

Out of the political confusion of this week the new is ...

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There is one very clear message from this week's elections. It is that politically the UK is in a very confused state. This needs some discussion. A thread follows.....and was posted on Twitter minutes before this post was published here. It was as follows:

Scotland has a strong pro-independence majority at Holyrood. No one but a charlatan could deny it.

Wales has rewarded competent, even if slightly boring incumbency. Plaid Cymru did not make the cut through it hoped for. And yet Labour's win is so distinct it feels like an expression of independent Welsh thinking nonetheless.

Except that is that elsewhere - in Manchester, Liverpool and London, Labour also proved it can deliver and win repeated terms in office.

Unionism in Northern Ireland is in chaos, and without leadership at present.

The Tories won Hartlepool. The Red Wall is theirs for now. But they cannot win Cambridgeshire or the Isle of Wight.

The Greens did well.

Despite all that it is easy to see Johnson as dominant. That is what the media portrayed on Friday. But now? Really? What is actually happening?

This feels incredibly Gramscian to me. The Italian philosopher famously said that there is always a moment when the old is dying and the new is waiting to be born. I suspect we are in that moment now.

My suspicion is that much is dying. The UK is, for a start. Brexit is history. We all now know that. But its legacy is that the UK is dying. Without a common membership of a

common union it has nothing left in common to hold it together. Scotland has just realised that first.

Labour is also dying. Again, Scotland is leading the process of change, but the reality is that Labour is built around materialist constructs of class war - and they do not resonate with most people any more. That consigns it to history in its current form.

The Liberal Democrats are dead. Centrism is rightly seen as indecision in a world where new direction is required. The party has nothing left to say to anyone any more.

And the Tories are nearly dead too. The party I once knew - of MacLeod, Gilmour and Walker and their likes - who once dominated Tory thinking has long been a memory. Major was its last outpost.

What is not acknowledged is that the Tories now have no ideology at all. Neoliberal monetarism killed the one-nation Toryism, but that philosophy has also died now. Sunak's quantitative easing is evidence of that. But so too are freeports - a meaningless gesture passing as policy.

All the Tories have going for them now is populism. And that is built around Johnson, a character built for that role without a rival close to his ability in performing it within his party.

Johnson succeeds where Cameron and May did not. Remember that the Tories did not look good under them, and majorities were hard to find. But there is nothing to Johnson except the promotion of division and discord as cover for failure. That is what populism does.

Expect much more division and discord, is my prediction. But also do not expect anything close to building back better, or reconciliation of the nations, or levelling up. There is no intention to do any of those things. Nor to deliver better public services.

The public will notice all of that. It will be unavoidable. And so too is something else. And that is that Johnson is not going to hang around in Downing Street for a long time. Commitment is beyond Johnson. And his friends have already left Number 10. So too will he.

Will he make it to 2024? Maybe, but probably not, and by 2026? I can't see him as leader then. Who will succeed him? The Tories are as bereft of talent as Labour is. We have hollowed out politics. But what that means is that there is no one else to lead the division and discord.

What Johnson is doing is taking the Tories towards a dead end as surely as Starmer is taking Labour in that direction. Very different men can neither deliver managerialism or discord to a country anxious for direction, when none is on offer.

The reality is that both our leading parties are walking the political path to oblivion. Labour as it stands is structured for a fight that belongs to the early twentieth century. The Tories are intellectually bankrupt, seeking now only the refuge of the scoundrel.

What happens then? I expect the answer is quite a lot.

We have to redefine the nations. There will be four - although quite what relationship Northern Ireland will have with Ireland is not clear. I see no chance for a Union any more.

Scotland will develop new parties. The SNP will not be a single entity after independence.

Wales will have a surviving Labour Party. Its own Methodist roots will ensure that. But Plaid will have a different left of centre vision. The right will have little to do in either country.

And in England? More Covid, no levelling up, cuts to public services (which are planned), more corruption, Johnson being under continual attack from the Tory media (which is already happening) and economic failings will account for Johnson.

The Tories will seek to find another populist. But whoever it might be will repel people. Only Johnson has the ability to make the repugnant views of populism acceptable in England. The Tories will be in deep trouble by then.

And Labour? They will be in as much trouble, unless they abandon their infighting. Whether that is possible is in doubt.

So what will happen? In England I do not know. I am genuinely unsure in ways I am not in the cases of Wales and Scotland. England needs electoral reform. It needs to tackle corruption. It needs new thinking. It has to create a new story of what it is.

Scotland and Wales know what they are. That is why they have hope. England has to find it. The peculiarly English first past the post system, the two party dominance and the failed ideologies of past eras that say nothing to us now all suggest this will not happen.

But it has to. And I am sure it will. England changes. It always has. Its politics are bankrupt. That's the only conclusion on English politics from this week. But, from out of this bankruptcy, as Gramsci said, the new will be born. The sooner the better.