



PROJECT ROME

# NORTHERN AGENDA

ELECTION SPECIAL 2017

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**Where to begin? The most unexpected election result in living memory left political pundits and campaigners across the North scratching their heads, and pollsters with their heads in their hands, again.**

Most polls predicted huge gains across the Pennine regions for Theresa May (and the late ones predicting a hung parliament dismissed as 'outliers').

Even the parties' internal polling and canvass returns pointed to a Tory landslide. Labour pulled resources from super-marginals deemed unsaveable to shore up other seats thought vulnerable to a Tory surge. It was an ultra defensive strategy but they need

not have been so worried. Of the 10 Labour marginals across Yorkshire and the North West with majorities of less than 10%, the Tories failed to turn a single one blue, including the super-marginals of Halifax and Chester with majorities of less than 100. Across the two regions Labour gained 8 seats, the Tories lost 5 and the Lib-Dems lost 2, leaving them with just 1 seat across the whole of the North of England. A senior Labour figure in the North admitted that they had no inkling of what was happening, even on election day, "All we knew was that there was a surge in people registering to vote, people we had no data on. On election day we knew that turnout was high, which could be a good or a bad thing. We were as surprised as everyone when we saw the exit poll."

But the results still leave the two regions as crucial battlegrounds at the next election, with 32 seats with majorities of less than 10%. Both parties launched their manifestos in West Yorkshire; Theresa May in Halifax and Jeremy Corbyn in Bradford. Given the electoral importance of these regions, don't rule out northern manifesto launches at the next election, whenever that may be. Jeremy Corbyn has placed the party on an election footing, anticipating another election as early as Autumn, and plans on a 60 seat tour of key marginals Labour need to win to form a government. We will be seeing a lot of his campaign rallies in the North.

As the Westminster horse-trading continues and the government try and get their Queens Speech through the House of Commons, what does the election result mean for the North?



**Jeremy Corbyn**

### Peak Corbyn?

Whilst Labour were celebrating a much better night than they were expecting, there were some more cautious voices in the party who fear that this is as good as it's going to get for a Jeremy Corbyn led Labour Party. If they are to form another government, they still need to win a further 60 seats, and that means appealing to swing voters and unenthusiastic Tory voters to win seats like Pudsey, Shipley, Bolton West, Calder Valley, Copeland... seats they have recently held whilst in government but failed to win this time, despite what one Tory MPs admitted was a "pig's ear" of a campaign and a poor personal performance by the Prime Minister. One veteran former Labour MP said, "We did better than expected, but I think we've reached peak Corbyn in the North."



**Andy Burnham**

### The Burnham Supremacy?

There is a quote from Chairman Mao that Andy Burnham might take from John McDonnell's copy of *The Little Red Book*, "Everything under heaven is in utter chaos; the situation is excellent." With uncertainty comes opportunity and for none more than the new Mayor of Greater Manchester. It is known that Burnham sees a role for his office beyond the boundaries of Greater Manchester. He has talked in the past about a Council of the North and of a Northern Brexit Committee. He sees the potential of Northern Metro Mayors to rewrite the governance of England. This is his chance. His time in government gave him an appreciation of the benefits of working in partnership, irrespective of party politics. If he can curb his more partisan instincts and offer to work with government, in return for more devolved powers and investment, then his vision of a Northern economic renaissance could begin to be realised. If he does and the North West continue to lead on English regional devolution then the inevitable call will be heard again from across the Pennines...

### Who will speak for Yorkshire?

Frustration at a lack of a devolution deal for the white rose county (or deals for its constituent parts) are growing, particularly amongst the business community. Their natural reluctance to get involved in political matters is being superseded by recognition that the Yorkshire regional economy is in danger of missing out to the North West and West Midlands because of a lack of a



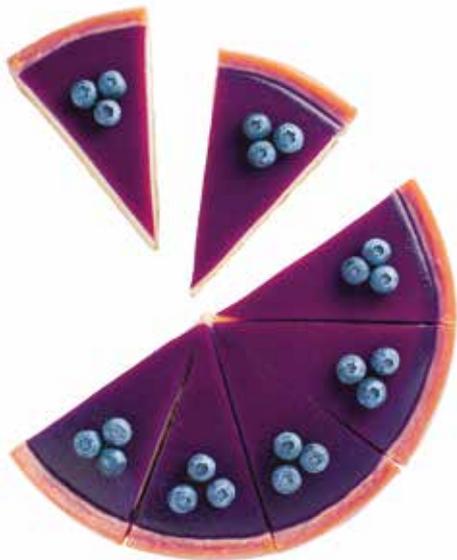
regional political voice. Admiring glances are being cast over the Pennines to the flying start made by Andy Burnham's mayoralty. Yorkshire businesses want the same and want it quickly. However, there is little sign of progress despite all parties involved nominally supporting some form of devolution. Help could be at hand. The return to Parliament of John Grogan, who won the key marginal of Keighley, gives the devolution cause a new parliamentary champion. A long standing political ally of Labour veteran MP Jon Trickett, another strong advocate of devolution and key Corbyn ally, they could form an important bridge between Yorkshire and Westminster in negotiating a deal. Former Northern Powerhouse minister, Andrew Percy, has announced that he will not be continuing in the role. Percy was a combative presence at the negotiating table; the appointment of a more emollient character to the role could be the best chance for getting devolution back on track. The biggest danger will be if the government decide it doesn't relish the thought of more Labour Metro Mayors making mischief in the North.



### **Devil in the detail?**

As details of the supply and confidence deal between the Tories and DUP are made public there is growing concern amongst MPs about the price paid to secure it, reportedly £1 billion (or £100million per DUP vote). That deal could be complicated by the Barnett formula, which maintains that any money spent in the Province has to be matched with funding in Scotland

and Wales. That issue isn't insurmountable; previous governments have made one-off payments to devolved governments in the past. SNP and Plaid Cymru MPs have already expressed their outrage that similar investment won't be made available for their devolved administrations. Theresa May could have an even bigger problem with her own backbenchers. If investment is to be diverted to Northern Ireland, where will it be diverted from? There are already grumblings among English MPs who fear for investment and infrastructure projects in their own constituencies and regions. Many Tory MPs believe that the DUP would never have risked putting Jeremy Corbyn in No 10 and governing as a minority administration would have been a less politically risky, not to say cheaper, option.



### Sharing the Ukip dividend?

The expected collapse of the Ukip vote duly came to pass and even exceeded the beleaguered pollsters predictions. But Tory hopes that the vote would naturally come home to them appear to be way off the mark, particularly in the North. In many seats it appears that Labour were the main beneficiaries of the Ukip collapse. Are these disillusioned former Labour voters returning to the fold tempted by Jeremy Corbyn's agenda of anti-austerity and renationalisation? If so, their votes proved crucial in saving some Labour seats and condemned some Tory MPs to defeat.



### Brexit, what Brexit?

The electoral impact of the EU referendum vote also appears to have been overstated. Of the 8 seats that Labour won in the North West and Yorkshire, 5 voted to leave the EU. The Tories sole gain in the North West from the pro-EU Lib-Dems, Southport, voted heavily to Remain. The conventional wisdom was that seats that voted heavily to leave, like Great Grimsby and Scunthorpe, would turn blue on the back of the Brexit vote. They didn't. It would appear that public services, the NHS and education were more of a determining factor in these seats.

### It was the young that won it

Again, conventional wisdom is that the young don't vote, so what's the point in targeting policies towards them; older people vote in their droves, so that's where you concentrate your flagship policies. It's worked for successive governments for decades. Although official figures aren't yet available, polling numbers suggest a significant surge in voting amongst the 18-24 demographic. One winning Labour candidate said he'd never had so many requests for selfies with teenagers, "They didn't really know who I was but they saw the rosette and said it was the closest they would ever get to meeting Jeremy Corbyn." Time will tell, but this could mean a significant change for party policy chiefs, as Corbyn's promise to scrap tuition fees appears to have been a significant driver of the youth vote. Caution is advised however, other polling suggests the real surge in the Labour vote was in the 25-44 age group; parents with young children facing cuts to free school dinners and elderly parents facing what was dubbed a 'dementia tax'.