

Where does Sturgeon go now Corbyn says Brexit means Brexit?

This piece by Brian Monteith of Global Britain originally appeared in the *Scotsman* and is used with permission.

The Labour leader, from his new position of strength, is revealing his true Trotskyist approach on Europe, writes Brian Monteith

It was not just the Queen's Speech that passed last week – the greater battle of the day was on a different field altogether – it was hard Brexit against soft Brexit, and it was hard Brexit that won resoundingly. The margin of 322 against 101 was larger than even that of the vote to invoke Article 50, despite Theresa May losing her overall majority, so what have we just witnessed, what is going on?

Thursday's vote was not just a victory for May's proposals on how to achieve Brexit, already laid out in her Government's White Paper, but a resounding show of strength by Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn who afterwards dismissed three shadow ministers who dared to break his whipping for an abstention by voting for a soft Brexit. This is a new Corbyn, a hard Corbyn willing to deliver a hard Brexit. Clearly emboldened by his comparative success in the General Election (even though he lost more seats than Callaghan or Kinnock, who both resigned as a result), Corbyn is now revealing his true self – the blood-red socialist against the EU corporate state.

Corbyn's past shows him as a man who voted as regularly

against the empowerment of the EU to the cost of the UK's sovereignty as any Tory Eurosceptic rebel. His reasoning was different, however, believing that the development of an EU superstate would enshrine open-season capitalism behind a high customs union wall that would diminish trade with the poor of the world. The trade unions would be emasculated and British workers would be impoverished as millions who could not find work in the African states denied tariff-free access to the single market would instead supply a steady flow of cheaper immigrant labour.

At so many levels – be it the EU's privileged elite against the masses, those inside the single market against those outside it or those in the euro against those outside it, the EU is indeed a heady political cocktail designed for the few rather than the many.

Unfortunately for Corbyn, his election as leader of his party by its members and trade unions left him at the mercy of the overwhelming majority of the parliamentary Labour Party that supported the European project with an unalloyed devotion. His first act was to ditch his Euroscepticism and play for time, so he could gain strength. Hence his tussles with his former shadow foreign secretary Hilary Benn. (Ironically it was Corbyn that better represented the views of Tony Benn on the EU than his son Hilary.)

The General Election has changed all of that. Now the majority of Labour MPs doff their cap to their leader, believing he has rejuvenated his party and may yet one day lead them to victory. And now from this position of strength, and with a manifesto that to all intents and purposes mirrored the Tory approach towards a so-called hard Brexit, Corbyn is able to drop his mask of europhilia and reveal his true Trotskyist approach by challenging once more the EU corporatist state.

Make no mistake, what this metamorphism means is that the UK is leaving the EU – and it will be Corbyn who will help the Tories do it.

Where does this leave Nicola Sturgeon when a hard Brexit is delivered? By that I mean the UK being outside the single market and customs union, with all immigrants from around the world treated equally, denying the special treatment given to people from the EU.

In Sturgeon's own mind a hard Brexit might provide a fresh pretext for her to push once more for Indyref2 – but paradoxically it also makes the case for independence that much more difficult to win.

For an independent Scotland outside the UK but aiming to be back in the EU, a hard Brexit must mean a hard divorce with the UK, resulting in a hard border and, of course, giving up our fishing grounds that will have only just been won back.

While the newly liberated UK will be free to decide its own economic future, striking advantageous trade deals with the likes of India, China and the US (three of more than 30 already being considered) Scotland would be tied to the slowest growing economic region in the world and bound by all its growing regulation. In addition, by 2020 the EU budget will grow by more than 15 billion euros and plug the black hole of 10bn euros caused by losing the UK's annual payment. Scotland would have to bear its share of the existing EU budget plus this additional 25bn euros.

Even a Scotland in the European Economic Area will not soften the blow. It would be like moving from the bridge to be shovelling coal in the boiler room.

Sturgeon's Scotland will be just like Norway (in the EEA) or Poland (in the EU) – both sitting next to Russia, with border posts, different currencies and the possibility of a tariff wall – only the barriers will be between England and Scotland.

Where also does this leave the EU negotiators when they can see a more united House of Commons than even on the vote to invoke Article 50? Do they climb down on some of their more perverse claims? The signs are that they are already retreating on the demand for the European Court of Justice to have jurisdiction over EU citizens in the UK.

And if they do climb down and a deal is struck, where again does that leave Sturgeon? Would a softer Brexit not neutralise any pretext for a second Indyref? Will the Scottish public not ask: "Seriously, what is the problem?"

The votes on Thursday were probably missed by most people who are only given the glibbest of reports by our broadcast news, but they were momentous and have changed the nature of the Brexit debate substantially. It appears May did not need a stronger majority to deliver Brexit after all – it was Corbyn who has benefited and it is Corbyn who looks like making Brexit mean Brexit.

Photo by Ninian Reid

