

Political Impasse in Britain in the Wake of the Elections: The Carve-Up in “The National Interest” Begins

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“The public and markets want...to see a “government in place”” — Alistair Darling

You didn't need a visit to the Delphic Oracle in order to figure out what would happen, in any case I doubt that many want to visit Greece these days. So, on 8 May the carve-up began with Nick Clegg, leader of the Liberal Democrats meeting a team of Tory advisors in order to strike a deal to try and form a 'coalition' government. So much for 'first past the post' electoral system, designed in pre-historic times to maintain the hegemony of the ruling class. And if a deal can't be struck with the Tories the next stop will be the Labour Party, though a deal with Labour is unlikely as it would require every party, aside from the Tories that is, to vote with the Lib-Dem/Labour coalition on the substantive policy issues.

Perhaps an analysis of the vote is in order or the 'first past the post' system as it is called. As you can see from the stats on the vote tally, there is actually very little between them, so how come seats in Parliament doesn't reflect the three-way split?

Conservative 306 seats 36.1%
Labour 258 seats 29.0%
Liberal Democrat 57 seats 23.0%

The turnout averaged around 65%, the highest it's been for decades, a reflection of two things: 1, an unprecedented media onslaught exhorting the punters to vote and 2, an electorate who do want change. But in real terms the numbers above represents much less than two-thirds of the electorate so the Tories actually got about 25% of the potential vote, Labour 20% and the Lib-Dems around 16%, a clear case of a 'plague on all your houses' even though it was the highest turnout since the 1970s when turnout was in the 70+ percentile range.

The low number of Liberal Democrat seats, although they got 23% of the total, is down to the fact that they came second in a lot of constituencies, thus whilst their total vote is high, the 'first past the past' system means that it is not reflected in seats in Parliament. Anecdotal evidence suggests that many voted Liberal Democrat in the hope that it would keep out the Tories through a Lib-Dem/Labour alliance and as we are witnessing, the 'progressive' wing of the Liberal Democrats fear that Clegg is in the process of negotiating a deal with the Tories (as of writing the haggling continues). The newly formed (like last Friday) Take Back Parliament organization reveals that there are a lot of very angry Liberal

Democrat supporters (and no doubt others) as this video demonstrates.

Fundamentally of course there is very little difference between the three parties, thus it'll be a haggle over things like 'reforming' the electoral system, education and perhaps scrapping the ID card. But the buzzword is 'the national interest', something the three parties and the media are all agreed on. But with the electorate almost equally divided, what does the term 'national interest' mean? Perhaps a visit to Greece is in order after all? The bottom line is that all three parties are agreed that some 'painful' decisions are going to have to be made, the only difference being when and who is going to need a shot of morphine and a side order of Valium.

This is 'consensus' politics; the media and the political class are all agreed on this. The divide between us and them is plain for all to see with the media punting the line 'the national interest' ad infinitum. This is how the Independent put it:

"City economists and business leaders yesterday urged all three parties to resolve political uncertainties quickly as the election result prompted a sell-off in the financial markets.

"The pound slipped sharply against the dollar, falling almost three cents to \$1.45, the lowest level for a year, as currency markets were unnerved by concerns about a hung Parliament. Investors fear there will be little progress made on setting out clear plans for reducing Britain's borrowing, which is on target to be higher than Greece's this year. The value of gilts - the bonds issued by the UK Government to fund its borrowing requirements - was also hit by the election result. As prices fell, the yields on 10-year gilts, the effective interest rate for the Government, rose by around 0.2 percentage points to 3.96 per cent.

"The political uncertainty also hit the stock market which opened around 90 points, or 1.5 per cent, down. While all the market setbacks also reflected continuing nervousness about the debt crisis in Greece and the extent to which it is spreading around Europe, Ian Spreadbury, a fund manager at Fidelity, said the two issues were inextricably linked. — ['Investors shun sterling after election result'](#), The Independent, 8 May, 2010

So this is what is meant by 'national interest'. As I pointed out earlier, the 'national interest' is newsspeak for preserving the rule of capital and making us pay for it.

"What is most striking, and highly relevant to the assessment of this week's IFS intervention, is that at no point did the monetarist economists - or their neoliberal successors - explain why any particular limit to public deficits and debt was economically necessary. Instead we are offered, then as now, an entirely circular argument. We are told that deficit cuts are necessary because international bond markets require them. So why do international bond markets require them? Because they think that cuts are necessary. And why is that? Because the economic experts say so!" — ['Cutting Public Debt: Economic Science or Class War?'](#) By Hugo Radice, The Bullet, 4 May, 2010

So the haggling continues with the public being fed a diet of media pablum echoing the business class' call for a deal in the 'national interest' or else we are told that British

capitalism will collapse.

The emergence of Take Back Parliament and Power2010 is a clear reflection of the electorate's frustration with the existing order, an order that regardless of what 'backroom' deal is struck will ensure the continued hegemony of the 2.5 major political parties.

But it's a 'deal' that none of us have been invited to participate in reflecting the fundamentally undemocratic nature of capitalist 'democracy'. No doubt some time today (10 May) or perhaps tomorrow, we will be presented with a 'democratic' fait accomplis, one that will satisfy no one except a shaken, not stirred, political class.

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