

The old politics of the twentieth century is dead

Published: January 13, 2026, 1:45 am

Much as I'd like to find a silver lining in Labour's decision on Brexit yesterday I can't. If the policy is to a) get a deal if prefers (which won't happen) or b) a general election (which it cannot decide upon) or, only then, c) a People's Vote then Labour has knowingly become a Brexit party.

Let's be clear: May's Deal is dead.

So is a compromise deal: there are ample Tories who will vote against it, as will many in Labour.

That then will leave the Tories wasting months looking for a new leader.

If that does not waste all the time until 31 October then votes of no confidence in the new Prime Minister will instead, with the DUP probably withholding their support for the Tories this time.

So a general election will happen, but because others chose it. And what yesterday's vote makes very clear is that in such an election Labour will be a Brexit party. That's clearly what Corbyn wants.

In that case the idea that Labour will ever allow rally allow the option of a People's Vote is not on their proverbial, and deeply annoying, table. It's a pretence that it is.

This has three consequences. First, for a lot of people it is going to make voting Labour very hard indeed.

Second, it is likely going to deliver hard Brexit. I do not think anything is guaranteed on this issue, but this now looks 90% likely because all likely major party leaders actively want it: all they are seeking is to avoid the blame for it.

Third, this means that the political disruption continues. Scotland will depart, because the major English parties have nothing to say in response to the SNP there. Northern Ireland will move that way too. And in the chaos of post-hard-Brexit England and Wales

there will have to be political realignments, in which the 'keep it as it was and hand the power back to the markets, small c conservative' Change Party is not a viable option.

When the history of this era comes to be written Labour's decision to abandon Remain voters yesterday, when it could have provided itself with a solid platform of support and Remainers in England and Wales with a short-term viable political choice, will, I think, be seen as pivotal in the collapse of both Labour and Tory parties and politics as we have known it.

That collapse is what I expect now. And it's because neither Labour or Tory leaderships have a clue about what they want that can also in any way appeal to a party, let alone the electorate. The old politics of the twentieth century is dead. Now we await the new.