



“To be truly radical is to make hope possible rather than despair convincing”.

Is the blue wall really collapsing or just a bit chipped?

Over 50 Compass members and supporters gathered for our coffee morning on 15th July 2023 to hear the reflections of Emily Robinson, Politics Department at Sussex University, and Neal Lawson, Director of Compass, on walls, blue and red, and recent events in the Labour Party which have left Neal threatened with expulsion.

Emily enlightened us as to how misleading the talk of falling walls and political realignments can be – these narratives often arise from the over-interpretation of short-term trends. Many ‘red wall’ voters have a Tory voter profile – financially secure, with mortgages – but had historically voted Labour. The catalyst for the switch was Brexit. In the South-Eastern ‘blue wall’, the opposite is the case – there are many ‘Labour type’ voters who have tended to vote Tory – and here partygate and other scandals have been the catalyst for a switching by these typically ‘rule-respecting’ voters. Other reasons the Tory vote may decrease include younger and more diverse voters moving out of London, and the Tories not delivering on the economic interests of their own voter base.

But, as Neal went on to point out, the blue wall may crumble, but what will happen if the Labour Party doesn’t have the intellectual, cultural, and political resources to tackle the problems we face. If Labour fails to deliver, the authoritarian right is waiting in the wings with an anti-democratic agenda. Labour’s offer is shrinking to a bleak contrast between ‘no hope’ and ‘false hope’. Neal feels that the country is ahead of politicians in many respects – we need a deeper, more thoughtful response to the climate and cost-of-living crises. Our first past the post system is corrosive to progressive hopes and leads to pandering to a small constituency of critical swing voters, building a cage around options in the process. With a changed system, we could start building a plural, progressive majority.

Emily and Neal then took questions arising from break-out groups – these included:

- do toxic cultural issues pose problems for a progressive alliance
- what lies behind Labour’s targeting of Neal, and what can ordinary Labour members do
- does the support for a radical agenda in 2017 provide evidence against Labour’s ultra-cautious approach
- are voters fragmenting because of failure to unite around a core economic message
- should we define the type of PR we are advocating

- how do we get the Labour leadership (including local MP Peter Kyle) to support PR
- how do we kindle passion and idealism in politics, and encourage non-voters to vote
- what is Compass's strategy as we approach a general election, including orientation to the media.

In his closing remarks, Neal quoted Raymond Williams: "To be truly radical is to make hope possible rather than despair convincing".

Emily's illuminating analysis and Neal's positive message in the face of current difficulties made for a brilliant morning of political discussion – thank you Emily and Neal.