

UK: Jeremy Corbyn Wins the Labour Leadership

By [Dr. Binoy Kampmark](#)

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Jeremy Corbyn has done it. The agitation of the Left in a deflated, and to a large extent ruined British Labour Party, raised Corbyn from the status of the rank outsider to that of leader with a mighty 59.5 percent of the vote. The Times deemed him a “veteran backroom operative” who became prominent while working for “Red” Ken Livingstone over the course of 12 years, eight of which he did so as chief of staff.

Shocked out of their nonchalance, various contenders, and former leader Ed Milliband, immediately made it clear that they would be reluctant to serve in a Corbyn ministry, shadow or otherwise. Andy Burnham, who netted a mere 19 percent of the vote, had only one tweet of any interest: “Fuck.” Yvette Cooper, another deemed “front runner” limped over the line with 17 percent.

The campaign against Corbyn has been, in certain quarters, venal. The Mail on Sunday predicted crippling, spell binding catastrophe, with a “Prime Minister Corbyn” whose 1000 days would lay waste to Britain. “£3 trillion debt. National riots. A UN airlift from No 10.”

The Tory tacticians were already gathering around the notion of Left wing “risk” and are eyeing the declining union base of the Labour Party. Defence Secretary Michael Fallon, GCHQ’s finest errand boy and rank apologist, chose to congratulate Corbyn with a statement that “Labour are now a serious risk to our nation’s security, our economy’s security and your family’s security.”

The richest comment to stem from Fallon comes from what Corbyn will supposedly do to Britain’s working class. Workers, he argues, will suffer under a Corbyn government, “racking up more debt and welfare or driving up the cost of living by printing money”.

Corbyn’s victory casts light on dramatic changes in party structure and policy. One involves the makeup of the Labour Party, which occasionally makes Corbyn sound like Podemos of Spain. “I don’t think we can go on having policy made by the leader, shadow cabinet, or parliamentary Labour party. It’s got to go much wider. Party members need to be more enfranchised.”

The effect of Corbyn’s campaign has been dramatic at the town hall level. He has spoken to packed halls across the country. Community activists have crammed in to listen in anticipation of a progressive coming. Labour membership has boomed. The so-called £3 registered voters have effectively become a new political feature of the party.

Corbyn has done something no British politician has managed in years, with the exception perhaps, of Nicola Sturgeon. “Thanks to Corbynmania,” writes Ellie Mae O’Hagan, “we now know people up and down the country will give up their evenings and weekends for politics” (*The Independent*, Sep 12).

The other feature this Corbynmania drive is the policy shift it represents within a party long bruised and emptied by the Blair modernisation program. Under Blair, the budget and the market became sacred trees in the grove. Call it market realism, or, as it might better be termed, market irrationalism.

Such a philosophy invariably prided the third way sound bite and the evangelical worship of focus groups. Blair the Witch (or Warlock) tended to linger malodorously, waiting for a Corbyn to fumigate it with conviction.

What Corbyn represents is the mainstreaming of opposition to public sector cuts. It is the reaffirmation that if a government collects taxes, it should spend it as part of its social undertaking to the electorate.

The Cameron government has been waging a remorseless battle against services in an effort to balance the books, and opposition at the public level has been noisy. Labour under Ed Miliband exhibited no such opposition, accepting the Tory line that slashing budgets was the more acceptable of economic wisdoms. A plethora of grassroots organisations took root in an effort to fill the void.

The Peoples' Assembly and UK Uncut will have much to cheer, as will economists such as Joseph Stiglitz and Paul Krugman who have long argued that scorched earth policies against public spending tends to be a suicidal way of reducing deficits. Austerity, by its very nature, shrinks all before it.

While hope tends to often be a counterfeit currency, Corbyn's victory has at least given Britain's political establishment a jolt. His tasks will be huge – regaining Labour's lost foothold in Scotland, and beating off detractors in his own party who are forming an exodus of retreaters. He also faces the diminishing influence of union membership in a party that always prided itself on those links. Critics will be trying to make sure Corbynmania doesn't assume the form of a reforming avalanche.

Dr. Binoy Kampmark was a Commonwealth Scholar at Selwyn College, Cambridge. He lectures at RMIT University, Melbourne. Email: bkampmark@gmail.com

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