

Left- Horizons

Labour to power with socialist policies

After months of speculation, a general election has finally been called for December 12th. This election will be a decisive turning point in British politics and it is a contest that Labour can win. The half-million strong Labour membership, bigger by far than the geriatric membership of the Tory Party, will be straining every sinew to make sure the Tories are defeated and Jeremy Corbyn is catapulted into power at the head of a radical Labour government.

It is the first general election in December for nearly a century and the latest in the calendar in more than a century. Elections are not normally held in December, and for good reason, given the possibility of wintry weather affecting the turnout. But that is precisely Boris Johnson's calculation in holding a short, sharp election. He even opposed an election on December 9th rather than December 12th, not because he has a sentimental attachment to Thursdays, but in the hope that the later the date the more likely that tens of thousands of student votes will go missing. In 2017, the student vote was overwhelmingly Labour and proved decisive in many constituencies, notably in Canterbury, where the seat went to Labour for the first time ever. Johnson's own seat, Ruislip South in West London, includes Brunel University, with 10,000 students and staff. Johnson is hoping that students broken up from university or on their way home will not vote.

Potential of Brexit monopolising the election

The Tory Party relies upon the active support of the press and mass media rather than any campaigning by their membership, so no doubt Johnson is hoping that poor weather and the darker nights will deter Labour's legions of workers from effectively working on the ground.

One thing that is different to the 2017 election, however, is the potential for Brexit to monopolise the entire campaign. As we have argued, the trading relationship between the UK and the EU is not and has never been the decisive question facing the

working class. That issue is *austerity* and the drive to the bottom in wages, services, working conditions and in all the normal securities of life.

Nevertheless, the press and BBC will be doing their best to keep the Brexit as much as possible at the centre of the campaign in the next six weeks. That will chime precisely with the Tories' main slogan, which will be to "get Brexit done". Johnson is hoping to cut across the support in the polls for the Brexit Party and the only way he can do that is for the Tories to *become* the Brexit Party and make it the *only* issue in the campaign.

A means to drive living standards down further

Johnson is indeed aiming for a majority to ram through his Brexit deal. But it is what is behind it that matters. A Tory Brexit is nothing more than a means of driving down living standards even further. Johnson's deal is worse than the miserable arrangement that Theresa May cobbled together. What environmental protections and food standards there are now will be ditched. Previously vague commitments to maintain working standards and workers' rights – the so-called "level playing field" – have been *explicitly* jettisoned by Johnson. The NHS will be chewed to bits by big American medical corporations and pharmaceutical companies. The Tories, if they are allowed to leave the EU on their terms, will try to turn the UK into a low-pay, low-tax and low-skill economy off the shores of Europe. This is a plan that has been described as "Singapore on Thames", where inward investment will be attracted by the opportunity to exploit the lowest-paid workers in Europe.

The Labour Party is absolutely right to oppose this Tory Brexit, but it is vital that the election campaign goes outside and beyond that issue and raises the *class* issues that affect the majority of the population. A recent tweet from TUC pointed out that from 1997 to 2008, the average UK worker's wage rose by £4772 a year, but in the ten years that followed, from 2008 to 2019, the average *fell* by £705 a year. This is the reality of Tory Britain...low pay, insecurity, uncertainty, a shortage of affordable housing, the disintegration of the NHS, education and local services and a relentless drive to the bottom. These are the real issues that

affect millions of working people and their families. And it is on these issues that Labour has a clear advantage because the Tories have nothing to offer.

As Jeremy Corbyn said recently, *“The real divide in our society is not between people who voted Leave or Remain in 2016. It’s between the many who do the work, create the wealth, and pay their taxes, and the few, who set the rules, reap the rewards and dodge their taxes.”* The potential is there for a Labour campaign on the real issues. According to the *Daily Mirror* this week, almost half of people polled think Boris Johnson is lying about the NHS and a US trade deal. As well they might.

This will be a vicious election campaign and the press attacks on Corbyn and the Labour left which we have seen in the past will be multiplied ten-fold. No lie will be too big, no exaggeration too great, no slander too outrageous for the national press to repeat and for the BBC to echo. We expect nothing else from the Tories, but we should not be surprised if they will be assisted from time to time by the barbs of some right-wing Labour MPs. These people have learnt nothing from the experience of 2017, when they demanded that Corbyn stand aside as leader who was “unelectable”, but then found their majorities increased as a result of Corbyn’s campaign.

Labour’s fifth column is still in place

Many of the old Blairite MPs are still in place as candidates and will be elected as MPs. We have to say, as an aside, that many of them would have been de-selected in the last year if the soft-left of the Labour Party, notably the Momentum leadership, hadn’t caved in to the right of the party and ditched Open Selection at the 2018 Labour conference. Labour’s right wing are a fifth column who are capable of sabotaging the election campaign. As long as their own seats are safe, many of them would be happy to see a Tory administration rather than a radical Labour government led by Corbyn.

Politics is more unpredictable and volatile than it has been for generations and it would be rash to predict the outcome of the election at such an early stage. But Boris Johnson’s calculations may well backfire as Theresa May’s did in 2017. The Brexit Party, starting off in the polls at around 10-11 per cent, is likely to be squeezed by the Tories. The Liberal-Democrats, supporters of the Tory coalition from 2010 to 2015 and therefore among the architects of drastic cuts in welfare and services, have made remaining in the EU their *only* policy, and in truth they have nothing else to offer. It remains to be seen whether or not they can get over the stigma of supporting the Tories on all of their flagship policies in the first half of the decade.

Two million registered to vote in eight weeks

What will be the decisive factors at play in the election? It is notable that according to official government figures, nearly two million people have applied to register to vote in the past eight weeks. This is almost double the number of the previous eight weeks. Out of the two million recent registrations, more than half (58 per cent) were from people under 34 and only 7% were from those 65 and over. This follows a spike in September, when there was speculation about an Autumn election and 200,000 people applied to register in just 72 hours, again more than half of them under 35.

In the 2017 general election, according to the [Guardian](#), 55% of 25-34 year-olds voted Labour and among 33 to 44 year-olds, it was still 50%. A [YouGov](#) survey was even better for Labour: 18-19 year-olds were 66% for Labour, 20-24 year-olds 62%, 25-29 year-olds 63% and 30-39 year-olds 55%. It is true that there is no guarantee that history will repeat itself, but Labour can at least be confident that it can win the majority of young voters again. It is still the case that Labour is stronger, the younger the age of voters polled. This election will therefore be as much about voter registration as it will be about voting.

Labour’s mass membership can be decisive

Another important factor in Labour’s favour is its half million members, overwhelmingly supporting Jeremy Corbyn. Most of these have not been active in terms of participation in meetings and that is the only reason why right-wing Labour candidates have withstood trigger ballots. But the three big influxes of membership in two leadership campaigns and the 2017 general election campaign, have left a permanent mark. Labour won the recent Peterborough bye-election, against the odds, precisely because it was able to mobilise hundreds of party workers one weekend after another in the run-up to the vote.

Even if only a fraction of Labour’s membership turn out to work in the election, it will completely eclipse anything the other parties can do. If the Labour Party supplements the work of its large membership with mass rallies up and down the country, as it did in 2017, it will not only by-pass the hostility of the media and TV, it will help to galvanise and energise the membership.

But key question, as ever, is what is in the Labour manifesto and how this is put across to the electorate. The more radical it is and the more it addresses the day-to-day needs of ordinary workers and their families, the better Labour’s results will be. Labour’s manifesto commitments from 2017 – and we hope and expect they will be even better this year – were extremely popular, as one opinion poll after another shows.

Labour regained 3 million votes in 2017

An energised labour party can do again what it did in 2017. In that election, Labour won back three million votes that had been lost by Tony Blair and New Labour. The jump in Labour’s support in 2017, by nearly 10 per cent from the 2015 election, was the biggest jump in Labour votes since 1945. Labour began 20 points behind in the polls and came within a whisker of winning. If the campaign had gone another two weeks Labour might have won. Unfortunately, there are some even on the left of the Labour Party who are already wringing their hands in despair. We say to them, remember 2017. *Left Horizons* supporters will be out in the streets and on the door-knockers with other Labour Party members and we will fight like never before. Capitalism offers nothing to working class people, except more blood, toil, tears and sweat. We need a Labour government that looks to socialist solutions for all the ills of society. Let us work, fight and campaign for the next six weeks to put Boris Johnson and his rich elite where they belong: in the dustbin of history.

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