# Brexit vote: Total silence - then disbelief



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Well, well, well.

The Tory rebels, and the government, believed that a last-minute panicked concession from the government side had walked Theresa May back from the brink of defeat.

Frantic conversations between the government, the whips, the party managers and their MPs who were tempted to rebel had been taking place all day.

We saw cabinet ministers take MPs aside - for just a quiet chat of course - in the closing moments of the vote.

And during the voting, which always takes about 15 minutes, some of those who were tempted tweeted that they had decided to abstain - the last minute promise from the minister, Dominic Raab, had changed their minds or delayed the clash.

We saw as one of the possible rebels, a new Scottish MP, Paul Masterton, was cajoled by the Defence Secretary, Gavin Williamson (the chief whip until weeks ago) - then after the conversation, picked up his mobile phone and tweeted that he was going to abstain. But the arm twisting and arguments failed.

As the MPs who count the votes made their way to the Speaker's chair, the opposition teller made their way to the outside of the despatch box.

It's a physical signal of telling MPs who has won before the official announcement takes place. As that happened the House of Commons erupted - well at least the Labour side.

Ministers looked like they felt sick. The deputy speaker had to call for silence so the chamber could hear the actual result.

Total silence, and then disbelief as the result was read out. The government had been beaten after all, by only four votes.

It's the first time that Theresa May has been defeated on her own business in the Commons. She has to front up in Brussels tomorrow with other EU leaders only hours after an embarrassing loss in Parliament.

Beyond the red faces in government tonight, does it really matter? Ministers tonight are divided on that. Two cabinet ministers have told me while it's disappointing it doesn't really matter in the big picture.

It's certainly true that the Tory party is so divided over how we leave the EU that the Parliamentary process was always going to be very, very choppy.

But another minister told me the defeat is "bad for Brexit" and was openly frustrated and worried about their colleagues' behaviour.

It's possible too that it was a miscalculation that could have been avoided. Had the minister at the despatch box put forward the concession even a few hours earlier, that tiny number of votes might have gone the other way.

This is only the first big piece of legislation related to our withdrawal from the EU and it has run into trouble.

And one of the leading Tory rebels predicted the government will have to drop one of its other plans, to put a date in the Withdrawal Bill, next week.

The broader risk for May is not just that she will have to budge on this particular issue, but that the small group of rebels in the Tory party is strengthened by actually having had this kind of impact - and the opposition parties are already emboldened.

Theresa May had been having her first good week in many, many months. That brief respite just might have come to an end.

Stephen Hammond, one of the rebels, has just been sacked from his position as deputy chairman of the Tory Party.

Tonight, no-one is playing nice.

# Brexit bill: Government loses key vote after Tory rebellion

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The government has been narrowly defeated in a key vote on its Brexit bill after a rebellion by 11 Tory MPs.

In a blow to Prime Minister Theresa May, MPs voted to give Parliament a legal guarantee of a vote on the final Brexit deal struck with Brussels. The government had argued this would jeopardise its chances of delivering a smooth departure from the EU. Despite a last-minute attempt to offer concessions to rebels, an amendment to the bill was backed by 309 to 305. Ministers said the "minor setback" would not prevent the UK leaving the EU in 2019.

Of the Conservative MPs who voted against the government, eight are former ministers. One of them, Stephen Hammond, was sacked as Conservative vice chairman in the aftermath of the vote. "Tonight I put country and constituency before party and voted with my principles to give Parliament a meaningful vote," he tweeted. The government said it was "disappointed" at losing - its first defeat on Brexit - despite the "strong assurances" it had offered. Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn said the defeat was "a humiliating loss of authority" for Mrs May on the eve of an EU summit where leaders will discuss Brexit.

It's the first time that Theresa May has been defeated on her own business in the Commons. She has to front up in Brussels tomorrow with other EU leaders only hours after an embarrassing loss in Parliament.

Beyond the red faces in government tonight, does it really matter? Ministers tonight are divided on that. Two cabinet ministers have told me while it's disappointing it doesn't really matter in the big picture. It's certainly true that the Tory party is so divided over how we leave the EU that the Parliamentary process was always going to be very, very choppy. But another minister told me the defeat is "bad for Brexit" and was openly frustrated and worried about their colleagues' behaviour.

The defeat came after opposition parties joined forces with Conservative rebels during a heated debate in the Chamber on the amendment. Critics accused those behind the amendment - which was authored by former attorney general Dominic Grieve and championed by other pro-Remain campaigners - of trying to "frustrate" Brexit and tying the government's hands. After the result was announced, one of the rebels, former cabinet minister Nicky Morgan, tweeted: "Tonight Parliament took control of the EU Withdrawal process." But other Conservative MPs reacted angrily, with one, Nadine Dorries, saying the rebels should be deselected.

The Tory rebels were Mr Grieve, Heidi Allen, Ken Clarke, Jonathan Djanogly, Stephen Hammond, Sir Oliver Heald, Nicky Morgan, Bob Neill, Antoinette Sandbach, Anna Soubry and Sarah Wollaston. Another Conservative MP, John Stevenson, abstained by voting in both lobbies. Two Labour MPs, Frank Field and Kate Hoey, voted with the government.

The UK is due to leave the EU in March 2019, and negotiations are taking place on what their relationship will be like in the future. The EU Withdrawal Bill is a key part of the government's exit strategy. Its effects include ending the supremacy of EU law and copying existing EU law into UK law, so that the same rules and regulations apply on Brexit day.

MPs have been making hundreds of attempts to change its wording - but this is the first time one has succeeded. Unless the government manages to overturn it further down the line, it means a new Act of Parliament will have to be passed before ministers can implement the withdrawal deal struck with Brussels.

Ministers had made several efforts to placate the Conservative rebels, and argued that Mr Grieve's amendment would put unnecessary time pressure on the government if talks with the EU continued until the last minute. They had already promised a vote on the final deal and to enshrine the withdrawal agreement in an Act of Parliament. But critics demanded a guarantee of a "meaningful vote" before the deal is agreed. They said the wording of the bill would allow ministers to bypass Parliament in implementing what is agreed with Brussels. And minutes before the vote, they offered a last-minute promise of action at a later stage of the bill's journey through Parliament. Some Conservatives said this had changed their minds but Mr Grieve said it was "too late".

Speaking afterwards, the government said: "We are disappointed that Parliament has voted for this amendment despite the strong assurances that we have set out. "We are as clear as ever that this bill, and the powers within it, are essential”. "This amendment does not prevent us from preparing our statute book for exit day. We will now determine whether further changes are needed to the Bill to ensure it fulfils its vital purpose." Justice Minister Dominic Raab said the defeat would not hold up the Brexit process. "It's a setback but it's a fairly minor setback, it won't frustrate the Brexit process," he said, adding: "It's not going to stop us leaving the EU in March 2019."

Mr Corbyn said "Parliament has asserted itself" amid a "power grab" by the prime minister.

The European Parliament's chief Brexit co-ordinator Guy Verhofstadt tweeted: "British Parliament takes back control. European and British Parliament together will decide on the final agreement. Interests of the citizens will prevail over narrow party politics. A good day for democracy."

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**Stephen Hammond: Tory MP sacked as a Conservative vice-chairman after Brexit rebellion**

* [Jon Sharman](http://www.independent.co.uk/author/jon-sharman) (Independent), 13 December 2017

Tory MP [Stephen Hammond](http://www.independent.co.uk/topic/stephen-hammond) has been sacked as a vice-chairman of the Conservative Party after he rebelled against the Government on a key [Brexit](http://www.independent.co.uk/topic/brexit) vote. The former transport minister voted in favour of Dominic Grieve’s amendment seven, to back his attempt to ensure MPs have a “meaningful vote” on the withdrawal deal. Before the news broke, Mr Hammond said the rebels had been prepared to work with the Government to ensure a meaningful vote.

On Sky News, he went on: “It’s disappointing, it gives me no pleasure to vote against the Government but I’ve made it very clear that for me, this was a point of principle and just occasionally in one’s life one has to put principle before party. “I know that sounds pompous but I’ve never done it before.”

A total of 11 Conservative rebels voted to change Theresa May’s EU Withdrawal Bill against her wishes – tipping the balance against the Government by just four votes.

Mr Grieve, the former attorney general, advanced an amendment that will guarantee MPs a “meaningful” vote on any Brexit deal she strikes with the EU.

Mr Hammond said any pressure applied by Tory whips had not worked. “You know, I’m an old lag so nothing can really work for me I’m afraid,” he said. “I had told the Government that this is what I intended to do unless we got the concessions I was looking for and therefore I’m afraid with a heavy heart I voted against the Government.” Mr Hammond added: “I think the Government could have been a little bit swifter of foot, I think there was a way out of this, we were all very close but the Government chose not to move that way.”

He later tweeted: “Very disappointed to no longer be vice chairman of the Conservative Party for London. It was a huge honour and I’ll continue to campaign across our capital in the run up to the borough elections next year.”

**Woman MP 'reduced to tears by bully boy Tory whips' ahead of crucial Brexit vote**

* [JOE MURPHY](https://www.standard.co.uk/author/joe-murphy-1), [Nicholas Cecil](https://www.standard.co.uk/author/nicholas-cecil-1) , 13 December 2017, Evening Standard

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Ministers were plunged into a [Brexit](https://www.standard.co.uk/topic/brexit) bullying row today as whips were accused of reducing a female MP to tears.

A male whip was alleged to have used “bully boy tactics” that left the MP trembling and crying in the Commons. It came as tensions soared ahead of a critical Brexit vote tonight where Theresa May is in danger of suffering her first major parliamentary defeat.

Tory former business minister Anna Soubry said the pressure on potential rebels to toe the line had gone too far. She told the Standard that the MP was left in distress after a conversation with a whip who tried to make her vote with the Government. Ms Soubry said: “It is right that the whips should exert pressure, cajole people — that’s perfectly proper in my view. But bullying, reducing colleagues to tears and making them shake is not acceptable. It has got to stop. We are the Conservative Party, not Momentum thugs.”

Two other MPs also said they were aware of the incident. One senior MP said: “The person was left shaken and upset. These were bully boy tactics.”

About two dozen potential Tory “mutineers” have threatened to support an amendment put down by former attorney general Dominic Grieve that would give Parliament, rather than the Government, the final say on any Brexit deal hammered out by Mrs May next year. The numbers are enough to overturn the Prime Minister’s working majority of 12, even if some rebels abstain rather than vote for the amendment.

During last night’s debate on the issue, Tory whip Chris Heaton-Harris was observed talking to one of the potential rebels, who was said to have been upset afterwards. No 10 said it was “categorically not true” that he had caused the MP to cry or feel intimidated. This year Mr Heaton-Harris denied trying to “intimidate” academics after he wrote to universities asking to know what staff were teaching about Brexit. He told the Standard: “You will have to go through No 10 to get any comment from me.” The female MP did not respond to requests for a comment.

This morning Cabinet minister Justine Greening told Radio 4’s Today show: “We’re going to make sure that through the concessions today we continue to command the support of Parliament.”

Brexit Secretary David Davis wrote to all MPs in a last-ditch attempt to get support. He also issued a written statement spelling out in more detail the process for voting on a Brexit deal, which promised not to implement the deal until after MPs have voted.

Mr Grieve rejected this as failing to offer a meaningful vote. He urged MPs not to fall for “woolly concessions”. He is seeking a special Act of Parliament to enshrine the Brexit deal before it is too late for Parliament to seek changes.

Mrs May faces a potentially bigger rebellion when MPs vote, probably next week, on her attempt to fix into law the Brexit date of March 29, 2019.