

It all comes down to Bercow

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For the second evening in a row I sat glued to the BBC Parliament channel.

You know what unfolded. It appeared that parliament succeeded in expressing its will. It does not want No Deal. For small mercies let us be thankful.

And now what? From my twitter feed it is apparent that people are still profoundly confused.

First, No Deal is still in the table, because it remains the law. Nothing has changed. No law has been amended meaning that on 29 March we can still leave without a deal against the current will of parliament. And what is apparent is that the government will permit that, at least as things stand at present. They want to keep No Deal as a threat and however many times they are defeated it seems May's coterie believe that they have the right to choose what is, and is not, permitted as an option.

Second, an extension to Article 50 is possible, but according to the motion to be debated today, only if May's Deal is accepted, when an extension to 30 June would be requested. This makes clear that unless parliament objects May's Deal will be voted on again next week. This must be unprecedented in parliamentary history. And, as a matter of fact, we have no idea what extension the EU might consider. It may only offer something much longer, for example, with the U.K. being left with the option of leaving on a date it chooses if it can ever make a choice.

Third, according to May parliament could also decide to revoke Article 50. Or it could decide on a second referendum. She rules these out. I think neither likely, however desirable. I cannot see parliamentary majorities for either, as yet.

She also, fourthly, appears to have entirely ignored the possibility that she might resign and let another government be formed.

Or, fifthly, that a general election might be held.

And there is in all this the unknown factor, which is Bercow. He refused to be drawn in

how he might react to this chaos once today's votes are out of the way when questioned during successive points of order in the House last night. But I think this is where the power lies now.

It is said Bercow has faults. I am sure he has. But this is his moment. And he is one of the few who is rising to it. Begrudgingly, I admit Yvette Cooper is another who is. The leaders of the SNP, Plaid and the Greens join them.

What Bercow might do we cannot tell. But I suspect he is running out of enthusiasm for a prime minister without an effective government, or even cabinet, who is acting contemptuously of Parliament.

He will allow today to proceed. He will take what is said as indicative of will, as he will take the last two days as similarly indicative. And I believe he will then allow a series of votes, whether the government likes it or not, on issues not then decided. Each will specifically stand clear of each other.

These might include should the Deal be renegotiated?

And should it now commit the UK to a Customs union?

And should the Irish Customs border, if one is required, be in the Irish Sea, meaning Northern Ireland can remain in a Customs Union even if the UK is not?

Maybe it will be asked if the UK should be in the single market?

And it is likely that a long extension will be explored.

As will the appetite for a second referendum be tested. Maybe what should be on the paper might be questioned, although I doubt there will be time.

And then Bercow will permit legislation to be tabled to effect the propositions most likely to win support.

He will at the same time, and only then, allow another vote in May's Deal.

And he might if nothing is passed then allow a vote on revocation.

Or an appeal for extra time on condition of the House being dissolved and an election called.

He could do all these things. He may 'take back control' by doing so but when there is no effective government - and there is not - then that is what he might need to do.

By doing so he could just steer us through this mess. But it all comes down to Bercow.