did, and justified it.

Second, at the crucial time the chance for a majority to work together in the common good has been created. It's not clear what the consequence will be as yet, of course. That this might break the whip system, at least on occasion, has to be wholly to the good of parliament, politics and the life of this country. When very large numbers have been alienated by our major political parties for MPs to reclaim the initiative is desirable and makes clear that who is in Parliament might matter again.

Third, I suspect Bercow will pay a high price for this. I suspect few in political power will eventually thank him. The right will vilify him. History will be his friend. But he may be isolated for some time.

But I think his decision is truly refreshing and a source of hope that parliament might become relevant once more. And that has to be good news. We are, after all, taking back control. It's long been needed.