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After UK General Election: I Am Crying, You're Crying. But Our Day Will Come.

Friday 13 December 2019, by [BRODER David](#) (Date first published: 12 December 2019).

The exit polls from the British election are a devastating blow. Allowing the Tories to pose as the defenders of Brexit ensured defeat — and has handed historic Labour areas over to the party of bosses and landlords. But with resolute socialist organizing, we will have another shot at power.

UNITED KINGDOM
ECONOMY PARTY POLITICS

If the exit polls are right, the British general election result is simply terrible. In England, Labour has lost as many as eighty seats directly to the Tories. North of the border, both have shed seats to the Scottish Nationalists, set to win almost every constituency. But it won't be anywhere near enough to stop Boris Johnson from winning a huge mandate for his hard privatization, hard pro-landlord, hard racist agenda.

We didn't think we'd do as badly. The exit poll released by IPSOS MORI at 10pm has the Tories with a majority of 86 — on the very worst end of all the pre-election predictions. Worse, seats held by Labour for most of the last century — often won to the party on the basis of organizing in industries that don't exist anymore — have swung to the party of low tax and low public services.

Every indicator is that the decisive shift was over Brexit. While Boris Johnson promised, in whatever hollow fashion, to “get Brexit done,” Labour called for a second vote, moving away from its 2017 position of following through on the 2016 referendum result. Before the last general election, we angrily denied we planned to subvert the democratic decision. This time, it sounded like we admitted it.

Ignoring Leave Voters

Our results party started late, so we had to stream the exit poll on my phone in the car. Tories 368 seats, Labour 191. If we'd done well, this in-car viewing party could have become a romantic memory, a botched end to a harum-scarum campaign. Instead, the poll came, and we sat in silence for several minutes afterward. So perhaps we should not be too quick to comment on the deeper reasons for the defeat. But there are some things which were apparent even when we were campaigning.

Most simply put, while liberals are rushing to claim that Corbyn was too “left” and too “radical,” as they angle for a fresh centrist leader, the simple fact is that we have done far worse than we did under Corbyn's own leadership in 2017, when we denied the Tories a majority. The most egregious losses are in Labour seats that voted to leave the European Union. Even if people could see through the lies about Corbyn's supposed “terrorist” links, they saw our position on Brexit as nonsense.

Some would say that only deluded Momentum activists would believe in Corbyn. We heard constant

lies that he is an antisemite and the BBC political editor was clearly against us. But was this really decisive? My own doorstep conversations over the last few weeks showed that insistent pressure from another zealous minority, those Remainer zealots campaigning to overturn the results of the 2016 referendum, was far more damaging. It set us against the average voter's own acceptance of the referendum result, but in particular set us against heavily pro-Leave, ex-industrial Northern England.

To see the result only an expression of popular racism or media bias — both real factors in the election — could be profoundly disorienting in the battles ahead, not least in choosing the path forward for Labour itself. We shouldn't have allowed Leave vs. Remain to define the election. Labour's call for the second referendum did just that. Everywhere in Europe, social-democratic parties defined by liberal culture warriors have shrunk to almost nothing. Labour has withstood better, but only in relative terms.

It didn't have to be like this. We got 40 percent of the vote two and a half years ago, with Corbyn as leader. There were over 12 million votes for a radical agenda. But when, in the run up to this context, supposed leftists characterized Brexit voters as "racist miners" and called on us to replace them with "urban progressives," they were listening too much to their own restricted, middle-class social circles and alienating the many.

In 2017 we put austerity at the heart of the election, uniting Labour Leavers with young and black and ethnic minority people on a program that was clearly anti-racist and clearly anti-austerity. We aren't a pro-EU faction like the Lib Dems but a party that aims to represent most working people and public service users. This time we did so... rather less.

Corbynism

In my own first article for *Jacobin*, as Jeremy Corbyn began his run for the Labour leadership in June 2015, I was one of many cynics. The membership wasn't radical enough, I said; even if he won, the resistance from MPs would be too great, and in any case class politics were on the decline.

I was wrong. Constant attacks on Corbyn there were, many simply lies. And the end result has been brutal. But the last four years have also seen a renaissance in organized socialist politics which isn't about to go away. The solidarity we built pounding the streets in the dark and the rain is a real, vital force, one that may even help us get through these next five years.

But we've also learned real lessons. We know that socialist politics isn't a matter for small sects or street protest movements. It's a galvanizing cause that can win over millions of people. Against the constant message that young people are apathetic, we see all around us the energy, enthusiasm, and commitment of those who are making Labour their own party.

Besieged from both within and outside the party through four years of leadership, subjected to vile personal attacks, it may well be that Jeremy Corbyn will not continue as leader. But the spirit he has brought to the party, and the engagement of tens of thousands of activists who would never have turned out to campaign for a David Miliband or a Jess Phillips, is an enduring shift in British politics. We've seen what the future is built on: the politics of class, of public services, of social housing, not just the liberal denunciation of Brexit.

There's no dressing up the result. Appealing to a spirit of resistance seems a little trite when we've just suffered such a defeat. The fight even to keep things the same will be much harder. But by way of consolation, at least now we have more comrades to cry with, more comrades whose pain is our own and more comrades who will win, some bright, future day.

David Broder

P.S.

• Jacobin, 12.12.2019:

<https://www.jacobinmag.com/2019/12/uk-election-results-labour>

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