

An Independent group

Seven Labour MPs resigned from their party in protest over its anti-Semitism and general attitudes. Several of them might not have been re-selected as Labour candidates, such is the gap between their thinking and that of their former party's leadership. None of them intend to put their new attitudes and affiliations to the test of the electorate in a by-election. So far they are not saying they are forming a new party, and there are no current plans to put up Council candidates in May or put up a candidate to fight a Parliamentary by-election when there is a vacancy.

Their policy platform is also so far unclear. They come from the Blairite pro-EU wing of the Labour party, but did not wish to play up support for a second referendum. Perhaps they grasped that that is not a very popular idea, and does not look very democratic. They were wishing to annex the idea of democracy to themselves, but would have some problem in explaining why they reject the biggest vote in our history when the people answered the question Leave or Remain on promise of Parliament implementing the decision. They said they did not wish to join the Liberal Democrats who showed that having as your main distinctive policy overturning the referendum on the EU commanded only 10% support in the last general Election.

UK politics has been substantially changed by the Brexit vote. It led to the two main parties defying the trend in the UK from 2010, and the trend on the continent, of declining vote shares for the two traditional left-of-centre and right-of-centre parties. Labour and Conservative together leapt up to 82% of the vote at a time when on the continent the two traditional parties in most countries is now well below 50% together and in some cases as in France down to under 20%. Labour gained votes by moving leftwards whilst saying they would implement Brexit, Conservatives gained votes by pledging we will leave the EU. The election did not show a large demand for a new party pro the EU along Lib Dem or Blairite lines.

UK politics this year will be about Brexit. Both main parties have to assist it or suffer electorally if they do not. Both promised voters they would implement the referendum, and both said they wanted an independent trade policy for the UK which means leaving the customs union. The Independent Group wisely avoided making Brexit the main point of their break from Labour, as they would be putting themselves in a difficult and unpopular position if that is their main grudge. They were after all willing to stand for election on a pro-Brexit ticket in 2017. They also need differences that will last longer than the time to our departing the EU. So far they struggle to define them, but doubtless will do more to set them out in the weeks ahead. The biggest point of difference they highlighted is one of tone and approach to people, with their plea for a kinder more inclusive type of politics than they find in the modern Labour party.