

Corbyn v Johnson and the paralysis created by Brexit

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We got an answer from the Johnson v Corbyn debate to the question I asked yesterday as to what would happen if Brexit was taken out of the election. It was, it seems, that Johnson would have nothing to talk about.

Ignore his rudeness, continually talking over Julie Etchingham and ignoring time limits. Ignore too the continual re-hashing of deeply annoying phrases like 'oven-ready Brexit' and 'we've got a fantastic deal'. Put aside the multitudinous lies, such as the denial that there will be a trade border between Great Britain and Northern Ireland when glaringly obviously there will be. Instead just look at content.

He was forced to say the NHS was not for sale, when the negotiations are underway. He, almost unbelievably repeated his claim there is a plan to build 40 new hospitals when that is an outright lie. And the only other policy issue he addressed was climate change, where he could not say that this was really the biggest issue facing us, as Etchingham invited him to do. Thereafter it was only clichés on Brexit. There was nothing else.

Jeremy Corbyn, in the circumstances, did better. He still failed to deliver convincingly on Brexit. But on occasion (racism, for example) his passion came through. As it did in the NHS. And he thought better on his feet, without a doubt. That did not mean it was a great performance. It wasn't. A great many direct hits, on lying about hospitals for example, were simply not made. But at least he showed he had other concerns.

That was reflected in the result. YouGov showed 51% for Johnson and 49% for Corbyn. Given the relative standing of their parties and their own popularity that is a considerable success for Corbyn. Reproduced in an election that would deny the Tories a majority, with ease.

This was not a knock out blow. But Johnson was the loser on the night. And people really should be worried that what his performance signals is the reality of his deal. What it actually means is that there will be only one issue in British politics for years. Brexit will not happen in January, or whenever. It will go on, and on, and on. Forget

those hospitals. Forget everything. The paralysis of the country will just get worse. And all because of something we simply do not need to do.