Corbyn and the Future of Labour

A Verso Report

CORBYN AND THE FUTURE OF LABOUR

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Introduction. At the Dawn of the Corbyn Era

At last, the leadership election has come to an end, with a victory for Jeremy Corbyn. Even with the compliance unit working overtime, and longstanding members and newcomers alike falling victim to yet another attempt to disenfranchise Corbyn's supporters, the election has demonstrated the strength of his support within the larger Constituency Labour Party. Furthermore, it gives him the mandate to demand support from the Westminster rump that still resists his authority.

But even with this support, the future is no walk in the park. Since the attempt to force Corbyn to resign, followed by the extended contest, the polls have shown the electorate to be unenthusiastic about the Labour Party's internal struggles. Widespread media coverage continues to drive home the message that the party will be unelectable in 2020 under Corbyn, when the next General Election seems most likely to occur. The collapse of the party in Scotland and the threat of future boundary changes make the prospects for success seem particularly dim. What is the Labour Party to do in order to present a credible alternative?

There are no simple answers. *Corbyn and the Future of Labour* looks back on an extraordinary year – in which the Labour Party and its membership changed almost beyond recognition – and offers a variety of prescriptions for what needs to be done. Already we have seen that the party is willing to move away from the centre ground for the first time in twenty years and beginning to offer an authentic alternative to the neoliberal doctrine of austerity. Perhaps the only thing the writers collected together here might agree on is that the road ahead is going to be hard.

While the flaws and weaknesses that have appeared in the first year of the Corbyn leadership don't go without mention, the palpable reinvigoration of the political debate it has stirred has been unavoidable here. In her essay, Joanna Biggs reports on the electric atmosphere of a rally on a rainy summer's day. In response, Hilary Wainwright asks how this energy should be focused: on transforming the party or developing a new political movement? Can we only choose one?

At the same time, can Labour develop – as Ellie Mae O'Hagan notes – a new 'story' that resonates with the electorate but also remains true to its values? Even more difficult questions arise when considering – as set out by Aaron Bastani – how the party can connect with its members without having to rely on the intermediation of an openly hostile media.

Now that Corbyn is victorious once more, what does victory look like this time around? Richard Seymour argues that the challenge to Corbyn's leadership – and by extension to the membership who elected him – has only galvanised his base and transformed what were relatively inexperienced and passive members into a movement to be reckoned with. As these essays show, it is not just about taking power for power's sake or to win solely by parliamentary majority, but also about initiating a counter-hegemonic shift towards a fairer, more just society. Corbyn's long-standing role in anti-war campaigns, Lindsey German argues, will lead him to propose a new era of anti-imperialist foreign policy, while Michael Rosen offers some friendly advice on the pitfalls of power.

The selection of topics and arguments presented here are by no means exhaustive; nor do they fit into one single agenda. Instead, they are the start of a debate, at the beginning of a new passage for the Labour Party. We hope that in future we might call this moment the beginning of the Corbyn era.

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Corbyn's Progress

Tariq Ali

The UK state – its economy, its culture, its fractured identities and party system – is in a much deeper crisis than many want to accept. Its governors, at least in public, remain in semi-denial. English politicians assumed that the threat to the unitary state had been seen off after they got the result they wanted in the Scottish independence referendum. The results of last year's general election suggested otherwise. The SNP now exercises a virtual monopoly of Scottish representation in the House of Commons and most opinion polls indicate a small majority in favour of Scottish independence. The impact of this on the crisis of Labourism, old and new, should not be underestimated. It is the most dramatic change in the UK party system since the foundation of the Labour Party itself.

Add to this the following facts: 11.3 million votes obtained 331 seats for the Conservatives; 9.3 million got Labour 232 MPs; the Liberal Democrats with 2.4 million went down to eight; while the Greens and UKIP gained a single MP each for a million plus and 3.8 million votes respectively. A blatantly rigged electoral mechanism is not a cause for celebration; whatever else it may be, this is clearly not a representative democracy. Ed Miliband resigned immediately as leader following his defeat and the caretaker leader, Harriet Harman, decided not to oppose the Tories on the basic tenets of their austerity policies: she knew that a post-2015 Labour government would have done the same. The Labour Party that lost the election was conformist and visionless: it had forgotten what it meant to mount an opposition.

The new system for Labour leadership elections that Miliband introduced in 2014 was meant as a conciliatory gesture. He had been accused of winning the leadership only with the support of the hated trade unions, so he instituted a one member, one vote system, with one vote for any Labour voter or supporter who – though not a party member – was prepared to part with £3 (the French Socialists had used a similar method to elect Hollande). It was a step forward for democratisation, but the new rules also had the overwhelming support of the Parliamentary Labour Party (PLP). Most of them assumed that if outsiders had any effect at all, it would be to help seal the status quo.

And so it might have been, had New Labour managed to come up with a halfway credible candidate. In order to preserve the fiction that the PLP remained a broad church that favoured diversity and loved a good debate, a few Blairites gave their vote to support a candidate from the minuscule parliamentary Left. This strategy had worked before: last time round David Miliband nominated Diane Abbott as a candidate. In 2015, they hoped a left candidate would take away support from Andy Burnham, who was what passed for leftish, leaving the door open for Liz Kendall or Yvette Cooper.

Enter Jeremy Corbyn stage left. He may not be a charismatic figure, but he could never be mistaken for a PR confection. I have shared numerous platforms with him over

the past forty years and on key issues he has remained steadfast. During the leadership debates, he came across as uninterested in point-scoring and oblivious to media hostility. The *Guardian* came out for Yvette Cooper, the *Mirror* for Andy Burnham. Absolutely nobody, including Corbyn himself, thought that he could win.

The campaign was simply intended to show that there was an alternative to the neoliberal leadership that had ruled the country for the last three decades. What appealed to the young and to the many who had left the party in disgust during the Blair/Brown years – what appealed to the people who turned the campaign into a genuine social movement – was precisely what alienated the political and media cliques. Corbyn's campaign generated a mass movement that renewed the base of the Labour Party – nearly 200,000 new members and counting – and led to his triumph.

He won almost as many votes as all his opponents put together. Blair's misjudged appeals ('Hate me as much as you want, but don't vote Corbyn') and Brown's out-of-touch attacks accusing Corbyn of being friendly with dictatorships (he was referring to Venezuela, rather than Saudi Arabia or Kazakhstan, states favoured by the New Labour elite) only won Corbyn more support. The Blairite cohort that dominates the *Guardian*'s opinion pages – Jonathan Freedland, Polly Toynbee et al. – had zero impact on the result, desperate though they were to trash Corbyn. They were desperate enough even to give space – twice – to Blair himself, in the hope of rehabilitating him. Naturally, the paper lost many readers, including me.

Corbyn's victory was not based on ultra-leftism. His views reflected what many in the country felt, and this is what anti-Corbyn Labour found difficult to grasp. Corbyn spelled it out himself in one of the leadership campaign TV debates:

We also as a party have to face up to something which is an unpleasant truth: that we fought the 2015 election on very good policies included in the manifesto, but fundamentally we were going to be making continuing cuts in central government expenditure, we were going to continue underfunding local government, there were still going to be job losses, there were still going to be people suffering because of the cuts we were going to impose by accepting an arbitrary date to move into budget surplus, accepting the language of austerity. My suggestion is that the party has to challenge the politics of austerity, the politics of increasing the gap between the richest and the poorest in society and be prepared to invest in a growing economy rather than accepting what is being foisted on us by the banking crisis of 2008 to 2009. We don't have to set this arbitrary date, which in effect means the poorest and most vulnerable in our society pay for the banking crisis, rather than those that caused it.

How could any Labour MP disagree with that? What they really hated was his questioning of the private sector. John Prescott had been allowed to pledge the renationalisation of the railways at the 1996 Labour Party Conference, but after Blair's victory the following year the subject was never raised again. Until now.

When I asked him when he first realised he might actually win, Corbyn's response was characteristic of the activist that he remains: 'It was in Nottingham during the last weeks of campaigning … you know Nottingham. Normally we think that fifty or sixty people at a meeting is a good turnout. I got four hundred and there were people

outside who couldn't get in. I thought then we might win this one.'

The crowds grew and grew, making clear that Corbyn was capable of mobilising and inspiring large numbers of people, as well as how flimsy the support was, outside the media, for the other candidates.

His election animated English politics. His horrified enemies in the PLP immediately started to plot his removal. Lord Mandelson informed us that the PLP wouldn't destroy their new leader immediately: 'It would be wrong', he wrote, 'to try and force this issue from within before the public have moved to a clear verdict.' Blair, angered by this outburst of democracy in a party that he had moulded in his own image, declared that the Labour Party would be unelectable unless Corbyn was removed. Brown kept relatively quiet, perhaps because he was busy negotiating his very own private finance initiative with the investment firm Pimco (Ben Bernanke and the former ECB president Jean-Claude Trichet are also joining its 'global advisory board'). Simultaneously, his ennobled former chancellor, Lord Darling, was on his way to work for Morgan Stanley in Wall Street. Blair, an adviser to J.P. Morgan since 2008, must have chuckled. At last, a New Labour reunion in the land of the free. All that 'light-touch' regulation was bearing rich fruit. Virtually every senior member of the Blair and Brown cabinets went to work for a corporation that had benefited from their policies. Former health secretary Alan Milburn, for example, is on the payroll of several companies involved in private healthcare and is currently working for Cameron as the chair of his Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission. It was not just the Iraq War that was responsible for the growing public disenchantment with New Labour.

The establishment decided to wheel out the chief of defence staff, Sir Nicholas Houghton. Interviewed on 8 November, he confided to a purring Andrew Marr that the army was deeply vexed by Corbyn's unilateralism, which damaged 'the credibility of deterrence'. On the same show, Maria Eagle, a PLP sniper with a seat on the front bench as the shadow defence secretary, essentially told Marr that she agreed with the general. Just another day in the war against Corbyn. The *Sunday Times* had previously run an anonymous interview with 'a senior serving general'. 'Feelings are running very high within the armed forces', the general was quoted as saying, on the very idea of a Corbyn government. 'You would see … generals directly and publicly challenging Corbyn over … Trident, pulling out of Nato and any plans to emasculate and shrink the size of the armed forces … There would be mass resignations at all levels … which would effectively be a mutiny. You can't put a maverick in charge of a country's security.'

If anything expressed the debasement of Britain's political culture, it was the lack of reaction to this military interference in politics. When Corbyn tried to complain, a former Tory grandee, Ken Clarke, declared that the army was not answerable to Parliament, but to the Queen. Anything but Corbyn: even a banana monarchy.

In December 2015, Cameron sought parliamentary approval for sending British planes to bomb Islamic State in Syria. From his point of view, a happy possible side effect of the predictably successful vote was that it might make Corbyn's position as leader untenable. Having been shafted by Maria Eagle, he was about to be stabbed in the front by Hilary Benn, whose disingenuous speech – Hitler, with the Spanish Civil

War thrown in for good measure – was loudly cheered by Tory and hardcore Blairite MPs. What a pity that the two-hour row between Hilary Benn and his father over the Iraq War, of which Hilary was an ardent supporter, was never taped and transcribed in Tony Benn's printed diaries – though he did talk about it to friends.

But this, too, failed to unseat Corbyn. The Labour leader – wrongly, in my opinion – permitted a free vote on the insistence of close colleagues. John McDonnell, the shadow chancellor, insisted it was a 'matter of conscience'. In the end, 66 Labour MPs voted with the Tories to bomb targets in Syria. Some of them had been given presentations by the Ministry of Defence designed to convince them that there would be no collateral damage. But the majority of the PLP opposed the bombings and voted with Corbyn.

Frustrated yet again, the media sought to attribute the failure of more Labour MPs to vote for the bombing to the 'bullying' of Stop the War, an organisation which Corbyn had chaired since the death of Tony Benn. For a week or so it was open season on the anti-war coalition. One effect was to scare the Greens and cause the party's former leader, Caroline Lucas, to resign from the STW committee. Was this really her own decision, or was it the idea of the inept Natalie Bennett, fearful that Green supporters were being carried away by the pied piper from Islington? Corbyn himself was unmoved: he told the audience at a STW fundraising dinner that he was proud of the work the organisation had done from the time of the Afghan war onwards, and that he was proud to serve as its chair.

Later in the week of the Syria vote came the Oldham by-election, which had, again, been talked up as a possible disaster for Corbyn. George Eaton in the *New Statesman* claimed to have been told by 'an insider' that 'defeat was far from unthinkable'. It was instead a resounding victory. All this left Corbyn's enemies on the defensive. How long can Labour MPs carry on this war on their own leader?

Corbyn will not be bullied or demoralised. The snipers will use any ammunition to achieve their goal. Bad local election results? The Scottish Parliament elections? Corbyn's fault? Of course. The zombies running Scottish Labour presided over the 2015 meltdown, the worst defeat since Labour was founded. But when they lost this time, Corbyn was to blame.

While the mood in Scotland shifted leftwards, the centre of politics in England has moved so far to the right since the 1980s that even though the Corbyn–McDonnell economic programme is not very radical – what it offers on the domestic front is a little bit of social democracy to strengthen the welfare state and a modest, fiscally manipulated form of income distribution – it is nevertheless a break with the consensus established by Thatcher, Blair/Brown and Cameron. As such, the thoughts and habits that have dominated the culture for almost four decades constitute a serious obstacle – a symbiosis of big money and small politics built on the assumption that private is better than public, individual more important than society, rich more attractive than poor.

Many who concentrate their fire on Corbyn's supposed unelectability shy away from the corollary of this: under the present dispensation, there is no room for any progressive alternative. The dogmatic vigour with which the EU and its Troika push

back any attempts by the Left to shift this obstacle, the refusal to tolerate even a modicum of social democracy, has contributed to a disturbing growth of the Right in France, the Netherlands and now Germany, as well as to the election of hard-right governments in Hungary, Poland, Slovakia and Croatia.

The creation of Momentum, which defines itself as 'a network of people and organisations to continue the energy and enthusiasm of Jeremy Corbyn's campaign', united old Bennites long dormant in the Labour Party and young activists drawn to the leadership campaign. Corbyn likes to boast that his own local constituency party has 3,300 members and 2,000 registered supporters – more than five thousand in all, in a constituency where the Labour vote is nearly 30,000. In other words, one in six Labour voters is a member or supporter of the party. This is an astonishing and exemplary figure, but one not matched elsewhere.

A body like Momentum could help to build support by working within existing campaigns against war and austerity, registering voters, encouraging school-leavers and students to become politically active, regularly debating opposing views (and not just on social networks). Only a movement of the sort that elected Corbyn as leader can send him to Downing Street, and in this regard the effect of the Scottish example on many in England should not be underestimated. Even media cynics were staggered by the degree of politicisation in Scotland and the debates and discussions taking place everywhere before the referendum.

The tens of thousands who flocked to join Corbyn's Labour Party were not that different from those who moved to support the SNP. The SNP's parliamentary cohort in Westminster provides solid support to the Labour Left on a number of issues, perhaps most notably over the vote to renew Trident. Every SNP representative, alongside Corbyn and his allies in the PLP, opposed the idea. In contrast, 140 Labour MPs, including challengers Owen Smith and Angela Eagle, voted against their party leader, with 41 abstaining. Yet, once again, attempts to use this to destabilise Corbyn foundered.

In Scotland, there is a large majority in favour of the removal of nuclear missiles from Scottish shores. Elsewhere in the UK, public opinion is more evenly divided and fluctuates depending on the way the question is posed. A number of retired generals have questioned Trident's utility, and in his memoirs even Blair admitted that in terms of both cost (£31 billion, with another £10 billion in reserve and lifetime costs predicted to exceed £180 billion) and utility, both 'common sense and practical argument' dictated getting rid of it. He was opposed to doing so because it would be 'too big a downgrading of our status as a nation'.

There is no other reason. Britain needs Trident as a symbol – and to be a notch above or below the Germans, depending on one's point of view. Yet those who dream of an English finger on the nuclear trigger inhabit a fantasy world: the finger will always be American. That's why the notion, recently discussed in relation to the EU and Brexit, that the Commons would vote through a motion declaring that the UK is a sovereign state caused much merriment abroad. Everybody knows that Britain has been a vassal state since 1956. While I favour Brexit for good socialist reasons, it can't restore

sovereignty. The only truly sovereign state in the Western world is the United States. It's worth noting that the SNP is for NATO. So was Syriza in better times. So is Podemos, one of whose leaders recently declared that NATO could help democratise the Spanish Army. To each their illusions.

Corbyn's radicalism lies not so much in what he is proposing on the domestic front – for that is increasingly the common sense of many economists and others, including the self-declared democratic socialist Bernie Sanders – but in his desire to change foreign policy. His criticism of the absurdly high level of military expenditure is echoed by some prominent US economists in relation to their own country. Joseph Stiglitz and Linda Bilmes have argued that America's spending on wars since 2003, estimated now at nearly $8 trillion, is crippling the country. 'A trillion dollars', they note,

could have built eight million additional housing units, could have hired some 15 million additional public school teachers for one year; could have paid for 120 million children to attend a year of Head Start; or insured 530 million children for healthcare for one year; or provided 43 million students with four-year scholarships at public universities. Now multiply those numbers by three.

There are a number of US historians and analysts – those of the realist school – who aren't shy in criticising their country's foreign policy. Indeed, Trump's recent assault on Bush over the Iraq War owes much to their work. Key figures include John Mearsheimer at Chicago, Stephen Walt at Harvard, Barry Posen at MIT, Christopher Layne in Texas, and a former colonel, Andrew Bacevich. Their thinking continues to evolve. In *American Empire*, Bacevich argued against the previous realist view that US Cold War policy was a defensive response to Soviet ambitions and insisted that its expansion of conflict to Eurasia in the 1940s was part of a drive to establish global hegemony.

Yet such opinions when voiced by Corbyn and his circle are denounced as anti-American, extremist, a threat to Britain, and so on. Corbyn has long been hostile to both Nato and the EU as presently constituted, but his views on these matters are so alien to the PLP that they have for the time being been shelved.

During the Blair/Brown period, the Labour Party unlearned social democracy of the Crosland variety, let alone anything resembling the classical model of early socialism. Corbyn knows it's vital that the party relearns at least the old tradition. It once seemed a hopeless task. Now, amazingly, they have a chance. The statistics about global inequality desperately need someone who can explain them in terms that can anger, mobilise and inspire people. If Corbyn can do this, it would mark an important shift in English politics.

2

At the Rally

Joanna Biggs

In the gloomy days of late June 2016, post-Brexit, we texted each other. In our WhatsApp groups, we confessed to tears, to anger, to surges of sentiment. We emailed each other with links to political blogs we usually ignored. We phoned our fathers. We waited for the newspaper editorials.

Perhaps, we comforted ourselves, this was just a useless convulsion in an empire that had been dying for years. We clicked to see seventy-five new tweets, thirty-two new tweets, twelve new tweets, three new tweets, as if Twitter were a live horoscope. We spoke more gently to those who served us coffee and drove our buses. When we met up, we asked each other: what should we do?

It was drizzling as we assembled on the front steps of SOAS. The Labour Party pressure group Momentum had organised a 'Keep Corbyn' rally in a hall in Bloomsbury, but demand had pushed the crowd out into the rain. I buttoned up my coat. The event had been organised because – the attempt to explain shows how little sense it makes – there had been a mass resignation of the Shadow Cabinet following a right-wing vote for Britain leaving the EU. Corbyn now faced a challenge for the leadership; our sense was that without him, there would be nowhere for us to go.

There was less tweeting in the crowd than hugging, cigarette-rolling, polite requests to move back 'a little bit'. John McDonnell was due; Corbyn was stuck in traffic with Diane Abbott. A man next to me carried a plastic pint glass of beer; others leaned out of windows, or gathered on balconies. While we waited, we heard from student activists who spoke of last summer, when they first campaigned for Corbyn to become leader. It already seemed mythical. 'I made my closest friends last summer', Rohi Malik, a vice-chair on the Labour Students National Committee said. 'We'll stick up for Jeremy Corbyn and his socialist values!'

It's a strange truth that those who have doubts about Corbyn will tell you they don't know what he stands for. But he has stood for the same thing since the beginning of the 1980s: it's one of the main reasons he won the leadership. At the rally, the old values are expressed in a new language: the new politics must be anti-austerity, anti-racist, anti-Brexit; it must defend workers' rights against the erosions of zero-hours contracts and the gig economy; it is pro-housebuilding, pro-NHS, pro-LGBT; against university fees and foreign misadventures such as the Iraq war; and it takes climate change seriously as the context in which these demands are made.

McDonnell fumbled with his microphone; we were watching and listening, not filming him on our phones. 'We have been expecting a coup,' he said. They say Corbyn is unelectable, he continues, but what of his mandate, the largest of any political leader in the UK, ever? What of the triumph in the Oldham by-election, the London mayoral contest, the local elections? 'We've got to nail the lies' – a line McDonnell repeated twice.

‘We will not be bullied like this.’ He called for courage; he insisted this wasn’t a cult of personality. Momentum members I knew socially told me that if they could pluck a leader out of thin air, they would want her to be Muslim. In the meantime, there was Corbyn. ‘Is he coming? Is he coming?’ I heard from the crowd as McDonnell handed the microphone back.

A representative of the Fire Brigades Union talked about the labour movement’s historical successes and began a chant of ‘Corbyn In! Tories Out!’ A junior doctor spoke, raising her fists, of her incredulity that she hadn’t been involved in politics until a year ago: ‘I joined the Labour Party yesterday!’ 13,000 people were said to have joined the week before, and 60 percent of those, James Schneider of Momentum told us, had declared their support for Corbyn. Speakers read their short speeches from their phones. Another speaker remembered that McDonnell and Corbyn had visited them at Occupy St Paul’s every day, yet another that Corbyn had attended the Pride march earlier in the summer. ‘You want to make it an annual event that Jeremy Corbyn gets a landslide? Bring it on!’

If it was a cult, it was a cult of values masquerading as a cult of personality. I had encountered the appeal for separate campaigns to come together in the spring when I’d spent time at the Nuit Debout occupation in Paris, where it had been called the ‘convergence des luttes’. Feminists, climate change activists, trade unionists and others had been brought together to fight the Valls government’s attack on workers’ rights. Perhaps the agreements and convergences are just old-fashioned solidarity, but the tactic seems useful, even if it didn’t stop the *loi travail* (labour law) from being pushed through. In London, it seemed that an interest in national politics could be coupled with local activism in support of migrants or against cuts to domestic violence budgets.

On the steps of SOAS, an *arriba* went up: ‘We love you!’ I turned to the gate; I smiled. Corbyn was striding through the crowd with purpose, somehow neither too quick nor too slow. Diane Abbott introduced him as her ‘hero’. He began to speak on the downbeat: ‘We live in interesting times, shall we say.’ I wondered how one would create a cult of personality around a man who clearly enjoyed his least memorable phrases best, such as ‘the science of shortages’ and ‘social dislocation’, a man with the conical cap of a Bic ballpoint pen poking out of his shirt pocket.

He talked first against austerity: at the last election both main parties backed cuts. Labour lost because they ‘weren’t offering enough’, he continued, ‘or indeed very much’. Austerity, he said, was a political choice, not an economic necessity. I couldn’t help clapping. He spoke about the NHS, about the high rate of suicide among young men, about unaffordable rents. I spotted a homemade placard of metallic pink with a photo of Corbyn in the centre and the enamoured slogan ‘We ♥ Jezza!’

He seemed to be evoking an old idea of the politician – or better, public servant – who acted in accordance with moral values. He talked of ‘solidarity’ and ‘deep conscience’; he mentioned that there were ‘rich people who are happy to see the destitute’. For him, the ‘refugee crisis will not be solved with tear gas and barbed wire’.

A shout went up from the back of the crowd: ‘Europe! Brexit! Where were you when we needed you?’ Boos answered; Corbyn carried on. Yet perhaps unsurprisingly,

this was the part of the rally that made the evening news.

Jeremy said he wasn't frightened of press barons, and in a strange and touching aside, that every child deserved the musical, artistic Islington childhood guaranteed to so many of his North London constituents. A few selfies and he was done, leaving a smile for the makers of the pink placard. A lipsticked woman began her section to camera; young men shook buckets for donations to Momentum. I checked Twitter later for photos of the crowd, and found myself clutching my notebook in the drizzle and listening. They hadn't caught me clapping.

I suppose I came closer than I ever have to joining the Labour Party after the rally. But I still haven't. I spent weeks afterwards arguing with friends for whom defeating the Tories meant more than the nurturing of the new politics I saw in London and Paris last spring and summer. When the texting subsided, something of the rally remained: I know I'd prefer to vote for something I want to happen, rather than for something I don't want to happen.

3

The Coup

Rachel Shabi

We know these are serious issues that need to be addressed, but that doesn't stop eyes glazing over when people start to speak of democratisation or political engagement. This is at once both ironic and symptomatic: politics has become so removed, created so much alienation and cynicism, disenfranchised so many, that even a discussion about this very subject seems dull.

Now, in the eye of a post-Brexit political crisis, we're watching a live demo of what this means, in the fortunes of the Labour Party leader, Jeremy Corbyn. The Parliamentary Labour Party (PLP) has chosen this moment to reject his authority in a vote of no confidence. But Corbyn was given a mandate of historic proportions in a leadership election just nine months ago by the wider Labour Party – which, with him at its helm, now has record membership figures.

For the past week, broadcasters have framed Labour's crisis as a sort of 'unstoppable force meets immovable object' scenario. That Corbyn clings on while Labour MPs line up to tell TV channels he has to go is transmitted as belligerence or stubborn bloody-mindedness. Such casting is clearly more media-friendly, especially when pitted against that dull old democratisation thing. So we miss the significance of the Labour leader's democratic mandate to lead, even when it is stated by MPs who aren't obvious Corbyn die-hards – Emily Thornberry, or Andy Burnham; and this is precisely the point that has infuriated so many supporters.

Labour's current battle is over the political DNA of Britain's main opposition party. The turmoil has been exacerbated and degraded by a relentless swirl of insults: deluded lefties on one side, awful Blairites on the other. But at the same time, the tussle has at its core the democracy project simultaneously pursued by Corbyn and also propelling his popularity. In this context, opposition to him may not just be over ideology, but also reflect an inability to see the point of, or engage with, the movement-building that he promotes.

As others have explained, Tony Blair's embrace of neoliberalism put Labour in power in 1997, while at the same time eroding support for the party. Labour lost some five million voters during its time in government. Yet they weren't alienated by the politics alone; the simultaneous centralisation of power in that period made the party less connected to its base.

Corbyn became party leader last year in the context of a surge in grass-roots movements. This provided a counter to a political class that seemed to serve the few at the top, while financially and politically marginalising everyone else. In Greece, Portugal or Spain, in the US spearheaded by Bernie Sanders or by Corbyn in the UK, such movements resonate because of their inclusiveness as much as their actual political projects. Both these elements, working together, have restored a sense of agency and

hope.

It's true that the sort of grassroots policy-making Corbyn and his team espouse can appear shambolic if you are used to top-down policies communicated in efficient soundbites. Building inclusiveness and engagement can also seem infuriatingly slow; like the man himself, Corbyn's democracy project can come over as a bit plodding. Post-Brexit and plunged into a seismic political crisis, the panicked reaction is to speed things up, find urgent, instant solutions – but this is precisely the time to step back and slow down. It is, paradoxically, the hour of the plodders. This is especially true of the Labour Party because it has been in decline for so long and in a manner that has no quick fixes.

Corbyn's politics resonate as an authentic progressive alternative to rampant, socially destructive neoliberalism and as social ballast to the current toxic tug towards the xenophobic far Right. But such politics make no sense without a movement, people and communities behind them.

And this is why the PLP coup attempt is so damaging: it is not just a snub to the process by which the Labour leader was elected; it is also a rejection of the grassroots engagement that Corbyn has ignited and been propelled by – as if it doesn't matter, as if it isn't what ultimately helps win seats.

All of which should explain why it is now so important for Labour to play the leadership hand that the democratic process has dealt, boosting this process inside the party, while also exploring necessary progressive alliances inside parliament. Throwing away those cards, whatever the immediate appeal, would be calamitous not just for the party, but for the people it seeks to represent.

4

The Curator of the Future

George Monbiot

On one point I agree with his opponents: Jeremy Corbyn has little chance of winning the 2020 general election. Either Labour must win back the seats it once held in Scotland (surely impossible without veering to the left), or it must beat the Conservatives by 12 points in England and Wales to form an overall majority. The impending boundary changes could mean that it has to win back 106 seats. If you think that is likely, I respectfully suggest that you are living in a dream world.

In fact, in this contest of improbabilities, Corbyn might stand the better chance. Only a disruptive political movement that can ignite, mesmerise and mobilise, that can raise an army of volunteers – as the SNP did in Scotland – could smash the political concrete.

To imagine that Labour could overcome such odds by becoming bland, blurred and craven is to succumb to thinking that is simultaneously magical and despairing. Such dreamers argue that Labour has to recapture the middle ground. But there is no such place; no fixed political geography. The middle ground is a magic mountain that retreats as you approach. The more you chase it from the left, the further to the right it moves.

As the social philosopher Karl Polanyi pointed out towards the end of the Second World War, when politics offers little choice and little prospect of solving their problems, people seek extreme solutions. Labour's inability to provide a loud and proud alternative to Conservative policies explains why so much of its base switched to Ukip at the last election. Corbyn's political clarity explains why the same people are flocking back to him.

Are they returning because he has tailored his policies to appeal to the hard Right? Certainly not. They are returning because he stands for something, something that could help them, something that was not devised by a row of spadbot mannikins in suits, consulting their clipboards on Douglas Alexander's sofa.

Nothing was more politically inept than Labour's attempt before the 2015 election to win back Ukip supporters by hardening its stance on immigration. Why vote for the echo when you can vote for the shout? What is attractive about a party prepared to abandon its core values for the prospect of electoral gain? What is inspiring about a party that grovels, offering itself as a political doormat for any powerful interest or passing fad to wipe its feet on?

Writing for openDemocracy, Ian Sinclair compared Labour's attempts to stop Corbyn with those by the Tories in 1974–1975 to stop Margaret Thatcher. Divisive, hated by the press, seen by her own party as an extremist, she was widely dismissed as unelectable. The Tory establishment, convinced that the party could win only from the centre, did everything it could to stop her.

Across three decades, New Labour strategists have overlooked a crucial reality:

politicians reinforce the values they espouse. The harder you try to win by adopting your opponents' values, the more you legitimise and promote them, making your task – and that of your successors – more difficult. Tony Blair won three elections, but in doing so he made future Labour victories less likely. By adopting conservative values, conservative framing and conservative language, he shifted the nation to the right, even when he pursued leftwing policies such as the minimum wage, tax credits and freedom of information. You can sustain policies without values for a while but then, like plants without soil, the movement wilts and dies.

The Labour mainstream likes to pretend that Blair's only breach of faith was the Iraq war. The marketisation of the NHS, the private finance initiative, the criminalisation of peaceful protest, collusion in the kidnap and torture of dissidents from other nations, the collapse of social housing – I could fill this page with a list of such capitulations to greed and tyranny. Blair's purges, stripping all but courtiers from the lists of potential candidates, explain why the party now struggles to find anyone under fifty who looks like a leader.

The capitulations continued under Ed Miliband, who allowed the Conservative obsession with the deficit and austerity to frame Labour politics. As Paul Krugman explains, austerity is a con that does nothing but harm to the wealth of this nation. It has been discredited everywhere else: only in Britain do we cling to the myth. Yet Miliband walked willingly into the trap. His manifesto promised to 'cut the deficit every year' and to adopt such cruel Tory policies as the household benefits cap.

You can choose, if you wish, to believe that this clapped-out, alienating politics – compounded by such gobsmacking acts of cowardice as the failure to oppose the welfare bill – can capture the mood of the nation, reverse Labour's decline and secure an extra hundred seats. But please stop calling yourself a realist.

Rebuilding a political movement means espousing what is desirable, then finding ways to make it feasible. The hopeless realists propose the opposite. They assemble a threadbare list of policies they consider feasible, then seek to persuade us that this package is desirable. If they retain core values, they've become so muddled by tacking and triangulation as to be almost indecipherable.

So great has the damage been to a party lost for twenty-two years in Blair's Bermuda triangulation that it might take many years until it becomes electable again. That is a frightening prospect, but the longer Labour keeps repeating the same mistakes – reinforcing the values it should be contesting – the further to the right it will push the nation, and the more remote its chances of election will become. The task is to rebuild the party's values, reclaim the democratic debate, pull the centre back towards the left and change – as Clement Attlee and Thatcher did in different ways – the soul of the nation.

Because Labour's immediate prospects are so remote, regardless of who wins this contest, the successful candidate is likely to be a caretaker, a curator of the future. His task must be to breathe life back into politics, to recharge democracy with choice, to ignite the hope that will make Labour electable again. Only one candidate proposes to do that.

5

Labour's Fabricated Anti-Semitism Crisis

Jamie Stern-Weiner

Labour has a 'Jewish problem'. Or so it has been widely alleged. Headline after headline across 2016 has claimed that the party, in whose last-but-one leadership election both front-runners were Jewish, has become infested with anti-Semitism.

The outbreak has been blamed on the veteran socialist Jeremy Corbyn and the mass influx of new members who were inspired by his leadership to join. With a long-time Palestine solidarity campaigner at the helm, according to an article in the *Jewish Chronicle*, the party is now said to be attracting antisemites 'like flies to a cesspit '. Respected commentators warn that the Jewish community is 'fast reaching the glum conclusion that Labour has become a cold house for Jews ', while within the party, these are reportedly 'difficult times to be a Jewish member'. With 'Labour's merger with the far right proceeding at speed', pundits have urged public recognition of a sobering truth: 'anti-Semitism is now firmly embedded in the Labour Party's DNA … Labour is a racist party now'.

These are extraordinary claims to level against the UK's principal party of opposition, and they have generated an extraordinary amount of media coverage, albeit no serious investigation. The common premise underlying this torrent of articles, think-pieces and polemics – that anti-Semitism is a growing problem within the Labour Party – is rapidly congealing into conventional wisdom.

Yet this basic claim is devoid of factual basis. The allegations against Corbyn and the Labour Party are underpinned by an almost comical paucity of evidence, while whatever evidence does exist not only fails to justify the claims being made, but has itself been systematically misrepresented. There are no grounds for supposing either that anti-Semitism is significant within the Labour Party, or that its prevalence is increasing. But, under mounting pressure, the Labour leadership's response to the accusations has regressed from dismissive to defensive, to the point where policy interventions from such noted anti-Semitism experts as Richard Angell of Progress are reportedly being treated as serious, good-faith contributions.

The political logic behind this retreat is understandable, but there is no reason for others to play along. The enraging and – for genuine opponents of anti-Semitism – dismaying truth is this: a miserable assortment of chancers, cynics and careerists are exploiting Jewish suffering to prosecute petty vendettas, wage factional warfare and discredit legitimate criticism of Israel. In the process, they are poisoning relations between British Jews and movements for social justice; fomenting anti-Semitism while claiming to combat it; and libeling the tens of thousands of many young, idealistic people, embarking upon their first foray into politics, who joined Labour in the past year determined to make the world a less cruel and despairing place for the impoverished, the subjugated and the dispossessed. If Labour has an anti-Semitism

problem, it lies not with Corbyn, but his unprincipled and reckless opponents.

The case against Corbyn has two variants. The stronger alleges that under Corbyn's watch anti-Semitism has become pervasive in Labour. The weaker holds that anti-Semitism in the party has sharply increased since Corbyn's election. In either case, Corbyn stands accused of tolerating, acquiescing to and thereby encouraging anti-Semitism. Let's take each of these claims in turn.]

Is Anti-Semitism pervasive in the Labour Party?

The core evidence that anti-Semitism is a significant problem within the Labour Party comprises allegedly antisemitic statements made on social media by eight low- to mid-level party members and an MP, as well as claims of widespread anti-Semitism within a university Labour club. This evidence is collated below.

Labour's 'anti-Semitism problem'

GERRY DOWNING, PARTY MEMBER

Downing's Trotskyist publication, *Socialist Fight*, published an article, to which Downing tweeted a link, entitled 'Why Marxists must address the Jewish Question'. The article argues, inter alia, that 'elements of the Jewish-Zionist bourgeoisie … have played a vanguard role for the capitalist offensive against the workers'.

Downing tweeted links to other articles on *Socialist Fight*, which used dodgy and, frankly, mindless phrases like 'Jewish-Zionist Bourgeoisie'.

VICKI KIRBY, VICE-CHAIR WOKING CONSTITUENCY LABOUR PARTY (CLP)

Tweeted:

- 'What do you know abt Jews? They've got big noses and support spurs lol'.
- 'That awkward moment when you realize you've taken this whole – "I'm a jew" charade too far'.
- 'point abt Jews is that they OCCUPY Palestine. Used to live together, now slaughter the oppressed'.
- 'Who is the Zionist God? I am starting to think it may be Hitler. #FreePalestine'.
- 'lol we invented Israel when saving them from Hitler, who now seems to be their teacher'.
- 'Apparently you can ask IS/ISIS/ISIL questions on ask.fm. Anyone thought of asking them why theyre not attacking the real oppressors #Israel'.

BEINAZIR LASHARIE, LABOUR COUNCILLOR

On Facebook:

- 'Many people know about who was behind 9/11 and also who is behind ISIS. I've nothing against Jews … just sharing it!'
- 'I've heard some compelling evidence about ISIS being originated from Zionists!'

BOB CAMPBELL, PARTY MEMBER

On Facebook:

- Posted: 'ISIS is run by Israel'.

•Shared a photo claiming ISIS hasn't attacked Israel '[b]ecause the dog doesn't bite its own tail'.

•Shared a picture of a rat with a Star of David and the caption 'the real plague'.

TONY GREENSTEIN, PARTY MEMBER

Tweeted the phrases 'Zio idiots' and 'Zionist scum'.

KHADIM HUSSAIN, LABOUR COUNCILLOR AND FORMER LORD MAYOR OF BRADFORD

On Facebook:

•Shared a photo referring to '6 million Zionists', rather than six million Jews, having been killed by Hitler.

•Implied, in a post, that Israel created ISIS.

SCOTT NELSON, PARTY MEMBER

Tweeted, of Tesco and Marks & Spencer, 'They have Jewish blood'.

AYSEGUL GURBUZ, LABOUR COUNCILLOR

Tweeted, inter alia, that 'my man' Hitler was the 'greatest man in history' and that '[the] Jews are so powerful in the US it's disgusting'.

NAZ SHAH, LABOUR MP

On Facebook:

•Shared an image which suggested resolving the Israel-Palestine conflict by 'relocat[ing] … Israel into United States', accompanied by the comment, 'Problem solved and save u bank charges for £3 BILLION you transfer yearly'.

•Commented below the image: 'Only problem with that is Israel would need to return all the land and farms it has stolen and give the Palestinians rights which is not possible :(therefore I will tweet Barack Obama and David Cameron and put this idea to them?' and 'Save them some pocket money?'

•Urged others to vote in an online poll to condemn Israeli war crimes in Gaza, saying, 'The Jews are rallying to the poll'.

On Twitter:

•Linked to an article which compared Zionism to al-Qaeda and claimed that 'Zionism used this and the colonial period to groom other modernised men and women of Jewish descent to exert political influence at the highest levels of public office'.

OXFORD UNIVERSITY LABOUR CLUB (OULC)

According to former OULC co-chair Alex Chalmers, who resigned in February 2016, 'A large proportion of both OULC and the student Left in Oxford more generally have some kind of problem with Jews'.

The chasm between the proffered evidence shown above and the sweeping condemnations that have appeared in the press is truly vast. Even were all the above charges true, what would it prove? The social media postings of a handful of mostly junior party members have no necessary representative significance, and plainly do not demonstrate widespread anti-Semitism. Indeed, given that an estimated seven-to-ten percent of the UK population doesn't like Jews, the wonder would be if Labour, which with a total membership of some 400,000 is Britain's largest political party, did *not* harbour a small number of anti-Semites within its ranks.

In fact, the gulf between accusation and evidence is even wider than it first appears. Take the case of Labour councillor Beinazir Lasharie. According to right-wing gossip blog Guido Fawkes, Lasharie 'was suspended for writing that "Jews" were behind 9/11 and ISIS'. Another Fawkes headline referred to Lasharie as the '"Jews did 9/11" councillor'. But in the Facebook post to which Fawkes was referring, Lasharie's only mention of 'Jews' was to declare that she has 'nothing against' them.

Fawkes also quoted a Facebook comment by Lasharie stating: 'I've heard some compelling evidence about Isis being originated from zionists!' But, so far from being anti-Semitic, this remark was made in the context of *rebutting* and *criticising* anti-Semitism. Lasharie's full comment read: 'Jews are not zionists let's get that straight just like Muslims are NOT Isis, in fact I've heard some compelling evidence about Isis being originated from zionists!' The Guido Fawkes blogger lifted the second part of this sentence without quoting the first. Nor did he – or any of the newspapers that uncritically repeated his allegations – report Lasharie's insistence elsewhere in that same thread, that 'we can't call Jews zionists because not all of them are'.

The case against Tony Greenstein, meanwhile, rests upon tweets that make no reference to Jews. On 2 April 2016, the *Daily Telegraph* reported on 'the latest anti-Semitism controversy to hit the Party in recent weeks': the readmission of 'a previously barred activist', who 'refers to his critics as "Zio idiots" and "Zionist scum"', claimed that Zionists collaborated with the Nazis, and 'compared Israel's views on inter-racial marriage to the Nazi party's Nuremberg laws on race'. The allegations were repeated by *The Times*, which described Greenstein's comments as 'the latest incident of anti-Semitic and anti-Zionist behaviour to have affected Labour'.

Quite apart from the fact that none of Greenstein's alleged comments are anti-Semitic, Greenstein is a Jewish socialist and long-time antifascist campaigner who – even his critics within the Jewish community agree – has led efforts to expunge anti-Semitism from the Palestine solidarity movement. The hour must be late indeed if anti-Semitism has spread to veteran Jewish anti-fascists.

The most high-profile 'anti-Semitism' case to date implicates Labour MP Naz Shah. In 2014, before Shah became an MP, she reposted an image on Facebook suggesting that the Israel-Palestine conflict be resolved by relocating Israel to the United States. Obviously, there is no prospect of something like this happening; it was a Facebook meme, not a UN draft resolution. Shah was well aware of this, as her accompanying comments ('I will tweet Barack Obama and David Cameron and put this idea to them') indicate.

The tongue-in-cheek proposal may have been tasteless, but that doesn't make it anti-Semitic. And to present it as various media outlets did, as Labour MP endorses 'chilling "*transportation*" policy', or, Labour MP '[backs] plan to "relocate Israelis to America"', or 'Labour MP backed moving Israel to US in anti-Semitism row', as if Shah had put her name to a Nazi-like deportation scheme, is obscene.

Shah was further accused of tweeting a link to a 'blog post comparing Zionism to al-Qaeda' and accusing 'Zionists of "grooming" Jews to "exert political influence at the highest levels of public office"'. The article in question reads,

In my view Zionism like al-Qaeda was and is a political movement layered with religious symbolism that was (in the case of Zionism) responding to a millennia and more of European pogroms, persecution by people who were fuelled by hatred and need to find any excuse to persecute Jews. Zionism used this and the colonial period to groom other modernised men and women of Jewish decent to exert political influence at the highest levels of public office by using the guilt of the pogroms and offered a solution to the 'Jewish Question' in Europe.

Zionism is compared to al-Qaeda in the sense that both are politico-religious movements; that is the only mention of al-Qaeda in the piece. The claim in the paragraph quoted above appears to be that the Zionist movement leveraged antisemitism, which the author emphasises was real, brutal and pervasive, to win Jewish support, and exploited European guilt over anti-Jewish persecution to persuade colonial elites to support the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine. There is nothing remotely antisemitic about any of this. The article also explicitly distinguishes Israel and Zionism from Judaism.

The only substantive allegation of anti-Semitism against Shah is that, during Israel's 2014 Gaza massacre, she urged her Facebook contacts to vote in an online poll about whether Israel was committing war crimes. With the results leaning heavily towards the negative, Shah warned her followers that '[t]he Jews are rallying to the poll'. No doubt, Shah should have referred to 'Israel's apologists' rather than 'the Jews', and for this, it is right that she has apologised. But the response – a *Telegraph* editorial headlined 'Labour's disgusting anti-Semitism' condemned Shah's comments as 'shocking', 'truly disturbing', 'repellent' and 'quintessentially anti-Semitic', while John Mann MP and the BBC's Andrew Neil compared Shah to Eichmann – has been beyond hysterical. It also merits notice that, while Shah has been suspended over a two-year old Facebook post imagining the relocation of Israel to the US, many Labour and other MPs in good standing make it their business to defend *and facilitate* Israel's active and on-going dispossession of the Palestinians. Truly, it is cause for wonder, which is the bigger sin? Shah chastising 'Jews' for denying Israel's criminal conduct in Gaza, or the perpetrators of, and apologists for these crimes. Attempts to use Shah to discredit Corbyn are also somewhat undermined by the fact that her problematic comments were made before Corbyn became Labour Party leader, while in the 2015 leadership election, Shah endorsed Yvette Cooper.

The anti-Semitism scandal at the Oxford University Labour Club (OULC) is important for Corbyn's critics. Whereas the other cases implicate individuals, the OULC controversy implicates an institutional culture. Thus, Jonathan Freedland writes of Gerry Downing and Vicki Kirby that '[i]t'd be so much easier if there were just two rogue cases. But when Alex Chalmers quit his post at Oxford's Labour club, he said he'd concluded that many had "some kind of problem with Jews".'

The specific charges leveled against OULC members by Chalmers and others included: using the epithet 'Zio'; expressing solidarity with Hamas; dismissing anti-Semitism as 'just the Zionists crying wolf'; singing a Hamas song called 'Rockets over Tel Aviv'; stating that OULC should not associate with any Jew who fails to publicly

denounce Zionism; alleging that US foreign policy is controlled by the 'Zionist Lobby' and, when asked whether 'Zionist' meant 'Jewish', falling 'very silent'; and warning that 'we should be aware of the influence wielded over elections by high-net-worth Jewish individuals'.

The veracity of these claims cannot at this point be established, since most were made anonymously and without accompanying evidence. But there are solid grounds for scepticism.

First, the only verifiable allegation – and also the most shocking one (most of the others would not constitute anti-Semitism even if true) – is a fabrication. It was claimed that an OULC member had been 'formally disciplined by their college for organising a group of students to harass a Jewish student and shout "filthy Zionist" whenever they saw her'. But according to the (late) principal of that college, the student in question was never the subject of complaint or disciplinary proceedings, for anti-Semitism or anything else.

Second, there may well be ulterior motives at work. Chalmers is a former intern at BICOM, an Israel lobby group that has sought to redefine antisemitism to encompass criticism of Israel, while the occasion for Chalmers's resignation was the OULC's vote to endorse Israeli Apartheid Week. Furthermore, the OULC has been at the centre of a bitter struggle between pro- and anti-Corbyn factions of the party's youth wing. The composition of the OULC was transformed by Corbyn's leadership campaign and subsequent victory. The Labour right was demoted almost overnight to minority status, and it is from this aggrieved quarter that many of the allegations of anti-Semitism against left-wing OULC members have issued.

Third, the claim that Oxford's broader student Left is pervasively antisemitic is, *prima facie*, highly implausible. None of the OULC and student left activists this author contacted recognised the description. More generally, the student Left is hyper politically correct, at times to a fault. Are large numbers of politically correct left-wing students really going around Oxford spouting Jew-hatred? A contemporaneous article by a former president of the Oxford University Jewish Society alleging that 'the student Left' in Oxford is 'institutionally anti-semitic' gives further cause for doubt, failing as it does to provide remotely convincing evidence for the claim.

Fourth, it is hardly unknown for students to concoct false charges of anti-Semitism. In March, the president-elect of Stirling University's Labour Club was suspended as a result of false accusations (she was quickly reinstated), while earlier this month, there was a concerted effort to use trumped up charges of anti-Semitism to derail Malia Bouattia's candidacy for president of the National Union of Students.

To reiterate, this author is not in a position to determine how many of the specific charges against OULC members are true. But neither was Jonathan Freedland, who specifically repeated the one OULC allegation that is checkable – and false. Nor was John Mann MP, who condemned 'rife' and '[o]vert' anti-Semitism 'amongst certain elements at Oxford' and demanded the suspension of the entire OULC, or Henry Zeffman, who, after speaking with Chalmers, ventured that 'being a Labour member' might be 'incompatible with being a Jew'. Vanishingly few commentaries and reports

about the scandal mentioned any of the multiple grounds for scepticism about the claims, even as they uncritically repeated a demonstrably false smear.

Has Labour Party Anti-Semitism Increased under Corbyn?

It might be argued that, even if anti-Semitism remains confined to a small minority of party members, the frequency with which new cases of anti-Semitism have been uncovered in recent weeks reveals that its prevalence is increasing.

But, first, of the nine incidents of alleged anti-Semitism detailed above, at least three took place before Corbyn became leader, while virtually all implicate people who became Labour members prior to Corbyn's leadership.

Second, the frequency of allegations appearing in recent weeks more plausibly reflects not rising anti-Semitism in Labour, but a concerted effort to uncover and publicise such evidence. The political and media storm around Labour anti-Semitism no more evidences a spike in Labour Party anti-Semitism than the recent political and media frenzy over the Prime Minister's tax affairs evidenced an April spike in tax avoidance.

Some of Corbyn's critics appear aware of the flimsiness of their case, advancing their accusations through convoluted circumlocutions like, '[it] is *undeniable* that there *seems* to be an increase in anti-Jewish sentiment in the Labour party' and 'it's clear' that Labour 'might' have an anti-Semitism problem. Jonathan Freedland observes that '[t]hanks to Corbyn, the Labour Party is expanding' and alleges that among these new members can be found 'people with hostile views of Jews'.

True enough, if a party's membership doubles, the absolute number of antisemites within it may increase. So, too, the number of Islamophobes, fattists, ageists, disablists, self-haters, sociopaths and journalists. Without knowing the scale of the increase, this tells us nothing. According to Jeremy Newmark of the Jewish Leadership Council (JLC), 'it appears that within [the Corbyn-inspired] … surge in members there is a pocket of people that do harbour these problematic views'. Newmark won't even state with certainty that this 'pocket' exists, still less estimate its size. But why make clear accusations, for whose accuracy you can be held accountable, when you can make vacuous non-statements and trust to innuendo to accomplish the rest?

Others have been less cautious. Rod Liddle insists there are 'thousands more' like Vicki Kirby, organised into a 'vibrant anti-semitic wing' of the party. So then why does everyone keep mentioning Vicki Kirby? Liddle's article opens, 'Attacked any Jews recently? Hurry up or they'll all be gone'. This was published by *The Times*, which in a separate editorial warned that, '[f]aced with' the 'noisome buffoonery' of the likes of Kirby and Downing, 'there is a danger of underreaction'. Danger averted.

'Generally, I think it's a mistake to look at nuts and imagine they're a trend', Hugo Rifkind explains. 'The thing is, there is a trend', QED. It is now 'a regular occurrence to find an anti-Semite hiding in the Labour woodwork', laments *Jewish Chronicle* editor Stephen Pollard. 'The examples go on and on' – indeed, soon we won't be able to count them on our fingers. Pollard acknowledges that 'Downing has been

expelled from the party and Kirby suspended'. 'But', he adds, 'they are the tip of an iceberg'. Doesn't he mean an ice cube? Surveying the darkening clouds, Pollard is reminded of '1930s Germany'. One wonders why he didn't recall 2014 – the last time he was moved to draw the 1930s parallel.

Has Corbyn Been Soft on Anti-Semitism?

It might be rejoined that what matters is not the number of alleged anti-semitic incidents, nor even their frequency, but the Corbyn leadership's 'tardy and tentative' response to them. The JLC's Jeremy Newmark alleges that Corbyn has overseen a 'resurgence of the acceptance of anti-Semitism', while a *Times* editorial condemns Corbyn's 'insouciance, indifference and indulgence when faced with evidence of an ancient and odious hatred'.

These claims are baseless. Corbyn has repeatedly condemned anti-Semitism in the most emphatic terms, both as an MP and as Labour leader. In response to allegations of anti-Semitism at the Oxford University Labour Club, Labour instituted a formal inquiry chaired by a figure who commands the respect of Corbyn's harshest critics. Labour members accused of anti-Semitism have been immediately suspended or expelled, and in no case has it been shown that a member suspended or expelled for anti-Semitism has subsequently been re-admitted to the party. It has not been shown that Labour under Corbyn has dealt with allegations of anti-Semitism any less swiftly or severely than the party did under Ed Miliband, Gordon Brown and Tony Blair. Nor has it been demonstrated that Labour's disciplinary mechanisms have processed anti-Semitism allegations differently to allegations of other forms of racism or prejudice.

In order to prove the Corbyn leadership's tolerance of anti-Semitism, Jonathan Freedland cites the cases of Vicki Kirby and Gerry Downing:

Thanks to Corbyn, the Labour party is expanding, attracting many leftists who would previously have rejected it or been rejected by it. Among those are people with hostile views of Jews. Two of them [Kirby and Downing] have been kicked out, but only after they had first been readmitted and once their cases attracted unwelcome external scrutiny.

First, both Kirby and Downing joined Labour prior to Corbyn's leadership campaign. Second, Kirby was readmitted to the party before Corbyn became leader, during the reign of that notorious antisemite Ed Miliband. Third, Kirby's initial suspension was reportedly on the basis of crudely anti-Israel, rather than antisemitic, tweets; her tweets about Jews only surfaced, at any rate publicly, after she had been readmitted. Fourth, Downing was first suspended on the grounds of public support for another party, not anti-Semitism; the anti-Semitism allegations surfaced only after his readmission. In short, neither Kirby nor Downing were readmitted after being suspended for anti-Semitism; both were suspended or expelled as soon as allegations of anti-Semitism were aired (at any rate, in public), and neither has since been readmitted. Apart from this, Freedland makes a compelling point.

On whether Corbyn's response to allegations of anti-Semitism has been 'tardy and tentative', a cursory look at the facts is enough to refute the accusation. How long did it take after concerns were first publicly for each alleged offender to be suspended or expelled? The answers are shown below.

Gerry DowningSame dayVicki KirbyNext dayBeinazir LasharieNext dayBob CampbellBeforeTony GreensteinBeforeKhadim HussainSame dayScott NelsonNext dayAysegul GurbuzBeforeNaz ShahNext day However, some question why anti-Semites were admitted to the party in the first place. But at the grassroots level, political parties are very broad tents. Labour's Compliance Unit does not comb through the social media accounts of every aspiring member for potentially offensive tweets and Facebook posts. Rather, the party's disciplinary processes for lower-level members are – as a rule – reactive, kicking in once a complaint has been received. For example, in February 2016 it emerged that notorious paedophile Tom O'Carroll had joined Labour after Corbyn became leader. In the wake of scandalised press reports, O'Carroll was suspended. *Doesn't this prove that Corbyn's Labour has a 'paedophilia problem'?* True, O'Carroll was suspended from the party – but only after his case attracted public scrutiny and only after Labour initially responded to the story by refusing to comment. *What explains Corbyn's 'timid and tardy' response?* Isn't it obvious we need a 200-point plan from Richard Angell of Progress to tackle this crisis? In fact, *isn't it past time for a public inquiry into left-wing paedophilia?*

Several critics, scraping the barrel, argue that, even if Corbyn himself has condemned anti-Semitism, and even if antisemites have been suspended or expelled from the party, still, the real question is, 'Why are anti-Semites so drawn to Jeremy Corbyn's Labour party' in the first place? For consistency, we might also ask, *Why are leading paedophiles so drawn to Jeremy Corbyn's Labour party?*

For this argument to work, it would need to be shown, first, that anti-Semites are particularly attracted to Labour as against other political parties; second, that Labour has become more attractive to anti-Semites since Corbyn was elected leader; and third, that anti-Semites have joined Labour on account of their anti-Semitism. The argument is premised on the assumption that, if someone has at some point made an anti-Semitic comment, it follows that anti-Semitism is what gets them out of bed in the morning, and is the basis on which they determine their political allegiance. But this is not necessarily true. And if it were in fact true of most of the individuals who have been accused, then Corbyn's critics would not have needed to go hunting for isolated comments on social media, often several years old, to prove their case.

To summarise. It has been claimed that, as a result of Jeremy Corbyn's leadership, the UK's largest political party and a pillar of mainstream British politics is increasingly, and perhaps pervasively, anti-Semitic. The evidence for these claims comprises anonymous and unproven (or else proven false) allegations of anti-Semitism within a single university Labour club, plus a handful of alleged anti-Semitic tweets and Facebook posts, some of which date back years, overwhelmingly from low- and mid-level party members. Almost all of the people concerned joined Labour before Corbyn's leadership campaign, almost none were close to the Corbyn leadership or prominent in

the Corbyn-aligned Momentum movement, and all were suspended or expelled from the party as soon as allegations of anti-Semitism were aired.

The Institute for Jewish Policy Research has lamented 'the hyperbole, bias and conjecture that litter public discourse' on anti-Semitism. The allegations of widespread or increasing anti-Semitism in the Labour Party offer ample evidence of all three. They are based on wild generalisations from a small number of cases, most of which have themselves been misrepresented. This has been done either to fabricate anti-Semitism where none exists, to unfairly taint Corbyn and his supporters by association, or simply gratuitously, one presumes out of habit. But while sensationalist and sloppy journalism has abetted the propagation of these falsehoods, the accusations have snowballed because they serve, and are being opportunistically seized upon to advance, real political interests.

Briefly stated, the taboo against anti-Semitism is being exploited by three distinct, but overlapping, groups: the Right, which hopes to present Labour as dangerously radical while directing attention away from the Conservative Party's internal tensions and unpopular policies; pro-Israel activists, who hope to unseat a prominent critic of Israel and to discredit Palestine solidarity activism; and the Labour right, which hopes to weaken a popular movement that has, suddenly and quite unexpectedly, wrested from it control of the party.

The offence is not that these libellers of the elected Labour leadership are oversensitive to anti-Semitism. On the contrary, in the sordid smear campaign they have collectively whipped up, the interests of Jews figure almost as low on the priority list as the imperatives of justice and truth. Rather, the outrage is that certain of Corbyn's critics are so profoundly contemptuous of Jewish suffering that, for the sake of their petty vendettas and tawdry factional jostling, they are prepared to put at risk the living and traduce the dead.

6

The Labour Right's Year of Misery

Richard Seymour

Change is always painful, and defeat is a difficult experience to master. But with the best will in the world, the own goals being scored by the Labour Right today are entirely unforced.

The major result of the on-going backbench aggro, building up to the plot to oust Corbyn, is that they have in all likelihood dramatically reduced their own influence and summoned hundreds of thousands of new members and supporters to Corbyn's side. This is not to deny any strategic rationale on their part. Paul Mason has suggested that the coup plotters acted when they did because they were frightened that, should a snap election be held, a Corbyn-led Labour Party might prevail over a divided and distracted Conservative Party. Given the poll numbers prior to the coup, this was not the most probable outcome, but it was definitely within the range of possibility. However, even taking this kernel of rational apprehension into account, it is difficult to see the coup as anything but a gross political error driven by frustration.

A Corbyn government, with the Cabinet including many of his political opponents, would have been sufficiently embattled and divided as to give the belligerents opportunity and time to develop a strategy and gradually unwind the hold of Corbyn's supporters. Certainly, prior to the coup it is not clear that the emotional investment that members had in Corbyn's leadership could not have been defused. The ideological character of his base was not at all as univocally left-wing as their oblocutors assumed, as they would know if only they'd chosen to talk to them rather than resorting to ineffectual abuse and vindictive purges. Had the anti-Corbyn faction been smarter, had it not been driven to distraction by its sense of entitlement to rule, it would have waited. Instead of lashing out, it would have sustained the formal posture of quietly enduring, hoping for the best, and tragically expecting the worst, without being openly seen to expedite the worst.

In a way, then, the coup was a short-cut; the resort to brute political force, an admission of failure. It said, 'we do not have the vision to persuade people, the resources to bear with our current marginalisation, or the imagination to hold firm for a future in which we have something new to offer'. They have not succeeded in their aim of tearing Labour back to the 'electable' centre. What they have done is electrify Corbyn's base with missionary zeal and determination, and infused them with a sense of the realpolitik ruthlessness with which these fights will be conducted. The putschists have done more than the embattled British Left ever did to hasten the coming of a mass party of the radical Left, with significant parliamentary representation, and trade union support.

This is not as surprising as it may at first appear. The overweening grip of the Blairites at the height of their reign was marked by a striking brittleness, defensiveness

and paranoia. Having never gained control primarily through persuasion, they acted on the basis of a kind of organised distrust of the membership. The Blairites used enforcers like Margaret McDonagh to ensure that the leadership line was rarely up for debate, invoking 'unwritten' rules to blockade critical motions, or depending on loyal apparatchiks or trade union allies for diversion. The small remaining left-wing fringe was habitually derided as a coterie of 'Trots'. Loyalists were parachuted into safe seats. When one inconvenient left-winger, Liz Davies, was selected by members as the parliamentary candidate for Leeds North East, Blair and his allies concocted a media smear campaign, and the NEC undemocratically blocked her selection. Those who departed from the loyalist fold over matters of conscience were 'traitors', as Tom Watson dubbed Emily Thornberry when she rejected the government's authoritarian policy of ninety-day detention without trial.

Despite their comprehensive triumph over the Left, the leadership clique couldn't trust anyone. Liz Davies, in her memoir of the haut-Blairite period, *Through the Looking Glass*, recalls the inability of the leadership to accept responsibility for failure: it was always blamed on 'a lapse in presentation or a conspiracy', or on 'Labour party members or Labour party councillors'. Conference speeches, even those of delegates, were written by party staff, and critical delegates systematically prevented from speaking.

But at this point, whatever they lacked in persuasion, they also had the moral trump card that amid a sustained period of economic growth, Labour was winning elections. Whatever scepticism existed about Gordon Brown's claim to have transcended the cycle of 'boom and bust', it was hard to argue with apparent success – especially since the government promised to use some of the proceeds of growth to mitigate the social costs of what was then lauded as globalisation. And for as long as that was the case, the party's right-wing could present their political agenda in the language of technocracy: what matters is what works.

And then it stopped working. Like the Clintonites, the Labour Right in this period had abided in the wisdom that 'it's the economy, stupid'. Focusing on supply-side measures to bolster skills (and thus 'employability'), reducing taxes on businesses, and letting the City of London get away with murder, they depended on debt and speculation to fuel expansion while paying for public services. Strange to relate, however, unprecedented corporate and household debt, and unimpeded speculation, left the UK economy peculiarly exposed to the grinding breakdown of the financial sector when the US housing bubble burst. At that point, the deeper dysfunctions in the economy, such as the weakness of manufacturing and investment – exacerbated under New Labour – came to the fore.

Gordon Brown's valiant rescue of the British banking system involved the Treasury in guaranteeing the viability and profitability of the banks at all costs. This was part of a globally concertinaed effort alongside the White House to prevent systemic collapse, keep world trade open, and preserve Wall Street's ascendancy. And this is where another signal strength of the New Labour project turned into a weakness. The Blairites had spent the years before attaining office smoothing the path of their

integration with a network of power centres, ranging from the Murdoch press, the Bank of England, big business and the Federal Reserve to global financial institutions. The flow of power and authority between these nodes was strikingly frictionless. For as long as the system was working, they could claim that there was no shame in being so openly identified with it. Hence, the literally shameless nuptials with the rich.

Once the system began to collapse, however, the institutions, authorities and ideologies justifying it were likewise tainted. The tolerance, through gritted teeth, that Labour supporters had displayed toward this leadership began to disintegrate. The mystique of power was lost, and – seemingly oblivious of the fact – the Labour Right lost their major argument for remaining in charge. Not only that but, complacently convinced that they didn't need to fundamentally reassess their positions or offer anything new, they spent the Miliband years preparing for the inevitable moment when the detour of a hapless leadership sympathetic to the party's soft-Left would collapse.

At no point in these years did any faction of Labour succeed in offering an alternative way of running the economy which could sustain a modern social-democratic project. The opposition's slogans favouring 'responsible capitalism' were not matched by a depth of transformative ambition, and ultimately the party cleaved to a mitigated version of the redoubled austerian neoliberalism that the coalition government was implementing, with significant costs for its base and its own long-term future.

The most striking aspect of Jeremy Corbyn's leadership election, then, was the paucity and enervation of the opposition to it. Unused to having to defend their ideas, the three candidates of the Labour Right were like deer caught in the headlights of history. Meanwhile, there rumbled on the backbenches a wayward truculence, with MPs briefing the press that if Corbyn was elected his reign would be overturned by the parliamentary party within weeks. Blairite intellectuals hinted at an SDP-style split. Stunned by the scale of his win, and disarmed by his conciliatory approach on questions of principle (NATO, the EU, nationalisation), they were unable to muster the momentum necessary for either a coup or a secession.

Stuck in what had, for them, become a foreign country, they relied upon a combination of sabotage, leaks, misinformation and *de facto* external support from the Conservatives, the media, and even outspoken sections of the armed forces, to weaken the Corbyn leadership. What is striking is that despite the sullen disloyalty of backbenchers, the grandstanding of cabinet colleagues like Hilary Benn, the strategy of tension waged through the right-wing press by the likes of John Mann MP, and the episodic confection of scandals – the 'march' outside Stella Creasy's house that never happened, the alleged takeover of antisemitism in the party – Labour's poll ratings did not collapse in the way predicted by the Right, and its electoral performance was generally respectable and gradually improving. This was not because Corbyn did not shed support, but because he attracted new supporters to make up for those lost. Moreover, despite the reputation for incompetence at the top, Labour was able to exploit Conservative divisions to achieve government defeats on a range of issues from disability benefits to Saudi prisons. The growing impatience of the parliamentary rabble

had as much to do with Labour's resilience in the face of their sabotage as anything else. Their tactics should have worked, and ordinarily would have worked.

Arguably, then, the coup could be understood in part as a pre-emptive measure aimed at preventing the demoralisation and disintegration of the anti-Corbyn bulwark. Without the choreographing oversight of Tom Watson and Angela Eagle, there was a good chance that the momentum would dissipate in a series of chaotic and syncopated resignations and attacks. As it was, the first week of the putsch looked as though it had successfully galvanised all the Right's traditional strengths – their disproportionate parliamentary weight (as well as the disproportionate strength of the parliamentary wing of the party), their dominance in the party apparatuses, their media connections, and their support by a host of celebrities, grandees and establishment figures who came out of the woodworks to plead with Corbyn to 'do the right thing'. Orchestrating a chorus of denunciations of grassroots members for alleged 'bullying' and other forms of misbehaviour, they also went on the offensive against the membership by suspending branches and stopping the wave of votes declaring 'no confidence' in anti-Corbyn MPs.

There was just one major problem. They still had no idea what to replace Corbyn with. Lacking a candidate to challenge him was only the first problem. They did not even dare to admit to disagreeing with Corbyn on the major planks of his policy. It came to such a pass that even the candidate they ultimately agreed on – an egocentric, Redcoat-style purveyor of sexist witticisms named Owen Smith – tried to model himself as an acceptable version of Corbyn. The Blairite columnist and former spin doctor Dan Hodges bitterly derided the 'Dump Corbyn, Get Corbyn' line, on the grounds that even if he thought the Corbynistas mad, 'they aren't stupid'. But what Hodges forgot to ask was why the big beasts of the party's Right were fighting shy. Why, for example, did neither Tom Watson nor Hilary Benn stand? Because they have no plausible answers. For all their talk of electability, a party trying to win on the old Blairite platform would crash and burn.

None of this is to claim that the solutions being slowly unfurled by Jeremy Corbyn and John McDonnell, centred on using an activist state to modernise the productive base of the British economy, with a retooled tax system and welfare state to rationalise and humanise the country's class system, will prove more sustainable in the long run. Even if the policies turn out to be viable in principle, they depend on the cooperation of businesses and owners, who may not find 21st century social-democracy convivial to their profit margins. However, only Corbyn's camp is proposing solutions that at least take into account the systemic scale of Labour's problems and the historic depth of its detachment from its base. This – not 'entryism', not 'madness', not the 'Trotskyite twist' – is why Corbyn is on his way to his second victory.

And when he wins, business is about to pick up. With a renewed mandate, a pro-Corbyn slate elected to the National Executive Committee, a Shadow Cabinet now dominated by the parliamentary left, and a greatly expanded Labour Party base, Corbyn will be in a far better position once Labour turns its guns outwards. It is a misplaced cliché to talk about Labour becoming a social movement, but with the resources at its disposal it can be a campaigning organisation. An example would be the involvement of

Momentum members in supporting the RMT's dispute with the appalling Southern Rail, and linking it to passengers' frustration with inefficient, crowded and frequently cancelled services. By connecting the policy of rail renationalisation to daily experience, and establishing Labour's presence on the side of passengers and workers, they turn policy into something concrete and bypass the media spectacle. On a whole range of issues, from Uber workers to junior doctors to the socially cleansed, they can condense and generalise the experiences of millions of people through practical solidarity and forge new political identities in the process. This, while it appals the Spad generation of MPs, is the kind of thing that Corbyn and his allies have always known how to do. And it is the only chance the Labour Party has.

7

From Ralph Miliband to Jeremy Corbyn

Hilary Wainwright

Corbyn's overwhelming victory in the leadership elections over the summer of 2015 had been a nightmare come true for the architects of New Labour, who had no shortage of allies in the Parliamentary Labour Party. They still had sufficient hubris from their own earlier successes to think that they could engineer Corbyn's downfall. Repeated rumours of a coup inside the PLP started to take more substantive shape in the run up to the first by-election after the May 2015 general election, which took place in Oldham, a normally safe Labour seat in Greater Manchester. As John MacDonnell, Corbyn's close ally and his newly appointed shadow chancellor of the exchequer, subsequently said: 'We knew at that time, that for some time they were plotting to see if they could have a coup at some stage … But we won a resounding victory with a good local candidate and the enthusiasm of Corbyn supporters from across the country. So they backed off.'

The rumours of a coup persisted, however, reaching a new crescendo as the local government elections of May 2016 approached. MacDonnell picks up the story: 'They said again "You can't win an election with Corbyn." We won every mayoral election we contested – every one. We won the seats in terms of local government, councils we were expected to lose, we won every one.'

Then came the Brexit vote. The reality of Corbyn being in office but not being in power fully exploded a few days after the UK's EU Referendum of July 2016, when 52 percent voted 'Leave' against 48 percent for 'Remain'. Corbyn's position in the referendum campaign, in line with the Labour Party's official position, had been 'Remain but Reform'. His arguments (and indeed those of anyone arguing 'Stay in Europe to Change Europe') were ignored by a media obsessed with the dramatic divisions within the Cabinet, but Corbyn had been around the country speaking at more meetings than any other Labour leader in favour of Remain, while a lacklustre official party campaign relied on churning out dull leaflets and posters for party foot soldiers to deliver. Such details did not delay those who had been waiting for their moment to move against Corbyn.

Beginning with a long-planned series of resignations from the Shadow Cabinet, this was the excuse for a determined revolt against the new Labour leader, nine months after his overwhelming victory. One by one, as if choreographed to cause maximum damage, Corbyn's critics resigned, in a perverse form of direct action aimed at destabilising the leader and embarrassing him into resignation.

Corbyn stood firm, however, supported by only a small minority of MPs and the nascent movement of activist supporters from inside and outside the party, now rather more consolidated through Momentum. He appointed a new Shadow Cabinet, insisted on remaining true to his electoral mandate and declared himself willing to take on any

challenger. A challenger was slow to emerge.

It was a strange political moment: simultaneously superficial, hyperbolic and bad-tempered and yet seemingly of fundamental importance for the future of the Labour Party, trade unions, democracy and the lives of working or would-be working people, all facing a Tory government that has a renewed determination to carry through the authoritarian free market agenda of Mrs Thatcher. Media rhetoric alleged threatening behaviour towards MPs by revolutionary 'thugs'. The paltry substance of studio discussion was all about tactics, accusations of intimidation and party gossip. Will Labour split? Will Corbyn cave in? The hyperbole concerning yet another terminal crisis for Labour distorted the divisions between Left and Right that haunted the party's early years and have surfaced in many conflicts since.

Understanding Labour's Crisis: Miliband on 'Parliamentarism' and 'Labourism'

In this frustrating political and intellectual context, it was a pleasure to turn to Ralph Miliband's *Parliamentary Socialism*, as I had in 1986 when I wrote my own book, *Labour: A Tale of Two Parties*. Miliband's work is useful not for predictions, but for tools to identify tendencies underlying the febrile atmosphere of today's historic moment.

Miliband's classic work provides exactly the historical perspective and structural analysis that is needed to understand the conditions that established and sustain the Labour Party's monopoly hold over working-class political representation in Britain, as well as its persistent conservatism. The latter includes the seemingly permanent subordination of the Labour Left. Miliband enables us to understand how far today's conflicts indicate a breakdown of those conditions and the possible emergence of a new configuration of progressive political representation, which may herald a new relation between the Labour Party and the UK's diverse and diffuse social movements, including the labour movement.

What remains vital is Ralph Miliband's concept of 'parliamentarism'. This means more than 'parliamentary' as understood in its normal usage as referring to the importance of parliamentary representation and through this, legislative change. Parliamentarism is, in Miliband's words, the 'dogmatic devotion to the parliamentary system'. He explains,

The leaders of the Labour Party have always rejected any kind of political action (such as industrial action for political purposes) beyond the framework and conventions of the parliamentary system. The Labour Party has not only been a parliamentary party; it has been a party deeply imbued by parliamentarism.

This has been reinforced by a corporate and sectional trade unionism concerned with bargaining over workplace issues, and delegating wider political issues of welfare, taxation, industrial policy, macroeconomic policy and foreign policy to the parliamentary party. Here Miliband's concept of 'Labourism', complementary to 'parliamentarism', is important: the idea of the Labour Party as an instrument for a sectoral, corporate understanding of the interests of labour, reflecting 'the growing integration of the trade unions into the framework of modern capitalism'.

Labour's devotion to the parliamentary system as a fixed point of reference and conditioning factor of their political mentality, Miliband further understood, rests upon a deference to the moral authority of the British state – the crown in Parliament. It is significant here, Miliband points out, that the party's founding manifesto, 'Labour and the New Social Order', contained virtually no commitment to constitutional reforms that would democratise the British state. Instead, it was fervent in its reassurance that the manifesto's policies of public ownership and redistribution would be carried out by means of parliamentary government, Westminster style.

Here, the role of the UK's unwritten constitution is vital, as is the associated symbolic potency of MP's swearing allegiance to the monarch – rather than the republican and normal European convention of making an oath to the people. The significance of this pledge to the crown is that, between elections, moral authority lies within Parliament. This is important not simply in regards to the laws it makes or agrees to, but in the process through which it relates to the executive of the state. To suggest authority lies anywhere else – for example, with the people – is in effect a challenge to the state's authority.

All this is crucial to understanding the non-cooperation that Corbyn faced from the PLP in spite of his overwhelming mandate from party members and supporters. The continuing hold of parliamentarism was evident in the statements of Corbyn's critics: 'He has great integrity. We share his values. But …' – and here the speaker adopts a extra serious, almost reverential tone as if to emphasise the gravity of the point being made – '… the Labour Party is after all, a parliamentary party and a leader must have the confidence of the PLP.'

What was so striking about the self-important dogmatism this expresses was the dismissal of Corbyn's huge popular endorsement. The membership, thousands of individual union members and most union leaders might as well not exist. Indeed most MPs – and Labour ones were joined by the Conservative 'honourable members' of the House of Commons in this – seemed genuinely puzzled and deeply irritated by Corbyn's insistence on sticking by this mandate. Hence their incomprehension as to why their rebellion did not, as intended, lead him to resign, as he might well have done had he been a lone, isolated MP instead of someone accountable to, and in effect created by, what has really become a movement.

In fact, as Miliband's *Parliamentary Socialism* showed, crisis has been endemic in the party's hybrid institutions and ideologies – parliamentary and extra-parliamentary, socialist and social reformers. 'Like Hobbes and fear, crisis and the Labour Party have always been twins – Siamese twins,' Miliband wrote.

The tense hybridity underlying this permanent state of crisis is also what sustains the legitimacy of the Left, often referred to as part of 'the party as a broad church'. The party's organisation developed in an *ad hoc* way, comparable a buildings being adapted to survive earthquakes. In the Labour Party, these can be unpredictably set off by enthusiastic members and trade union militancy.

Until the mid-1980s, the formula at the heart of Labour had been: trade union power plus the evangelical (but powerless) enthusiasm of constituency socialists equals

Labour governments. But then something happened, and Labour's constitution lost its dignified appearance. Party activists, allied with increasingly well-organised and politically conscious trade union militants, pulled every formal or customary lever of democracy to its limits and demanded democracy for real.

Jeremy Corbyn was part of this campaign. The Left, led by Tony Benn, very nearly won control of the party, though not the leadership, through the long struggle over intra-party democracy and socialist policy that divided Labour right through the 1970s and into the early 1980s. The strength of the Left proved too much for a group of right-wing MPs who split to form the Social Democratic Party, which subsequently merged with the Liberals. Most of these MPs have not been heard of since, except indirectly as a warning to would-be splitters that the future is bleak outside the party. But to ward off any further split in the party led from the right, first Michael Foot and then Neil Kinnock, like most left Labour MPs before them, made preserving the unity of the party the highest priority. They were supported in this by the union leadership, which had previously backed Benn and the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy (CLPD).

It was precisely this endemic tendency to crisis inside the Labour Party that Tony Blair was determined to put to an end when he took hold of the leadership in 1994. In a process begun by Kinnock, Blair and Peter Mandelson (then head of Communications at Labour HQ, later an MP and minister, and a decisive power behind Blair's leadership) worked to change the party's constitution and establish institutions to effectively turn the party conference from an annual parliament of the labour movement into a leadership rally organised mainly for the media. In addition, an increasing number of candidates were imposed centrally, sometimes against the wishes of the local party. The significance of these reforms was that while the PLP's independence from the rest of the party was strengthened, this only widened the gap between MPs and party members.

Large numbers of angry workers and young would-be workers were also cut adrift. Corbyn's victory in September 2015 owed a lot to the pent-up anger of trade union members, not only in the aftermath of Thatcherism but in response to Blair's continuation of many Thatcherite policies. Some trade union leaders, such as Len McCluskey, general secretary of Unite, shared this anger, while others, like Dave Prentis at UNISON, the public service workers union, could not hold it back from influencing their own decision-making.

Ralph Miliband could not have predicted what happened with the unions in the aftermath of the defeat of union militancy at the hands of the Thatcherite counter-revolution. The anger this produced eventually took a new political expression, as the economistic or syndicalist dynamics of trade unionism were blocked to support Jeremy Corbyn in 2015, when almost 100,000 union members directly signed up to the Labour Party. It was their sense of the persistence of his commitment that led so many union leaders to support Corbyn against the coup mentality in the PLP, right through the new leadership contest forced in the summer of 2016.

This continuing commitment could also be seen in the remarkable action by the organisers of the Durham Miners Gala, an annual high point on the political agenda of the labour movement (both left and right), who declared that none of the 127 MPs who turned against Corbyn would be welcome on the historic balcony of the County Hotel where Labour leaders and important figures have spoken and waved since the 1930s. Corbyn addressed a record crowd of 150,000 labour movement activists and their families.

Neither could Ralph Miliband have predicted the extraordinary consequences of the equally pent-up anger of party members after decades of being treated with contempt, demonised and excluded from what they passionately considered their party. It was this that ensured that the Party's National Executive Committee would rule in July 2016 that Corbyn's name would have to appear on the leadership ballot, even without the support of sufficient MPs as normally required for candidates in a leadership contest.

Labour Beyond Parliamentarism

Through the summer of 2016, Corbyn's rallies and very presence became like a spark that lit a prairie fire. The terrain was arid, desperate for a source of political life that workers could trust. 'He's a decent man, with great integrity – but he's not a real leader' was the constant refrain from Corbyn's critics, questioning his electability. This was said at the same time that over half of the voting population had railed – in the Brexit vote – against the establishment, jam-packed with would-be and retired leaders of the kind that critics want to put in Corbyn's place.

Corbyn is not charismatic. He doesn't need to be. His daily record has been one of contradicting his oath to the crown in parliament and in practice, making and renewing an oath to the people. This explains his victory first time round, but it at the same time led him to come under ruthless and relentless fire from the British establishment and their media. Put simply, they will do everything to stop a socialist who means what he says and has a popular base to support him from becoming prime minister.

Corbyn could certainly never attain this position through the traditional parliamentarist strategy of the past. The refusal of the PLP to follow the logic of Corbyn's practical – if as yet untheorised – rejection of parliamentarism is a wake-up call for the need for a different strategic vision beyond simply the personal example, rare and impressive as it is, of a principled, honest and courageous way of doing politics in practice.

The next general election, whenever it comes, will not be taking place in a functioning political system with high turnout and strong levels of trust in the main political parties. Rather, it will come after more than a decade of growing disengagement from mainstream politics, especially by the young and the poor and insecure, to the point where the present Conservative government was voted for by only 24 percent of the eligible electorate, and when many Constituency Labour Parties

struggled even to ensure a quorum at their meetings.

To be electable in today's mood of anti-establishment politics, any leader and party has to be able to reach out beyond the political system and give a voice to those who have no vested interest in that system. Corbyn showed himself able to reach out and demonstrate that he would open up spaces in politics for the disenfranchised to ensure they had a voice. He has re-engaged hundreds of thousands of young people, whether or not they are union members.

Typically, the young don't just engage with institutions as they are; they bring new ideas and they shake things up, producing new political configurations with the potential of attracting more of their generation. Hence Momentum, the organisation created largely by these young 'Corbynistas', in no way resembles the stereotypes of the traditional Left. It treats political education through football sessions with disaffected youth as being as important as left caucuses in the party, if not more so; it chooses initiatives like 'the people's PPE' (purposefully contrasting its popular education programme with the Oxford degree) over the stale, pale, male political rallies of the past.

This is the generation whose culture, including political culture, has been shaped by using the tools of the new information and communication technology to share, collaborate and network, emancipating themselves daily from overbearing authority, hierarchy and other forms of centralised, commanding domination. A collaborative, facilitating kind of leadership and political organisation is the only one with which they can engage.

In this way, they are building on the innovations of the class of '68, Corbyn's generation. For this reason, the gap between generations and classes shouldn't be exaggerated. Older working class people of Corbyn's generation listened to Bob Dylan, and the women in their communities were influenced by and contributed to feminism. On the other hand, as the Brexit result demonstrates, there are distinct problems to be addressed among the white working class, where strong feelings of abandonment and powerlessness have led, with the aid of right-wing media and politicians, to a scapegoating of immigrants and the EU.

Again, the Corbyn leadership, with its commitment to fighting austerity, was well placed to reach out to those whose lives and communities have been all but destroyed by cuts, low pay (and no pay), privatisation and casualisation. Jeremy Corbyn can commit himself to putting money where his mouth is when he says that immigration is not the cause of people's social and economic desperation.

What has also surfaced is the problem of power and powerlessness. Here there is a confluence with the aspirations of the young to achieve some control over their future. But while the urban young use new technologies to create forms of daily collaborative control over their lives, people without easy resources for mobility and communication need other sources of control that they too can feel in their daily lives. Here, the unions are vital – but not so much in their conventional role as funders and foot soldiers for the party's election campaigns.

Nor is it only about their ability to defend jobs or bargain for better wages. It is also about enabling their members and the wider workforce to obtain greater control over the organisation and purpose of their work, especially in the public sector; an increasing emphasis on the organisation of part-time and casual workers; and support for cooperatives and similar structures as a means by which precarious workers can develop collective strength. Already, community branches created by Unite to organise and campaign beyond the workplace are illustrating new possibilities. Greater control of our working lives is limited, however, if our wider political environment is controlled by a remote, over-centralised political system through which there is little or no chance of having a voice in decisions about housing, the environment or the national and international matters of war and peace, trade and investment.

Following the defeats and brutal destruction of sources of mass strength outside parliament, initiated by Margaret Thatcher and consolidated by Tony Blair, working class industrial organisation and associated community cohesion and solidarity are weak. Far too weak, certainly, to sustain any insurrectionary strategy based on the revolutionary imaginary of a general strike leading to institutions of dual power, to be built on by a left government as a midwife to a new economic and political order. But this does not rule out the possibility of a strategy for anti-capitalist transformation based on the popular organisation and assertion of transformative capacity. Such a strategy would need to be supported by an elected government committed to systemic change through the exercise of multiple – and extra-parliamentary – sources of power and with a recognition of the popular capacity to create and exert power in social and economic life.

What is needed, then, is a fully participative process of creating a convincing alternative to Britain's unwritten constitution and the immense but opaque executive powers derived from it – from the extensive powers of patronage to the power to press the nuclear button, and in general the power to preserve the continuity of the British state.

It is exactly this that the establishment fear most from the dynamics unleashed by Corbyn's leadership: that is, the democratic potential to realise a transformative politics beyond 'parliamentary socialism'.

8

The Question of Leadership

Jeremy Gilbert

In December 2015, YouGov published some polling data that excited understandable interest. It showed that despite, or perhaps because of, the media barrage against him, current Labour Party members were overwhelmingly happy with the job Jeremy Corbyn was doing as party leader. To some extent these findings were to be expected, given reports elsewhere about the turnover of members since his election, as 'moderates' leave and leftists joined, continuing to shift the political composition of the membership as a whole.

Predictably, Labour centrists were in near-despair, especially given that the same polling shows Labour members significantly out of step with broader public opinion on many key contemporary issues. But what was truly remarkable about the poll findings was the extent to which that membership agreed with both the Blairites and the wider public on a particular key issue: the electability of Jeremy Corbyn.

Astonishingly, perhaps, only 50 percent of the Labour membership currently saw Corbyn as having a decent chance of becoming prime minister in 2020, while many more currently approved of his leadership. This meant that a large section of the current membership simply did not see winning the next election as the most important thing for Corbyn to be trying to do. Why was this?

New Labour's achievements in office were not just disappointing in scale and scope, given that they had a working parliamentary majority for thirteen years – more than twice the time it took the Attlee government to transform British society forever. New Labour's achievements were qualitatively different from those even of the Wilson and Callaghan governments, in that they simply didn't leave most people in Britain any more able to influence their destinies by working with their fellow citizens than they had been in 1997, and they left social inequality at a higher level than it had been before they came to power. They made no attempt to challenge the deepening individualism, inequality and commercialisation of our culture: instead they actively reinforced it by, for example, insisting that schools and hospitals accept neoliberal systems of management and quality control. I repeat, the latter criticism could not be fairly made even of the disastrous Labour administration of 1974-9.

This is why many of us have concluded that the entire political strategy associated with the project of Labour 'modernisation' since the 1980s was a failure, and that the strategy advocated by the Bennite Left at that time, which emphasised long-term movement building over short-term electoral tactics, might at least be worth a try.

This might all be wrong. But if critics on the right actually understand it and still think it's wrong, then they ought to be able to marshal some actual arguments against it. Which they haven't done. Instead, they just repeatedly call Corbyn's supporters mad, naive or nostalgic.

The reason the two sides of this argument find it so hard to talk to each other, or even understand each other's logics, is that what is at stake here really is two quite different conceptions of politics; this implies, among other things, two quite different conceptions of what leadership is and what leaders are for. One perspective basically thinks that politics is about selling your party to consumers; the other thinks that it's mainly about building up a coalition of social groups with common interests.

Politics as Marketing

This is the view of politics that is that reproduced by the mainstream media (including the 'centre-left' press), by much of mainstream political science, and is shared by the vast majority of the political class. Accordingly, there is only ever a very narrow range of opinions that can really be considered sensible, because they are predicated on an understanding of how the world really works.

Political parties compete to convince voters that they are able and willing to enact a governmental programme which fits within these parameters while delivering both competent administration of the existing political and economic system, and whatever minor modifications thereof are most popular with voters. Convincing voters of that means presenting politicians, and above all party leaders, as likeable and competent (so worthy of trust), while also clearly understanding the limits of what is acceptable to think, say or do.

Likability and competence are defined according to very narrow criteria, largely borrowed from the cultures of contemporary business: as such, a party leader should come across like one of the less offensive candidates on *The Apprentice*, and if they stray too far from that mode of self-presentation, they will be assumed to be failing. The leader is, essentially, a salesperson, selling the party 'brand' to a target market. The target market is almost exclusively floating voters in marginal constituencies, which are overwhelmingly in small to medium-sized English towns. So if you don't look and sound like a marketing manager from one of those places, you are basically doing it wrong.

This is a model of politics that is essentially liberal in nature. I don't mean 'liberal' in the casual sense in which it is normally used today (meaning something like 'a bit progressive', 'a bit free thinking', 'generous to the poor', etc). I mean 'liberal' in the classic philosophical sense of assuming that people are inherently rational, self-interested individuals before they are anything else, and that politics is a means of aggregating and deciding between their individual competing demands. From this perspective, the practice of politics is fundamentally a matter of making one's particular political brand the most popular in the consumer marketplace.

At the same time, if you think that the social world is ultimately just made up of competing individuals, then there is no particular reason to be sceptical about the assumption that parliament and government are more-or-less neutral instruments that any political party can use in order to achieve its aims. This is a view which is quite difficult to believe if one pays any attention to the frequency with which corporate

interests seem to influence political outcomes; but it is a very convenient one for journalists to believe in, because it means that they don't have to report on anything more complicated than the personalities of politicians and the results of the latest polls.

The great weakness of this model of politics is that it simply cannot explain how social change happens. It insists that politics as it has been done since the 1980s is the only way it could ever be done. This doesn't explain why at other points in history politics has demonstrably been done differently. If you ask them why the NHS happened, adherents of this model will usually say that it was because Mr Beveridge and Mr Attlee thought it was a good idea. If you talk to them about the Tredegar Medical Aid Society, then you will usually find that they have never heard of it. If you point out that the NHS was not designed by focus groups and was opposed even by much of the Labour movement, only really being brought into being because the south Wales miners demanded it, then they will try very hard to change the subject.

Politics as Movement-Building

On the other hand, we have a quite different view of politics. This is a view which some might call vaguely 'Marxist', but which might more accurately be called simply 'sociological', because it is perfectly possible to endorse this view while remaining very sceptical about many analytical and political assumptions of most of the Marxian tradition. This is a view that sees politics as essentially a matter of conflicts between competing sets of interests, those interests being shared by various groups of various shapes and sizes.

From this perspective, what governments actually do when they get into office is not simply a question of what they said in their manifestos, or what the people who voted for them want them to do, or what their members want them to do. Ultimately, what governments do will tend to be shaped by the overall strength and weakness of the different interest groups that exist in society at a given time. Those groups might include: workers, investors, speculators, home-owners, women, immigrants, professionals, consumers, hunters, farmers, gardeners, etc. The strength and weakness of these groups is dependent upon a range of factors: their wealth, how well organised they are, their access to bits of the state, their access to technology, how far other members of society care what they say or do, how willing the members of that group are to make personal sacrifices for the good of the group, etc.

Therefore, even if you win an election, if you don't have a powerful coalition of social forces to back you up, then you are going to end up effectively being told what to do by other powerful social forces. It is very easy to see why someone might agree with this view if we consider the differences between the various Labour governments I referred to above. The '45 Labour government was able to enact radical reforms because the unions were very powerful during the era of post-war reconstruction, a time of acute labour shortage. In 1997 they were weak, and nothing had happened in the wider social, economic or technological environment to make them any stronger by 2010, which meant that the New Labour government had far less scope to do anything that might annoy the financial enclave of London.

Of course, the Blair government did nothing much to try to make the unions any stronger – beyond enacting some progressive legislation early in its first parliament – while its aggressive support for European labour market deregulation contributed considerably to making them weaker. Which is one of the fundamental things that even the once-moderate Left cannot forgive them for. And it is one of the things that the Labour Right simply cannot get their heads around at all.

A Different Kind of Leadership

But the key point I want to make here is that this sociological conception of politics produces a quite different set of ideas as to what the role of the party leader should be. From this perspective, the first role of the leader is to rally their own side effectively. And this is precisely what Corbyn has done.

For the first time since the mid-1980s, he has brought together and largely unified the disparate elements of the English and Welsh left, the 20–30 percent of the population who share a more or less Marxist outlook on most things, who voted for Labour's radical socialist programme in '83 and who have not significantly grown or shrunk in number since then.

Critics are quite right to point out that, then as now, enthusing less than 30 percent of the voting public gets you nowhere, no matter how enthusiastic they may be. But those critics would do well to reflect on the sheer achievement of rallying a force that has been dispersed, demoralised and defeated for three decades, even if Corbyn never achieves anything else.

The question that critics would pose if they had a sufficient grasp of this model of politics (which they don't) is simply this: what next? Having rallied your forces, what do you do with them? Most fundamentally, how do you extend them, bringing other social groups into the same coalition, without watering down your aims to the point where you demoralise your own side?

Again, the radical tradition does have a classic answer to this question. What you do, simply, is convince enough of those other social groups that their interests are best served by throwing in their lot with you than by supporting the other side. This is what it means to achieve 'hegemony' (leadership) within a wider ensemble of social forces.

In a society in which it is pretty much self-evident that a tiny elite are creaming off almost all of the products of everyone else's labour for their own benefit, this ought to be easy enough. Unfortunately, when that tiny elite owns the mass media, and uses it to insist that anyone who advocates anything resembling this sociological model of politics is simply mad, then the job becomes much more difficult. When your own professional politicians are mostly deeply committed to the truth of the liberal consumerist model of politics, and have been taught since their youth that anyone who isn't committed to it is a mad Trot, and have mostly never been taught any basic sociology (the subject you don't study if you read PPE), or even much serious history, then you really have a problem.

What you do under those circumstances is not clear, and this is what Corbyn and his sympathisers are still trying to work out. The most radical of them are looking for something quite different from old models of leadership, they are looking instead for a 'leader' whose role will be to facilitate a real democratisation of the Labour Party and an empowerment of a new grassroots movement. Unfortunately even the most radically sociological thinker has to acknowledge that however democratic the party becomes, if it doesn't have a leader who can rally not just their own side, but a majority of the public, behind a progressive cause, then the party will not be able to democratise wider society. What their critics fail to grasp is that simply appearing likeable to that wider public, while completely failing to inspire the party membership, is not something which an effective party leader can do either, and that a large section of the public is so disillusioned with that style of politics that they will not return to acquiescing to it for at least another generation.

There aren't any easy answers to these dilemmas. Building a movement and making that movement successful are by nature complex tasks which take a long time to complete. There are elements of marketing technique which even the most democratic movement-building leader must deploy if they are to widen their coalition of interests successfully. Whether the current Labour leadership can figure out how to do that remains to be seen. On the other hand, looking at the Labour leadership's critics, the fact that they cannot imagine a form of leadership which does not make marketing its first priority, and can only understand a practice of leadership which is not exclusively focused on marketing as failing, shows just how limited a conception of politics the British political class is committed to.

The great difference between the liberal and the sociological models, however, is that the latter can at least explain the former. It is easy to understand where the idea of politics as marketing comes from and why it has so much support if we think about the fact that it essentially serves the interests of exactly the same groups that other forms of commercial marketing serve: the wealthy capitalist elite. From the other side however, the liberals of the political class are completely mystified by the emergence of another model of politics, and can only denounce it in the most confused of terms. Calling someone mad is not an argument, but an admission that you cannot understand what they are doing. If anything demonstrates the redundancy of their models of both politics and leadership, it is this inability to grasp the motivations and the objectives of their opponents.

Straight-Talking, Honest Politics

What would it take to carry the momentum of Corbyn's leadership campaign forward and into some strategically viable radical projects? It would mean taking seriously Corbyn's popular campaign slogan from the 2015 leadership election – 'straight talking, honest politics' – and taking that straight-talking honesty into a territory which even Corbyn has not dared to explore yet.

Firstly, it would mean being honest and straight-talking about the reality of the

balance of forces in Austerity Britain. The metropolitan Left is back on the political map in England, but it has no better idea than it did in 1983 on how to move from a position of marginality to one of political potency. Under these circumstances, there is one thing that any honest, straight-talking politician will say to their followers: we are in this for a long haul, or we are not in it at all.

In the early 1980s, Corbyn was a leading young member of the 'Bennite' faction of the Labour Party, led by the former cabinet minister Tony Benn, whose experiences in the Labour governments of the '60 and '70s had convinced him of the need for Labour to adopt a radical socialist programme, and to campaign on it despite the relatively narrow support for such a programme apparent in the country at large. This is what the Bennites could have said at that time, but never quite did:

We have a movement to build. In the process, we may lose the next two or three elections. As long as our enemies control the media, dominate workplaces and determine the nature of so many community institutions, they will always be able to frighten enough of the electorate into voting against us to prevent us from winning an election.

They will only allow us to come close to winning office if we simply remove all radical demands from our programme. We could do that – we could make ourselves 'electable' by becoming so 'moderate' that the existing elites they would be willing to let us form a government for a while. But to achieve that, we would have to abandon much of our support among the poorest sections of society, and would demoralise our own forces to the point where we would have lost more than we had gained. We might get into office, but all real power would remain in the hands of our enemies, and we would have lost the opportunity to build a real movement for social change.

We have to build our forces across culture and in civil society, in order to take our positions and deepen our networks, and in order to fight what Gramsci calls the 'war of position'. We have to develop our own institutions, our intellectual networks, and above all our own media. Only then will we be in a position to form a government. This may take a decade – it may take a generation – but it is the only path open to us.

They could have said that. If they had, then a lot more people might have listened to them. But they didn't. And it was for this reason as much as any other that their natural allies, the soft-Left, drifted into two decades of uneasy complicity with the Blairites.

Of course, the past is no necessary guide to the future, and there is no certainty that a Corbyn-led Labour party cannot win the next UK general election (which is more than four years away). But an effective political strategy would at least have to be open, straight-talking and honest about the fact that right now victory in the short term doesn't look likely, and that the recognition of this fact requires some kind of strategy.

What might be an example of such a strategy? Let's consider one key issue. Any project to build a radical consensus in the UK would have to take account of the widespread endorsement of demonstrably false beliefs about the economic costs of immigration and the extent of welfare dependency in the country today. There is no doubt that Corbyn and his policy team will put forward the most radical and

progressive set of policy proposals on these issues that any major party has advanced since the 1980s. The question is whether they will also acknowledge that simply having those policies is worthless without a plan to persuade the country to back them, and that however well formulated those policies may be, their opponents are in a position to put up major obstacles to them ever winning majority support.

What might be a way out of such a dilemma? There may be many possible routes. One that I would suggest would be the following: instead of simply announcing a policy, announce an intention to facilitate a 2-year process of extensive nationwide, community-level democratic deliberation, leading up to a final referendum to resolve some key questions on immigration and welfare policy. Be upfront about the fact that the extent of public misinformation on these issues makes it impossible simply to propose a policy, and that instead, a national conversation, a plan to let the people decide, will themselves be the policy put forward in the manifesto. Let democracy be the strategy.

My point here is not to propose a particular answer to the intractable question of strategy; this is only one possible solution. The fundamental problem with Corbynism as it is currently constituted is not the differing answers that it might give: rather the problem is that, like Bennism before it, Corbynism currently seems unwilling to ask the question of Labour's strategy at all.

The other key issue about which an effective Corbynism would have to be honest and straight-talking is the breakdown of the British party system.

Arguably, since the late 1980s it has been clear that there is no future prospect of a Labour government simply achieving a parliamentary majority and proceeding to implement a radical progressive programme. The existence of a substantial centrist vote from the mid-1980s onwards created a situation in which Labour always had only two strategic options. On the one hand, it could have accepted the inevitable necessity of coalition, and become the leading element of a left-of-centre coalition with the liberal democrats, committed to implementing proportional representation and a broad social democratic alternative to Thatcherism. This was the path urged on Labour by many soft-eft commentators in the late '80s. On the other hand, the only alternative route was the one that it eventually took – Labour rebranding itself as a centre party which outflanked the Liberal Democrats to the right on many social, political and economic issues. This was the New Labour project in a nutshell.

As explained above, the recent self-destruction of the Liberal Democrats has not improved the situation for Labour at all, and has only intensified the obvious non-representativeness of the British electoral system. Today only a radical reform of the electoral system could give an adequate expression to the complex distribution of opinion across contemporary British society (an example of which would be the shared commitment of the soft Left, Blairites, Bennites, Liberal Democrats and pro-EU Tories to a set of cosmopolitan values which are rejected by UKIP, Tory Eurosceptics, and the old Labour Right). Under these circumstances, my own judgement is that it is more or less inevitable that at some point in the foreseeable future, a broad coalition of parties – probably including both Labour and UKIP – will have to fight an election on a joint slate

committed to introducing proportional representation immediately. This may happen in 2020 and it may happen in 2040, but it is the only foreseeable way in which proportional representation will be introduced and some kind of representative legitimacy restored to the UK constitution.

We should be clear about two things here. One is that the crisis of representative democracy is by no means local to the UK and its particularly decrepit constitution. Such a crisis is a global phenomenon, typical of the era of 'post-democracy' and a direct consequence of neoliberal hegemony. I have argued elsewhere, extensively, that only a return to the classical radical democratic agenda of the New Left, advocating for participatory democracy in government, and for the democratisation of public services and workplaces, can really meet the challenges posed to democrats by the complexities of twenty-first-century culture. Introducing proportional representation to the House of Commons would hardly constitute a panacea for British democracy or the English Left. But it would nonetheless be an absolutely necessary step. The problem here is twofold: neoliberalism and the very experience of postmodernism have weakened and revealed the inherent limits of all forms of representative democracy; but democracy in Britain is not even weakly representative in the way that most European democracies are.

The other thing to keep in mind is that Corbyn has not thus far demonstrated the indifference to democratic questions of which the Bennites have historically been accused. In fact, he has made it party policy to try to set up an autonomous, nationwide constitutional convention to examine the health of the country's democracy in every possible aspect, and has handed responsibility for this task to one of the most radical and intellectually expansive MPs in the House of Commons, Jon Trickett. Trickett has made clear that not just proportional representation, but a radical rethinking of British democracy in the 21st century, will be on the agenda. So the question, again, is not one of policy and programme, but of political strategy. If the constitutional convention recommends proportional representation, would a Corbyn-led Labour party go so far as to enter into an electoral pact which would include not just the Greens or even the SNP (both natural ideological allies), but also the most under-represented party ever to contest a British election, UKIP? Will they, in short, be honest with themselves about the fact that the story of Corbynism as a socio-political phenomenon is not merely about the return of the Labour Left, but is a part of the much bigger story of the transformation of the twentieth-century party system beyond all recognition?

Only time will tell. But I fear that if the answer is 'no', then the chances are that the country will remain largely where it is now, governed by unaccountable elites nominally representing the Labour or Conservative parties, but ultimately representing nothing but the interests of finance capital.

Of course, any such strategy would also have to have a complex class dimension. I've suggested elsewhere that the contemporary Left must rethink the class alliances on which it could base itself, and in particular the potentially progressive role of key sections of the entrepreneurial classes. But history suggests that it will be far easier to persuade the Labour leadership to take that kind of argument seriously than to get them to accept that the Labour Party must let go of the singular political strategy which has

defined its politics for over a century: seek an exclusive parliamentary majority, and assume that from there, all else will follow.

The great fear of many of us today is that this is a strategy that can never work, but also one from which Labour can never free itself. Our great hope is that the pluralist, anti-sectarian and radically democratic instincts being demonstrated by Corbyn's young supporters, especially in the process of constituting the Momentum organisation, suggests that a pluralistic and radically democratic politics may yet have a future in the UK, a future that is much brighter than its past.

9

Corbynism and the Parameters of Power

Alex Williams

One recent claim, made by those on the Labour 'moderate Right', has been that the Labour membership endorse Corbyn because they 'don't care about winning the next election'. There is a degree of truth to this, although not in the terms presented by the Labour Right. Why is this?

The logic that ran through most of the Labour Party from the 1990s to shortly before Corbyn's ascension, and which still constitutes the ruling political common sense among 'moderates' today, states the following:

1.winning power is all that matters;

2.winning power equals the Labour party winning (general and local) elections;

3.winning elections means matching our policies to the desires of the electorate;

4.the desires of the electorate, in turn, are discernible through polls, focus groups, and the inherent limitations imposed by the agenda of the UK media.

What were the effects of understanding the parameters of power in these terms? The end result saw a programme of *neoliberalising* the Labour party, acceding to many (if not all) of the hallmark policies of neoliberalism: market efficiency as governance norm, privatisation, marketisation, and contracting out. While Labour were committed to 'sharing the proceeds of growth' more equitably than in the Thatcher and Major years, the process by which growth was to be achieved remained the same: the embedding of neoliberalism within government, society, and the economy. Rampant financialisation, the reliance of households on house price increases, and the hollowing out of the welfare state were some of the key consequences.

Two strands within the Parliamentary Labour Party supported such a programme. The first group acceded to neoliberalism totally: the true believers. Meanwhile the second viewed its own strategic position as so weak it felt compelled to throw its lot in with the new regime.

This first group were those who had fully imbibed that discourse first developed by the Austrian school of economic and social theorists – in particular Hayek and von Mises – that proposed that the world was simply too complex to manage through state control and that only markets would be capable of functioning as an appropriately supple information-processing and coordination system. While Thatcher had developed an economic response to these conditions, it could be managed more humanely and with less socially harmful effects than it had been by the Tory Party. Here we might think of Tony Blair and Peter Mandelson, along with their key allies and acolytes. The second group perceived neoliberalism as basically false and/or malign in its results, but could not discern any way to win power without agreeing to some of its terms. We might think here of a large tranche of what has been called the 'soft Left', including key Brownites, along with some of the major UK unions in the 1990s and 2000s.

Returning to the original question, then, what might the actual parameters of power look like? Why was New Labour (and its inheritors today) so wrong?

Here we need to move beyond thinking of winning a singular position of power (for example,. state power). Instead, we need to highlight a more complex, dynamic, and open-ended understanding of what power is, and therefore where it lies. In this, we need to talk about *hegemony*, an idea that was developed most famously by the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci. Hegemony is a system of power within complex societies like the UK. Some of the key ideas of hegemony are as follows.

There is no *singular* position from which power is exercised, but only relative locations. Therefore, power within the state is important, but only insofar as it interacts with power in other locations – such as the media, social movements, the economy, finance, infrastructure, culture, and so on. To focus on state power over and above power in other areas of society is therefore short-sighted, and likely to be self-undermining over time.

The ultimate mode of power is the power to configure the space on which politics is played out, to change 'the rules of the game'. This might be thought of in terms of control over ideas of common sense and the array of possible acceptable opinions. Real power lies in transforming this array, rather than acceding to what already exists.

Looking at politics through the lens of hegemony therefore demonstrates that while nothing is inviolable, we must still work with the world as it is today. Nevertheless. 'opinions', 'desires', 'beliefs' can all be re-engineered, shifted, or re-articulated. This is where hegemony can mean something like 'leadership'-- changing, rather than merely reflecting, what publics think. Such leadership cannot just consist of a rationalistic insistence, but rather work upon existing beliefs and desires to transform them over time.

Hegemonic power is complex, not simple. It can have a component of force, or coercion, but largely operates in the space between pure force (such as a policeman's truncheon) and pure active assent (for example, being an ideological true believer). This space might be defined as *minimally passive consent*, or the path of least resistance. The overriding objective of hegemonic strategy is to use more short-term forms of power to achieve long-lasting modes, and transform what minimally passive consent consists of.

This ultimately leads to what Gramsci termed 'the historic bloc': a social system where the state, civil society, the economy, culture, media, and infrastructure were all in sync, mutually re-enforcing; stable, but dynamic. The result of such an achievement is a trajectory, or a direction of travel. No historic bloc lasts forever. When such a bloc breaks down, different forces must compete to hegemonise the new state of affairs.

On this basis, what can we say for Corbyn's Labour? How can we bring the actual parameters of Labour's political power back into focus?

First, we have to emphasise above all that nothing will be quick, and that there is a need to focus on long-lasting processes of transformation. This means a time frame beyond the electoral cycle, where winning long-term power is about *more* than elections, while simultaneously not ignoring them.

State power without hegemony means no kind of power at all, but Labour must

not become a mere 'party of protest'. This means thinking about Labour in terms of other progressive parties, with the possible need for a much-mooted 'progressive alliance' in the future. It also means thinking about how organisations such as unions, think tanks, social movements, charities, and businesses interact with the party. Working out how to get different kind of organisations to pull together without insisting on some kind of absolute unity implies the need for a new ideology. This must be more than simply a negatively defined project. It needs to be one that is focused on resistance and opposition. While this might be successful in certain individual cases – say, defending a given hospital or library from closure – it can never compete with dominant systemic tendencies.

Hence, there is an absolute requirement for a positive vision at the core of the agenda for a Corbynist Labour. This positive vision should be constructed in relation to future dynamics that are predicted to reshape the UK and the world in coming decades. The two most important of these forces are climate change and the rise of automation in the workplace. The world of 2030, for example, will be a very different one from now. Any successful hegemonic, long-term strategy for the Left will need to account for these future dynamics in some sense. For example, a left-wing party that embraced automation, in conjunction with a universal basic income policy, would be able definitively to portray itself as a future-oriented political entity. The interest already demonstrated by John McDonnell in this respect has been one of the more encouraging aspects of the new leadership of the party.

A fundamental flaw in UK left thinking for generations has been the abandonment of the long-term hegemonic strategy. With the election of Corbyn, a new opportunity arises for a historic re-engagement with an ambitious politics across the Left in the UK. This would, minimally, place an emphasis on long-term change. In addition, it would prioritise the focus of activism and party politics on key dynamic trajectories of the future. It must shift the terms for party politics beyond simply 'winning state power', and for activism beyond single issues and ethical localism towards a large-scale project to re-orient the entire platform of UK society. In so doing it should seek to transform the commonly understood ways of seeing – and feeling – what can and ought to be done. It is in the transformation of our political common sense, and the embedding of this new common sense in the UK's institutions, which will enable the politics of Corbynism to create genuinely transformative change.

10

What Next? The Corbyn Plan

Ellie Mae O'Hagan

So the world's stupidest coup has finally come to an end. Jeremy Corbyn has an even bigger mandate than he did before, and the Labour Party's poll ratings have plummeted. An excellent feat by the self-professed tactical geniuses of the party, I think we can all agree.

But while Corbyn supporters should be allowed a few days of *schadenfreude*, they should also look ahead. And now the party is no longer in a state of war, for the time being at least, Corbyn supporters need to get serious. It's time to start thinking about winning votes.

We know why the 'electability question' has been rejected by so many Corbyn supporters. There have been too many Labour grandees who used the issue of electability as a cover for what is essentially an ideological project to move the party to the right. Blair's 2005 conference speech virtually admitted as much when he said, 'In the era of rapid globalisation, there is no mystery about what works: an open, liberal economy, prepared constantly to change to remain competitive.' In 2015, he made his intentions even more explicit: 'I wouldn't want to win on an old-fashioned leftist platform. Even if I thought it was the route to victory, I wouldn't take it.'

In these conditions, it is wilfully ignorant of anti-Corbynites to dismiss Corbyn supporters' reservations about electability. The concept has been contaminated by Labour MPs who insinuate that electability is incompatible with left-wing policy. Only last year, Harriet Harman instructed MPs to abstain on the Welfare Bill in order to show voters that Labour was 'listening'. Of course, Labour has never backed, say, rail nationalisation on the grounds that two thirds of Britons support it. It's not surprising the concept is treated with suspicion.

Even so, it's time to start talking about reaching out to that strange and unknowable tribe we call the electorate. So what does the Labour leadership and its supporters need to think about?

The Polls

Labour is doing very badly in the polls. The coup, conducted in the shuddering aftermath of the Brexit vote, transformed the party's ratings from tepid to catastrophic. Those who agitated for it must take responsibility for that and learn lessons (they won't). But now the captain has the responsibility to steer the Titanic away from the iceberg.

One of the most urgent things Corbyn supporters can do here is to dispense with conspiracy theories. No more supposing that shady Blairite organisations are stitching up the leadership, no more arguing that the polls were wrong about the general elections so they can be disregarded, and no more citing examples of big pro-Corbyn

rallies as evidence that Labour is reaching beyond its base.

The Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci famously advocated the strategy of 'pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will', and this is the approach Corbyn supporters must take. They need to accept that the outlook is bad, but also know that it can get better. Pretending things are going well when they are not does not help the leadership, nor does it help members appear as if they have a grip on reality. When Labour members make inaccurate, overblown claims about Corbyn's ratings on social media, they are providing fodder for journalists looking to discredit the entire movement as a collective act of madness.

Media Strategy

Corbyn's media strategy has been one of his greatest weaknesses. Luckily, on a pragmatic level, the leadership has made new hires in this part of his team. And this is already improving its relationship to the media. As a journalist, I am now in contact with Corbyn's press team almost daily – either through press releases or by phone to check claims made by hostile MPs in the media. This is a massive improvement.

However, what Corbyn's administration is yet to do is come up with is an overarching vision for society that they can then communicate to the electorate. To do this, it must above all else decide what values it wants to embody. It has to pick a key set of flagship policies that reflect these values, and develop a number of key messages to give to MPs speaking to the media. Finally, it must source a slogan that sums up these values succinctly and colloquially.

While I leave it to the leadership to determine what this vision would be, I suggest that Jeremy Corbyn could aim to portray himself as the leader who champions the little guy over the elite, and promises to narrow the gap between rich and poor. These qualities have two benefits: first, they are the only values that most Labour MPs agree on; and, second, it is virtually impossible for Labour to be outflanked by the Tories on this turf.

To support these values, the leadership should develop policies to help those in low-paid, insecure work and self-employment. It should promise to tackle tax avoidance, rebalance the economy away from London and the South East, and pledge to bring key services back into public ownership so the government can concentrate on reducing costs and improving services for the households that use them. Key messages should, above all, be framed with experts on political messaging and then tested before they are rolled out to the electorate. There are already plenty of methods to do this, and the Labour Party should be exploring all of them.

The party should use social media, particularly targeted Facebook campaigns, to improve and amplify a strong traditional media strategy. Supporters could use social media to spread the party's messages far and wide.

Momentum and the Labour Party as a Social Movement

Can a grassroots movement do without a successful media strategy? The Leave campaign was disorganised on the ground, for example, but managed to convince the

majority of the British public to leave the EU using a set of emotionally resonant and simple messages. But grassroots members can make a huge difference.

The grassroots movement behind Corbyn should focus less on rallies and more on making a material difference in people's lives. Why not offer a service where Momentum helps people fill in their tax returns? Or fill in their benefit forms? Grassroots members could even organise family days with bouncy castles and face painting. In short, Momentum needs to be an active and practical presence in people's lives – not only to ensure that Labour itself is a positive presence in people's lives, but to counterbalance the constant stream of negative press that will no doubt continue to plague grassroots members.

Momentum's actions should nonetheless reflect the wider communications strategy of the leadership. If the leadership is focusing on self-employment, Momentum should carry out a drive where it helps people with tax returns. If the leadership is focusing on housing, Momentum should get training in the basics of housing advice.

And finally, Momentum should be strategic in terms of where this activity takes place. If there is a big Momentum group in an active Labour area where the local MP has a big majority, is there an area nearby where the MP looks shaky, or where the party's base is beginning to become disillusioned? If so, Momentum should focus its energies there.

Unifying the Party

Given the majority of Labour MPs took part in a vote of no-confidence against Corbyn, and the Left doesn't have a couple of hundred talented would-be MPs waiting in the wings, it's unrealistic to expect de-selections to yield anything fruitful for Corbyn's leadership. It's likely that de-selections would either cause a split or tie the party up in electoral shenanigans for months – and frankly the Corbyn leadership does not have the luxury of causing that level of chaos.

That being said, grassroots activists should be ensuring as many new members come to local party meetings as possible. Funnily enough, one person they could learn a lot from is Luciana Berger. A friend of mine is now an active member of the party because Berger was her local MP and convinced her to come to a local meeting. When my friend arrived, Berger was waiting outside to meet her. Every Labour active member should seek out inactive members in their local area and do the same. Then, during the local meetings, the members should hold their MP to account, but without threats.

At a leadership level, the party should focus primarily upon issues that most Labour MPs agree on. The leadership should attempt to mend ties with the least hostile MPs, like Lisa Nandy and Andy Burnham, and once they are on board, move towards reconciliation with more hostile colleagues. Of course there will be continued attempts to unseat Corbyn, but the leadership needs to be the victim of hostility rather than the proponents of it. The civil war was deeply unedifying to watch and made Labour look unable to govern. Even if the leadership can't secure total harmony in the party, it must ensure it is not seen as an aggressor.

Corbyn will never be a perfect leader, and he faces challenges unlike any Labour

leader before him. But that is not a reason to expect him not to appeal to a wider electorate in any way, or that Labour's poll rating cannot be improved with him as leader. Instead of making excuses for the shortcomings of his leadership, or the movement around it, everyone who wants Corbyn to succeed should be honest about the challenges ahead and how to address them. The Labour Party can do better. So what next?

11

Instructions for the Next Labour Leader

Michael Rosen

1.Don't eat bacon sandwiches in public.
2.Check what your relatives said about the war.
3.Always wear a tie – but not if you're a woman.
4.Be normal.
5.Love Trident.
6.Say you're going to put the 'Great' back into Great Britain.
7.Love the Queen.
8.Say that we can learn a lot from Lord Sugar.
9.Say that abolishing the House of Lords is more difficult than it looks.
10.Say that trade unions can't keep having their own way.
11.Say that banks have got a job to do just like the rest of us.
12.Remember that the band plays four notes before you come in with 'Send her victorious'.
13.Every now and then suggest that 'minorities' do something wrong, e.g. talk their own language, live next door to each other. This implies that a) you are not a minority and b) you don't talk your own language or live next door to someone who's in your minority – which is not possible because you are not a minority anyway. I know this is complicated. Keep it simple: it's all about 'us' and 'them'.
14.Like sport.
15.Jumpers – weekend only.
16.Don't eat noodles.

12

Recruit, Re-Tweet, Re-Nationalise

Aaron Bastani

Jeremy Corbyn promises that Labour will deploy digital technology to mobilise Britain's 'most visible general election campaign ever'. He said,

Labour have now lost two successive general elections … we will not win elections solely by relying on the methods and strategies of the past. And I'm pleased to say that our leadership campaign is leading the way in harnessing the advances of new technology so that we can organise political campaigning like we've never seen before in Britain … the challenge is to now take this forward to the next general election. Labour under my leadership will utilise the advances of digital technology so that we can mobilise the most visible, targeted and effective general election campaign in British history.

While it is of some concern that Corbyn didn't get more specific as to precisely how Labour can mobilise its massive and growing membership, nor how it can leverage new media for a comparative advantage on the ground and circumvent an often hostile establishment in both broadcast and print, as with much elsewhere, it's clear that his offer is significantly more substantial than that of his rival, Owen Smith.

Let me be honest. I don't believe that one person at the top of an organisation – whoever they are – is the difference between winning and losing. That holds true in determining both the future of what is now Europe's largest centre-left party, and Britain too. What I do believe, however, is that the Corbyn leadership comes with a very unique dividend: a much larger membership – and with it more money and a potentially superior ground campaign – as well as the affordances of a social movement. But more of that in a moment.

It is this dividend that is Labour's 'get out of jail' card. It might not lead to a parliamentary majority after the next general election; after all, that's for the public to decide. But it is the answer to a decades-long crisis of social democracy more generally and the Labour Party in particular.

What is the scale of that crisis? Labour have lost seats at every single general election since 1997. That's four elections and nearly two decades. While Cameron was a talented enough leader – after all he led his party for ten years – the rot set in well before he was hugging hoodies and riding huskies. Labour, under Tony Blair no less, lost forty-six seats in 2005. That wasn't because the Tories offered anything new or because Michael Howard dazzled. He was only a slight improvement on his two predecessors. It was because Britain was already tiring of New Labour. Many were outraged over Iraq, yes, but there was also a widespread recognition of Number 10's press operation and the intimate relationship between politics and the media – always present but now bordering on flagrant. By 2001, New Labour was stridently post-political: a year earlier Blair had proudly asserted 'I was never really in politics', while a member of his cabinet welcomed the 'depoliticising of key decision-making'. With no other game in town, and

the Tories lurching from one dud to another, apathy set in.

How else do you explain John Major winning more votes in 1997 than Blair eight years later? Labour dominance at the beginning of the century was more a result of Tory torpor than Labour talent.

Five million votes were lost between 1997 and 2010, and that was before the Scotland fiasco in 2015 when the party lost forty out of forty-one seats – automatically rendering tragi-comic any future interventions by Ed Miliband regarding electability. People talk about Corbyn polling in the high twenties as a disaster, but they seem to forget that's precisely what Labour under Gordon Brown actually won in the 2010 general election. That was with a relatively united party and a mass media not perpetually beset by foaming wrath.

It's clear that something seismic has shifted since the global financial crisis of 2008. Since then we have seen the same story unfold that transpired after the two major economic crises of the twentieth century: 1929 and 1971. A global crisis of capitalism has unravelled the prevailing orthodoxy, and with it the way Labour understands how to run an economy and deliver rising living standards. As to when the party will find an answer and adapt, as it previously did in 1945 and 1997, remains unclear. I suggest that you can see the outlines of catharsis already with the current leadership.

New Media Is More Than Social Media

One commonly hears the refrain that if Twitter was a decent indicator of public opinion, Ed Miliband would have won a healthy majority at the last general election. I agree. Twitter is no decent barometer of public sentiment – especially when age is an increasingly predictive indicator of party political preference. But to view this as what is meant by new media under Corbyn, and the opportunities it confers, is to disregard not only a rapidly changing area around media consumption but, put simply, how effective organisations now operate.

As Daniel Kreiss recently put it, 'With digital convergence and technological change, all political communication practices, from advertising and field canvassing to direct mail, have taken on new technological dimensions and are now premised in some way on digital media, data and analytics.' There is no such thing as 'digital organising' or 'digital activism', just organising and activism. These are technologies that are now so fundamental to our lives that they have become 'mundane' – for some a new technology becomes transformative precisely at the moment it is taken for granted.

To see the digital element of organising, persuasion and mobilisation as distinct from the real thing is, in 2016, a misnomer. What is clear is that British politics has significantly trailed events in the US over the last decade. Similarly, as Tim Ross identifies in his excellent book *Why the Tories Won*, Labour were second to the Tories in deploying new media at the last election. With Corbyn as leader, that gap, so the argument goes, could be overcome.

So, as someone who has researched this field for over five years, I've drawn up a list of proposals that Corbyn's Labour should introduce, focusing specifically on new media. This list is informed by broader thinking about building left hegemony, not only

within Labour but across civil society too. This, in part, is how we prepare to win.

1)Establish a Campus Recruitment Programme: *GradLAB*

This programme would focus primarily on computer science departments, seeking out individuals who care about progressive issues and causes. The pitch to these young people, students but also graduates, junior academics and researchers, would be a simple one: *come to volunteer and work for us so that we can build a set of technologies and processes not only capable of winning a general election, but changing minds and values across the country. Let's engineer a new country*.

It can't be left to serendipity that talented people in this field stumble across party politics and activism – and anyway, there aren't enough of them. They must be actively sought out. These graduates would work on things like the party's data and analytics platforms, data integration, APIs and field tools. They would also feed into the party's 'digital leaders programme' (see Point 3) as well as a more digitally empowered Labour Students operation.

2)Re-establish an Annual NetrootsUK Event

Between 2011 and 2013, there were several 'NetrootsUK' events across the country. These were modeled on the annual political convention in the US, 'Netroots Nation', originally organised by a community orbiting the US blog *the Daily Kos* (the event was initially called the YearlyKos).

While NetRoots has proved an enduring success in the US, running every year between its inception in 2006 and this July in St Louis, the UK equivalent failed to ever really get going. For me that offers, in microcosm, the gulf between what has happened in the US over the last decade in relation to progressive politics and the new media space, where significant advances have been made, and the UK.

NetRootsUK would make far more sense in the present political environment, including not only anti-austerity groups and single issue campaigns, but also unions – old and new – Corbynistas, Greens, and SNP activists. Politics has only got more interesting since 2011, and I think that would be reflected in any conference. While the UK events had previously partnered with the likes of 38 Degrees, Left Foot Forward, Liberal Conspiracy and the TUC, this seems to have created an aversion to a politics of disagreement and persuasion (the only politics that matters). A similar event, jointly hosted by unions, parties and other third sector groups, should happen – and with the same intentions in mind.

This time, however, there will need to be a space for politics and, yes, ideology. It would be fantastic if not only Labour, but the Greens, SNP and Lib Dems, as well as groups like Compass and Momentum could be partners in such an event. Ideally, more than simply an annual affair in London, NetRootsUK would be something that happens on a relatively regular basis in every major UK region, if not city.

3)Creation of a Digital Leaders Programme in the Party

If Labour is to establish a genuine advantage with new media, not only nationally but at the local level too, talented amateurism needs to be polished and professionalised. What we've seen in the last five years is the emergence of a layer of activists that are intelligent content creators, operating at the interface between increasingly mediatised

politics and journalism.

While journalists have always held political commitments, sometimes stated and explicit, for the new generation that is now more true than ever before. Is Milo Yiannopolous a writer or an activist? How about Owen Jones? Paul Mason? Laurie Penny? Cenk Uyghur? Molly Crabapple? This phenomenon, which spans both the Left and the Right, is less to do with a revolving door between media and politics – that's nothing new – than with the fact that modern political journalism is increasingly hybrid: it aims to inform but also to act. When Owen Jones tweets a Facebook event for a protest, he is facilitating collective action in a way that, until recently, we thought only organisations could perform.

That isn't to say that organisations aren't necessary. They are as important as ever for sustained, compelling action, but the worlds of politics and media increasingly overlap.

Paul Mason understands figures such as those mentioned above, as well as politicians like Pablo Iglesias (who started his political career on the TV show *La Tuerka*) and Yanis Varoufakis, as 'networked individuals'. I agree with that label and think it cascades all the way down to people operating in local and hyperlocal activist–media contexts. What holds for these people – just as with the likes of Iglesias and Jones, albeit in a different way – is that they are able to channel resources and information in ways that suit them and their politics to an extent that is significantly higher than is true for the general public. While everyone's personal bandwidth to communicate and broadcast is widening in the digital environment, there are now individuals whose personal bandwidth is bigger than organisations'. This is new.

More importantly, these networked individuals aren't just influencers who come laden with social and media capital, but everyday people who allow contemporary social movements – from Black Lives Matter to Oxi – to achieve rapid scalability. They are the modern day 'bridge leaders' that Belinda Robnett identified as fundamental to the US civil rights movement. They are creatives, writers, video and podcast producers, designers and developers.

One of the most exciting things about the groundswell of support around Corbyn, and other UK-based phenomena such as Soctland's Indy-Ref in 2014, was how the networked youth, understood as the under-fifties generally and millennials in particular, suddenly engaged in massively increased communicative output. More than just Facebook posts and tweets, they created videos, blogs and podcasts. They campaigned using new media, created apps and convened conferences. In the case of Labour under Corbyn, much of this must be formalised, trained and empowered. That's where the Digital Leader Programme comes in.

Right now Constituency Labour Party branches and Momentum groups will be using generalists: people familiar with Photoshop, video editing and content writing. The problem with that is people who are competent with Premier Pro (video editing software) tend to be less able at writing copy or collecting and analysing data. What Labour must offer these activists – networked individuals operating in local contexts – is training and certification. Very quickly this will become a training programme, with its

own academy, where party members are trained in a range of new media practices regarding campaigns, persuasion, infrastructure, data collection and mobilisation.

Here they will learn about things like analytics, web development, content strategies and production. And all for free. In the short-term, given this will be an important undertaking involving a significant transfer of communicative power to everyday people, it will be limited to a digital leaders programme (Labour DLP) with numerous individuals in each CLP offered the opportunity to undergo a prototype training course including video production and editing, Photoshop, crowd funding campaigns and web development. Each of these will be modules with certification.

One element of persuading those presently critical of Corbyn, and the dividend the party-as-movement will bring, is to make clear that the opportunities of new media also extend to candidates 'downstream' from Westminster elections. This new, large cohort of digital leaders will help MSPs, AMs, mayoral candidates and councillors win elections up and down the country. They will also, as an ancillary point, empower other campaigns and activist efforts that Labour members choose to involve themselves in. This network of digital leaders will interact with the party's graduate programme as outlined in point one, although there would be an open – and easy --applications process that is available to members of all ages and backgrounds. Individuals from minority backgrounds would be favoured, this being a first step in getting more BME members, as well as those from working class backgrounds, into elected office.

4)Establish a New Media and Technology Incubator in Labour Party HQ: *LabourLAB*

In 2014 the Republican Party announced the launch of Para Bellum Labs. While the name of that project was unfortunate (it was also the name of a pistol produced by Nazi Germany), the concept was an impressive and original one. Para Bellum was intended to be an autonomous operation that operated both within and apart from the party. This would allow it to develop a different culture and serve as the incubator of new technologies for the Republican Party.

Similar, then, to a start-up, Para Bellum Labs recruits highly skilled staffers by claiming its work is of significant importance to American democracy. This would also hold true in terms of the core beliefs behind *LabourLAB* – a similar operation – and how it would recruit. What specifically would this incubator do? It would take data and figure out how to harness it in order to change outcomes in elections; work on tools that empower local party democracy; upgrade the digital infrastructure of the Labour Party; and create processes and technologies by which Labour activists could communicate better among themselves, with other civil society actors and with the electorate. *LabourLAB* would inject the party with a different working culture in relation to new media and the relationship between analytics, data, communication and mobilisation. It would help create many of the tools and processes necessary in any fundamental disruption to British politics.

5)Hire a party Chief Technology Officer (CTO)

This individual would, at the highest level, be accountable for the party's digital media, data and analytics operations, as well as delivering on the architecture outlined

in the rest of this article – from local digital leaders to *LabourLAB* – and, eventually, regional directors of new media. A world class technologist in their own right, they would work closely with not only the NEC and party leadership, but also the New Media Advisory Council (see point 8).

6)Create a Head of New Media (Battleground Constituencies)

This individual would be one of several answerable to the party's new CTO and, ultimately, NEC. They would be accountable for new media in fifty constituencies, isolated by the end of 2016, that Labour would be looking to win at the next general election. They would work not only with the CTO and new technology incubator above them, but also digital leaders across the fifty relevant constituencies below them.

Again, this would be the beginning of a bigger process, with heads of new media operating on a regional basis. They would serve as bridges between a massively enhanced party headquarters and empowered, well-resourced local party operations. In the future, 'battleground constituencies' would be only one of these positions, but it makes sense for it to be the first. Starting immediately, this individual would be responsible for implementing new media strategies in each constituency, delivering content strategies that are locally relevant. These strategies would ultimately be coordinated with digital leaders in each constituency.

7)Create a Party Donation Site for Crowdfunding and Microdonations: *BeRed*

ActBlue is a political action committee (PAC) established in 2004 that enables anyone to raise money online for the Democratic Party candidates of their choice. In spite of that, it is independent of the party and does not endorse individual candidates. Over the last twelve years, ActBlue has raised more than $1.1 billion for Democratic candidates and progressive organisations at various levels of politics, making it the single largest source of funds in US politics.

The last twelve months have shown a pressing need for a similar platform here in the UK. While rules around party spending are different this side of the Atlantic, crowdfunding has already played a significant role in internal party elections, most notably providing funds for Jeremy Corbyn in 2015 and 2016, as well as Tom Watson last year and in the recent NEC elections. It was also used to raise the costs for a recent legal challenge by five new party members who chose to contest the NEC decision to exclude them – and 126,000 others – from this month's leadership election. Momentum have likewise utilised the method, most recently in paying towards some of the costs for their 'The World Transformed' event at Labour Party conference. Elsewhere, the recent Deliveroo Strike in London saw its strike fund entirely crowdfunded.

Just as the Democratic Party has ActBlue, Labour now needs BeRed: a crowdfunding and donation platform for Labour party candidates, projects and various efforts undertaken by allied organisations and actors in the party's orbit. Each party member – in addition to enjoying a membership number – would also automatically get a BeRed number and identity as well as be added to its mailing list. Were the party membership to reach one million before the next general election, this would be a huge, instant community for crowdfunding and fundraising. Not only would it pay for various electoral efforts at local, regional and national levels, but it would also help

resource the kinds of projects which are now fundamental to Labour becoming a genuine social movement at the local level: food banks, literacy classes and breakfast clubs. How and where this happens will, of course, be up to local party members. The ability to create assets and content for local crowdfunding efforts would be one of the original modules on the Digital Leaders Programme.

The platform would also be used by affiliated organisations such as the Fabians, Labour Students, LGBT Labour and the Co-operative Party, with this new, disintermediated network helping to finance a flourishing party ecology at every level. The platform would not be limited to party members, but would be open to any member of the public – whether that means funding a project or starting one.

8)Create a New Media Advisory Board

This would be drawn up from world class academics and practitioners, who would discuss best practice from around the world and how it can be adapted and deployed in a British context. The New Media Advisory Council would meet once every two months and would liaise with the party's CTO and *LabourLAB* to discuss and measure progress in the party's new media operation, the potential prototyping of new projects, and potential obstacles and opportunities that are on the horizon. Those on the council would include people from both the UK and beyond. The likes of Andrew Chadwick, Manuel Castells, Tiziana Terranova, Francesca Bria, Rasmus Kleis Nielsen, Ada Colau, Daniel Kreiss, and Joe Rospars should all be extended invitations.

Conclusion Already, the movement behind Corbyn is without precedent and has deployed new media in hitherto unseen ways in UK politics. In spite of that, the current trajectory does not indicate a sufficient architecture to leverage the party's growing membership, broadcast its message or circumvent where necessary an often hostile mainstream media.

What is now needed is the institutionalisation of what has been, so far, emergent and organic activism. The movement behind Corbyn must create a discernible architecture for leveraging new media to not only win a general election, but transform civil society and dramatically shift public attitudes. I believe that with the institution of new actors at the national level (a new CTO, *LabourLAB*, regional CTOs), local level (Digital Leaders Programme and *ChangeLAB*), with new technologies (*BeRED*) and new events (a revivified NetRootsUK), that process can be started.

All of the suggestions here, as well as being aimed at the Corbyn leadership and those that back it, are also intended for supporters of Owen Smith – as well as anyone who remains sceptical of the possibilities that a party-as-social movement brings. It is now incumbent on us, as those supporting Corbyn, to visibly demonstrate the advantages of the party's new direction, and, importantly, show how it confers new opportunities and advantages downstream to candidates seeking to win elected office at every level, from councillors to mayors and MPs. Corbyn's team, and his movement, must now advocate an architecture for the incipient energies his latest leadership bid has re-energised, and what the party can concretely achieve before, during and after the next general election.

13

The Alternative to Empire: A New Foreign Policy

Lindsey German

There are few issues that excite the opponents of Jeremy Corbyn inside the Labour Party so much as those of war and peace. They have been at the heart of many of the major flashpoints within the Parliamentary Labour Party and within Parliament itself since the leadership election of 2015.

This was seen most clearly last December when the vote to bomb Syria became a central test of Corbyn's position. During the debate in the House and elsewhere he was denounced by the media, by the right wing of his own party, and by the man he had appointed shadow foreign secretary, Hilary Benn. The rebellion in his own ranks was considerable despite the fact that opponents of this latest lurch in the war on terror included the majority of Labour members, the majority of its MPs, the majority of the shadow cabinet and the majority of Labour members of the House of Lords. All were obliged to listen to a debate where there were two summings-up in favour of the intervention and none for the proposition to abstain from action. It was a drama where the shadow foreign secretary directly contradicted the opposition leader, making a speech that, in arguing for a new war, evoked the spirit of Churchill and the fight against Hitler.

Just three weeks before the vote, Benn had ruled out military intervention. But in the heightened atmosphere following the terrorist attacks in Paris on 13 November, when gunmen stormed the Bataclan concert hall and bombs detonated elsewhere in the city, pro-intervention politicians pressed the question again and this time succeeded. But what was particular about this volte-face was, rather than focus on the issue of intervention itself, the debate was an excuse to attack Corbyn, who stuck to his long-held anti-war positions. At the same time, there was a concerted effort to blacken the reputation of those around Corbyn. The mass lobbying of MPs by Stop the War and Momentum was very successful, but was denounced as bullying. A peaceful demonstration that ended outside Walthamstow MP Stella Creasy's office was widely reported by the media as having gone to her house and then to her office where it frightened her staff. The implication was that the demo had been intentionally intimidating. In fact, the demo was totally peaceful; it never went to Creasy's house, but did go to her office long after it was closed, when there was no staff there to be frightened. It took the BBC nine months to admit that its reporting was wrong. By which time the narrative of a violent bunch of intimidating anti-war protestors bullying a cowering MP and her staff had sunk deep into the public's imagination.

There has been evidence of the weaponisation of defence and foreign policy by Corbyn's enemies since his election: the Syria vote; the vote on Trident in July 2016, which changed absolutely nothing but which was staged to cause him and his team maximum discomfort; the question whether he would go to war with Russia if another

NATO member was attacked; the constant attempts to link his support for the Palestinians and criticism of Israel with anti-Semitism. Even on the day of the Chilcot report's publication, a day when Corbyn's politics on Iraq were vindicated and Tony Blair's reputation sank, unbelievably, to a new low, Corbyn was heckled by a member of his own party in parliament, Ian Austin, and called a 'disgrace'.

That these barbs and campaigns have been so unsuccessful in denting Corbyn's support within the Constituency Labour Party demonstrates some difficult truths for those on Labour's right.

The first of these is that the policies he espouses are popular on the Left generally and among wide sections of British society. There are significant sections of public opinion who support the Palestinians, oppose British military intervention abroad, and are opposed to Trident's replacement. The legacy of Iraq continues to play its part, as Chilcot demonstrated. The sense that this was an illegal war, that Blair lied, and that the war created a lot of the chaos we now see in the Middle East runs very deep.

The second important fact to note is that Jeremy Corbyn's record as an anti-war and anti-nuclear campaigner, and his campaigns on other areas of foreign policy, all played a major contributing part in the upsurge of support for him last year, and they continue to do so. He was known as a principled campaigner who spoke at the founding meeting of the Stop the War Coalition and was its chair for several years before becoming leader. He is a lifelong supporter of CND and a long-time campaigner around a range of international questions. He is a strong supporter of justice for the Palestinians and has visited Occupied Territories on a number of occasions. When Hugo Chávez visited London, Corbyn was a key figure at events in his support, and his campaigning regarding Latin America has been extensive. As a supporter of Liberation (previously the Movement for Colonial Freedom), he has opposed colonialism across the world and has taken up diverse cases, such as the Kenyan struggle for compensation for British atrocities committed during the Mau Mau uprising and that of the Diego Garcia islanders whose homes were taken to build a military base. He was always identified with the campaign against apartheid.

So Jeremy Corbyn won the election not just because he was a well-known left-wing MP, the closest of all of them to the late Tony Benn, who shared many of his priorities, but because he was identified with so many causes. His opposition to the war was especially important, but so was his work against racism, colonialism and imperialism. This has often involved widespread opposition to government policy, both Labour and Tory.

This long-standing commitment to strongly held beliefs appeals to many young people, who see in him a principled politician who has held on to his views despite the prevailing ideologies. It also appeals to older people, many of whom left Labour under Blair, most notably over Iraq, and who are now rejoining in large numbers.

In the light of this it is perhaps easier to understand the anguish of someone like Ian Austin, who has, unexpectedly, witnessed the rise of a Labour leader who is anti-war, anti–nuclear weapons and who represents an approach to foreign policy alien to that of his predecessors. It is of course a rejection of the Blairite politics on which Austin

cut his teeth as a politician, overturning not just the domestic austerity policies of modern Britain but Blair's whole pro-US, pro-imperial stance, which saw him appointed Middle East peace envoy as a reward for the devastation he helped visit on the region while prime minister.

But this isn't just a break from Blair, but from traditional Labour Party policy. The post-war Attlee government is often alluded to today as the most successful Labour government. Its domestic agenda between 1945–1950 created the NHS, nationalised industry and set the foundations of the welfare state. Its foreign policy record, however, is often overlooked and was much less distinguished. It defended the British Empire in most places, presiding over the transition to Indian independence that resulted in the bloody Partition. It intervened militarily in Malaya, sent troops to Korea and was fully in support of the new Cold War agenda espoused by the US. The government, despite straitened economic conditions after the Second World War, was determined to develop its own nuclear weapons to maintain Britain's world role. The Ernest Bevin, a Labour MP from the right of the party, talked about developing a nuclear bomb with 'a bloody Union Jack on top of it'.

It is this tradition that tends to represent the views of the Labour leadership. For example, Blairite MP Chuka Umunna said recently that he was proud of the tradition which created NATO and kept the peace for seventy years – a position which omits all mention of wars in Europe, such as in the former Yugoslavia, let alone colonial wars elsewhere and the more recent interventions in the Middle East. In contrast, Jeremy Corbyn presents himself as a departure from the status quo. He upholds the tradition of protest against war and weapons – a viewpoint shared by many of Labour's members and supporters, but few of its MPs.

Many within the parliamentary party cannot accept the abandonment of a foreign policy they have held so dear over the decades. We can therefore expect major clashes over these questions in the future.

These clashes will come from sections of the PLP deeply wedded to the Atlanticist and imperialist view of foreign policy, and a number of them involved with organisations such as Labour Friends of Israel or even the neocon Henry Jackson Society. But as we have already seen, the source of attacks on Corbyn are often much wider, including elements of the British military and the state, the media, and even the Israeli embassy, where Netanyahu's former press spokesman Mark Regev now presides as ambassador.

The foreign policy positions Corbyn made his name opposing remain centre stage in our current political debates. The intervention in Syria by the major world and regional powers is likely to guarantee prolonged war. At the same time, a survey of recent government policies makes for unedifying reading: the damning parliamentary Foreign Affairs Committee report into the bombing of Libya five years ago admits that David Cameron's motive for bombing was not humanitarian but the pursuit of regime change. Chilcot has made clear what a wilful and mendacious role Blair played, along with many others, in Iraq. This is hardly a good record for two out of the last three British prime ministers; and another indication as to why Jeremy Corbyn is a very

welcome alternative.

If the conflict in the Middle East seems intractable, one reason is the West's continued support for Saudi Arabia and Israel, both important customers in the western arms trade. Since Margaret Thatcher's infamous al-Yamamah arms deal back in the 1980s, British governments, arms companies and the Saudis have been closely intertwined to such an extent that when the Saudi king died, the British government ordered public buildings to fly their flags at half mast. The present Saudi air onslaught on the people of Yemen has been with the close aid of British military, using arms supplied by Britain. This has been largely unremarked on by the British media.

Support for Israel from successive governments has again been unwavering, despite the siege and bombing of Gaza, the treatment of the Palestinians and the encroachment onto more and more territory through illegal settlements. These policies have built an unprecedented level of support for the Palestinians among British trade unionists, the left and faith groups.

In his opposition to these policies of legitimised violence and compromised deals, Jeremy Corbyn's stance cleaves more closely to public opinion than that of the MPs and journalists who deride him. Their only response is to vilify him and his associates. The aim is guilt by associate when they are portrayed as terrorist sympathisers, anti-Semites, haters of the west, and pro-Russian. Corbyn himself is depicted as weak when he refuses to 'push the button' in order to annihilate whole cities in other parts of the world.

There are those on the Left who would prefer to avoid these issues in the hope that sticking to a domestic policy agenda might avoid such vilification. Some even argue that Corbyn should soften his position or downplay some of these issues. But the world is hurtling towards more conflict, not less. Whether this is the New Cold War in Eastern Europe and NATO expansion, the tensions in Korea over nuclear testing, the 'soft coups' in Latin America, the growth of nationalism in the Balkans, or the wars in Africa and the Middle East, foreign policy is not going to slip down the agenda any time soon.

Nor should it. In 1997 Tony Blair's foreign secretary, Robin Cook, talked about the possibility of an 'ethical foreign policy'. To Cook's chagrin Blair's government delivered the opposite. Today Corbyn has the chance to develop a genuinely ethical foreign policy. But it will mean confronting Britain's imperial past and its imperialist and militarist present. It will mean insisting on spending on welfare, not defence. On abandoning the obsolete nuclear 'deterrent'. On being unashamed to demand justice for the Palestinians. On categorically stating a policy of withdrawal of all British troops from foreign interventions. On opposing NATO aggression and expansion.

The Left needs to own these arguments. Significant numbers already subscribe to these positions, and it is possible to win over much larger sections of society. This is, after all, about the future of the planet and the safety and welfare of millions of people. The Left around Corbyn also needs to connect with and build the movements that have done so much to influence public opinion and to mobilise on a mass scale, whether over war, Palestine or nuclear weapons.

In Jeremy Corbyn we have a Labour leader more knowledgeable about foreign

affairs, more sympathetic to those who suffer imperialism, and more acutely aware of inequality across the world than any of his recent predecessors. This is a turning point in the history of Labour. That's why the Blairites, the media and the wider establishment are fighting so desperately against him.

About the Authors

Tariq Ali is a writer and filmmaker. He has written more than a dozen books on world history and politics – including *The Clash of Fundamentalisms and The Extreme Centre* – as well as the novel series the Islam Quintet and scripts for the stage and screen. He is an editor of *New Left Review* and lives in London.

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Rachel Shabi has written extensively on the Israeli–Palestinian conflict and the Middle East. *Not the Enemy: Israel's Jews from Arab Lands* was published in 2009 and received the International Media Awards Cutting Edge prize in 2013, the Anna Lindh Journalism Award for reporting across cultures in 2011, and was shortlisted for the Orwell Prize the same year.

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