



NEWS

OPINION



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**The Forlorn Hope, Tom Watson, Has Fallen Foul Of A Once Great Party**

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Politics

Tony Broadbent Sat, 16 Nov 2019 11:46 GMT



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So Tom Watson is stepping down as the Labour Party's deputy leader and, come a cold cruel pre-Yule December election, will be quitting parliament, as well as the Labour Party for good or, as an awful lot of people would have it, for ill. Following in the footsteps of once Labour great Labour stand-ups and standouts of recent years, David Miliband and Alan Johnson.

Tom Watson's decision to leave the Labour Party after 35 years of honest and honourable toil, blamed on a four-year, targeted war of attrition with close aides of Party Leader Jeremy Corbyn. For which read his senior political advisor and *éminence grise*, Seumus Milne.

We all of us, at least those of us who identify as ‘moderates’ or even moderate socialists had high hopes Tom’s clear-eyed vision of Britain still being part of the EU, rather than still being torn apart by the never ending calamity that is ‘Brexit’, would one day win through to sunlit uplands. With enough party members and supporters, coming together, in the end, to give a ‘centre-Left’ Labour Party a real chance of governing a still woefully divided country. But, now, alas, those hopes appear to be dashed and, if not forever, certainly, for much of the foreseeable. More’s the pity.

A day can seem a lifetime in politics; but five years of Boris Johnson and his chief political advisor, Dominic Cummings; the likely victors of this hastily called, nay, obscenely devised December election; unless by some miracle every last man and woman standing unite together to defeat them; is going to seem like an eternity to anyone who gives a damn about the whole of Great Britain, rather, than, say, Little England.

Tom Watson, the one politician people really seemed to want to follow. A ‘people’s champion’ more and more people earnestly hoped would lead the Labour Party to champion a Second Referendum on membership of the European Union and a successful ‘Remain’ campaign.

Only, a thoroughly honest and open referendum, this time, or at least as honest and as open a people’s vote as the mother of parliamentary democracies could possibly stomach. With no data driven dark arts from such a one as Mr Cummings working hugger-mugger with the likes of Cambridge Analytica.

Cambridge Analytica, the cruelly indifferent data mining entity founded and funded entirely by a shadowy American billionaire, Robert Mercer, and his shabby ‘would-be-advisor-to-presidents’ alt-right cohort, Steve Bannon.

‘Brexit’: an unexpected opportunity for Mercer and Bannon to harvest vast amounts of ‘preference’ data from social media of millions of unsuspecting

British voters for psychological profiling, with the intent of weaponising it to move public opinion at scale. Britain, in reality, nothing more to them than a petri dish to establish proof of concept. With neither man having any interest, at all, in making 'Great Britain Great Again' their sights firmly set on achieving their desired political outcome; 'Make America Great Again'; some six months later, in 'The Land of The Free'.

Tom Watson, by comparison, not an inveterate ideologue, militant fundamentalist, or political deviant, but an impassioned realist, with not a single dirty trick up his sleeve. A seasoned, but still eminently reasonable politician, who clearly saw that the road to No. 10 for the Party led through people uniting behind a less extreme version of red-dyed-in-the-wool Labour ideology. And he endeavoured to make his position clear and simple enough for people to understand and fully appreciate.

Tom Watson always struck me as being something of a cross between the much beloved and much missed entertainer Harry Secombe and the equally much missed TV broadcaster, journalist, and commentator Barry Norman. Both men much admired and well respected. Much as Tom Watson has been both as politician and man of the people.

It's always been enjoyable to be in the company of these three great Brits, even if only listening to them on the radio or seeing them on television. They were always likeable; displayed a true humanity; were never false or ingratiating. Were always honest, humorous, and often very, very funny. Always straight forward, and straight talking. All of which led to them each being seen as eminently trustworthy. A quality that's all too rarely seen in politicians, of any stripe, and that's never been more lacking than in the crop of political miscreants, now, all parading before us.

How singularly refreshing it was to hear Tom, but a few months back, when he very clearly signalled his position before this year's Labour Party Conference: "The only way to break the 'Brexit' deadlock, once and for all,

is a public vote in a referendum.” He even added that in the likely event of a general election in the coming months Labour must be "crystal clear" about where it stood on 'Brexit' if it ever wanted to get any sort of hearing on the rest of its domestic policy agenda.

"There is no such thing as a good 'Brexit' deal," Tom said. "Which is why I believe we should advocate for 'Remain'. That is what the overwhelming majority of Labour Party members, MPs, and trade unions believe."

All of which, of course, was immediately met by an unrelenting tide of spite and invective from Labour Party purists. But on the other hand, there were many Labour party supporters who genuinely respected Tom; who very much liked and enjoyed him. Or else how could he have survived the plot to oust him or get rid of his 'position' as deputy leader at the Conference? A potentially very nasty situation that called for none other than Jeremy Corbyn to need to intervene, for that news cycle at least. It would have been a burned bridge too far and lost the Labour Party even more support from past and present senior ministers, as well as a lot of rank and file.

It says much when "clarity" and "trustworthiness" can appear to be such quaint and undesired qualities, naïve even. But that seems to be more and more the case in what now passes for political campaigning: with unseen, unsung, and wholly unscrupulous manipulation of public opinion ever more the accepted norm.

In comparison, these past three years, Tom Watson, even during his determined and wholly successful campaign to lose weight, after a diagnosis of Type-2 diabetes, has only seemed to gain in gravitas. And the more he stood for, the more he spoke up for what an increasing majority of Labour supporters believed in, the more he looked the very picture of what a true leader of the Labour Party could be, should be. Yet, to read some of the comments about him leaving the Labour Party; even as recorded by some of Britain's more trusted news sources; is to wonder and weep.

“Class traitor!” “Good riddance to bad rubbish!” “Eff Off! You Wanker!” the very least of it; the hard liner’s incandescent spleen and poisonous ire brooking no deviation, at all, from party purity. And little or no room, by anyone, anywhere, for: ‘Moderation in all things’ or ‘Compromise is the very essence of democracy.’

Is it any wonder that Tom Watson stood out so clearly against all the narrow-eyed, grim-visaged hardliners and po-faced party purists? And Tom, ‘The Forlorn Hope’ of common sense; now, fallen, by the way side. And the question still: Did he fall or was he pushed?

And what you may well ask is a ‘Forlorn Hope’? It’s a term once used to describe a small group of soldiers tasked to undertake a desperate enterprise with very little chance of success. Taken now to be: a persistent or desperate hope that’s unlikely ever to be fulfilled. Certainly, given the madness of the intellectually driven extremes that beset both sides of the parliamentary aisle.

And how sad a day for the Labour Party, and for Britain, at Tom’s departure, for it would seem it’s going to be ages before we ever have chance, again, to hear the cry: “Once more unto the breach, dear friends, once more.” And any and all hoped-for uplands more and more swathed in shadow.

Thanks, Tom, old chum, for all you endeavoured to do for all of us of sound mind and liberal heart. May I wish you well in whatever comes next for you? I know that you still wish us well. But I know, too, there’s an awful lot of people who still wish you were there for us to follow.

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