

A lesson in the ruthlessness of the British ruling class

Whilst there will be no shortage of efforts to apportion blame for the electoral defeat of Labour an indisputable factor was the PLP's participation in the four year witch-hunt against Jeremy Corbyn. Symptomatic of the rage of sections of the PLP against the membership for having the audacity to elect Corbyn, was the case of Angela Eagle and the brick which was said to have been thrown through her office window, ostensibly by Corbyn supporters. On the back of this 'incident' she helped the rabid anti-Labour media to paint his supporters as thuggish bullies. "Call off the dogs", she said. The only problem was that there was no brick thrown through the window of her office, there was only a cracked window in a shared stairwell. Yet Eagle never apologised for her falsehood. She and others in the PLP gave credence to the lies of the Mail, the Sun, the Telegraph. They facilitated the witch-hunt against Corbyn.

Behind this hostility was a fundamental contradiction between the aspirations and views of the membership and the majority of the Parliamentary Party which was still gripped by the neo-liberal virus of New Labour. After all, one of the key reasons for Corbyn's victory was the outrage of members at the PLP when Harriett Harman was temporary Leader. Labour abstained on the welfare reforms, the 'hostile environment' against the poor and the disabled. Blair had adopted the Clintonite 'tough love' which 'incentivised' people who were dismissed as scroungers. The abstention was rooted in this reactionary New Labour policy. Only 40 Labour MPs voted against the reforms.

That such a weak creature as the Labour left was able to win the leadership election was a reflection of the bankruptcy of Blairism, made obvious by the global crisis of capitalism. Although it didn't receive much attention Gordon Brown's statement in his interview during the recent election campaign was significant. "The neo-liberal consensus was wrong," he said, admittedly somewhat belatedly. This consensus was the bedrock of New Labour's politics.

Faced with the ongoing global crisis, with another crash likely sooner rather than later, and deteriorating environmental conditions, the tinkering which most of the PLP seems to want, is the equivalent of playing the fiddle whilst Rome burns. Some of them, such as Gareth Thomas want "moderation, and patriotism". Others a "progressive patriotism".

Heaping all the blame on Corbyn is just a convenient excuse. **The election of Corbyn was a necessary means of beginning to break from the politics of New Labour.** Yet there was no thorough-going critique of New Labour.¹ Not long after Corbyn's first election I was at a meeting in Bracknell where John McDonnell spoke about the 'good things' Labour did in the public sector. This may have gone down well with those still attached to New Labour but it was a travesty of the truth. It was the New Labour government which opened up the NHS to the private sector, sought to eradicate council housing, promoted the growth of the private rented sector by tax breaks to buy-to-let landlords. The deregulation which was de rigueur under New Labour was one of the contributory factors to the Grenfell Fire disaster. It introduced austerity into the NHS with its £20 billion cut just before the 2010 election. The global crisis which resulted from neo-liberalism destroyed the political foundations of New Labour. That was why its supporters lost so heavily in the two leadership contests. They had no credible political perspective.

Let those nostalgic for those good old days (when the Sun supported Labour) explain why it was that after the first four years of government there was an *historically unprecedented* 12% fall in turnout at the 2001 general election, to 59.4%. Here was the

¹ See this for what appears to be the 'official' position on New Labour which has not a single criticism.
<https://labour.org.uk/about/labours-legacy/>

beginning of the 'disaffection with Westminster politics'. The scale of this fall can be measured by the fact that in the previous 21 general elections the turnout had always been over 70%. There was a widespread sentiment that it was difficult to tell the difference between the two major parties. There was a large scale exodus of Party membership because they could not stomach New Labour's neo-liberalism and the partnership with the US war machine.

A constructive critique of the leadership – liberalism in the face of a ruthless ruling class

The culpability of the PLP, however, should not stop us from a thorough-going critique of Jeremy and John McDonnell's leadership and their mistakes. This is not a holier than thou or sectarian criticism but simply the need to learn from experience.

We have just had a salutary lesson in the ruthlessness of the British ruling class, its propagandists and its hangers-on. Any lie, any calumny, however outrageous, will be used to prevent the election of a government and a movement which might threaten their power, their wealth and their privilege. There have been many historical precedents. Despite the Zinoviev letter in 1924 Labour gained an extra million votes. Churchill's preposterous assertion that Labour would introduce "some sort of Gestapo" had no influence on the outcome of the 1945 election. Today, with 24 hour media and ubiquitous social media, lies have better prospects of being taken as good coin. The witch-hunt against Corbyn has been withering and constant, to an unprecedented degree.

However, the key factor in Labour's electoral failure is the one-sided class war we have suffered for 40 years since the watershed year of 1979. *Jeremy's injunction of "a kinder, gentler politics" in the face of this was pure small l liberalism.* Although he can be very dogged in defending principles that he holds dear he is an instinctive conciliator. But *you cannot conciliate with people who are out to destroy you.* That was what the worst sections of the PLP wanted to do. They collaborated with the Tory media to keep Corbyn out of Downing Street. 'Labour cannot win under Corbyn' became a self-fulfilling prophecy. Many of them did not want Labour to win under Corbyn.

Jeremy's instinctive conciliatory nature was expressed even after the defeat of the attempted coup against him. To take one example, he gave John Healey, one of the coup supporters, his job back even though he was the main obstacle to radicalising Labour's housing policy. And still members of the Shadow Cabinet were leaking to the press and undermining Corbyn. Deputy Leader Tom Watson was allowed to get away with the most outrageous behaviour without serious challenge.

Momentum and 'Corbynism'

There were problems from the very beginning of 'Corbynism'. The Labour Representation Committee, of which John McDonnell was the chair, was effectively frozen out the leadership campaign and Jeremy and John plumped for John Lansman as their main lieutenant. A campaign to democratise the Labour Party therefore rested on a movement, Momentum, which was undemocratic; set up as a company owned by John Lansman. Later on Lansman would change its constitution by fiat. **You cannot democratise the Labour Party whilst using undemocratic methods yourself.** Symptomatic of Lansman's approach was the bureaucratic attempt to remove Watson just before the general election by getting rid of the position of Deputy Leader. As an act of stupidity it has rarely been surpassed. The timing was appalling but in any case it was the action of a 'machine man' who attempted to tackle a political problem – the treachery of Watson – by a machine manoeuvre rather than openly challenging his collaboration with the anti-Labour media; something which should have been done a long time before that.

In the early days John McDonnell told us that he and Jeremy would come under enormous pressure and that we would have to provide a counter-pressure. However, he and Jeremy were effectively quarantined. It was impossible to get to them, surrounded as they were by 'advisers' who, to my knowledge, had little experience in the working class movement, certainly at the grassroots level. Jeremy and John acquiesced at this state of affairs. *They chose who they spoke to and who they didn't.*

Anti-Semitism, real and counterfeit

The issue of anti-Semitism was badly mishandled. Jeremy and John, by the way they dealt with it, *gave credence to the idea that there was a major problem with anti-Semitism in the Party.* Instead of saying let's examine the evidence of the extent of [anti-semitism, real and counterfeit](#), we heard generalities about opposing anti-Semitism. What has been forgotten was that when the issue first arose the General Secretary was McNichol, who would be one of the key organisers of the attempted coup to oust Corbyn, together with Watson. *There was undoubtedly a factional purpose behind this assault*, reflected by the fact that Margaret Hodge, sent in hundreds of complaints about online behaviour, the majority of which² were against people who weren't actually Labour Party members. Instead of being openly transparent and publishing the facts – the number of complaints, how many were found to be true, how many were vexatious, how many were expelled, or warned – the issue was allowed to fester when McNichol was the General Secretary, precisely because it was a useful weapon against Corbyn.

There is, of course, no place for anti-semites in the Labour Party, but opponents of the Israeli state were slandered as anti-semites. The sharpest point of this dispute was between Jewish members of the Party, Zionists and anti-or-non-Zionists. The initial wave of complaints included Jewish members accusing other Jewish members of being anti-Semitic. One example was Glen Secker, Secretary of the Jewish Socialist Group. Even when no case was found in relation to the accusation, there was no apology from McNichol's apparatus, and *no action was taken against the vexatious claimant.* There were other examples. When Jenny Formby took over, statistics were published but by then they weren't believed and they were not detailed enough. Even the latest statistics, recently published, provide only numbers without any indication as to what members have done to merit expulsion or sanction. Without that information then the members cannot judge whether the apparatus has acted fairly nor hold them to account.

The political purpose of the witch-hunt against Jewish members by Jewish members was to outlaw all but the mildest criticisms of Israel. The BDS campaign and deeming Israel to be a racist state were denounced as anti-Semitic. *People were denounced for their political views not for anything they had done.* The Jewish Labour Movement (a Labour Party affiliate), in particular, launched a war against other Jewish members, as well as Corbyn, ending up with a policy of *opposing the election of a Labour government so long as Corbyn was leader.* This was clear grounds for disaffiliation, but nothing will be done because it would be denounced as anti-Semitism. Imagine if the left had opposed the election of a Blair government? They would have been swiftly shown the door. Indeed the RMT was disaffiliated for supporting Scottish Socialist Party candidates. The JSM was in breach of party rules which demand support of all Labour candidates but no action has been taken nor even criticism made.

During the election campaign the very people who used the issue as a means of preventing the election of Labour, launched an orchestrated campaign, culminating in the propaganda of the most rabid ex-Labour MPs, Austin and Woodcock, assisted by Rabbi Mervis.

Politically, Jeremy and John's failure to identify the fact that there was a political aspect

² She sent in 200 complaints against 111 people of whom 91 were not Party members.

of this campaign, designed to make anti-Zionism persona non grata, meant *they handed the initiative to those who were trying to bring them down*. Whilst there was all manner of offensive rubbish published on social media, at the root of the dispute were conflicting views about the nature of the Israeli state.

Ironically, the very author of the IHRA working definition of anti-semitism, Kenneth Stern has said that anti-semitism has been weaponised by right wing Jews to stop debate on Israel. This opinion, of course, has been sufficient reason for Labour members to be expelled.

During the general election campaign the Jewish Chronicle was found guilty of [a breach of press standards](#) in relation to its reporting of events in the Liverpool Riverside Labour Party. It lied about what happened there – the myth of the local MP being “driven out of the Labour Party” - and against an individual member, Audrey White. Needless to say this did not receive much coverage in the press.

When the three Jewish publications issued their joint statement saying that the election of a Corbyn government was an “existential threat” to British Jews, Watson and co did not even object to such ridiculous hyperbole. Their silence in the face of a comment which implied that Jews would not be able to exist in Britain (was Corbyn going to set up concentration camps?) gave credence to such hysteria. When the Jewish Labour movement said they would not support a Labour government so long as Corbyn was leader, Watson and co remained silent.

Recently Barnet Momentum managed to get hold of a video from the Campaign Against Anti-Semitism which shows a gloating Joe Glasman drunk with joy at having 'killed the beast' (Corbyn). It expresses a chilling Jewish nationalism which suggests that England's green and pleasant land has been restored by putting Johnson back into Downing Street. Judge for yourself [here](#) .

One of the reasons why supporters of the Israeli state have been able to present political criticism has somehow unfair on Israel, treating it differently to other countries, has been the absence of any campaigning by Labour in support of those struggling against the theocratic or military regimes in the Middle East. This has facilitated the Israeli state's contrast of itself as “the only democracy in the Middle East”, with the autocratic and dictatorial regimes in other countries. Of course, Israel did nothing to support the democratic struggles of the Arab spring and has quite happily had friendly relations with the some of the regimes such as that of Egypt.

Corbyn's unpopularity

We are told that Corbyn was “an issue on the doorstep”. Undoubtedly he was unpopular in some quarters. Yet they don't follow on by asking why was that? Was it all his fault? Much of the material in the media combined the slanderous (the Czech agent) with the ridiculous (his non-existent intention to close down the army). However, what was critical in creating this response on the doorstep was the campaign against Corbyn from within the PLP, supported by Watson, who spared no effort in collaborating with the Tory media. Without any mandate whatsoever, he was regularly *promoting his own policy against that agreed by the Party*. Jeremy's instinct was to do nothing to lead to a blow up. Allowing Watson to behave as he did, however, meant that he came across as a weak Leader. Frankly, he should have demanded Watson's resignation for his undemocratic behaviour. He and others were organising what was in effect a civil war against Corbyn and the elected leadership bodies. MPs like Ian Austin and John Woodcock were saying in the House of Commons that Corbyn was 'unfit to be Prime Minister' and generally abusing him (e.g. in defence of the Iraq war). *They should have had the whip taken off them* but nothing was done against their treacherous behaviour which showed contempt for the membership. After all, if Labour MPs were seen to not support their leader and denounce him as a

“terrorist supporter”, why would you expect people to vote for Labour and put him in Downing Street? Yet Jeremy and the NEC did nothing to challenge this. Its repetition over time had an impact. We will never know now but the media witch-hunt may not have had the impact it did but for the fact that sections of the PLP were feeding it. It is an old cliché that voters don't vote for divided parties.

The Brexit conundrum

In relation to Brexit Corbyn is now being damned from both sides: for not supporting Brexit and not allowing Labour to become a Remain party. The problem with the compromise position was that *it alienated both those who wanted to leave and those who wanted to remain*; the leavers, because staying in a/the customs union was being seen as 'EU lite' (in Michael Gove's words) and the remainers because it proposed giving another opportunity to leavers to vote to depart. According to the Ashcroft poll data Labour lost 11% of their voters in areas which voted leave and 6% in those which voted remain. Emily Thornbury's criticism that we should have had a referendum before the election is spurious because there was no way that a referendum would have been conceded by the Tories.

Jeremy's liberal streak was expressed in the ludicrous idea that Labour wanted to “bring the country together” as if it had been 'together' before the referendum and it was possible (and desirable) to unify the classes. In any case the message was not well received because 'the country' did not want to be brought together, it wanted its (opposite) way.

The anti-austerity party?

For all the talk of Labour being an “anti-austerity party”, in practice Labour councils were implementing it. 'Sorry, it's not us, it's the Tories fault', was not well received by the victims of austerity. Perhaps the key point was when Jeremy and John sent the letter to Labour local authorities telling them to set legal budgets. Whilst there is no simple answer to the difficult circumstances councils face (they have a legal obligation to produce a balanced budget), the fact is that *there was no effort to organise a national campaign* bringing together councils, unions and community groups, to demand funding based on social needs. The Tories had ended the link between funding and an annual assessment of needs in 2013.

For many years Labour councils, most of them supportive of New Labour's neo-liberalism (e.g. huge numbers of them transferred their housing stock to housing associations) acted not as representatives of the working class in their area but as administrators of central government decisions. It was no surprise therefore, that after the PLP, Labour councillors had the lowest level of support for Corbyn in the leadership elections. In reality Labour was an anti-austerity party in name only.

Scotland

In relation to Scotland, Jeremy must take responsibility because Labour was pursuing the line that the SNP was some sort of 'Tartan Tory Party'. Accusing the SNP of implementing austerity when Labour councils were doing the same was not exactly a convincing argument. Labour under his leadership took no account of the fact that *New Labour had destroyed Labour's electoral base*. Historically, Labour had been the Party of the establishment in Scotland. It had treated its working class base as electoral fodder. The SNP was to the left of New Labour, not just in its rhetoric but in some of the things it did in government. It ended Right to Buy, prevented the market being introduced into the NHS, opposed tuition fees, ended prescription charges. The last straw, in terms of its electoral consequences, was Labour's joint campaign with the Tories in the independence

referendum, 'in defence of the Union'.

There were grounds for Labour working with the SNP against the Tories in Westminster but instead of working with them where they could find agreement, Labour's unrealistic election campaign was based on the unrealistic idea that they could win a majority in Scotland. Whilst the SNP is certainly no socialist Party, the SNP government was more social democratic than New Labour. That's one of the reasons why there was little 'Corbyn bounce' in Scotland, winning only five more seats in 2017. It was no wonder that Labour lost 200,000 votes in Scotland in the 2019 general election.

Labour should now support the right of the Scottish people to self-determination. It should not line up with Johnson in opposition to a referendum. It would be perfectly principled to support a referendum yet oppose independence. Lining up with the Tories on this, though, would deepen its decline.

The worst defeat since 1935?

Labour lost 2.58 million votes in 2019 compared to 2017. It has been described as the worst defeat since 1935, the Party is facing "oblivion" and so on. In terms of the number of seats Labour won, it was the worst result since 1935. But it still received over 10 million votes, more than under Miliband or Gordon Brown (Labour received 8.6 million votes at the fag end of the Blair/Brown incumbency). Obviously the worst feature was the loss of seats in the so-called "Labour heartlands". What happened in some of these places, though not universally, was the **collapse** of the Labour vote; the result of abstentions, voting for the Tories, or Brexit Party, and to a lesser extent the Libdems and the Green. See the Appendix for some stats on the seats that the Tories took from Labour.

To large extent the loss of seats was a direct result of the decision of the Brexit Party to act as an auxiliary for the Tories. They decided to withdraw from Tory seats which might have let Labour win some more and concentrate all their fire on Labour. As I have explained [elsewhere](#) in 18 of the 54 seats³ lost, the Brexit Party vote was higher than the majority the Tories won the seats by.

Working class people voting for the Tories is hardly a new phenomenon. Historically between a quarter and a third have voted for them at various times. What was new about this was that some of them appeared to vote for them for the first time and Labour lost seats that it had not lost for a long time. Even in the 203 seats it held onto, its vote declined considerably – 916,000 less than in 2017.

Reasons for the defeat

So why did Labour lose the general election badly after the relative advance in 2017 when it gained 3.5 million votes on 2015?

- The PLP gave credence to the witch-hunt against Corbyn in the media. Corbyn was perceived as a weak leader. By allowing the initiative to rest with those in the PLP who wanted to destroy him (even at the cost of losing an election), he could not challenge that perception.
- The Brexit policy was untenable, alienating people on both sides of the divide. Corbyn declaring himself 'neutral' (an 'honest broker') added fuel to the fire.
- There were, of course, more long-term reasons for a collapse of Labour's vote in many areas which voted heavily for leave. There has been a big decline in class consciousness. It's not that people don't think of themselves as being working class, so much as they do not consider themselves as being part of a collective; a social

³ Strictly speaking they lost less than this because of the departure of Chukka Umuna etc meant that Labour did not hold these seats at the time of the General Election.

group with interests in common. Obviously this is the result of the defeats we suffered from the 1980s onwards. Union membership has more than halved. Many younger people have never experienced a union in a workplace. They have to fend for themselves as best they can, as individuals. Even where there are organised unions, many of the members have joined as an 'insurance policy'. They don't conceive of themselves as active members who stick together for their common interests. They are in the union so that if they have an individual problem they can have some help. What help they get, of course, is dependent on the volunteer lay organisation in the workplace. Full-time officials cannot possibly handle the weight of individual members' cases.

- There has been a decline of historical memory which was kept alive by generations of activists who passed on their experience to their children and their workmates. Our sense of our collective power was the result of improving our material conditions through practical action and solidarity. The Heath government, it should be remembered, called an election in 1974 on the basis of 'who rules, the government or the trades unions?' and he lost.
- For all the talk about a new radical politics the election campaign was fairly standard. Vote Labour and you will get x amount a year was a traditional appeal to self-interest. Policies were announced with unseemly regularity giving the impression of improvisation which was a desperate attempt to find something to shift the polls.
- Despite the fact that the housing crisis impacts not only on those directly effected, but parents and grand-parents concerned at the circumstances of their children and grand children, Labour's housing policy was not presented as a key one. In fact a housing policy document was not issued until the day before the election!
- Despite the inclusion of policies of nationalisation there was no overarching theme of ending the market rip-off which has been suffered since Thatcher's privatisation of the public utilities and council housing. Social needs could have been counterposed to profiteering. Thatcher famously talked of driving back the boundaries of the state, Labour should have spoken of driving back the boundaries of the market.

Crisis of social democracy

What does Labour do now? What will its orientation be? What governmental programme does it need? Finding a solution based simply on electoral tactics, presentation of a saleable leader, 'acceptable' to the electorate, is guaranteed to fail. Critics of Corbyn say that the left was not interested in winning power. That's not true. What does Labour want power for? One way of preventing the media attacking them is for it to adopt an approach which is acceptable to the media tycoons. After all, this was what New Labour did. Who can forget the picture of Tony Blair holding a copy of the Sun with its headline, "The Sun supports Tony Blair".

The crisis of the Labour Party can only be fully understood in its historic and global context. When the post-war Bretton Woods system was abandoned in 1971, the global architecture of capitalism was fundamentally altered. Liberalisation (the abandoning of the international rules adopted at Bretton Woods) took place, allowing free movement of capital. Social democratic parties abandoned their reformist programmes and implemented neo-liberal policies, including wholesale privatisation. New Labour was no innovation. It merely adopted a philosophy and practice which had already been implemented in France, Germany, Spain, Australia and New Zealand by the social democratic parties there. In Britain the phenomenon was simply delayed by the 18 years in government of the Tories.

After the global crash of 2008-9 many social democratic parties adopted austerity and

have been severely punished electorally for it, with historically unprecedented decline of their electoral support. Labour's electoral advance in 2017, when it gained 3.5 million votes was an exception.

What has kept the Labour Party together as a 'broad church' for so long was the absence of a proportional voting system. Elsewhere, there have been splits from social democracy during its neo-liberal phase, and other organisations have grown and sometimes participated in governments. Where PR has been introduced this has been reflected in a break of sections of the electoral base of social democracy to other left wing parties. In Scotland that was first expressed in the election of six Scottish Socialist Party members to the Scottish Parliament. The collapse of the SSP, the reasons for which are beyond the scope of this article, opened the way for the advance of the SNP which increasingly won over ex-Labour voters.

In Greece, the historic social democratic party, PASOK, was virtually wiped out as a result of its involvement in austerity governments, and Syriza was the electoral expression of the attempt of the working class to put in power a government which would serve its interests. The political collapse of Syriza and its adoption of an austerity programme which it had opposed was the result of a political and economic campaign of the EU leaders to prevent the success of a left wing government. What they were really worried about was an example which might spread.

What happened to Syriza was a marker of what a Corbyn government would face. The ruling class would either have tried to neuter such a government or destroy it. As it happened its campaign designed to stop Corbyn getting into Downing Street was a great success. Their efforts were inevitable since any potential government which threatened their wealth, their power and their privilege, could expect the same.

First past the post or PR?

The two party system in Britain has rested on the First Past The Post system. The idea of Labour being 'a broad church' is rooted in it. Labour could always realistically say it was the only governmental alternative to the Tories. Even the SDP/Alliance which was the most successful attempt to replace Labour (only 2% behind them in the 1983 general election) failed to make an electoral breakthrough because of FPTP.

This has encouraged a kind of Labour Party arrogance which dismisses all other parties even those with which there may be a lot of agreement on policy and political programme, such as the Green Party. Practically, it is difficult to see how Labour could win a Parliamentary majority today, especially given its collapse in Scotland. Moreover, it faces a task not just of winning a majority within the UK Parliament but of *needing to win a majority in English seats*. The introduction of English Laws for English Votes, on issues which only relate to England, makes Labour's task even more difficult. If it won a majority in the UK Parliament but failed to win one on English seats it would be unable to implement its manifesto. That would be likely to produce a parliamentary stasis creating a constitutional crisis.

In the new Parliament today, in English constituencies, Labour has only 180 seats compared to the 345 of the Tories (3.5 million less votes). It would have to take 85 seats off of the Tories to gain a small majority in English seats; a tall order.

Labour should campaign for electoral reform; for proportional representation. It should do so not just for pragmatic reasons or the difficulties of its electoral challenge, but *because First Past the Post is undemocratic*. It provides the winning Party with a Parliamentary majority which has no relationship with the votes they received. In many areas it has created permanent seats for one Party or another; permanent administrations in local government. *This is a corrupting influence*. The [Poulson/T.Dan Smith affair](#), associated with local council building, was the classic example. It is also corrupting in the

sense that *semi-permanent one party states* at the local level make for complacent administrations which take their electors for granted. The alienation of much of Labour's electoral base has been the result of the way that some of these semi-permanent Labour councils have acted.

The classic left argument against PR was that it would prevent a majority Labour government being elected. This was no reason to support an undemocratic system, but in any case, the two Party system has served as a drag on the radicalism of previous Labour governments. Today, the two Party system is dead. The Scottish and Welsh assemblies and the introduction of PR there killed it. It will not be revived.

The other argument is that PR leads to coalitions becoming the norm. There is nothing in principal wrong with coalitions, it depends on who they are with and what their programmes are. The destruction of the post-war gains of the working class which had been introduced by reforming Labour governments underlines the fact that a single Party is no guarantee of preserving social gains it introduces.

Electoralism

One of the defining features of social democracy has been its electoralism. Power has been conceived as simply electing a government. Yet faced with the ruthlessness of the ruling class, any attempt to challenge their wealth, power, and privilege, cannot succeed without building the power of the working class and its organisations, in work and in its communities. Given that we have been on the receiving end of a one sided class war for 40 years, *we face the need to rebuild working class organisation, be it trades unions, tenant or community groups*. Any attempt to challenge the entrenched wealth and power of Britain's ruling class needs a powerful mass movement to support it against attempts to bring it down.

The Labour Party was founded by the trades unions as a means of enacting legislation to defend their members against the employer and state assault on their rights and their exploitation in the workplace. It was considered to be a working class party even if it was an alliance between working class and middle class members. Blair changed that when he transformed it into a neo-liberal party. He famously said that the founding of Labour had been a historic mistake which had "split the progressives"⁴. The leader of the Labour Party believed it should never have been founded! If he was unable to achieve what he wanted, a fusion with the Liberals, he managed to destroy the electoral base of Labour and drove out the majority of the membership who could not stomach its neo-liberalism and the alliance with the American ruling class which gave us the Iraq war. The large scale exodus of members in disgust at New Labour led many local parties to abandon their branch/ward structure and move to all member meetings. Those members who did not attend these meetings had no organic connection to the Party.

A 'social movement'

Under Corbyn there was much talk about Labour building a 'social movement'. Community organisers were hired and a series of meetings were organised. The main flaw in this was that it was done with electoral advantage in mind. In Swindon the first of these meetings was a wasted opportunity. Instead of a discussion with community activists we had a

4 In a speech in 1998 Blair said: The Third Way is not an attempt to split the difference between right and left. It is about traditional values in a changed world. And it draws vitality from uniting the two great streams of left-of-centre thought - democratic socialism and liberalism - whose divorce this century did so much to weaken progressive politics across the West. Liberals asserted the primacy of individual liberty in the market economy; social democrats promoted social justice with the state as its main agent. There is no necessary conflict between the two, accepting as we now do that state power is one means to achieve our goals, but not the only one and emphatically not an end in itself.

meeting which was controlled and the speakers chosen by the organiser.

The struggles of the working class and trades unions have always extended beyond the workplace. Trades unions activists were often the backbone of tenant and community organisations. During the First World War it was the rent strikes of working class women and the threat of supportive strike action by trades unions which made the government introduce a rent freeze. This action also was instrumental in the first large scale council house building programme after the war, which was designed to mitigate against the prospects of a post-war radicalisation.

Working class communities have usually got the short end of the stick. They have had to fight for facilities and funding which is more readily available for more well-heeled areas.

Probably two of the most positive phenomenon over the past few years have been

- the growth of [ACORN](#) and other tenant/community unions which have succeeded in building collective tenant action. They have had success in tackling landlords and poor living conditions and raising the profile of housing politically on the national level. That is why, for instance, the government has committed to ending Section 21 'no fault' evictions from the private rented sector. ACORN also strives to build the collective power of working class communities.
- The success of some small independent unions in organising, for instance, cleaners, often migrant workers, winning the living wage and unionisation. These have been considered to be difficult to organise workers. They have shown what the major unions might do if they organised the most exploited workers. These successes have been based on collective organisation in which the members are involved rather than passive subs payers. On a small scale it has shown the possibility of struggles which can facilitate the rebirth of working class collectivism.

Instead of passively looking towards a future Labour government to do good deeds for us, *we need to build our collective strength and fighting capacity*. The electoral prospects of Labour will be enhanced by the rebuilding of a working class movement and class consciousness. A sense of powerlessness, the result of defeats and weak organisation, is a drag on its electoral prospects.

Patriotism and our glorious past

The appeal to patriotism exemplified by the article by MP Pat McFadden in the Observer suggests that Corbyn was unpopular because of his 'world view', hostile to 'the west'. Historically, Labour had an 'Atlanticist' position, reflected in their support for the 'special relationship' with the USA. During the 2nd world war and the cold war this alliance was presented as defending the 'free world'. This myth persists to this day. Yet the camp of the 'free world' included the British empire, what remained of it, and the apartheid system in the USA. Of course, the Russian regime, with its gulag, was no friend of the working class, but the alliance was fraudulent because the US regime's idea of 'freedom' included vehement and violent opposition to democracy where it conflicted with US interests. And Britain connived with some of this, for instance in relation to Iran, where support for the dictatorial regime of the Shah opened the way to the theocratic dictatorship of Khomeini and the Islamic republic. Britain supported the 1953 coup against the government of Mossadeq because it wanted to keep 'its' oil in Iran. The Iranian government had nationalised it.

The Atlee government's domestic programme was hampered by its decision to support the Korean War and to launch a rearmament programme. The Wilson government which, although it would not commit to troops, supported America's war in Vietnam and in a case which has recently been in the courts, emptied the Chagos islands of its population to

facilitate a US base; one of the worst stains on Labour's record. The attempt to maintain Britain as a "global power" would lead to the debacle of Suez and much later, Iraq.

Rebecca Long Bailey, in her Guardian article, somewhat confusingly wrote of "progressive patriotism" in the context of the support of British workers for the boycott of the US southern states during the civil war. In fact it was an example of [selfless working class solidarity](#). A more recent example was the boycott of Chile by Scottish workers, recorded in the film [Nae Pasaran](#). Any socialist policy needs to be based on working class internationalism; direct solidarity between workers in different countries and support for democratic struggles. Diplomacy or 'strategic interests' are based on the idea of the 'national interest. We need to support democratic struggles be they in the USA, Russia, Iran, Saudi Arabia or Israel. Our enemy's enemy is not our friend. The USA is not our 'ally'. Its rulers never did anything which wasn't rooted in self-interest and the national arrogance of an imperial power. Even at the end of the Second World War it was quick to abandon support for Britain despite the fact that the war had exhausted its resources. The USA remains an imperial power which seeks to impose its interests on the world, be it with Obama or Trump in the White House.

What next?

Obviously the election of Leader and Deputy Leader will have a big influence on the direction of the Party. However, whoever is elected, there will be pressure to shift the direction of the Party, to shift it rightwards. Even the candidate labeled as 'continuity Corbyn' has said she would press that nuclear button if necessary (commit mass murder - "if you've got a deterrent you have to be prepared to use it") and sign up to the Board of Deputies ultimatum (its [10 Pledges](#)). There will undoubtedly be a battle to defend some of the policy advances won over the last few years. Yet the key question in terms of the evolution of the Labour Party is will it mobilise opposition to the Tory government? Jeremy Corbyn has said that Labour is the resistance to this government, but it failed to build any resistance under the previous government, especially in the local government sphere.

With no prospect of a Labour government and a workable majority for the Tories in Parliament, Labour cannot defeat the government in Parliament. If it continues to just function as an electoral machine it will not succeed in shifting the balance of forces and opinion in the country. Despite all the talk of the Tories turning into "the party of the working class" it remains a Party which supports an economic system based on the exploitation of labour.

Whoever is elected Leader there needs to be a thorough-going discussion about the strategy and aims of the Labour Party in the global context. We face an unprecedented crisis of capitalism on a world scale combined with the environmental crisis which is worsening the conditions of life. Social democratic tinkering cannot address these issues. Rebuilding working class organisation is critical if we are to break out of the cycle of defeats.

Labour vote in seats lost	Tory majority	Labour + or -	Con + or -	Brexit	Greens + or -	Lds + or -	Turnout
Ashfield	5733	-9314	-1613	2501	276	136	-1.40%
Barrow	5789	-4505	1493	1335	328	747	-2.90%
Bassetlaw	14013	-13402	5463	5366		1182	-3.00%
Birmingham Northfield	1640	-5279	1028	1655	90	1004	-2.80%
Bishop Auckland	7962	-4703	761	2500		957	1.80%
Blackpool South	3690	-5004	1189	2009	222	374	-3.00%
Blyth Valley	712	-7042	1585	3394	228	204	-3.60%
Bolsover	5299	-7661	2926	4151	758	387	-2.20%
Bolton NE	378	-3489	2926	1880	332	531	-2.50%
Bridgend	1157	-4877	980	1811	815	1449	-2.80%
Burnley	1352	-4464	3241	3362	278	-2545	-1.70%
Bury North	5	-4128	352	1240	802	672	-2.80%
Bury South	402	-5533	834	1672	848	1250	-3.30%
Colne Valley	5107	-4439	1579	3815	176	1321	0.80%
Clwyd South	1239	-4019	1576	1468		765	-2.40%
Crewe	8508	-5732	3124	1390	975	1284	-2.50%
Darlington	3294	-4994	1500	1544	533	1066	-2.00%
Delyn	865	-4782	423	1971		1315	-2.50%
Derby North	2460	-4903	-348	1908	1046	1188	-5.40%
Dewsbury	1561	-4194	686	1874	36	1192	-0.10%
Don Valley	3640	-8372	427	6247	872	1051	-1.90%
Dudley North	11533	-6489	5067		499	970	-3.50%
Durham NW	1144	-6462	3474	3193	643	-567	-0.60%
Gedling	679	-4794	579	1820	582	1227	-2.60%
Great Grimsby	7331	-6726	3170	2378	514	116	-3.80%
Heywood & Middleton	663	-6788	1492	3952	1220	986	-3.20%
High Peak	590	-2499	413	1177	1148	51	-0.70%
Hyndburn	2951	-6506	2260	2156	845	402	-3.20%
Ipswich	5479	-4751	1299	1432	443	1245	-1.80%
Keighley	2218	-986	1481	850		1347	-0.10%
Kensington	150	279	455	384	384	4588	3.90%
Leigh	1965	-7046	4473	3161		1301	-0.80%
Lincoln	3514	-2580	2472	1079	612	958	-1.10%
Newcastle Under Lyme	7446	-5085	2391	1921	933	737	-1.20%
Peniston & Stocksbridge	7210	-6329	2203	4300	3012		0.00%
Peterborough	2580	-3196	-9	2127	728	837	-0.90%
Redcar	3527	-8339	4673	2915	491	-831	-1.70%
Rother Valley	6318	-8169	2041	6264	350	1398	-0.70%
Scunthorpe	6451	-7061	2821	2044	670	321	-4.40%
Sedgefield	4513	-7106	3466	3519	308	1158	-0.50%
Stockton South	5260	-3598	2550	2196		1437	0.10%
Stoke on Trent Central	670	-3196	1371	1691	431	436	-0.40%
Stoke on Trent North	6286	-6584	1061	2374	-177	352	-10.80%
Stroud	3840	-2252	2275	1085	3541		-1.00%
Vale of Clewyd	1827	-3800	226	1477		805	-2.30%
Wakefield	3358	-5062	472	2725		829	-1.60%
Warrington South	2010	-3817	742	1635		1393	-0.40%
West Bromwich East	1593	-7453	1853	1475	94	688	-3.30%
West Bromwich West	3799	-5169	3090	1841	341	582	-1.40%
Wolverhampton NE	4080	-5640	3027	1354	121	390	-4.60%
Wolverhampton SW	1661	-2696	1150	1028		1257	-3.10%
Workington	4176	-5080	3096	1749	596	398	-1.40%
Wrexham	2131	-1954	-122	1222	445	582	-2.90%
Ynys Mon	1968	-2684	643	2184		-479	-0.20%
		-280454	95787	121801	27389	40444	
54		Average	Average	Average	Average	Average	
Increase/decrease		-5177	1780	2224	652	778	