



PROJECT ROME

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Editorial

Local Election Analysis

Local election results are usually seen as a weathervane for the prevailing national political mood.

The party of government usually get a bloody nose, the opposition parties share the spoils and argue about who had the better night, and then politics settles back down again. Last month's local elections were slightly different, and the results in the North, whilst not a political earthquake, were quite perplexing and asked more questions than they answered.

The broad-brush national picture was straightforward; a disastrous night for the Conservatives, a disappointing night for Labour, and a spectacular night for the Liberal Democrats.

Results in the North were somewhat more nuanced. A seasoned political commentator summed it up to Northern Agenda as, "A damp squib for Labour, a slightly less damp squib for the Tories and just a squib for the Lib-Dems."

At this mid-point in the parliamentary electoral cycle, and with a governing party in complete meltdown, a main opposition party should be counting its council seat gains in three or even four figures. And indeed, there were a couple of encouraging signs for Labour, particularly in Trafford and Calderdale. However, Labour lost seats in some of its key Northern heartlands, and lost control of Wirral and Stockport council. The Conservatives, whilst losing seats and control of a few councils, took comfort from the fact that it could have been a whole lot worse, and there were a few bright spots, like their performance in what will be key marginal seats at the next general election. The Liberal Democrats made modest gains, but not on the scale they managed in other regions in the country; although they did have a spectacular result in the City of York.

But it is the story beneath the headlines that is causing party strategists sleepless nights, particularly within the Labour party. Results extrapolated to a constituency level show Labour doing badly in key marginal seats

that they must win from the Conservatives if they are to win the next general election, an increasingly unlikely scenario. In the Leeds constituency of Pudsey, where Conservative incumbent Stuart Andrew MP is defending a 331 majority, the Conservatives had a good result, opening up a 4% lead over Labour, and taking the scalp of Labour councillor and Leeds council executive member, Richard Lewis. The picture was similar in other key seats.

There is an increasing sense of despair within Labour in the North over the performance of Jeremy Corbyn and the national leadership team. Sheila Murphy, the party's former 'super director' of its three Northern regions and one of its most respected and experienced campaigners, resigned from the party on the eve of the local elections, citing bullying and antisemitism by far-left factions in her native Liverpool, as well as Jeremy Corbyn's leadership and Labour's Brexit policy. It was a move that shocked senior Labour figures in the North. One told Northern Agenda, "Losing someone like Sheila will be the final straw for many activists. She was a massive figure in the party in the North of England. If she's leaving the ship, then others will follow."





European Election Report

The Conservative party has no elected Member of the European Parliament (MEP) in the whole of the North of England following the recent elections to the European Parliament. They lost their last remaining seat in Yorkshire & Humber and both of their representatives in the North West region. Labour lost a seat in both regions, leaving it with just one of the six seats in Yorkshire and Humber, and just two of the eight seats in the North West.

The big winners on the night, as in the rest of the country, were the nascent Brexit party, winning three seats in both regions. The Liberal Democrats and Green party were also celebrating. The former winning a seat in Yorkshire and Humber, and two seats in the North West. The Green party won a seat in each region, their first success in European parliamentary elections in the North of England.

It is difficult to imagine that these results will automatically be repeated in a future parliamentary general election, but senior figures within both the Labour and Conservative parties are alarmed at the collapse of their vote in their heartland areas across both regions, particularly coming on the back of disappointing local election results.

Deep splits within both parties over the future direction of travel are providing a potentially existential threat to both. Wigan's Labour MP, Lisa Nandy, has warned of the threat to Labour seats in towns like hers if Labour backs a second referendum. She believes that the political map in the North of England is on the verge of being redrawn. Other commentators are less apocalyptic, but it is clear that business as usual is no longer an option.