

UK: EU election results show time for compromise is over

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As we go to press, the European election results are just emerging. Nigel Farage's right populist Brexit Party was the clear winner with 31.6 per cent of the vote and 28 MEPs. The parties that stood on a clear, anti-Brexit, ticket collectively outperformed Brexit-plus-UKIP, with 38 per cent, and that leaves out of account those Labour voters who also oppose Brexit.

So, as a mini-referendum on the UK's membership of the EU, the results show a nation divided, but with a majority now in favour of remaining: grist to the mill of those campaigning, like us, for a people's vote.

The big story of the night was the disastrous showing for Labour. With Scotland and Northern Ireland still to declare (which will only deepen the gloom) Labour's share of the vote was slashed from 25 per cent to 14 per cent.

The party lost London to the Lib Dems, who came second to Brexit nationally, is likely to come fifth in Scotland, behind just about everybody, and could muster only 15 per cent of the vote in Wales.

Emily Thornberry started the post mortem on the BBC shortly after the first results, in the North East, were declared. She was spot on when she said, 'There should be a referendum and we should campaign to remain'. Another senior Shadow Cabinet member, John McDonnell, tweeted, 'we must unite our party and country by taking [the] issue back to people in a public vote'.

David Lammy told Radio 4, 'In this election we put out poor literature? Our activists did not want to come out for us. We had Labour members who did not feel able to vote Labour?. Absolutely true: presented with leaflets that ignored Brexit completely, thousands of party voters, members and activists stayed at home or voted for the Greens or the Liberals.

Many no doubt did that with a heavy heart but, for some, like Alistair Campbell and Andrew Adonis, voting for the Tories' junior partners was an easy choice; they oppose Brexit because they support the interests of the majority of British capitalists who know their future depends on the protection offered by the EU. No doubt many of those who voted Green saw this as a 'left' alternative to Labour.

Straight talking honest politics

While the results do not change anything, the campaign did enormous damage not only to the party but to Jeremy Corbyn's reputation as a 'straight talking, honest' politician, the very qualities that brought him the support of hundreds of thousands of members in the leadership campaign four years ago.

His strategy of 'constructive ambiguity', in other words avoiding a clear position on the central question, Leave or Remain, guaranteed that he came across as evasive, unable to answer a straight question with a

straight answer. Worst of all, it was based on preventing the membership of the party discussing and deciding the party's policy.

All that must now change. Corbyn should convene a meeting of the NEC and propose a Special Conference at which clear alternative policies can be debated, amended and voted on. We oppose Brexit because it is a reactionary nationalist project that obstructs the development of an internationalist working class movement that can fight the pan-European policies of the biggest corporations and banks.

Moreover, whatever its supporters might think, Brexit plays right into the hands of the US asset strippers who cannot wait to get their hands on the NHS and dismantle the welfare state, workers' rights and environmental protection. Consequently, we will support motions that commit the party to fighting to stop Brexit, either via a general election with a manifesto commitment to revoke Article 50, or via a second referendum, in which we campaign to remain.

If the NEC fails to deliver this, then we must start now to submit clear motions against Brexit to the annual conference in September. This time, delegates should refuse to accept decisions being taken behind closed doors and insist on alternative motions being debated and voted upon on the conference floor.

This is the acid test for Corbyn's leadership. If he fails it, then the surge of support that placed him at the head of the party will ebb away as quickly as it flooded in.

If he succeeds, then the transformation of Labour can get back on track, we can start to replace Blairite MPs with candidates who are committed to a socialist transformation of the UK, and to taking on the powers of Brussels from within the EU, alongside working class forces across the continent and beyond.

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