

Two thoughts on the last Labour crisis and Corbyn's leadership

by Lily McNulty-Bakas and Benjamin Thom



Two sides of Labour story

by Lily McNulty

The UK is currently witnessing a standoff between MPs and the Labour Party membership after Corbyn overwhelmingly lost a no confidence vote 172-40 on Tuesday and refused to resign. Whilst the Parliamentary Labour Party sets in motion mechanisms for a leadership contest, Momentum mobilises its grassroots support to protect their embattled leader and Len McCluskey, leader of the union Unite, Labour's chief financial backer, has lambasted "the extraordinary behaviour of Labour MPs is diverting attention from a Tory government in crisis".

Friday's seismic referendum and perceived failure by Corbyn in getting Labour voters to the ballot boxes for Remain in tandem with Corbyn's dismissal of his Shadow Foreign Secretary, Hilary Benn, triggered a coup whereby twenty senior members of the Shadow Cabinet had resigned by Monday.

Although bubbling under the surface for months, internal polling that showed a quarter of Labour voters would not vote for them in the next election after the referendum result was enough of a justification to start a process of replacing Corbyn. With reference to the confidence vote, it does not have constitutional legitimacy and as Corbyn was democratically elected by the membership he does not need to resign.

However candidates are gearing up to trigger a challenge to his leadership, the two current front runners being Angela Eagle, seen as a uniting force in the party, and Tom Watson, Labour's deputy leader. This turmoil on the opposition benches further compounds a rudderless Britain in the aftermath of the Brexit referendum.

The failure of Jeremy Corbyn, the other side of the coin

by Benjamin Thom

The narrative since the EU referendum has followed that Jeremy Corbyn, as the leader of the Labour Party, failed his voters by leading a half-hearted defence of the European Union. This approach, and his lack of commitment, meant that almost half of Labour voters did not even know where the party stood on this once in a generation issue. It may be true that Corbyn's statement that he was a "seven to seven and a half out of 10" did not exactly motivate or inspire people to flock to the Remain camp. However, the idea that Corbyn failed is not one that is borne out by the statistics.

Some of the first polling that was released after Cameron announced the date of the referendum following his negotiated Brexit reform package, revealed that support for Remain from Labour voters was consistently around the 70% mark. This means that even before the real referendum campaign began, roughly one third of Labour voters were minded to vote leave. Nevertheless, it is true that on a regional level, some of the strongest outposts for leave were to be found in Labour's northern heartlands. Such a state of affairs would imply that the Labour machine had utterly failed, and yet on the national level Corbyn encouraged approximately 63% of Labour voters to back the EU according to polling released after the vote itself.

In fact, blame should lie at the feet of the former Prime Minister, David Cameron, who not only called the dubious and vague referendum, but also failed to convince his own electorate who had brought him to power in the form of a majority government around a year prior.

Indeed, it was amongst Conservative voters that the fall in support during the campaign appears to have been heaviest. A rough 50/50 split between remain and leave in the Tory ranks in February, fell back to only 44% of the governing party's voters deciding that staying in the EU was the right choice for them. This in any analysis is an abject rejection of the authority of the Prime Minister, and of his message, yet it seems to have been largely lost amidst the focus on those who have been left behind by globalisation in the north of England.

Moreover, the intense focus on Jeremy Corbyn hides the fact that only one national party had a majority of its supporters reject the voting recommendation of their party leader, and that party where the Conservatives. It is arguable that Cameron's rapid resignation stifled any prolonged analysis from the national media on his failings and shortcomings, since after all, he'd be gone before too long. It appears to have been much more newsworthy to focus on the sizeable crisis of identity in the Labour party, and perhaps to try and make even more news by bringing down the democratically elected leader of the Labour party who had received a huge mandate from the party membership only ten months before.

Corbyn has undoubtedly lost the support of his MPs and sections of the Labour party membership, but it is a distortion of reality to assume that he failed the public in his campaign for Britain to stay in the EU. Prior to the vote, Corbyn appeared on national television for a one-on-one interview, after

having made 123 public appearances, including 60 in 22 days, which took place all over the country, and often in areas with strong Labour support. Significantly, his new leadership rival, Angela Eagle even praised him at the time for, “pursuing an itinerary that would make a 25-year-old tired”.

It thus seems clear that he delivered a clear majority of Labour voters to vote to remain the EU, that he worked extremely hard in getting his message across, and that he ran a far more positive, and ultimately successful campaign than the Prime Minister and the whole Conservative Party.

As the sun rose in the aftermath of the referendum, Corbyn was –and still is- the last active politician who is still standing that vocally campaigned in the referendum. Cameron has gone, Gove has shrunk, Boris has been banished, Osborne is humiliated, and only when the debris was being cleared did Theresa May decide that now was probably the time to return to pick up the pieces connected to that big, uncertain word that is Brexit. But Corbyn is still there, arguing his position, maintaining his principles, and arguing on a progressive platform in a consistent and dignified manner.

One can only imagine what would have happened were Britain to have had a stubborn, consistent and principled Prime Minister. Such a man would not have gambled away the nation’s future to settle an internal party dispute, and would not have offered a hugely risky vote simply in order to pacify would-be UKIP voters and to seek a Conservative parliamentary majority.

Therefore, Corbyn is not to blame for all of this, but Cameron is.

Picture: [The Telegraph.co.uk](http://TheTelegraph.co.uk)



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