

Yesterday was useful but don't underestimate the...

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I do not claim to be a student of parliamentary history. But I am aware of the norms of my lifetime. And by that standard yesterday's parliamentary votes were unprecedented.

May did not just lose. She has done that before. Her government was found in contempt of parliament. That, I gather, is previously unknown.

And on Brexit, parliament anticipated their own rejection of her negotiated deal by granting themselves the right to decide what happens next. In doing so there is little doubt that they have decided that May will either not know what to do, or will get it wrong if she presents a plan. This was a vote of no confidence in all but name.

But May carries on, largely because Cameron and Clegg stitched up parliament so that a failed government could survive, come what may (or May).

The consequences are obvious.

We have a Brexit crisis. There is no viable Brexit plan anymore, although the fact that parliament has taken back control just about (I hope) rules out a hard Brexit because parliament will never vote for that. Remain is all that is left, and it now looks like the Brexiteers much-loathed European Court of Justice might rule that possible without the consent of the other 27 member states in the very near future. But how we get there is not clear.

We have a prime minister in crisis. It seems almost impossible that May can survive a lot longer.

We have a governing party in crisis. I think it reasonable to assume that there is no one else who could now unite the Tories.

We have a Labour Party in crisis. Despite all this it cannot command convincing poll leads.

We have a constitutional crisis. The fact that it is proving so hard to get the rid of the government despite these continuing failures is evidence enough of that.

We have a potential national crisis. I listen too well to my Brexit friends, and the none too subtle warnings of some of them of what they think will happen to prominent Remainers in the event of us staying in the EU, to think that all who wanted to leave the EU will accept remaining with equanimity.

And we have a foreign affairs crisis: our national reputation will be diminished for generations. The idea that we are a player on the world stage can be quietly forgotten. The idea that we can achieve much in the EU can also be laid aside for a while. Acquiescing is the best we can do whilst a long process of re-assimilation takes place.

All that can be said is that the Good Friday Agreement is intact; a conflict with Spain over Gibraltar has been avoided; Scotland may take a little longer to leave the Union (although I cannot be sure of that) and British business has greater certainty, which will transfer into economic prospects that are better than those that would have happened with Leave, but will still not look that good.

Which, in other words means that all the massive range of issues that have needed to be addressed in the last two years are still outstanding. Resolving those issues, from failing public services, to failing benefits systems, to failing infrastructure investment, to an absence of policy to tackle climate change, to building the homes this country needs, to delivering tax justice, to ensuring that we never again suffer this constitutional mess, to also setting budgets that permit all this whilst facing down the EU, to solving private debt crises, to bringing economic policy out of the control of bankers and back into the heart of government: all of those issues still need addressing.

And I am really not sure who has the vision to take that on.

But I did note that Labour, the SNP, LibDems, Plaid and the Greens could work together yesterday in the national interest. If only they could also work together to deliver reform in the wake of this national disaster we might just have hope. I stress, might.

I am a pragmatist. It was good to see parliament assert its will yesterday. But there is a long, long way to go as yet. And given the scale of the task facing the country - which I would rate as the biggest challenges since 1945 - I am not confident that the answers are in any one party - not least because, as yet, I do not see anyone party winning a general election.

And that is a profound concern. Not least because Labour remains so tribal.