

Britain's Neo-Liberal Elite: Jeremy Corbyn and Challenges to Political Power

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Noam Chomsky and other serious critics on the left often have to contend with dismissals from opponents (including most in our political and media elites) that they are conspiracy theorists, or “anti-American” and “anti-West”.

For those who have not taken the time to read Chomsky, such arguments can sound superficially plausible. Doesn't Chomsky's criticisms of the US and the West not rest on the assumption that their leaders act together, conspiratorially, in bad and exploitative ways against weaker nations? Can all of our leaders really be so rotten? Isn't it more cock-up than conspiracy?

Chomsky is actually talking about *structural* conditions in our societies that maintain elites in power and allow them to look out for their own interests largely unchallenged.

Here Craig Murray, a former British ambassador to Uzbekistan who has been in the diplomatic wilderness since he turned whistle-blower on British collusion with torture more than a decade ago, makes a very simple observation that can help us understand what Chomsky is talking about.

Murray notes that among today's crop of senior politicians, media editors, top diplomats and university vice-chancellors, almost all supported the Iraq war in 2003. Not only did such support not harm these individuals' careers but it appears to have propelled them to even greater things.

The careers of prominent critics of the war, conversely, have tended to suffer. And all this despite the fact that there was huge popular opposition to the war at the time. The folly of the war was obvious to ordinary people but not, it seems, to our brightest and best.

The success of the war crowd can be explained without resorting to conspiracy theories. Chomsky's structural critique is expressed well below by Murray:

It is that Iraq is the touchstone for adherence to the neo-liberal consensus. All these professionally successful people share a number of attitudes, of which support for the Iraq War is a good indicator. There is a very strong correlation between support for the Iraq War and fierce Zionism. But there is also a strong correlation between support for the Iraq War and support for austerity economics. The strongest correlation of all lies in support for the Iraq War and for “business-friendly” tolerance of corporatism, TTIP, multinational tax avoidance, low taxation and marketization of public services including in

education and health.

In short, our key institutions are in the grasp of a set of ideological assumptions (very strange ones) popularly described as neo-liberalism. This neoliberal elite becomes self-selecting, replicating itself through the selection processes imposed by private schools, elite universities, the diplomatic service, the finance system, top legal firms, and the media. If one makes one's way through this obstacle course, then the door may open to a political career.

By the time politicians reach Westminster, they do not need to be recruited to a cabal. They have simply proven over a long period that they have a strong ideological fit with the institutions that govern us. If not, their careers would have stalled much earlier, in the lower rungs of these institutions, or they would have "dropped out". The same processes select those who fill top posts in the media and other influential "professions".

This isn't true just in Britain, of course. One can see similar processes of filtering and selection in the US and other western societies. That is why trying to tinker with the system invariably fails to bring about real change. These structures have to be overhauled.

That has happened – partially at least – in the past, following major social and economic upheavals like the Second World War. Our elites had to respond to the greater sense of entitlement and empowerment of the working classes, both the men who had been recently demobbed and the women who had gone out to work for the first time in factories to help the war effort.

That was why a Labour government was elected, in spite of the heroic standing of Winston Churchill, the Conservatives' leader, during the war. A key victory was the establishment of free health care for everyone, in the form of the National Health Service. Hard as it is to recall today, the NHS was long presented as a radical, dangerous idea – reminding us how crazy ideological assumptions can comfortably dominate even democratic systems. The NHS' popularity has made it difficult politically to reverse that success, but politicians of the right and left have been slowly eroding the principle of free health care for at least the past two decades.

Now the British elites are being challenged again, this time by a potential mass movement led by Jeremy Corbyn. Corbyn is the last gasp of that post-war era of Labour politics, when a class divide was acknowledged and some politicians were elected precisely because they represented the working poor's interests, often via trade unions.

It is a sign of quite how much the traditional elites have reasserted their power that Corbyn seems an isolated relic from that previous era. It is also a sign of how effectively the system locks the doors to outsiders that the young people who are so fed up with neoliberalism and our political elite have been unable to inject new blood into the system, and must rely on Corbyn instead to represent them. Expect an extremely rocky ride ahead.

<https://www.craigmurray.org.uk/archives/2015/09/breaking-the-depleted-uranium-ceiling/>

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