

Who wants an election?

It was curious to see how practically no Opposition MPs wanted a General election when offered the opportunity on Wednesday night.

The SNP probably do want an early election. They think they can improve their current position at Westminster.

Change UK and the Independents do not want an early election. They see from the polls that they are all likely to lose their seats. Of course many of the Independents recently created by their expulsion from the Conservative party will decide to take retirement. Most would probably like this Parliament to last a bit longer before they retire.

The Lib Dems probably think they could make some gains in an election, where they came a good second last time with a Labour vote to squeeze. Yet they have decided to resist the offer so far as they are more wedded to keeping us in the EU than anything else. They are clearly conscious of the weakness of other Remain parties, the ambiguity of the Labour position and the opportunity to annoy the Prime Minister more by refusing an immediate election. They have now said they wish to wait until the October 31 deadline has passed before facing voters. They want the PM to have to ask for a new extension against his wishes, and they may well want a longer extension than the suggested one until the end of January.

The Greens may have a similar position to the Lib Dems. As they do best in similar seats they have a difficult decision to make about whether both should fight all the most likely seats or whether they do a deal over which to contest.

Labour is not in much of a condition to fight an election. It is low in the polls, and deeply divided about what its best course of action would be. What will a Labour Manifesto say about the EU issue? Will it repeat the previous one promising to take us out, with new added language about a deal which only amounts to changing the Political declaration and accepting the Withdrawal Agreement? Will they sketch a possible Agreement which the EU of course may well reject? Will they demand that whatever deal is agreed is subject to a referendum vote on a Remain or deal choice? Will they just ask for a second referendum to try to get the public to change their minds? It seems likely that they will avoid anything too precise, with language that permits some to believe they will try to do a deal and others to think they will concentrate on a second vote. This will still leave a lot of their Midlands and Northern pro Leave seats vulnerable to parties that believe in Brexit.

Some on the Remain side think all these parties need an understanding to put together some kind of Remain platform and avoid too many contests where they oppose each other. It seems unlikely this will work. Labour will be very reluctant to come out clearly for Remain given the voting base in many of their current seats and given the studied ambiguity of the leadership for some time. Without Labour as part of any understanding an important part of

this vote base would not be not part of any deal. In Scotland it would be especially difficult to arrange an SNP/Labour agreement, just as Greens and Lib Dems are too close for comfort making a deal difficult.