

Labour Needs Corbyn!



Bevin Society

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The Parliamentary Labour Party had reason to be sceptical about Jeremy Corbyn's suitability for the job of leading the Party when the Party membership gave it to him. He came from a fringe section of the Party that was seen as having lived in ideological illusions for two political generations.

But there is now reason to be sceptical about the hard-headed realism of the Parliamentary Party majority which has done its utmost for ten months to disable the Party by boycotting its leader.

These 'realists' tell us that it is not the business of the Labour Party to be a protest movement. They tell us that it is its business to win elections and govern, and that anything that gets in the way of winning elections must be discarded.

But the Party whose only business is to govern is the Tory Party.

CENTRE GROUND PARTIES

It seems that the eminent figures in the PLP have been so focused on competing with the Tories for what is called the Centre Ground that they have forgotten the character and purpose of the Party they are in. And they have also shown that they no longer know what the Tory Party is.

The Tory Party is not a Centre Ground Party. Centre Ground Parties always fail in Britain.

The clever people of the Labour Party left it and formed the Social Democratic Party as a Centre Ground Party.

The SDP was well-funded. It contested every Constituency in Britain at one General Election. Then it disappeared.

The Liberals still hang on, but their future is behind them. Their great achievement was to become very junior partners in a Coalition with the Tories, helping the Tories through a difficult period, until they were able to govern in the way they knew was right for Britain—as a proper single-party Government.

A Left-Right System

The Centre Ground is too small to sustain a major political party and send it to Parliament to govern.

The serious Parties of the British political system—the parties which are capable of governing the state—are Parties of the Right and of the Left.

The great hinterland of the Tory Party consists of those who have ‘made it’. The solid hinterland of the Labour Party, when it had a solid hinterland, consisted of those who had suffered at the hands of those who had ‘made it’.

The Labour Party grows from the Left. It shrivels when it settles down at the Centre.

If the Labour Party is not a protest movement it is nothing.

For long periods it has failed to win elections. When it has won an election with the spirit of protest still strong in it, and harnessed it to the task of governing, it has achieved something.

Winning elections is often a matter of luck. If the Centre Ground PLP, which has boycotted Corbyn, was lucky and won an Election, it is a virtual certainty that it would just serve its term in Office in a way that was indistinguishable from Tory government, except to the people who have Government jobs for a few years.

An Effective Protest

The election of Jeremy Corbyn to the leadership was a protest movement by the membership. It was a frightening protest movement which had the immediate effect of causing the Tory Government to drop austerity measures which the Centre Ground PLP had not opposed.

Parties And Their Fringes

The Tory Party has an idealistic fringe, just as the Labour Party has. But the Tory leadership, which is not lodged in the Centre Ground, knows how to manage the idealist fringe of the Right, sometimes making use of it and sometimes restraining it, but always remaining in touch with it as a necessary element of Party life.

The Labour Party has come to its present dilemma through having a leadership fixated on a Centre Ground that became indistinguishable from Toryism, and that could only handle the idealistic Left fringe, that kept the Party alive, by trying to wipe it out.

The Kinnock/Blair Ideal: Back To The Future

The Labour Party, in a development that began under the leadership of Neil Kinnock (now Lord Kinnock), and that was carried to extremes under Blair, separated itself from its working class membership, and came to take it for granted as a helpless social stratum that had no option but to be its voting-fodder. It came to despise its members who were part of the organised Labour movement and to be embarrassed by any close public contact with it.

Its ideal, as stated openly by Blair during his run of success, was to detach the PLP from the organised Labour movement and remake it into a radical middle class party—a Liberal Party. He said that one of the political tragedies of the 20th century was the action by which Labour freed itself from Liberal Party tutelage and set up on its own in 1918.

Kinnock And Son

This development began under Lord Kinnock as defensive action against “*entryism*” into the party by a number of small Trotskyist groups and their manipulation of local party structures against the interests of the party. The Party leadership had, on the whole, the support of the general membership in that action. But success against the Militant Tendency led on to the very different project of freeing the PLP from the organised Labour movement.

That was a feat that could not be achieved by Kinnock. It is probable that, if it was put to him at the start that this was what it would lead to, he would have been horrified. He was an opportunist demagogue with a limited talent for a certain kind of oratory. He had no grand project for remaking the Party into a radical middle class party of the Centre Ground. But he did not dissent when Blair followed on from him and boosted his defensive action against a hyper-active fringe into a project for re-making the Party and freeing it from its base in organised labour.

His son, Stephen Kinnock, MP for Aberavon, has been active in the campaign against Corbyn’s leadership. Harking back to the great days of his father, Stephen presents the Corbyn movement as a revival of the Militant Tendency. And he said: “*We dealt with them before and we’ll deal with them again*” (Sky News interview on July 12th, broadcast live while the Party Executive was meeting and was expected to rule that Corbyn, though

the elected Leader, would not be on the ballot paper automatically in the new election caused by Angela Eagle's challenge. But the expected did not happen.)

The Militant Tendency And The Labour Left

The Militant Tendency was a small external organisation that gained a foothold within the Labour Party. It was a small organisation, with a systematic revolutionary ideology, based outside the Party. Its members joined the Party and, acting under external discipline, gained influence in a few local Party organisations by undertaking Party business which ordinary members were increasingly disinclined for. There was no possibility that it could ever take control of the leadership of the Party. The conservative structure of the Party in those days made sure of that.

The Militant Tendency was different in kind from the traditional Labour Left. There may have been much in common between what the Militant Tendency said and what the Labour Left said but the two were essentially different nevertheless. And what the Labour Left said also had much in common with what the Labour Centre said, and even what the Labour Right said. The Labour Party, and the Labour movement as a whole, had a common Socialist language in those days. And the Militant Tendency entryists used the common socialist language of the Party. And yet there was no difficulty in the actual situation at that time in distinguishing between the Militant Tendency and the Labour Left.

One of Blair's achievements was to dispel the common Socialist language of the Party, and replace it with another language that worked while he was there to operate it, even though it was found to be meaningless if you stopped and thought about it. Now that Blair is gone, what the Party has inherited from him is a dead language.

Kinnockism opened the way to Blairism and was swept along with it and got lost in it. Kinnock has left no political heritage of his own. He was Labour Left who moved rightwards, perhaps for practical political reasons at the start, but in the end he was no more than an ingredient in the Blairite mix.

Stephen Kinnock is not his father's son politically. They are all Blair's children. None of them are familiar with the landmarks of the Labour Movement, as it was before Blair worked his black magic on it. And we can quite understand that Stephen Kinnock cannot see the difference between the Militant Tendency and the Labour Left of Michael Foot and Tony Benn.

What happened last year was not that the Militant Tendency gained the

leadership of the Party. It was the traditional Labour Left that gained the leadership. It won because the socialist spirit in the Parliamentary majority had decayed into careerism.

Radical Rules

Tony Benn contested the leadership and lost. Jeremy Corbyn contested it and won. Benn contested it under the old, conservative rules and lost. Corbyn contested it under the new radicalised rules and won. But Corbyn did not radicalise the rules so that he could win. He had nothing whatever to do with changing the rules.

“Radical” has become a bad word. It was Blair’s favourite word. The radicalising of the election system was the dying flicker of Blairite radicalism.

Blairism worked by charisma.

Blair was a Public Schoolboy with charisma. He took over from Kinnock, a Labour Party that was losing its bearings. It became putty in his hands. He was like that other fundamentalist radical, Lloyd George, when he got the conduct of the First World War into his hands, who told his colleague:

“The whole state of society is more or less molten and you can stamp upon that molten mass almost anything as long as you do it with firmness and determination.”

Lloyd Georgism was all great fun for six years, until it collapsed, leaving the wreckage of the Liberal Party behind it—as Blair has now left the Labour Party almost a wreck as he tours the world making millions from despots by telling them the story of how he reduced the Iraqi state to a condition of murderous anarchy.

It is evidently proving difficult—too difficult—for those who fell under Blair’s spell, and were carried away from themselves, to shake off the mesmerism and return to the normality of what they were before the transfiguration.

All that remains normal in the Labour Party, post-Blair is the Labour Left that refused to take part in the Blairite transformation.

The Blairites Changed The Rules

The throwing open of the election of Party Leader to the party membership and the downgrading of Trade Union participation in the affairs of the Party were Blairite measures. Blair yearned for referendum politics, being confident of holding sway in them by mesmerising the masses in direct

communication with them. But, in the absence of Blair, it didn't work like that. The enfranchised masses voted for the only element of the Party that still lived in their real world—the traditional Labour Left.

It was Blairite hubris that gave Corbyn the Party leadership. And now the orphaned Blairites are appalled by what they have done and they are trying to undo it by chicanery.

Ed Milliband opened Pandora's Box. And now he condemns what came out of it.

We thought it was a good thing when Ed stood against his brother and pipped him at the post. The least that could be said in his favour was that he wasn't his brother David, and that he prevented a supporter of torture from being elected Leader. David euphemised the torture for Blair, and no doubt under the spell of Blair, into cruel and unusual punishment. And no doubt it seemed the normal thing to do at a moment when the "close relationship" with America had progressed to intimacy. When discussing it later he explained cruel and unusual punishment was a preferable choice of words. But, a rose by any other name . . .

Blairism in decay has given a traditional Labour Left leader to the Party. If the Party is to survive in a way that deserves the name of Labour, and that can exert a positive influence on the masses whose organisation has been disrupted by Thatcherism followed by Blairism, it can only be done from the Labour Left. Corbyn and his colleagues have shown an ability to handle the practicalities of political power, but their post-Blair enemies can never go down and restore genuine contact with the working populace from which they have systematically detached themselves.

Lord Kinnock says Corbyn is "*vain*". We see no sign of vanity in him. But, if he was vain, Lord Kinnock would not be the man to condemn him for it.

Who Is "*Selfish*"?

Angela Eagle says Corbyn is "*selfish*", because he refuses to "*do the right thing*". By "*doing the right thing*" she means resigning the Office to which he was elected. The reason he should resign is that he has "*lost*" the support of the Parliamentary Labour Party.

How could he lose what he never had? The PLP was chagrined by his election and it immediately began searching for ways to get rid of him.

Could it be that they had not realised, until Corbyn was elected under rules set by themselves, how out of touch they were with the Party membership?

Angela Eagle should have known better. She had a Constituency Party on which she had been imposed by Blairite methods. It tolerated her. But then she made herself intolerable to it.

Her big gripe against Corbyn is that he did not make her Constituency vote “*Remain*” in the Brexit Referendum. Why didn’t she do it herself? And why, if she knew that she couldn’t do it, did she think that Corbyn could have done it for her?

Was it because she saw Corbyn as being on a political level with the ignorant masses which she had risen above and lost contact with, and therefore as somebody who could influence them in a way that she could not? If so, did she explain this to him and ask him to come and help her?

The Referendum

Corbyn campaigned for “*Remain*”. He did so because it was party policy. But he did not do so in the frantic manner of some others, predicting the destruction of basic workers’ rights if there was Brexit.

Alan Johnson, a one-time Trade Union leader who became a thorough Blairite and who then refused to contest for the leadership, modestly confessing that he didn’t think he would be up to it, made a very remarkable statement during the Referendum campaign. He said a vote for *Remain* would be a victory comparable to the Labour victory in 1945.

The implication of this wildly extravagant statement was that Brexit would be catastrophic for workers’ rights, which had come to depend on European Union Directives.

Was it the case that workers’ rights had come to Britain from the EU? Were there no workers’ rights in Britain before 1972?

How Did British Socialism Collapse?

When Britain joined the European Economic Community (which became the European Union in accordance with its stated aims) in 1972, there was a strong Labour sentiment against it. It was argued by the self-confident Labour movement of that time that Britain was on the brink of becoming a fully socialist country and that membership of the capitalist EEC would be an obstacle to the completion of British socialist development.

So how did it happen that the British socialist movement collapsed and that even basic workers’ rights are now in danger? Was it membership of the EEC/EU that brought this about?

That can hardly be the case if, as the PLP majority tells us, workers’

rights in Britain are now completely dependent on the EU and could not be maintained if Britain left the EU.

The truth is that the British socialist movement collapsed for domestic reasons, and that the Parliamentary Labour Party, in its Kinnock/Blair development, became a force for freeing capitalist development within the EU.

Kim Howells was Arthur Scargill's public relations man in Scargill's great class-war Miners Strike of 1985-6—a Strike that was badly misjudged but was conducted in earnest to the bitter end.

Howells went on to become a Minister in Blair's Government. His job was to make Europe more capitalist, to make it more competitive, by ending the restrictive practices imposed on capitalist development by the Christian Democratic philosophy of the "*social market*".

Scargill's Strike was ill-judged. It took on Thatcherism when she was prepared for it and refused to negotiate a settlement, even when it became clear that victory was impossible. It was destructive in its consequences. But it was not what undermined the socialist movement. And Scargill himself did not follow the example of many who had urged him on, and then joined the other side.

Industrial Democracy

The new Tory Prime Minister, Theresa May, has proposed that there should be workers' representatives on the Boards of Directors of companies. Jeremy Corbyn welcomed the proposal, while Angela Eagle and the PLP majority ignored it.

The collapse of the socialist movement began when the Bullock Proposals for Industrial Democracy (1977) were rejected.

The Bullock Commission investigated the possibility of having workers' representation on the Boards of Directors of companies. It did this at the behest of Labour Prime Minister Harold Wilson and his chief Minister Barbara Castle. The Commission investigated the matter, judged that it was practicable, and made proposals for implementing it.

Trade Union power in industry was very great in the 1970s. Wilson and Castle judged that it was too powerful to remain unharnessed to the direction of industry. It could not continue as a negative power on capitalist enterprise. It needed to undertake a positive role in the conduct of enterprises which could no longer be conducted without its consent.

The Communist Party condemned the Proposals as an attempt by the

capitalists to ward off socialist revolution by implicating the Trade Unions in the functioning of Capitalism.

The Bevin Society supported the Proposals as measures which would begin to erode the power of the capitalists in industry and begin a process through which workers would acquire the ability to manage industry without capitalists.

We could not see how the “*socialist revolution*”, hazily envisaged by the Communist Party, could come about under British conditions as they existed. The workers could not have no responsibility for conducting industry one day and have entire responsibility for it the next. The thing could only happen through an intermediary arrangement under which the workforce in industries undertook the responsibility for industry jointly with the capitalists, with a view to phasing out the capitalists.

The Communist Party condemned that as “*workers’ capitalism*” and many in the Labour Party agreed with it—including Lord Kinnock, who in those days would have nothing less than complete socialism on the instant.

The notion was put about that the Bullock Proposals, implicating the workers in the functioning of capitalism, was “*corporatism*”. It was the kind of thing done by Mussolini. It was Fascism.

Until there could be an instant abolition of Capitalism the workers should take no responsibility for industry. There should be “*free collective bargaining*” from a position of strength.

And so it was.

The Bullock Proposals came to nothing. James Callaghan vetoed them in Cabinet. The capitalists saw that their power would be eroded under them and acted accordingly. Thatcher took up the cause of “*free collective bargaining*” and took a stand against “*corporatism*”, disabling much of the Left with these slogans.

Before long what we had was free collective bargaining from a position of weakness.

The weakness of the workforce has led to such a degree of irresponsible capitalist management that a Tory Prime Minister proposes to do something about it—something on the Wilson/Castle lines which the PLP rejected at the time. And the majority of the present PLP doesn’t even notice it. It has other things on its mind.

It is intent on defending the heritage of Blairism, which all but destroyed the Party. And it is working itself into the state of mind of the American General in the Vietnam War who said that the only way to defend some village was to destroy it.

Jeremy Corbyn tried to involve the Parliamentary Labour Party in his project of rebuilding the Labour movement and offering a real opposition to the Tories. Instead of chasing a centre ground that moved ever further to the right, he moved politics to the left in a seismic shift. His Parliamentary colleagues did not back him—but the Tories were forced to follow him leftwards. Several key victories were won in the social welfare field in the first months of the Corbyn leadership. And on accession Theresa May espoused One Nation Toryism and positioned her party to the left of the Blairites.

Instead of taking these facts on board and drawing conclusions, Blairite MPs appear intent on wrecking a Labour Party they can no longer control. The way they plan to do that is to bring down Corbyn and obstruct grassroots democracy. But the ground these MPs are standing on is disappearing fast.

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Read

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