

Labour's 'local campaigns', a view from the trenches

Labour's right-wing and the press have been making dire predictions of a Labour defeat on June 8th.

Jeremy Corbyn's opponents inside the party are getting their blame in early, calling on Corbyn to 'take the hit' and resign when, as they assume, Labour loses.

Many anti-Corbyn MPs are running 'local campaigns', something that is beyond their competency given that it is a General Election.

If there is a Labour defeat then it should be made clear that the ground for that was prepared with the decision of the Labour rebels to launch a coup after the Brexit vote.

The Labour still has an opportunity to pull off an historic shock if it mobilises the huge resources of a membership of over 500,000 and uniting to campaign professionally and enthusiastically on Labour's progressive policies.

Get the blame in early



Peter Mandelson ex-Labour cabinet minister

As soon as the election was called, some anti-Corbyn MPs were lining their ducks up to launch

another challenge against Corbyn.

A typical example is Emma Reynolds who, launching her campaign for Wolverhampton North East, [said that](#); Ed Miliband did the right thing in 2015 and I think Jeremy Corbyn will have to take the hit if we lose this election.

With reports in the Sunday Times, 14th May 2017, of Tony Blair's circle plotting a break away party, it would seem that sections of Labour's right-wing are more pre-occupied with splitting the party than winning power.

The national campaign

The campaign nationally at the start showed signs of having the DNA of the failed Milliband campaign of 2015 where policies were shot out like each day as chaff with no cohesive vision of the country under a Labour government. That has now improved with the leaking, done with the intention of damaging Corbyn, of Labour's draft manifesto which backfired and allowed Corbyn's team more influence over the election agenda.

The claims by some within the party of Corbyn's unpopularity on the doorstep is wildly exaggerated. It's true that while Corbyn is popular with young people, there is less of a cut through with older people. However, the release of what is looking to be a calamitous Conservative manifesto is bringing home that issues such as pensions and social care costs are what really matter.

The release and reception of Labour's manifesto coupled with the reaction to the Conservatives' manifesto has given Labour members a morale boost with a glimmer of hope of over hauling the Tories.

Local campaigns

Many anti-Corbyn MPs are running 'local campaigns'. This is based on the premise that they as a 'brand' are strong enough to counter what they see as the toxicity of Corbyn.

I have first hand experience of this, over hearing an anti-Corbyn member admonishing two canvassers for introducing themselves as Labour on the doorstep. Don't mention Labour, you're here to re-elect xxxx [name withheld], xxxx is the brand, xxxx is the brand, they were told.

My MP and his team is one of those running a local campaign so it's worth giving a little flavour of what this looks like on the ground.

In past elections the campaign would start with knocking all doors to identify the vote behind them and calibrate targeting as the campaign wore on, this would be nationally co-ordinated. For this campaign we're mostly knocking on the doors of known Labour voters with little effort to actively engage them. Our work so far has more the feel of a survey than a political campaign.

Materials that are locally produced, such as leaflets, are of poor quality layout and content. They are also printed on low grade paper, sometimes about a quarter of leaflets I deliver end up as screwed up litter on the doormat. I haven't seen any nationally produced material yet, though I know it exists.



Paul Nuttall: UKIP leader

A real danger in Labour seats where the UKIP vote is greater than the MP's majority is of a collapse of that vote to the Conservatives. I took this up directly with my MP, pointing out that the polls and local election results indicated this was a real possibility in our seat.

I asked what the strategy was to target the UKIP vote. The MP replied that they didn't think the UKIP vote would have much impact. When I pointed out the maths, that if two thirds of the UKIP vote went to the Conservatives then Labour would lose the seat, the MP looked a little downcast and admitted he didn't know where the UKIP vote was...

It is clear that these MPs and their campaign teams do not possess the necessary competencies to run a campaign where multiple national issues predominate and change rapidly. Their messaging, limited to local issues is poorly targeted and mostly drowned out by bigger events.

The danger of this is the fragmenting of the national campaign and reducing its effectiveness. They may not cost their own seats with this 'local campaign' experiment but they are putting them at greater risk.

The coup and Brexit

There are two major influences at work affecting Labour's campaign. The attempted coup by Labour MPs after the European referendum, Brexit, vote. The other being the Brexit vote result itself.

Instead of kicking the Tories when they were down, Labour MPs with a series of resignations and a 172-40 vote of no confidence, launched a disastrous attempt to oust Jeremy Corbyn.

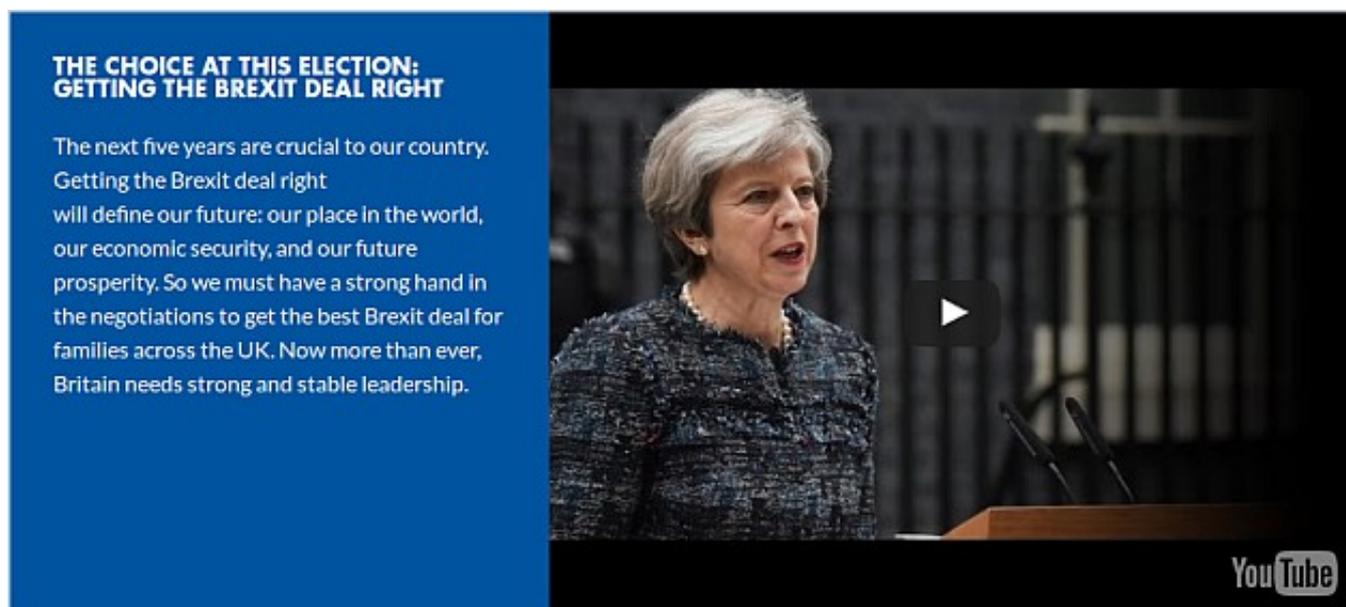
While the Tories organised a quick and smooth coronation of Theresa May, Labour was plunged into months of public bitter in-fighting.

All this gave the Tories time to recover and not only recover but establish a commanding lead at the beginning of the election campaign.

Brexit is described as an historic event but the psychological impact is poorly understood. I have memories of the Falklands war and similarly, the mood after Brexit was akin to a declaration of war where the natural instinct is to gather behind the leader.

The Conservatives have understood and have exploited this with the slogan of 'strong and stable' leadership. This is helped by some elements of the Labour Party claiming Jeremy Corbyn is weak and shambolic, a narrative that is relentlessly amplified by their allies in the press.

'Strong and Stable' leader or feet of clay?



**THE CHOICE AT THIS ELECTION:
GETTING THE BREXIT DEAL RIGHT**

The next five years are crucial to our country. Getting the Brexit deal right will define our future: our place in the world, our economic security, and our future prosperity. So we must have a strong hand in the negotiations to get the best Brexit deal for families across the UK. Now more than ever, Britain needs strong and stable leadership.

YouTube

Theresa May: Strong hand or clay feet?

The Conservatives have gone to great lengths to present Theresa May as a 'strong and stable'

leader. Their campaign has more the look of a US presidential campaign with only passing reference to the party and its candidates.

The 'Theresa May' story of someone reliable who gets things done as a total fiction. Her real record as Home Office Minister was poor and her record as Prime Minister very thin.

The claim that a vote for her would strengthen her Brexit hand with the EU is a delusion that needs to be challenged whenever it's raised. There is no explanation of what the EU would give for example, a 200 seat majority, that they wouldn't for a 50 seat majority. It seems that Theresa May thinks the election is a reward points scheme in negotiations with the EU.

The Tories have illustrated a Trump-like naïvety that trade negotiations are just a matter of horse trading. The EU response to their letter brought them up with a jolt and the realisation that trade deals are just as much about politics, internal and geopolitical.

The chances of a 'good deal' for Britain in the Brexit negotiations is unlikely. Politically, the EU can not afford a successful Brexit, it would sound the death knell of the whole project.

Given Theresa May's poor record and the regressive programme revealed in the Tory manifesto - closer scrutiny reveals her as a leader with 'feet of clay' rather than 'strong and stable'.

Can Labour pull off an historic shock?

There is some encouragement for Labour with several factors that can help the campaign including its manifesto, the Conservatives attacks on their own base, targeting some of the UKIP vote and events themselves.

The upside of the leaking of Labour's draft manifesto was that it was reported unfiltered for nearly a day. The reception from voters on the doorstep and in press interviews has been overwhelmingly positive.

On the contrary, the Conservative manifesto has received a poor reception. Their proposals on social care, dubbed the 'dementia tax', angered many voters. The backlash has been so devastating that Theresa May has been forced into a humiliating retreat. In the space of four days the media went from praising the Tory manifesto as [redefining the Tories](#) to dismissing it as a ['manifesto of chaos'](#)!

The collapse of the UKIP vote, [nearly 13% in 2015](#), into the Conservatives is in large part responsible for their, [currently narrowing](#), lead in the polls. Labour can and must target elements of the UKIP vote with its commitment to crack down on rogue employers and landlords, abolishing zero hours contracts and to raise the living wage to £10 per hour and build 500,000 social homes.

As the saying goes there are also 'events dear boy', the [cyber attack on the NHS](#) threw into sharp relief the underfunding and mismanagement by the Tories.

There's no doubting the the scale of the task facing Labour, but there is still an opportunity to pull off a historic shock of winning more seats than the Tories. But this can only be done on the basis of mobilising the huge resources of a membership of over 500,000 and uniting to campaign professionally and enthusiastically on Labour's progressive policies.

Gary Hollands – May 23rd 2017

Election campaigning suspended

Publication of this article was delayed out of respect to the victims, and their families and friends, of the horrific [suicide bomb attack](#) at the Manchester Arena.

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