

The Major UK Parties are Effectively Leaderless

News:

The daily disaster of UK politics continues. Yesterday parliament voted against PM Theresa May's revised deal with the EU, which top law-makers described as worthless, and this evening, Wednesday the 13th of March, parliament voted against a no-deal Brexit. Everyone is asking: where does the UK go from here?

Comment:

Actually, everyone has been asking that question since the night of the referendum two long years ago. The result had been close and the country was deeply divided, but the majority voted to leave the European Union. UK politics has been in a visible downward spiral since then. The referendum was then PM David Cameron's idea, but he resigned when the result came in. He never expected that the result would be to leave, and it is claimed that he didn't even expect to have to hold the referendum that he had campaigned for. Donald Tusk, the European Council President, said that he asked Cameron: "Why did you decide on this referendum? It is so dangerous, it is stupid" and he said that Cameron had "felt really safe, because he thought at the time that there was no risk of a referendum because his coalition partner, the liberals, would block this idea of a referendum. But then, surprisingly he won, and there was no coalition partner. Paradoxically, David Cameron became the real victim of his own victory." Tusk was referring to the 2015 elections where the Liberals went from having 57 seats in parliament to just 8, and with a surprise conservative majority he was forced to hold the promised referendum that was only intended as a populist promise to get more seats in parliament and secure good terms with the EU.

Democracy is at the mercy of populism, which exposes politics to the will of the mob. Politicians play a subtle but dangerous game of courting the most savage instincts of the electorate trying to predict and massage trends to work in their favour only to leave the voters feeling betrayed later. Populism brought the Brexit crisis and it brought Trump into office in the US on a platform of protecting white America from foreign immigrants and foreign imports and xenophobia is on the rise in Europe.

The populist political maneuvering for votes led to the Brexit referendum and the result has been two years of paralysis, and the majority who voted to leave the EU fear that the deadlock between May's government and parliament will continue indefinitely with the UK never actually leaving, while those who voted to remain fear that the UK will leave abruptly on the worst possible terms.

The Conservative party is split, reflecting the divisions across the country, while the Labour Party is united only in its opposition to the Conservatives and it offers no decisive leadership as that would expose its own divisions. Never before has the UK felt so utterly leaderless. As much as the current PM is an object of scorn, no politician aspires to take her place and expose himself to the waves of anger that crash from either side of the Brexit divide. The *Washington Post* wrote that "Brexit has devastated Britain's international reputation-and respect for its democracy," but the turmoil experienced by the UK is a phenomenon of democracies in general that run affairs of state in servitude to opinion polls and constituencies. The US Congress provides many examples of Congresspersons voting against their party leadership, as have UK MP's, in order to avoid the risk of losing their seats at the next election.

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