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IN the last month, my sleep patterns have slowly returned to normal. I kept waking up in a cold sweat fearing the Article 50 notification leading the UK out of the EU.

With a closure of the UK's borders, it could irrevocably change the north east for the worse.

Without Single Market access, foreign manufacturing investment would dry up. Manufacturing was always, according to Brexit's House Economist Patrick Minford, a sacrifice worth making to get back 'sovereignty'.

A new visa regime would turn the screw on regional universities by restricting foreign student numbers. And without free movement, universities would be banished from the European research programmes which bring tens of millions - and hundreds of highly skilled jobs - to the region.

Brexit would bring victory to the Scottish Nats' second independence referendum. And that threatens the return of a hard border to north Northumberland for the first time in centuries as the Scots seek to stabilise their fragile new economy and placate their new European partners.

There'll be no new money for the NHS, and kicking out thousands of European NHS staff would create an existential threat for British healthcare. So expect a rapid shift to rationing via an American-style health insurance system with eye-watering premiums and bankruptcies routine after now-standard operations.

We can forget any pretensions for Northern Powerhouse or even a decent regional policy promoting decent regional jobs; it was the EU that forced Whitehall to invest billions in the North East in recent decades.

Left to their own devices the Tories and Whitehall would focus on London's Technology Roundabout (really!) or whatever hip craze follows it. In short, Brexit would be an unfettered disaster for everyone in the North East who gets sick, draws a pension, wants to study, wants to work or wants to be in the United Kingdom.

But events in the last month are making our departure from the EU less rather than more likely. First was new Conservative leader Theresa May's appointments to the Brexit departments.

Although David Davis is a serious political operator, both Boris Johnson and Liam Fox have made a career out of patronage and publicity rather than competence or

commitment. Neocon Liam Fox apparently sincerely believed that our large trading partners would be busting a gut to negotiate new deals with us when we left the much-hated EU.

But there's been a rude awakening for him as his gauche approaches have been persistently rebuffed, ensuring a post-EU UK would face punitive tariffs and steeply rising prices in the foreseeable future.

New foreign secretary Johnson has also been on tour trying to pour oil on some troubled waters he recently stirred up with his borderline xenophobic public outpourings. His appointment announcement was greeted by giggling from the normally pofaced US State Department spokesman, and the German Foreign Minister called out his response to a German terrorist outrage as irresponsible scaremongering.

Other EU member states are lining up their best negotiators to screw the UK if the exit negotiations ever launch. And we must be under no illusion that these are battle-hardened political operators who will hit us where it hurts, "pour encourager les autres" as Barnier might say, to scare other potentially Eurosceptic countries back into line.

There's no ways that Theresa's Three Bungling Brexiteers can ever cut a deal that isn't obviously a massive disaster for Britain. But these three collectively have enough low political cunning to know that would derail their professional gravy train.

It's the prospect of these three having to lie in the bed that they've fouled that makes Brexit further away than any time in recent memory. And as an added bonus, it's finally given me back the sleep of the righteous. And so to bed | North East born Dr Paul Benneworth is a senior researcher in the Center for Higher Education Policy Studies at the University of Twente in the Netherlands.

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