



GRESHAM COLLEGE
Founded 1597

The General Election, 2015 Transcript

Date: Tuesday, 19 May 2015 - 6:00PM

Location: Museum of London



19 May 2015

The General Election, 2015

Professor Vernon Bogdanor

Ladies and gentlemen, this is the last of six lectures on significant post-War General Elections, but in the autumn, for those who want more punishment, I will begin another series of six lectures on post-War political crises, the first of which will analyse the crisis in the National Health Service in 1951, which divided the Labour Party and which has, I believe, many echoes today. But this lecture is on the recent General Election.

The outcome was, of course, unexpected, unexpected perhaps even by the victorious Conservatives themselves. It is said that the bookmakers did very badly from it, losing money to those who had made large bets on the Conservatives at favourable odds. It is said the only people from whom they made money were the pollsters and the political scientists. Now, I was often asked before the Election who I thought would win, and I answered "I haven't the faintest idea, and nor really has anyone else." And perhaps some commentators now wish that they had said the same.

In the Election, the Conservatives gained 25 seats net from 2010, and around 0.9% of the vote, so the Conservatives increased their share of the vote and also their number of seats, and that is the first time in modern history that a Prime Minister has ever achieved both after a full-term in office. No Prime Minister in modern times has ever done that before. It is a remarkable achievement on the part of David Cameron. His nearest competitor is Lord Salisbury, who, in 1900, secured a higher share of the vote than in 1895, but nine fewer seats. Now, despite that, the Government has a majority of just 12, in practice, 16, since four Sinn Fein Nationalists from Northern Ireland do not take their seats. This is the lowest majority of any Government since October 1974, when Labour had a majority of just three. The Coalition Government of 2010-15 had a majority of 78. And, to the extent that stability depends on the size of the majority, the overall majority of 2015 could be less stable than the Hung Parliament of 2010 because of course, with a majority of 16, any nine rebellious backbenchers could undermine the Government, and that experience happened to the last Conservative Prime Minister, John Major, who, in 1992, had a majority of 21, which caused him great difficulty in ratifying the Maastricht Treaty. John Major used to say that, of those 21, at least 13 were quite mad. These conflicts could occur again, especially of course upon the issue of the European Union, which is going to be very important in the first half of this Parliament and which will be very divisive.

As you can see, the Conservatives are 6.5% ahead of Labour, and in the past, that would have given the Conservatives a much larger majority. But part of the reason why the Conservative majority is not large, not the whole reason but part of the reason, is that the boundaries are out-of-date and favour the Labour Party, and equalising the boundaries, which the Conservatives intend to do, would give them around 20 extra seats. But Margaret Thatcher, who, in 1979, got only a slightly greater lead than Cameron, had a comfortable majority of 43. Edward Heath, who had half Cameron's lead, had a comfortable majority of 30, and Harold Macmillan, who had a smaller lead than Cameron, had a majority of 100, and Anthony Eden, who had around half Cameron's lead, had a majority of 58.

The Conservatives have a majority of seats only in England. For the first time ever in British history, there are different majorities in each component part of the United Kingdom. In Wales, Labour is the majority party, and the Conservatives there gained just over a quarter of the vote, very far from a majority. In Scotland, the SNP are the majority party, and the Conservatives have around 15% of the vote, one-seventh of the vote, and just one MP. These are the lowest percentages of the vote in Wales and Scotland of any Government since the War. In Northern Ireland, none of the three parties had been able to win seats - indeed, Labour and the Liberal Democrats do not contest seats there - since the conflict is not between different visions of Britain's economic and social future, but between different and competing national identities, British and Irish, and voters who feel that their identity is primarily British vote for unionist parties, primarily the Democratic Unionist Party, voters who feel that their identity is primarily Irish vote for national parties, Sinn Fein and the Social Democratic and Labour Party, and the majority party in Northern Ireland is the Democratic Unionist Party.

These different majorities in different parts of the United Kingdom show very clearly that Britain has become a

multinational state, and what had previously been seen as one nation representing different kinds of people is now seen as a union of different nations, each with its own identity and institutions, and in this multinational and quasi-federal state, Scotland and Northern Ireland have their own party systems, quite distinct from those in England. So, this multinational state has a multi-party system and is unlikely to return in the foreseeable future to the standard pattern of two party Conservative and Labour competition.

Now, the Labour Party won 232 seats, 26 fewer than in 2010, and 99 fewer seats than the Conservatives, and that is the furthest it has been behind the Conservatives since 1987. The Party made a net gain of 15 seats in England, mainly in London, but lost 40 seats in Scotland, all but one of its Scottish seats, to the SNP, and also lost one in Wales to the Conservatives. There was a miniscule net swing to Labour of around 0.2%. Labour gained around 1.4% of the vote from its historic low of 2010, its second-worst result ever. The Conservatives gained 0.8% of their 2010 vote. It is a paradox that the small increase in the Conservative vote led to a gain of 24 seats, while the larger increase in the Labour vote led to a loss of 26 seats, and the reason for this is that, contrary to expectation – or at least one of the reasons, that, contrary to expectations, more Labour votes seem to have been wasted than Conservative. Most of Labour's votes in Scotland were wasted since came second almost everywhere, and many of Labour's votes in Conservative/Labour marginal seats in England were also wasted. Labour had hoped that much of the 2010 Liberal Democrat vote would come to it. Some of it did, but the consequence in some seats was paradoxically to help the Conservatives and increase the number of wasted votes. For example, in the typical Liberal Democrat seat in the West Country, Labour was a bad third. In the past, some Labour voters had supported the Liberal Democrats on tactical grounds to keep out the Conservatives. In 2015, many such voters decided they could no longer support the Liberal Democrats since that Party had entered into coalition with the Conservatives, so they returned to Labour. The result was that Labour came a better third, but the Conservatives won the seat, so the higher Labour vote was wasted.

Although Labour's vote was slightly higher in 2015 than 2010, it seems to me, nevertheless, that this defeat was, in many respects, worse for Labour because, in 2010, Labour had the excuses, if you like, that it had been in power for 13 years, that it was perhaps exhausted, and it had to cope with economic crash of 2008, for which many voters blamed it. In 2015, there were no such excuses.

Now, some have compared the outcome with that in 1992, which was another unexpected victory for the Conservatives, but 2015 seems to me worse because, although the Conservatives won the 1992 Election, against expectations, they were then on a withdrawing tide after four Election victories. They in fact lost 40 seats, admittedly insufficient to destroy their overall majority, but sufficient to reduce it from 102 to 21. But in 2015, it seems that the Conservatives are on a rising tide and that they are gaining seats after just one term in office.

There are only two post-War Elections at which Labour won fewer seats than in 2015 and they were the Elections of 1983 and 1987, both fought against Margaret Thatcher at the height of her power. But at least, in that period, Labour had the security of safe seats in Scotland and the North of England, and that is no longer so. The supposedly safe seats in Scotland have been won by the SNP, while the safe seats in the North of England are now under threat from UKIP, which came second in 48 Labour seats, 19 of them in the North, and that is dangerous for Labour since UKIP is a more acceptable alternative for many traditional Labour voters than the Conservatives or the Liberal Democrats. And it seems, in contrast to many predictions, that UKIP damaged Labour more than it did the Conservatives, which Conservative defectors seem to have returned to their Party in larger numbers than Labour defectors did.

In the last 40 years, just one man has won an Election for Labour, Tony Blair, though he has become a pariah in some Labour circles, who have seemingly never forgiven him for this. In 2006, in his farewell address to the Labour Party Conference, Tony Blair said there was just one Labour tradition he did not like and that was losing Elections. In January, he told the Economist newspaper that if the Election was going to be fought between a traditional left-wing party and a traditional right-wing party, it would have the traditional result - a Conservative Government, and so it has proved to be, and Blair's diagnosis has, in a sense, been vindicated by the outcome of the Election.

The Liberal Democrat vote collapsed. The Party lost over 15% of its 2010 vote and 49 of its 57 seats. This was a catastrophe and takes the Party back to its position in the 1970 Election when it gained 7.5% of the vote and just six seats. At that time, there was a joke that all of the Liberal MPs could comfortably fit into a taxi. Since then, leaders such as David Steel and Paddy Ashdown sought to rebuild the Party as a credible party of the centre-left.

In a sense, the Liberal Democrat position now may be worse than in 1970 since, under the Coalition, it seems to have lost that identity as a party of the centre-left.

Now, Nick Clegg's strategy was to join the Coalition with the Conservatives to prove the Liberal Democrats could be a responsible party of Government and not just a protest party for the discontented. But joining the Coalition meant breaking the Party's pledge on student fees. The Party had promised in its 2010 Manifesto to abolish student fees and had supplemented this Manifesto promise with a personal pledge by every one of its 57 MPs, but the Coalition Government in which the Liberal Democrats participated, instead of abolishing tuition fees, tripled them, and this, at a stroke, destroyed the Party's credibility, even amongst those who disagreed with the pledge, and many voters refused to take any notice of what the Party said after that.

Nor did the Liberal Democrats achieve their aim of constitutional reform. There was a referendum in 2011 on electoral reform, not the Liberal Democrat favourite, proportional representation, but a different system, the alternative vote. Before the 2010 Election, Nick Clegg had called that "a miserable little compromise" but he nevertheless advised voters to support it. It was, however, defeated in 2011, on a low turnout of around 43%, by a 2:1 majority. The Liberal Democrats also failed to achieve reform of the House of Lords.

More fundamentally, the Liberal Democrats had a basic difficulty, as a party of the centre-left, in joining a coalition with the Conservatives, and this dilemma was again well summed-up by Tony Blair, who said: "If you have opposed a Labour Government from the left for 13 years, and then you join a Conservative-led Coalition, you have some questions to answer." Perhaps the Liberal Democrats might have left the Coalition earlier, saying that, with the economic crisis over, the Party now needed to re-establish its identity.

Perhaps smaller parties always suffer in coalition, but what is clear, in the past, Liberal coalitions with the Conservatives have been disastrous for the Party. The Lloyd George Coalition in 1918 ended the role of the Liberals as a party of government. The National Government of 1931 ended the role of the Liberals as a party of opposition. This Election seems to me to have ended the role of the Liberals as a third party. Indeed, there must now be a real question mark as to whether the Liberal Democrats can continue as a party. You may say that Nick Clegg's strategy has been, as it were, tested to destruction.

David Cameron was widely criticised in the Conservative Party for forming the Coalition in 2010 rather than a single-party minority Government, which could then call a second general election, and in that election, his critics hoped, he would win a majority. But Cameron said that was too risky a strategy. He said the Conservatives must first show they can govern responsibly and secure economic stability – then they could win and undermine the Liberal Democrats, and this he has achieved, remarkable in a period of austerity. Those who came to my last lecture may remember Mervyn King's comment in 2010, that is the Governor of the Bank of England, that the 2010 Election would be a good one to lose because the new Government would have to impose such severe measures of economic restraint that it would be condemned to opposition for a long time, and that has proved to be yet another failed prediction.

Cameron, perhaps, is an underestimated politician. Indeed, the political cemeteries are littered with those who have underestimated him. He has now destroyed a whole political generation: Ed Miliband and Ed Balls in the Labour Party, which may well seek its next leader from a generation untainted by the Blair/Brown years. He has destroyed, amongst his Coalition partners, Nick Clegg, Vince Cable, David Laws, Ed Davey and Danny Alexander, almost the whole frontbench of the Liberal Democrats.

Let us now look at the other parties.

The Scottish Nationalists, the SNP, won 56 of Scotland's 59 seats, where the three major parties, Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrats, have one seat each.

UKIP has just one seat, although nearly four million voters, one-eighth of the voters, voted for them.

And the Greens also won just one seat for nearly 4% of the vote.

The one minor party which most people will be glad to see has disappeared, the British National Party, which got nearly 2% of the vote in 2010, broke up shortly after the Election, and received a total vote in the country of 1,667 votes, less than half of that secured by the Monster Raving Loony Party, which won 3,898 votes.

Now, the Election is bound to raise questions about the justice of the electoral system. The Conservatives won their majority, a small overall majority, on 37% of the vote, and that is a smaller percentage than Winston Churchill's Conservatives gained in 1945 when they lost the Election. In 2005, Tony Blair won an overall majority of 62 on just 35% of the vote. So, in each case, over three-fifths of the voters did not support the Government and were presumably opposed to it. The last Government to secure even 40% of the vote, let alone 50%, was Tony Blair's in 2001, and that gave him a landslide majority of 176. Previous landslides, in 1997, 1987, and 1983, with Governments enjoying majorities of at least 100, were secured on 42% of the vote - Governments which nearly three-fifths of the voters rejected. So, if the first aim of an electoral system is to produce majority rule, the British electoral system is now spectacularly failing because it is producing not majority government but government by the largest minority, and quite a small minority.

The second aim of an electoral system should be that all minorities, or all significant minorities, are reasonably fairly represented, and again, I think the electoral system fails spectacularly at that, because minorities, other than the largest minority, are represented in haphazard fashion, according to no clear principle. Now, 4.7% of the United Kingdom vote yielded 56 seats for the SNP, but 12.6% of the United Kingdom yielded one seat for UKIP. Nearly four million voters gained no representation, and so the voice of those who want Britain to leave the European Union will not be effectively heard in Parliament. Perhaps it is not surprising that UKIP and the Greens favour proportional representation, but also, to be fair, so does the SNP. Nigel Farage, the leader of UKIP, rather ironically perhaps, wants Britain to adopt the German system of proportional representation.

Now, two parties in the Election secured eight seats: the Liberal Democrats, with nearly 8% of the vote in the United Kingdom, and the Democratic Unionist Party of Northern Ireland, which competes only in Northern Ireland and secured 0.6% of the United Kingdom vote. Under proportional representation, the outcome would have been as follows...

In England itself, 525 of the 533 seats are held by the Conservative or Labour Parties. The Conservative and Labour Parties are dominant in England, with almost all the seats. But around a quarter of English voters voted for other parties. They are represented by eight MPs: six Liberal Democrats, one UKIP MP, and one Green MP.

In Scotland, the disproportion is even more acute. As we have seen, the SNP swept the board, winning 56 of the 59 seats. That would lead the incautious observer to conclude that nearly every Scottish voter supported separatism, but in fact, the SNP vote was 50%, just 5% higher than the "yes" vote in the Referendum last September, and 5% higher than the SNP's vote in the Scottish Parliament Elections of 2011. The 50% of the voters who supported separatism secured 56 seats. The 50% of the voters who supported the Union secured three seats. Now, David Cameron declared after the Election that he would respect the wishes of the Scots in their choice of representatives, but it is to be hoped he will also respect the wishes of the 50% who voted for unionist parties and who are, scandalously, in my opinion, under-represented. Again, under a proportional electoral system, the allocation of seats would have been like that.

The House of Commons has now come to resemble a distorting mirror of the kind that people see at the fair, where some people's profiles are magnified and distorted, while others are diminished to the point of invisibility. Of course, the reason for this is that under the first-past-the-post system, the number of seats which a party wins depends not only upon how many votes it wins, but also upon the geographical structure of its vote. A party whose vote is fairly evenly spread, like UKIP, may gain a large number of second places but will win hardly any seats. A party whose vote is geographically concentrated, such as the SNP, whose vote is of course concentrated in Scotland, will be over-represented.

These distortions are now, in my opinion, of more than theoretical interest because they could threaten the very unity of the country by making Britain appear more divided than it actually is. There are, of course, great differences in voting behaviour between England and Scotland, but these are exaggerated by the electoral system, which therefore exacerbates the West Lothian problem, divides England from Scotland, and increases the likelihood of separation. One argument for changing the electoral system, in my opinion, is that it would alter the dynamics of the conflict between England and Scotland and make it more manageable.

I now want to talk about the significance of the Election, and I earlier mentioned that David Cameron's nearest competitor for electoral success was Lord Salisbury, who was Prime Minister at the beginning of the 20th Century. Lord Salisbury defined the essential role of the Conservative Party as follows. He said: "I rank myself no higher in the scheme of things than a policeman whose utility would disappear if there were no criminals." And its fear of the left that has made the Conservatives Britain's national party of government.

Social psychologists have told us that fear of losing what one has is a stronger motivation than hope of future gains. Voters turn to the Conservatives when they are fearful. In the early-19th Century, they were frightened of contagion from the French Revolution in Britain. In the late-19th Century, they were frightened of Irish home-rule. In the 1920s, they were frightened of socialism and communism. In the 1930s, people were frightened of financial collapse, and in the 1980s, people were frightened of the trade unions. Now, 2015 was, I think, no exception. Voters seemed fearful that Labour might not be economically competent and that there will be a repetition of the economic problems that faced Gordon Brown's Government, and they also feared that, with a Labour Government, the SNP would exercise a stranglehold over Westminster.

Labour wins elections when it can convince voters that it combines policies of fairness with basic economic competence, and that it will preserve rather than undermine. That was the case in 1945 when it seemed that Labour would be a better guarantor for proposals in the Beveridge Report than the Conservatives. In 1966, when Harold Wilson's slogan was reassuring, "You know Labour Government works," and 1997, when Tony Blair promised to maintain much of the new settlement carved out by Margaret Thatcher and John Major. In 2015, Labour was not able to convince the voters that it would be competent at running the economy, and therefore its message of social justice had less resonance than it would otherwise have done.

Tony Blair had argued, in 1997, that one did not have to choose between economic competence and fairness, that Labour could provide both, and that message now seems to have been lost. Labour has now lost three different constituencies, which it needs to re-gain: it has lost Scotland, where the threat is from the SNP; it has lost many voters in the hitherto safe North of England, which is threatened by UKIP; and it has lost Middle England, where it is threatened by the Conservatives.

Labour is now almost wholly unrepresented south of a line from The Wash to the Severn, outside London. Of 197 seats south of that line, excluding London, Labour holds just 11. This is obviously a very complex problem for the Labour Party, and not to be resolved simply by saying it should move left or it should move right, because, in England, possibly, it was seen as too left-wing; in Scotland, some people said it was not left-wing enough, that the SNP was more opposed to austerity than the Labour Party, and the SNP was against the independent Trident nuclear deterrent. Nor is it to be resolved simply by saying that Labour must appeal to the aspirational voters because it is not clear that many of those in the North and Midlands, who deserted the Labour Party, were necessarily aspirational voters at all. So, the problem for Labour is to meet the needs of a very diverse series of constituencies which it has lost, and it is much easier to state the problems than offer a solution, and I am certainly not going to do that.

The General Election of 2010 had revealed the lowest combined vote for the two major parties since the 1920s: one-third of the voters supported parties other than Labour or the Conservatives. In 2015, there was a slightly higher percentage supporting the two major parties, but not much. But the crucial difference is this: that the composition of the remaining third was quite different. In 2010, as you can see, most of the voters who did not vote Labour or Conservative voted for the Liberal Democrats; in 2015, they did not. Now, in both Elections, the Liberal Democrats called upon moderate voters to support them, to moderate the two extremes. In 2010, the voters listened; in 2015, they did not, and the bulk of the remaining third of the vote which did not go to Labour or the Conservatives went to parties which the Liberal Democrats, and perhaps others too, would certainly label as extreme - namely, UKIP and the Scottish National Party. They were the only parties which radically increased their votes, very dramatically.

Now, in 2010, UKIP got 3% of the vote, and that itself was by far the largest vote ever secured by a minor party nationally in a British election. The 12.5% vote in 2015 for a minor party outside the Big 3 is quite unprecedented and indicates, like the vote for the SNP, that there has been a genuine grassroots insurgency and rebellion in British politics. The high votes for these two parties are a quite new phenomenon in British politics. They mark a discontinuity and show that the 2015 Election is quite different from anything that has happened in Britain in the past.

UKIP and the SNP have one important feature in common: that they seek to replace the politics of ideology with the politics of identity. They are not easy placed on the left/right spectrum of politics. You can be a left-wing supporter of British exit from the European Union or a right-wing supporter of exit. And indeed, UKIP is saying not that David Cameron is not right-wing enough but that he is not British enough. In Scotland, you can be a left-wing Nationalist or a right-wing Nationalist, and the Scottish Nationalists are not saying that the other parties are too left-wing or too right-wing, but that they are not Scottish enough. These parties are concerned not primarily with the distribution of income and resources or the economic matters which constitute the main elements on the political agenda for the other parties; they are concerned about questions on where we belong. Are we really European? Is being European compatible with being British? Is being Scottish compatible with being British? These questions, whether Britain should remain in the European Union, whether Scotland should remain in the United Kingdom, and if so, on what terms, look likely to dominate this Parliament.

David Cameron warned that a vote for UKIP could give Ed Miliband the key to Downing Street by splitting the right-wing vote, and Ed Miliband said a vote for the SNP could allow Cameron to remain in Downing Street by splitting the left-wing vote. But the people who voted for these parties said that Cameron and Miliband were all too similar, and the voters for these parties came from those who felt the two major parties, far from being extreme, were all too similar in their moderation, which they rejected.

UKIP pointed out that the major parties, together with the Liberal Democrats, agreed that Britain should remain in the European Union; they broadly welcomed immigration, or at least were unable to curb it radically; they favoured gay marriage; and they favoured HS2. The SNP reminded the Scots that the major parties agreed on the need for austerity and for retaining the Trident independent nuclear deterrent. So it made little difference which of them won the Election. Both represented a discredited political class, so these voters said, unable to speak a language which these voters could understand – they felt unrepresented by these parties. Who were they to vote for if they did not agree with these elements of the consensus? UKIP voters said, if only we were out of the European Union, we would not have a problem with immigration. SNP voters argued, if only we were out of the United Kingdom, we would not have a problem with austerity.

These views were most strongly held, so it seems, by those left behind by social and economic change, in the areas of the first industrial revolution, the areas of heavy industry, which are in decline. Of one of the left-behind areas in the Midlands, Stoke, one of its Labour MPs said, "It has never really recovered from industrial decline." "In the past," he went on to say, "...people in Stoke did not need qualifications. They left school, went straight into a job and thought they would never be out of work." In the three Stoke constituencies, UKIP gained between 20% and 25% of the vote.

The strength of UKIP and the SNP lies in these areas: in the West-Central Belt of Scotland, in parts of the Midlands, and the decaying seaside towns on the East Coast. In the West-Central Belt of Scotland, Glasgow had voted yes in the Referendum last September, but middle-class SNP areas in Perthshire and Aberdeenshire voted no. The East Coast, the decaying seaside towns on the East Coast, such as Clacton, where the one UKIP MP was returned.

There is developing a sharp cleavage in Britain between those who have the skills to benefit from globalisation and those who have not. This is a new cleavage in British politics. One might call it a meritocratic cleavage, distinguishing, broadly, between those who have been through the process of higher education and those who have not, and those who have not are much more likely to vote for UKIP than those who have.

This, of course, represents a long-term threat to the Labour Party as well as the Conservatives, indeed probably more to the Labour Party, because its historic task has been to represent the disadvantaged, those left behind

by industrial change, and because the disadvantaged tended to live in safe Labour seats, perhaps the Party developed a sense of entitlement to their votes. Labour argued there was no alternative, you have to vote Labour, but there are now alternatives: in England, UKIP; and in Scotland, the SNP.

Amongst such voters, there was a strong sense of disfranchisement and powerlessness, so fear was not the only motive animating electors. UKIP and the SNP, the first popular grassroots insurgent movements in British politics since the War owe their success to a quite different emotion, a feeling of powerlessness, a belief by many English voters that the political class makes decisions on matters such as Europe and immigration without consulting the voters or considering their interests, and a belief by many Scottish voters that Westminster regards them as colonials needing to be placated.

These views were much less felt in London, which was the seat of Labour's greatest success. The Labour vote in London increased by 5.5%. If that had happened in the country as a whole, David Cameron would probably not be in Downing Street. In the South outside London, it fell by 0.4%, and in Conservative/Labour marginal, it was down by 1.3%. Indeed, outside London, the Conservatives won more seats from Labour than Labour won from the Conservatives.

In London, there is broadly strong support for the European Union, a welcome for immigration, and support, broadly, for gay marriage. And perhaps there is another factor – it is not wholly a frivolous point – differentiating London from the rest of the country, namely, attitudes to Russell Brand. Because, in the fashionable parts of London, many people rather like him and regard him as entertaining, with a message that ought to be heard. In Middle England, by contrast, he is thought of as very weird.

Now, the fact that London is so different from the rest of the country may be one of the reasons why media and metropolitan commentators based in London missed the significance of what was happening in the rest of England. London is the headquarters of what one might call liberal internationalism, a doctrine which went down to defeat in the General Election, and traditionally, the Labour Party has been based on an alliance between the metropolitan intelligentsia and the working class, what might be called a Hampstead-Humberside alliance. But that alliance has now been undermined. Hampstead remained loyal – indeed, the Labour vote there increased, despite the mansion tax, which probably affects it more than any constituency outside London. Hampstead remained loyal to Labour. Humberside is now under great threat, not only or primarily from the Conservatives but from UKIP.

Ed Miliband hoped that the financial crash of 2008 had led to a fundamental change in attitudes to the private enterprise system. He hoped that attitudes to the free market had altered and that there was now a strong electoral constituency for greater regulation of markets and the banks and for redistributive taxation. He hoped that 2008 had been a social democratic moment. This turned out not to be the case. Indeed, on the contrary, in Britain, as on the Continent, social democrat parties find themselves defensive and under threat. It is the case certainly in Greece and in Spain, and perhaps coming to be the case in France and Germany.

UKIP and the SNP are constitutional and British versions of other new parties on the Continent, some of them very unpleasant. On the right are the Front National in France, Jobbik in Hungary, and the Sweden Democrats in Sweden; and on the left, Syriza, in coalition with the Independent Greeks Party, a party which has been accused of racism and homophobia, a party of the right, and is admired by the Front National leader, Marine Le Pen. In Spain, there is Podemos, whose leader, Pablo Iglesias, in a speech in January 2015, paid tribute to Spain as a patria and spoke of pride in his country and the need to recover Spanish sovereignty, and that speech struck a new note on the Spanish left.

What all these parties have in common, whether on the right or on the left, is nationalism, and 2008 has led not to a social democrat moment but to a nationalist moment. In Europe as a whole, nationalist feeling has been strengthened, while class feeling and social solidarity seem to have been weakened. The alienation and sense of disfranchisement which has arisen has, on the whole, benefited the right, except in the poorer Mediterranean Member States of the European Union, where it has, on the whole, benefited the left. But even where it has benefited the left, it has not benefited traditional conservative and Christian democrat parties' as much as nationalist parties on the right who are not conservative, with a small "c", but very radical.

There is a new political conflict in the whole of Europe, which is now reflected in Britain, reflecting a new social cleavage between those who have benefited from globalisation and those who have not, and this is coming to overshadow traditional left-right policy differences between mainstream parties. These policy differences revolve largely around an internationalist/nationalist axis, which may become as important in Britain and on the Continent as traditional left/right politics.

Now, the Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund, Christine Lagarde, has drawn attention to the contrast between an increasingly integrated global economic system and a political system which is becoming more fragmented as a reaction against globalisation.

The 2015 Election in Britain represented a serious defeat for the ideologies of social democracy and liberalism, and for believers in liberal internationalism, for those who believe in an international and open society. Now, believers in these ideologies, Labour and the Liberal Democrats, now have a majority only in the unelected House of Lords, not in the elected House of Commons. The left, ironically, has a majority in the unelected chamber but not in the elected chamber. And perhaps the main cleavage in British politics is now that between those who believe in an open society and those in UKIP and the SNP who do not, and perhaps that cleavage is also there within the main parties, and particularly within the Conservative Party. David Cameron and George Osborne are liberal internationalists, who believe in an open society and want to keep Britain in the European Union, but there are of course other Conservatives who do not share that view, and the lines will be clearly drawn in the battle over whether Britain does or does not remain in the European Union.

Paradoxically, UKIP has made the British party system more like the multi-party systems on the Continent. It is no longer a two-party system but a multi-party system, and that is why the British electoral system has produced such strange results. It doesn't work too badly when you have just two parties. When you have a multi-party system, its results can be somewhat haphazard. All this is very ironic because those who want Britain to remain in the European Union have continually insisted that Britain must become more European. Perhaps they have succeeded all too well...

The General Election of 2015 left some fundamental questions still to be decided. It answered fairly conclusively, contrary to the predictions of most commentators, the question of who is to govern Britain for the next five years. It left open the question of whether there will still be a Britain to be governed. It also left open the question of whether Britain will remain in the European Union, and it also raised the question of whether we had the right electoral system for a multi-party and multinational state, and these questions are perhaps interlinked, and they are likely to be at the centre of the political argument in the 2015 Parliament.

Now, I began this series of lectures by discussing the General Election of 1945, when none of these issues were even on the horizon. The two major parties gained 86% of the vote between them, and the Liberals got another 9% of the vote. Labour won 47.8% of the vote, very near to 50%, and the defeated Conservatives 39.8% of the vote, nearly 3% more than David Cameron's victorious Conservatives this year. There was a sense of confidence and trust in political leaders. Churchill was obviously a giant, while the Attlee Government followed its Manifesto almost to the letter, pursuing a programme of radical social reform that set the parameters of the modern welfare state and established structures which no later Government has been able to undermine. Nationalist parties had no representation in Parliament. They seemed irrelevant, and Attlee said, in the 1950s, they were out of date. The politics of Northern Ireland was dominated by the Unionists, but they were then in alliance with the Conservatives and voted with them in the House of Commons, so there were two unified parties which had almost all of the vote. And Britain seemed a unified society, despite the rigors of War and the economic hardships of the period, and it was also a very confident society.

One commentator in 1944 said that a radical friend of his had said: "We have shown in this War that we British do not always muddle through; we have shown we can organise superbly. Look at these invasions of the Continent which have gone like clockwork. Look at the harbours we have built on these beaches. No excuse anymore for unemployment and slums and under-feeding. Using even half the vision and energy and invention, and pulling together as we have done in this War, and what is there we cannot do? We have virtually exploded the arguments of old fogies and better-not-ers who said we cannot afford this and we must not do that."

But disillusion was not long in setting in... In 1950, a Labour backbencher, who was to become a Minister in Harold Wilson's Government in the '60s, said, sadly, in a Fabian lecture: "All the obvious things have been done

which were fought for and argued about, and yet, mysteriously enough, the ideal, the pattern of values, has not been achieved. We have done them. We have created the means to the good life, which they all laid down and said, if you do all these things, after that, there'll be a classless society. Well, there is not."

And, at the same time, W.H. Auden, the poet, wrote of Britain, calling it: "A backward and dilapidated province, connected to the big busy world by a tunnel, with a certain seedy appeal, is that all it is now?"

The Labour Party has tried desperately to recover the spirit of 1945 in the post-War years, and I said, in my first lecture, that 1945 was a victory from which Labour never recovered.

But in 1945, Britain also seemed a great world power and imperial power. Its prestigious in Europe was enormous. Now, it is not even at the centre of European politics, let alone world politics, and is fighting to secure influence in Europe in the re-negotiation over its place in the European Union.

And the various constitutional experiments of the last two decades, in particular devolution, seem to leave the very unity of the country in doubt, so that, from Britain being a certainty, it is now a question mark, and indeed, these constitutional reforms may themselves be a sign of uncertainty.

Bagehot once said that a happy man is not continually repairing his house, and a happy country is not continually reforming its institutions or supporting new-fangled political parties or questioning its identity and its role in the world.

Now, elections, and I think this one in particular, hold a mirror to society, revealing the relationship between the people and the parties that seek to represent them, and it seems to me that this General Election reveals one particularly disquieting feature of post-War British politics: that the self-confidence which marked the British people at the end of the War, and for the first few years after it, and which was reflected in the early post-War Elections has now gone. The key question that we all have to ask is: will it return? Fortunately, that is not a question I am called upon to answer because it's difficult enough for the historian to find out what happened let alone predict the future, and I think what happened to the pollsters and commentators in 2015 shows how very dangerous it is to try to predict the future.