

ADEPT – View from Westminster December 2019

It feels strange, after months of penning diatribes about the chaotic nature of politics and the ineffectiveness of the political class, to be suddenly talking of stable majorities and legislative certainty. It's odd, having watched successive meaningful votes fall to historic parliamentary losses, to see the House of Commons pass the latest incarnation without drama or fuss. It's weird to think that the chaos of 2019 has been ended, of all people, by Boris Johnson; a man who celebrates his own deliberately different approach to doing politics.

But here we are. Election over. Red wall dismantled. Labour defeated. Mr Corbyn, who took Mrs May the distance in 2017, proved lightning doesn't strike twice as he sank to a loss worse than that suffered by Michael Foot in 1983. The post-mortem has already commenced with the blame game running wild on social media (where everything from media manipulation to Tony Blair sees an accusatory finger pointed). Early polling evidence however suggests a more simplistic and brutal reality. It was a leadership and policy problem. Quite a toxic combination in politics!

Fortunately for Labour, both these matters should be addressed in short order. The biggest policy muddle, Brexit, is about to be resolved by the government. Brexit will now happen at the end of January. Discussion will move to the Free Trade Arrangement and continuity Remainers will need to switch to transition extenders or rejoinders. As for Mr Corbyn, he has already signalled his race is run and the allotment beckons. Rebecca Long Bailey and Sir Kier Starmer are front runners to replace him, but with Jess Phillips also in the contest and an Ian Lavery candidacy possible, the contest should sparkle with all shades of socialism getting a chance to shine.

The Conservatives know the results are not straightforward to interpret. They know we didn't see "the north" warmly embrace the Johnson juggernaut. Indeed, in most red wall seats, Tory candidates polled only slightly better than in 2017. Instead, we saw Labour voters either staying at home or switching to the Brexit Party. Enough voters moved so that standing still or inching forward put the Conservatives first past the winning line.

Team Johnson know the majority is vast as a canyon, but deep as a puddle. They know the circumstances that delivered the seats they now hold are not replicable as Farage is another whose race is probably run. A crucial part of what they need to do now is around delivery. The Government needs to demonstrate that it can offer a solution to the left-behind communities it finds itself representing. It must give people a reason to keep it in power. For people like Dominic Cummings, who've long preached a desire to remould politics, this is their moment. Genuine change is now possible for the first time since Blair dressed social democracy up in neoliberal clothing.

This will be a very different Conservative government to those of the past. Circumstances dictate that. For local government, doors previously shut can be opened with a bit of ingenuity. Austerity is clearly over and opportunity abounds; particularity for those with capital investment to secure. Brexit will continue to dominate, but the majority allows for the domestic agenda to be pushed as well. If the Government gets it right, Boris Johnson could become known as one of the great political reformers in history. Get it wrong and it's a Labour win in 2024 (or sooner). Politics is about to move very fast. For local government, the start of the next decade has never been so fascinating. Enjoy the ride....