

F All for Nuttall is little comfort for Labour

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It was an interesting night for by-elections.

Let's celebrate the good news. UKIP could not win Stoke. Paul Nuttall's credibility has been shattered and even Farage cannot want to return to UKIP now: their vote fell heavily in Copeland in an ominous sign for them of what might well be happening in the country as a whole. The Brexit vote has happened. UKIP has no role left. The signal is emphatic and clear to politicians: move on and deal with the world we're now living in.

For democracy it was a poor night: turnouts were low. In Stoke the MP was returned with 37% of the vote; in Copeland with 44%. Most people remain unrepresented in Westminster, as usual. It's very hard to defend such a situation any more. The time for electoral reform has arrived.

The chance of it happening also seems more remote than ever. The Libdems saw vote increases in both by-elections that will cheer them and discourage deals. Labour remains as tribal as ever. The Conservatives will after an historic by election win - the best for a sitting government in a century (I believe) - see no reason for changing anything.

Which brings attention back to Labour. Yes they won Stoke, but so they should have done. It took a mighty effort to do so. Losing Copeland more than neutered that. Again we're talking about over-turning a century of history. I know the excuses that will be offered: it was all about nuclear. But it was also all about the NHS. And Labour could not win when the local maternity unit was closing and as a dad who has had to drive an in-labour mum to hospital wondering whether we would make it in time I can tell you an hour to a maternity unit seems far too distant to me. So Labour lost on two counts. And with hospital closures across the country coming up this is a disaster.

If Corbyn has not got the sense and the vision to go now then things can only get worse for Labour. There is no doubt that he lost this election. We desperately need an opposition in the UK and he is not providing it, Worse, it is now clear that he never will. For the sake of the country as a whole it is time he moved on.

But I doubt that he will. And that's deeply depressing for what it says about the left, Labour, and the greed for power of supposedly ethical politicians.