

UK elections intensify crisis in Labour Party

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The most notable feature of Thursday's round of elections in the UK is the obvious disappointment of many of Labour's leading representatives that the party did not perform worse than it did. This was an extraordinary contest, with large swathes of the parliamentary Labour Party not merely predicting a disaster, but actively working for one.

In the run-up to the elections for London mayor, the Scottish Parliament, Welsh Assembly and local councils, Labour's right wing colluded with the Conservatives and Zionist groups to portray their own party as a hotbed of anti-Semitism, engineering numerous expulsions and suspensions, including that of former London mayor Ken Livingstone.

The message delivered at every opportunity was that Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn was responsible for discrediting the party, because anti-Semitism was the inevitable product of hostility to Israel's battle for "self-determination" and its war against the Palestinians, which was tantamount to "cuddling up" to "Muslim extremists." This, the right-wing Blairites declared, was just one more expression of how Corbyn's supposed "left-wing" agenda was consigning Labour to electoral oblivion, in part because "good" Labourites were being saddled with the unwanted image of a "tax and spend" party.

In the event, Labour's performance was poor, but not disastrous on the scale they had hoped would pave the way for an immediate party leadership challenge. As opposed to predictions of losses of 100, 150, even 200 seats, Labour basically held its share of the vote in local elections and even increased it by 1 percent. It held a number of key swing councils, including Crawley, Harlow, Southampton, Nuneaton and Redditch, but lost Dudley.

In the Welsh Assembly elections, Labour secured 29 seats, just short of a majority, having lost votes and one of its heartland valley seats, Rhondda, to Leanne Wood,

leader of Plaid Cymru (Party of Wales). The UK Independence Party (UKIP) won its first seats in the assembly, a total of seven.

Corbyn's opponents were forced to focus on Labour's worst performance, in Scotland, where the Scottish National Party (SNP) maintained their electoral grip on the Scottish parliament in Holyrood. Although the SNP lost its outright majority in the 129-seat parliament and received a smaller vote, with 63 seats it remains by far the largest party. Labour won only 24 seats, a loss of 13, coming third behind the Conservatives, with 31.

Labour's share of the vote in the constituencies fell a further 9.2 percent from its 2011 position. Recently elected Labour leader, Kezia Dugdale, lost her Holyrood constituency seat, only returning as a member of the Scottish parliament on the regional lists. Labour is in danger of losing control of its remaining local authorities. Since the 1950s until recently, Labour was the dominant party in Scotland.

Tactical voting against the nationalists enabled the Conservatives to become the largest opposition party in the Scottish Parliament. Under Scottish Tory leader Ruth Davidson, who distanced herself completely from the Conservative government at Westminster, the party increased its share of the constituency vote by 8.1 percent and doubled its seat tally, largely by portraying itself as a defender of union with the UK.

Political responsibility for this rests with the pseudo-left groups, which have systematically promoted Scottish independence as a supposedly progressive response to Conservative rule and the rightward shift of the Labour Party. The result of this injection of nationalist poison has been to push large numbers of workers into the clutches of the SNP, which has been given the undeserved gloss of a party of the "left," and create the conditions for a Tory revival north of the English border.

Dugdale has consistently identified herself as an opponent of Corbyn and lined up with the right-wing attack on Livingstone. She is now indicating sympathy for home rule for Scotland.

Following the vote, Ian Murray, Labour's shadow Scotland secretary, told the BBC, "I don't think that the public see the UK Labour party led by Jeremy Corbyn at the moment as being a credible party of future government in 2020. That's something, after this week's results, we should reflect on, the leadership of the party should reflect on..."

In the end, the single most important event of the day was Labour's win in the London mayoral election. Sadiq Khan, a human rights lawyer, has become the first Muslim mayor of a major Western city.

Khan received 1,310,143 votes after second preferences were taken into account, besting the Conservative Party's Zac Goldsmith, who received 994,614 votes, by a margin of 13.6 percent. Labour also took the majority of seats in the London Assembly, giving the party control of the capital after eight years of Tory rule.

Khan, who stands on the party's right wing, convincingly defeated his Tory opponent Goldsmith, who ran a filthy racist campaign with the active support of the Conservative national leadership. The Tories sent leaflets accusing Khan of being a supporter of Muslim extremists to Hindu, Sikh and Tamil voters and warned that Labour would tax the gold jewellery of Indian families. Home Secretary Theresa May said Khan was unfit to run London at a time when there was "a significant threat of terrorism," while former London mayor Boris Johnson accused him of "pandering to the extremists," referring to both Muslims and the Labour Party.

Goldsmith, whose declared wealth is £281 million, hoped to benefit from accusations that Labour is anti-Semitic.

The results of the elections are nevertheless an indictment of Corbyn, though not in the terms laid out by his right-wing opponents.

In its first national electoral test since Corbyn became leader, Labour has once again demonstrated that it is an unreformable right-wing party of big business, while he has proved to be a man without principles or a political future. To the extent that he is relied on to lead a fight-back, this only inhibits the emergence in the working

class of a politically independent socialist opposition to the Tory government.

Labour was in a position to inflict major defeats on the Tories in the midst of the greatest assault on workers' living standards in the post-World War II period by a widely hated government. It did not do so because Corbyn has backtracked on every one of the promises he made in his campaign for the party leadership, whether on opposing austerity or standing against militarism and war. This reached a new low with his agreement to suspend large numbers of his own supporters in the ongoing anti-Semitism witch-hunt.

Following their attempt to sabotage the elections, the only thought of the party's right wing will be how best to pursue the campaign to remove Corbyn. In contrast, Corbyn's main ally, Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell, was quick to offer an olive branch, pleading to the right wing, "Look, get behind us and stop carping, there's room for everyone in this Labour party. Everyone can make a constructive contribution."



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