

THE END OF SHORT-LIVED MAYBYNISM AND THE VICTORY OF FULL-BLOWN RIGHT POPULISM?

The December 12th general election will decide

Contents

- a) From January 20th to December 12th – the accelerating nature of political change in the UK**
- b) Theresa May – a transition figure on the road to the consolidation of British Right populism**
- c) Maybrynism and the Brexit Party prepare the ground for a Johnson-led British Right populism**
- d) Johnson’s Right populism triumphs in the Tory Party and then tests out the limits of the UK state’s Crown Powers in preparation for their further strengthening**
- e) Corbyn upholds the sovereignty of the Crown-in-Westminster, his allies opt for parliamentary manoeuvring rather than organising any popular opposition, and Lib-Dem hubris**
- f) The emergence of Left Remainer challenge, Corbyn and his allies’ manoeuvres to isolate it**
- g) Maybrynism and the Brexit Party prepare the ground for a Johnson-led British Right populism**
- h) The Labour manifesto’s inability to recognise the unionist nature of the UK state or the significance of national democratic challenges, whilst the Tory manifesto plans a further clampdown**
- i) The political significance of the unionist nature of the UK state – something that is central to the general election and beyond**
- j) Political developments in Scotland in the run-up to the general election**
- k) Political developments in Wales in the run-up to the general election**
- l) Political developments in Northern Ireland in the run-up to the general election**
- m) The fragmentation of Socialist organisation, its failure to offer an independent cross-UK electoral alternative to the Right populists, the Left social democrats or the constitutional nationalists**
- n) Conclusion**

a) From January 20th to December 12th – the accelerating nature of political change in the UK

The pace of political change has continued to accelerate over this year. The public declaration of the launch of the Brexit Party on January 20th marked a new stage in the drift to Right populist ascendancy. It took from 2006, when Nigel Farage became leader of UKIP to June 23rd, 2016, when the Leavers won the EU referendum, for Right populism to become the major force in UK politics. From then on, despite the demise of UKIP in the 2017 general election, Right populism has made major strides within the ruling class's party of first choice – the Tories. Although the Brexit Party may be short-lived, it contributed significantly to the emergence of Boris Johnson as Tory leader, and their full conversion to reactionary unionism. This was shown when Johnson declared himself to be the Minister for the Union upon becoming UK prime minister on July 23rd. And in response to the UK-wide needs of the British ruling class and its revamped Tory Party, new Scottish and Northern Irish Secretaries, Alister Jack and Julian Smith, were appointed on July 24th to ensure closer compliance with Johnson's hard Brexit and intended unionist clampdown. The one-time Remain-supporting Welsh Secretary, Alun Cairns, who had shown considerable acquiescence to the Right-moving Tory leadership, was suspended on November 6th in the face of a political scandal.

In contrast, the attempt to mount a defence of neo-liberalism through Change UK, in a new Macron or an old SDP type party, has been a failure. This despite Change UK at its height having 11 MPs, compared to the Brexit Party's 0 MPs. The difference in political impact was highlighted in the EU elections on May 23rd. The Brexit Party came first with 5,248,533 votes and 29 MEPs, whilst Change UK came sixth with 571,846 votes and no MEPs. In contrast to Change UK, the main British neo-liberal party, the Lib-Dems gained 3,367,284 votes and 16 MEPs. But this did not lead to the political initiative passing over to the Remainers. Instead it led to a temporary upturn in the Lib-Dems' fortunes within the neoliberal camp. This camp then went on to fragment.

Beyond Westminster, politics took to the streets. There was the hate and threat filled far Right (UKIP and EDL) 'Make Brexit Happen' rally outside Westminster on March 29th; the 500-700,000 strong 'Peoples Vote' demo in London in March 23rd; the 150-200,000 strong 'All Under One Banner' demo in Edinburgh on October 5th, the culmination of a series of well-attended local marches; and three smaller, but nevertheless politically significant AUOB marches in Wales. In contrast, there has been relatively little street activity in Northern Ireland, with the Sinn Fein and SDLP backed Borders Communities Against Brexit focussing more on lobbying Brussels.

There has been the proroguing of Westminster on August 28th to be overturned by the Supreme Court on September 24th. Since then the grounds have been prepared for a general election, which Johnson has been able to call on a date of his choosing - December 12th.

b) Theresa May – a transition figure on the road to the consolidation of British Right populism

Clearly politics have been highly contested, but so far, in line with the global rise of Right national populism, the political initiative has stayed in the hands of the Right. Following the original 2016 Brexit vote, the subsequent two Tory governments, led by the decidedly uncharismatic Theresa May, have shown themselves to be but a transition to a very possible, harder Brexit under a ‘Boris’ Right populist Tory government. And, in Scotland, where a wider independence movement has maintained its ability to act independently, it has still looked to a SNP government to take the political initiative. But, being deep-dyed constitutional nationalists, the SNP leadership has no viable strategy to bring about a legal IndyRef2, should Johnson win the general election. And so far, the SNP leaders have been forced to react to the intransigent Right, over a hard Brexit and the slide to British Right populism, now more based on English nationalism and Empire2 nostalgia.

Despite the demise of UKIP in the 2017 Westminster and local elections, the external pressure of Trump and the Right populist global ascendancy had more influence on May and her government following that general election than the soft Brexiteers in her cabinet. Over this year that pressure has just grown stronger. May largely ignored the ‘opposition’. The DUP (with behind the scenes pressure from Loyalists) pushed May to hold to a position that could only lead to a hardened Irish border. The Europhobic European Research Group (ERG)¹, a party-within-a-party, has been another pressure. Boris Johnson draws as much of his political influence from the behind-the-scenes backing of the US Right, including Trump, and not just from his ruling class sense of self-entitlement. And other hard Right Tories, Jacob Rees-Mogg and Michael Gove have also openly consorted with the US far Right Steve Bannon, who has also worked with Nigel Farage.

But, until the pressure of the hard Right in the US and some EU member states made the prospect of an even further Right shift in UK politics possible, Johnson, the ERG and others still needed May to move politics in their direction. They recognised May’s ability to resort to the formidable range of anti-democratic Crown Powers at her disposal under the UK constitution, and her consistent ‘hostile environment’, anti-migrant stance. And ‘taking back control’

was always about using the state's anti-democratic Crown Powers to further the Right's aims. After initially attempting to take much greater personal control of 'Brexit' through resort to the 'Henry VIII clauses' and getting a setback, May soon found her dictatorial feet. She used the royal prerogative to override parliament and decide which votes were 'meaningful'. In the meantime, the further Right Tories tested out how far they could push May to advance their longer-term plans.

May's ability to survive major defeats over her deals, which would have seen off any leader in another parliamentary democracy, showed that her robotic personal characteristics were quite suited to fronting the UK's anti-democratic political order. However, as May's popularity plummeted, the hard Right in the party thought the time had come to front their campaign with a real populist - following Trump's example. And in 'Boris' they had a figure who could upstage Farage. Johnson had the backing of Trump, (although he also told Johnson to take Farage on board), and Labour MPs' Westminster facilitation of harder and harder Brexit stances, anti-migrant legislation, and defending the unity of the UK state. As the early months of 2019 passed, hard Right Tories saw the opportunity to replace May. And just as they had benefitted from Farage's UKIP and his 'Grassroots Out' campaign, so they came to benefit from Farage's latest creation, the Brexit Party, formed in the lead-up to the May 23rd, 2019 Euro-election.

c) Maybrynism and the Brexit Party prepare the ground for a Johnson-led British Right populism

After the electoral demise of UKIP (now tainted by a neo-Fascist fringe) Farage formed his Brexit Party, with the backing of Trump. He was assisted by the defection of Tories like Ann Widdecombe and Annunziata Rees Mogg. On May 23rd, 2019, in the privacy of the Euro-election ballot box, many Tories gave their votes to the Brexit Party. It managed to upstage even UKIP. In the 2015 Euro-elections, UKIP had gained 24 MEPs with over 26% of the vote; but in May 2019, the Brexit Party gained 29 MEPs with over 30% of the vote. May's 'Brexit Deal' Tory MEPs were reduced from 19 (on 23% of the vote) to 4 (on 9% of the vote). Corbyn-led Labour MEPs were reduced from 20 (on 24% of the vote) to 10 (on 14% of the vote).

Prior to this, the English local elections, (which the new Brexit Party declined to stand in) were held on May 2nd. These elections proved to be bad news for both May's Tories and Corbyn's Labour Party. The Tories lost 1330 councillors and Labour lost 84. But with 31% of the vote, the Tories were still ahead of Labour on 27%. Labour had also done badly in the May 2017 local elections, but then

confounded critics by making gains in the June 2017 Westminster general election. So many Corbynistas thought that this pattern could be repeated in a future general election. They argued that the EU election was over a single issue, which would not figure so large in a future multi-issue general election.

Here a glaring weakness of Labour revealed itself. Labour largely accepts the existing UK state and its unwritten constitution as an adequate vehicle for its proposed reforms. However, since the 2008 Financial Crisis, growing sections of the British ruling class have found that even the sovereignty of the Crown-in-Westminster with its battery of anti-democratic Crown Powers, is no longer sufficient to maintain their control. Their position needed reinforced first by a more centralised UK state ‘taking back control’ from the EU and from the devolved parliaments and assemblies. Therefore, the British ruling class’s planned economic and social attacks on workers and others have been linked to their hard Brexit and a reactionary unionist constitutional counter-offensive.

The Tories’ key slogan in the 2017 general election was ‘Brexit means Brexit’, supplemented in Scotland with ‘No to a Second {independence} Referendum’. Labour supporters, both Right and Left, find this hard to come to terms with. They prefer to concentrate on the ‘bread and butter’ issues they think workers are really interested in. This separation of constitutional and socio-economic issues is part of a deep-dyed British economism shared by wider forces on the Left, beyond the Labour Party. It is ill-adapted to meet the Right Brexiteers’ combined political/constitutional and socio-economic challenge.

On June 6th Labour faced a Westminster by-election in Peterborough. It took some succour from holding on to the seat. But Labour only gained 31% of the vote, which had collapsed by 17 percentage points since 2017. The combined Brexit Party (which came second), Conservative and UKIP vote was 51%. This vote was for candidates who all stood for a hard Brexit. But Lisa Forbes, the Labour candidate, a UNITE official, also supported Brexit, albeit a vague softer version. The fact that support for a hard version of Brexit was at 51% in a constituency that had voted 62% Leave voters, was an indication how successful the hard Right has been in redefining what Brexit means. But as well as the big swing to hard Brexit support, Labour also lost votes to the anti-Brexit Lib-Dems, which gained 9 percentage points.

Therefore, in the English local elections, the EU election and now in a parliamentary by-election, Labour’s studied ambiguity, which had helped them in the 2017 general election, was no longer having the desired effect. And what was worse, it was Labour’s own performance at Westminster under Corbyn that had helped to shift the terms of the debate further to the Right. At several key points, whether over the sanctioning of the original Article 50 application in

January 2017, his opposition to the soft Brexit proposal coming from Chuku Umanna in June 2018, or his shameful assistance to May in getting through the first stage of her harsh new Immigration bill in January 2019, a new Maybynism developed. This largely replaced the last elements of the old neo-liberal Blatcherism, to which only a few Tories, the Lib-Dems and the Labour Right still adhered, without ever developing the greater political cohesion of the Right Brexiteers.

But with the Right populist Johnson replacing May, it became clearer that Maybynism could not further develop into a new Jobynism (and colloquial Scots' readers will be thankful for that!). Whereas May saw Corbyn as a useful head of the parliamentary 'opposition' because of his failure to successfully oppose Brexit, Johnson wants to see the complete elimination of Corbyn, the 'Marxist', 'Communist', 'terrorist sympathiser'² and a "yokemate of destruction" along with the SNP leader, Nicola Sturgeon.³ Right populists don't want a real official opposition, just a plethora of conjured-up hate or ridiculed figures.

In England, the Europhile Lib-Dems have become the main anti-Brexit Party. The Lib-Dems gained 704 seats on 17% of the vote in the English local council elections in May. They then took 16 MEPs in the May EU election on nearly 20% of the vote. This contributed to their abandonment of support for a second EU referendum and their calling for the straightforward revoking of Article 50. They were soon to be overwhelmed by their own growing hubris. This was further fed by the Brecon and Radnorshire, Westminster by-election result on August 1st. The Lib-Dems managed to take the seat from the Tories (with the help of Plaid Cymru standing down). However, Farage's Brexit Party also stood, knowing this would split the Right vote. He wanted to ensure that pressure was kept up on the Tories, so they didn't soften their stance on Brexit. Therefore, with the Brexit Party standing (along with a much-depleted UKIP) the Conservatives lost the seat.

However, the combined pro-hard Brexit vote in Brecon & Radnorshire (now at just over 50%) was much firmer than the Remain vote. The hard Brexiteers' ability to win over the overwhelming majority of Leave voters was a further indication of how far politics was moving to the Right. The 54% who had voted Leave in the wider Powys constituency in the 2016 EU referendum would then have included quite a number prepared to accept a soft Brexit. By August 2019 the Right had won over the overwhelming majority. The Remainers in the constituency were divided between the Lib-Dems (backed by Plaid Cymru for their own reasons) and an unknown percentage of Labour supporters, with quite different views of what Remain, or even a soft Brexit meant. And the weaknesses of Labour's ambiguous stance were further confirmed by their fall

to fourth place with just over 5% of the vote, in a constituency they had once held with 42% of the vote.

In the Corbynistas' own minds, the unexpected Peterborough 'victory' (which the Brexit Party had been expected to win) was perhaps seen as a turning of the tide, after Labour's drastic Euro-election results. (Labour was wiped out in Scotland and came third in Wales - its two traditional heartlands). Corbyn tried to lead a Westminster opposition to the now looming prospect of a 'No Deal' Brexit. Johnson, in his Tory leadership campaign, was quite prepared to contemplate this, if his own hard Brexit proposals failed in the EU negotiations.

After May stepped down as Tory leader on the 7th June, Johnson quickly emerged as the leading Tory candidate to replace her. On June 13th, Corbyn attempted to stop a 'No Deal' Brexit by means of a Westminster vote. He was successful in gaining the votes of the majority of Labour MPs (including all the Remainers), and the SNP, Lib-Dem, Plaid Cymru, the Green and even 10 Tory MPs. But 8 Labour MPs voted with the government, whilst 13 more abstained, giving the government a victory.⁴ Johnson, following Corbyn's failure to oppose a 'No Deal' Brexit, felt his time had come.

d) Johnson's Right populism triumphs in the Tory Party and then tests out the limits of the UK state's Crown Powers in preparation for their further strengthening

So little did the majority of Tories fear either Corbyn's Labour or the Lib-Dems at Westminster, that by the time of the final round of the Tory leadership voting in July, the choice was between two hard Brexit candidates. However, Jeremy Hunt was an old-style Right-wing Tory, whilst 'Boris' was a new-style Right populist Tory. Like Trump, Johnson is the ideal frontman for the corporate business forces behind the scenes. 'Boris's and 'The Donald's publicity seeking antics give them an ideal cover. On 23rd of July, Johnson was elected Tory leader with 66% of the vote. He immediately declared himself Minister for the Union, taking another step beyond Cameron renaming his party, the Conservative and Unionist Party in May 2016. Reinforcing the Union, Eurosceptic and now Europhobic politics went hand in hand.

Johnson now pursued a two-track strategy. The first track involved using the Crown Powers vested in the monarch to prorogue parliament and to allow him to push through a Brexit deal without much parliamentary scrutiny. The second track was to prepare the ground for a general election to overcome the Tories' dependence on other parties', including the DUP and the Brexit Party. When his proroguing of parliament was ruled illegal by the Supreme Court in September,

then Johnston and his backers prepared for his government to be removed in a 'No confidence' vote. This could help their general election campaign. Johnson, the 'man of the people', would be up against the insider 'Westminster elite'.

Johnson's key strategist, Dominic Cummings, had a 'Plan A' and a 'Plan B'. The opposition, led by Corbyn, didn't even have a 'Plan A', highlighted by their failure to mount a 'No confidence' vote or to push for a general election. As early as August 23rd, Cummings told a meeting of Tory ministerial advisors that, "I'm going to go and meet billionaire hedge fund managers and get a giant pot of cash from them."⁵ On September 5th, in further preparation for a general election, Johnson proceeded to expel 21 Tory MPs who had opposed him (10 were later to be readmitted after pledging loyalty to Johnson's hard Brexit).

Johnson's approach was in stark contrast to that of Corbyn and McDonnell. They have bent over backwards to accommodate the Labour Right. In a TV interview on October 11th, 2019 McDonnell went as far as to suggest that uber-Blairite, Alasdair Campbell could re-join the party and he denied that Tony Blair is a war criminal.⁶ In order to consolidate the Left forces in the Labour Party, Corbyn did not need to resort to a Johnson-style top-down purge of the opposition. He just needed to provide leadership to those grassroots members who wanted to exert democratic control with mandatory reselection of their MPs. One way to undercut Right populist attacks on the Westminster elite would have been to come out openly against all those MPs who thought they had jobs for life and used their positions to feather own their nests. But, in order to keep the Right on board, Corbyn refused to do this.

Corbyn was mightily helped in this by Len McCluskey, the highly paid and privileged (compared with his members) UNITE general secretary. He and other key union leaders had blocked mandatory reselection at the 2018 party conference. Instead they backed possible trigger ballots.⁷ It is not surprising that on October 17th, 2019, *The Guardian* was able to report that "the trigger-ballot battles taking place across the country have allowed the Labour leader's critics to come out largely unscathed and better organised than ever."⁸ UNITE's own effort to deselect Scottish Labour, Right winger, Ian Murray, in Edinburgh South on 24th October was easily seen off. And given McCluskey's role in 2014 in sacrificing the Grangemouth workforce to further UNITE's Labour ambitions,⁹ it is perhaps not surprising support was decidedly muted.

And as Johnson was outlining his new 'Get Brexit Done' policy to replace May's 'Brexit Means Brexit', and ousting any internal opposition in preparation for the general election, Corbyn and his close advisors worked overtime at the 2019 September Labour conference to come up with another Brexit fudge. The

Labour Party would support a new negotiated Brexit deal to be put to the electorate in a future referendum, alongside an alternative Remain option. The Labour government would then remain neutral in such a vote. Having already rejected a Norwegian style deal (because it allowed free movement of people), Corbyn attempted to satisfy Labour Leavers by suggesting a better deal could be made than by the Tories. But it was not at all clear how such a deal would differ significantly from May's. The Right Leavers, led by Stephen Kinnock, had already come to that conclusion and expressed their support for May's deal.¹⁰

e) Corbyn upholds the sovereignty of the Crown-in-Westminster, his allies opt for parliamentary manoeuvring rather than organising any popular opposition, and Lib-Dem hubris

When the Supreme Court ruled Johnson's proroguing of parliament illegal, Corbyn and McCluskey expected the next stage to be the forced resignation of Johnson. At the Labour Party conference, on September 24th, Corbyn gave "a thumbs up to Len McCluskey as he reacted to the Supreme Court ruling... He urged Boris Johnson to 'consider his position' as leader of the country."¹¹ It didn't take long for Johnson 'to consider his position' and ignore the Supreme Court, Westminster and Corbyn. However, with their belief in the UK constitution, Corbyn and his inner coterie were not interested in any mass mobilisation. They still preferred Westminster manoeuvring to any attempt to win any wider support.

But extra-parliamentary opposition was mounting, and another large 'Peoples Vote' demo took place on October 19th. John McDonnell addressed this. Until recently he had been Corbyn's closest ally.¹² But once again, Corbyn and his immediate backers were not interested in mass mobilisation. They could offer no clear vision of what their alternative Brexit deal might entail. And if they had called their own a pro-Brexit march, they might well have been concerned at who else might turn up, given the Right's overwhelming domination of the issue!

Corbyn took some comfort from the Westminster vote also held on October 19th, the same day as the latest 'Peoples Vote' demonstration. Johnson was forced by 322 to 306 votes to accept a Brexit delay until January 31st. Some Corbynistas now argued that their official Labour facilitation of a harder and harder Brexit would force the Tories in a general election to defend a Brexit, which lacked majority support. They also claimed that postponing Brexit until after October 31st considerably undermined Johnson, who had stated that "I'd rather be dead in a ditch" than have Brexit delayed beyond this date. But Dominic Cummings

already has his plan B. He was able to argue that, just as with the failure of Johnson's attempt to prorogue parliament, any the delay to January 31st should be put down to the out-of-touch elite in the House of Lords and the courts, and most of all to the House of Commons 'opposition', nominally headed by Corbyn.

And in October 22nd, Labour Right and Left Leavers, whether members or suspended, went on to assist Johnson's Withdrawal Amendment Bill, which accepted his new EU Brexit Deal with its January 31st extension.¹³ From this point on, many Remainers became fearful of a general election chosen at a date which would benefit Johnson and the Tories. Johnson now poured scorn upon those who were not prepared to test their support in general election. Johnson and his immediate backers felt they had manoeuvred Corbyn's Labour Party into another corner. Corbynistas thought their tactics had now manoeuvred Johnson into a general election where his hard Brexit Tories would be more isolated, opening up the political space for Labour's planned new manifesto, and in particular defence of the NHS.

With Labour Remainers unable to get their party to deliver Westminster support for a 'Peoples Vote', even the Lib-Dems and the SNP were now prepared to support a general election, in order to advance their own politics. Only 20 MPs opposed Johnson's chosen day for the election, 12th December - 11 Labour Right Remainers, the 3 remaining Independent Group for Change, 3 Plaid Cymru, 1 Independent Unionist, 1 Green and 1 SNP. The other 35 SNPs MPs along with the Lib-Dems abstained by agreement, whereas other MPs just absented themselves.

Labour's very belated attempt to extend the vote to EU residents and 16-18 year olds (which they had not supported in the 2016 EU referendum) was defeated by the narrow margin of 315 to 295.¹⁴ But Kate Hoey and 5 Labour defectors opposed this, and another 17 Labour MPs absented themselves. Over the last four years, Corbyn-led Labour had been loath to deal with the Labour Right and put defence of migrants forward, so this last blow could have been anticipated. The vote of the Change UK MPs showed that whatever had made them leave Labour, it wasn't concern about EU residents living in the UK. Two such MPs, Ian Austin and John Woodcock, went on to urge Labour voters to support Johnson's Tories in the forthcoming general election. The smarter Labour Right MPs (also wanting to hold on to their seats), though, looked to a possible post-general election situation, where they could sabotage any potential Corbyn-led Labour minority government, and line up with Lib-Dems and Tories to form a National Government.

However, others on the Labour Left and Right have gone on to back Johnson's 'Get Brexit Done', whether out of Brexit conviction or because Westminster Remainers have been unable to hold up the advance of Brexit. This fits with their reluctance to effectively challenge the ruling class over constitutional and international affairs. If 'Get Brexit Done' could be achieved by January 31st, 2020, they believe that Labour could return to the 'bread and butter' economic politics it is best suited to. However, the Right populists have no intention of ditching the issue of Brexit. The UK's formal departure from the EU will be followed by 11 months of further negotiations, with the threat of 'No Deal' hanging over them. EU residents remaining in the UK will become 'hostages' and the object of hyped-up attacks. These will be needed as a cover for the type of trade and military deal which the Tories have planned with Trump's USA.

One indication of the political climate Johnson will try to create was provided by Arron Banks in early October. He posted a photo of Angela Merkel with caption. "After two world wars who wants to be pushed about by a kraut?"¹⁵ Banks, following Trump and his advisors, knew full well he would have to officially withdraw such a provocative statement, but he was appealing over their heads to the Brexiteer audience he was cultivating for the forthcoming election and his longer term hard Right project. And on November 11th Banks advised Brexiteers to vote, not for Farage's Brexit Party, but for Johnson's Tories in the forthcoming general election.¹⁶ Johnson, if he is elected, will not be slow to resort to similar racist language, with appropriate denials, saying 'it is all a joke', if he is deemed to have overstepped the mark. But as with Right populism in general, the aim is to eventually mainstream national chauvinist, racist and misogynist language. Brexit negotiations will be accompanied by Johnson's new Immigration Bill, which will leave Labour, Left and Right Brexiteer or Right Remainder hamstrung, given their role over the first reading of May's bill in January.

Meanwhile, Lib-Dem hubris was to reach fever pitch. Their newly elected leader, Jo Swinson, MP for East Dunbartonshire, elected leader on 22nd July, announced she was ready to be the next prime minister! Electing somebody, who had been a minister in the last Con-Dem coalition government, was not the Lib-Dems' smartest move. Memories easily stretched back to her role, along with Nick Clegg and Vincent Cable, in helping George Osborne to push Austerity.

Traditionally, party leaders are able to call on wider local support in general elections, despite them being less able to spare time campaigning in their own constituencies. But, with the growing divide between UK and Scottish politics, this would become not so much an advantage but more of a handicap. The contempt in which large numbers of people in Scotland now hold Gordon

Brown is an indication of the problem. And when Swinson declared she would rather prop up a Tory government than a Corbyn-led Labour government, this just resurrected the memory of the 2010-15 Con-Dem Coalition. Furthermore, when Nicola Sturgeon for the SNP said she could support a Corbyn-led government under certain conditions, this showed that Swinson had boxed the Lib-Dems into a rather tight corner, over their claim to prioritise opposition to Brexit. And, compared to the Lib-Dems, the SNP's opposition to Brexit had made much more impression in Holyrood, Westminster and at Brussels.

As the December general election campaign develops, two major issues dominate – Brexit and Scottish independence. This has led all the major parties to seek tactical electoral alliances. Johnson and his backers have put heavy pressure on the Brexit Party to stand down. By November 11th the Brexit Party agreed not to stand in any of the Tory-held seats. Significantly Farage declined to stand himself for the Brexit Party, perhaps anticipating its demise and thinking about creating another party after the election, just as he had done following the 2017 demise of UKIP.

The Labour Party looks to lead a Great Britain-wide anti-‘Boris’ voting alliance. It hopes to make defence of the NHS, in the face of the threat from Trump over a US/UK deal, the key issue. Whilst there is still some basis for expecting Labour to remain the majority party in Wales, in Scotland, where the party had become much more closely associated with the Tories since IndyRef1, the prospects for the Labour Party look poor. And Labour's British bureaucratic ‘internationalism from above’ does not extend to support for its fraternal party in Northern Ireland - the SDLP. This shows, in stark terms, that Labour's ‘internationalism’ is a reflection of the nature of the UK state (with its semi-detached Northern Ireland administration) and not a means to maximise working class unity.

The Lib-Dems look to lead a Right anti-Brexit alliance. Primarily, they hope to win over anti-Brexit Tories. In England, the Lib-Dems have decided to stand down for the former Conservative, now Change UK candidate, Anna Soubry and for the former Conservative, now Independent candidate, Dominic Grieve. Four former Change UK MPs are standing directly as Lib-Dems. However, with Jo Swinson's record as minister in the Con-Dem coalition, the Lib-Dems' appeal to many Labour Remain voters, is likely to be relatively limited. And despite Swinson's wild claim to be the next UK prime minister, the Lib-Dems' best election hopes lie in becoming a support player in a cross-party National Government, which marginalises Boris's hard Right Tories and ousts Corbyn from the Labour parliamentary leadership.

f) The emergence of Left Remainer challenge, Corbyn and his allies' manoeuvres to isolate it

Meanwhile, Corbyn had faced another challenge, this time from those mainly young Left Remainers, including those from migrant backgrounds, who had joined the Labour Party. The influx of these members led to the Left's highpoint of influence at the Labour Party's September 2019 conference. A motion from the Camberwell and Peckham branch pledged the party to overturn the Corbyn-backed 2017 general election policy to end the free movement of people from the EU, successive government's anti-migrant 'hostile environment' policies, and to extend the vote to EU residents and close down detention centres.

This was obviously a major problem for Corbyn and his allies, and a stark illustration that a more principled challenge to Brexit comes not from the Right but the Left Remainers. The Right Remainers are supported by the Right and Left Labour Leavers in holding an anti-migrant worker stance. So Corbyn and McCluskey joined with the Right in the party to marginalise the conference decision on migrants. Sometimes the Left Brexiteers hide their shame-faced, anti-migrant stance behind the chimera of non-racist immigration controls. But these Brexiteers just represent another wing of the 'British jobs for British workers' tradition. This had been highlighted by their assistance in helping May get the first reading of the draconian Immigration Bill through in January.¹⁷

And on the 27th October *Andrew Marr Show*¹⁸ Diane Abbott responded to the tragic death of 39 Vietnamese migrants at Tilbury Docks by calling for greater security measures and support for 'legal' migrants. But it was precisely the UK's harsh anti-migrant security measures and their 'illegal' status that led to these deaths. Diane Abbott is a Corbyn-supporter, Labour shadow home secretary and privy councillor.

Labour launched its *Its Time for Real Change* manifesto on 21st November. The *Migration* section called for a new policy on the basis of economic requirement, with "a work visa system" and "if we leave the EU... freedom of movement will be subject to negotiations". Although there are a number of positive policies with regard to migration, the September 2019 party conference decision was overturned. Instead, there is an overall framework, which accepts a watered-down version of the Tories' gastarbeiter proposed system of migrant labour control, and the likelihood of new restrictions on EU migrants.

g) Corbyn's and the Labour Left's failure to recognise and deal with the forces who would challenge the *It's Time for Real Change* manifesto

On paper, Labour's 2019 *Its Time for Real Change* manifesto, appears to be an advance on its 2017 *For the Many Not the Few*. In the light of the global Extinction Rebellion protests, and wider concern about the environmental degradation of the planet, the main focus is on promoting *A Green Industrial Revolution* followed by *Rebuild Our Public Services* and *Tackle Poverty and Inequality*,

Such commitments are going to represent a major challenge to a British ruling class and the global corporations determined to decrease their costs (particularly labour) following the heightened global competition since the post-2008 Crash. However, the manifesto constantly evades this problem. At the global level, a world economy policed by the US, and in particular NATO, is just accepted.

And even that traditional Labour Left principle, opposition to nuclear arms, has been ditched, as the manifesto supports the renewal of Trident. Support for nuclear weapons has long been a Labour Right shibboleth. But this could have been overthrown at conference, if it had not been for trade union leaders, including the 'Left' McCluskey. Clearly, he has no belief in pushing for a radical policy to use his members' skills in other economic arenas, based on a 'Just Transition'¹⁹ to the party's promised Green Industrial Revolution. It makes you wonder where he would have stood when opposition to chattel slavery was being raised, with so many British workers' jobs being tied to servicing the slave economy!

But even before the prospect of any future Labour government, Corbyn and his allies were tested out on another aspect of international politics. This was their prior commitment to the oppressed Palestinians and opposition to the apartheid Israeli state. To overthrow this, Corbyn has been faced with an alliance of the US and UK governments, the Israeli state and British Zionists, including the Jewish supremacist, Israeli state-promoting Labour Friends of Israel within the Labour Party (no Israeli Palestinian exiles need apply) and a Right dominated media, with its own long record of promoting racism (and in some cases anti-semitism too). Corbyn and his immediate allies, including the leaders of Momentum, have retreated continuously before the constant barrage of false accusations of anti-semitism. Ken Livingstone, Chris Williamson, black Jewish member Jackie Walker and leading black anti-racist campaigner Marc Wadsworth amongst many others have become victims of this Right-wing witch-hunt.²⁰

Support for Israel (including large arms sales) and opposition to meaningful Palestinian national self-determination remains an important feature of UK state policy (and of course of the USA). This goes some way to explain the concerted opposition to Corbyn and the wider Left over this issue. But this is relatively small beer compared to the opposition the City of London and its global and domestic allies would mount against many aspects of Labour's manifesto, should Corbyn ever become the UK's prime minister.

Capital's ability, especially that of the finance sector, to mount offensives from beyond the UK state's borders have been very evident, even in the days of social democratic and neo-liberal ascendancy (e.g. runs on sterling under Labour chancellor, Denis Healey between 1976-9 and 'Black Wednesday' under Tory chancellor, Nigel Lawson in 1992). But today's Labour manifesto doesn't even have anything to say about ending those tax havens that do lie within its jurisdiction. These include the unique role given to the City of London, and those tax dodgers' sanctuaries and 'dark money' conduits in the Isle of Man, Jersey, Bermuda, and British Virgin and Cayman Islands. And these tax havens also provide a major financial laundering service for gangster-related economic activities, in the underbelly of the modern global economy, not least the people trafficking of non-documented migrants.

h) The Labour manifesto's inability to recognise the unionist nature of the UK state or the significance of national democratic challenges, whilst the Tory manifesto plans a further clampdown

But Corbyn's and the Labour Left's lack of understanding of the nature of the UK state goes further than this though. When significant movements have emerged, which do contest a major feature of the UK state - its unionist nature - Labour's manifesto opposes these. The most significant of these have been the national democratic movements in Ireland and Scotland. Unionism reinforces the constitutional monarchist and imperialist nature of the UK state, with its anti-democratic Crown Powers. And this in turn buttresses the Brexiteers' current Empire2 illusions, or their desired America First'/Britain second, imperial 'special relationship'.

During the period of earlier neo-liberal hegemony, the UK state came up with the Peace (or pacification) Process in Northern Ireland. The 1998 Good Friday Agreement (GFA) and its successors have been at the centre of this. After years of Irish Republican-led struggle, the British ruling class finally ditched its support for the local Orange supremacist statelet, with its fortified Partition at the Border. Instead the UK state now took on a 'neutral' arbiter role between two constitutionally recognised communities - Unionist/Loyalist and

Nationalist/Republican. Thus, Partition took on a new form in the bi-sectarian Northern Ireland Executive and Assembly - a rejigged Stormont. The old border Partition has been significantly downgraded, helped very much by shared EU membership. The most blatant Partition is now seen in the divisive 'peace walls' in Belfast, Derry, Portadown and Lurgan. The GFA was part of a wider neo-liberal 'Devolution-all-round' settlement (also including Scotland, Wales, the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands). This was designed to maximise the opportunities for corporate profitability throughout the North East Atlantic Archipelago (the UK + the Republic of Ireland).

But there are two other important aspects of post-GFA Northern Ireland which point to its underlying conservative/reactionary unionist nature and distinguish it from the liberal unionist 'Devolution-all-round' settlement in Scotland and Wales. There are still 5000 non-Northern Irish British troops stationed in Northern Ireland. MI5 has been given upgraded facilities at Palace Barracks in Holywood just outside Belfast. Under the cover of tackling dissident Republican or hardcore Loyalist terrorists, MI5 is very likely continuing its old practice of attempting to manipulate these organisations for the state's own purposes, and framing people to divert attention from its own assets.²¹ Or, using a variety of techniques, MI5 will be trying to undermine organisations and individuals, without any such connections, but who represent a different political challenge to the UK state and its allies.

Since the 2008 Crash, any 'Peace Dividend' that was meant flow from the original GFA has dried up, as Austerity was imposed on both communities. This has intensified the tensions between those Unionist/Loyalist and Nationalist/Republican communities most dependent on UK state subventions. In 2012, the only semi-disarmed Loyalist paramilitaries launched the Belfast Flag Riots. The old 'Ulster Says No'/'No Surrender' Right populism was revived, and a new reactionary unionist alliance formed. This would eventually extend across the whole of the UK.

In 2013, Loyalist pressure upon the DUP ensured that even the US state-backed Haas talks were derailed over the flag issue. In January 2016, the more hard-line Arlene Foster took over as DUP leader. And by January 2017, even the DUP/Sinn Fein Northern Ireland Executive and the subordinate divided Assembly was suspended. After the June 2017 Westminster general election, the DUP came to an arrangement with Theresa May. This ended the liberal 'parity of esteem' cover for the essentially conservative unionist GFA and its ever-diluted successors, which had culminated in the 2006 St. Andrews Agreement. In 2017, the Tory government ditched any pretence that the UK government acts as a neutral arbiter.

There was a time in the 1980s, when both Corbyn and McDonnell were in favour of a united Ireland and negotiations with Sinn Fein to facilitate this. Now, however, despite the evidence of the mounting problems surrounding the GFA, the *Constitutional Issues* section of Labour's manifesto claims, "the Good Friday Agreement and long-standing peace in Northern Ireland is one of the great achievements of {Tony Blair's} government. Therefore, as a priority, Labour will work quickly and tirelessly to secure a return to a genuine power-sharing." In the meantime, McDonnell has been making overtures to the DUP to prop up a possible future minority Labour government!²²

And the growing demand for Scottish independence, far from being seen off by the 'defeat' of IndyRef1 in September 2014, has become mainstreamed. Scottish Labour's collaboration with the Tories in 'Better Together' or 'Project Fear', to get a 'No' result, led to the loss of 40 of its 41 Scottish MPs in the 2015 general election. Even the limited unionist revival in the 2016 Holyrood and 2017 Westminster general elections saw the conservative unionist and recently dominant Scottish Labour Party slip down to third place, after the increasingly reactionary unionist Tories. Worse still for Scottish Labour, in the May 2017 local elections, it lost its last major source of patronage, the City of Glasgow, to the SNP.

By the 2019 Westminster general election, one might have thought that Labour could have come up with some 'Devo-Max' proposals. It could have attempted to win popular support for the radical economic and social aims of *Its Time for Real Change* manifesto with campaigning for its alternative to independence in a new multi-option referendum - Independence, Devo-Max and the Status Quo. But all the *Constitutional Issues* section can come up with is, "Scotland needs the {UK decided and imposed} transformative investment coming from a {British} Labour government. Not another referendum, and not independence."

Wales is the one constituent unit of the UK where the *Constitutional Issues* section of Labour's manifesto does argue for a renewal of the liberal unionist, political devolutionary process. In Scotland, Labour had abandoned this course during the 2012-14 IndyRef1 campaign. In Wales, though, Lord Thomas of Cymgiedd has produced a review for the Welsh Assembly, *Justice in Wales for the People of Wales*. It advocates the transfer of the responsibility for justice to the Welsh Assembly at Cardiff Bay, along with some liberal reforms of the legal system. However, this will be very much opposed, in the event of a Johnson-led Tory general electoral victory. Don't expect much 'justice' in or for Wales, should he still be prime minister. Thomas was one of three judges labelled "as an enemy of the people" by the *Daily Mail* for their legal support for Gina Miller over Brexit.²³

In parts of England, regional parties have formed with an essentially social democratic outlook, e.g. the Yorkshire Party (with 7 local councillors) and the North East Party (with 3 local councillors). They are strong supporters of regional political devolution and see this as way to challenge both the growth of the hard and far Right and over-centralised Westminster/Whitehall control. Back in 2004, following the referendum defeat of the Blair government's North East England devolution proposals, Labour had ditched its own proposals for English regional political devolution. These had formed part of its original Devolution-all-round deal. Since then, the Labour Right has promoted US/Tory style elected city/regional mayors. Corporate business finds mayors and their senior officials are easier to pressure and to bribe. They have incomes and conditions closer to private business managers, with whom they sometimes socialise, often receiving perks as they do so.

Therefore, it is revealing that, in relation to England, the *Constitutional Issues* section of Labour's manifesto opts, not for political devolution, but for administrative devolution. "Regional Government offices to make government more attuned to our English regions." It supports the creation of a One Yorkshire mayor, but with the somewhat pious hope that "directly elected mayors {are} more accountable to local councilors and elected representatives." And these ambiguous proposals are termed "decentral{ising} decision making and strengthen{ing} local democracy".

Labour's manifesto also falls back on the longstanding UK state liberal smokescreen of calling for a "Constitutional Convention", along with the more recent and radical sounding "citizens' assembly". This is just a way of kicking any potentially controversial constitutional proposals into the long grass. There is also a proposal to transform the House of Lords by "end{ing} the hereditary principle". Presumably this is to be replaced by the top-down appointment principle. This would be needed to ensure there are enough places in the proposed "Senate of the Nations and Regions" for all of Labour's 183 placemen and careerists currently sitting amongst the 795 lords. It is hard to believe that these people will easily give up their substantial financial rewards and other privileges. And if Labour's Right MPs are already plotting Corbyn's demise in the event of a minority government, you can be sure they will find plenty of allies in the lords in the face of any such threat.

But Johnson's Tories also have their own constitutional manifesto proposals. Their wording is even less specific than the introduction to Labour's *Constitutional Issues*. However, their intent is far more serious. In putting forward a Constitution, Democracy and Rights Commission, the Tories claim to be "restoring public trust in government and politics". This is of course a continuation of their claim when pushing for their own hard Brexit. "Not all

their plans are spelt out. But their scope is potentially breathtaking. They include voter ID systems, likely to deter young and migrant workers; a fresh constituency boundary review, opening the way to electoral gerrymandering, strong backing for a first past the post system, suggesting future attempts to abolish proportional representation where it exists {Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland} while doing nothing to extend the voting rights of foreigners domiciled in the UK.”²⁴ There is also a reference to “examining the relationship between, government and the courts”,²⁵ a likely harbinger of the kind of Right populist state clampdowns on the judiciary already taking place in Hungary and Poland.

i) The political significance of the unionist nature of the UK state – something that is central to the general election and beyond

The overwhelming majority of the electorate in the UK is found in England - 38,371,400. This compares with 3,925,800 in Scotland, 2,230,100 in Wales, and 1,248,400 in Northern Ireland. In a unitary state, the significance of those votes coming from the geographical areas covered by Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland would be relatively small. But in a unionist state, with its constitutionally recognised ‘three and a bit’ nations; and where national democratic movements with Westminster representation have been a continuous feature of politics since the mid-1970s, then the different situations in each constituent unit of the UK are significant. Thus, it helps to outline the current political position of England on the one hand, and Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland on the other, in the run-up to the December 12th general election.

In England, in the 2017 general election, the Tories took 296 seats, Labour 227 and the Lib-Dems 8. With the exception of the Green Party of England and Wales with its 1 MP (and 4 MEPs and 372 councillors), all English MPs are British unionists, and uphold the unity of the UK state. This aspect of their politics can often be disguised when only English or local matters are being dealt with. But liberal, conservative and reactionary unionism often surfaces in these parties whenever wider UK politics have to be addressed. UKIP and the Brexit Party have been trying to consolidate reactionary unionism as the main force within the British unionist camp. They have had considerable success in England amongst the Tories, although this extends further as shown in the case of George Galloway. In England, during the May 2019 EU elections, the Brexit Party took 26 seats, the Lib-Dems 15, Labour 9, the Greens 7, and the Tories 3. The reactionary unionist Brexit Party formed the largest block amongst all the

unionist parties, and their pressure has pushed Johnson's Tories further towards this camp too.

In Scotland, however, in the 2017 Westminster general election, the constitutionalist nationalist SNP took 35 out of the 59 MPs, the increasingly reactionary unionist Tories 13, the conservative unionist Labour and Lib-Dems 7 and 4 respectively. British ruling class fear, caused by the IndyRef1 result, is demonstrated by the shift of previously conservative unionist Tories to reactionary unionism, and the previously liberal unionist, Labour and Lib-Dems to conservative unionism. In the May 2019 EU elections, the SNP took 3 MEPs (out of 6) seats, but the other 3 MEPs were divided between the Tories, the Brexit Party and the Lib-Dems. (Labour, which had once had 3 MEPs, was knocked out altogether). But Scotland (like Wales and Northern Ireland) has another level of government - the politically devolved Scottish Parliament at Holyrood. In the 2016 Holyrood general election, the SNP took 63 out of 129 MSPs (and the independence supporting Scottish Greens a further 2), the Tories took 31 (replacing Labour as the main unionist party), Labour 24 and the Lib-Dems 5.

In Wales, a different pattern again can be found. In the 2017 Westminster general election, the Labour Party took 28 out of the 40 MPs, the Tories 8, and the Plaid Cymru 4. Although the Labour Party in Wales is unionist, it is divided between liberal, conservative and reactionary wings. To a greater extent than Scotland, liberal unionists have been able to maintain the upper hand amongst Welsh Labour (which goes some way to explain the difference approaches to Wales and Scotland in Labour's 2019 general election manifesto). In the 2016 Welsh Assembly elections, the Labour Party took 29 out of 60 MWAs, the then conservative unionist Tories 14, to which were added the liberal unionist Lib-Dems with 4 and the reactionary unionist UKIP with 7. In contrast to Scotland, the constitutional nationalist Plaid Cymru only have a relatively small representation amongst the MWAs - 11 out of 60.

Wales is divided between the largely English-speaking former coal and steel dominated South Wales with its north east Wales outlier (these areas have long been Labour dominated); the largely English language speaking Border Counties (mainly contested between the Lib-Dems and Tories, with the latter gaining ascendancy) and their north coast extension and a Pembrokeshire outlier (mainly contested between the Tories and Labour); and the still significant Welsh language speaking North and West Wales (dominated by Plaid Cymru).

The prospect of Brexit has introduced a new political bombshell, which has fractured the fragile unity gained around liberal constitutional reform, highlighted as recently as 2011 by Welsh Labour/Plaid

Cymru/Conservative/Lib-Dem backing for greater political devolutionary powers to the Welsh Assembly. The reactionary unionist UKIP had already challenged this unity by winning 7 seats in the 2016 Welsh Assembly elections. However, in the May 2019 EU elections in Wales, the reactionary unionist Brexit Party came first with 2 MEPs, followed in the number of votes by the anti-Brexit Plaid Cymru with 1 MEP, and then the more ambiguous-on-Brexit Welsh Labour Party with 1 MEP.

The Brexit Party has torn into both Labour's heartlands and the main Tory/Lib-Dem contested areas in Wales. South Wales has in many ways suffered from the same industrial devastation and break-up of working-class self-organisation and communities as England's old industrial North and Midlands. So, in contrast to those areas in the Republican areas of Northern Ireland, which had long experience of contesting the unionist Right, and those areas in the Scottish Central Belt, which had experienced the 'Project Hope' of IndyRef1, many in the de-industrialised areas of Wales, as in the English North and Midlands, have fallen under the influence of the conservative unionism and anti-EU sentiment of 'Project Fear' promoted by the Tories and sections of the Labour Party, and to the reactionary unionism and EU-phobia of 'Project Hate' promoted by UKIP and the Brexit Party. But in other parts of the UK, particularly London, the large majority of black and Asian British also opposed Brexit, knowing that many on the hard Right would come out against even long-standing and now English-speaking EU residents, by questioning these British subjects' Britishness too.

Scotland's 'Project Hope' has been linked to people making more of the Scottish prefix of their former hyphenated Scottish-British identities. For many the British suffix is being increasingly jettisoned. Scottish-Britishness is associated with a backward-looking British provincialism. For many, a European suffix has replaced the British suffix in a new hyphenated identity. This has contributed to a more outward looking civic national politics. This recognises anybody who chooses to live in Scotland as being Scottish. This goes some way to explain the much stronger support for Remain in Scotland. But, in the de-industrialised South Wales, as in the North and Midlands of England, the Brexiteers' politics have been linked to a more inward looking ethnic hyphenated-British identity. Here the regional or national prefix is subordinate to the British state suffix. With both Labour (under Gordon Brown) and the Tories (under Michael Gove) pushing for a cultural (ethnic) basis for official Britishness, this often acts as a mental barrier towards people outside the state's boundaries. Such thinking has also been linked to the idea of 'British jobs for British workers' to gain wider support amongst a marginalised working class. Such thinking can also quickly turn against 'others', e.g. migrants, other minorities such as Travellers, Welsh language speakers and those in Scotland and Northern Ireland who increasingly reject Britishness.

The political situation is different in North and West Wales. Here the language issue best explains why the majority oppose Brexit and give their vote to Plaid Cymru. Although Westminster parliamentary acts have recognised the Welsh and Gaelic languages (after years of language struggles in Wales), support could easily be diluted or even turned off altogether with a change of government, especially hard Right Tories. Thus, Welsh and Irish speakers (in Northern Ireland) see the EU's Charter for Regional or Minority Languages as the most secure underpinning for their own languages. And this goes a stage further in Northern Ireland, where the sole underpinning for the Irish language comes from this source. The DUP has been prepared to suspend the power-sharing Executive and Assembly rather than concede any Irish language rights.

Northern Ireland, the fourth constituent unit of the UK reveals yet another political pattern. In the 2017 Westminster general election, the reactionary unionist DUP took 10 out of the 18 MPs and a liberal unionist Independent took 1. Against this, the former revolutionary nationalist but now constitutional nationalist Sinn Fein took 7 MPs (who don't take their Westminster seats). In the 2017 Northern Ireland Assembly elections, the reactionary unionist DUP took 28 MLAs and the TUV 1 MLA; the conservative unionist UUP took 10; and the liberal unionist Alliance took 14. Whilst the constitutional nationalist Sinn Fein and SDLP took 27 MLAs and 12 MLAs; and the Left social democratic/Left Irish nationalist People Before Profit took 1 MLA.

Although, as in Wales, the unionist parties have remained dominant, there is a much closer balance between unionists and nationalists in Northern Ireland. When it came to the May 2019 EU elections, Sinn Fein narrowly won the first preference vote (with a drop of votes from 2014) and kept its 1 MEP, but the reactionary unionist DUP, although again coming second in the first preference vote, fell back even more, but still kept its 1 MEP. But when all the votes were redistributed by the fifth count, the liberal unionist Alliance Party of Northern Ireland (APNI) gained the most overall votes winning the other MEP (and displacing the conservative unionist UUP MEP).

And, unlike Wales, because the majority of people in Northern Ireland had voted in 2016 by 56% to 44% to Remain in the EU, by 2019 the pressure on the unionists came from its liberal Remain-supporting wing, led by APNI. And in the 2019 local elections in Northern Ireland again it was APNI that made the biggest gains. As a consequence, the reactionary and conservative unionist and the constitutional nationalist blocs have tended to fragment, with the pattern varying according to local political conditions.²⁶

To sum up, before the December 12th general election, England only had unionist MPs and MEPs (with the partial exception of the 1 Green MP and 7

MEPs). And following Johnson's Tory purge, the largest group is pro-hard Brexit and reactionary unionist. Wales also has a majority of unionist MPs, MWAs and MEPs, but with the liberal unionist dominated Labour Party having the majority of MPs and MWAs, and the reactionary unionist Brexit Party having the largest number of the MEPs. The constitutional nationalist Plaid Cymru remains a minority party, although it did emerge with second largest vote in the 2019 EU election, second to the Brexit Party. This suggests a greater polarisation in Wales than before. In Northern Ireland, the reactionary unionist DUP has the majority of MPs and biggest number of MLA members, but the constitutional nationalist Sinn Fein is quite close behind. But recent developments in the 2019 Euro-elections and NI local elections have shown the DUP and Sinn Fein both to be in retreat, and the liberal unionist APNI making considerable gains. But in Scotland, the constitutional nationalist SNP dominates Westminster, the Scottish Parliament and EU representation, as well as holding the largest number of local councillors. Within the unionist camp, the Tories have taken the lead, although a long way behind the SNP. Their reactionary unionism has become dominant in the Scottish unionist camp. Whatever, the overall UK result, the National Question will figure large after December 12th.

j) Political developments in Scotland in the run-up to the general election

Although the SNP has continued to dominate Scottish politics, following the 2012-14 IndyRef1 campaign, its leadership faces growing problems with its strategy to win an IndyRef2. With reactionary unionism currently ruling the Westminster roost, this strategy depends upon a revival of liberal unionism, and a UK government prepared to concede a referendum. This explains why Nicola Sturgeon hopes that there will be a minority Corbyn-led government after December 12th. But, not only is Corbyn in 2019 little more sympathetic towards Scottish self-determination than Ed Miliband in 2015; some of the strongest opposition comes from the Labour Party in Scotland, led by British Left unionist and ambiguous Remain/Leaver Richard Leonard.

The SNP leadership is aware that Johnson's Tories intend to remove any constitutional options for getting IndyRef2. And, Johnson could still well be prime minister after December 12th. The Tories are more likely to look favourably to the Spanish government's handling of the non-Spanish state backed Catalan referendum, than to concede any IndyRef2, although they have a number of other options too. Therefore, amidst all the 'independence is inevitable' bluster, the SNP leadership is retreating to its pre-2014, openly pro-

business accommodationist stance, focussed on the Sustainable Growth Commission. The SNP leadership's long-term goal is to build up a Scottish ruling class, centred on Scottish businesses, ready to take its place in the current world order. And in the process, the SNP leadership does not want to rock too many boats, or to encourage wider campaigning that could move beyond its control.

However, the Sustainable Growth Commission's accepted world order had already begun to fall apart in 2008, and there is little prospect of any significant 'trickle down' social democratic reforms within a bureaucratic EU or UK state dominated Scottish economy. The closer the SNP becomes involved with business, either at local council or national level, the more it will become tangled up with the financial corruption this inevitably brings. It will also be unable to put up any but a token opposition to the corporate driven destruction of the life sustaining circuits of our global environment. This tension is highlighted in the difference between those neo-liberals in the SNP who look to the opening of new oilfields (and some to fracking) to provide the key financial basis for their 'independent' Scotland, and to those Left social democrats in or close to the party (e.g. Commonweal²⁷) who look to an independent Scotland to take the lead in the transition to a new carbon-neutral green economy.

Despite these political tensions, the SNP enters the December 12th general election campaign with some confidence that it can make significant electoral gains. Its public performances compare well with the Tories, Labour and Lib-Dems, particularly at Westminster and Brussels. The SNP leadership has been able to maintain MSP voting unity at Holyrood and, with the single exception of 1 MP who voted against the December 12th date for the general election, at Westminster. This contrasts strongly with both the Tories and Labour at Westminster. Furthermore, Holyrood has looked more competent and business-like than the chaos and dysfunction surrounding Westminster this year. This difference has been highlighted by the issues of 'meaningful votes', the proroguing of parliament and the countervailing (but ineffective) Supreme Court ruling, and the use of blatant lying as a means to advance Right wing politics at Westminster.

The contrast between how politics are conducted at Holyrood and Westminster has enabled Sturgeon to extend the official SNP reasons for demanding IndyRef2. Previously these lay in 'Better Together's broken promises to keep Scotland in the EU and to move towards Devo-Max if there was a 'No' vote in 2014. But now the UK regime no longer looks like a stable parliamentary democracy, but more like a tinpot monarchy. Indeed, in the light of scandal and family division, the British monarchy appears to be a central part of a dysfunctional UK state. On November 24th, the normally very cautious

Sturgeon even said, “We need a ‘debate’ on the monarchy’s future.”²⁸ In line with the SNP leadership’s lack of faith in Westminster, it no longer seeks a Section 30 order to facilitate IndyRef2, but wants the transfer of referendum initiating powers to Holyrood. Although the grounds for this are fully in line with a democratic right of self-determination, this is no more likely to be conceded than a new Section 30 order, when all the unionist parties support the sovereignty of the Crown-in-Westminster.

As in England, the major parties in Scotland have all advocated tactical voting. For the Scottish Tories, this has meant prioritising ‘No to IndyRef2’. ‘Get Brexit Done’ is secondary and designed to consolidate existing Tory support. It is also designed to appeal in some local areas within the Central Belt, where Orangeism can still be found and which did vote Leave. So, beneath their wider ‘No to IndyRef2’ appeal, the Scottish Tories are using this election to try and forge a UK wide (including ‘Ulster’) Right populism. But any overt connection with a very English Johnson also limits the Tories’ ability to build a wider electoral alliance.

‘Ulster’ Orangeism sees its prime connection to the UK and Britishness as lying through Scotland, rather than through England. But, in Scotland, as in ‘Ulster’, support for Orangeism is on the decline. Even ‘Better Together’ maintained a long arms-length between their liberal fronted conservative unionism and the reactionary unionism of the Orange Order. The Scottish Tories are making the Orange link with Scottish-Britishness more central to their defence of the Union. This will lead others to reconsider their Scottish-Britishness. The Scottish Tories will also find it difficult to persuade many outside their ranks that having Scottish Tory MPs makes any difference, given that their existing MPs just act as a conveyor belt for whatever their Westminster leader decide. The 7 DUP MPs have used the Tory minority position at Westminster to extract concessions; the 13 Scottish MPs have achieved nothing.

The Lib-Dems claim to represent the majority in Scotland who voted to Remain in the UK in 2014 and in the EU in 2016. Therefore, they are trying to build a tactical voting alliance around ‘No to Brexit’ and ‘No to IndyRef2’. On the face of it, such an alliance would seem to have better prospects than that of the Tories. But outside shrinking areas of the Highlands and Islands, north-east Fife and the leafier city suburbs, the Lib-Dems don’t have much traction. And their participation in the 2010-15 Con-Dem coalition and ‘Better Together’, coupled to the unlikelihood of their emerging as the largest Westminster party, makes it appear that voting Lib-Dem is just another way of getting a possible Tory-led government.

The Scottish Labour Party is trying to build another tactical voting alliance. This is around ‘No to Boris’, ‘No to IndyRef2’. This has brought them into conflict with the Corbyn-led British leadership (which could contemplate a deal with the SNP if this became necessary to form a Labour government). Despite ‘Left’ Richard Leonard being leader, the Scottish Labour Party at Westminster, Holyrood and many constituencies is Right dominated. Attempts to verbally outflank the SNP on the Left are not very convincing when Scottish Labour was the central component of ‘Better Together’; runs several Scottish local councils in coalition or tacit agreement with the Tories; and in some areas is not averse to competing with the Tories for the Orange vote.

And those few Scottish Corbynistas face the additional problem that if they were able to oust the local SNP MP, the replacement Labour MP could well be less likely to support a Corbyn-led minority Labour government! For many amongst the Scottish Labour Right, the best prospect is a hung parliament, where they hold on to their seats along with their incomes and expenses, and access to well-paid sinecures. In such a situation, they would hope to come to some deal, involving others on the Labour Right in England, Wales and Scotland, the Lib-Dems, some Conservatives and even the DUP in ditching Corbyn and forming a National Government. Therefore, it is very unlikely that those few genuine Corbynista candidates in Scotland can overcome this Right-wing legacy and help the Scottish Labour Party to widen its appeal. In addition, in Scotland, the Corbynistas are also much hampered by their deep-dyed economism with its hostility to addressing constitutional issues.

The SNP leadership is also trying to build a tactical voting alliance. This is built around ‘Yes to IndyRef2’ and ‘No to Brexit’. Through the first they are trying to reach out to those, particularly in the Scottish Labour Party, who support Scotland’s right to self-determination, without necessarily supporting Scottish independence. In the second, they are claiming to be the most pro-European party, with the best option of retaining EU membership, whether in alliance with a possible post-election, pro-Remain majority at Westminster, or failing that, by pursuing a ‘Scottish independence in the EU’ strategy in opposition to a Johnson-led hard Brexit. As with Johnson’s ‘Get Brexit Done’ strategy, some of the contradictions in the SNP would only become apparent in the longer term. However, the SNP’s current stance allows for both a Plan A and a Plan B. This tends to suggest that the SNP leadership’s tactical voting alliance has better electoral prospects on December 12th than those of the Scottish Tories, Lib-Dems or Labour.

The only other pro-independence party contesting the general election is the Scottish Greens with 22 candidates (the decision whether to stand or not has been left to local constituency parties). The main hope of the Scottish Greens

lies in becoming an electoral conduit for the rising concern about the environment, highlighted by the Extinction Rebellion protests. (In this respect it is similar to the Labour Party, which hopes that the future of the NHS will take priority over constitutional issues). However, in Scotland, because of SNP political hegemony, the Greens have not made the same headway as in England. Indeed, they have felt the pressure enough to stand down in the marginal SNP-held Perth and North Perthshire constituency.

However, politics in Scotland is not confined to parliamentary arenas. The broadly-based All Under One Banner (AUOB) campaign, was founded in 2016, and has campaigned for an early IndyRef2. In 2019, AUOB held demonstrations in Glasgow (May 4th), Galashiels (June 1st), Oban (June 15th), Ayr (July 6th), Campbeltown (July 27th), Aberdeen (August 17th), Perth (September 7th), culminating in one in Edinburgh (October 5th) attended by 150,000-200,000.

As part of the SNP's general election campaign, Sturgeon addressed an independence rally in Glasgow on November 3rd attended by 20,000. Clearly this is part of the SNP leadership's longstanding policy of trying to rein-in and take control of any independent challenges. However, AUOB has announced its plans to organise independently in 2020. Many AUOB supporters will not be fobbed off with SNP leadership excuses for further IndyRef2 delays, whether under a Corbyn-minority Labour, a National or a Johnson Tory government.

If there is to be a Johnson Right populist majority government, then there is likely to be some pressure from the so-far, marginalised ethnic Scottish nationalists (Soil nan Gaidheal and Scottish Resistance), in response to the hyped-up Right-wing English ethnic nationalism, which increasingly informs reactionary British unionism. Furthermore, the frustrations could open up divisions amongst a very disciplined SNP, despite a minority Plan B for independence strategy being batted down at the party conference on 13th November.²⁹

k) Political developments in Wales in the run-up to the general election

In Wales, the political initiative has been in the hands of the Right. The linked issues of Brexit and reactionary unionism appeared as far back as the 2014 Euro-election, when UKIP came second and gained 1 of the 4 MEPs and in the 2016 Welsh Assembly election where it gained 7 MWAs. This year the Brexit Party has done even better, coming first in the Euro-elections and winning 2 MEPs. It has also inherited 4 of UKIP's MWAs, who have changed party. One effect of UKIP and the Brexit Party has been to hold back any Right Tory advance in Wales, despite a 6% gain in votes in the 2017 Westminster general

election. However, the December 12th general election could see the Right Tories ‘cashing in’ on the groundwork done by UKIP and the Brexit Party. Significantly, the Brexit Party is not standing in Brecon & Radnorshire, where it cost the Tories the seat in the August by-election. The likely decline in Brexit Party support (following the 2017 UKIP precedent) vote could well see the Welsh Tories being the main beneficiaries of the Brexit-led Rightwards move in Wales. In Wales, unlike Scotland, the Tories don’t need to flag up any equivalent of ‘No IndyRef2’ but can rely on wider anti-Welsh language speaker sentiment to dismiss any idea of greater Welsh self-determination. Such sentiment is held in some Labour circles too.

The Lib-Dems have been in decline in Wales for some time. In the 2016 Welsh Assembly elections, they only held on to 1 of their MWAs (losing 4 others). In the 2017 Westminster general election they lost their last MP. In the 2017 Welsh local elections they lost 10 of their 73 councillors. Despite the 10% surge in the Lib-Dem vote in the May 2019 Euro-election, (part of a shared Great Britain phenomenon) this failed to win them a single MEP in Wales. Thus, there is a sense of Lib-Dem desperation about their limited tactical voting alliance which also involves Plaid Cymru and Welsh Greens.³⁰ Holding on to their by-election Brecon & Radnorshire MP is the Lib-Dems’ priority. The voting alliance has also given the Lib-Dems an anti-Brexit free run in Montgomeryshire (a seat they last held in 2005) and Cardiff Central (a seat they last held in 2010). It is very unlikely, though, that the Lib-Dems will be able to hold on even to their Brecon & Radnorshire MP, who is also party leader in Wales.

The Welsh Labour Party also faces a dilemma. Although in the 2017 Westminster general election, it maintained its first position with 28 MPs out of 40 (a gain of 3); and in the 2016 Welsh Assembly election, with 29 MWAs out of 60 (a loss of 1), in the May 2019 Euro-election, the Brexit Party took first place in all the South Wales and north east Wales seats held by Labour at Westminster and Cardiff Bay. A Right Labour group of MPs led by Stephen Kinnock, bitterly hostile to Corbyn, has fallen in behind Brexit. They supported May’s deal. Some in this Welsh Labour group are part of a conservative unionist tradition, which once opposed the setting up of the Welsh Assembly and has often been hostile to Welsh-speaking Wales.

However, the Labour leadership in the Welsh Assembly has taken a different political direction to these Westminster MPs. Unlike Scottish Labour they have maintained a liberal unionist course, supporting the further advance of political devolution in Wales (following the winning of the 2011 referendum granting greater powers to the Welsh Assembly). And again, in contrast to Scottish Labour at the Scottish Parliament, Welsh Labour has also been able to maintain

its leadership of the Welsh Assembly, with the assistance of Plaid Cymru between 2007 and 2011, and the Lib-Dems since then. Furthermore, successive Welsh Assembly Labour leaders have been sympathetic to the Welsh language, beginning with Rhodri Morgan (2000-09), and both Carwyn Jones (2009-18) and Mark Drakeford (since 2018) are Welsh speakers.

A key feature of the majority of Labour's MWAs has been their attempt to provide some "clear red water" between the Welsh Assembly and Westminster. Although Jones' willingness to act as 'Better Together's Welsh outrider during the Scottish IndyRef1 campaign threatened to turn the 'clear red water' a blue-tinted pink, Labour at Cardiff Bay has gone on to maintain its liberal unionism. This is in contrast to Scottish Labour at Holyrood, which has retreated to conservative unionism, and has long abandoned any attempt to put any 'red water' between Holyrood and Westminster. Indeed, since the election of Corbyn as British Labour leader, the majority of Scottish Labour has been desperate to dig its own blue moat, separating it from Labour's London head office.

In 2018, the more Miliband-supporting Carwyn Jones, was replaced as Welsh Labour leader by the more Corbyn-supporting Mark Drakeford. Again, in contrast to Scottish Labour's 'Left' Labour leader, Richard Leonard, Wales Labour leader, Drakeford, was able to win over the majority of constituency party members and many MWAs. But perhaps more significantly, since the looming prospect of Brexit, the Welsh Labour-led Assembly has been prepared to cooperate with the SNP-led Holyrood Parliament in an attempt to minimise the damage and to defend the level of political devolution already achieved. This is threatened by a hard Right Johnson-led Tory government. Thus, it's not to Scottish Labour that Welsh Labour looks for support to defend and further advance Welsh political devolution, but to the SNP-led Holyrood government.

Welsh Labour has managed to win some liberal devolutionary concessions in British Labour's *Its Time for Real Change* manifesto. Clearly these depend on a Labour-led government after December 12th. Should that not happen then Welsh Labour is probably in a better position than Scottish Labour to make a sharper break with Labour's acceptance of Westminster supremacy. If, following the general election, the Lib-Dems further decline in Wales, the current Welsh Labour/Lib-Dem coalition in the Welsh Assembly could well come under greater strain. It is significant that, despite their current Welsh Assembly cooperation, no attempt has been made by these two parties to form a tactical electoral alliance for the general election.

Welsh Labour has had to confront the hard Right in its own heartlands to a much greater extent than Scottish Labour (where neither UKIP nor the Brexit Party have had any local councillors or MSPs). However, in making some effort

to confront this challenge and not to capitulate to Brexit (unlike Kinnock and his Westminster-backers), Welsh Labour was able to hold on to 1 of the 4 Welsh MEPs despite falling to fourth place in the May Euro-election. In Scotland, however, so paranoid has Scottish Labour become over the SNP and the Scottish independence challenge, it was neither able to provide an anti-IndyRef2 alternative to the Tories, nor an anti-IndyRef2, anti-Brexit alternative to the Lib-Dems, both of which took a seat in the May Euro-election. Indeed, Scottish Labour's own flirting with the wilder Orange fringes of unionism, just helped to open up the space for the Brexit Party to take the last Scottish MEP, leaving Scottish Labour without a single MEP. Unlike Right-led Scottish Labour, Left-led Welsh Labour has some expectations from a post-December 12th Corbyn-led Labour minority government. But Welsh Labour seems better prepared for a Johnson-led Tory government, and the further decline of the Welsh Lib-Dems, with a possibility of returning to a deal with Plaid Cymru in the Welsh Assembly and continuing to cooperate with the SNP-led Holyrood government.

The Welsh Greens (who are an autonomous part of the Green Party of England and Wales) are facing as difficult an election as the Scottish Greens, but for different reasons. Although the Scottish Greens are putting forward candidates, they have made no electoral deals. The Welsh Greens are putting forward 18 candidates also with little prospect of success. But 1 Welsh Green is standing in the Vale of Glamorgan as part of the Lib-Dem/Plaid Cymru/Welsh Greens Anti-Brexit electoral pact. This seat has been awarded to the Greens, not with much hope of success in this Brexit and Brexit MEP voting constituency, but only because the prospects for the Lib-Dems and Plaid Cymru there are very poor. They both lost their deposits here in the 2017 general election.

Whereas the Scottish Greens have an MSP base in Holyrood and form part of a constitutional nationalist alliance, the Welsh Greens have no base in Cardiff Bay, and are the smallest component of a wider Welsh liberal unionism. How this will pan out after the general election will depend upon whether there is a Corbyn-led Labour government, whose manifesto could initially hold the Welsh Greens to a liberal unionist path, or whether there is a more hostile National or a Johnson-led Tory government, which could lead the Welsh Greens along the Scottish Greens' constitutional nationalist path.

As a consequence of the Brexit vote, Plaid Cymru has been forced back into its Welsh-speaking heartlands. This change was marked by the ousting in 2018 of party leader, Leanne Wood, the openly republican and Welsh language learner MWA for Rhondda in South Wales (strongly Brexit voting), and her replacement by Adam Price, MWA from East Carmarthen and Dinefwr, with its significant Welsh-speaking and more anti-Brexit electorate. Although Plaid, the

Lib-Dems and Welsh Greens are contesting each other in many seats, Plaid is part of the localised anti-Brexit tactical voting pact. In contrast to the 1 seat awarded to the Greens, and the 3 seats awarded to the Lib-Dems, Plaid has been awarded 7 seats – 3 in seats it currently holds - Arfyn, Dwyfor Merionedd and Carmarthen East and Dinefwr; 1 an obvious target seat– Yns Mon (since it voted Plaid in the 2019 Euro-election, whilst Plaid holds the Welsh Assembly seat and also held the Westminster constituency between 1987-2005); the other 3 seats, Caerphilly, Llanelli and Pontypridd are in South Wales. These are all majority Brexit voting constituencies, in none of which Plaid is the main contender to its current Labour MP.

If Plaid takes Yns Mon that will be seen as a big success for the party. Despite the limited tactical electoral alliance, the Lib-Dems' electoral demise at Westminster would probably benefit Plaid. In the 2019 Euro-election Plaid emerged as the leading anti-Brexit party in Wales, with 1 MEP, whereas the Lib-Dems came fourth with no MEP. Some of the tensions within the current electoral pact are shown by the emergence of the Welsh nationalist Gwlad Gwlad³¹ which is standing in the Lib-Dem allotted seats of Montgomeryshire and Cardiff Central and the Welsh Greens allocated seat of the Vale of Glamorgan. A Lib-Dem is also standing as an Independent in the Plaid allocated seat of Pontypridd.

However, another significant development has been the emergence of All Under One Banner (Cymru), which has consciously followed the AUOB (Scotland) in organising demonstrations. The key thing about these demos is that they openly promote Welsh independence, something Plaid has up to now been reluctant to do. Plaid has preferred to try and piggybank support for greater Welsh political devolution on to what has already been achieved in Scotland. 2000 joined the first AUOB (Cymru) march in Cardiff on 11th May, 8000 joined the march in the Plaid heartland of Caernafon on 27th July and 5300 joined the march in strongly Brexit-supporting Merthyr Tudful in South Wales on 7th September. Another march is planned in Brexit-supporting Wrexham on April 18th, 2020.

The Plaid leadership has been more supportive of AUOB (Cymru) than the SNP leadership has been of AUOB (Scotland). And it is already looking to join up with a growing IndyRef2 movement in Scotland. In its attempt to break beyond the traditional Welsh-speaking Plaid heartland and to foreground the issue of Welsh independence, AUOB (Cymru) is anticipating a much more fluid political situation in Wales. If Johnson's Tories win the general election then the closing off of further Welsh political devolution (indeed its likely reversal) could undermine not only the Brexiteers' reactionary unionist Welsh-Britishness, but Welsh Labour's liberal unionist Welsh-Britishness too.

1) Political developments in Northern Ireland in the run-up to the general election

In Northern Ireland the balance between the unionists of all the local parties (DUP, UUP, TUV and Alliance Party of Northern Ireland - APNI) and the constitutional nationalists (Sinn Fein and SDLP) is much closer than in Wales. However, the prospect of a UK-wide Brexit has tended to fragment both camps. Unlike Wales, the majority in Northern Ireland voted in 2016 to Remain in the EU 2 by 56% to 44%. However, like Wales, there is a divide between two camps, though not primarily on the basis of language, but reflecting the Nationalist/Republican and Unionist/Loyalist divide. Although all the Republican/Nationalist constituencies (on the basis of the 2015 Westminster general election results) voted by large majorities to Remain, the Unionist/Loyalist constituencies were split 6/4 in favour of Leave, but with more substantial Remain minorities in the Leave constituencies, than Leave minorities in the Nationalist/Republican Remain constituencies.³²

This has opened up a divide within the Unionist camp between the DUP-led reactionary unionists, who consider themselves to be Protestant 'Ulster'-British and the APNI-led liberal unionists, who consider themselves to be non-sectarian Northern Ireland-British. DUP see Brexit as reinforcing the UK state and 'Ulster'-Britishness by ending some of the constraints EU membership has placed upon their desire to unpick the GFA and 'parity of esteem'. APNI see continued EU membership as a means of softening divisions between Northern Ireland and the Republic and opening the political space for a more non-sectarian Northern Ireland. The non-sectarian nature of APNI has caused some confusion, especially outside of Northern Ireland. Thus, the growth of APNI support at the expense of the official Unionist/Loyalist bloc, has been misinterpreted as a growth in support for Irish reunification, rather than a shift within the wider unionist camp. This confusion has been promoted by the Sinn Fein leadership, anxious to maintain the illusion that the post-GFA political order inexorably paves the way for Irish reunification.

The UK government, the Northern Ireland Executive and Assembly and their associated Northern Irish administration underpin the bi-sectarian nature of the local statelet. There is a constitutionally-recognised division between 'Ulster' Unionism/Loyalism of the DUP, UUP, TUV and PUP (open only to those from a Protestant background) and the Irish Nationalism/Republicanism of the SDLP and Sinn Fein (which, although open to people of any religious background, is overwhelmingly supported by those from a Catholic background). Since Partition in 1922, 'Ulster' Unionists/Loyalists have rejected any notion of being

Irish - Northern or otherwise - and they equate their Six Counties 'Ulster'-Britishness with Protestant supremacy, constitutionally underwritten by a Protestant British monarch.

However, the UK state, for its own changing political purposes, has given the name Northern Ireland to Unionist/Loyalist 'Ulster'. The notion of Northern Ireland has been reinforced in the Good Friday/St. Andrews agreements. It is on this basis that APNI pursues a different form of British unionism that does not fit into the bi-sectarian categories enshrined in the GFA. This is why APNI is not officially recognised as part of the official Unionist/Loyalist bloc. Unlike the parties in this bloc, the APNI welcomes Catholic members. Nevertheless, it remains a unionist party, and supports the continued link with the UK. Sections of the Catholic middle class have benefitted from the post GFA order, as new posts, including even in the police (no longer called the Royal Ulster Constabulary, but now the Police Service of Northern Ireland) have been opened up. This has encouraged some liberal middle-class Catholics to join the APNI, whose main support comes from liberal middle-class Protestants. It is significant that the APNI's main target seat is North Down, the most prosperous constituency in Northern Ireland.

Thus, although 56% of the electorate in Northern Ireland voted to Remain in the EU in 2016, this includes liberal unionists and even some conservative unionists, and is not necessarily a vote which rejects the Union. In the 2017 Westminster general election, the wider unionist camp (including APNI) got 55.1% and the wider nationalist camp (including People Before Profit) got 41.8% of the vote. In the 2019 Northern Ireland local elections the wider unionists got 51.9% and the wider nationalists about 39% (now also including the socially conservative Aontu and dissident Republicans) of the vote. In the May 2019 European election, the unionists got 60.4% and the nationalists got 35.9% of the vote. On this basis, it is the wider unionist camp that has strengthened its electoral position since 2017. But this is at the cost of a growing division between the reactionary unionism of DUP and TUV and the liberal unionism of APNI (with the vacillating but largely conservative unionism of the UUP in between).

In the longer term, APNI hopes to displace reactionary 'Ulster'-British unionism and get more support from former Irish nationalists for a liberal unionist Northern Ireland within the UK. Although APNI is likely to increase its percentage of the vote in the December general election, and take the North Down seat, Westminster's first past-the-post system works strongly against it. APNI is unlikely to recapture the Belfast East seat they held for one term (2010-2015) due to unique circumstances, or to overtake the SDLP as the main contender for Belfast South. APNI, still wanting to be seen as a unionist party, has rejected SDLP and Sinn Fein overtures for an electoral pact in Belfast.

However, to underscore their liberal unionist Northern Irish-British ambitions, APNI is the only party standing in every Northern Irish seat.

APNI will also be thwarted by the UK state-backed constitutional set-up in Northern Ireland. This undermines any opposition to its entrenched sectarianism. APNI's non-sectarian Northern Ireland project is also held back by the party's middle-class nature, meaning that it is very unlikely ever to gain majority support through a combined Catholic and Protestant vote. Unlike the middle class, the majority of the working class in either community has seen no economic 'Peace Dividend'.

Furthermore, APNI's road to a non-sectarian Northern Ireland depends on continued EU membership and a liberal unionist regime at Westminster. APNI's sister party, the Lib-Dems, has abandoned liberal unionism and is not likely to call the shots after the general election. Therefore, APNI's best hope would seem to lie in a Labour government, following Labour's manifesto commitment – "As a priority, Labour will work quickly and tirelessly to secure a return to a genuine power-sharing." But Labour's renewed 'power-sharing' is also based on an acceptance of the bi-sectarian nature of the GFA, not on any unlikely majority non-sectarian Northern Irish vote. And Corbyn wants the UK to leave the EU.

From the 2007 general election, with May's hung parliament at Westminster, until Johnson became prime minister, the DUP was at the centre of a key piece of the Tory government's Brexit negotiations. The Tories tried to come to an agreement with the EU, which does not undermine the GFA, underwritten by the UK, EU and US governments. Since the GFA, shared membership of the EU has reduced the significance of the Irish/UK border for everyday travelling and trading to virtually zero. This is in sharp contrast to the heavily fortified border that existed before the GFA. May's Tory government was prepared to be pragmatic about the location any border (with a preference for the Irish Sea) to ensure minimum customs and security checks between Northern Ireland and the Republic. Any such arrangement, which would be of uncertain duration, has been called the 'Backstop'

Johnson and most of the ERG initially sided with the DUP and opposed the 'Backstop'. But, as it turned out, this was but a manoeuvre to bring down May. As soon as Johnson took office, he negotiated a deal with the EU, which, with regard to the 'Backstop' is very similar to May's. Loyalists and leading DUP members have called this a 'betrayal'. The DUP's opposition is one of the main reasons Johnson wanted an early general election to break their Westminster stranglehold. In the event of a Tory government, Johnson would probably want to re-establish the Northern Ireland Assembly and the Executive. This is part of

a longstanding UK state tradition upheld by reactionary and conservative unionists (with minimum opposition from Westminster-based liberal unionists) to keep Northern Ireland at arms' length.

However, a Johnson-led majority Tory government would continue with May's blatant disregard of acting as a 'neutral' arbiter. And, despite the falling out with Johnson, a chastened DUP is unlikely to have anybody else to turn to, in order to maintain what they can of the existing reactionary order in Northern Ireland. There may still be DUP links with former members of UKIP, the Brexit Party, or whatever replaces it on the hard Right, since as fellow reactionary unionists they support the DUP in their rear-guard battle to re-establish a 1950s style UK. But the DUP leadership would probably reluctantly accept that this is unattainable and give up any grander pretensions about influencing the course of all-UK politics. They would accept the 'Ulster' unionists' traditional allotted place and take political responsibility for the maintenance of Northern Ireland within the Union. In return the UK state would turn a blind eye to any excesses and corruption under a reconstituted Northern Ireland Assembly.

Northern Ireland, with Ulster unionist consent, has long held a semi-detached relationship to the rest of the UK. This led to a whole host of different measures being put in place, whether under the two Stormont regimes (1922-72 and 1998 to the present) or under Direct Rule (from 1972-1998). However, the DUP, somewhat hypocritically, have said they do not want Northern Ireland to be treated any differently than the rest of the UK. From the 2017 Westminster general election until October 22nd, 2019, they were able to take advantage of the May's hung parliament to extract financial bungs for Northern Ireland, and to obstruct May's proposed Brexit deal with its 'Backstop'. And various Loyalist organisations acted behind-the-scenes to keep Arlene Foster and the DUP in line. Despite the DUP's public pretensions about not wanting a hard border, their Orange and Loyalist base would prefer to go back the pre-GFA situation. They want to end the hated 'parity of esteem', which to them appears to be responsible for the socio-economic advance of Catholics/Nationalists (and even worse ex-IRA members) in the local machinery of the Northern Irish statelet and the wider economy.

Back in 1922, Sir Edward Carson the Irish/'Ulster' Unionist and his allies were ditched by the wider British ruling class. Carson's continued all-Ireland ultra-unionism threatened to destabilise the UK and British Empire in the face of a strong Irish Republican challenge and the UK's growing dependence on the USA to help it prop up the Empire. And even Carson's fall-back position of wanting Northern Ireland fully integrated within the UK, with no sectarian Northern Irish 'Home Rule' parliament, did not fit with UK state designs to win back 'Southern Ireland', not by direct force, but by undermining the First Irish

Republic, through provoking civil war. So, Carson was side-lined and replaced by Sir James Craig. He was prepared to let the Twenty-Six Counties state come to its own arrangement with the UK state, and to accept the Ulster Unionists' privileged but subordinate position in the Six Counties, and within the British unionist and imperialist scheme-of-things. Unlike Carson, this meant supporting a devolved Orange Stormont regime to maintain security. Today, as in the case of Carson's attempt to dictate Westminster policy in 1922, many DUP supporters have come to think its leaders have overplayed their hand. The extra UK state subventions (some just rejigged from existing funding) are likely to be forgotten, as a UK/EU/Irish government deal attempts to maintain a soft border, which many of the Orange and Loyalist base want hardened, to undermine the GFA and 'parity of esteem'.

Arlene Foster accepted the suspension of the Northern Ireland Assembly and Executive, in January 2017, rather than be held responsible for the 'Cash-for-Ash' scandal or having to implement an Irish Language Act. Therefore, after becoming an important prop for May's government in May 2017, the DUP began to increasingly see their deal at Westminster as preferable to reconstituting Stormont. But the Tories wanted to drop Tory dependence on the DUP. The government stood back when two Labour MPs moved an amendment to the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation) Bill to legalise abortion and same-sex marriage. It was passed by the House of Commons by 435 to 65 votes on the 18th July. The Tory government did this to increase the pressure on the DUP to return to Stormont (where it could have vetoed these social measures) and to remove Northern Ireland from Westminster's public politics.

Significantly, since October, the DUP's Loyalists base, including 'past' UVF, UDA and Red Hand Commando leaders, have been mobilising.³³ On December 6th, 1000 Loyalists, including Orange Order leader, Mervyn Gibson, DUP MP, Nigel Dodds and TUV MLA, Jim Allister, attended a 'Stop the Betrayal Act, Defend the Union' meeting in Belfast's Ulster Hall. This was the venue used by Sir Edward Carson preparatory to signing the Ulster Covenant in 1912, and by the DUP's Ian Paisley and Peter Robinson before attempting to set up the armed Ulster Resistance in 1986. Following the December 6th meeting, some Loyalist leaders have made the customary official statements about the meeting's proposed 'civil disobedience' being only confined to legal action. However, their proposed action is still designed to stir up sectarianism by sabotaging the existing cross-community and cross-border initiatives (key to DUP designs to end 'parity of esteem' and re-establish a harder border).

But the long established Loyalist tradition of allowing each participating group to maintain its autonomy, over what action to actually take, has prompted the PSNI chief, Steve Byrne, to warn of the "potential among loyalist communities

to bring violence back on the streets”.³⁴ Furthermore, in the May EU elections, held before Boris’s ‘betrayal’, the hard-line TUV still retained 11% of the vote, coming fourth. So, the TUV is still there in the wings, ready to offer Loyalists an alternative ‘No Surrender’ politics to that of the DUP should it falter. And should the APNI vote in either Belfast North or Belfast South constituencies cost the DUP their MP, then it is likely that the local Loyalist/DUP response will be vicious.

However, given the centrality of Trump’s USA in providing international backing for Right populist forces, the DUP’s links with evangelical Protestant fundamentalism could become more significant, than a constant resort to the Loyalist and Orange base, with diminishing political returns. The Caleb Foundation (CF) was founded by George Dawson of the DUP and Independent Orange Lodge. It is supported by many influential DUP and TUV politicians. Indeed, with its claimed support of 200,000 evangelicals, it has been suggested that it has “overtaken the Orange Order as the most influential pressure group within Unionism”.³⁵ The CF could provide more openings to the Protestant Right from the USA. They have been increasingly active in Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK, over abortion, gay rights and the peddling of creation theory. But in the infant USA, Loyalism and Orangeism were connected with forces hostile to the American Revolution and to US Republicanism. So, these two terms can act as a barrier to making connections between the hard Right in today’s US imperial republic and in the monarchist ‘Ulster’-British province. Evangelical Protestant fundamentalism (from which Trump gains much of his support) is better suited to cement their alliance. The CB draws attention to the 1857 Christian Revival, which was also inspired by prior events in the USA.

The Nationalist/Republican camp has also become divided in the aftermath, not only of Brexit, but the continued failure of the Northern Ireland Assembly or Executive to deliver any ‘Peace Dividend’; their failure to bring about reforms which Nationalists/Republicans had expected, e.g. an Irish Language Act; and DUP NI Executive members’ corruption exposed in the ‘Cash-for-Ash’ scandal. Although both the devolved Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly can point to some modest reforms, which can gain their governments wider support, the Northern Ireland Assembly has not been able to achieve this. It is specifically structured to smooth over the deep differences between Unionism/Loyalism and Nationalism /Republicanism, including when it comes to the allocation of funds from the UK government. A UK Cabinet (even when a coalition) is far more united than a Northern Ireland Executive. Major differences have led to the earlier and current dissolutions (October 2002-May 2007, May, 2016, January 2017 - ?), and the resignations of key ministers (September 2015 - UUP, and October 2015 - UUP, SDLP, APNI). This is why the various Northern Irish ministries are more obviously controlled by the

senior civil servants to maintain continuity of service provision, than is the case with the relationship of the UK Cabinet and Whitehall.

When an exasperated Sinn Fein pulled the plug on the Northern Ireland Executive in January 2017, this appeared to be well supported by their Republican base. In the May 2017 Westminster general election, Sinn Fein took every Nationalist-held seat (apart from Belfast South which went to the DUP), wiping out the SDLP's MPs. However, Sinn Fein still saw the institutions of the GFA as central to its long-term plans to bring about Irish reunification. But there was no obvious Plan B, other than perhaps a hope that the UK and Irish governments would step in and relaunch the Northern Ireland Assembly and Executive on more favourable terms. Otherwise, Sinn Fein has fallen back on the 'inevitability' of longer-term demographic change by which Catholics will eventually outnumber Protestants. Such thinking, reinforced by the constitutionally bi-sectarian post-GFA order, is just the reverse side of the 'Ulster' Unionists' previous majoritarian sectarianism. It also ignores the class dimensions of the GFA, which have enabled more of the Catholic middle class to come to terms with Northern Ireland and hence the Union. It also ignores those increasing numbers, including migrants, who don't choose to be, or are neither Catholic nor Protestant.

However, the suspension of the Assembly and the Executive was also backed by most DUP supporters, pleased at the diminished local publicity going to Sinn Fein. In the 2017 general election, the DUP took every Unionist held seat (apart from the Independent Unionist seat of North Down) wiping out the UUP's MPs. It also had the bonus of a candidate, Emma Little-Pengelly, with Loyalist paramilitary links taking South Belfast. And straight away, the DUP was given a Plan B to the suspension of Stormont – propping up May's Tories in return for special consideration.

But, with neither the UK nor British government showing any great hurry to put the Executive or Assembly back in place, it was Sinn Fein which first began to experience the consequences of not having its own Plan B. In the May 2019 Euro-election, Sinn Fein's first preference votes (fpv) fell by nearly 3 percentage points, whilst the DUP's fpv increased slightly by 1 percentage point. Both parties experienced a drop in their overall votes, since turnout declined by 6 percentage points. The SDLP made a small 0.7 percentage point gain, whilst APNI made a substantial 11 percentage points gain.

With absolutely no progress in getting the NI Executive or Assembly restarted, Sinn Fein's lack of a Plan B began to tell. Other Assembly parties called out Sinn Fein (and the DUP) for 'intransigence' over Stormont's continued suspension. And the local leadership of Northern Irish Committee of the Irish

Congress of Trade Unions (NIC-UCTU) has no vision beyond an acceptance of this bi-sectarian set-up and had signed-up in 2015 to 'Fresh Start', not to challenge UK-imposed Austerity, but to try and minimise its effects. It has been made to appear that the lack the Assembly and Executive are responsible for the effects of Austerity and the problems in the local NHS; rather than UK government's continued cutbacks, and the deliberate design of the Stormont set-up. The Assembly and Executive have removed the focus of discontent away from the UK state and consecutive British governments and channelled it into permanent squabbles over the carve-up of UK state allotted funding.

However, there were also other problems for Sinn Fein. Being an all-Ireland party is important for its members. So, Sinn Fein's Northern Ireland supporters pay close attention to developments in the Republic. In the 2016 elections to the Irish Dail, Sinn Fein had increased its vote by nearly 4%, taking 23 out of 158 TDs, an increase of 9. Since then, Sinn Fein has been pulled in the Dail between attempting to present itself as an Anti-Austerity party and grooming itself for a future coalition government (most likely with Fianna Fail). But, when issues such as gay marriage and abortion rights became central to Irish politics, this placed Sinn Fein in an awkward position. Sinn Fein had not led over these issues but left them to the wider liberalisation that had come about through the Republic's membership of the EU. Young people had pushed from below for increasingly radical social change and a break from the Catholic Church policed social order. This had prompted a cautious top-down liberalisation, which Sinn Fein eventually joined, under its new more socially progressive women leaders - Mary Lou McDonald in the Republic and Michelle O'Neill in Northern Ireland. But this also cost it support amongst many of its Catholic traditionalist, socially conservative supporters, particularly in rural areas. When Sinn Fein finally decided to give its backing to the Irish 8th Amendment over abortion in 2018, this prompted the breakaway socially conservative Aontu, led by Peadar Toibin, Sinn Fein TD for Meath West.

The severe Austerity regime imposed by the EU-led Troika, and by the UK government backing for British banks' demands that the Irish government enforces evictions in the face of unpaid mortgage debts, had contributed to the surge in the number of anti-Austerity TDs in the 2016 Dail general election. However, there was also an underlying current of anti-migrant and welfare dependents feeling, directed particularly against Travellers. This was revealed starkly in the October 2018 Irish presidential election. In 2011 Martin McGuinness had received nearly 14% of the vote but in 2018, the Sinn Fein candidate, Liadh Ni Riada received just over 6% of the vote. Worryingly for Sinn Fein, a significant section of its rural vote went to the right-wing, anti-Traveller, anti-welfare candidate, Peter Casey. He came second. Then in the June 2019 Euro-election, Sinn Fein's vote dropped by nearly 8%, costing it 2

out of its 3 MEPs. And just before this, in May, Sinn Fein was the main loser in the Irish local elections, losing 78 or nearly half of its local councillors.

The slightly earlier May Northern Ireland local elections were nothing like as bad for Sinn Fein. Overall it held on to the same number of councillors, but faced challenges to its Right and Left, particularly in Derry and Belfast. Aontu stood 16 candidates in 7 councils, winning a councillor in Derry. It soon extended its essentially Catholic social conservative appeal to SDLP members too, gaining a defecting councillor in Mid-Ulster. But Sinn Fein also lost support to its Left, with People Before Profit - PBP (one-time Irish SWP front) gaining 4 new councillors, 2 in Belfast and 2 in Derry, and the Cross Community Labour Alliance (the Socialist Party of Ireland's Northern Ireland front) gaining 1 councillor in Enniskillen. Dissident Republican Gerry Donnelly also increased his vote as a Derry councillor, despite the election closely following the killing of journalist Lyra McKee, in the city's Creggan district, by the New IRA on April 19th.

Furthermore, Sinn Fein made little attempt to mobilise wider independent support against Brexit, but looked to "Leo Varadkar, head of the Irish government, Donald Tusk and Jean-Claude Juncker, heads of the EU, or Trump-led Capitol Hill... to defend the interests of the Irish people!"³⁶ The consequences of this soon became clear, when Varadkar and the EU accepted Brexit and the deal negotiated with the UK government. Above all else, the Irish government wants to protect trade links with Northern Ireland and the UK. It is not at all interested in furthering Irish reunification, not wishing to become responsible either for the high cost of replacing UK funding, or the possible violent opposition of hardcore Loyalists. Indeed, as part of any continued post-January 31st trade negotiations, the Irish government would probably be quite prepared to support the raising of the threshold for any reunification referendum from 50%+1 to 66.6%. And, as for looking to Capitol Hill, those one-time Irish Nationalist/Republican supporting Democrats (who helped to bring about the GFA) no longer have the influence they once did; whilst Trump's evangelical Protestant supporters have far more in common with many members of the DUP.

Indeed, Sinn Fein has tacitly recognised that it has been pushed into a secondary role over Brexit. Like pro- and anti-Brexit parties elsewhere in the UK, it has joined a tactical electoral alliance. Along with the SDLP it is not standing candidates in North Down or Belfast East, in order to assist the liberal unionist APNI. Furthermore, this move is unrequited in Belfast North (or South). This means that, unlike APNI, Sinn Fein is no longer standing in every Northern Irish constituency, undermining its declared all-Ireland commitment.

Nevertheless, whatever government – minority Corbyn-led Labour, National or Johnson majority-led Tory - is elected on December 12th, there is a greater likelihood of concerted moves being made to reconstitute the Northern Ireland Executive and Assembly. This is mainly so Northern Irish politics can be relegated to the margins at Westminster and in the British media. Such a reconstitution will not open up any road to Irish reunification, particularly in the face of the Unionist/Loyalist constitutional veto and Irish government hostility. If the DUP and Sinn Fein take up their leading roles again in the Executive and Assembly, this will just once more highlight the obstacle this bi-sectarian set-up is to any progress, and that would be just as true in the unlikely event of an Alliance/SDLP-led Executive and Assembly.

m) The fragmentation of Socialist organisation, its failure to offer an independent cross-UK electoral alternative to the Right populists, the Left social democrats or the constitutional nationalists

In December 12th, 2019, as in the 2017 Westminster general election, there will be no electoral challenge from independent Socialist organisations³⁷ except for Northern Ireland. In the 2015 general election, the two largest Socialist parties, the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) and the Socialist Party of England and Wales (SPEW), cobbled together the widest Socialist electoral challenge since the days of the Socialist Alliance and the Scottish Socialist Party (SSP). It was called the Trade Union & Socialist Coalition (TUSC), TUSC was originally set up by SPEW, which had also formed the Left anti-EU No2EU campaign along with Germanophobic, 1941-45 UK/USSR alliance nostalgic, Communist Party of Britain (CPB) members and a few fellow-travelling trade union officials. In England, TUSC also came to a carve-up deal for seats in the 2015 general election with the Left Unity Party and in Scotland with the SSP and Respect, Independence, Socialism and the Environment (RISE), an organisation whose leadership had mainly broken from the SWP. Significantly, despite both the SWP and SPEW having fraternal organisations in Northern Ireland, TUSC's electoral alliance did not extend there.

But, in the aftermath of the 2014 IndyRef1, constitutional issues dominated the 2015 general election. But none of the contending Socialist organisations had an independent political stance on these. They either ignored constitutional issues or tail-ended one or other of the mainstream parties. The SWP and SPEW, in particular, tend to fall back on a deeply engrained economism, whereby they see the constitution as a ruling or middle-class issue. They prefer to concentrate more on 'bread and butter' issues, particularly Austerity and the Cuts, not seeing that these can no longer start to be resolved within the current, crisis-ridden constitutional order.

During the 2015 general election, those parties which did have something to say on the constitution, whether the unionists, e.g. the Conservatives' EU referendum promise, the DUP's strident defence of 'Ulster'-British supremacy; or the nationalists, e.g. the SNP's support for independence and Sinn Fein's support for a new border poll, dominated the election campaign and the results. With TUSC having nothing to say over constitutional issues, its constituent political organisations were left to make their own statements. These reflected their own tactical adjustments to the constitutional options advocated by the unionist or nationalist parties.

TUSC, LUP, SSP and RISE performed very badly in the general election. The hopes of the retreating SWP and SPEW, now lay in opposition to the EU and support for Leave. SPEW had backed No2EU in the 2009 and 2014 Euro-elections, getting 1% and 0.2% of the vote respectively. However, the SWP was wary about the underlying chauvinist and anti-migrant workers sentiments of some of No2EU's participants and did not participate. But, after the defeat of IndyRef1, which both the SWP and SPEW had supported on paper (but largely leaving it to their local organisations to deal with, and organising very little wider solidarity), these two organisations fell back on their own 'British roads to socialism'. They backed leaving the EU and became Left Brexiters -or Lexiters (SWP) and Socxeters (SP). They saw the Brexit campaign not as battle between two sections of the British ruling class, but as a working class and petty bourgeois revolt against Neo-liberalism and Austerity, which the Left could take the lead of.

During the Leave campaign, Lexiters mainly held meetings in areas which went on vote to Remain, and largely ignored those areas which voted for Brexit. This mismatch between the small number who supported Lexit and the much greater number who supported one of the two Right-led Brexit campaigns, was to be even more marked than that between those Left unionists, whether in the Red Paper Collective or George Galloway's 'Just Say Naw' campaign, and the much greater numbers of conservative unionists in 'Better Together' or reactionary unionists in the Orange Order, during the IndyRef1 campaign.

The Lexiters failed to notice the Brexit leaders' close links to the new rising Right populism led from the USA, backed by major corporations and hedge fund owners. They hardly noticed that the Brexiteer's alternative to the EU was a closer alignment with the US to end the existing protections on labour, consumer and environmental rights, and to buttress NATO. They made no connection between the official Brexiteers and the 2016 Immigration Act and the Tories' plans to bring in a gastarbeiter system of migrant labour controls. They made little of the exclusion of the overwhelming majority of non-UK EU citizens and 16-18 year olds from the referendum franchise. However, the SWP,

in particular, could not help but notice the rising racist attacks and the greater size of far Right. But their front campaign, Stand Up to Racism, made no attempt to link this to the impact of the Right-led Brexit campaign, or to the continuing impact of the UK state's own immigration laws, which gave the far Right succour.

When, following the 2016 Brexit vote, not the slightest glimmer of Lexit prospects appeared, Lexiters stuck to their criticism of left Remainers. This had formed their main activity during the EU referendum campaign. But their failure to organise any independent demonstrations, or to participate in their own name in the 2017 general election to fight for the Lexit they claimed to want, was a very strong indication that they were on the political retreat. However, they found a new outlet for their Lexit politics in the Eurosceptic Jeremy Corbyn, who had been elected as Labour leader in September 2015.

As long as the Blairites and their successors had been in control of the Labour Party, many Socialist organisations had tried to build wider electoral fronts around Left social democratic politics (Socialist Alliance, Respect, and TUSC), sometimes claiming to be 'Real Labour' or old Clause 4 Labour. However, when the Left social democrat, Corbyn, became Labour leader, these Socialist organisations were all thrown into crisis. They had made no real attempt to spell out the difference between Socialism and Left social democracy. This was often seen as little more than the degree of nationalisation being sought, or a greater willingness to call for trade union-led strike action to back election promises.

'Real Labour' or Left social democrat, Corbyn made big inroads into those supporting TUSC, but also into the LUP, as well as opening up a breach in Scotland between those who now looked to Corbyn-led Labour and to those who looked to Sturgeon-led SNP (with leading RISE members tending to the former and SSP members to the latter, whatever reservations they still held). Furthermore, the SSP moved from its earlier opposition to Brexit to a Left version of Cummings/Johnson's 'Get Brexit Done'. The SSP hopes that as soon as the UK leaves the EU, good old economic 'bread and butter' issues can come to the fore, e.g. a £10 an hour minimum wage.

For most ex-TUSC supporters who supported Lexit, Corbyn and his immediate coterie supported an 'alternative' Brexit. However, this still involves new migration controls. This was covered up by many Left Brexiteers and key trade union leaders, like McCluskey, as being support for 'non-racist' migration controls. Once again, this demonstrated a British Left's blind spot when it comes to the nature of the UK state, in this case the state agencies responsible for migration controls. British racial equality laws have not prevented the

actions of the authorities that led to the Windrush Scandal, nor the eviction of Travellers from the site they owned at Dale Farm in Essex.

Most ex-TUSC members in England and Wales and some in Scotland now called for a vote for Corbyn-led Labour. This, despite the fact that the Right still constituted the majority of Labour candidates, and the party had no coherent position on Brexit. SPEW and SWP constituted, in effect, an unofficial external faction of the Labour Party, cheering on Corbyn and his inner coterie in their struggles with the Right Remainers (and ignoring their attempt to marginalise Left Remainers and their behind-the-scenes overtures to the Right Leavers in the party). And, in the December 12th general election, they are calling for a Labour vote. The fact that they are no longer offering an independent Socialist electoral alternative, highlights how far to the Right Brexit politics have gone, and how misplaced Lexit was. Despite the Right having a vociferous and united Johnson-led, hard Leave party to vote for, there are other alternative hard and far Right Brexit electoral candidates standing in the election – the Brexit Party (275), UKIP (44), Christian Peoples Alliance (27) Social Democrat Party (20), English Democrats (4) and BNP (2).

However, in Northern Ireland, there will be two Socialist organisations standing in the December general election and they have their origins in the British SWP-controlled International Socialist Tendency (IST) and the British SPEW controlled Committee for a Workers Alliance (CWI). These two organisations are People Before Profit (PBP) and the Cross Community Labour Alternative (CCLA). PBP was set up as front for the IST-affiliated Irish SWP and is an all-Ireland organisation; whilst the CCLA is the Northern Irish partitionist front for the Socialist Party (Ireland) - SP(I). As recently as 2016, the SP(I), standing in the Dail general election for its new electoral front, the Anti-Austerity Alliance (AAA) gained 4 TDs, as did PBP.³⁸ And in the Northern Ireland Assembly general elections in 2016, PBP gained 2 MLAs, 1 in West Belfast and 1 in Derry. None of these parties or fronts had made Irish or UK EU membership an issue in their electoral campaigns. Only the Communist Party (Ireland) had publicly advocated leaving the EU, and it only gained 185 votes (a 0.05 % decrease on their previous lowly performance).

However, following the EU referendum vote in the UK, the British dominated CWI and IST transmitted their pro-Lexit politics to their Irish affiliates. The first test for this occurred in the 2017 Northern Ireland Assembly elections. In Northern Ireland, Brexit is heavily identified with the Right, particularly the DUP, TUV, PUP and Loyalist paramilitaries, but also has support from the much smaller dissident Republicans, eager to start a military campaign against any new border posts and officials. So, it was not surprising that the PBP vote dropped and they lost 1 of their 2 MEPs. They retreated from open Brexit/Irexit

politics and concentrated instead on opposition to a hard border, which every party but the DUP, TUV and PUP supports.

In the Republic, during May 2019 local elections, Solidarity, (the renamed AAA) lost 10 of its councillors, whilst PBP lost 7.³⁹ For the 2019 EU elections in the Republic, Solidarity and PBP cobbled together a slate, but it won no MEPs, whereas just one of its co-sponsors, the SP(I) had gained an MEP in the 2014 EU elections. In Northern Ireland, neither PBP, nor CCLA wanted attention drawn to their unpopular Irexit/Brexit stances, so they declined to stand in the May 2019 Euro-elections, in the run-up to the slightly earlier May local elections. They concentrated on more local politics or acted as if they were the missing Corbyn-led Labour Party in Northern Ireland (with its more half-hearted Brexit stance). This enabled the PBP and CCLA to win 5 (an increase in 4) and 1 local councillor respectively.

This retreat to localism or being the surrogate for the Corbyn-led British Labour Party, and a concentration on ‘bread and butter’ and social issues (still important under the reactionary unionist dominated Stormont regime) has meant a further downplaying of the importance of constitutional issues. PBP and CCLA are even more likely to tail-end the political initiatives of others – such as PBP’s backing the for SDLP/Alliance call to reconstitute the Northern Ireland Executive and Assembly, and the CCLA’s open commitment to Corbyn’s Labour Party, which also wants to kick start the Executive and the Assembly. Growing localism has been accentuated by the SWP in Ireland becoming the Socialist Workers Network (SWN), a Socialist think tank for the PBP. Despite abandoning a party-building orientation, the SWN remains an IST affiliate, probably because its British SWP dominated leadership fears the consequences of expelling yet another breakaway group. The SP(I) has also come into conflict with the British SP over the future of the CWI. The SWN’s and SP(I)’s distancing from the sectarian ‘internationalism’ of the SWP controlled IST and the SP-controlled CWI is not likely to be replaced by a genuine internationalism but is more likely to accentuate these organisations’ localism.

PBP is standing in two seats, West Belfast and Foyle (which includes Derry); whilst the CCLA is backing an independent Labour candidate in Fermanagh & South Tyrone. The issues dominating the election are likely to be the impact of Brexit, the prospects for a new border poll versus the reconstitution of the Northern Ireland Executive and Assembly. And underlying these will be the outcome of the general election in Great Britain, with the Left looking for a Corbyn-led Labour government. And, like Corbyn, a large part of the Left in Northern Ireland hopes to insert economic issues, particularly defence of the NHS into these debates. Whilst the need for trade union action is often invoked,

senior union officials' acceptance of the existing state as an adequate framework for improving pay and conditions has an added more restrictive dimension in Northern Ireland. The NIC-ICTU is tied to the bi-sectarian institutions of the post-GFA agreements through Fresh Start. Socialists calling for trade union action, should use elections to go beyond attacking Sinn Fein and the DUP, and highlight the complicity of senior trade union officials in these attacks.

However, although now very much downplayed, PBP's (and the CCLA's) support for Brexit/Irexit highlights a specific problem in Ireland. This is on top of the failure to understand that such a stance, in the existing political circumstances, can only buttress the rise of global Right populism, and in particular reinforce the US/UK imperial alliance. If Ireland, north and south, were to leave the EU, where would the alternative trade links be found? Quite clearly this would create the best conditions for a new UK/US imposed trade deal. Nigel Lawson, former chair of the official 'Vote Leave' campaign, has even gone as far as to suggest that following Brexit, "it would be great' if the Irish free state realised it had 'made a mistake' in getting independence from Britain in 1922.'" ⁴⁰ If the GFA has been termed "Sunningdale for slow learners", then maybe Lawson's suggested post-Brexit deal could be termed the '(unamended pre-Partition 1912 all-Ireland) Third Irish Home Rule Bill for even slower learners'!

But, even Lawson acknowledges that, "I don't think it's going to happen."⁴¹ But if Ireland can be forced out of the EU, then the grounds for re-establishing the neo-colonial, post 1922 Irish Free State relationship with the UK, in alliance with the USA, are much stronger. Therefore, it is worth noting that Connor Rafferty is standing in the general election for the Irish Freedom Party (IFM) (also backed by Aontu) in Mid-Ulster. The IFM was formed in Dublin as 2018 as an all-Ireland pro-Irexit and anti-abortion party. The presence of Nigel Farage and Anthony Coughlan (an ally of the CPI in relation to Irexit) at their founding conference is a further indication of the Left/Right populist (and even worse, Red-Brown) convergence, which the old communist parties, and their would-be successors have been prone to. If Left groups are serious about Brexit/Irexit (in contrast to just making vote-catching populist appeals) then making links with the larger Right forces follows almost inevitably. Meanwhile in the December general election, it will not only be the now Brexit/Irexit-Lite 2 PBP candidates which are standing, but the Right pro-Brexit/Irexit Aontu, who are fielding 6 candidates and backing the 1 IFM candidate too.

The PBP, unlike the CCLA or the IFM, will receive a significant vote. It is a local Left social democratic organisation. But in some ways, it also a Left nationalist organisation, more Left SDLP than socialist Republican (just as

CCLA is more a Left version of the old Northern Ireland Labour Party than Loyalist) The PBP's sometimes James Connolly-invoking 'Workers' Republicanism' is designed to put a barrier between it and a wider Republican challenge to the existing UK state (something with a long tradition beginning with the Irish Labour Party in 1918). And despite the wider constitutional crisis in the UK, particularly in Scotland (and to a lesser extent Wales), this is not seen to be of enough importance to use the general election to organise a wider immediate social Republican, 'internationalism from below' challenge to the UK state, in an alliance with migrant workers who face an imminent attack should Johnson win the general election and Brexit be implemented.

n) Conclusion

There are only three likely immediate outcomes following the election on December 12th. Few think there is any chance of a Labour or Lib-Dem majority government. Many on the Left, though, are still convinced that, following the 2017 general election precedent, there will be a late surge for a Corbyn-led Labour, leading to the possibility of a minority Labour government. Clearly this would be a very unstable situation, with perhaps the greatest threat coming, not from any other deal-making political parties, but from the Right within the Labour Party. Right and Centre Labour MPs will remain a significant force. And any Left hopes that the trade unions would then organise action to defend the *Its Time For Real Change* manifesto proposals are very misplaced. Whether Right or Left, trade union leaders will oppose such action, other than possibly weekend demos 'to let off steam'. Members will be told not to rock the boat now that senior trade union officials at last have direct access to the 'captain on the bridge' - with 2020 style prosecco and canapes replacing 1974-9 style beer and sandwiches.

If the balance of political forces does not lead to Labour Right MPs ditching Corbyn, on what would soon be called 'Black Friday 13th', then wider pressure from both outwith and within Westminster could soon lead to a National government. There is little likelihood of a Johnson-led minority Tory government, because he has alienated the few significant Conservative Remainers and the DUP Leavers. Instead Johnson has concentrated on building maximum unity within the Tory Party by winning over the majority of the British ruling class to his hard Brexit politics, taking over much the Right populist UKIP and Brexit Party political agenda in the process and having the backing of Donald Trump and the powerful US-based Right. This means the election of a Johnson-led Tory government is a strong possibility. But it would

be a government presiding over a Union in which, outside England, the Tories only have either minority or insignificant support.

9.12.19

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/European_Research_Group#Funding

<https://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/politics/from-broadband-communism-to-a-marxist-dystopia-how-labours-social-democratic-reforms-have-been-branded-as-hard-left-fantasies>

<https://www.standard.co.uk/news/politics/general-election-2019-boris-johnson-calls-jeremy-corbyn-and-nicola-sturgeon-yokemates-of-destruction-a4281641.html>

<https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2019/jun/12/keir-starmer-urges-mps-to-back-safety-valve-to-stop-no-deal-brexite>

⁵ *Tories lay secret plans for an October 17th General Election, The National, 26.8.19*

<https://novaramedia.com/2019/10/14/john-mcdonnells-triangulation-risks-endangering-the-corbyn-project/>

<https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2018/sep/24/labours-left-divided-against-itself-over-reselection-reforms>

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/oct/17/labour-trigger-ballot-deselection-campaign>

<http://republicancommunist.org/blog/2013/10/28/after-grangemouth-what-now-for-the-left-in-scotland/>

<https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2019/jul/06/kinnock-says-corbyn-should-order-labour-to-back-may-brexite-deal>

<https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/1181970/Brexit-news-Supreme-Court-ruling-latest-Jeremy-Corbyn-Boris-Johnson-resign>

12 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-50108531>
<https://www.theneweuropean.co.uk/top-stories/how-did-your-mp-vote-on-the-brexit-deal-1-6336259>

14 <https://www.ft.com/content/2c492f60-fa6f-11e9-98fd-4d6c20050229>

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2019/10/08/leaveeu-fire-racist-advert-calling-angela-merkel-kraut/>

<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/election-2019-arron-banks-tells-leavers-to-ditch-nigel-farage-and-back-tories-9gbltkz5c>

17 <http://republicancommunist.org/blog/2019/01/31/12823/>

18 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/m0009tsn/the-andrew-marr-show-27102019>

19 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Just_Transition

And even when individual cases of anti-semitic comments do come up amongst new and less politicised members not understanding the distinction between Israel/Zionism and Jewish people - a conflation made as much by the Israeli state and Zionism as by the far Right - then automatic suspension or expulsion does nothing to combat such misunderstanding. It is more likely to lead to real anti-semitism. Attempting to find out the source of misunderstanding and then education are far better ways to minimise any anti-semitism.

21 <https://www.patfinucanecentre.org/mi5>

<https://www.newstatesman.com/politics/uk/2018/12/why-jeremy-corbyn-trying-woo-dup>

<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2019/oct/24/welsh-justice-review-calls-for-scottish-style-devolution-of-powers>

24 *The Guardian*, Editorial 6.12.19

25 **ibid.**

Sinn Fein felt its loss of overall nationalist control in Derry to the SDLP far more than its gain of overall control from the SDLP in Newry, Down and Mourne.

27 <https://commonweal.scot/big-ideas/green-new-deal-scotland>

<https://inews.co.uk/news/uk/nicola-sturgeon-snp-debate-monarchy-future-prince-andrew-jeffrey-epstein-1327736>

<https://news.stv.tv/politics/1441566-snp-members-reject-plan-b-for-securing-scottish-independence/?top>

30 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-50325815>

31 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gwlad_Gwlad

32 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-36616830>

<https://www.irishnews.com/news/northernirelandnews/2019/10/25/news/unionists-to-hold-more-brexit-protest-meetings-in-coming-days-1748056/>

<https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/brexit-deal-could-lead-to-loyalist-disorder-psni-chief-warns-38625979.html>

35 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caleb_Foundation

<http://republicancommunist.org/blog/2019/08/30/after-boriss-coup-lets-fuk-it-its-the-constitution-stupid/>. Part 5

The exceptions are the cultist sect, the WRP and the small propagandist sects, the SPGB and SEP.

Another 4 TDs were elected in 2016 from the breakaway Independents4Change. The traditional sectarianism between the IST/SWP and CWI/SP had already led to the break-up of their United Left Alliance in 2014, and to the departure of the Workers & Unemployed Action Group's' (W&UAG) TD in 2012. Independent4Change (O4C) , formed in 2014, was partially a response to both the SWP and SPs control-freakery within their front organisations.

There were undoubtedly other factors, apart from Irexit, involved here. The earlier breakaway W&UAG retained its councillor, whilst I4C won 3 councillors and the new breakaway Independent Left won 1. These breakaways were clearly a response to the sectarianism of the IST/SWP and the CWI/SP.

<https://www.newstalk.com/news/lord-nigel-lawson-hopes-irish-republic-realises-its-mistake-and-rejoins-uk-following-brexit-612949>

41 **ditto**