

Elections - Corbyn is right to be neutral on Brexit

Wednesday 27 November 2019, by [STOWE Andy](#) (Date first published: 26 November 2019).

Labour is the only party with a chance of forming the next Westminster government which is committed to giving us a second referendum on Brexit writes Andy Stowe. Remainers should vote Labour in England and Wales. Brexit supporters who think Johnson's deal is poor should also vote Labour. The manifesto [1] is unambiguous:



Photo: Steve Eason

"Labour will give the people the final say on Brexit. Within three months of coming to power, a Labour government will secure a sensible deal. And within six months, we will put that deal to a public vote alongside the option to remain. A Labour government will implement whatever the people decide."

Jeremy Corbyn's position is that as head of the government committed to giving voters a second referendum, he will stay neutral [2], favouring neither the leave or remain option as he may be called on to implement either.

In a referendum offering the choices of remain or a Labour leave deal, Corbyn can't go into negotiations having already declared that he'd recommend rejecting his own deal. The EU could simply ask for Johnson's to be put on the ballot. It's better to have a fractionally less bad Labour leave offer to vote on.

Corbyn's position is that he will negotiate with the EU and carry out the will of the people expressed by the public vote; in both situations, his holding a neutral position is appropriate. Those that insist that his position is too complicated are simply not listening closely.

What seems to confuse them is that the leader of a major political party has accepted that Brexit is very divisive but he's not insisting that his MPs and members follow his line. Corbyn is saying that he will allow Labour people and the wider electorate to make up their own minds and he'll abide by their democratic decisions. It's an approach which is consistent with his way of doing politics. He sees himself as an advocate and a servant of his supporters rather than their guru.

Remember Jo Swinson?

As party leader, Corbyn has to take into account the electoral arithmetic. It's estimated [3] that in the region of three to four million Labour supporters voted to leave, about 30% of the party's total.

The data seem to show [4] “148 Labour-voting seats probably voted to leave, while 84 probably voted to remain”. Many of the Brexiteer voters in those constituencies will have been racists, Tories and Ukip supporters, but that still leaves a sizable number of Labour voters Corbyn can’t walk away from.

Jo Swinson, the tragi-comic Lib Dem leader who was talking about being the next Prime Minister a week ago, is an instructive contrast. The Financial Times [5] reports that “the mood in the Lib Dem camp is one of “concern, close to despair”. This isn’t just because of her terrible performance on the BBC’s Question Time in front of millions or the fact that she’s now seen as an austerity politician. It’s principally because “the party has committed a tactical error by ditching its support for a second EU referendum in favour of a straightforward promise to scrap Brexit by revoking the Article 50 exit process.” This is exactly the mistake that Corbyn is avoiding and the same Lib Dem sources are saying that they wish they’d applied the same tactics as Labour.

One could argue that rather than presenting himself as the honest broker, Corbyn should be making more of the argument that it’s his job to implement the verdict of the voters. But the bottom line is quite simple. He will give us a chance for a second referendum in a situation where people have looked into the abyss of a no-deal and Tory Brexit and millions of young voters are now on the electoral register. A compromise to keep Brexiteer Labour voters on board is one worth making.

Andy Stowe

P.S.

- Socialist Resistance, 26th November 2019:
<http://socialistresistance.org/corbyn-is-right-to-be-neutral-on-brexit/18672>

Footnotes

- [1] <https://labour.org.uk/manifesto/the-final-say-on-brexit/>
- [2] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=13s2Muc8ZAg>
- [3] <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-48039984>
- [4] <https://fullfact.org/online/referendum-results-by-constituency/>
- [5] <https://www.ft.com/content/b47696d4-0f9b-11ea-a225-db2f231cfeae?fbclid=IwAR0Zg1o-RKHmp5cVvwGKSLL176R73fuIFnU4PkVpLgE1iOwF13vmq9KbAg>