

The Corbyn Effect

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Why should it be that in a climate that's shifted so far to the right, that out of the morass that is contemporary Britain, there should emerge a politician who was shaped by and effectively still lives, in a world that no longer exists? It's bizarre to say the least but how to explain it?

Perhaps it's because, as Alain Badiou says, under neoliberalism, there is no politics. Hence, water can flow uphill and people can vote for Jeremy Corbyn. He exists outside politics, as an idea, as a nostalgic nod to another age. As a dream deferred. The date 1945 comes to mind. Note his slogan, 'For the many, not the few'. It could mean anything really. It's unfocused. It's totally apolitical and it fits our depoliticised times.

When there is only a single politics, it means that there is fact, no politics, because politics is always the conflict between several politics. So in opposing this political void with the unity of the mass movement, one remains trapped within that political void: that is to say, within a void of thinking, and ultimately a failed action.

You will reply, 'Well, not really - today within parliamentary democracy, there are several different politics, for there is a Left and a Right.' In truth, within the current parliamentary system, the existence of multiple different politics is a fiction. There is in reality just one politics. And this has manifestly been the case ever since the 1980s.

Having ostensibly shaken off the communist political hypothesis, capitalism quite naturally gets back to its own doctrine, which is indeed, liberalism. The communist parties everywhere have disappeared, and the socialist parties - which often identify with what they call liberal socialism - have themselves rallied to the consensus over globalised capitalism. For this reason, across the West, there is no longer anything other than a single politics; which means no politics.

Many people have now more or less clearly understood that since capitalo-parliamentarism is a single politics, it is not a politics at all. - Alain Badiou[1] (my emph. WB)

Other quotes by Corbyn, reveal his own sentimental vision of a country he imagines existed at one time or another. A land of fair play and understatement:

Heads and hearts are connected.

Let's defend the principle of a society that cares for everyone and everyone cares for everyone else.

We don't pass by on the other side. - [Jeremy Corbyn](#)

Corbyn's Phoenix-like rise signifies the last gasp of the old social democratic contract between capital and labour, when the organised working class took a little more of the wealth they created, back via the social contract, not necessarily as money but principally via the social wage; the NHS; public housing, social benefits, greater state regulation of capital, nationalisations, some progressive taxation and so on. This was the reformist mission of the Labour Party, to which Corbyn is trying to return but as a shadow of its former self. And we should not forget that whether Labour or Tory governments, the 'social wage' was actually paid for in part with the UK's colonial possessions, its people and their resources! It was a kind of state socialism at home but most definitely imperialism abroad (my own view on this is that our former Empire has poisoned us, made us complicit in the vast crimes committed in our collective name over the centuries, it explains why so-called socialists can side with Empire).

Nevertheless, that social wage was and is, critical to millions of people. It's the difference between living and surviving for perhaps 20 million people including several million children. Corbyn represents those of us who have been right royally shafted by neoliberal (read Victorian) capitalism; the former industrial workers, zero hours contracts, poor immigrants/refugees, old folks and the young. No wonder half-a-million people joined the Labour Party in the space of a couple of years. But although it's many millions of people, it's still a minority, with, as Badiou puts it, 'a middle class reserve army of the rich' in lockstep with the elites. Let's face it, two-thirds of the population are quite alright thank you very much and it seems are quite comfortable with their government butchering people in far-off lands or treating our disabled like criminals.

But could the Corbyn Effect have happened without the central role of what's inaccurately called 'social media' and the key role of Momentum and other outreach networks? Does it help explain the meteoric rise of Corbyn?

The UK is a very small country. The vast majority live in a tiny handful of cities, with the bulk of the population residing in the Southeast, with London at its centre. We live in a wired and increasingly wireless, culture. Television and now the Web mediates public life. The electronic and print media reflect the way the ruling elite sees itself and how it wants us to see them and their reality (they're obviously not interested in how we see *our* reality). In this context, it's really quite easy to reach almost the entire population and the mass media are monopolised by less than a handful of corporations – until the Web came along. Now, in theory anyway, a single individual can reach just about everyone! It's a potential game changer as they say.

The paradox is that the twenty million (or so) I mentioned earlier, may be poor (relatively) but they're all connected and most have smartphones which has made the Web portable. We are all connected and it's this connection, plus desperation, that made the rise of Jeremy Corbyn possible in such a short space of time.

There are at least two precedents that I think inform the situation, one going back to the 17th century, the '[Broadsheet](#)', made possible by another revolution, the printing press and the other, much closer to home, the Blackberry phone and all for pretty much the same reasons.

Rebellion

In 2011 a handful of the dispossessed rebelled here in London and elsewhere, triggered by

yet another murder of a black man by the police. The state's reaction was to blame Gangs and the Blackberry phone with its encrypted messaging, BBM, that according to the state, enabled them to coordinate their 'lootin' anna burnin'. Remind you of anything?

"Irresponsibility. Selfishness. Behaving as if your choices have no consequences. Children without fathers. Schools without discipline. Reward without effort. Crime without punishment. Rights without responsibilities. Communities without control. Some of the worst aspects of human nature tolerated, indulged – sometimes even incentivised – by a state and its agencies that in parts have become literally de-moralised." — David Cameron in the Guardian, 15 August 2011

My reaction at the time was, in part, this:

Two thousand people arrested and all just to make a point. Courts working around the clock to make an example of anybody who dares challenge the status quo, no matter how chaotic and self-destructive such cries of rage are. History is littered with such spontaneous rebellions, all of which are symptoms of a much deeper malaise but clearly it's a malaise that the political class do not want to confront, dare not confront, else they would be forced to deal with the conditions that they themselves have created.

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'Gang culture'. Code word for Black. And the BBC follows up its list of 'causes' with yet another parade of 'experts', this time pontificating on the alleged role of Gangs in the disturbances, with an even more outrageous list of 'reasons'. One 'expert' even suggests, I kid you not, that the Gangs waited until the riots had caught hold, before moving in for the loot. And all of it coordinated via Blackberry Messenger (BBM)! – ['The state unleashes the Dogs of Media'](#) By William Bowles, 17 August 2011.

Seven years later, for millions, conditions have gone from bad to worse. This time round it's not the Blackberry but 'social media' that's taking the blame for pretty much everything that ails us, from stalking celebrities to 'fake news'. The World Wide Web is more of a Pandora's Box than a trap.

Momentum

The people behind [Momentum](#), the online political organiser, the force behind the Corbyn Effect are sussed, media-wise. They're 'media savvy' as they say. Advertising, public relations, professional political workers, are the roots of this new kid on the block (though not new to US politics, where such tools have been in use, by the Right since the 1990s). They're also well schooled in the inner life of the Labour Party, without which you don't stand a chance!



Screenshot from Momentum website

What Momentum has shown is the power of the new interactive media to motivate and organise those previously without a voice. The technology has the potential to connect everyone to everyone else!

It's a dilemma for the ruling elite, they can't very well ban the Internet, or smartphones and tablets, or for that matter video cameras. So enter 'fake news' and corporate censorship via Facebook, Google, Twitter et al. They try to undermine the new, independent media by slandering it, blocking it, censoring it and undermining it. Enter the corporate, security state.

In the early days of the Web, the elite ridiculed it, they treated it like a joke. But when they realised just how powerful a medium it is, they tried to co-opt it. Hey presto! 'citizen journalism' was borne. Wonky videos without attribution, time or place started cropping up on BBC 'News', allegedly from the aforementioned 'citizens'. And notice, that today, no more 'citizen' videos on the BBC News, now we have the White Helmets, funded by the UK Foreign Office and USAID, producing their little dramas for the public to swallow. Because that's what they are, fiction. Propaganda, disinformation is now professionally made to look like citizen journalism, so no need any longer for the 'citizen journalists' themselves. It's literally the White Helmets Theatrical Troupe in performance.[2]

The Corbyn Effect is the fortuitous product of a confluence of events. Firstly the maturation and now ubiquity of online and interactive technologies that made it possible to give a voice to the disenfranchised millions. It gave those who had been effectively abandoned by the state a voice to propel Corbyn into the leadership of his Party, but a party that hates his guts and tried twice to get rid of him.

As they say, 'one swallow does not a summer make'. It's going to take more than the mobilised millions, firstly to elect a Labour Party headed by Corbyn, he is also going to need a transformed Parliamentary Labour Party, never mind what the undying hatred of the corporate, security state will do should he be successful. This is why Corbyn remains an 'aberration' (as do all those who came before him, e.g. Wedgwood-Benn, Neil Kinnock et al).

Underlying all this, is Corbyn's complete absence of politics and his total allegiance to the Labour Party, which means that ultimately he can't be trusted, the Party *always* comes first. That's why there are no extra-Parliamentary actions except the odd demo, when logic dictates that thousands on the streets trumps 257 neoliberals in Parliament. Sorry, 256. It's

also why Momentum, at first free of central control by the Labour Party hierarchy, is now wholly 'owned' by the Party. It's been absorbed. Now it serves new masters (perhaps it did all along, we just didn't know it).

The main man behind Momentum is professional politician, John Lansman, a long time Labour Party worker for Corbyn and also a friend of his. Lansman along with other socialists in the Labour Party hope to transform the Party into one that fights for socialism, at least I assume its socialism. At the very least they want to ameliorate Austerity, restore the NHS to working order and so on. How they intend to do this is not clear to me. People like Lansman and others, have been trying for a hundred years to 'transform' the Labour Party' (the words of William Morris are ringing in my ears, again!).

"If we ally ourselves to any of the presen[t] parties they will only use us as a cat's-paw; and on the other hand, if by any chance a Socialist slips through into Parliament, he will do so at the expense of leaving his principles behind him; he will certainly not be returned as a Socialist, but as something else; what else is hard to say. As I have written before in these columns, Parliament is going just the way we would have it go. Our masters are feeling very uncomfortable under the awkward burden of GOVERNMENT, and do not know what to do, since their sole aim is to govern from above. Do not let us help them by taking part in their game. Whatever concessions may be necessary to the progress of the Revolution can be wrung out of them at least as easily by extra-Parliamentary pressure, which can be exercised without losing one particle of those principles which are the treasure and hope of Revolutionary Socialists." — William Morris, *the Commonweal*, Volume 1, Number 10, November 1885, p. 93.[1] (My emph. WB)

The problem is that it's always been a problem without a resolution. The Labour Party came about when the trade union leaders of the '[labour aristocracy](#)' were coopted by the state and on the state's terms, something they were quite happy to do, and it's been this way ever since. You might as well try and transform the Tory Party to fight for socialism. The Labour Party is an intrinsic component of the ruling elite, the political class, is it realistic to contemplate its transformation into a party of revolution, or even meaningful reform?

This has always been the problem confronting revolutionaries. The reformists offer the working-class solutions short of revolution. Capitalism is presented as an economic system which can be reformed in the interest of workers. Parliament is presented as being capable of passing laws that could improve the lives of workers. All that is required is to gain a majority at the polls, so the emphasis remains on electioneering and canvassing. What the reformists refuse to acknowledge or say aloud, though the leadership is aware of it, are the political undercurrents in society that will frustrate their grand plans, namely that state and economic power lies with the capitalist class. – '[The Perennial Question: to Work In or Outside the Labour Party?](#)' (PDF) By Brian Green, May 2018

A Blackberry Moment(um)?

The irony (and paradox) of Corbyn's success, is that the millions Momentum mobilised to pull it off are where the real power to transform society resides, and who knows, perhaps even the Labour Party but I think the millions have been used and dumped. Used to launch (probably a reluctant) Jeremy Corbyn, near the end of his professional life, so he had

absolutely nothing to lose. And dumped because they've done their job. The local election results prove it. Where is the great Labour transformation at local level? Momentum branches? It's simply not in the interests of the Parliamentary Party to have a rival at the Constituency level and history bears this out. And the trade unions behave in the same way, unfortunately. I saw an identical process at work in South Africa in 1993-94 when I was working in the ANC election campaign.

Worse still, Constituency Labour Parties have become, once more I might add, battlegrounds between various sorts of 'lefts' and the entrenched neoliberals who run the bureaucracy and have the PLP backing them and most importantly, access to resources of all kinds, including the media. The kicker is the Rules. They wrote 'em, they know how to use 'em. The left are the 'interlopers', who try to keep up with the entrenched bureaucrats. Mostly it's a losing battle for the lefts. Enormous energy gets expended but the left still gets bulldozed and eventually expelled for one reason or another.[3]

But nevertheless, in spite of my total disbelief in the Labour Party as a vehicle for radical change, Momentum was an important development for the left, for it shows what can be done and the potential of this new medium of communication. Perhaps what the Left needs now is its very own 'Blackberry Moment'.

But first the left is going to have to get serious about socialism instead of squabbling all the time about who is the 'real revolutionary' and trying to run everybody's else's 'revolution', and take a long, hard look at itself. Right now, I don't see a single organisation on the left that really has a clue what to do. I think they all run on automatic, saying the same things, in the same way that they always have. I'm trying not to be cynical here, I'm a third gen lefty myself, but I've had to change my thinking throughout my life. Never to stand still, always to question.

The problem is that the various lefts are all led by their own professional lefties, or adhere to one or the other lefties who have made a career out of being one, mostly in academia and in journalism/publishing (the 'Gatekeepers'). As long as their outmoded theories hold sway, we're stuck with their interpretations of the world, interpretations that haven't changed in decades because they haven't changed in decades.

1945 gave us a small taste of what is really possible, a really small taste and it lasted about 30 years and degenerated over time. Given the nature of transnational capitalism, revolution here, by itself, is simply not possible. Therefore, we need to look toward a time when we can take action internationally. This requires an entirely new way of organising but we have the tools and Momentum was just the beginning.

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This article was originally published on [Investigating Imperialism](#).

Notes

1. 'Greece and the Re-invention of Politics' by Alain Badiou, pps.75-76. Verso Books, 2018
2. This is not the place to go into the history of the role of propaganda and disinformation in the preservation of capitalism but suffice to say that the modern incarnations can be traced back to the post-WWII period and the creation of 'foundations' and 'think tanks' as part of the Cold War being waged on the Soviet Union. Universities played a pivotal role in their creation and running, as did the

media/PR industry of course.

3. I'm not a fan of Ken Livingstone, or his opportunism but the hatchet job done on Livingstone by the rightwing Zionists, is sinister and fascistic (and the despicable role the BBC played in it). I don't think Livingstone went far enough in exposing the links between Fascism and Zionism in the 1930s. And have we forgotten about the links between [Israel and Apartheid South Africa](#), let alone Apartheid [South Africa's links to the German Nazis](#)? Apparently so. See Jonathan Cook's excellent [essay](#) on the subject.

Ditto the job they tried to do on Corbyn's alleged anti-semitism and no doubt it contributed to the less than spectacular performance of Labour in the local elections. If you want to know where on the political spectrum these particular Zionists stand, look to Donald Trump. The Zionists have managed to conflate Zionism with being Jewish, this is why if you attack Zionism, you are called an anti-semite. It's a sleight-of-hand. I'm Jewish, by birth (my mother was Jewish) but that's where it ends. I don't support the existence of a theocratic state called Israel, in fact, it's a settler state that needs to be dismantled and rebuilt with both Jews and Palestinians in the land of Palestine. Corbyn's 'crime' by the way, was to attend a leftie Jewish, anti-zionist meeting of some kind. For this he was forced to apologise!

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