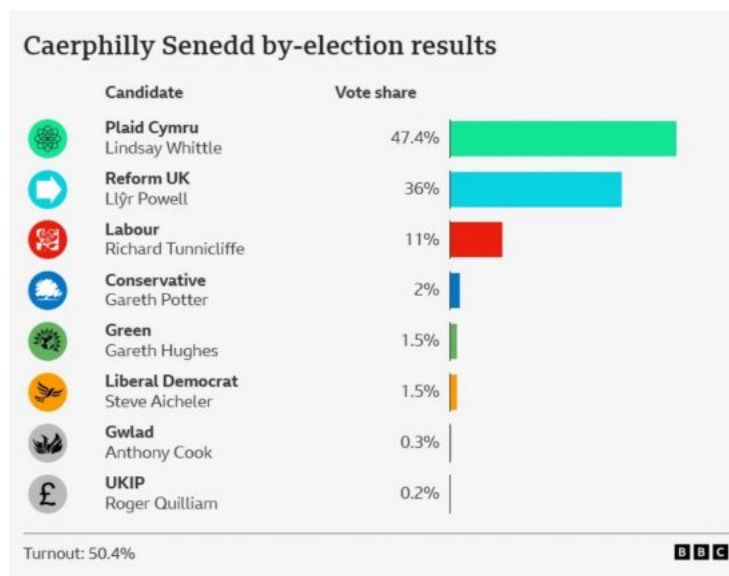


Caerphilly brings hope

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The Caerphilly Senedd by-election result yesterday was reported in advance as being on a knife-edge between Plaid Cymru and Reform, with Labour, the incumbents in all types of elections in the constituency over the last century, being forecast to be swept from power.

This was the result:



There are three things to note before considering the implications of this.

Firstly, labour was swept from power in the constituency. It was not consigned to the fate of all other parties with a national presence in the UK, but the result was ignominious, nonetheless. To pretend that Labour is now influential in Wales makes no sense at all when the swing against it is so glaringly obvious.

Secondly, this was not a knife-edge result. The victory by Plaid Cymru was emphatic. They deserve massive credit for what they have achieved. Since I believe Wales has a right to be a self-governing country, I am delighted for them.

Thirdly, Reform can be beaten. That is very clear.

So, what are the implications?

Firstly, it is apparent that people think Labour and everything to do with Keir Starmer's hopeless government are irredeemably bad. The takeover of the Labour Party by a group from the centre right, who have far-right tendencies on occasion, has been rumbled. Pinning a Labour badge on a candidate no longer means that people think that the person in question is interested in the well-being of ordinary people; they have realised that Labour now only serves the interests of a very narrow, extremely privileged group within society, and those with far-right and/or racist tendencies. As a representative of left-wing thinking, Labour is finished. I doubt it will recover.

Second, ideas, conviction, passion, dedication and plain straightforward belief matter, most especially when they are about something positive, rather than about something negative. Plaid Cymru, and their candidate in this election, evidenced all those things, and the win was theirs precisely for that reason. People want to vote for something. They do not want to vote against something. As a passionate believer in ideas and their importance in the political economy, I find this particularly heartening.

Third, Reform might be a part of protest, but they are not a party that people can believe in. A Senedd by-election is a perfect occasion to register a protest, but Reform could not win, simply because there was someone better to vote for. Reform can, therefore, be outmanoeuvred, and I believe they will be if parties elsewhere can demonstrate conviction.

Fourth, the Welsh nationalist movement is now as vibrant as the Scottish nationalist movement, and both are going to play a significant part in politics in the UK for some time to come, I suspect. The end of the so-called United Kingdom is on the agenda, aided of course by the significance of Sinn Féin in Northern Ireland. England had better come to terms with its diminished status and to no longer being a colonial power.

Fifth, if you're not going to win votes, under the first-past-the-post system, there is little point in standing. The Tories, Liberal Democrats and Greens were all embarrassed here. For the Lib Dems and Greens, this is not particularly worrying they know they have places where they are significant. But, the message might well be that this is the time to begin to build alliances, where actually standing down in favour of another candidate might be important. If these parties all accept that they will only achieve power through coalition, and that is likely to be true, then acting as if that is the case from the outset is an honest recognition of truth, rather than an exercise in forsaking power.

Sixth, the Tories are part of history. For them, there are no alliances that can now save them, even with Reform, because the public has already given up on them, as much as they have on Labour.

And, let's go deeper for my seventh point. There is a rejection of neoliberalism that is apparent in this vote. I stress, I interpret the vote for Plaid Cymru positively. I think it is right to do so. No one could vote for it to be against something. You could only vote for it to be for something. And as a party that has most definitely rejected neoliberalism, people are not just seeing a future for and in Wales in what it says, but also a future that rejects the values that have dominated politics for far too long. Neoliberalism is not dead, as yet, but it looks as though it is heading that way.

Even the turnout of 50% in a Senedd by-election is encouraging. When ideas take hold, people can be motivated by politics.

It would be too much to suggest that this election heralds a new era in politics. The history of by-elections is far too tortured to think that one unusual result always heralds change. They do not always. But this one is record-breaking simply for the scale of the defeat of Labour, the rejection of the far-right and the rise of a party of ideas to take a seat that changes the political landscape in Wales almost immediately. It is massively encouraging for all of us who have hope. I am imbued with a little more of that this morning. And that's a good start to any day.