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Left divided Which way for Labour?

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Editorial

A decade after the Labour Party of Tony Blair and Gordon Brown left government, so much looks different: a country affected by austerity, globalisation and the turmoil of Brexit, and a party whose membership base has been rejuvenated and radicalised.

What to make of Labour today? On the one hand, it has re-emerged as a people's party to a remarkable extent. At 540,000 members, Labour is the largest political movement in Europe; alone, it accounts for more members than the Conservative Party, the Liberal Democrats, the Scottish National Party, the Green Party, UKIP and Plaid Cymru together. Labour's remarkable progress at the 2017 general election fits well with this impression of a party back on its feet and close to regaining power. And its support among younger voters adds to the impression that winning the next election should be achievable.

Yet on the other hand, Labour is mired in controversies related to policy positions, strategy and leadership. Some of these controversies seem to involve the party's heart and soul. What should it imply to be on the Left today? What kind of radicalism is called for, and what kind of 21st-century vision should be Labour's own? Could the party enable a cross-class coalition by explicitly shying away from the centre ground?

In the eye of this storm rests Jeremy Corbyn's leadership. He was an essential driving force behind the rise in membership and fought a sterling electoral campaign in 2017. His fight for a different kind of politics has generated enthusiasm among people who have been disenfranchised and disillusioned for long. Yet many of Corbyn's actual policy positions remain grounded in the political conflicts of the confrontational 1980s. Moreover, the activism he has helped engender includes sectarian and illiberal elements.

In the House of Commons, Corbyn remains alienated from a considerable share of his party's MPs; the same party elite that attempted to dispose of his leadership in 2016. And then there is Brexit; Corbyn's ambivalence on the terms of leaving the EU are at odds with the desire among his membership for retaining as close ties to the EU as possible - and indeed, to demand a new referendum if the government's proposed withdrawal deal fails to get majority support in the House of Commons.

Three years ago, we devoted an issue of *British Politics Review* to "the Corbyn gamble". Three years downstream it is time to revisit the issue of Labour's internal strife and overall outlook. We hope you enjoy the read.

Øivind Bratberg & Atle L. Wold (editors)

The Corbyn Insurgency

by Andrew Gamble

The British Labour Party has been the main alternative party of government in Britain for a hundred years, ever since the coming of full universal suffrage in 1918 and 1928. It has enjoyed only mixed success. In that time there have been 27 general elections. Labour has been in government after only eleven of them. It has been in government with a parliamentary majority after only eight, and with a majority of more than 10 seats after only five. Labour has had fifteen leaders before Jeremy Corbyn. Only four of those leaders managed to win an election. Only three of them won a parliamentary majority, Clement Attlee twice and Harold Wilson and Tony Blair three times each.

Labour's situation after the 2015 election seemed bleak. The Conservatives had won a majority of seats in Parliament for the first time since 1992 and increased both their number of seats and their share of the vote, the first time a party had done this since 1974. There were many reasons Labour lost in 2015 but the basic reason was that for five years they had lagged behind the Conservative party by up to 20 percentage points on two crucial polling indicators – which party had the best candidate for Prime Minister and which party was trusted to manage the economy. Labour lost 40 out of its 41 seats in Scotland to the Scottish Nationalist Party (SNP), because it was seen as not sufficiently anti-austerity; it lost votes in the North of England to the UK Independence Party (UKIP) because it was seen as not sufficiently protectionist and anti-immigrant, and it lost votes in the South of England and the Midlands, because it was seen as insufficiently New Labour.

The 2015 result suggested that support for Labour was in a downward spiral and that like social democratic parties across Europe the party would find it hard to recover. The period since the 2008 financial crash had been marked by

recession, austerity and slow recovery and social democratic parties had struggled to hold on to their base against the challenge of mainstream centre-right parties and the new populist nationalists. Pessimists pointed to the social and political changes which were weakening Labour's traditional appeal. Since the 1970s trade union membership has halved, manufacturing industry and working class communities have declined, and collectivist attitudes have weakened. The world of Labour which once provided the Labour party with both identity and purpose is not coming back. Only 14 per cent of workers in the private sector now belong to a trade union. Fifty per cent of workers now work in small and medium sized enterprises and 15 per cent are self-employed.

Labour has only won decisively in the past when it has had a unifying and compelling national popular story to tell. It had such a story in 1945, 1964 and 1997, and this helped Labour to construct the kind of cross-class coalition which united many disparate groups and interests in a broad push for reform. To win again Labour must find a new national popular story and build a new cross-class coalition. It cannot rely on the votes of the traditional working class by themselves to do so. After the 2015 defeat it was unclear where such a new political narrative and purpose would come from. Many observers were pessimistic, believing that Labour would continue declining.

Since 2015 however two things have happened. In September 2015 the Labour Party held an election to elect a new leader. In June 2016 the British Government held a referendum to ask the people whether they wanted to leave the European Union or remain within it. The results of these two votes, and of the early general election which followed in June 2017 were not only unexpected, they were seismic



Reference points. Three Labour Party Leaders who managed to win elections and change the country: Clement Attlee (PM 1945-51, Harold Wilson (PM 1964-70, 1974-76), and Tony Blair (PM 1997-2007).

shocks which have created a degree of turmoil, division, deadlock and constitutional crisis in British politics which is unprecedented. Labour's prospects have been transformed as a result.

In the Labour leadership election Jeremy Corbyn, a member of the small hard left faction in the party, who had never held any ministerial position and had devoted his parliamentary career to extra parliamentary activity, campaigning on a number of internationalist and anti-war causes, was elected. He only managed to get a place on the ballot because 22 MPs who did not intend to vote for him signed his nomination papers to ensure all points of view in the party were heard in the campaign. But once he became a candidate, and aided by new rules, Corbyn succeeded in launching a left insurgency which propelled him to the leadership. He was the only candidate who generated energy and excitement, attracting a huge number of young people to join the party as registered supporters, as well as encouraging many who had left the party because of the Iraq war and other issues to rejoin. Corbyn's odds at the beginning of the campaign were 100/1 against but he ended as odds on favourite at 1/16. He won the leadership on the first round of the ballot with the support of almost 60 per cent of party members.

Corbyn had a greater mandate from his party than any Leader since Tony Blair, but only fourteen MPs voted for him. His victory revived the split between the parliamentary and the extra-parliamentary party which had featured in every decade of Labour's existence. This was the first time however that the extra-parliamentary party had triumphed and elected the Leader. For the first six decades after 1918 the

leader of the parliamentary party was chosen by the MPs not the wider party. When the rules were changed in the 1970s the Left was not able to win the Leadership and lost ground. As an anti-Establishment figure who had spent so long on the fringes of the Labour party Corbyn's unexpected breakthrough was compared to populist left insurgencies elsewhere in Europe, such as Syriza in Greece and Podemos in Spain and later to Bernie Sanders in the US. What was novel about Corbyn's victory was that it occurred within an established party rather than outside it, and it was party members not party voters who drove it. Unlike social democratic parties elsewhere in Europe Corbyn's election meant a flood of new members into the party, boosting the total to over 500,000.

Corbyn's success reflected the deep dislike many in Labour felt at being on the defensive for so long, and always tacking to the centre. Rediscovering the joys of full-throated opposition, voting from the heart, on the basis of principles, proved attractive. Jeremy Corbyn's platform had little policy detail but its messages of anti-war, anti-austerity, and anti-inequality were very clear and resonated with many existing and returning members and particularly with the thousands of new recruits. Corbyn meetings were packed out and many who attended them spoke of how inspiring he was and of how good it felt to have at last a candidate who said the things they believed. Corbyn was authentic and unspun, and able to capitalise on the desire to reject established politics and politicians, as well as providing a powerful new focus for a politics around the traditional values of Labour.

The Corbyn phenomenon also drew on a pervasive sense



Early days. Jeremy Corbyn attending his first Prime Minister's Question as Leader of the Opposition, September 2015.

that since the 2008 financial crash old models both of economics and politics had broken down, and old orthodoxies discredited. The new hard times of austerity and deflation, weak economic recovery and rising inequality have fuelled a powerful sense that there must be a better alternative. Corbyn's campaign slogan 'Straight talking, honest politics' captures a great deal of his appeal. In rejecting all the mainstream responses to the crisis Corbyn was able to position himself as the outsider speaking truth to power and offering an escape from the compromises and failures of the past.

Labour's new members have brought a fresh radicalism, purpose and energy to the party. It has raised the possibility of Labour becoming a movement again, developing a new creative tension between the party's representative role and its movement role. Richard Crossman in the 1950s argued that the members were always much further left than the Leadership and the majority of the MPs. The trade unions were a counterbalance to the membership and their block vote allowed the Leadership to control the party and the conference and determine policy. This has now disappeared. Corbyn's authority does not rest upon the support of his MPs but directly on the members. But in a parliamentary system that is a crucial weakness, if the members and the MPs do not agree. Many leading Labour MPs declined to serve in Corbyn's Shadow Cabinet, and relations between Corbyn and his MPs went from bad to worse. After the vote for Brexit, most of his Shadow Cabinet resigned, precipitating a fresh leadership election. But under the new election rules and with another surge of new members Corbyn was re-elected in September 2016 by a similar margin as a year before.

The second shock was the referendum vote for Brexit in June 2016. Corbyn was a lifelong Eurosceptic and had voted against every European treaty since he entered Parliament in 1983. Although he announced he would vote Remain he did not campaign with any enthusiasm or vigour for that result and after the result was announced he positioned Labour to support Brexit in Parliament. Although 65 per cent of Labour voters in 2015 voted Remain, 70 per cent of the parliamentary seats actually held by Labour voted Leave. This divide between Labour's traditional industrial heartlands and its new base of young urban professionals was even more sharply exposed in the 2017 election. Theresa May called the election because she wanted to have a larger majority to give her a stronger hand in the Brexit negotiations, and because she thought that Labour's internal divisions, and the evidence that the Conservatives were 20 per cent ahead in the polls would deliver as crushing a victory as Margaret Thatcher's against Michael Foot in 1983. There were widespread fears in Labour that the party might win fewer than 200 seats for the first time since the 1930s and receive less than 25 per cent of the vote. But the actual result of the election confounded these expectations. Even though the Conservatives recorded their highest vote share since 1983 they lost seats and their parliamentary majority. Labour gained seats and increased its share of the vote by 9.6 per cent.

Part of the reason for Labour's advance in 2017 was that the electorate divided on Leave/Remain lines. 70 per cent of Conservative voters in 2017 had voted Leave in 2016. The party picked up the bulk of UKIP votes and won traditional Labour seats like Mansfield. But Labour picked up many Remain votes and won for the first time ever seats like Kensington and Canterbury. The turmoil unleashed by Brexit meant that Corbyn's radicalism was no longer shocking. Some of the anti-establishment sentiment which took down Cameron and the liberal elite in 2016 was turned against the Conservatives and the Brexit elite in 2017. Corbyn seized his moment and produced a manifesto which focused on practical policies to help different groups struggling with austerity and debt, and reconciled some of his critics to his leadership.

One practical consequence of the 2017 general election was that the loss of the Government's majority made negotiating Brexit much harder, and prepared the way for the descent into the parliamentary gridlock and the increasingly insuperable divisions within the Conservative party. All this has made Labour despite its own divisions an increasingly credible contender for power. Labour has not managed to achieve a strong poll lead, and Corbyn's ratings remain worse than May's, but Labour is increasingly developing a far-reaching programme of economic and social reform. There remain doubts about how effective a Corbyn Government would be and how it would manage the division between the leadership and backbench MPs. But the progress of the Corbyn project has been remarkable, and in one of those ironies that abound in politics, it is the consequences of Brexit above all that could make Corbyn, the life-long Eurosceptic, Labour's seventh Prime Minister, at the head of a party whose members are strongly pro-Corbyn and even more strongly anti-Brexit. There is long way to go. Labour needs a swing as big as it achieved in 2017 to clinch victory. But so long as the Conservatives remain paralysed and divided by Brexit Labour, under its most unlikely Leader, has a chance of making a breakthrough, something no-one thought possible two years ago.



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Don't Be Fooled: Labour Are Still Divided

by Glen O'Hara

The British Labour Party's unexpectedly high share of the vote in the 2017 General Election bought it some breathing space from its internal struggles. For two years, the Party had looked like it would come apart at the seams. The advent of Jeremy Corbyn as its leader, elected by a mass membership that had come to look on the majority of Labour Members of Parliament as a mere band of "centrists" and careerists, seemed likely to lead to a split. That has not happened: Mr Corbyn's performance in the 2017 election campaign defied his critics, and led to a period of uneasy calm between MPs and the leadership. That period of reflection might now be coming to an end.

One reason for this is the baleful issue that is poisoning all of British politics: Europe. Mr Corbyn is a lifelong Eurosceptic, and has quite frankly admitted that he voted against staying in the European Economic Community (as it was then) in 1975. His internal critics suspect him of deliberately sabotaging the 2016 Remain campaign to stay in the European Union, and even of voting to leave the EU. Labour's pro-Europeans had to lay low after Labour's relatively good showing in 2017: now they are re-emerging to oppose his apparent acquiescence in the Conservatives' "hard" or "clean" Brexit.

Mr Corbyn has seemed at every stage to take the wind out of Remainers' sails just as they seemed to be gaining some momentum. He has repeatedly opposed moves to firm up Labour's position on leaving the EU: at the Party's autumn conference, his allies fought off attempts to insist that there should definitely be a referendum

on the final deal, and in the end they were able to keep any mention of a Remain option out of Labour's call for the option of a plebiscite to remain open. Most recently, he has insisted in a series of media interviews that Brexit "cannot be stopped", and that all Labour can do is listen to the people who voted Leave. His own Brexit spokesperson, Keir Starmer, swiftly contradicted his leader in public.

The public People's Vote campaign, in which the most prominent Labour voice is the ex-Shadow Business Secretary Chuka Umunna, is supported by more than 30 Labour MPs; but in private, perhaps a majority of the 257 Labour MPs are deeply unhappy with the Party's stance on Europe. It is also the one issue on which they can disagree with their leader, and be confident that the majority of Labour members agree with them and not him. Opinion polls have shown again and again that the vast majority of them – 86%,

in one recent survey – support the idea of a second referendum on the final Brexit deal. Mr Corbyn's own grassroots movement, Momentum, is also in favour of another vote, with a majority of their members responding positively to the idea in an official consultation.

In some ways this issue should be easy to handle. Being in Opposition allows Labour to say what it wishes, on most occasions simply (and fairly) criticising Prime Minister Theresa May's negotiation tactics and final deal. There is little doubt that the Labour Front Bench will vote against whatever Mrs May can bring back from Brussels. In so doing, they will appease their pro-European activists while at the same time reassuring Leave voters in Labour seats



Old battles anew? Jeremy Corbyn (lower left) featuring on a Conservative Party election poster from 1987. The argument then was that parts of Labour had lurched irrevocably to the "loony Left", despite the party leadership trying to hold the centre ground.

that they are only objecting to the “terms” of Britain’s exit.

There are, however, signs that this strategy is fraying. Labour Shadow Ministers are openly arguing with each other in an embarrassing, and frankly absurd, manner, such as the case of Shadow Brexit Secretary Sir Keir Starmer disagreeing with Mr Corbyn about whether Brexit can be stopped. Moreover, activists are becoming deeply frustrated with Labour’s failure to actually shape any of the debate. None of this poses any threat to Mr Corbyn’s position at all: as centrist Labour members leave the Party, to be replaced in most cases by new adherents far to their Left, his control of Labour is strengthening, not slackening. But it does take some of the lustre off his leadership, especially among those younger pro-European voters who threw in their lot with Labour during the 2017 general election, hoping that it would provide a pro-European alternative to Mrs May’s deeply insular and seemingly backward-looking Conservatism.

I see two longer-term problems with Labour’s new Euroscepticism. They both focus on the Party’s propensity to split, as it has done before on this issue – in 1981, when Labour pro-Europeans left the Party to found the Social Democratic Party.

The first is the evident risk of a potential new “moderate” party being created to occupy the centre that both British Left and Right appear to have vacated. Just as Conservative, Labour and Liberal pro-Europeans bonded during Britain’s first referendum on Europe (in 1975), those Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat MPs currently campaigning together for another People’s Vote are showing every sign of enjoying each other’s company much more than they enjoy that of their more well-established allies. Their grassroots organisation, which recently saw 700,000 people march through London calling for another chance to stay within the EU, could easily be deployed in the foundation of a new party. There are definitely some Labour MPs – who might number as few as ten, or as many as thirty – who would willingly peel off to join such a grouping.

The second threat of renewed schism focuses on what might happen if Labour wins power because the May government falls over Europe. Such is the Parliamentary arithmetic that there is a good chance of the Prime Minister losing the substantive vote on her deal. That might mean that Britain crashes out of the bloc with nothing at all in place, and in the ensuing economic crisis a Labour Government could come to power after an emergency General Election. That is not the likeliest scenario by any means, but it is possible. Then Labour would have to choose: does it want to stay inside the Single Market and accept the free

movement of people (anger over which was arguably the single biggest reason why Leave won in 2016), or does it want to try again for a looser trade deal – given that Mrs May would already have failed?

Any Labour Government is more likely to choose the former, especially as it might well be dependent in Parliamentary votes on the pro-European Scottish National Party and the Liberal Democrats. But by choosing that route, it might well alienate many of its remaining working-class voters in England: some of its more pragmatic MPs have already made clear that they would be very worried about returning to free movement, and a Prime Minister Corbyn would risk alienating them as much as he currently risks a breakaway among pro-Europeans. Any British government will face many years of unpalatable European choices, because no deal can possibly be as good as the one it is leaving: EU membership with a large budget rebate and a Euro opt-out. A Labour administration would find the hard realities of governing no different from Mrs May.

Mr Corbyn still faces formidable challenges. His political opponents in the Conservative Party are doing their best to collapse before his eyes, since they are as divided about Europe as they have ever been. They might yet dissolve altogether, practically giving him the keys to No. 10 Downing Street by default. In many ways his most dangerous enemies still sit behind him, on the Labour benches. Although relatively content with a more Left-wing economic agenda at home, they are deeply unhappy with the way he has handled foreign policy – in particular his stance towards Russia, Iran and Syria – and the anti-Semitism crisis which at times this year has threatened to overwhelm Labour altogether. A fundamental split between Labour’s social democrats (still very powerful among the MPs, councillors and the more seasoned activists) and its new breed of radical socialists could easily be the result.

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Divides and Rule? Corbyn and the Labour Party

Paul Beaumont

Back in 2015, I was asked to assess Labour's electoral prospects under Corbyn, and now again to reflect upon the contemporary prospects given the divides among its members, voters, and MPs. Squinting at my 2015 piece, the predictions regarding Corbyn's leadership stand up pretty well. Back then I was cautiously optimistic that Corbyn's chances were not as hopeless as most presumed. In the context of a hostile press, I argued the boost in Labour membership and the slight bump in the polls upon Corbyn's election, was not an altogether terrible start. However, more importantly, the macro economic conditions for Corbynism seemed promising. Having privatised everything but the kitchen sink in the last four decades, and suffering from the cumulative social externalities of under-regulated markets, Britain appeared primed for Corbynomics. Regarding foreign policy, chastened by decades of failed interventionism, Britain seemed likely to be more receptive, or at least, indifferent to Corbyn's anti-militarism. These predictions have largely been borne out. Corbyn's policy platform – promising the renationalisation of the railways, mass house building, and taxes on the richest – enjoys a plurality of support from across the political spectrum. Meanwhile, attempts to characterize Corbyn's anti-militarism as unpatriotic and dangerous have prompted frothing amongst Daily Mail readers, but gained little traction among potential Labour voters.

Indeed, since the 2017 election, Labour has polled at around 40%, roughly equivalent to Tony Blair's numbers in his landslide 1997 victory. This is quite a remarkable turnaround. Back in 2015, if you had said that not only would Corbyn would still be leader, but he would be widely recognized as the Prime Minister in waiting, most of the pundit class would have laughed. British politicians could be divided into those that believed the Parliamentary Labour party (PLP) would successfully organize a coup before Corbyn failed at the polls, and those who believed they would wait until after he failed. His electoral toxicity seemed confirmed by the data; until the final weeks of the 2017 election, Labour's seemed headed for a landslide defeat. Yet, in the run up to the polling day the tide changed. The Labour manifesto, initially leaked and mocked by the right-wing press, turned out to be wildly popular. Meanwhile, the mass grass-roots movement, fomented by Corbyn's election to leader, made the most of new online media to bypass and counter critics in the traditional press. For her part, Theresa May conspired to produce perhaps the most inept manifesto since Labour's "Longest Suicide Note in History". These two factors saw Labour sweep away the Conservative majority and cement Corbyn's position as leader. Just looking at headline numbers, Corbyn's leadership has been a success, all the more so if we consider that left leaning parties around Europe have collapsed.

Yet, not everybody is happy. Indeed, throughout Corbyn's tenure, critics inside and out have consistently claimed the Labour should be doing better and Corbyn is an albatross around the party's neck. Embodied within this claim is the idea that Corbyn enjoys the blind adulation of his followers, who are said to be almost religious in their dogmatism and irrational in their loyalty. This "magic grandpa" quality is said to allow Corbyn to escape proper scrutiny of his followers; Max Weber might have called it charisma. While Corbyn's long-term voting record grants him a credibility among the left that few of his critics can match, I do not think Corbynistas are as green as many suggest they are cabbage looking. A closer look at the two major internal divisions within Labour – Centre/left split in the PLP and the remain/leave schism among Labour's support—suggest that quite besides his personal charisma, there are quite sensible reasons why Corbyn has enjoyed such resolute support from the Labour membership.

The PLP handicap

By far and away the rockiest period for Corbyn's leadership was in the year following his surprise victory in the 2015 leadership contest. As expected, the primary challenge facing Corbyn in his early days was the PLP itself. Characterised by a sense of entitlement and a media savviness Britain and Labour's membership had grown to loath, "centrists" within the PLP felt their turn had been unfairly stolen from them. Moreover, a man they used to mock, a member of the "loony left" no less, was now calling the shots. Instead of biding their time and at least feigning loyalty, several joined the cabinet only to take every opportunity to leak and visibly undermine the leadership. Among the most egregious examples, Hillary Benn's speech endorsing military intervention in Syria stands out. Going against the whip, and pandering to Britain's worst militaristic instincts, the shadow foreign secretary made a thundering speech in support of bombing Syria. It is typical of Benn and his ilk that he seemed unconcerned that Labour supporters had developed a healthy skepticism to military interventionism, and equally unconcerned that by far and away the loudest cheers came from the Tories, and later the next day, the Daily Mail.

The internal chaos in the party hit Labour hard in the polls. Corbyn's critics believed that this would make Corbyn vulnerable to a leadership challenge. However, what they had not bargained for, was that the Labour membership held them responsible for the chaos. Nonetheless, oblivious to their own unpopularity in the party, and seizing upon the (flimsy) alibi that Brexit was Corbyn's fault, leading members of the PLP mounted a staged-coup following the referendum. Yet, given 65% of Labour supporters voted for remain, the vote of no confidence by the PLP struck Labour members as opportunistic and unfair. Moreover, Corbyn's luke-

warm support for remain was arguably the most credible message available: Ignoring the EU's many faults would have risked patronizing an electorate, which took umbrage at the simplified "project fear" message of the official remain campaign. Further, unlike in a general election, which the Labour party benefits from the threat of Tory government, the referendum was seen as a "free vote". It was not clear that party loyalty or leadership authority mattered. Finally, Corbyn's personal history of Euroscepticism would have made a full-throated endorsement of the EU seem insincere. Thus, while most of the Labour membership preferred remain, they did not hold Corbyn responsible for Brexit. Unsurprisingly, the leadership contest saw the Labour membership return Corbyn in the first round of voting, reaffirming and solidifying his mandate.

Given the internal opposition from his own parliamentary party in these first 18 months, Labour's struggles were seen by many in the party—quite plausibly—as a function of his internal opponents' maneuverings. Had the critics in PLP given Corbyn time to fail on his own, bad polling numbers may have prompted the membership to have second thoughts. Instead, the membership believed that Corbyn had been deliberately handicapped by the PLP. As such, the loyalty Corbyn enjoyed was not merely a function of the magic grandpa effect or ideological dogma, but the result of a shared recognition among Labour members that he – and the ideas he espoused— had not been given a fair chance

by the PLP.

Brexit divides

The second salient schism within Labour that bears upon Corbyn's leadership stems from Brexit and is potentially more dangerous for the leadership. Back in 2015 I suggested the "wildcard of the EU referendum" made electoral predictions about UK politics hazardous. This turned out to be something of an understatement. Brexit made latent divides over Europe the dominant political cleavage dividing the country and British politics is now so consumed with Brexit that little else gets a look in. In short, the referendum has set the government an impossible task: deliver a deal with the EU that picks the best bits of membership (frictionless trade) without the costs or accepting the rules. If the EU were to grant the UK such a deal, the EU would cease to exist as every other member would want the same deal. As such, every option available to the government is significantly worse than being in the EU and none resembles what Leavers were promised. How such large numbers of the British public and political class could believe—or at least claim to believe—the EU would let Britain have its cake and eat it, even after overwhelming evidence to the contrary was available, will puzzle scholars for a generation. However, here, we are concerned with how this predicament—delivering the democratic wish for an impossible dream—has produced extremely dysfunctional political context for Labour to mount an opposition.



Magic grandpa? Jeremy Corbyn at the unveiling of a statue representing Millicent Fawcett, Parliament Square, 24 April 2018.
Photo: Garry Knight.

In retrospect, just missing out on a majority in 2017 was probably the best thing that could have happened to Corbyn, Labour, and the left in Britain generally. Theresa May got lumbered with the poisoned Brexit-chalice. As such, Labour has had the luxury of watching the Conservative Party fail to deliver the Brexit its base demand. However, as enjoyable as it may be to watch the omnishambles unfold from the outside, Labour is also supposed to mount an opposition. This is trickier than might be presumed for two reasons. First, Labour cannot be seen—at least until the withdrawal agreement became known—to want to overturn the democratic decision of the public. Second, although a majority of Labour voters voted remain, around 60% of Labour seats voted to Leave. Under these circumstances, Corbyn's personal Euroscepticism is moot, realistically Labour has had to select its policy from the same self-defeating menu of Brexit alternatives as the government.

The Labour response to this predicament is relatively straightforward to understand, but difficult to endorse. Throughout the withdrawal agreement negotiations Labour's Brexit policy has displayed all the hallmarks of triangulation. Popularized by Bill Clinton in the 1990s, triangulation involves taking the middle ground between two positions in order to present oneself as the most reasonable between two extremes. In the case of Brexit, Labour's policy has consistently positioned itself as offering a slightly softer Brexit than the government, but still Brexit. However, this softer Brexit has always been kept as vague as possible. Unwilling to get pinned to any particular Brexit position lest they risk losing either their remain or leave voters, Labour position is best described as (un)constructive ambiguity. They are hostile by default to whatever the government does, yet generally unwilling to state exactly what they would do differently. Given Theresa May has been held hostage to Eurosceptic fanatics in her party, and given Labour could not be seen to want to sabotage the "will of the people" expressed in the referendum, this position was quite savvy at first.

The main tension this policy creates is between the Labour leadership and its anti-Brexit members. However, the only mainstream pro-EU party—the Liberal Democrats—remains toxic amongst the left following their decision enter a coalition government with the Tories' in 2010. Some have called for a new "centrist" party, but First Past the Post and the ghost of the Social Democratic Party, continues to make this option appear hopeless. Thus, the remain supporting membership have no other electorally-plausible, progressive home to go to. Further, while an overwhelming majority of members voted remain and endorse a second referendum, they also understand the difficult electoral position the leadership faces. Taking this into account, the apparent incongruity of members professing to "love Corbyn, hate Brexit" makes sense. What is perhaps ironic, is that the Leadership's pragmatism regarding

Labour's Brexit "position" is precisely the type of ruthless strategy Corbyn's opponents once claimed he could not provide.

At the time of writing (1 Dec 2018), Labour's triangulation is running into trouble. Now the withdrawal agreement is on the table, Labour needs to clarify its position. Default opposition to the government with an eye on forcing a general election will not wash for much longer. To be sure, Theresa May's "Tory Brexit" is a "bad" deal and her negotiations have been a shambles. Hard Brexiteers and Remainers agree on at least this point. However, it can also be true that it is the "best" Brexit deal available. As such, Labour will soon have to lay down a plausible alternative, or call for no Brexit. Yet, currently, Labour and Corbyn continue to rely on platitudes ("jobs first Brexit") and doggedly insist that that Labour would be able negotiate rainbows and unicorns given the chance. This position will probably suffice to justify to voting down May's deal on the first reading on December 10, but will look increasingly cynical and may become politically untenable if it persists much beyond.

While Labour's remain-supporting members understand why all alternatives must be seen to be exhausted before any "people's vote" can seem legitimate, once May's deal gets voted down, they will feel that time has come. I suspect that if (when) May's deal fails to pass, and Labour do not get the general election they want, then Labour leadership—pushed by its members—will exercise the option they left open in their 2018 Labour Party Conference and officially back remain via a second referendum. However, if the leadership continues to back Brexit through the chaos, it will offer the first genuine test of the magic grandpa thesis and indicate that Corbyn's personal Euroscepticism may well have been a salient force all along. I would also expect the PLP may well convince themselves that a third leadership will prove lucky.



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The Leftward March of Labour

by Eunice Goes

The definite sign that British politics has changed beyond recognition since 2015 is the fact that the prospect of a government led by Jeremy Corbyn is taken seriously by the current government and mainstream media. This is an extraordinary turn of events and suggests that the conventional wisdom that has guided British politics since the advent of Thatcherism in the 1980s no longer provides answers for the problems of the day. The public, bruised by the impact of the 2008 global financial crisis and of the public spending cuts and pay freezes that followed it, voted to leave the European Union (EU) in the referendum of 2016. It then denied a majority to the Conservative Party at the general elections of 2017 and now seems receptive to the anti-austerity narrative of Corbyn's Labour Party.

This article seeks to shed some light on the Corbyn phenomenon and argues that the popularity of the Labour leader is partly the result of a congenial timing that made voters more receptive to Labour's ideas, which ingeniously combine a radical narrative with a social-democratic programme. Indeed, part of the explanation for Corbyn's breakthrough lies in the leftward turn of his predecessor as party leader, Ed Miliband. Miliband's renewal of Labour was not

altogether successful, neither in terms of ideas, organisation or public appeal. Yet, as I will demonstrate, Miliband to some extent paved the way for a more radical leader rather than a step back towards the centre ground.

The article will start by contextualising Corbyn's election as leader of the Labour Party. Next it will analyse his leadership which is divided in two distinct periods. The first period covers his first 18 months as leader, whilst the second goes from the 2017 general election and marks a new phase in Corbynism, the phase when the party leader decided he was interested in power. The article will conclude by assessing Labour's likelihood of leading a government in the near future.

From Miliband to Corbyn

Jeremy Corbyn was elected leader of the Labour Party in extraordinary circumstances. A few months before his election in September 2015, Labour had suffered a humiliating defeat in the general election winning only 30.4% of the vote. The party had failed to recapture any of the lost ground to the Conservatives, despite five years of a government presiding over austerity and a set of unpopular reforms. Ed Miliband



The forerunner. Ed Miliband gives his first keynote speech to Labour Party conference as leader, in September 2010.

resigned immediately triggering a leadership election for which the party was totally unprepared.

As the party was still licking its wounds from the electoral defeat, the campaign for the leadership that took place in the summer of 2015 reflected Labour's state of ideological confusion. Whilst the candidates Andy Burnham, Yvette Cooper and Liz Kendall felt that the party had lost the election because it was too left-wing and needed now to target "aspirational voters", the veteran left-wing backbencher Jeremy Corbyn was given space to shine with his promise of a "new kind of politics". To the surprise of seasoned observers Corbyn's unambiguous anti-austerity message attracted thousands of people to the rallies and public hall meetings he held across Britain during that summer.

When it became clear that Jeremy Corbyn was on course to be elected Labour leader alarm bells started to ring across the Parliamentary Labour Party (PLP), but by then it was too late. Helped by a new method to elect the party leader that empowered party members and supporters at the expense of the PLP, Corbyn was elected Labour leader with 59.5% of the vote, winning more votes than his three rivals combined.

But he was not given a lot of time to enjoy his victory. As soon as the results were read most members of the PLP mobilised to resist Corbyn and his brand of politics. Many party grandees were sceptical of the idea that mobilising voters who normally did not vote was the road to electoral success. What followed was an ugly civil war between the leader's team and his army of supporters located outside Parliament and the PLP. This civil war involved a leadership challenge in the summer of 2016 (which culminated with Corbyn's re-election on an even bigger majority), resignations by anti-Corbyn MPs, and countless plans to create a new centrist party that have so far failed to come to fruition. It did not help that Corbyn was a politician with no experience of frontline politics and who was resistant to play by Westminster's traditional rules. By the end of 2016, the mood in the Labour benches was so dark that the Guardian columnist John Harris wondered whether "the Labour Party as we know it may very well soon not exist".

This climate of fatalistic despair was reflected in the party's electoral expectations. Labour lost important by-elections as well as hundreds of seats in the local elections of May 2017. The opinion polls, which showed that Labour was on average 20 per cent behind the Conservatives, confirmed the party's decline. When Prime Minister Theresa May announced a snap election for the 8th of June, the party expected the worst. In private some MPs feared that Labour could not win more than 140 seats.

It turned out that these predictions were wrong. Labour ran an energetic and positive campaign that mobilised many young as well as not so young voters. Above all, its anti-austerity manifesto, entitled *For the Many and Not the Few*, touched a chord with voters, particularly with those who had been more adversely affected by the austerity measures. Confirming the change in public mood, the 2017 British Social Attitudes survey showed that voters were tired of austerity.

Interestingly, Labour's 2017 manifesto, which included proposals like the rise of the minimum wage, scrapping tuition fees, investing in the NHS, building new homes, introducing free school meals, was not very different from the one proposed by Ed Miliband in 2015. Apart from the proposals to scrap tuition fees and nationalise the railways, the utilities and postal services, Corbyn's proposals on macroeconomic policy, industrial policy, welfare, devolution of power to the English cities and towns, immigration and even foreign and defence policies mirrored those of Miliband's manifesto. Even Corbyn's fiscal rule and commitment to keep the cap on welfare spending were an adaptation of Labour's 2015 light austere promise of a "triple lock of responsibility" to tackle the public deficit.

However, there were important differences in terms of emphasis and language. Miliband had been criticised from the Left for wavering between radical reform and caution. This ambiguity was also reflected in sporadic launches of new initiatives without an overarching narrative to tie them into. Voters were enticed, but not convinced. And their lack of trust in Miliband could easily be seen as a more general challenge posed to Labour: by moving Left, they would lose large segments of the middle class, and by appealing to socially liberal voters they would shed votes in the working class and in the North. Corbyn arguably proved these assumptions wrong. Whilst Miliband's "on-the-one-hand-but-on-the-other-manifesto" lacked ideological definition, Corbyn's rhetoric was unambiguously social-democratic and anti-austerity.

The electoral results show that voters responded to the stark ideological differences between the two main parties: as the vote share for Labour and the Conservatives increased to 82.3%, the vote share of the smaller parties declined. Corbyn's Labour, surprisingly, seemed to have broken the code for how to forge a radical and popular mass movement on the Left, but it remains the fact that Labour did not win the 2017 general election. By losing the general election with much better results than expected (Labour won 40% of the vote and elected 262 MPs, 30 more than in 2015) the party stole a majority from the Conservatives. Above all, Corbyn's leadership was safe.

Preparing for Power

The realisation that Labour was tantalisingly close to win an election led to a substantial change in the modus operandi of Corbyn's team. If the first two years of his leadership were defined by chaos and amateur politics, since the 2017 general election that the Labour machine started to wheel in a more professional and pragmatic manner.

Above all, the party is concentrating its energies in developing a credible and radical programme that can mobilise voters. The Shadow Chancellor, John McDonnell, hailed as the "brain" behind Corbynism, recruited economists, academics and public policy experts to help him to develop a transformative agenda.

This work is on-going, but it has already resulted in the publication of proposals – like the report on Alternative Models of Ownership – that are being taken seriously by the media and have generated a buzz amongst Labour activists and sympathetic think-tanks and journalists. These proposals, which focus around ideas to democratise the economy, are radical but they do not represent a return to the statist socialism of the 1970s. To a large extent, these proposals are a more radical development of Ed Miliband's power and redistribution agenda and which had also drawn on the influence of the Guild Socialism of G.D.H. Cole, of the New Left and of Karl Polanyi.

The similarities with Miliband's agenda are the by-product of two factors: 1) Corbyn's wing of the party does not have access to a well-established ideational infrastructure (think-tanks and a vast team of experts), thus it is less costly to add to something that already has some foundations than to start from scratch; 2) the ideas that Miliband toyed with during his term were ahead of his time as they dominated discussions about public policy in the post-recession era in centre-left circles.

As such, these proposals are not about nationalising industries and giving more powers to the state but about involving local councils in the running of public utilities and public services, developing more co-operatives, promoting worker control over private businesses and changing the mandate of Bank of England to target unemployment and inflation.

McDonnell's strategy also involves a charm offensive to the City of London. He is now often seen in the company of bankers and businesspeople in the hope of persuading them that Labour's ideas are sensible. Part of that effort involved as well supporting conservative fiscal policy, namely tax-cuts for middle-income voters.

Similarly, Labour "constructive ambiguity" about Bre-

xit suggests that the party is ready to play strategic games for electoral gain. By opposing the government's plans to leave the EU, whilst maintaining that Labour can negotiate a better agreement which would give Britain the benefits of the single market and the customs union but without freedom of movement of people, Labour hopes to keep both Leave and Remain voters on board. Ultimately, the party is betting that deadlock over Brexit will result in an early election that will place Labour in power.

But saying that Labour is close to power does not mean that it will be easy to get there. Labour has become more professional but the party is still divided and its reputation has not yet recovered from the accusations of condoning antisemitism within the party's ranks. Moreover, Labour lags behind the Conservatives. More importantly, in order to win a majority of seats at the next election Labour needs a swing of 5% which remains a very challenging goal. At best, Labour can hope for a hung parliament which will offer the party the opportunity to form a minority government with the support of a variety of like-minded parties. But in the current volatile climate of British politics, this goal is good enough to keep Corbyn and his team fixated on the prize of leading a government.

Further reading

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New Labour and the Social Democratic Alternative

by Luke Martell

Social democracy broke from Marxism at the start of the 20th century, differentiating itself over its attitude to capitalism, class, and parliament. Capitalism was deemed not to be doomed to collapse through its own contradictions, but a robust system that could be worked with from within. Rather than the class system polarising, middle classes were emerging with different values to the industrial proletariat so that social democracy's ideology would have to appeal to them too. Parliament was not just a tool of the bourgeoisie. It could be used for social reforms that benefitted the working class within capitalism rather than something to be overthrown in a revolution to a new system.

The UK Labour Party came from the trade unions rather than out of Marxism as elsewhere in Europe but adopted these positions on capitalism, class, and state. Postwar social democracy went further. A commitment to public ownership became diluted in favour of a greater emphasis on indirect control of the economy via Keynesianism, allowing much private ownership to be left intact. As the class structure evolved, appealing to an aspirational working class and the expanding middle-class became electorally essential, especially as the right was able to gain votes amongst the workers.

The British Labour Party was slower than its sister European social democratic parties to revise itself away from traditional commitments but in the 1980s Neil Kinnock's policy review followed by Blair's leadership of the party moved things along until New Labour overtook its neighbours, startling them by its willingness to shed social democratic commitments. Blair told European social democrats to "modernise or die". He believed in negative as much as positive integration at a supra-national level.

In the 1980s market socialist theory was revived, some of its proponents later advising Blair, and there were discussions in left and liberal rethinking of more radical democracy. These were reactions to neoliberalism, paternalistic social democracy, and state socialism.

Some of the discussions fed into Blairism. Blair shifted Labour from a pragmatic acceptance of the market to a more principled one committed to its advantages over planning, from a belief in the mixed economy to the free market economy, and from regulated markets to deregulating them, not only nationally but also via the EU. The Labour left had seen the latter as a capitalist institution that needed to be exited to allow socialism to be pursued. Some of the proposals of the radical democrats fell by the wayside but New Labour introduced devolution to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland (alongside quite a bit of centralised interventionism and conservative moralism) and the Human Rights Act.

Blair made a symbolic break with public ownership, already underway in practice, removing it from the party constitution. He said he wanted to avoid ideological dogmas, instead following the pragmatic principle that what matters is what works. Labour, he said, should stick to its values but be imaginative about the means for achieving these, not be wedded to mechanisms that were no longer relevant as if ends in themselves. While the Tories had privatised publicly owned parts of the economy, New Labour continued the work and spread private ownership into the public sector where

it had been thought profit could not be a motivating factor. They allowed internal markets in the NHS and turned higher education into a commodity, sold to consumers rather than planned and free at the point of delivery.

Keynesianism and tax and spend were seen as difficult in a deterministically defined globalised world and because of inflation and the unwillingness of the electorate to vote for income tax rises. Demand-side economics were replaced by the supply-side, Gordon Brown's "prudence with a purpose", cautious spending but directed at specific ends, and business-friendly stability in economic policies. In practice, targeted increases in spending continued, financed in alternative ways.



However, the abandonment of means for achieving equality, such as public ownership and tax and spend, made the old ends more difficult to achieve. And Blair redefined the ends as well as the means of social democracy, moving from declarations for equality of outcome to equal opportunities. But as inequality was explicitly accepted and allowed to grow, equal opportunities were undermined. In reality the commitment was to minimum opportunities, via a minimum wage, welfare to work and education and training. Social democratic sentiments may have been detectable but less so social democratic values and policy. This was more social liberalism than social democracy, social inclusion rather than equality, giving a leg up to individual achievement in place of collective provision. There was a tension between more neoliberal economic policy on one hand that allowed inequality to rise and social policy and elements of redistribution by stealth that tried to correct this: the "third way", not so much beyond left and right as combining them with the contradictions that involves. The outcome was that the working poor benefitted from initiatives like the minimum wage and tax credits, but the gap between the non-working poor - hit by benefit cuts and the view that the solution to their problems was work not welfare - and the rich, allowed to get richer, got wider.

Blair drove home peace in Northern Ireland. Health and education benefitted from funding boosts. But Blair committed the UK to an ill-founded war that led to mass slaughter in Iraq, something he still refuses to apologise for. And New Labour solidified the neo-liberal revolution, offering help to those suffering its worst consequences, but making the private sector, free markets, and deregulation into a default in public policy reform, accepted across the spectrum. Thatcher is reported to have said her greatest achievement was Tony Blair and New Labour, and equality and collectivism moved from accepted norms to outside the mainstream. British politics no longer had a social democratic alternative at the core of politics and key positions in contemporary political ideologies were not available to the electorate beyond small Green and left parties with no chance of significant representation in a First Past the Post electoral system. It was a long way from Labour the party of the trade unions and working class, pursuing socialist reforms to capitalism using the state.

Ed Miliband, the first post- Brown and Blair leader, added leftwards tweaks to Labour but they were tentative. He took an anti-immigration stance that helped fuel unfounded assumptions about migration and fed into public prejudice and the Brexit vote. It was not the more left policies that put the public off Miliband's Labour but his perceived lack of Prime Ministerial qualities and the possibility of a post-election coalition with the Scottish National Party, impressions encouraged by the Tories. The Conservatives were re-elected in 2015. The financial crisis, ideal ground for arguing against short-termism, deregulation, and excess at the top, and for reflationary economics and spending on public infrastructure, was not exploited by a timid

and neoliberal centre-left. They allowed the Conservatives to falsely blame the deficit on alleged profligacy by their own party – if anything to do with Labour, it was more the financial deregulation Brown had introduced at fault - and to use the crisis and inappropriate language of household spending to justify public sector cuts, driven by ideology but disguised as necessity.

Austerity policies, however, fired the real left. Anti-austerity protest and areas of local government and the voluntary sector mobilised to promote ideological and policy alternatives and support for those at the sharp end of government policies. Jeremy Corbyn rose on the basis of these movements, taking everyone by surprise, except supporters derided for their faith in his ability to mobilise popular support, winning Labour's leadership and significantly increasing the party's vote at the 2017 election. Corbyn has brought back egalitarian values and a critique of the rich separating themselves from society and their social obligations. He has been building an agenda for social ownership, an instrument Blair swept away as archaic. Rather than throwing social ownership out with its statist past, Corbyn's proposals are for democratised and decentralised social ownership, mutualism, and popular participation in decision-making.

Blairism isn't dead. It has a potential base in the private sector middle classes, more affluent working class, Parliamentary Labour Party and think tanks like Progress. But Corbyn has won back young people to Labour, long alienated by its failure to provide an alternative to neoliberalism, Old Labourites and even Marxists who have discovered a belief in the possibility of social democracy. He is popular with the educated, and ahead among the traditional working class and socially excluded. Collectivism, economic democracy, and equality are back as mainstream parts of UK political discourse. After New Labour we have neither New Labour's post-Thatcherism nor Old Labour, but a social democratic alternative again, with a cross-class basis, some old values and democratic and devolved means of social ownership for achieving them



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Labour and Antisemitism

by Dave Rich

In March 2018 Britain's Jewish community leaders called for British Jews to attend a remarkable and unprecedented demonstration outside Parliament. This demonstration, organised to protest against antisemitism, was not triggered by the activities of neo-Nazis or Islamist extremists. It was directed at the leadership of Britain's Labour Party: the party that enjoyed the support of British Jews for most of the twentieth century, that was, in turn, Britain's most pro-Israel party for most of its history, and that prides itself on its anti-racism. However, the election of Jeremy Corbyn, a veteran and previously obscure backbench Member of Parliament, to be leader of the Labour Party has brought many ideas and people from the fringes of the left into the mainstream of British politics: and amongst those ideas are an obsessive anti-Zionism and the antisemitism that often accompanies it.

Much of the debate about this problem has focused on Corbyn's personal record over many years in politics. For example, in 2009 he described representatives of Hamas and Hizbollah as "friends" and invited them to Parliament; an invitation he repeated three years later for Sheikh Ra'ed Salah of Israel's Islamic Movement, who had evoked the notorious antisemitic myth of the "blood libel" in a speech in Jerusalem some years earlier. In 2012, when appearing on Iran's Press TV, Corbyn referred to a convicted Hamas terrorist as "brother" and speculated that "the hand of Israel" might be behind jihadist terrorism in Egypt. Corbyn appeared to lay a wreath at the grave of terrorists linked to the 1972 Munich Olympics massacre while at a Palestinian cemetery in 2014 (Corbyn denies this particular charge, but the photographic evidence suggests it is accurate). In 2010 Corbyn chaired a meeting in Parliament on Holocaust Memorial Day titled "Never Again for

Anyone – Auschwitz to Gaza" and backed a campaign to rename Holocaust Memorial Day as "Genocide Memorial Day". Then there was Corbyn's support for a graffiti artist who had painted a huge antisemitic mural, complete with conspiracy motifs and big-nosed Jewish bankers getting rich off the backs of the downtrodden masses. Most damning of all was Corbyn's comment at a meeting in 2013 that "Zionists... have two problems. One is that they don't want to study history, and secondly, having lived in this country for a very long time, probably all their lives, don't understand English irony either." The implication of Corbyn's words was that English-born "Zionists" have failed to acquire the characteristics of indigenous English men and women: a form of words that only makes sense if those English "Zionists" are descended from immigrant families. In other words, when Corbyn said "Zionists", he meant Jews. By late 2018, according to several opinion polls, up to 39 per cent of the British public – and a staggering 85 per cent of British Jews – had concluded that Corbyn is personally antisemitic.

However, it would be a mistake to blame this all on one man, even if he is leader of the party. Corbyn is both a leader and a product of a political culture in parts of the British left that is instinctively hostile towards, or suspicious of, the mainstream Jewish community and its attachment to Israel – and that has, as a consequence, opened up political space for antisemitism to find a home. This political culture has deep roots: a longer article could explore in depth the discussions on the "Jewish Question" amongst Marx and his contemporaries, or British trade union support for immigration restrictions on Jews in the early twentieth century, or the long-standing association of Jews with capitalist exploitation in some left



wing thought, or the stream of antisemitic propaganda produced by the Soviet Union from the 1950s onwards, expressed via an anti-Zionist lexicon that would be familiar to observers of today's British left.

It was in the late 1960s that the British left started to change its orientation away from its historic Zionism. This was the decade when a youthful New Left appeared on the stage. They increasingly viewed Israel as a remnant of European colonialism, newly-crowned as a regional superpower following the Six Day War in 1967 and increasingly bound into America's orbit. The Palestinians, meanwhile, were a stateless people, refugee fighters who embraced armed struggle against imperialism. The idea began to spread that Zionism is a racist, colonialist ideology and Israel an illegitimate vestige of Western colonialism, all underpinned by a fundamental opposition to the United States and its allies that endures in Corbyn's politics to the present day. Rather than seeing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as a struggle between competing national movements, this part of the left sees it as a much simpler story of coloniser and colonised; oppressor and oppressed; the powerful and the powerless.

At the same time, an understanding of racism developed on the left that sees it as an expression of structural power, through which old white elites exclude non-white minorities from access to the sources of power in Western societies, such as education, jobs, housing or political elevation. Jews, accordingly, cannot suffer racism, because racism is only about structural discrimination, whereas Jews are perceived as white, wealthy and integrated into Western elites. This means that, while far right antisemitism is vigorously opposed because it fits the radical Left's broader politics, other types of antisemitism are often denied, ignored or excused. Hence Corbyn and his allies were quick to condemn the murder of 11 American Jews by a neo-Nazi in Pittsburgh, and did so genuinely, but have had much less to say about the murder of 11 French Jews over the past 12 years by radicalised or criminalised French Muslims.

Most Labour Party members are not antisemitic, but they do not need to be for the party's internal discourse about Jews, Israel and antisemitism to become toxic. Over the past three years there has been a seemingly endless supply of party members, activists and officials being shown to have made antisemitic remarks, usually on social media. This is not, on the whole, an old-fashioned, overt dislike of Jews (although that is present at times). Rather, it is a modern representation of the types of antisemitism and anti-Zionism that developed in parts of the British left from the 1960s onwards. Soviet antisemitic conspiracy theories (in the language of anti-Zionism), combined with the idea that the creation of Israel was itself a consequence of a Western colonial plot, mixed with older antisemitic versions of socialist anti-capitalism, added to contemporary resentment about the

legacy of the Holocaust and the assumption that Jews and Zionism are part of today's networks of power, all find their current expression through social media memes about wars fought for the Rothschilds and ISIS being an Israeli creation, or conspiracy theories about "Zionists" or Israel controlling Western politicians and comparisons of Israel to Nazi Germany; plus a general sense that Israel and its supporters are so inhuman as to be uniquely cruel, racist and murderous.

One reason this has been allowed to spread is because there is no political will at the top of the Labour Party to put a stop to it. And even when complaints of antisemitism are investigated by the Labour Party, its disciplinary processes are not fit for purpose. In April 2017, former Mayor of London Ken Livingstone was found guilty of bringing the party into disrepute for claiming that Hitler "supported Zionism" before "he went mad and ended up killing six million Jews". Livingstone's punishment was extremely mild: he was prevented from holding certain internal party positions for two years, following which he would be allowed to resume full membership of the party. Effectively, Labour's highest disciplinary body decided that a party member can be found guilty of bringing the party into disrepute by repeatedly and deliberately abusing the memory of the Holocaust to insult the Jewish community and ultimately remain a party member.

It did not need to be like this. Labour was for much of its history the beneficiary of widespread support and votes from British Jews. It was for long periods Britain's most pro-Zionist party and still, to this day, sees itself as the natural opponent of racism and antisemitism. Corbyn could have proactively reached out to the Jewish community, Labour could have effectively disciplined its members who made antisemitic comments on social media, and the inquiries that the Party has held into antisemitism could have produced genuine change. Instead, Labour has followed possibly the most damaging trajectory possible. Only a process of honest self-reflection, education and genuine engagement with the Jewish community can change the antisemitic political culture that has taken root in Britain's Labour Party; but sadly, there is no sign of this change happening under the party's current leadership.



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Can the Divisions in Labour be Explained by Intergenerational Divides?

by Charlotte Norton

Division in the Labour party is certainly nothing new. The Labour party was formed by a collection of different groups, including trade unions, Fabians, non-Anglican Christians, republicans and socialists. The first past the post system in the UK makes it difficult for smaller left-wing parties to form and Labour remains a broad coalition. While this can lead to better policy, formed by debate, it also creates a breeding ground for division.

Across the numerous debates in Labour over these last three years, there has been a tendency to assume that the rise and popularity of Jeremy Corbyn are related to a youth revolution. Hence, opposition to Corbyn's leadership is supposedly grounded in an older generation of centrist members and activists. But how much of current division in Labour can be explained by an intergenerational split? I identify three main threads of disagreement in the party at the moment: ideology, loyalty to the party leadership, and Brexit. While there is clear overlap in these debates, the divides play out in different ways and with different implications for the unity and coherence of the party.

Ideology

Looking firstly at ideology, I find that this is perhaps the area where divisions in the party are most exaggerated and exploited. Terms like "Blairite" and "Corbynite" are thrown around as short hand for the extent of a person's left-wing credentials.

However, if you scratch the surface of debates such as "tuition fees versus graduate tax", you will find that most people in the party have the same core values and aims. I have found that this is true across the generations in the party. Under Corbyn's leadership, it has arguably become much more common to debate "radical" left wing ideas, but a 17-year-old is just as likely to hold those views as a 50-year-old.

Younger people are more likely to be able to get out on the doorstep often and actively campaign (although do not underestimate the dedication of many older members who devote what energy they have volunteering for the party). I find that it is campaigning for Labour that enables many to overcome perceived ideological splits. In my experience, the ideological differences found within the party remains a strength for us. Like those who founded the party, we have differing viewpoints, but a common goal of bettering society.

I know that this might sound idealistic, but I find that it is in fact true for most members, across generations. If it were ideological differences alone that divided mem-

bers in the party, I do not think that we would have the difficulties that we currently face.

Loyalty to the/a party leader

This is the split that causes the most vitriol on social media. I separate this from ideology because it plays out differently. It is perfectly possible to place yourself on the left of the party yet have doubts about Corbyn's leadership. Similarly, it is possible to be sceptical of some of Corbyn's ideology yet toe the party line.

This is perhaps best illustrated by the ongoing debates around anti-Semitism in the party. While Corbyn himself does not hold anti-Semitic beliefs, the same cannot always be said of his supporters.

There is sadly a small minority of party members who are either anti-Semitic themselves, or who fail to take anti-Semitism seriously as they view any allegations as a slight or "smear" on Corbyn and his leadership. That minority tend to be men and tend to be from an older generation of left-wing activists.

This rift has caused many Jewish members to leave the party, and greater numbers of Jewish people in the UK to refuse to vote Labour.

Sadly, judging from this year's tumultuous debate it is difficult to offer an explanation or guarantee that there will be major improvement soon. There has certainly been a positive response of solidarity from most members in the party towards the Jewish community and Jewish members. The Labour Party also certainly remains a better choice for fighting prejudice and racism than the Tory party. However, in a time where a female Jewish MP requires police protection against threats within her own party, and where party members, including a fellow MP, accuse her of lying, we will remain at somewhat of an impasse.

Antisemitism is not a new phenomenon on the left under Corbyn's leadership. I remember campaigning under Ed Miliband in Finchley and Golders Green and being told by Jewish voters that they couldn't consider voting Labour because of the perceived prejudice against the Jewish community. However, it must be remembered that for much of his career, Corbyn was a backbench politician on the fringe of the party. This pushed him to make allies where they could be found, and unfortunately some of them held unsavoury views. As they were loyal to him before his rise to the leadership, he can appear slow to criticise or even to recognise when anti-Semitic views are espoused. This lack of action enables others who would have remained silent to step up and present

their views on more respectable platforms.

The party has finally accepted the definition of anti-Semitism given by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA), and it appears that complaints are being dealt with, albeit slowly. The situation is certainly improving inside the Labour Party itself, but expelled members, and those who are members of other left-wing groups, continue to take to Twitter to stoke the problem.

Brexit

I would argue that this is the one divide in the party that can most forcefully be explained by intergenerational divides. Although there are many young "Lexiteers" – that is, activists coming to Brexit from a Socialist point of view – the majority of those in the party who supported, or continue to support, Brexit are of an older generation. This is not entirely surprising as it reflects UK society. Age was a major explanation for voter preference on Brexit in the referendum.

In wider society, the Labour Party and its leadership is significantly more popular amongst younger people. Nearly two thirds of people under 40 voted for Labour in the last general election. By contrast, the average age of a Labour Party member is 51, and this has not changed under Corbyn's leadership. Whilst Labour voters are increasingly younger, party membership has not completely caught up. Contrary to some assumptions, then, the rise of Corbyn is far from a straightforward youth revolution.

Internal debates on Brexit do convey a generational cleavage, but intermingled with the other two threads of disagreement: ideology and loyalty to the leader. Jeremy Corbyn was the first person to ask for Article 50 to be triggered on the day of the referendum result, despite most Labour MPs being pro- Remain. While he states he voted Remain in the referendum, he does not hide the fact that he is Eurosceptic. This has created particularly interesting divides amongst the younger members of Labour. The Chair of Young Labour has responded to young people inside and outside the party and is an advocate of offering a second referendum – a people's vote. The Youth rep on the National Executive Committee takes the opposite view, arguing that the first referendum was a people's vote, supporting the stance taken by the party's leadership.

This example shows that whilst young people are more pro-EU, demand for a people's vote from within the party does not fall strongly along intergenerational lines, but in fact loyalty to Corbyn is much more likely to dictate the stance to be taken in relation to practical implications of that stance.

That said, in a recent survey, only 17% of Momentum

members said that they did not want a second vote on Brexit, with 41% saying that they wanted a vote in all circumstances, suggesting that ideology is beginning to take more of a centre stage.

Has Corbyn shifted the divides?

To sum up, society is diverse and varied and this is always going to be reflected in a party that claims to represent the people. If anyone tries to argue that the intense divides on the left are anything new, I would have to advise them to pick up a history book.

I don't think that it is possible to frame the major disagreements in Labour as intergenerational divides. While it tends to be older members who would espouse anti-Semitic views, their supporters/ opponents do not fit to one type. The same is true in relation to Brexit. While older members are more likely to reject the EU, the Party is in near unanimous agreement that Theresa May's deal must be voted down. There is also no clear divide along age lines in relation to practical policy such as a people's vote.

Much is made of the argument that Corbyn captivated the young. While this is reflected in the response his policy offer has drawn from British society in general, his leadership has not shifted intergenerational divides within the Labour Party. It also cannot be said with any degree of certainty that he has either improved or worsened party unity. Each Labour leader has faced their difficulty through the ages, and it is the Party that survives. Everything now must be looked at through the lens of Brexit, over which Corbyn has little control. The Referendum revealed and exacerbated deep divides in society that have also become apparent in the party.

At the time of writing, the UK is due to leave the EU in two and a half months, presenting a unique challenge to society as a whole and to the political class. Whether Corbyn will be able to hold his support in Labour (and the country) is for time to tell.



Charlotte Norton is the National Chair of the Young Fabians, the under 31 section of the Fabian society. She works with members to run events around the UK and create policy pamphlets. Prior to being elected chair, she edited *Anticipations*, the Young Fabian magazine for two years.

When not working on Young Fabian business, Ms Norton works as a lawyer and is Vice Chair of her local Constituency Labour Party.



Caroline Flint MP visited Oslo to speak at BPS event

“Politics can never go back to how it was. But, we’re not there yet. There’s still a way to go to feminise our public policy and our body politic. We need more women at the grassroots, in local government, parliament and in political party leadership.”

On 18 September, the British Politics Society co-hosted a seminar to mark the centenary of “Votes for Women”, the introduction of a female franchise in the UK through the Representation of the People Act of 1918.

The keynote speaker was Caroline Flint MP (Labour), who has represented the constituency of Don Valley since 1997. During Labour’s last tenure in government, Flint served as Minister for Public Health (2005-07), Minister for Employment (2007-08), Minister for Housing and Planning (2008), and Minister for Europe (2008-09).

Ms Flint offered a personal reflection on how life in Westminster as a female MP has changed

over the last two decades. In light of the centenary of votes for women, she also provided an expansive historical outlook on the stepwise progress towards gender equality in politics in the UK and the effects it has had. Particular attention was devoted to the role of the Labour Party throughout this history, and among the questions she addressed was why the Conservatives have harboured two female Prime Ministers, while Labour has yet to see a female Leader.

Caroline Flint’s speech can be read in full via britishpoliticssociety.no

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Forthcoming issue of British Politics Review

In the first edition of British Politics Review for 2019 we will be looking into British anti-radicalisation policies, with a particular focus on the *Prevent*-programme. A subject of much debate and controversy, Prevent was recently revised by the British government in what appears to be an attempt to answer some of the criticism raised against the programme. Does this mean that the government is in the process of devising new policies to counter radicalisation? In the forthcoming edition of BPR we seek to answer this, and other questions pertaining to the perceived problem of radicalisation in the UK, and the policies adopted to oppose it.

2019 will also see a change to the BPR itself, as the journal will now move from a quarterly to a bi-annual publication. The first of the two editions of 2019 is due to arrive in May.