

Is Corbyn a Socialist and Does It (No Longer) Matter if He Isn't?

Is this our last chance before the darkness falls?

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Region: [Europe](#)

Theme: [History](#)

This is probably the most difficult piece I've ever had to write, at least about the Labour Party. My feelings about Corbyn and the Labour Party are on record, [here](#), [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#), to name a few. The Labour Party is a party of Imperialism and always has been since its inception, well over a century ago. Even its high point in 1945, with the creation of the welfare state, occurred through pressure from below and just as today, capitalism was bankrupt and in crisis. The Labour government, in return for the Welfare state, saved capitalism from revolution (or collapse). The gains made during that critical period following WWII lasted about thirty years before the lords of capital started taking back what 'we' had tried to take from them and by 1975 we were clearly not equipped to resist. In part, the Labour Party was directly responsible, in fact it was party to the attacks on the Welfare state and the working class.

But is this election different? Can we expect a Corbyn-led government to turn back the tide? Can we even expect an *attempt* at turning back the tide? Frankly, I don't think we have much choice, after all, what else is there? The left, such as it is, is bankrupt and devoid of revolutionary ideas so the Labour Party, at this critical juncture, is all we have.

Does Corbyn have a socialist programme? Of course not. At best it's a rehash of 1945 but minus most of the reformist stuff, so the same old social democracy then, the one that was effectively neutralised ages ago. But desperate times require desperate measures.

The question is, if by some chance we do get a Labour government on December 13, what kind of government will it be? What kind of space will Corbyn and his (not very reliable) team be able to carve out of our rank neoliberal, Victorian times? In a word, what are we voting *for* and what are the chances of getting any of Corbyn's diluted reforms, carried through?

If Labour's 2017 election manifesto is anything to go by (not the leaked, draft manifesto), then we may see some minor changes for example, ending zero hours contracts and maybe a rollback of some of the NHS privatisation. But the real question to ask is whether even these limited reforms will be possible in the current climate? The hysterical climate of fear that's been created about Corbyn's alleged views on pretty much everything he touches now or has in the past, makes it virtually impossible for a Corbyn-led government to function as it would want to.

Of course, the first hurdle would be the size of the Labour majority. To be potentially effective, it will have to be able to survive alliances in opposition and given the politics of the Lib-Dems, the Greens and the SNP, anything is possible, especially getting stabbed in

the back.

Politics, such as it is, is so poisonous, so corrupt and driven by personal ambition and sheer greed for power and/or money, that frankly, will it make any difference to most of us which party gets elected? Well that's the hope isn't it, that Corbyn will attempt at least to reverse or ameliorate the worst of the neoliberal destruction of the gains made since 1945. That's what inspired so many to support Corbyn and put an end to this reactionary attack on the working class and the gains that have been made.

All of my lefty/liberal friends are desperate for a Labour victory, the thought of more Bojo and the backward and reactionary Tories is more than they can bear and who can argue with that!

Capitalism is in crisis, a crisis like no other, compounded by the environmental catastrophe that capitalism has unleashed on our planet. So you would think that extraordinary times would demand extraordinary measures.

So where does the Labour Party and Jeremy Corbyn sit in all this mess? In a way, they're all of a kind. *Everyone* is in denial about something. Corbyn's earnestness, his sincerity in the face of the atrocious red-baiting and slander he has put up with contrasts with the 'cosiness' of Extinction Rebellion and the almost masochistic enjoyment in how it deals with the arrests of its members. In contrast, Corbyn turns the other cheek whenever these slanderous lies are hurled at him.

In the name of maintaining "party unity" with the Blairites, he has presided over the NEC's expulsion of Livingstone, Jacqui Walker and Marc Wadsworth. Just last week, while Corbyn stayed silent, Chris Williamson was told by the party's pro-Corbyn NEC that he would not be able to stand as an MP in his Derby North constituency. Williamson, like Sultana, had merely pointed out that the anti-Semitism campaign is "proxy wars and bullshit"—the "weaponisation of antisemitism for political ends." - ['Corbyn refuses to fight ramped-up bogus "anti-Semitism" witch-hunt'](#), WSWS, 12 November 2019

Are we to ignore Corbyn's vacillations simply in order to get Labour elected? It's the lack of response by Corbyn over the witch hunt against him and other anti-Zionists that raises questions about Corbyn's ability, once in power, to pursue the agenda that has made him so popular. Many who support Corbyn, will no doubt put these questions to one side, just as Corbyn, in pursuit of 'party unity', ignores the Israeli-funded attacks made on him but frankly, it doesn't give me much confidence in Corbyn's ability to 'stay the course' once elected.

We live, or try to, by rules that no longer apply. Labour's nostalgia about 1945 exemplifies the paradox. And it's arguable that the left as whole, lives by rules that probably have *never* applied. Much is wishful thinking and wishful thinking, just like moralising, will get us nowhere.

Somehow, thinking about who (or what) to vote for on December 12, seems ludicrous, yet just as with the totally unnecessary Brexit Referendum, ludicrous votes do serve a purpose, of a sort anyway. They give us the illusion of control over events, when it's obvious that the opposite prevails. We are neither informed nor equipped with the necessary knowledge or skills to do much of anything, let alone possess the political will to see things through.

But in spite of this, you would think that choosing between Corbyn and Johnson would be a no-brainer for any decent, progressive person, and you would be correct. Clearly, if you put Corbyn next to Johnson it's obviously a no-brainer except of course (I think I said this in 2017), you're not voting for Corbyn, you're voting for the Labour Party. It's a Labour Party that's divided between its base and its superstructure. In reality, there are two Labour Parties and it's a bit of irony that the superstructure, the Parliamentary Party and the Party's bureaucracy are firmly a part of the political class that runs (or pretends to) the country but it's supported by the base, the Constituency Party and its tens of thousands of members, and these two entities couldn't be further apart.

So really the question a would-be Labour voter needs to ask is what to expect from a Labour government with Corbyn at its (titular) head but in reality, run by the same old political elite? What could we expect it to do when confronted with for example, some of the quite radical proposals passed at the Labour Party conference in September?

The Grassroots

It was obvious, to me at least, that Corbyn's best bet for moving the Labour Party to the left and away from its Blairite, neoliberal reality, was to mobilise the tens of thousands that grassroots organising had brought onboard with Corbyn as its figurehead. After all, the Labour Party was suddenly the biggest political party in Europe! But it created a dilemma for the Labour Party bureaucracy and the majority of the PLP. Mobilising the Constituency Labour Parties would have created a mass base with which to challenge the power of the bureaucracy and the PLP. But this never happened. Instead, the Right mounted a disinformation campaign using the 'anti-semitism' tag (amongst others, notably the 'unelectable' tag), to vilify and marginalise Corbyn and others on the left of the Labour Party in the eyes of the public. How successful the campaign has been will no doubt be revealed come election time.

The second objective should have been to dump the right-wing MPs by changing the selection rules for candidates but again, this wasn't done either. The Blairites maintained their control of Parliamentary Party and the Party's bureaucracy. They write (and therefore enforce) the rules.

Then came the *coup de grace*, Momentum, a key tool for reaching the marginalised and the young who never voted, and primarily the work of John Lansman, Corbyn's former election agent, was taken 'in-house'. No longer could it reach out to potential supporters unless you first joined the Labour Party. The key tool that mobilised the thousands who joined the Labour Party was effectively sidelined. The centre reasserted control.

Yet what choice do I have? The alternative is to abstain as there's no other party worth voting for as far as I'm concerned. So assuming a Labour victory, what are the chances of a grassroots mobilisation bringing pressure to bear on a Labour government to enact even a few of the policies voted for at the Labour Party conference?

Back in 2017 in a [piece I wrote](#) about the then snap general election, I quoted from a [piece](#) on the WSWS Website which highlighted the contradictions between what Corbyn wanted as laid out in his draft manifesto and what the final, published manifesto stated. By the time the real power in the bureaucracy had finished 'editing' Corbyn's draft, very little was left of the original. Opposition to Austerity had been watered down to some reforms but leaving the body of Austerity in place. So too with Corbyn's opposition to Trident nuclear weapons

and his 'reluctance' to start a nuclear conflagration.

I'm minded to say, this time, so what? Yes, the arguments WSWS presents are true, the Labour Party is an imperialist party but can Corbyn, if supported by a grassroots movement, move beyond its imperialist past and its Blairite present? Is the situation so dire that Corbyn, aka the Labour Party is all we have got and we'll just have to make the best of a bad bunch?

Maybe it's the last chance we have to halt the headlong rush into barbarism but only if we mobilise the masses of Corbyn supporters, which of course, if successful, runs the risk of splitting the Labour Party in two which, just like the Conservative Party, has passed its sell-by date and splitting the Labour Party could be the best thing we'll ever do for British politics.

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