



20<sup>th</sup> February 2019

Dear Prime Minister,

Thank you for your letter of 16 February in response to me and my Parliamentary colleagues.

We backed your leadership bid in 2016, because we saw you as the best candidate to unite the party and country and we want you to succeed in doing so.

However, your Brexit deal - which we know was hard-fought - has united leavers and remainers in the country against it.

Your refusal to meet us to discuss a way forward is, therefore, deeply shocking. You have rightly berated Jeremy Corbyn for his refusal to engage seriously in a discussion about the future of our country.

Yet in the last few weeks you have met him, the far left Len McCluskey and the irreconcilable European Research Group, who were again in Downing Street only last night.

Against this background, your refusal to meet not only entrenches divisions in the Conservative family, but more importantly is not in the national interest.

The UK now appears paralysed and polarised as we career towards a devastating no deal Brexit for which the country will rightly never forgive us. It is beyond argument that the UK has been brought to a point of national crisis that is unprecedented in peacetime as a result.

We fear that, because the Government has failed to level with voters about the real consequences of Brexit, even if some version of a withdrawal deal is passed, the electorate will respond with incomprehension and anger when they realise that, far from settling the issue, it opens the door to what all sensible observers agree will be at least five more years of grinding negotiation in which the EU has the upper hand.

Regardless of your view of the rights and wrongs of Brexit, it is painfully apparent to everyone that the UK is not ready to leave on March 29. If you had agreed to meet, we would have stressed the need to take no deal off the table, take some time out and consider what the best course of action for our country now is - a view shared by many in the Cabinet, Government and country.

This would be in the long Conservative tradition of pragmatism, common sense and sound economic management. This tradition, and our appeal to the moderate, centre ground voters who determine election results is being put at serious risk by the course that the Government is adopting.

Instead, the Conservative Party has alienated a swathe of the electorate – particularly the younger, socially liberal voters we have worked so hard since 2005 to persuade that we were not indeed ‘the nasty party’ and the majority now in favour of staying in the EU, according to consistent opinion poll findings.

As a doctor, I have always believed in the principle of informed consent. That was not given in 2016 because those who advocated Brexit did not put forward any coherent or deliverable plan for how it should be effected.

Now that it is clearer what Brexit will mean, with the Government’s own figures suggesting that even your proposed exit deal will mean a four per cent hit to our national income, we believe we need to go back to the people to give them the right to a final say vote.

If Brexit proceeds without this informed consent, then this issue will not be settled – indeed, it will be contested - for a generation and will continue to divide our politics and our society.

It will also be profoundly damaging for the Conservative Party that we know you love and have served for most of your adult life.

We have seen this week in the Labour Party the shattering consequences for a leadership which closes its mind to pragmatic arguments in the centre and instead panders to a faction.

The country is crying out for leadership which can inspire genuine unity, rather than seeking to impose it. We are sorry that you have not been prepared to talk with patriotic, centre ground Conservatives face-to-face, but we urge you, even at this late stage, to do the right thing and press the pause button on Brexit so that Parliament can seek to agree an alternative way forward.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Phillip Lee', with a large loop at the top and a horizontal line at the bottom.

Dr. Phillip Lee MP  
Chair, Right to Vote