

Oldham honours the memory of Michael Meacher

Published: January 13, 2026, 7:04 pm

The late Michael Meacher MP was a friend of mine with whom I had the honour to work closely on some issues during the last parliament. His death was a shock and a loss and so I was pleased for that reason to see that the people of Oldham honoured his memory by returning a Labour MP - with an increased majority despite all that had been suggested in advance - in yesterday's by-election in his old seat. I have no doubt that Michael would have preferred to still be the local MP, but given the circumstances I am sure he would have been pleased with this outcome.

Politically it is also a significant outcome. Despite the extraordinarily negative reporting - even after the victory - from [the likes of the Guardian](#) (who only a day or so ago were suggesting turnout may only be 20% when it was actually 40% and that Labour would struggle, which turned out to be complete nonsense) the actual result repeated the May 2015 trend of delivering the unexpected.

The Labour vote went up, significantly. It is claimed this is because of a strong local candidate and I have no doubt that helped, but so was Michael incredibly well known in May. And it has been claimed that this result was despite, rather than because of, Jeremy Corbyn - a man Michael Meacher had been proud to support. I have to say it just seems to me that this was a strong Labour vote for three reasons.

First, in memory of Michael: there has been a strong tradition of Labour voting. This was, no doubt, reflected in organisation on the ground.

Second, the candidate is reported to be good, and I am sure that is true.

Third, there is national politics. In Oldham a vote to go to war on Wednesday may have been significant. And an anti-austerity message from Labour nationally no doubt resonated. How do we know this is likely? I'd suggest the evidence is in the Conservative vote halving - most going to Labour.

And UKIP? It simply also ran, badly, again. It picked up a few Tory votes but not in any way enough to make a difference.

This then was in many ways a conventional referendum on the government in office and the Conservatives seem to have done badly and Labour surprisingly well.

In that case Labour is definitely a credible opposition. It is, in fact, a winning opposition. And the issue of note is the collapse in the government vote, which has major implications for the Brexit vote to come.

In the meantime, those who have said Labour is over need to think again. That appears not to be the case. And for the sake of democracy in the UK that is good news.

Again, I think Michael would be pleased.