

Uniting the UK

Leighton Andrews

The results of the General Election on 8th June are still only beginning to sink in. It is clear that thousands, possibly millions, turned out to vote down the Prime Minister's plans for a hard Brexit.

No political party received a majority for its Brexit proposals. An analysis by the Sky News Political Editor Faisal Alsam suggests, on the basis of the General Election vote shares, implied majorities could be calculated for the following propositions:

- Accepting the referendum result (adding Conservative, Labour, DUP and UKIP vote shares): 85%
- Universal Guarantee of the rights of EU citizens: (adding Labour, LD, Green, SNP, Plaid and UKIP vote shares): 54.3%
- Ruling out 'No deal' (Labour, LD, Green, SNP): 52%
- Exact same benefits as Single Market (Labour, LD, Green, SNP): 52%

On the basis of voting patterns, there were no majorities for leaving the Single Market, the Customs Union or the jurisdiction of the ECJ, supported only in the manifestoes of the Conservatives, UKIP and the DUP.

Of course, such calculations are crude – and wrong. There will be Conservatives who favour staying in the Single Market, and Labour voters who favour leaving. But the voting demonstrates the complicated nature of public feelings on these issues, and the lack of

endorsement for any specific proposition.

So it's all to play for. For those of us who are Labour supporters, it is time to spell out the need for a Labour proposition that has the best chance of uniting the UK. Though it won't go far enough for some – indeed, it doesn't really go far enough for me – that means a commitment to an arrangement which allows us the benefits of the Single Market and the Customs Union, probably on EFTA lines – a proposition which also avoids the dangers of a hard border between Northern Ireland and the Republic. You could call it the 'jobs, prosperity and workers' rights' option. It's defensible, it's obtainable, and it's capable of inspiring unity.

It requires leadership – and it requires a determination by Parliamentarians – in both Houses of Parliament – to fight for it. It requires Labour to commit to voting down any deal brought back by the Conservatives which doesn't meet those objectives.

It will of course, provoke tabloid reaction. Those of us who voted against Brexit are already, in the eyes of certain papers, 'enemies of the people'. But the General Election showed that the tabloids are no longer to be feared. It's time for Labour leadership.