

Some crumbs of comfort

One person who must feel vindicated by yesterday's election result is former Prime Minister Gordon Brown. He resisted calls for snap election soon after becoming leader in 2007 and although he was defeated at the General Election in 2010, this morning he may well be considering that he could have met with the same fate as Theresa May if he had likewise gone to the public prematurely.

On the face of it, the General Election result solves very little. Mrs May asked the electorate for a fresh mandate, hoping to see the Tories returned with a substantial majority, but it didn't work out like that. Her position has been weakened and at time of writing, it is by no means certain that her announcement early this morning that she intends to carry on as leader will survive challenges from within her own party.

On the other hand, the General Election does not create as many problems for Brexit as some commentators are suggesting. Let us be clear. Brexit will still go ahead. Both Labour and the Conservatives were quite explicit about this. Article 50 will not be reversed. The comment in the Washington Post that last night's result was somehow the "revenge of the remainers" is thus very wide of the mark. Also, the claim that somehow this election will "soften" Brexit, as propounded by Andrew Grice in the *Independent* does not stack up. Assuming the Tories form the next government, perhaps in some sort of agreement with the Democratic Unionist Party, either Mrs May carries on or else her successor is likely to be a fervent Brexiteer who is unlikely to decide that we should after all remain within the EU's Customs Union. This election was not about how "hard" or "soft" Brexit is going to be. Ironically, considering it was dubbed the "Brexit election", neither Labour nor the Tories went into much detail about their plans for the forthcoming negotiations with the EU.

Bizarrely, the Lib Dems were the party who were keenest to talk about Brexit. Given their drubbing in 2015, it was no surprise that they improved on that dismal performance, but campaigning on essentially an anti-Brexit ticket reaped little reward. They failed to come anywhere near winning Cambridge, a remainiac stronghold, and didn't recapture Lewes, which they lost in 2015 to the strongly pro-leave Tory Maria Caulfield. What is more, their former party leader Nick Clegg lost his seat in Sheffield, claiming that it was because he was too anti-Brexit.

The predominant mood for some time among voters in this country has been that they just want the government to get on with Brexit. Most people have accepted the result. Therefore, the Tories, in spite of only boasting a minority of committed Brexiteers among its MPs, are unlikely to row back on Brexit knowing it would be suicidal for their future electoral prospects which do not look wonderful at the moment. Any deal with the DUP, whose MPs are unequivocal Brexiteers, will give even less wriggle room to any would-be backsliders.

So are there any crumbs of comfort from the result? – apart from the defeat of Mr Clegg? Yes indeed. The SNP lost ground in Scotland and especially in the North East, where Alex Salmond and Angus Robertson both lost their seats. This is the heart of the Scottish fishing industry and thus gives the fishermen, especially in places like Lossiemouth and Peterhead, a greater voice in ensuring we get a good deal on fisheries in Brexit.

Furthermore, not only the DUP but staunch Tory Brexiteers will have more leverage as the Government begins its negotiations. A large Tory majority would have given the Government *carte blanche* to do whatever it wanted. We have already highlighted our concerns about the European Arrest Warrant and European defence policy. It now becomes much harder for any sub-standard deal in these areas to avoid close scrutiny and challenge.

Besides the Lib Dems' hopes of revival failing to materialise, Jeremy Corbyn's strong performance has confounded hopes of a Blairite revival, as we mentioned a few days ago. Whatever one's opinions about Mr Corbyn's policies in general, he is at best lukewarm about the EU and is more sympathetic to Brexit than the Blairites, who are among the most ardent remainiacs of all. Having strengthened his hold on the Labour Party, its MPs are unlikely to try to derail Brexit, even if the deal they would ideally like is different from that which Mrs May is contemplating.

But finally, this unsatisfactory election has at least bought time for the Brexit process. Whatever happens to Mrs May, there is no appetite for any more elections. Many of us will have heard of the BBC's new star, Brenda from Bristol. This lady, when informed that Mrs May had called an election, forcefully replied "You're joking! Not another one!" For all the unsatisfactory nature of yesterday's result, after two elections in just over two years, the EU referendum last year and Scotland's independence vote in 2014, everyone, especially the many exhausted candidates, will want a good break before they go knocking on doors and leafletting again. By the time we next go to the polls, hopefully Brexit will be done and dusted and the EU will no longer be an election issue.

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