

When abstention is the only option

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Labour is sitting out today's Covid 19 lockdown vote.

It would be wise of the SNP to do the same. This is an English vote.

Plaid Cymru could use the same logic, as could Northern Ireland parties.

The logic is easy to identify: as the Tories propose action that may well lead to a third wave of coronavirus that goes against scientific advice and the actions of other countries, let them take responsibility for their decisions.

Perhaps more importantly, let their divisions be seen. The electorate needs to know they are not united.

But is there an important precedent in this? Should Labour also be indicating to Johnson that he cannot rely on Labour to get him out of a mess of his own creation when it comes to Brexit?

The possibility of a Brexit deal remains. I have no idea whether it is likely. The UK negotiators are so crazy that anything is possible. But suppose they choose not to sell fisherman out, after all, and do a deal that lets them sell the fish they catch (which will be the excuse offered that, conveniently, happens to be factually accurate), then what does Labour do?

Whatever deal there might be will be bad for the country. Surely Labour cannot support that?

But a deal will be better than no deal. Surely Labour cannot suggest it prefers the no deal option and vote a deal down?

This is a big question for all the opposition parties and it seems that the answer that they should give today is the one that they will also have to deliver on a Brexit deal. They have to make the Tories own the mess, having made very clear why they will not vote for it, whilst not voting it down. Abstention may be the only option to make clear

that the mess to come is not of their making.

I am not sure there is another option.