

If the electorate chose austerity it was because it was...

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I am bemused by a post by Jon Cruddas on [Labour List](#) this morning. In it he says Labour post election analysis has shown that:

The first hard truth is that the Tories didn't win despite austerity, they won because of it. Voters did not reject Labour because they saw it as austerity lite. Voters rejected Labour because they perceived the Party as anti-austerity lite. 58% agree that, 'we must live within our means so cutting the deficit is the top priority'. Just 16% disagree. Almost all Tories and a majority of Lib Dems and Ukip voters agree.

From this he concludes:

The electorate voted for fiscal responsibility.

And then adds:

But as the [questions] on wealth distribution reveal, the electorate also holds radical opinions on the economy. 60 per cent agree with the statement, 'the economic system in this country unfairly favours powerful interests'. This rises to 73%t amongst UKIP voters and 78% amongst Labour voters.

Before concluding:

Labour did not recognise the way the electorate is both economically radical and fiscally conservative. Labour's failure to understand the electorate works both ways.

I have to say that this is bordering on nonsense for three reasons.

First it says that public opinion cannot be swayed. That's obviously untrue.

Second, it ignores the fact that Labour sold an austerity agenda, but not as convincingly as the Tories and so were bound to be seen as less effective in doing so.

And third, it ignores the fact that, [as Paul Krugman has noted](#):

There is no fiscal crisis, except in the imagination of Britain's Very Serious People; the policies had large costs; the economic upturn when the UK fiscal tightening was put on hold does not justify the previous costs. More than that, the whole austere ideology is based on fantasy economics, while it's actually the anti-austerians who are basing their views on the best evidence from modern macroeconomic theory and evidence.

And that, as Paul Krugman has again noted:

What's been going on within Labour reminds me of what went on within the Democratic Party under Reagan and again for a while under Bush: many leading figures in the party fell into what Josh Marshall used to call the "cringe", basically accepting the right's worldview but trying to win office by being a bit milder.

Or, to put it another way; of course this was the outcome of the polling: Labour's own failure resulting from adopting austerity and then failing to sell it convincingly made that inevitable. The electorate were presented with only one option, which was austerity, which they were told was the only option available, and when they came to assess who was credible to deliver it opted for the party who clearly believed in it, however wrong headed that might be.

The error was then in offering austerity in the first place. There is no other explanation for the finding. The SNP result in Scotland shows what might have happened if an anti-austerity programme had been offered instead.

And the consequence is that any party who wants change has to offer an alternative to austerity. Nothing else is plausible. But I am sure that is not what the intended interpretation is.

And, with apologies, I know I have ignored the Green option.