

British Politics: Jeremy Corbyn's "Member-Driven" Labour Party

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Global Research, January 14, 2016

Region: [Europe](#)

First they ignore you, then they laugh at you, then they fight you, then you win. Ghandi

British politics is starting to look interesting, despite the efforts of the mainstream media and the Westminster establishment – those Members of Parliament who have more interest in position, power and money than the opinions of the people they are supposed to represent.

First they ignore you...

Jeremy Corbyn, MP for Islington North, sitting on Labour's back benches for over 30 years, has been ignored by Westminster for a long time. Known and loved by a lot of ordinary people for his dedicated campaigning against apartheid, for peace, against nuclear weapons and for social justice, he was labelled as 'hard' or 'far' left by his fellow Parliamentarians. Tolerated but not taken seriously, the Labour Party never seemed to ask itself just why he kept being re-elected by his constituents, each time with a bigger majority than before.

Then they laugh at you...

When he became a candidate in the Labour party leadership contest, media and MPs all laughed. They simply couldn't take it seriously. The Conservatives couldn't believe their luck. They had beaten Labour into the ground in last May's general election, and here was Labour practically cutting its throat by having such a maverick stand for leader.

That lasted for about two weeks, and then it began to sink in that, as inferior to themselves as they thought he was, he was actually rather more popular with the public than they were. For most of the established Labour MPs, there wasn't anything to laugh about after he was voted in as their leader.

Then they fight you...

From day one, Corbyn and his team suffered the most appalling onslaught of bad press, some of it downright slanderous, aided and abetted by yesterday's men Tony Blair and his friend the equally 'filthy rich' Peter Mandelson. There were constant exclusives based on rumours, leaks and complaints from certain members of his own Shadow Cabinet (who he had appointed in an effort to be inclusive) bent on getting him ousted.

This man couldn't possibly be a Prime Minister; he didn't look like one, he didn't dress like one and he certainly didn't talk like one. For a start, he couldn't shout, insult and make stupid, over-rehearsed jokes like David Cameron. And no way could Labour win the next election. The picture the public was constantly presented with was of a Labour party at war with itself, destroying itself from the roots up.

And then you win.

It was depressing, watching the horribly childish shenanigans. And it was also depressing that Corbyn did not appear to make any effort to curb those people who were intent on destroying him. But he has always been someone for dialogue rather than confrontation. Perhaps he was just waiting, patiently, as they removed themselves – as some already have by resigning from his cabinet team.

Even newspapers like the Guardian, once known for its liberal views, were happy to report on all the nonsense stories, seemingly as eager to put the boot in as everyone else. Until now. They have published Ewen MacAskill's report on how Corbyn is [reshaping Labour](#).

Over 100 of Labour constituency parties were interviewed on the changes they had seen since the general election. It makes for some interesting reading, encouraging for Corbyn's supporters and positively frightening for both Blairite MPs and the Conservatives.

The main change has been a surge in membership. Peter Mandelson would have Labour MPs and peers believe otherwise, [claiming](#) that "30,000 long-term members have left the party, real members, tens of thousands..." He has forgotten the number of people who left the party because of Tony Blair and Iraq; Blair reduced party membership from 407,000 to under 200,000. Corbyn on the other hand has increased membership to 388,407, and that number is still rising.

As the [breakdown](#) of the Guardian's survey shows, almost every constituency party reported increased numbers, sometimes quadrupling or quintupling the number of their members.

Some of the big rises are in constituencies that are not traditionally Labour. Cities show a surge in new young members. The membership increase was at one point excused by the 'old guard' as being all youngsters who idolised Corbyn (the Corbynistas) and who didn't understand 'real' politics. However, as one constituency put it, "our members range from 16 to 90".

Many old members are returning to the fold, and having an immediate impact. Most new and returned members are left-wing, and many will want their voices to be heard. Some constituency officers complained that new members didn't 'come to meetings' but as the secretary for Southampton and Romsey explained, old members want old-style meetings, when many others, including the young, were far happier to discuss politics over a glass of wine.

And of course, being 'active' for many new members will mean being out on the streets, campaigning.

It is clear that the gains in local membership are most apparent in constituencies with Conservative MPs. And from the comments given to the Guardian they are the ones that want to really oppose the Conservatives. Those constituencies with Labour MPs are far less adventurous.

It is also apparent that, although Labour has gained some new members in Scotland where the party to beat is the Scottish Independence Party, they are unlikely to make much impact on the Scottish Parliament elections being held later this year.

Scotland, once a Labour stronghold, has never really forgiven Labour for its part in the

Better Together campaign, and while Corbyn is popular north of the border, as he demonstrated at a recent trades union event in Glasgow, he cannot by himself regain the trust they once had in Labour.

But that aside, the quiet but steady growth this survey shows will be very unwelcome news to Corbyn's detractors, and very welcome indeed to those who want Britain to engage in a new and kinder politics.

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