

Britain's Labour Party Leadership: Has Jeremy Corbyn started the Political Conversation that England Needs?

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Ever since the Scottish Independence Referendum campaign I have been envying the Scots for the liveliness and engagement of their political thought and conversation and wondering how the phlegmatic English could be prodded into really thinking about the politics that run this country. The answer appears to be Jeremy Corbyn.

Many people, battered and depressed by the result of the general election and the prospect of an all-Tory government for the next 5 years, with its austerity for the poor and tax breaks for the rich, cheered up when Jeremy announced he was entering the Labour leadership contest. Not because we were 'leftwing Commie nutters' or for any other silly reason.

No. The 'surge' for Jeremy started because many of us already knew him. Anyone who has campaigned on behalf of peace, human rights, against the UK's illegal military actions, on the plight of the Palestinians or for ridding the world of nuclear weapons knows Jeremy. The word spread as people listened to what he was saying.

From the first televised Labour leadership hustings, he engaged the public. He said what people wanted, needed to hear. And, despite what the papers say, it isn't just the politically innocent young who are engaged. Nor the disillusioned old who had given up on the Labour party after Blair's Iraq debacle. It is all those who hear an honest man who does not hunger for power, but who does hunger for a just, caring and engaged society.

There is one simple reason why Jeremy can start this much-needed conversation, a reason that was highlighted by the presenter of the LBC debate Iain Dale, when he said that the reason Jeremy was ahead in the polls was because he was the only one of the four who gave a straight answer to a straight question.

And this [particular question](#) - 'would you give ex-Labour leader Ed Miliband a job?' - demonstrates how far apart he is. None of his rivals are really willing to commit themselves to any action or policy; there are too many ifs, buts, maybes and we have to wait and see. Jeremy is commitment personified. You may not like what he stands for but at least you know where he stands. Where he has always stood.

At a [rally in Norwich](#), when talking about re-nationalising the railways, he said that whenever journalists ask him about railways they have a problem - because he answers them! (He takes an interest in railways because, as a non-driver, he uses them, frequently). It says a lot about our media when an MP actually answering questions would pose a problem.

The average politician rarely answers the question – witness David Cameron’s [record](#) in Prime Ministers Questions – and when they do the answer is so full of waffle and piffle and qualifications that it is impossible to work out what they really mean. In fact, their answers are deliberately unclear. It enables them to say, five years later when they are challenged on some broken pledge, “Ah, if you look at the record, I didn’t actually say that...”

Jeremy on the other hand answers “Yes, because...” or “No, because...” Whether you agree or disagree, he has provided a simple debating point that anyone can discuss. It stops people from being vague about their own views. Perhaps it even makes us think, not something the Westminster bubble would like us to do. In fact, the clarity Jeremy offers presents a huge challenge. So what do they do? Both Tories and senior Labour figures, aided by a rightwing media resort to name-calling and threats.

But they never learn. What has happened is a repeat of the Independence campaign. The more Westminster and its cronies insulted Scotland, in a peculiar hope that would keep Scotland in the United Kingdom, the more Scots wanted independence. And losing the Referendum has not made that disappear. The push for independence has increased, the conversation is carrying on. So, for each insult and denigration of Jeremy, another person signs up in support.

The people who nominated him were called ‘morons’. The ex-Middle East Peace Envoy Tony Blair said that anyone who wanted Corbyn for leader needed a heart transplant. Liz Kendall says Corbyn voters were ‘[traumatised](#)’. Haaretz [labelled](#) him as the “Loony-left front-runner...” after he spoke up for Palestinians at a leadership hustings sponsored by the Jewish Chronicle, saying that his “view on Middle Eastern terrorist groups wasn’t interesting when he was on the political sidelines. But now, when polls claim he could end up leading the Labour, it gets more attention.” They’d obviously missed the fact that his peace making efforts had gained him an [International Peace Award](#) from the Ghandi Foundation – something Blair hasn’t achieved.

All this nastiness, the name-calling, the denigration, the fear and doom mongering, is precisely the kind of behaviour that occurred in the run-up to the Independence Referendum. I was disgusted then. I am now. It shows all too clearly that mainstream politics, backed by mainstream media, has run out of vision and honesty. It was no surprise that so many people became members of the SNP after the Referendum, having decided they could live without the insults from Westminster. And it is no surprise now that people are signing up in droves to back this ‘leftwing’ MP.

The language is inevitable. Jeremy comes from the ‘hard left’, the ‘far left’. It will open the doors to the old Militant Tendency. It will drag the Labour Party away from the centre. Politics these days is all about the centre or the centre right. And it’s all nonsense.

Jeremy becoming leader will, they say, [split the party](#). No. But it may very well create a much-needed reform of the party. It will make them [unelectable](#). Are they electable now? The party will lose its [major donors](#). But would that matter to a greatly enlarged, committed and active membership? Another threat, from Galloway himself, is that George Galloway will rejoin the party if Jeremy becomes the leader. (Regardless of his way with words, Galloway was ever one to jump on a bandwagon, and he seems to have forgotten that he didn’t resign from the party, he was sacked.)

As I said, nonsense. Waffle and piffle from all sides except Jeremy's. I don't know if there is a word in Gaelic for 'waffle and piffle' and if there was I wouldn't know how to pronounce it. But at last the conversation that we so need south of the border is taking off, as people finally discover that the 'centre ground' they have been voting for is actually rather more to the right than they had realised, and that the 'loony left' is not as loony as they had been told.

And there is one thing these Westminster folk don't get. Among the people (rather than the media), the conversation is not so much about Jeremy but about the politics he is offering. And no, people don't see those as a return to the past, but as a positive re-figuring of the future. The conversation has finally started.

Years ago people like me were genuinely in the 'centre'. There were some conservative policies that made sense; there were others, liberal or socialist, that also made sense – and please note the small 'c', 'l' and 's'. We were not wedded to any one party, but made up our minds as to the best option on offer for each election. But over the years we stayed very much where we had been while the politics moved ever rightwards, something that up till now, few political commentators have noticed.

This is a difficult concept for politicians, particularly those running against Corbyn for the Labour leadership, but he and his ever-increasing supporters are now standing in the centre. Both he and they really are not the 'hard' left. Policies and aims that want a fair and just society, that see people, jobs, wages, housing, education without debt for the young and care for the old and vulnerable as far more important than profits for big business are actually very soft and humanitarian in their intent. Very threatening to the rich one percent of course, but I for one care as little for that as they apparently care for us.

Because it turns out that Jeremy is speaking for a majority – who are not red or blue, left or right; who are young, middle aged and old; well-off and poor – who also want rid of austerity, nuclear weapons made illegal, railways renationalised, higher taxes for the rich and [other loony things](#). One Facebook comment said "It is time we had somebody less middle of the road". But surely, if the majority want these things and back the person who, they hope, will have a chance of pushing them through, isn't that the middle of the road? Isn't the centre ground where the majority stands?

So let's start talking.

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