

Johnson is proving himself to be utterly untrustworthy

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I should not be surprised by anything Boris Johnson does. But I am. Trumplike, it seems he has total disregard. This contempt for the commitments made by a previous government would be contemptible. But he is now showing himself willing to ignore the legal agreements his own government has negotiated.

This come from this morning's [Guardian](#):

Boris Johnson is drawing up legislation that will override the Brexit withdrawal agreement on Northern Ireland, a move that threatens the collapse of crunch talks which the prime minister has said must be completed within five weeks.

Johnson will put an ultimatum to negotiators this week, saying the UK and [Europe](#) must agree a post-Brexit trade deal by 15 October or Britain will walk away for good.

But progress on the already fragile talks will be threatened by plans revealed on Sunday for the UK government to publish a controversial section of the internal market bill on Wednesday that will intentionally try to unpick parts of the withdrawal agreement signed in January. It will include elements of the special arrangements for Northern Ireland that are legally binding.

There is almost no possible favourable interpretation of this plan to renege on what has already been agreed by Johnson's own government.

And let's also be clear who this has been agreed with.

It's not just been agreed with the EU, although that, of course, is the case.

It' also been agreed by parliament. It is the law that is being unwound here. And that law was only passed in January.

And at the same time, that parliamentary agreement is the embodiment of the so-called 'oven-ready' Brexit that was the basis for the 2019 election campaign, which Johnson won because he claimed that the Brexit deal was done. So it is quite

reasonable to claim that this arrangement was agreed with the people of the UK.

But Johnson never showed much sign of understanding what he had agreed, most especially on Northern Ireland, where he continually claimed that he had not created a border when he had very clearly done so. He was continually told that he was wrong, and now at the very last minute, having appreciated that he is, Johnson is reneging on all he said.

There is no-one incapable of appraising his behaviour on this issue if this report turns out to be true (and I have little doubt that it will do so). We all know that we have to negotiate deals to get through life. Most of them will not have the significance of this one, but every one of them has implicit within it our commitment to fulfil the promise that we have made. And we are, rightly, appraised on the basis of our willingness to fulfil that commitment by those with whom we negotiated.

It is not by chance that those who honour their commitments are trusted in life, and are honoured and respected, on the basis of which they usually prosper in the long run, even if that means that they sometimes suffer short term disadvantage as a result of a deal made in error.

It is also not by chance that those who break their word are considered not just dishonourable, but simply untrustworthy. It takes little time for relationships of all sorts to be terminated when that becomes apparent. Without trust there is no basis for dealing with anyone.

And what Johnson is proving himself to be is utterly untrustworthy.

And this is not without consequence. It should shatter the faith of anyone in Johnson for good. And when I say anyone, I mean from the Conservative Party onwards.

But much more significant is the national and international consequence. Apart from the fact that the people of the UK now know that they have a government led by a person whose word is worthless, internationally this has massive repercussions.

The deal on Northern Ireland, which is at the core of the arrangement that is to be broken, is the embodiment of the continuing commitment to the Good Friday Agreement, on which peace was built there.

No one can doubt that the Good Friday Agreement was an extraordinary achievement that has had a lasting and massively beneficial impact. But that, apparently, is inconsequential to Johnson, as is the fate of those in Northern Ireland who might suffer as a result.

But gone too is the commitment to simply honour an international, legally binding agreement signed by Johnson only months ago because it is now treated as irrelevant.

And gone too will be in faith in the MPs of a Party who could vote for a commitment in January and reverse it later the same year if they do, as I expect, honour the whip that will be imposed on them and vote for this breach of every element of trust into law.

What we now very clearly have is a government that cannot be trusted. Not only will it not keep to its word once given; what is also very apparent is that it will enter into agreements in bad faith with no intention of ever honouring them, which is the only reasonable conclusion to be drawn from Johnson's refusal to ever accept the only possible interpretation of the agreements on Northern Ireland that he signed and had endorsed by parliament.

This brings us to a new low in UK history. We have been ruled by incompetent people before now and fools have risen to high office. But I do seriously wonder when it was that the supposed greatest characteristic of the English, that they would keep their word, was ever quite so abused.

I suppose we should have expected this. When a major political party chose to be led by a man who was known to have lied and cheated throughout his career, who was known to have ignored all concepts of fidelity in his relationships, and who has a reputation for simply not putting in the hours so that he might understand the issues that he is supposedly meant to decide upon, then this was, I admit, foreseeable. But that does not change the fact that it is profoundly shocking.

This is a bad day. It is a thing badly done, as Jane Austen might have put it. The price to be paid will be substantial. And there is no happy ending to this one. Johnson is leading the UK into a wilderness from which, for England at least, there is no obvious exit at present.