

The latest polls should warn the two main parties in the Commons to avoid a European election.

The latest poll for the possible European elections shows Labour on just 22% and the Conservatives on a new low of 15%. The two main parties in the current Commons commanded 82.4% of the vote between them in June 2017. Then both parties promised to implement the decision of UK voters to leave the EU. By making that important promise many UKIP voters returned to the two main parties. The Conservatives hoovered up Eurosceptic votes and Labour attracted left wing votes from people who had often not voted before. Labour kept a lot of its Leave voters in the Midlands and the North by promising to leave. The two parties have lost 55% of their vote according to the latest poll, and will struggle to get it back for the Euro election.

The votes have gone to parties clearly committed to an early Brexit on the one hand, and to parties wishing to abandon Brexit on the other. The pro Brexit parties are on 34% of the vote, and the anti Brexit parties on 29%

Brexit party 27% Greens 10%

UKIP 7% Lib Dems 9%

Change 6%

SNP/Plaid 4%

Total 34% Total 29%

It is difficult to see how a Euro election could be other than a verdict on how and when to get out of the EU. The indecision by Conservatives and Labour over this very issue has led to their collapse in the polls, as many voters have come to doubt their stated intention at the last election to get us out in good time.

My advice to the government remains the same. Announce you are cancelling the Euro elections and leave without signing the Withdrawal Agreement. We can leave on 22 May under the extension agreement. Offer talks on a free trade agreement for the day after we leave.

Looking at these polls were Mr Corbyn and Mrs May to do a deal to put the Withdrawal Agreement through they could avoid the Euro elections that way. The problem with that approach is as described yesterday. The Withdrawal Treaty entails binding us back into the EU, meaning both parties have a great deal of explaining to do as to why they have committed to it. Both parties would continue to suffer in the national polls from uniting to push through a much disliked Treaty that does not allow us to take back control of our laws, our money and our borders any time soon, and does not agree terms for our eventual possible departure from the EU. They are also leaving it very late to get the complex and unpopular legislation through Parliament against a determined minority opposing it all the way.

It is strange to watch two leaders fixated by such an unpopular Treaty and willing to preside over such a huge collapse in their party's vote owing to

failure to do as promised in the summer of 2017.

Mr Corbyn's dilemma

Over the next two weeks Mr Corbyn can determine the fate of Mrs May's EU Agreement. If he placed a three line whip on Labour MPs to vote for the legislation necessary to bind the UK into this new Treaty, he would give Mrs May enough votes to secure the matter. There might well be more Conservative rebels against such legislation, but not enough to prevent a grand coalition of Mr Corbyn and his loyalists with Mrs May and her government appointees putting through the necessary law. So far Mr Corbyn has been unwilling to do this, even though Labour has not made much of a case against the terms of the so called Withdrawal Agreement. We saw the kind of votes we could expect in such circumstances on the vote about the latest delay to our exit. Delay won by 400 to 120, with only 133 Conservatives voting for the delay despite a three line whip to do so.

Instead Mr Corbyn has concentrated on criticising the attached Political declaration. Understandably he has argued that signing the Withdrawal terms does not place the UK in a good position to secure the kind of eventual exit from the EU that he and others would like. He has placed considerable emphasis on his wish to see the UK stay in a customs union with the EU, though he has also hinted that he would still like some independent trade policy. It is difficult to see how these two usually incompatible positions could be negotiated with the EU. He has also made it official Labour policy in certain circumstances to have a second referendum to endorse any Agreement, though he seems more flexible about this than the Blairite wing of his followers.

Mr Corbyn now has to recognise that Mrs May could end up conceding the customs union. If she has her way and puts indicative votes to the Commons again, the customs union proposal without a Conservative whip on to oppose might get through. It has been voted down several times before because it was Conservative policy in the last election to oppose it, and because 3 line whips were placed against it. It would only take a handful of Conservative rebels against the Manifesto to tip over the vote, assuming all opposition parties coalesced around the proposal. Mrs May would probably then change her own mind and recommend the customs union.

This could place Mr Corbyn in a more difficult position. Why would he wish to take responsibility for the Withdrawal Treaty and for rescuing Mrs May's government? Why would he hand her a big win, finally vindicating her tenacious support for a Treaty which is opposed by a big majority of the public? More Labour than Conservatives might end up voting for the legislation it needed. He still has a couple more options. He can argue that he dislikes other features of the proposal as well as the absence of the

customs union to avoid commitment. He could help her win the first vote but then find detail in the legislation he could not support, creating subsequent chaos amidst allegations of bad faith.

The way out appeared to be to rewrite the Political declaration, as the EU used to say there was some flexibility about that document. That seems to be closed off by the tough terms of the recent extension, where they categorically rule out any further discussions of the future partnership until the Withdrawal Treaty is adopted in UK law.

Mr Corbyn's safest course is to find another reason why he cannot bring himself to back this Treaty, He has been talking about worries over who the next leader of the Conservatives might be, what kind of future partnership the Conservatives would want to negotiate, what trade deals they might do elsewhere and other related matters. He could even start to expose some of the undesirable features of the Agreement. Were he to give the government support not just for the first vote but to get through a very contentious and important piece of constitutional legislation to enforce the new Treaty he might unleash uncontrollable forces amongst his own voters and members. The curse of the Agreement might gravely damage his party. This is a draft Treaty which unites many Leave and Remain voters in opposition to it. Labour MPs in Leave voting seats would be particularly uncomfortable, whilst the left would make unusual supporters of Mrs May.

The worst outcome for Labour would be securing a second referendum. The party would then become a pro Remain party and lose most of its Leave voters. It would be scorned by at least half the electorate as anti democratic for going back on its word to accept the result of the original referendum. It would need to defend its new found enthusiasm for all things EU including its austerity economics.

Wokingham Town Centre

I was pleased to see the Council opened Peach Place for people to see what it will be like last week-end. I look forward to early completion of the remaining pavement works, so new shop tenants can move in.

What would a Manifesto for the

European elections say in the UK?

As someone who wants us to leave now and not fight the EU elections, I think the parties will struggle to write their Manifestos for May 22nd.

Presumably the Brexit party and UKIP will write similar documents urging a WTO exit as soon as possible. They should look forward to not having to take their seats or to giving up their seats after October 31st on the assumption we have then left the EU. Their problem will be differentiating their approaches from each other and avoiding splitting their pro Leave votes.

The Conservative party will presumably draft a Manifesto today based around Mrs May's Withdrawal Agreement. The problem with that approach is if her Agreement were to pass with Labour support anytime soon then the elections will be cancelled, as the UK's new status of in the EU without vote and voice would then kick in removing the entitlement or need for MEPs.

If the Agreement does not pass, this would leave Conservative candidates with a Manifesto made irrelevant by events.

If instead the Conservatives draft a Manifesto based on the proposition that the Agreement has not gone through, they follow a logical but politically dangerous path of hypotheticals. What then should it say? I would want it to say because there is no support for the Withdrawal Agreement we are leaving without signing it. That invites the response of "Get on with it, and spare us the election". Alternatively the Conservatives have to set out in the document how they might get talks with the EU retriggered even though the EU has made clear its refusal to re-open the Withdrawal Agreement. Likely tough responses from the EU make that a fraught approach.

Labour too has a difficult task in compiling a Manifesto. It faces all of the above problems facing the Conservatives over what to offer, with added grief from the factions wanting dilution or cancellation of Brexit within the party. If it includes a second referendum it is alienating all Leave voters who see no need to answer the same question again. If they leave out the second referendum they upset many of their pro Remain MPs and supporters especially in heavy Remain areas like London and Scotland. If they stick with their wish to enter a Customs Union they will be asked why they have failed to support Mrs May's Agreement which is a necessary prelude to a customs union solution according to the EU. They will also generally be asked why they have been such an obstacle to leaving the EU and why they rule out leaving without an Agreement which most Leave voters and some Remain voters saw as necessary leverage in the talks.

The Lib Dems, Greens and nationalists who want us to stay in the EU have the easiest task. They will presumably set out why they think the people were wrong to vote to leave and how they wish to reverse the decision. They can then go on to explain how they want to spend 5 years in the European Parliament voting on EU laws, budgets and taxes. They will write off any chance of winning votes from more than half the public who want to leave or

accept we need to leave in the light of the referendum result.

The funeral of Councillor Bob Wyatt

Yesterday there was a moving civic service to commemorate the life of Bob Wyatt. He gave Wokingham years of service as a Borough and a Town Councillor. He supported charities, and offered kind advice and help to many in need of assistance. His son and grandson made moving tributes to him, whilst Councillor David Lee and the Leader of Wokingham Borough told us of the great work he did on the Councils.

Bob was the founder of a the Classic Austin car society, so the procession to the Church included vintage Austin vehicles. Bob left behind a loving family and many books. He was an avid collector of military memorabilia and an author on the subjects that interested him.

It was fitting that Wokingham remembered his life and work for the Town and many who live here.