

De selection and staying true to your party and Manifesto

Both parties are prey to de-selection motions against sitting MPs. This has been brought about by changes of mind or stated belief by Conservative MPs over EU exit, and by a combination of factors over the style, policy and direction of the party in Labour. The imminence of a no confidence or de-selection motion is one of the drivers of recruitment to the so called Independent group of MPs. The 8 Labour and 3 Conservatives so far recruited by this new organisation shelter together from such moves by their old parties. The Conservatives and Labour in turn can get on and choose replacements for them for the next election in their seats now they have gone.

On the Conservative side I read that Sarah Wollaston and Heidi Allen were likely to face action by their former Executives or wider Associations. Anna Soubry had defeated one no confidence move, but faced a petition of others protesting about her perceived change of approach to Brexit. It is put out in the press that at least five MPs all face significant opposition within their Conservative Associations. I do not know whether these stories are true. It is true that some local Conservative parties are angry with MPs who have deviated from the Manifesto position on leaving the EU. That said we would leave on 29 March 2019, with or without a deal, and stated that No deal is better than a bad deal. All Conservatives fought the last election opposing the second referendum on the EU which the Lib Dems championed. It is always difficult if an MP changes his or her stance on crucial matters like these after an election but does not carry his or her local party members and electors with them for that change.

On the Labour side there is the added issue that the party leadership has now changed the party stance on the second referendum. Labour was in agreement with the Conservatives in 2017 at the election that there should be no second vote and we should get on and implement the decision of the People's vote in the summer of 2016. Maybe as many as 70 Labour MPs are said to be unwilling to support the new referendum policy, as they represent heavily Leave voting areas and promised to support getting out in their election literature. This includes a dozen or more Shadow office holders. Labour too is riven with disputes over anti Semitism, over the tough style of the leadership towards non believers in its project, over the general drift to the left. Recent flare ups over whether Labour is anti semitic have not helped relations between members and MPs, nor between different local party organisations.

The party leaderships face a dilemma. If they encourage de-selections of people who clearly have drifted from the leadership line they could end up creating a bigger Independent Group, thereby nudging it towards forming a proper party and fighting elections. The more risk of de-selection the more likely an MP is to jump first. If they do not impose some discipline over the party line and leave people alone within the party who have little or nothing in common with the rest of the party they encourage poor discipline within

the Parliamentary party and have a battle with the local associations. Whipping breaks down and the leaderships are left looking weak and less important. There should be a big difference in treatment for an MP who occasionally votes against a 3 line whip to keep in line with the party's Manifesto and in line with the membership who supports him or her, and an MP who regularly votes against a 3 line whip in order to deviate from the Manifesto. If an MP has used a popular Manifesto set of proposals to get elected and then unilaterally tears up those promises it causes understandable stress within the party.

Both leaderships are likely to muddle forward on a case by case basis, with events often under the control of local parties rather than under national direction. The Conservatives have far fewer MPs seeking to deviate far from the Manifesto line, but more at risk as they need to keep up their stated party numbers in order to qualify as a coalition government with a majority of votes in the Commons. The Conservatives will have a problem if the leadership seeks to deviate from the Manifesto line itself on the issue of leaving the EU. The overwhelming majority of party members and a significant number of MPs want to stick with it and keep pledges made to voters about no deal being better than a bad deal and taking back control by leaving the EU, its single market and its customs union on 29 March this year. Labour's leadership too is moving away from the Manifesto, and that is splitting their party.