

A PLURALIST OR MAJORITARIAN FUTURE?

THE AV REFERENDUM AND THE STRATEGIC DIRECTION OF THE LABOUR PARTY.

ABSTRACT

Labour's 2010 election defeat and the subsequent Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition reopened a long-standing debate. Should it remain tribalist or pluralist? Should it seek to govern alone, or be open to governing as part of a broader 'progressive alliance'?

METHOD

I undertook an academic literature review, spoke to leading Labour MPs, and analysed the implications of the matter in hand;

It is widely accepted that AV would make coalition government more likely. Labour essentially divided itself over coalition government. Although a coalition could still be the outcome under First Past the Post in 2015 (Curtice 2010);

Interview with Stephen Twigg MP: "Labour will always be at the heart of progressive politics, but many decent, progressive people don't vote Labour, and Labour must work with other parties and accept this."

Interview with Margaret Beckett MP: "There was never a progressive consensus in this country. I never believed that. I would have loved to, but I never did."

IMPLICATIONS

The negotiations that took place revealed three key findings within our political system:

1. Labour remains divided over electoral reform, and over working with other parties. Out of declared votes: 94 Labour MPs voted 'Yes2AV'; 132 voted 'No2AV'.

2. A Liberal Democrat cabinet of younger politicians who had not experienced politics with a Tory government now appeared happy and willing to work with the Conservatives.

3. The Conservatives now appear to sense an opportunity for a coalition of the centre-right, making things more difficult for Labour.

Labour is no longer in a position to lead the debate of the centre left. It must rely on the Liberal Democrats being willing to listen. Their support is no longer assured.

CONCLUSIONS

The problems of the Labour Party remain. I am clear: the Labour Party must work with other parties, both to achieve greater electoral success, but predominantly as a matter of principle: the Liberal Democrats remain a party of the centre-left in my view, as do Labour.

A wider contribution of ideas will lead to a greater source of policy ideas.

These ideas are unlikely to be accepted in the short or medium term by any majority within the Labour Party. Only a wide and open discussion will lead to any meaningful reform.

CONTACT DETAILS

Should you wish to contact me to discuss this research further, please visit my website: www.craigjohnson.org.uk or email me: craig.johnson1@newcastle.ac.uk.

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