

# The political issues posed by Corbyn's election as UK Labour Party leader

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The election of Jeremy Corbyn as leader of the British Labour Party is an indication of enormous social anger and disgust with the rotten state of British society. Only someone without a shred of conscience, or with considerable reserves of personal wealth, could fail to solidarise himself with such sentiments.

The political legacy of Margaret Thatcher and Tony Blair is one of financial parasitism and criminality on the part of Britain's upper echelons both at home and abroad, and deepening social misery for everyone else.

But there are principled considerations that must govern political analysis. And while Corbyn is the initial beneficiary of a significant shift in the political climate, he and the party he now leads cannot escape responsibility for the present state of affairs, much less provide the means for changing it.

In evaluating the outcome of the leadership election, several interrelated factors must be taken into account. The received wisdom following Labour's crushing defeat in the May general election was that it had lost because its "austerity-lite" agenda was at odds with a public consensus in support of even greater spending cuts, more anti-immigrant measures and a rise in military spending.

The leadership race was intended to seal a further shift of the Labour Party to the right, as underscored by acting leader Harriet Harman's insistence that Labour MPs abstain on the Conservative Party government's Welfare Bill, which will further impoverish millions. Instead, the contest opened a fissure just wide enough to give an inkling of the hostility within the working class and sections of the middle class to such measures, disrupting the original plan.

Veteran "left" Labour MP Corbyn, who stood on an anti-austerity ticket, was able to secure 59.5 percent of the vote, more than the combined total of his three

opponents—Andy Burnham (19 percent), Yvette Cooper (17 percent) and Liz Kendall (4.5 percent).

This was despite, or, more accurately, in part because of repeated interventions by Tony Blair to urge a continuation of his "legacy." His interjections had the effect of ensuring a humiliating rout for Kendall, the most Blairite contender. The lack of a substantial constituency for New Labour's right-wing nostrums even within the shrunken shell of the Labour Party is a reflection of the state of class relations more broadly.

But this is not merely a British phenomenon. The world-changing implications of the 2008 financial crash are everywhere breaking through the putrefied crust of official politics. A deepening general crisis of world capitalism—economic, social, geo-political—is destabilising the traditional mechanisms of rule, fuelling social and political discontent and throwing bourgeois politics into a state of upheaval and flux.

Seeking to regain its political footing, the bourgeoisie is attempting to effect a political readjustment that will prevent an increasingly restive working class from breaking out of its control and mounting a serious challenge to its rule. This accounts on the one hand for the elevation of fascistic and xenophobic forces such as the National Front in France, and, on the other, the toying with "left" forces such as Syriza in Greece, Bernie Sanders in the US and Corbyn in Britain.

In evaluating Corbyn's victory, some commentators are pondering, in the words of former *Telegraph* editor Charles Moore, the "next jolt to the system" that could create "an electoral market for the... bearded Bourbon of Bolshevism." The *Guardian's* Andrew Sparrow opines that the "by no means unthinkable" eruption of "some sort of economic catastrophe... could lead to Corbyn-led Labour defying the pundits and taking power in the manner of Syriza in Greece."

Working people must draw a sharp warning from such calculations. The lessons of Syriza's abject capitulation in Greece must be understood, so that workers are not blindsided by the manoeuvres, compromises and betrayals that will inevitably follow Corbyn's victory.

If some in the political establishment and the media now speak with horror of an electoral "earthquake" that could change the political landscape in Britain, it is not Corbyn that makes them nervous, but the mass movement that is developing and which they fear he will not be able to contain.

Corbyn's own history is steeped in opportunist petty-bourgeois politics. For all his votes against aspects of Labour policy, he has been a loyal defender of the party throughout his 32 years on Labour's backbenches.

No one can seriously propose that this party—which, in its politics and organisation and the social composition of its apparatus, is Tory in all but name—can be transformed into an instrument of working class struggle. The British Labour Party did not begin with Blair. It is a bourgeois party of more than a century's standing and a tried and tested instrument of British imperialism and its state machine. Whether led by Clement Attlee, James Callaghan or Jeremy Corbyn, its essence remains unaltered.

From this standpoint, Corbyn's insistence in the aftermath of the election that party unity matters above all else is a declaration of solidarity with an organisation that has proven itself, time and again, to be the principal political opponent of socialism in Britain.

So too are the pledges of fidelity to a Corbyn-led Labour Party made immediately after the vote by British pseudo-left groups such as the Socialist Workers Party and the Socialist Party. Fresh from their role in facilitating and then covering for the betrayal by Syriza in Greece, they are now preparing a new betrayal under the guise of connecting with the "grassroots," "extra-parliamentary" movement they claim must be spearheaded by the new Labour leader.

In point of fact, to the extent that Corbyn's election is a reflection of widespread social outrage, it refutes the pseudo-left's insistence that it is not possible to build a revolutionary alternative.

More fundamentally, the problem confronted by the working class is not just the limitations of Corbyn or the Labour Party. Underlying this is the reality of

existing social relations.

Can anyone seriously argue—especially after the events in Greece—that a redistribution of wealth can be effected apart from a massive social struggle by the working class to break the stranglehold of the financial elite over economic, social and political life? The statements of Blair and his political ilk in recent weeks are only a pale expression of the ferocious resistance of the ruling class to any change in policy.

The critical factor is the development of a genuinely independent movement of the working class. This is fought for in Britain only by the Socialist Equality Party. Based on the objective logic of the situation, the SEP will prepare for the inevitable social struggles to come and elaborate a programme for socialist revolution.



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