

Comment – Ian Murray's view on the message from the European Election 2019

The European election results are by far the worst results in Scottish Labour's long and proud history.

There is no way to sugar-coat this – the people of Scotland have delivered an utterly damning verdict.

For us and our colleagues at Westminster and Holyrood, this was a deeply upsetting campaign as countless friends and supporters told us they could not vote for Labour.

It was heart-breaking to witness the anguish and pain they were going through, many turning up at polling stations and placing a cross next to another party for the first time in their lives. They felt they had no choice other than to back explicitly pro-remain parties instead of the Labour Party.



We both know many long-serving members, not just voters, who have been forced to walk away from our party.

It is devastating that David Martin will no longer represent Scotland in the European Parliament, which means we no longer have any Scottish voices in the progressive Socialists and Democrats group in Brussels. We pay tribute to his extraordinary work on behalf of the people of Scotland over three decades, and today we feel a deep sense of loss.

David is an outstanding public servant who can hold his head high.

The same is true for Scottish Labour staff and activists, as

categorically no blame lies with them. They went above and beyond in this campaign and they have our unreserved thanks.

The blame for the worst result in Scottish Labour's history lies squarely with our party's leadership.

This was an election campaign about the biggest issue facing our generation: Brexit. And yet we walked away from that battlefield, offering nothing but ambiguity on an issue that will determine the future of our country.

There is no such thing as a good Brexit. Any Brexit will destroy livelihoods and leave the poorest people in society worse off.

The people of Edinburgh and East Lothian know this, and they know that we both stand with them. But at this particular election, too many of them couldn't vote for Labour.

With a clear commitment to fight to remain in the EU, we could have won in the capital and in East Lothian, and in local authorities across Scotland. Instead, we were decimated.



Louis Stedman-Bryce The Brexit Party speaking at the rally held in Edinburgh Photo: Martin P McAdam

It is official Labour Party policy to support a People's Vote as a way out of this catastrophic mess, yet Jeremy Corbyn snubbed our membership and refused to embrace it. As a result he personally handed victory to Nigel Farage.

As the hard right rises and the Tories tear themselves apart, Jeremy is squandering the opportunity to deliver a radical reforming government that so many millions of people urgently need.

But in this election, Scottish Labour could have chosen very different path.

We are (or should be) an autonomous party – a hard-fought victory achieved by Kezia Dugdale delivering immediate results under her leadership in the 2017 General Election.

The Labour Party is the only party that stands for what the majority of Scots want – Scotland in both the UK and the EU. That's how you fight the nationalists, whether they be Nigel Farage, Boris Johnson or Nicola Sturgeon.

And yet in this European campaign we completely failed to capitalise on this clear advantage, with a disastrous message that meekly echoed the UK Labour campaign, even putting Jeremy's face on our leaflet to voters.

This was Jeremy Corbyn and Richard Leonard's manifesto, their message, their decision to ignore the membership and what voters were saying to us. It was their election campaign and their mess.

They stuck their heads in the Brexit sand because they can't lead.

We have paid the price for their failure and we have been wiped off the electoral map.

These results must now act an urgent wake-up call for Richard

Leonard, deputy leader Lesley Laird and campaigns manager Neil Findlay.

Just two years ago, under a different leadership, we stunned the SNP, gaining six Westminster seats and coming within a whisker of winning many more.

Now we are trailing the nationalists in a distant fifth place.

If there is to be any hope of recovery, Scottish Labour must become a passionate, relentless, and vocal voice for a final say on Brexit. There can be no ambiguity – any Brexit deal simply must be put to the public.

We must commit to remaining in the EU, and campaign for this if there is a snap General Election.

Scottish Labour can lead the wider Labour movement on this, and should have been doing so for many months.

The Labour Party is nothing if it does not stand up for solidarity, and as well as fighting the Tories' nationalist vision for barriers with Europe, we must also stand up stronger against the SNP's nationalist vision for barriers in the UK.

Jeremy Corbyn must be told in no uncertain terms: Labour firmly opposes an unwanted second independence referendum and we will never, ever, deal with the SNP on this.

We must also reassert our autonomy and ditch the debilitating 'branch office' status – that includes taking control of disciplinary procedures, running distinct Scottish campaigns, and listening to what our members are telling us.

Members were promised that this would be their party, and they've been ignored at the first time of asking by the leadership that promised them so much.

The labour leadership refused to listen to us, its members and its supporters. Maybe now they'll listen to the voters.

This must be a time for reflection. We have been sent an unambiguous message from the people of Scotland.

If we fail to listen and learn, our party will never recover.



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