

Might Philip Hammond save us, after all?

Published: January 13, 2026, 1:30 pm

The new UK prime minister will, if they are lucky, have a working majority of four when they arrive in office, assuming all parties but the DUP do not vote for them in a vote of confidence and that the usual suspects such as the Speakers and Sinn Fein do not vote.

This matters. [Reports today](#) suggest that Philip Hammond, David Gauke and Rory Stewart are likely to join Ken Clarke and Dominic Grieve (at least) on the backbenches and voting against any arrangement that might result in a No Deal Brexit. I happen to believe that all of them would do that. I suspect that they are strong willed enough, and sufficiently principled on this issue to break their party line. And if our new prime minister was Boris Johnson I cannot see even Kate Hoey from Labour voting for him in a vote of no confidence, much as she is inclined to vote for all things that might deliver Nigel Farage's dream.

What does this then mean? Simply that a new prime minister with a commitment to No Deal cannot form an effective administration with support in the House of Commons, and so cannot hope to govern. Indeed, the question arises as to whether, knowing this, Theresa May could advise the Queen to issue them with the invitation to form a government.

The Tories have thought that prevarication and delay in the form of a leadership election might solve their problems around No Deal - simply by delivering it by default. But what is clear is that the emergence of two candidates, both committed (or so they say) to leaving on 31 October, has done the opposite. It has ensured that the rump of those in the Conservatives who retain some economic judgment have had to resolve to use the power they have to block this outcome.

I never thought the day might come when I would have to be grateful for Philip Hammond and my long time foe on tax gaps, David Gauke, but it looks as if that might yet happen.

This game is not over. We're hanging on by our finger tips. But there are reasons to think that we might still not slip. And since I trust Hammond et al not to waiver then,

bizarrely, the outcome will be down to the persistent Labour rebels who want No Deal for their constituents at any price, including to those constituents.