

Labour's Brexit strategy

*CIB affiliated organisation the **Labour Euro Safeguards Campaign** has published its September bulletin, which can be downloaded at the end of this article. We reproduce here part of the bulletin, which analyses the current dilemma facing the Labour Party on Brexit. Although the bulletin was written before the recent Labour Party Conference, it is informative in understanding why delegates voted against a motion committing the party to a policy of campaigning for Remain.*

The Labour Party continues to be in a very difficult position. While no doubt a large majority of the Party's current members would happily see the Brexit referendum result reversed, this is not the case with a very substantial number of Labour's traditional voters. In 2016, 37% of those who had voted Labour in the 2016 general election voted Leave, reproducing a Leave majority in nearly two thirds of the parliamentary seats held by Labour, many of them marginals in Wales, the Midlands and the North of England.

It now seems likely, whatever the Brexit outcome, that there will be a general election either later this year or early in 2020, during which all the contention round Brexit will dominate the agenda. The current government clearly hopes that it will be successful in negotiating a better deal with the EU, getting this through Parliament and then going to the country on the back of a successful departure from the EU. This scenario would leave the Brexit Party without a cause to fight and with the Remain camp having to campaign to get the UK to re-join the EU rather than not to come out of it.

This is not likely to be easy territory for Labour on which to fight a general election. There are, however, other scenarios which may well materialise before the general election takes

place. Parliament may block No Deal, precipitating a further extension of Article 50, although this would postpone all the difficulties over Brexit rather than providing a solution to them.

We may leave with No Deal, potentially causing economic turmoil which may undermine the government's position, if those who are reasonably optimistic about the impact of a No Deal exit are proved wrong by the way it turns out. There is still an outside chance that we will finish up with a second referendum.

As for tactics, Labour needs to play a long game. Its crucial aim must be to hold together the alliance upon which it has always depended, between its middle-class supporters, most of whom are Remainers, and its traditional working-class voters, large numbers of whom are for Leave.

If the current government succeeds in negotiating a deal with the EU which resolves the Irish backstop issue and perhaps some other outstanding contentious elements of the Withdrawal Agreement, it may be a high-risk strategy for Labour to be seen to be responsible for voting down this outcome, especially if some Labour votes are needed to get it through.

If the government's strategy unravels, which may well happen, Labour may be in with a better chance, although even this is far from certain. There is a high possibility then that the country will become even more polarised, with electoral support swinging either to hard-line Remainers, including the Lib Dems and the SNP, or to equally hard-line Leavers centred round the right of the Conservative Party, probably with some sort of arrangement in place with the Brexit Party. The danger for Labour then is that it gets squeezed in the middle.

What Labour needs to do, therefore, is to hold as much ground as it can over the coming months until Brexit gets resolved one way or another, leaving politics to revert back to much

safer territory for Labour on the NHS, social care and public services. We very badly need this to happen.

To download the LESC September 2019 bulletin click here: [LESC Bulletin Sept19](#)