EconoMag

The Tory War Is Over ©

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Theresa May will become leader of the Conservative Party, and UK Prime Minister, after Andrea Leadsom unexpectedly left the leadership race. Let us start with the common points between the two. Both women, as Margaret Thatcher in her day, have middle-class country origins, and studied in grammar schools, which are the UK's good state schools. This is in strong contrast with David Cameron, George Osborne or Boris Johnson, who all went to Eton, a very expensive and elitist school. There is often tension within the conservative party between the urban aristocrats, who are often more liberal on social issues, and the rural middle class, which is more staunchly conservative. It is not a surprise then that the two were open Eurosceptics, and are on the right of David Cameron.

After some years at the Bank of England and as a consultant, Theresa May was elected to parliament in 1997, in a safe constituency, when the conservatives were heavily defeated by Tony Blair. She became well respected within the party, serving as chairman of the party from 2002 until 2003. When David Cameron won the 2010 election, she became Home Secretary and has stayed there ever since. This is a difficult job and she is the longest serving British Home Secretary for over 60 years. She was able to deal with spending cuts in the police without too many problems, and she took a tough stance against radical Muslim preachers. May is also well-known for her plain-speaking, in a Tory conference after the 2001 election loss she reminded the audience that they were called the "Nasty Party". In 2014, in a well-known speech delivered to the Police Federation, she openly reminded them of the record of police misconduct.

Andrea Leadsom is a bit younger than May, and she started her career in the financial industry. Recently it came to light that she may have lied a bit in her CV about her responsibilities at Barclays. She was elected to Parliament in 2010, and became a junior minister at the Treasury. After the 2015 election she became Minister of State for Energy (but in the UK a Minister is more junior than a Secretary of State). She campaigned forcefully for Brexit, and declared her candidacy for the Tory leadership after the result. She is very conservative, and many see the influence of UKIP behind her candidacy.

Despite her Euroscepticism, Theresa May decided not to campaign for Brexit, because of cabinet loyalty. However, she merely stayed neutral during the campaign, so that she kept good relationships with both Leave and Remain conservatives. In a sense, her strategy was the opposite of Boris Johnson's, a centrist who campaigned for Leave but

alienated both sides. After David Cameron's resignation, she had wide support within the party, both from Remain conservatives who saw her as the best alternative, but also some Leave voters who saw her as the most effective politician. She promised that with her, Brexit would mean Brexit, she also said that the rights of European citizens already living in the UK could not be guaranteed and would be part of the Brexit negotiation.

The rules of the Tory leadership election are a bit complicated. If there are more than two candidates, Tory MPs eliminate candidates one by one over a few days, until two remain. Then the party members get to vote. There were originally five candidates, but May and Leadsom quickly emerged as the most likely winners, May having a very strong lead of 199 to 84 MPs. They were supposed to campaign among the party members during the summer, announcing the result in early September. Leadsom was the underdog, but her true Brexit, staunch conservative appeal could have done well in the rural conservative shires. However she shocked many by saying that having children would make her a better Prime Minister than May who is childless. She tried to back off from this comment, but the outrage was already there, and she was probably not strong enough to handle it. On Monday, she gave up the race, claiming that May's support among MPs would make her the most effective person to lead the country. The party soon decided that it wouldn't hold an election, and Theresa May became leader of the Conservative Party, and Prime Minister of the United Kingdom on Wednesday as Cameron resigned. On the other side, in the Labour party, Jeremy Corbyn is now officially facing a leadership contest.