

General Elections in Britain - The choice: Labour hope or Tory Brexit racism

Wednesday 11 December 2019, by [DAVIS Alan](#) (Date first published: 9 December 2019).

With just three days to go and the contest tightening, the election remains too close to call, writes Alan Davies. Everything remains to be played for. Whilst the polls are still predicting a Tory majority they are highly dubious. In 2017 they were still predicting a Tory landslide in the days just before the voting. They are likely to be underestimating support amongst young people for Labour and there remain a high number of undecided voters.

A last big campaigning push by Labour members and supporters in the next few days could be crucial. If the election is tight it could well be decided by tactical voting, which people are forced into by the outrageously undemocratic FPTP voting system, in around 50 seats where such voting might keep the Tories out. The Observer on Sunday published a full guide for this constituency by constituency [\[1\]](#).

Whilst all general elections are potential turning points, this one is in a league of its own. This time we are either going to have a Labour (or Labour led) government moving to the left, reversing years of brutal austerity and investing heavily in public services in a way not seen for many years, or a populist Trumpian government led by a dangerous charlatan and inveterate liar bent on a free trade deal with the USA. The days of 'I can't tell the difference' are over.

The deeply reactionary nature of today's fully Brexitised Tory party was clear enough when Johnson, along with Farage, refused to take part in the party leaders debate on climate change – the first ever held in a general election in this country.

Labour's ground army

Labour has a powerful manifesto and has run a good campaign. Many records have been broken by the huge teams that have turned to argue the case on the doorstep.

Holding the general election before a second referendum was always going to be a problem for Labour in getting its extensive domestic agenda across, particularly in its so-called red wall seats in the north and the Midlands where the politics of Brexit – English Nationalism and anti-immigration – cuts across Labour's progressive agenda. This problem became more acute after the decision of the Brexit Party not to contest Tory held constituencies – in other words semi-collapse into the Tory campaign.

A recognition of this problem has shaped Labour's approach to Brexit: i.e. negotiating a soft (less damaging) version of Brexit and then putting it to a popular vote with a remain option. How successful this has been in convincing Labour Brexiteers to stick with the party we will not know until Thursday evening.

Apart from Johnson's 'get Brexit done' mantra - which is the biggest single lie of the whole campaign - the Tories have nothing to offer other than dog-whistle racism and the further brutalisation of the prison and criminal justice system. If Johnson wins, Brexit will not 'be done' on January 30. Britain will then enter the 10 month Transition Period out of which Johnson would rather crash out with no-deal rather than extending this period which is likely to become unavoidable.

Johnson hammered home the reactionary racist nature of the Tory campaign and the Brexit project in a Sky interview [2] using language reminiscent of Enoch Powell:

'I've said that what we want to do is bear down on migration, particularly of unskilled workers who have no job to come to and I think that's what's happened over the last couple of decades or more. You've seen quite a large number of people coming in from the whole of the EU — 580 million population — able to treat the UK as though it's basically part of their own country...'

Labour activists are reporting that some people who previously voted for the party have been won over by this appeal to racism and nationalism. They have become so ground down by insecure jobs and unaffordable housing that they almost find it impossible to believe that an alternative is possible. This demoralisation and atomism of swathes of the British working class is the secret of the Tories' success in winning their support. They are voting for racism rather than their class interest.

Along with racism and xenophobia, the Tories have relied on massive support from the media - in particular the tabloid press which has lifted political vilification to a new level in its treatment of Jeremy Corbyn and of Labour, with multiple pages of vitriol every day.

The BBC has not been much better, for example describing Tory spending plans as spending plans and Labour's spending plans as giving away 'free stuff'. Even the best of the broadsheets such as the Guardian and the Observer have regularly battered Corbyn on the completely manufactured antisemitism allegations that have been relentless pursued throughout this campaign. Yesterday's Observer, for example, in calling for a vote for Labour only did so after accusing Corbyn of presiding over institutional antisemitism in his own party and backing up all the false claims of the misnamed Jewish Labour Movement - while ignoring the many voices of other Jews who take a completely different approach - i.e. backing Labour and Corbyn.



Photo: Steve Eason

British politics will change

Politics in this country, however, will not be the same after this election whoever wins. If it is Johnson, he is likely to lead an unstable government still battling for the foreseeable future to 'get Brexit done'. In fact he could win this election in the short term but destroy the Tory party (even in its Brexitist form) in the medium to longer term. To win Brexit is to own it and face the consequences as the effects of it become increasingly clear - in particular as the union, which the Tory party was created to preserve is destroyed in the process.

The task for Labour, on the other hand, if faced with a Tory majority must to preserve the huge gains

that have been made since Jeremy Corbyn was elected leader as leader of the party, most crucially the radical left alternative that it has developed so effectively, the mass membership it has recruited, and most importantly the new generation it has brought onto the scene and on which the future depends.

If Labour wins a majority or is in a position to form a minority government, then the vitriol that has been poured thus far on Corbyn and the party will be as nothing. The need to defend the achievement of defeating the Tories, combat media opposition and implement the most radical manifesto ever produced by a political party seriously vying for government means there will be little time to draw breath. At the same time there will be the need to push for even more radical – and controversial – policies such as support from a second independence referendum in Scotland and for PR in Westminster elections...

Meanwhile the only way to stop Brexit is either a Labour majority government, a Labour led government, or in a hung parliament where a Labour led coalition of opposition parties could force a second referendum through against a Tory minority government.

Whatever the outcome of the election on the 12 December, Labour's new manifesto has radicalised and mobilised large number of people, in particular under the age of 35, who are actively helping the election campaign. A left social movement has been created which will not disappear. Labour's manifesto has also shifted the debate on economic policy to the left. The recent large demonstrations and the school students strikes against climate change will intensify as the next COP climate summit will be in Glasgow in December 2020.

Finally the campaign for independence for Scotland will continue as the Scottish National Party is on course to win a big majority of seats north of the border with England.

Meanwhile this means winning every possible vote for Labour candidates in the short time that is now left.

Alan Davies

P.S.

• Posted on 9th December 2019:
<http://socialistresistance.org/the-choice-labour-hope-or-tory-brexit-racism/18850>

Footnotes

[1] <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2019/dec/08/tactical-voting-guide-2019-keep-tories-out-rmain-voter-general-election>

[2] <http://socialistresistance.org/Downloads/thetimes.co.uk/edition/news/election-2019-johnson-vo-ws-end-to-migrants-treating-britain-as-their-own-nczv7r97n?fbclid=IwAR2CXyI5NHXFsrV82TeASQXYYSvgFHaRrMMIPOC0Qku7aVWS6B8B8uxDzU>