

# What happened and why?

*These are some brief initial observations on the outcome of the General Election.*

Understanding exactly what happened in the General Election will take some time. It makes no sense to draw hasty conclusions on what is a complicated outcome in which a number of different trends appear to have clashed. However, what is clear from the results is that the small Parliamentary majority which the Tories gained was delivered above all by the First Past The Post (FPTP) electoral system. The bald facts are these:

- The Tory vote across the UK increased by 608,306 on 2010
- Labour's vote increased by 737,799
- The Libdems lost a staggering 4,420,936
- UKIP's vote increased by 2,961,583
- The Green Party vote increased by 868,946.

The Tory party's electoral majority is based on an increase in their vote of just 0.8%. Whilst they could be said to have a Parliamentary mandate of sorts *it is by no means a popular mandate*. For the Tories to say that “the country has given us a mandate” is a travesty of the truth. The fact remains that a little over one third of the electors who voted, voted for them, with 63.1% voting against them. This election result shows the need for a serious campaign for a proportional voting system. FPTP has always been defended in the Labour Party and the trades unions on the grounds that it delivers a majority Labour government. This is unlikely to happen again. There is nothing wrong in principle with coalitions or alliances, it just depends who it is with and for what purpose. That FPTP has delivered a small majority for the Tories is the accidental result of the configuration of votes at a time when the two party system is dead and buried. FPTP is undemocratic and is more easily manipulated by electoral boundary changes (the Tories have plans to change them again). Ironically FPTP has delivered a virtual monopoly of seats for the SNP on the basis of a 50% vote in Scotland.

## **Failure of Labour**

That the Tories did as well as they did after five years of an unprecedented austerity programme is an indication of the utter failure of Labour. As Nicola Sturgeon pointed out even if the SNP had not won the overwhelming majority of seats they did in Scotland Labour would not have had sufficient seats to form a government because they failed to beat the Tories in England. As you can see from the table below their vote increased by 3.6% in England but from the low base at the end of the Blair/Brown governments. Labour gained a million votes more than in 2010 in England compared to a gain of just over half a million for the Tories. However, the Torvote was nearly 2.4 million ahead of Labour.

Coming away from voting last Thursday I was chatting to an old couple on our Council estate, traditionally a strong Labour voting area. The bloke said to me “they are all the same”. He and his wife were traditional Labour voters. Despite his misgivings he had voted Labour because he was fearful of what the Tories were doing to the NHS, and what they

would do if re-elected. On the Council estates of Swindon the turn out was less than 60%, 10% or more lower than Tory voting areas. There was a similar picture on the national level. People who would never vote for the Tories simply did not come out to vote or switched to another party. Labour had failed to galvanise their traditional voters and some of them had turned to UKIP. You cannot mobilise a vote to win a majority if voters are just voting for the least worst option, or just keeping the other lot out.

### **The rise of the SNP**

For many years Labour treated their working class base of support as electoral fodder, especially, but not only, in Scotland. What has happened there is of such significance that it merits separate discussion. However, suffice to say that the working class vote has deserted Labour en masse for the SNP based on the experience of New Labour, the Scottish Parliament and the referendum campaign. The SNP vote in Scotland rose from 19.9% in 2010 to 50% in this election. Labour's vote fell from 42% to just 24.3%. It lost over 300,000 votes. The fact that Labour in Scotland worked with the Tories in the referendum campaign did not go down well with working class voters, even some of those who voted against independence. There even some Scottish local authorities where Labour has gone into coalition with the Tories. They seem to hate the SNP more than their traditional enemy. Labour learnt nothing from the referendum and the election of a right wing machine man like Jim Murphy sounded its death-knell. This was the man who said that Labour would not lose a single seat to the SNP whereas it won just a single seat itself and lost 40!

Faced with the Tories desperate ploy of the 'threat' of a Labour/SP coalition, Miliband gave credence to the Tories argument rather than pointing out that if there were a hung Parliament then both the Tories and Labour would have talked with other parties (including Tories to UKIP) to try and form a government. But, of course, for Labour defence of the United Kingdom is raised as some key 'principle'.

### **Failing to 'go beyond New Labour'**

In England where the Tory vote went up by 1.4%, they have 41%. The gulf between the Labour vote and Tory vote in England is large, but not unbridgeable at 9.4%. Yet Labour has conceded so much ground to the Tory 'narrative'; the supposed need to 'balance the books', acceptance of their spending limits and so on. Labour was unable to challenge the Tory explanation of 'Labour's recession'. The fundamental reason for this failure was *their refusal to face up to their own responsibility for the crisis*. It wasn't just that they failed to regulate the banks and financial institutions. The global crisis was the product of the restructuring of capitalism begun by Reagan and Thatcher. Blair and Brown worshipped globalisation. They were proselytisers for the very neo-liberalism which produced the global crash.

However, whilst Miliband talked of 'going beyond New Labour' he still defended the politics of Blairism. The Party leadership tenaciously cling to their support for 'right to buy' despite the damage it has done. They are "the party of aspiration", personal rather than collective; of what is really self-interest in the competition of one against all. They are the Party of the 'nuclear deterrent', prepared to spend billions on this socially useless kit whilst prepared to

cut socially useful spending. They want to 'make the market work' rather than re-nationalise the railways or the privatised utilities which are ripping us off. Miliband reiterated his support for the abandonment of Clause 4 and its replacement by the 'dynamic market economy'. It was the very 'dynamism' of this unregulated market which caused the crash.

Exhibiting the same breath-taking historical ignorance that Blair did (he famously thought the founding of the Labour Party had been a 'historic mistake', splitting the 'progressives'), Miliband declared Labour to be a 'One Nation' party, praising Disraeli, supporter of the British Empire and the Monarchy (See "[One Nation Labour – New Labour-lite with a touch of Disraeli](#)"<sup>1</sup>).

Now with Miliband having fallen on his sword the political battle for control of Labour has started with the Blairites and the great man himself demanding that Labour 'return to the centre ground'. Various shadow cabinet members are lining up to demand that Labour must attract 'aspirational' voters, apparently people who shop at Waitrose and such. The Prince of Darkness himself, Mandelson is demanding an end to 'union influence' (as if there were any). Tristram Hunt, reputedly a historian, wrote in the Guardian that

"History shows us that combining empathy and entrepreneurialism is how Labour succeeds in office. That is how Labour rebuilt Britain after the second world war."

Yes, entrepreneurialism like introducing the NHS, building hundreds of thousands of Council homes, nationalising the railways and so on.

Most of them intellectual pygmies concentrate on how they think can Labour win an election rather than the fundamental question of what is Labour for, and what sort of society does it want.

### **The coming onslaught**

Meanwhile the Tories are going to move as swiftly as possible to deepen their war on the poor and on the trades unions. Ian Duncan Smith has been kept on at the Department of Work & Pensions, with the job of deciding how to cut £12 billion from the welfare budget. The privatisation of the NHS will continue apace in the form of contracting out more work to the private sector. The government will introduce its 'reform' of trade union legislation so that for industrial action to be legal a union ballot will have to secure a vote of 50% of those eligible to vote. Additionally in public services a Yes vote of at least 40% of the membership will be necessary. So if you ballot 1000 members you would have to have a return of at least 500 ballot papers and 400 of those would have to vote for action. A vote of 399 for and 101 against means that you would be barred from taking lawful industrial action. This from a government which gained only 36.9% of those who voted and 24% of the electorate overall. In contrast they demand an 80% yes vote on a 50% turnout. This is nothing other than rigging the system in favour of the employers and the state. This will provide a severe test of trades unions weakened by years of defeats.

However, the new government will face internal divisions which are potentially explosive,

<sup>1</sup> <http://martinwicks.wordpress.com/2012/10/09/one-nation-labour-new-labour-lite-with-a-touch-of-disraeli/#more-431>

especially in relation to the question of Europe. The Economist has written:

"So it is a night that far exceeded Tory expectations. But such is the ragged state of British politics that David Cameron looks condemned to preside over a government that will be weaker than the coalition he has run for the past five years, even as this election has deepened the problems Britain faces. The Tories must strengthen a fragile economy, manage the uncertainty of a referendum on Europe and salvage a union with Scotland that is falling apart."

They further added:

"The Conservatives celebrations may be short-lived. Thought Mr Cameron has returned to Downing St with far more Mps than he ever thought likely, his majority is wafer thin. Unable to draw on support from the shrunken Libdems he will rely on votes from his own party's Eurosceptic tight wing, which wants to leave the European Union. The United Kingdom itself looks more vulnerable than ever, following the triumph of the successionist SNP. Meanwhiole the nearly 4 million mainly English voters who cast their ballot for UKIP, only to see the party rewarded with a single seat in Parliament, may agitate for constituional changes in England too. An unpredicted election result marks the beginning of a very unpredictable time."

We cannot, of course, console ourselves just with hopes of internal divisions in the Tory party. As ever the results of struggles against the government will determine the course of events. I'll look at what they will throw at us and what our response should be in a more extensive article.

**Martin Wicks**

May 13<sup>th</sup> 2015

## Appendix

### 2015 General Election

#### UK result

Electorate 46,425,386

Turnout 66.1% (2010 65.1%)

	Seats	Gain	Loss	+/-	Votes	Share %	+/-%	2010 seats	2010 Votes	2010 %
Cons	331	35	11	+24	11,334,920	36.9%	+0.8%	307	10,726,614	36.1%
Lab	232	22	48	-26	9,347,326	30.4%	+1.5%	258	8,609,527	29.0%
SNP	56	50	0	+50	1,454,436	4.7%	+3.1%	6	491,386	1.7%
Libdem	8	0	49	-49	2,415,888	7.9%	-15.2%	57	6,836,824	23.0%
DUP	8	1	1	0	184,260	0.6%	0.0%	8	168,216	0.6%
SF	4	0	1	-1	176,232	0.6%	0.0%	5	171,942	0.6%
Plaid	3	0	0	0	181,694	0.6%	0.0%	3	165,394	0.6%
SDLP	3	0	0	0	99,809	0.3%	0.0%	3	110,970	0.4%
UUP	2	2	0	+2	114,935	0.4%	0.0%	-		
UKIP	1	1	0	+1	3,881,129	12.6%	+9.5%	0	919,546	3.1%
Green	1	0	0	0	1,157,613	3.8%	+2.8%	1	285,616	1.0%

Numbers voting 30,698,210 (2010 29,691,380)

#### England

Electorate 38,811,622

Turnout 65.9% (2010 65.5%)

	Seats	Gain	Loss	+/-	Votes	Share %	+/-%	2010 seats	2010 Votes	2010 %
Cons	319	32	11	+21	10,483,555	41.0%	+1.4%	298	9,931,029	39.6%
Lab	206	21	6	+15	8,087,706	31.6%	+3.6%	191	7,042,398	28.1%
Libdem	6	0	37	-37	2,098,430	8.2%	-16%	43	6,076,189	24.2%
UKIP	1	1	0	+1	3,611,367	14.1%	+10.7%	1	866,633	3.5%
Green	1	0	0	0	1,073,242	4.2%	+3.2%	0	258,954	1.0%

#### Scotland

Electorate 4,094,784

Turnout 71.1% (2010 63.8%)

	Seats	Gain	Loss	+/-	Votes	Share %	+/-%	2010 seats	2010 Votes	2010 %
SNP	56	50	0	+50	1,454,436	50.0%	+30.0%	6	491,386	19.9%
Cons	1	0	0	0	434,097	14.9%	-1.8%	1	412,855	16.7%
Lab	1	0	40	-40	707,147	24.3%	-17.7%	41	1,035,528	42.0%
Libdem	1	0	10	-10	219,675	7.5%	-11.3%	11	465,471	18.9%
UKIP	0	0	0	0	47,078	1.6%	0.9%	0	17,223	0.7%
Green	0	0	0	0	39,205	1.3%	+0.7%	0	16,827	0.7%

## Wales

Electorate 2,282,297

Turnout 65.7% (2010 65.1%)

	Seats	Gain	Loss	+/-	Votes	Share %	+/-%	2010 seats	2010 Votes	2010 %
<b>Plaid</b>	3	0	0	0	181,694	12.1%	+0.8%	3	165,394	11.3%
<b>Cons</b>	11	3	0	+3	408,213	27.2%	+1.1%	8	382,730	26.1%
<b>Lab</b>	25	1	2	-1	552,473	36.9%	+0.6%	26	531,601	36.2%
<b>Libdem</b>	1	0	2	-2	97,783	6.5%	-13.6%	3	295,164	20.1%
<b>UKIP</b>	0	0	0	0	204,360	13.6%	+11.2%	0	35,690	2.4%
<b>Green</b>	0	0	0	0	38,344	2.6%	+2.1%	0	6,293	0.4%

## Northern Ireland

Electorate 1,236,683

Turnout 58.1% (2010 57.6%)

	Seats	Gain	Loss	+/-	Votes	Share %	+/-%	2010 seats	2010 Votes	2010 %
<b>DUP</b>	8	1	1	0	184,260	25.7%	+0.7%	8	168,216	25%
<b>SF</b>	4	0	1	-1	176,232	24.5%	-1.0%	5	171,942	25.5%
<b>SDLP</b>	3	0	0	0	99,809	13.9%	-2.6%	3	110,970	16.5%
<b>UUP</b>	2	2	0	+2	114,935	16.0%	+0.8%	-	-	-
<b>Alliance</b>	0	0	1	-1	61,556	8.6%	+2.2%	1	42,726	6.3%
<b>others</b>	1	0	0	0	25,995	3.6%	-3.5%	1	47,778	7.1%
<b>UKIP</b>	0	0	0	0	18,324	2.6%	+2.6%	-	-	-
<b>Green</b>	0	0	0	0	6,822	1.0%	+0.4%	0	3,542	0.5%

