

Political Thinking Meeting Report No 38

Chiltern U3A 'Political Thinking'

Meeting No 38 Monday 19th Aug 2019

Topic; Brexit No confidence vote, second referendum, election campaign

Summary

After the expected failure of the forthcoming further negotiation with the EU the likelihood of a no confidence vote early in September was accepted; with the distinct possibility of being passed. The possibility of an attempt to form a Unity government was considered, as sufficient support for a Corbyn government was considered unlikely. It was however considered unlikely that such a government could reach a coherent policy. Further referendums in various formats had been suggested as a means of resolution, but these were considered too complicated and unlikely to be accepted. The recent clamour of initiatives was seen as electioneering with no expectation of substantial implementation.

The stalemate seems set to continue with no means of resolution.

Discussion

The initiative to reopen negotiations with the EU was considered by a substantial minority of the group to stand a reasonable chance of success, though quite what would count as success was less clear. This minority considered the EU stance to be a bluff and that eventually an open Irish border would be negotiated, on an unspecified basis. The majority however felt that the EU stance was clear and reasonable; accordingly checks would be required to enforce differing trade rules as is normal with every border. If the UK government chose not to accept this, no deal seemed to be the likely outcome; and presumably EU border checks from the date of leaving.

Opinion was divided as to whether the projected "no confidence" vote in respect of the Johnson government anticipated early in September would succeed. Though there is claimed to be no majority in the Commons for a no deal Brexit, presumably what the Government's policy would be at the time if renegotiation fails, there is no majority for anything else. It was felt unlikely the Commons would express confidence in a Corbyn led government.

The possibility of a Unity government was discussed; the fundamental remains that there is no consensus as to what Unity policies might be; the selection of an acceptable leader does not of itself result in a consensus as to what an acceptable policy might be. Preventing no deal does not of itself produce a policy that may result in a deal. In other situations, the standstill option,

that is no change until the agreed change is determined would probably be considered as a sensible step towards resolution. However in this situation the no change possibility ie revoking the Article 50 application and giving the UK more time to decide what it wants to do is seen as anti-democratic; the decision has been taken on this viewpoint.

Parallels with wartime or national crisis where a form of national or unity government had succeeded were irrelevant, as there had been underlying consensus; in the present crisis there is no consensus as to a direction which might lead to resolution.

More complex versions of the second referendum possibility have been put forward, including a two stage referendum, separating the "remain or leave" decision from the "what type of leaving" decision. Although theoretically sensible and rational, these ideas seem unlikely to gain traction. They appear complex, considerable time is required, and there is no certainty of definitive results that all would accept.

The outlook for an early general election is not propitious. Either the adverse effects of no deal will be becoming apparent if the policy "leave on 31st Oct, no ifs or buts" has been successful; or if leaving is further delayed or revoked, recriminations and accusations of betrayal and collaboration will be the rhetoric. In such an atmosphere the only consensus that political parties reach might be that a general election is inadvisable

Major political change soon or continuing stalemate? No way of knowing but the latter seemed more likely.