

After UK General Election: Labour defeated - Brexit certain

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As Scotland hurtles towards independence we need an internationalist left and new electoral alliances.

It's clear Johnson's Tory party has won a big majority. I still expect Labour to take seats in the working class areas of southern England, but those gains will be overwhelmed by a swing to the Conservatives in small town Labour seats in the north and midlands.

If the final score is 42% for the Tories, having absorbed most of the Brexit Party and UKIP vote, that means there was still a majority for parties opposed to the Brexit deal. But Brexit will happen and most likely Scottish independence will follow.

That will need a major strategic realignment for both the centre and the left: around the defence of democracy, the defence of European values and a European trade orientation above a USA-first project.

In the short term we have to become the resistance. The vibrant and massive membership campaign has left Labour as an organisation in good shape to lead the fightback - and it's possible we can grow the membership much higher than 500,000.

Detailed analysis of the results will show Labour in England and Wales is still the party of those who work, of ethnic minorities, of young people and precarious workers. It is also the greenest of all parties when it comes to fighting climate change. But it has lost the elderly former industrial workforce to a toxic offering of nativism, nationalism and selfishness.

We are facing what Hannah Arendt called "the temporary alliance of the elite and the mob". The only answer to it is an alliance of the left and centre.

The form that has to take needs to be the subject of reflection, because disastrous though the Labour result is, the centre has almost disappeared (in England at least).

We tried to avoid this election becoming a referendum on Brexit and the tragedy is, we half succeeded. For the progressive majority of working class people it was about health, privatisation, wages. For conservative workers and their middle class allies it was always and only about Brexit. They cemented an alliance; the left and centre refused to do so.

The Labour left is now subject to three lines of attack.

- We should have supported Brexit
- We moved too far left

- We should not have backed Corbyn

I reject them all.

To understand how much bullshit is being talked about Brexit take a look at the polling averages for 2019. Between April and June Labour's support slumped from 32% to 22%, while the Libdems surged, at the very moment we rejected the second referendum. If we had followed the advice of the Lexiteers we would have started this election neck and neck with the Libdems, and probably lost numerous activists to the Greens and disillusionment.

As a result of the line imposed by Corbyn's inner circle and the Unite/CWU general secretaries, we had to spend the entire summer and autumn fighting to regain 10+ percentage points lost to a liberal centrist pro-Remain party. That was time we could have spent working in the constituencies we have now lost. Instead we spent the summer in the ludicrous position of worrying about losing Brixton to the Liberal Democrats.

The move to the left on economic policy was not the major problem on the doorstep. Elements of it could have been sold better; and there were too many promises and not enough narrative.

The manifesto became, as Richard Tawney complained of Lansbury's manifesto in the 1930s, a glittering forest of Christmas trees with presents for everyone.

But a large section of voters wanted only one Christmas present: Brexit - and on terms no Labour party, left or centrist led, could agree to.

Jeremy himself however did become a major problem. On the doorsteps of Leave areas I heard time and again that issue #1 was Corbyn, and only #2 Brexit. We managed to move the conversation beyond Brexit but not beyond Corbyn.

There are many reasons for Corbyn becoming an electoral problem, and despite our gratitude and solidarity to Jeremy for enduring the past two years we need to be honest about them:

- First, the absolute levels of vilification and slander aimed at him by the right wing media and the neoliberal centre.

- Second, his indecision over Brexit. For a man sold to the electorate as a conviction politician, to dither for months, and go into the election neutral on the biggest issue of the day, was fatal

- Third, his abject failure to get a grip over the antisemitism crisis, which became reputationally damaging for the entire 500,000 activist base. The low point of this was when his advisers tried to rewrite unilaterally an internationally accepted IHRA definition, against strong advice

- Fourth, his decision to surround himself with people determined to build walls around him instead of alliances; the use of bureaucratic means to impose wholly unsuitable candidates, and to delay the selection of candidates to facilitate this.

He went into the May EU elections unpopular with Leave voters in the north; he came out of it equally unpopular with the Remain voters of the big cities. He abandoned the mantle of insurgency but never looked competent in return, and in the campaign never discovered the ability to engage voters he showed in 2017.

The bigger picture is this: like it or not there is a culture war in Britain.

Corbyn already symbolised the cultural enemy for the Express reading nativist workers in places where we've lost. After May, for many progressive workers in Labour's big city heartlands, he looked disinterested in championing their values. His strategy was to refuse culture war but it engulfed him.

All this was clear in the Spring of 2019 - yet those of us who tried to change things - even minor things like his advisers - were vilified and excluded by the tight circle around the leadership.

Jeremy should now stand down. He's done his best with the available situation but we've been defeated. I want to pay tribute to his resilience and humour in the face of the worst vilification campaign in modern history.

I don't want a long interregnum or "period of reflection": we need a leadership contest in which an internationalist left takes control of the party and builds a genuine alliance with the centre left based on respect and compromise.

The new leadership's job should be to cement the left economic programme, democratise the party further and turn it into a mass social movement.

Corbynism, for about the past 12 months, has been less than the sum of its parts - because the pro-Remain internationalist left and the Lexiteers were fighting each other over the most strategic issue.

Meanwhile the party machine remained unreformed, sluggish and inept. It was better than 2017 but on all available evidence was once again outperformed by Momentum - in terms of activism, organisation and digital strategy.

Clearly we will have to rebuild confidence and support among voters in the north and midlands of England. But there cannot be one step back from our commitment to open-ness, tolerance, anti-racism and internationalism.

To the extent that we cannot regain support in those areas, we have to build a new electoral alliance - and potentially a series of electoral pacts, based around the promise of electoral reform.

The SNP's massive victory tonight arguably gives them a moral mandate for independence even before the 2021 Holyrood election or a second referendum. The English and Welsh left now need to begin planning for a post-UK future, a development which again means that only constitutional and electoral reform. Scottish Labour needs to be given complete autonomy, so that the party in England can seek wider alliances with the radical Scottish left.

For me, who leads the Labour Party now is an urgent but secondary issue.

What's important are the candidates' answers to these questions.

- Who supported us and who deserted us, and why?
- What are the new class dynamics of Britain?
- Where does this leave Britain in the global order?
- What kind of party do we need to win the 2024 election?
- What survives of our radical economic and climate programme?
- What is our programme for constitutional change, and what alliances are we prepared to make to

achieve it

Finally congratulations to all the new, radical MPs joining the PLP. The PLP will be younger, more diverse and more left wing than before, shorn of the Cold War relics and many Blairites. What it needs to do now is show imagination, and political leadership - a role that it was never allowed to perform under late-stage Corbynism.

Paul Mason

This is my initial analysis. I will be producing a substantial e-pamphlet over the weekend.

P.S.

- <https://paulmason.substack.com/p/labour-defeated-brexite-certain>