

INTRODUCTION

The Corbyn Effect

As a collection, *The Corbyn Effect* ranges far, wide and deep to provide an understanding of Corbynism, an explanation of how it has been ‘framed’, a critical examination of its limitations and a hopeful forecast of its potential. The book is not an account of Jeremy Corbyn’s rise to become leader of the Labour Party, this is best provided by *The Candidate: Jeremy Corbyn’s Improbable Path to Power* by Alex Nunns. Nor is the collection written according to a single unified viewpoint; the best interpretation of this kind, from the left of Corbynism, is provided by Richard Seymour’s *Corbyn: The Strange Rebirth of Radical Politics*. Rather, this book combines a thematic approach with a variety of viewpoints, which all have varying degrees of agreement and disagreement with Corbynism.

Mark Perryman’s keynote essay, *The Great Moving Left Show*, traces the emergence of Corbynism via Labour’s adoption of one single model of modernisation, the Blairist-Brownite version. Perryman counters this by uncovering alternative, radical models of left modernity, which now have the potential to re-emerge as the Corbyn moment continues to take shape.

The Corbyn Effect seeks to understand Corbynism in the context of the changing terrain of politics, economics and society characterised by some as ‘New Times’. Jeremy Gilbert powerfully illustrates this in his opening chapter to the book. A companion piece by Andrew Gamble relates such an analysis to the specificities of the 2017 general election, and in particular the rise and fall of Theresa May.

Jeremy Corbyn’s election and re-election as Labour leader against all apparent odds was largely due to changes in the party’s previously arcane method of voting in these elections. One member one vote, combined with an audacious registered supporters’ scheme, threatens to transform Labour’s organisational and campaigning culture. Jessica Garland puts

this dramatic change in the context of what being in the Labour Party now means for its hundreds of thousands of new members.

Scotland was a key battleground for the 2017 general election, and it will most certainly be just as important for the next, whenever it is called. Gerry Hassan accounts for 2017's dents in support for the SNP and the cause of independence, while describing the emergence of a Caledonian version of Corbynism that before the election barely seemed to exist.

No recent party leader has had to suffer the kind of media-trashing *The Sun* and the *Daily Mail* have dished out against Jeremy Corbyn, ever since his election as Labour leader, which became most sharp of all as the 8 June polling day approached. Yet as the votes were counted and the story of Labour's 'blue murder' was replaced by a historic shift in the party's share of the vote and new seats won, the idea that it is 'the media wot wins it' for the right took a knocking, alongside the more simplistic critiques of inevitable 'mainstream media' bias. Des Freedman's chapter combines a theory of how the 'framing' of Jeremy Corbyn was constructed via the press and TV, with a strategy to challenge media power from the left.

One of the main themes of any coverage of Corbyn's Labour has of course been the vivid reality of a party divided. How is such a division explained? Hilary Wainwright gets behind the parliamentarianism of most theories on offer, to revisit the meaning of 'Labourism' as an obstacle to Labour's radical potential. She suggests how Corbyn has become the vehicle for such a dramatic change in direction: to the left. Corbyn as a serial backbench rebel since the 1980s of course has long personified this, but this has always been from the margins; he has never before had anything remotely near this level of influence within Labour. It is that long and principled journey which provides Jeremy Corbyn with what Eliane Glaser in her chapter calls 'authenticity'. It is this that has helped spark unprecedented support for Labour amongst young people. One of the most surprising events in the 2017 campaign was the way #Grime4Corbyn took off, but Monique Charles cautions readers not to be so surprised. Corbyn's youthful, and musical, support originates in the alienation of young people from pre-Corbyn politicians' conduct of themselves. For many, this connects to a musical culture, grime, which is embedded in the values of the collective, and is quite different to the celebrity-driven individualism with which popular music is commonly associated.

The combined vote share of Labour, the SNP, Plaid Cymru, the Greens and Lib-Dems would amount to a rainbow coalition of a government rather than the Tory-DUP coalition of chaos. Of course, our anything-but-proportional electoral system prevented this outcome. Now, Labour's eyes are on the sixty-six target seats that if won, along with holding the nineteen key defences, would deliver a majority Labour government the next time round. Sue Goss urges that any such ambition mustn't be allowed to crowd out pluralism and co-operation amongst progressives who share so much in common. In practical terms, Labour still needs the votes from supporters of these other parties to win, and save, the required numbers of seats. And politically, it needs to open out to a radicalism that is broader than what party membership card we have, or don't have. 2017 was a snap general election, Labour fought a hugely effective, if rather last-minute, campaign on a manifesto that clearly caught the popular imagination. But politics doesn't stand still, there are fundamental socio-economic and cultural changes underway that, as Phil Burton-Cartledge's argument in his chapter goes, impact on a class politics. That class politics is key to – but doesn't leave unchanged – any Labour politics worth its name. The party is only just catching up with the meaning of this, and needs to construct a politics not simply of the present but for the future too.

Migration remains central to many of these changes, and is an issue that Labour continues to have problems getting to grips with, veering from reaction to rhetoric and nothing very much in between. Talking about migration has become an unseemly 'race to the bottom', as Maya Goodfellow puts it in her chapter, from which Corbyn's Labour has not been immune. To avoid the ugly consequences of such a descent, Corbynism itself remains in urgent need of change on race and migration. Any failure to develop a wider coalition of support, to engage with changing class relations, to cherish a multiple society as a product of modern migration, would contribute to the defeat of any future Corbyn Labour government. Indeed, the portents of a radical left government under siege and in retreat are obvious enough in Syriza's Greece. Marina Prentoulis urges Labour to learn these Greek lessons, not to write off either all that Syriza, in the most difficult of conditions, has achieved, nor to erase Labour's possibilities to make a difference either. Rather we should learn from Greece to help us ensure that the worst possible outcomes are avoided.

Our best hope remains, of course, that a Corbyn-led Labour victory leads to a Labour government of the sort we could only ever dream of before. Key to this, will be reversing inequality by abandoning the myth of meritocracy which limits thinking and policy from the liberal wing of British conservatism across to Labour's centre-right. Jo Littler provides ideas on how to dismantle the myth and replace it with policies for social change.

James Doran originated the thesis of 'pasokification' to describe a sorry outcome for Labour if it continued with a politics that failed to oppose austerity and break with the cross-party neoliberal consensus. It is a fate that has afflicted social-democratic parties across Europe and the Democrats in the US too. Here, Doran describes how Corbyn has led Labour to buck that trend of dismal decline and what it will take to continue doing so.

'Oh Jeremy Corbyn' became the unofficial soundtrack of a post-election summer, testament to Corbyn's huge personal popularity. James Kellam details the perils and the potential of such a moment, and suggests what is needed to translate this into an enduring popular left politics and support. But none of this will amount to very much unless Labour can win, rather than come a good second. Paula Surridge's concluding chapter helps focus us on this salient fact, with her detailed analysis of the demographics and voter attitudes in Labour's sixty-six target seats. This is the electoral terrain for the next five years, hopefully for a shorter period if another early general election is called or forced to be called, on which the 'Corbyn effect' has the potential to amount to something substantial.

And as afterwords, in this volume there are two useful tools to aid the process of preparing for power. Firstly, there is a seat-by-seat profile of Labour's target seats and key defences with the 2017 general election results, and contact details for local groups, to help readers to get involved with Labour's 'permanent election' campaigning. Secondly, for those inspired to find out more about the various ideas and critiques raised in this book, there is a further reading list with other resources including campaigns, websites, blogs and twitter feeds.

'Books are weapons' in the battle of ideas, and this one aims to challenge the assumption – prevalent over the last couple of years – that daring to dream has no place in politics.

The Great Moving Left Show

Mark Perryman

Whether it loses 30, 50 or 70 seats, the Labour Party is heading for a shattering defeat under Jeremy Corbyn.

Jason Cowley, *New Statesman*¹

W'e're all allowed to get things wrong. And there were many on the left who weren't feeling particularly chippy in the week before polling day in June 2017 when Cowley's confidently dire prediction was published. Many of us had allowed pessimism of the intellect to overwhelm optimism of the will as the election approached. But perhaps a decent period of reflection is now in order on the part of the left-leaning commentariat that so misunderstood and so misrepresented the Corbyn effect for such a long time.

For the best part of two years – in fact until the exit poll at 10pm on election night in 2017 – it has been hard to endure being told, day in day out, by writers I otherwise respect (and not just in the *Statesman*), that my support for Corbyn meant I'd become delusional, had signed up to a personality cult rather joined a political movement, had been manipulated by entryists, colluded with anti-Semites, and, of course, had backed the losing side.² With all that being thrown at us, even the most convinced Corbyn supporter was likely to sometimes feel doubts.

This inability to recognise the change that Corbyn represented is less surprising, however, when considered alongside the long history of failure on the left since the advent of Thatcherism in 1979. For, although New Labour seemed to represent a winning streak after 1997, their success was only achieved through the abandonment of many cherished tenets of the left. The common sense view for the last thirty years and more has been that anything representing socialist

politics has had no chance of success. The overturning of this deep pessimism is therefore one of Jeremy Corbyn's greatest successes.

The party's turn to the right stopped delivering Labour election victories long ago: the Labour Party had been in crisis for a considerable time before Corbyn won the leadership election. Writing in 2015, John Harris combined a healthy scepticism for what Corbyn might be able to achieve with an acute sense of the depth of the crisis he had inherited. Here he describes the context of Corbyn's stunning win in the 2015 Labour leadership election:

Centre-left politics all over Europe remain locked in deep crisis, sidelined by the dominance of the centre-right, and further unsettled by the rise of new populist and nationalist parties from both ends of the political spectrum. In the delirium of Corbynmania and the arrival of tens of thousands of new members, the cold reality of Labour's predicament has been somewhat forgotten. At the last election (2015), it won its second-lowest share of the vote since 1983.³

This was the wreckage from which Corbyn was expected to climb with the party in tow. Nobody, including many committed supporters, believed he could achieve that if the Tories set the trap of an early general election. What in those circumstances could possibly go right?

And, lest we forget, despite the shock and awe, Labour didn't actually win a majority in the 2017 election, and under the UK's first-past-the-post electoral system that is pretty much all that matters. It's just that Corbyn did so much better than almost everybody expected: he didn't do enough to change that losing streak, but he got Labour close and might yet turn defeat into victory.

The fate that was staring the Labour Party in the face before the election of Corbyn to the leadership – along with many other European social-democratic parties – was 'Pasokification', a process named after the virtual elimination of Pasok in Greece.⁴ Pasok, once a successful social democratic party, lost nearly all its support when it signed up to neoliberal policies and ceased to represent the people who had once elected it. It was effectively replaced by Syriza, a party of the left. Corbyn has been able to partly avert this prospect by shifting the Labour Party back towards some of its traditional positions. The party's manifesto, welcomed by previous regular Corbyn critic Polly

Toynbee as ‘a cornucopia of delights’, created a platform for the left populism that Corbyn had promised to deliver.⁵

The manifesto was notable in that it represented the first clear break from New Labour’s neoliberal legacy. When it was published, a *Guardian* leader broadly welcomed it: ‘its achievement is to expand the limits of the thinkable in British politics’ (though it reserved judgement on its likely effectiveness in terms of Labour’s appeal, declaring that it was rooted in ‘Mr Corbyn’s preference for energising his own support rather than persuading those outside it’).⁶ The reservation wasn’t entirely misplaced, as every day that we endure under a minority Tory government should convince us, but the spectacular expansion of Labour’s previous base of support is enough to suggest that the direction of travel mapped out – ‘For the many not the few’ – is decisively the correct one.

Michael Rustin also situated Corbynism’s potential as a break, though somewhat more unreservedly:

Jeremy Corbyn’s election campaign, and its outcome, is without doubt the most positive development that has taken place in British politics for more than twenty-five years – since Tony Blair became leader of the Labour Party. The reason for this is that it is the first substantial challenge to neoliberalism from Labour in all those years. Corbyn’s campaign has now demonstrated that a politics based on the rejection of neoliberalism – the contemporary version of ‘full capitalism’ – and the development of an alternative to it – is capable of success.⁷

This is borne out by my experience in the election campaign. Peter Kyle, one of the local MPs for whom I campaigned in Hove and Portslade, was defending a slender 1274 vote majority over the Tories, and we thought he was doomed. But if Labour was to survive 2017, this seat was one of the ones we needed to save. Kyle had been quoted in the eve-of-election *New Statesman* piece predicting Labour’s worst defeat ever, and, perhaps minded not to rock the boat too much at this delicate time, he had chosen his words carefully: ‘If we aspire to govern, we should listen to what the electorate is about to say on 8 June; we should listen to what will be the unvarnished truth’.⁸ In the early hours of 9 June the unvarnished truth was that Peter Kyle’s seat had switched from being a Labour marginal to one with a whop-

ping 18,757 Labour majority. Kyle's election publicity had been very much focused on his own performance as an MP rather than Labour's leader. Jeremy Corbyn didn't get a look-in. And it was a good and hard-fought local campaign. But those 18,000-plus extra votes were not won by local factors: the truth is that Corbyn as leader, with a manifesto that sought to break with an austerity-driven neoliberal consensus, had reached voters in a way in which no individual candidate, however good, could emulate. This was the Corbyn effect many of us had been waiting for.

MAKING THE SPACE FOR A NEW POLITICS

The crucial difference in the 2015 leadership election, which enabled all these subsequent changes to happen, was the Labour Party electorate. Voting rights were extended from 'one member one vote' to include 'registered supporters', who could simply sign up for just £3 to get a vote. This at last gave a chance for a vast range of people to express their desire for change in and through the Labour Party; and the momentum that was generated during Corbyn's leadership campaign has since then continued and grown: it is this that has made the political sea-change possible.

I had never been a member of the Labour Party before, but when the opportunity came to vote for a Labour leader I could actually believe in and share some ideals with, one who could make a difference to the mish-mash of honourable defeat and shoddy compromise I'd witnessed for most of my adult life, I duly signed up to the rather surprising notion that I was entitled to have this vote.

The registered supporter scheme has the potential to entirely reinvent what a political party looks like. It banishes the 'strong-power' barriers to entry – the party card, the closed ideological identification, the need to subscribe to all manner of policy positions, a one-size-fits-all model of activism, the endless rounds of meetings, committees and conferences, a bewildering rule book, and the expectation that one would be Labour to the exclusion of any kind of affection for any other party. It was not just because of political direction that until 2015 Labour's membership had been experiencing a headlong decline in numbers.

Now the party has at least the beginnings of becoming a soft power organisation. In my case the identification was simple – with a guy called Jeremy Corbyn and the hopes I projected upon him. I shelled

out my £3. But at that point my loyalty to Labour didn't involve much more than that. I certainly didn't assume I was signing up for life. Shallow and inconsequential, opportunistic even? Yes, I suppose so, but my guy won and now I had my toe in the party, I was willing to give more, to see if this could be made to work, shifting Labour to the left – me and several hundred thousand more. British politics, the Labour Party, had never seen anything quite like it before.

As Gary Younge commented, those yearning for 'the Corbyn effect' to represent meaningful, radical change, including those who fondly remembered the Bennite left in the 1980s, needed to note the differences:

If this really were a return to the eighties, as some suggest, then he would have a peace movement making his case for him against war and a vibrant trade union movement making the case against austerity. As it is he doesn't even have a party he can rely on. He did not emerge to the Labour leadership organically from a deeper organisational base but disorganically from a wider, amorphous, alienated sentiment.⁹

What Corbyn did have, however, was a new mass membership and a new message. This was what allowed the 'shock to the system':

This election was the first time since the crisis that a mainstream party had offered principled opposition to austerity and shifted the conversation from immigration to investment in public services. We were told that voters would not buy it. We were told it was not possible. But when the clock struck 10, the tectonic plates shifted. And for just a minute, until we found our footing, we felt a little giddy.¹⁰

In the early hours of Friday 9 June 2017 in Lewes, 'a little giddy' was putting it mildly. I'd spent most of the previous day in Kemptown in Brighton, where the Tories were defending a 690 vote majority. We'd had a good campaign, with huge turnouts of supporters, youthful and enthusiastic: this was a seat Momentum had targeted for help, and it showed. Old hands had provided the tried and tested organisational infrastructure, newer ones trod the streets, knocking on doors, sometimes fired up by the helpful and inspiring training session with organisers over from the Bernie Sanders' campaign. On polling day I had had a recurrence of

pessimism of the intellect, but I needn't have worried. Labour voters had queued up to tell us with unrestrained enthusiasm that they'd voted for the party, while on the Brighton University campus we were mobbed for anything to wear with Labour on it to show support, and at the campaign HQ throughout the day more and more activists had been turning up to help out, then coming back telling the same, positive story.

But there was still no real sense of the scale of the change to come, so, after a long day, as I checked the exit poll I was all ready for an early night. Wow! I hurriedly got dressed and jogged round to the Lewes Labour Party offices, where the optimists were already camped out for the night, with big screen, beer, wine and packets of Pringles. Tectonic plates shifting? When the Kemptown result came through it felt more like an earthquake. A Tory marginal had been transformed into a 10,000 Labour majority.

THERE ALWAYS WAS AN ALTERNATIVE

Throughout the long period of Thatcherism, Labour's capture by New Labour and its subsequent decline, there have always been alternative roads that could have been taken. There have been many debates about how to renew the left, and being critical of New Labour is not to deny that Labour in 1979 was in great need of new ideas. It is therefore worth revisiting some of these debates now, as an aid to thinking about what needs to be done to keep the Corbyn momentum going. Because that momentum, the pun is intended, should be about not accepting Labour as it is and was but what it could be and become.

The largely accurate and immensely uplifting film *Pride* is a good place to start looking for inspiration. It tells the stories of both the stalwarts of Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners (LGSM) and the communities who provided the backbone to the 1984-85 miners' strike in the Welsh valleys. Hywel Francis chaired the South Wales miners support group that features in the film, and with which LGSM twinned to such good effect in both film and actuality. In his book *History On Our Side*, he recalls the impact of 1984-5:

The network of women and mixed support groups had given rise to an alternative, community-based system of food, clothing, financial and morale distribution which had sustained about half a million people for nearly a year. The social and political skills of organisation

and communication were akin to the experiences of people during a social revolution. Women, men and indeed children had learnt more about the strengths and weaknesses of the state apparatus, more about the problems of working-class solidarity and above all more about their own individual and collective human potential than at any time in their lives. The new links within and between coalfields, with non-mining areas in Britain and indeed internationally were all pregnant with possibilities.¹¹

Francis is here writing about a very specific kind of geographical community in a very particular set of historical circumstances. Nevertheless, the creative solidarity which this strike sparked, and which is so memorably portrayed in *Pride*, offered at least the beginnings of the shape of things that might have become a new model Labour Party. In particular it showed how links could be made between older left constituencies and newer kinds of politics, with the effect of enriching the understanding of all involved.

Stuart Hall's essay 'The great moving right show', written in January 1979, was the first to take the measure of the crisis facing the left, as the age of neoliberalism was dawning with the onset of Thatcherism. Hall was a brilliant critic of both the wider left and the Labour Party at that time. He was very supportive of the kinds of creative political responses that developed during the miners' strike, as seen in *Pride*, but he was critical of the inadequacies of the kind of left response to Thatcherism he summed up as: 'Away with all those time-wasting theoretical speculations! The Marxist guarantees are all in place after all, standing attention. Let us take to the streets'. It was not only the Labour Party that needed new thinking, the old left, too, was stuck in a previous era. As Hall was at pains to argue, however, this was 'not an argument against taking to the streets'. It was, rather, 'an argument against the satisfactions which sometimes flow from applying simplifying analytic schemes to complex events'.¹²

Hall pointed instead to an alternative left strategy, particularly as seen in the late 1970s popular campaigns against the National Front:

... the direct interventions against the rising fortunes of the National Front – local campaigns, anti-fascist work in the unions, trades councils, women's groups, the mobilisation behind the Anti Nazi

League, the counter-demonstrations, above all Rock Against Racism (one of the timeliest and best constructed of cultural, interventions, repaying serious and extended analysis) – constitute one of the few success stories of the conjuncture.

Rock Against Racism was probably the most memorable part of the campaign against the National Front.¹³ Hall recognised that this was because of its nature as a cultural intervention: this was what enabled it to engage in action a broad new constituency. As with the support groups during the miners' strike, it was a movement that stretched far beyond the traditional horizons of the left.

Paul Gilroy provides an insightful understanding of RAR's significance:

Unruly opposition was given creative expression not just in the musical cross fertilisation that came from the founding commitment in which black and white bands always shared audiences and performance space, but in the visual excesses of the RAR collective's graphics and the effervescence of what would now be drily called their 'branding' strategy. Badges, stickers and bright placards were all orchestrated around key colours, icons and slogans. There was an unprecedented connection between the spirit of political dissent and the novel ways in which it was being communicated and rendered. These tactics certainly drew courage and inspiration from the brazen confidence and reckless '1-2-3-4 let's get on with it' attitude of punk, but they also surpassed it in delivering viewers and participants beyond the limits of a world projected recursively in black and white.¹⁴

When I went up to London for the Rock against Racism Carnival in Victoria Park in 1978, a fresh-faced sixth-former straight out of Tadworth, Surrey, I didn't have the wherewithal to describe my experience as anything much more than discovering that politics could be fun. The appeal of the Carnival, of Rock against Racism, was that anybody could join: there was nothing to sign up to, no membership form, no committee, just a movement we could call – and make – our own. Analogue still ruled in those days, but RAR proved for a time at least to be the most (post) modern of social movements.

In 2017 something of this sort emerged once more. It is too early to be sure with any certainty what will happen next with

#Grime4Corbyn, but already it has made links between politics and popular culture in a way that has not been seen for years. And, like RAR, it is a do-it-yourself movement, framed first and foremost by the music and culture that generated it. Music and politics have come together in a shared breakthrough moment. It is a measure of both the music and the politics that they did, so that we once more had a glimpse of the potential for cultural change that Stuart Hall recognised in Rock against Racism all those years ago.

Following the Brexit referendum, John Harris wrote a brilliantly powerful piece in *The Guardian* against the rising wave of post-referendum bigotry:

What is afoot is as much cultural as political, and it will take much more than conventional politics to turn it round. This is a moment: one that demands the attention of musicians, writers, dramatists, journalists – and the millions of people who surely feel a dismay about what is happening.

Harris, too, argues we should look for inspiration to the late 1970s:

when a surge of largely English racism and bigotry was killed off by trailblazing creations such as Rock against Racism and the Anti-Nazi League, and a great counter movement of people that went right to society's roots. I do not know what a twenty-first century version of that fight will look like, but I do know we need one.¹⁵

Soon afterwards, when John came to a discussion meeting of Lewes Labour Party in early 2017, I asked him whether he could see the Labour Party getting involved in the kind of popular movement he had described in the article. His response was that, however popular Corbyn's populism might be on keynote issues such as housing, there was an almost universal disbelief that it would ever amount to anything, given that his leadership had put Labour so far from winning power. But this is precisely what the shift in tectonic plates has subsequently achieved. People now believe that Labour can win, and they also believe that it can bring about dramatic and meaningful change. So now is the time to start thinking imaginatively about how to build on this new sense of confidence.

A reconnection between parliamentary and extra-parliamentary

campaigning will be a crucial way of making such change possible. As Tom Blackburn put it on the *New Socialist* website, we need a ‘Corbynism from below’.¹⁶ The new politics will need to involve more than leadership at the national level. Labour’s mass membership needs to go local, forging a renewed bottom-up politics that proves, in practice, what Labour values can achieve on the ground. Such a shift could be the basis of a populist movement that is rooted in people-power, rather than in thrall to a demagogue, as is so often the case with right-wing populism. This is neither to decry or minimise Corbyn’s role, but to understand that the role is that of representing our aspirations as a party: we all need to be involved on the ground, rather than waiting for him to do everything for us. As Blackburn puts it, Corbynism is a movement. It is not a personality cult, as some lazy critics describe it (and nor is it the kind of cult of personality seen in some left populist/hard-left traditions): ‘To succeed, Corbynism must begin the vital process of rebuilding popular self-confidence, and the capacity of working-class people to take real collective control of their everyday lives’.¹⁷

Blackburn’s article drew on the work of socialist-feminist writer Hilary Wainwright, one of the pioneers of the alternative modernisation tradition represented by RAR and the miners’ solidarity groups. Wainwright was deeply engaged in these traditions, but this did not mean that change could not also be rooted in good old-fashioned political economy. In discussing the legacy of the Greater London Council (with co-author Maureen Macintosh), she argued:

Any future political authority which thinks it can construct a progressive and successful economic policy without developing a model of constructing and implementing it in association with (and also sometimes in active contradiction with) those in whose interests it is intended to operate will be wrong.¹⁸

In other words, the way we do our politics shapes what our politics becomes. And this connects, too, with the necessity to show that popular power can operate effectively in the local arena, and so help dispel the myth that the left does not know how to govern. Lynsey Hanley argues for the huge potential that is released when a sense of incapacity is overcome:

Where politics fails, cynicism reigns, and the only way to negate that cynicism is to treat politics first as a local endeavour – in which voters have direct and regular contact with politicians whose experiences inform their parties’ national policymaking from the bottom up.¹⁹

When Corbyn toured the country during the election campaign, he filled huge halls and parks with crowds desperate for precisely the kind of political engagement that Hanley describes. In this sense his is a practical vision that could appeal across some of the party’s divides that so crippled Labour from 2015 to 2017. Many of the Labour MPs who lined up against him before the election also recognise this need, as can be seen in their constituency work and can be seen, when they are not undermining Corbyn, by their work in Parliament and more widely. They have practised and preached the beginnings of new and different ways of doing politics as much as, if not more than, some of Corbyn’s own allies. Until the election the chances of any kind of dialogue with this group were next to zero, but there are now possibilities for co-operation.

This is to be welcomed, but we do no-one any favours if we fail to understand why the division erupted in the first place. We need to revisit the layers of support inside and outside Labour that Corbyn was able to give expression to and mobilise – not to re-open what we hope are old divisions, but to recognise what caused them. Jeremy Gilbert sums up the people energised by Corbyn as ‘a body of opinion which has been widespread throughout the country for many years, but has been denied any kind of place in our public life since the early days of New Labour ... a body of opinion which believes, with good reason, that the embrace of neoliberal economics and neoconservative foreign policy under Blair was a disaster’. And he concludes, it would be better for all of us if Labour Party members had more say over policy and over who represents them in parliament.²⁰

The successes of the 2017 election campaign have created the conditions for a new political settlement in Labour, able to bring together both sides of this long-standing argument – MPs, party members and voters – as the base from which Labour can go from a good second to a solid win next time.

THE BLAIR CUL DE SAC

There were varying models of modernisation available to Labour in 1994, when Tony Blair became leader after a series of failed attempts to remould the party. But the party under his leadership opted for an approach that combined a conservative version of modernity with a populist rhetoric that disavowed even the mildest version of social democracy. David Stubbs captures very well the problems of Blair's version of populism as it sought to draw on the pre-millennium mood of celebrating all things new, with the drive to reinvent and rebrand, connecting this mood to a technocratic managerialism divorced from the political. This embrace of the new was closely linked to a belief that the era was marked by the eclipse of left-versus-right politics: 'the End of History meant the end of the old struggle between top-hatted Capital and cloth-capped Labour'. This left us 'drifting backwards into a future in which a communal conservatism would see to it that the present, the Be Here Now, was maintained as long as possible'.²¹

At the core of this post-political Blairism was an uncritical reading of globalisation: 'I hear people say we have to stop and debate globalisation. You might as well debate whether autumn should follow summer'.²² Blair portrayed the economic powers reshaping the world as a force of nature, unstoppable, irresistible; there was no point in expecting that they could be changed in any meaningful sense:

The character of this changing world is indifferent to tradition. Unforgiving of frailty. No respecter of past reputations. It has no custom and practice.

It is replete with opportunities, but they only go to those swift to adapt, slow to complain, open, willing and able to change. Unless we own the future, unless our values are matched by a completely honest understanding of the reality now upon us and the next about to hit us, we will fail. And then the values we believe in become idle sentiments ripe for disillusion and disappointment. In the era of rapid globalisation, there is no mystery about what works: an open, liberal economy, prepared constantly to change to remain competitive. The new world rewards those who are open to it.²³

In other words, modernisation meant renouncing any hope of real change, and turning the government's attention, instead, to

managing people's lives. Of course the Blair governments did many good things. But they were crippled by this embrace of neoliberalism, and it was this legacy that doomed Brown and Miliband when they unsuccessfully followed in Blair's wake. During the 2015 television election debate, Ed Miliband was forced to deny that he was the same as the Tories in face of united criticism from Nicola Sturgeon, Leanne Wood and the Greens' Natalie Bennett. As Sturgeon tellingly retorted, no Ed, you're not the same, but nor are you different enough.

As former *Marxism Today* editor Martin Jacques commented: 'For three decades the dominant themes were marketisation, privatisation, trickle-down economics, the wastefulness and inefficiencies of the state, the incontrovertible case for hyper-globalisation, and bankers and financiers as the New Gods'.²⁴ The election campaign of 2017 had finally turned Labour away from this legacy. As Jacques further commented: 'To be able to entertain a sense of optimism about our own country is a novel experience after 30 years of being out in the cold. No wonder so many are feeling energised again'.²⁵

THE BENN HERESY

Blairism had been the logical conclusion of Neil Kinnock's leadership of the Labour Party; modernisation of the party – which was certainly needed – had already become identified with the repudiation of the left by the time Tony Blair became leader. But throughout the 1980s there was a strong rearguard action from the 'Bennite' left, who argued that only a democratic left renewal could defeat Thatcher. Not long before Corbyn first became an MP, in 1983, Alan Freeman described the mood in the Labour Party:

Benn now had grounds for hope. The left seemed on the verge of complete triumph. It looked as if only the last bastion – the PLP – needed to be conquered, and with the right wing packing its bags and reselection entrenched in the constitution, this would surely fall in time.²⁶

Benn's proposed electoral strategy was not so different from Corbyn's today:

Our road to victory does not lie in coaxing back half a dozen *Guardian* readers from their flirtation with the SDP, but in mobilising the 10 million people who don't vote but are our natural constituents because they are the ones, more than any other, who are repressed by our society ... We shall win by practical socialist arguments that begin with the experience of ordinary men and women. We must be there when they need us, and then assist them, as best we can, to learn from their experience and make something of it so that socialism and the vision that we have, and the revolution that we need, is constructed by the people, for the people and not one that drips down from above – to be imposed whether they like it or not.²⁷

This is an extract from a debate with Stuart Hall in 1984. In his response, reflecting on the state of the Labour Party under Kinnock's leadership, Hall voiced a number of reservations:

If that looks like a party with enough political imagination and 'feel' for the current situation to put itself at the head of the different forms of struggle and to take that struggle, not just into its own organisations, but out into society and to generalise the case for socialism on the basis of it, then I yield to a more optimistic version of events. I honour Tony Benn's courageous efforts to 'gloss' the current situation in this way, but I regret to say that, on this issue, I believe he is whistling in the dark.²⁸

Hall was reiterating his support for an alternative approach to that of both Kinnock and Benn, one that would be based on creating a more populist Labour Party, combining both radical politics and electoral appeal. But to suggest that Bennism was no longer the model to create the conditions for such a change was not very popular in 1984.

This debate took place at a packed out venue in Islington. Though I was there, I have no idea if the newly elected Labour MP for Islington North, Jeremy Corbyn was. But whether he was or not, I can be pretty certain that, as a convinced Bennite, he wouldn't have been in agreement with Hall when he argued:

The left must be able, on its own programme, with its own project, to engage the society as a whole, to generalise itself throughout society,

to bring over strategic popular majorities on the key issues, to win converts, first of all among those sectors of its own class and those who can come into alliance with it, but who have in recent years not supported it. But secondly, to make converts to its case, to carry the case to a widening set of constituencies, to polarise the society in new ways towards the left, to connect with new experiences in society, to engage with its increasing complexity and in that way to make socialism grow in relevance to the emerging experiences as well as the traditional experiences of our time.²⁹

As we now know, the Labour Party took the advice of neither Hall nor Benn, and in 1997 it was Blair's version of Labour modernisation that predominated. What do you do when the alternative to Thatcherism you've always believed in, a Labour government, turns out to be so much less than the stuff of your dreams? There were few answers as the years passed, and the left became ever weaker. The resources of hope were running on empty.

And then, in 2015, along comes Jeremy, a rank outsider. The other leadership candidates in 2015 were the same old faces or the same old politics, and in most cases, both. Corbyn represented a change, but he was never going to win – though he might be worth a flutter.

NOW THAT'S WHAT I CALL POLITICS

After Corbyn won, and when I had recovered from the rare experience of being on both the left and the winning side, I promptly became a full member of the Labour Party. To effect the change Corbyn now represented there was simply nowhere else to be.

My local Labour Party branch, as has been the case all over the country, was welcoming but a little unsure about who all these new members were. This is a party culture unused to the convulsions of change – or 'surge', to use the modern term. It sometimes seems as if, in the face of such a challenge, some of the old guard believe that bigger isn't necessarily better, and that the enthusiasm of the new members won't last. Why should an organisational culture more or less unchanged for the best part of a century adapt itself to what is probably no more than a bunch of fly-by-nights? Blair's modernisation had left most of this culture untouched: his objective had not been to modernise the party itself: in so many ways he ruled in spite of it, not

with it. But if Labour really was now to become a social movement as well as an election-winning force, something would have to give.

Once again I rekindled my optimism by remembering some of my own experiences and influences, in this case Red Wedge, which was a hugely ambitious attempt to keep a culture of resistance on the road after all the benefit gigs of the 1984-85 miners' strike. The aim was to keep the flame burning of an avowedly political 'soulcialism', as us Red Wedgers liked to call it. I've got a strong memory of my first sighting of Billy Bragg – with his amplifier in his rucksack – at a gig in Birmingham on their first tour, and in 1986 I organised a gig on their comedy tour at what was then Wolverhampton Poly. The key thing about Red Wedge was that it was pro-Labour without being in and of the party, and it allowed a looser kind of association with them. Stuart Cosgrove described the Red Wedge audience in terms of geography, gender and class: suggested that the ideal image for Red Wedge was less a modified Russian slogan and design out of 1917 than a 'ginger haired typist from Carlisle who dances to soul music and has to save up for her holiday', adding, 'if Labour wins the typists' vote, who cares what art students do with their ballot papers?'³⁰

This cultural initiative posed a challenge to the conservative organisational structures of Labourism. Cosgrove hoped that Red Wedge could become 'the animator not the afterthought', generating events, not simply providing them: 'Red Wedge has to chase the improbable and fast. It has to unite the night away. Labour: it ain't nothing but a parrrrty'.³¹ But, of course, nothing of the sort happened. After Labour lost the 1987 election it reverted to type, most notoriously at the American-style rally in 1992 in Sheffield.

Red Wedge was a seriously ambitious attempt to effect change in the party's culture, but it wasn't factional in any traditional sense. It was very open: all who could see that Labour's ways of working and appealing weren't being effective could have a piece of the change it offered. Tony Mainwaring, at the time political assistant to the Labour Party's general secretary, describes what he now recognises to have been a lost opportunity:

There was a moment of crystallisation of a new form of politics. It was brilliant and beautiful to see, and Red Wedge was reconfiguring the DNA. But I don't think the Labour Party had the reflective learning

capacity to draw and learn and honour what was being done. The Party was bound to let it down in some way because there wasn't a clear enough expectation and conversation about what 'good' would look like.

Yet thirty years on Tony remains convinced of the potential that did exist:

The answer isn't what Red Wedge brought to the Labour Party, it's what kind of politics we could have created together. If it had developed for another few years it would have been extraordinary.³²

Red Wedge eventually found the door slammed shut. But in 2017 a similar mood has appeared. In spite of the naysaying cynics, when Jeremy Corbyn took the Glastonbury stage he received the adulation usually reserved for rockstars. There are precious few politicians – now, or ever – able to attract such affection, and trust too, from young voters.

The success of the 2017 election campaign suggests a breakthrough, electorally and culturally, in generating the kind of connection between Labour as an institution and young voters that Red Wedgers could only dream of in the 1980s.

MOVEMENTISM VS LABOURISM

A core part of the Corbyn appeal is the idea that Labour can become both a party and a social movement. And to achieve this, a cultural politics is key. This is what will be able to project the party as more than the sum of its members, branches, annual conference and MPs, and put forward a vision for change which, in the here and now, defies all the limitations to practise its ideals.

David Graeber summed up the changes that would be needed for Labour to make the shift towards combining the electoral and the social:

Over the past century it has gradually become like all the other political parties – personality (and of course, money) based, but the Corbyn project is first and foremost to make the party a voice for social movements once again, dedicated to popular democracy (as

trades unions themselves once were). This is the immediate aim. The ultimate aim is the democratisation not just of the party but of local government, workplaces, society itself.³³

Corbynism, like Syriza, Podemos and the rest, has not emerged out of nowhere; it is in this sense part of a wider phenomenon. Each of the new movements and parties is different, but all have a base beyond, and sometimes in contradiction with, the left's traditional support, while still remaining part of the left. Paul Mason in part explains this shift in sociological terms, describing the base as 'the graduate with no future', equipped with access to social media and a flexible attitude to traditional leftist ideologies. This constituency is characterised by a rejection of rigid hierarchical structures, and a preference for 'horizontalism' and bottom-up politics: as a mix-and-match network, ad-hoc groups rather than organised factions are the norm; and within this group there is a thirst for knowledge of how to resist, no limits to the imagination, and no fear of the opposition.³⁴ This description certainly describes many of the new and younger Corbyn supporters, though part of Corbyn's success has been to engage with this group while also re-enthusing older Labour supporters and engaging other areas of support. Part of the task ahead is to hold these groups together in the broadest possible coalition.

Neal Lawson, a 'soft-lefter' back in the 1980s, surprised himself, and no doubt many of his friends, by voting for 'hard-left' candidate Corbyn. As he commented: 'Things change. There is no perfect wave, and Jeremy isn't perfect. But this is not about the person but the moment and the wave the Corbyn candidacy has unleashed. I voted for the wave':

The Corbyn Wave is a window into what is possible. Its energy is breaking up the permafrosted soil that for thirty years has been too harsh for our dreams to grow in. Labour as a party and a movement cannot survive electorally or politically unless it holds out the hope of radically changing society. On this point, time has caught up with New Labour. If the best it gets is to slow the pace at which the poor get poorer and the planet burns, it's not enough to sustain us. A party needs high ideals and deep organic roots in society if it is to transform that society. This cannot be done from

the top down, but only when a party meets a groundswell from below.³⁵

Since 2015 we have had that groundswell in the party, and after 2017, it has the potential to reach the country. For this to be sustained, Labour has to change so that it can ride the wave, and become part of it in every possible respect. But, as David Wearing warned in 2016, there is a danger that the Labour membership's potential to organise as an active social movement would be unrealised, 'given the exclusionary, aggressive and patronising attitude they have been greeted with by the party establishment'.³⁶

There is a reason for the hostile attitudes to the new politics. It is caused by the existence of two fundamentally different conceptions of what constitutes the political, broadly speaking the parliamentary and the extra-parliamentary – though in my view they are by no means as incompatible as so many suggest. In a rebuttal of this mistaken counterposition, Rachel Shabi outlines one way in which Corbynism connects with a constituency seeking a Labour Party that is at one and the same time a social movement:

This pursuit of collectivism, in the face of decades of rampant individualism, was always one of the more radical aspects of Corbyn's leadership. It was in evidence throughout his campaign speeches, where he often spoke of society's many cohorts as one community, binding together groups – young and old, black and white, nurses as well as builders and office workers – that are more often encouraged to compete against each other in the current economy.³⁷

None of this would appear either new or all that threatening to those steeped in the Labour tradition of Keir Hardie and Ellen Wilkinson, the hunger marches, Cable Street, the International Brigades, Stafford Cripps, Labour winning the peace in '45, Nye Bevan and the foundation of the NHS, Barbara Castle on the picket line with the women striking for equal pay at Fords, Foot, Kinnock and Benn leading CND demonstrations, Bernie Grant standing with his community after the 1985 Broadwater Farm riots. But there has been a resistance to this kind of politics for a long time from the centre and right of the party, and many sitting Labour MPs share a distrust of social movement activism.

Progress, the grouping most identified with this position inside the Labour Party, some of whom identify as ‘Clause One socialists’, put it thus:

In the 1930s, 1950s and 1980s Labour was pulled away from its true path by syndicalist social movements. At its founding, the party’s intention was clearly spelled out for the world to see in the very first paragraph of the constitution: to ‘maintain in parliament ... a political Labour Party’.³⁸

In contrast, there is a potential for Corbynism to create a party that has a lived experience of, and presence in, every community, at all levels of society. These days, in my small East Sussex town of Lewes, within ten minutes of setting out from my house I know I will come across a fellow member of the Labour Party – a neighbour, a market-stall holder, a fellow parent, a swimmer down at the pool, someone serving in a shop, the programme editor of the football club I support, all sorts. This is what the Labour Party is becoming – a mass membership party. We are everywhere. But if we are restricted to the kind of role that these Clause One socialists want to ascribe to us – passive supporters to be switched on and off when a canvassing session is required, extras rather than the actors – how many will choose to stick around?

What could have been more symbolic of the potential for Labour as a social movement than Saffiyah Khan’s role as she introduced Jeremy Corbyn at the final outdoor rally of the 2017 election Campaign? A few months previously a photo of Saffiyah, a young Muslim woman, had gone viral: it showed her fearlessly facing down the English Defence League boot-boys in her Birmingham home town – and with a smile on her face. She had stood up for what she knew was right. Neither parliamentarianism nor protest politics can achieve changes in attitudes on their own. To make such resistance possible we need Saffiyah and hundreds of thousands like her, not as a stage army at the party’s beck and call, but as individuals who, when they come together, become communities of change.

On 1 July 2017 I was at a rally in St Leonards-on-Sea at which Corbyn was a much anticipated speaker. He told the crowd that the world, Britain, our communities, didn’t have to be divided in the ways they were: inequality was not the result of natural causes but

of unnatural decision-making, and we now had the power to reverse all this. He made us feel we were all an important part of this movement that he had rather surprised himself by being at the head of. As he spoke, cars stopped so that drivers and passengers could listen, and residents stood on balconies and opened their windows, eager to hear the speech. But best of all, a fire engine pulled up and the crew disembarked to join in, welcomed by rapturous applause. Afterwards I caught sight of the firefighters in conversation with Jeremy. The crew were keen for the now almost obligatory selfies, but they also wanted to talk to Jeremy about their work, the attack on their conditions of employment, the cuts that had forced fire stations to close, the 1 per cent pay cap they, like all other public sector workers, had been forced to endure. Any politician in their right minds would have stopped and listened. But I could tell this was something different. This was a politician who has stood on those firefighters' picket lines, never condemning them or offering mealy-mouthed excuses when they've taken industrial action. He can count their union amongst his closest allies, and before he became an MP he was a trade union organiser himself. This is the kind of authenticity no marketing consultant or communications adviser can ever manufacture, because it's real. This, almost more than anything else, is Corbyn's appeal. His authenticity is rooted in his politics, and, as we've now learned, it has huge popular appeal. Jeremy Corbyn made Corbynism, but now it is ours, it belongs to all of us.

LET'S GET THIS PARTY STARTED

Our ownership of Corbynism, however, depends on Labour changing too. This risks driving politics towards the inward-looking. I doubt if many of the households whose doors I knocked in Kemptown and Hove during the election had heard of the 'McDonnell Amendment' (to change the percentage of PLP support needed to be nominated for leadership candidacy), let alone been stirred to action by it. But that doesn't mean the issues it raises don't matter, though perhaps not in the way either its supporters or opponents intended. Of course Labour is a parliamentary party: it is not, nor has it ever been, a revolutionary party, and that hasn't changed under Corbyn. Yet Labour has always existed outside parliament as well as within. For most of its history it has had the explicit ambition of a mass membership, not as an alter-

native to parliamentary representation but as a complement to it. So, now that it once more has such a large number of members, what role should be ascribed to us? A *New Statesman* leader in March 2017 made this helpfully clear:

The absurdity of a leader opposed by as much as 95 per cent of his own MPs is incompatible with this mission [as a parliamentary party]. Those who do not enjoy the backing of their parliamentary colleagues will struggle to persuade the voters that they deserve their support.³⁹

Under current Labour Party rules, for a leadership candidate to go on to the party ballot paper, 15 per cent of MPs and MEPs must nominate them. In other words it is possible for 85 per cent of MPs to be opposed to the winning candidate (not the 95 per cent of the *New Statesman's* worst nightmares). But the problem is not that the party leader is out of kilter with the parliamentary party: it is, rather, that the right's domination of the PLP allows it to deny the possibility of standing to a leadership candidate of the left – a model more suited to a feudal party, with the MPs as barons and the members as serfs. It assumes a powerless party membership. This is not to deny that MPs have a special role, but rather to question the extent of their power over the rest of us.

Another area where many sitting MPs and their supporters seek too much privilege is the issue of *reselection*. I've lost count of the number of times I've read articles by otherwise well-informed political commentators who mistake the *reselection* of Labour MP's for their *deselection*. Quite why anybody finds the former in the least controversial is entirely beyond me. Local Labour members have the right to select parliamentary candidates, so it seems entirely legitimate that they should also have the right, once every five years, to review their role and confirm or not their candidacy for the next election. If this rule were applied automatically to all MPs, the process would be removed from factional motives. A job for life – which plenty of MPs in safe seats enjoy – should be the anathema of democratic politics. Labour MPs do need to represent all their constituents, of any party and none, in parliament. But the clue to the necessity of *reselection* is in the job title: they are elected as *Labour* MPs. There is no reason to believe that the vast majority of MPs wouldn't sail through *reselection*.

tion, but the importance of the process is that it asserts the principle of accountability, something that would help in the reshaping of Labour Party culture

A members-led party, bottom-up not top-down, is not, however, enough. Labour must also be a values-added party. And that means no more of the common-sense ‘listen to the voters’ mantra. In the aftermath of the 2017 election, Labour MP Graham Jones remained unimpressed by Corbyn’s popularity. ‘How thick does this party have to be?’, he asked, before going on to answer his own question. His beef was that the party had not learnt ‘the lessons’ from the rise of the populist right: ‘Our core voters cannot be taken for granted. These are people who have been let down by political elites for decades. They see themselves as being at the back of every queue.’ Jones is convinced that he knows how to win these voters back: ‘We have to talk about their concerns – counter-terrorism, nationalism, defence and community, the nuclear deterrent and patriotism’,⁴⁰ Jones is right to ask what kind of party Labour wants to be. It is just that his answer is wrong. He believes that, when faced with former voters who have switched to the BNP, Ukip or the Tories, Labour should simply go along with their reasons, regardless of their irrational – more likely racialised – underpinnings. If the concerns of all Jones’s constituents are indeed as he lists them (which is doubtful), Labour does have a choice. It can nod sagely and agree that the rotten state of our nation is all down to those Muslims and their un-British habits, our unfettered borders, our lack of enthusiasm for nuclear war, and our failure to wave the flag at every opportunity. Alternatively, it can find a way to listen to people’s grievances but choose to engage them in a discussion, seeking to convince them that we live in a potentially convivial multi-racial nation; that it is austerity and low wages that drive down our living conditions not immigration; that launching a first strike nuclear armageddon would destroy our own nation for no obvious reason; and patriotism means attachment to a place that we can all call home, wherever we come from, whatever our faith or lack thereof. This is not always an easy conversation, but, without it, the ‘working-class appeal’ that Jones and others in the Labour Party were calling for after the election will be based not just on a value-free politics, but on an attitude that has more than a whiff of something much nastier.

Labour isn’t immune to other kinds of nastiness, within all sections of opinion. Social media has helped unleash a tidal wave

of abuse at the click of a send button. None of this is excusable.⁴¹ A party that is serious about social change, inside and outside parliament, must be one that forms ideas out of difference and argument. But it must also involve in the discussion people from as wide a variety of backgrounds as possible, maximising the means of participation so that no-one feels excluded. This means both tolerance and limits to that tolerance. Name-calling doesn't get us very far down that difficult road of negotiation. Nor does heaping all the blame on one 'side' to score dubious points without examining our own behaviour. Ellie Mae O'Hagan put this very neatly in less than 140 characters: 'Time to draw a line under the disingenuous argument that there is a causal link between the left and bullying, and go back to debating ideas'.⁴²

An ideas party is one that doesn't stand still. Labour needs to revise and adapt its ideas as society changes, but to do so based on a clear set of principles. Corbynism has sparked a wave of new thinking in and outside the academy, and across all the disciplines. Labour must find a way to constantly encourage this, never to be afraid of being challenged, both to surf change and to shape it too.⁴³

Stuart Hall, a great populariser and adaptor of the thought of Antonio Gramsci, argued that a key purpose of intellectual discussion within a left party, 'the whole purpose of what Gramsci called an organic (i.e. historically effective) ideology' is to 'articulate ... into a configuration different subjects, different identities, different projects, different aspirations'. The task is not to reflect back opinions, but to 'construct a unity out of difference'.⁴⁴

To seek to create an organic ideology, built from the bottom up, is a risky, messy and unfamiliar proposition. But ideas, even the good ones in the 2017 manifesto, cannot be frozen in perpetuity. Ceasing to think is the death of any political party. If the party is to be effective this is the responsibility of us all, because not all intellectuals are academics (and not all academics are intellectuals).

Labour also needs to be a smart party. It needs to be modern not for the sake of cheap impact, but to do the best job it can in communicating, mobilising and leading. And right now there's no more important place to be doing this than in the sixty-six Labour target constituencies that will determine whether or not Jeremy Corbyn eventually enters number ten.⁴⁵ We also have to defend the nineteen seats with majorities of less than 1000. Under our rotten

electoral system these seats are key. This is the place to turn rhetoric into reality; these are the communities in which we need to root the new mass membership party; in which we must take Labour out to those who have not yet been convinced, engaging with their fears and reservations. This represents an extra-parliamentary parliamentary politics of an entirely new type. And if people in those seats are convinced, more will surely follow.

THE GREAT MOVING LEFT SHOW

So, we need a bottom-up party, a values-added party, a conversational party, one that is brimming with ideas and thinking, and a party that is smart enough to know how to win, and able to inspire those who will make it happen. If this happens, it won't just be the Labour Party that is remade: our very understanding of the political will be transformed. It is Stuart Hall, once more, who confirms not only the implications but also the potential of such a change:

One of the most important things that Gramsci has done for us is to give us a *profoundly expanded conception* of what politics itself is like, and thus also of power and authority. We cannot, after Gramsci, go back to the notion of mistaking electoral politics, or party politics in a narrow sense, or even the occupancy of state power, as constituting the ground of modern politics itself. Gramsci understands that politics is a much expanded field; that, especially in societies of our kind, the sites on which power is constituted will be enormously varied.⁴⁶

None of this will be easy. As the movement grows, differences will surface, including some that are currently submerged in the excitement of living on the verge of success. Rachel Shabi is one of many thinkers urging the party to promote a more inclusive and participatory style, one which would 'represent a change in Labour's political culture'. This requires being open to challenge from groups that are often marginalised within the party:

Because, as women, people of colour, or anyone else who sits outside the dominant group know all too well, inclusiveness within left movements does not happen organically. It does not just sort itself out. For member democracy to be a truly empowering venture, conscious

and continuous attempts to make inclusiveness and participation a built-in part of the programme are an essential part of the politics.⁴⁷

In place of the militancy of the clenched fist, we need to embrace the majoritarian politics of open arms; we need a sense of human solidarity that increasing numbers can identify with, so that, as we join up to become part of a greater whole, we remain alert to the contradictions, anxieties and occasional fallings-out this will entail, and come together not simply as a party, but as a movement, a community.

Such an honest endeavour, and the best of motives, brings no guarantees of success. And it is made all the more difficult by the critics, who by their constant denigration risk expunging the sense of possibility that any radical politics has to cling on to.

The rise and rise of Jeremy Corbyn has been accompanied throughout by the conviction of his certain failure and misbegotten motives. But though this must be resisted, we also need to be realists. Richard Seymour, writing in 2016, combined both the optimism of the moment and pessimism of the most likely outcome: 'In the final analysis, Corbynism will struggle to outrun the limits of Labourism. And it is those limits, above all, which have brought us to this impasse'.⁴⁸ Such circumspection was certainly justified in 2016, and even now, at the height of Corbynism's popularity, it remains necessary.

We need both hope and doubt: one without the other is not much good to anyone. But we need also always to remember that eras do come to an end. This is what Thatcher achieved when she overturned the postwar consensus to win consent for the forging of a free economy within a shrinking state. Blairism largely continued the trajectory of the neoliberal consensus it had inherited, and this continued with Brown, Cameron and Clegg. But the successes of 2017 are the beginnings of a reversal of all that.

The 2017 election showed, at least in part, the potential for a resurgent progressive majority. This did not come from a tactical voting stitch-up between the parties, or behind-closed-doors coalition deal-making: it was much more a question of a resurgent popular politics, embedded in values but not so rigidly that it set people apart. There is a long way to go, but there are signs that the momentum is continuing. Labour is putting itself at the cutting edge of oppositional politics, and it needs to continue to do this, winning support for its proposals in parliament and outside from

the SNP, Lib-Dems, Plaid Cymru and the Greens' Caroline Lucas. They need to expose May's weakness, as well the Tories' deep-seated ambivalence about doing anything that serves the common good if they can possibly avoid it, while always being the first to defend the interest of the few.

Labour needs to win the next election, but an even bigger prize will be the creation of a radicalised majority that can embed a new, progressive, post-neoliberal, consensus right across civil society.

Stuart Hall summed up the way Thatcherism achieved its dominance:

It works on the ground of already constituted social practices and lived ideologies. It wins space there by constantly drawing on these elements which have secured over time a traditional resonance and left their traces in popular inventories. At the same time, it changes the field of struggle by changing the place, the position, the relative weight of the condensations within one discourse and constructing them according to an alternative logic.⁴⁹

A very similar strategy needs to be put into play to entirely different ends by Labour in 2017 and beyond.

Maybe revisiting the ideas that have framed my politics isn't such a bad idea – though not with the aim of freezing them in time. I've often considered the accusation of revisionism to be a compliment rather than an insult. But it is good to go back to Hall's militancy of uncertainty and his hard-headed recognition of the strength of the opposition. The ideas I have set out here, coupled with an unstoppable sense of optimism in the bleakest of times, have been my personal resources of hope. If Hall's words in any way sum up the prospects for Corbyn now, it is not, of course, that Corbynism has anything in common with Thatcherism. Nor is it the case that the idea of hegemony can ever be disconnected from the politics of the conjuncture that shapes it. Instead Hall's account should be read as the definitive account of what a hegemonic, transformative politics looks like.

In 1979 it was the right that understood and articulated such a hegemonic politics, to devastating effect. 'The great moving right show' went into excruciating detail in its forecast of the lengthy nightmare that Thatcher would unleash on us. In the intervening decades we've travelled from old times to new times, and with more than our fair share

of hard times. Now, pregnant with possibilities, it is Corbynism that has the potential to become hegemonic and transformative – to ‘work on the ground’, ‘win space’, and in the process ‘change the field of struggle’ with an ‘alternative logic’. We’ve waited long enough for such a moment. A great moving left show just might be about to take the stage, allowing the good times to finally roll. Cue: ‘Oh, Jeremy Corbyn’ (repeat).

NOTES

1. Jason Cowley, ‘The Reckoning’, *New Statesman*, 2-8 June 2017, p28.
2. See for example ‘Leader: Corbyn’s failure is no excuse for fatalism’, *New Statesman*, 31 March to 6 April 2017, p 3; Nick Pearce, ‘Corbynism is invisible now. It has no secrets to conceal’, *New Statesman*, 31 March to 6 April 2017, p 36; Jonathan Freedland, ‘Copeland shows that Corbyn must go’ *The Guardian*, 25 February 2017; Owen Jones ‘Polling and Labour’s Prospects’, www.medium.com, 21 October 2016 and ‘Last words on the Labour Leadership’, www.medium.com, 20 March 2017. And the most extreme example of the lot: Nick Cohen, ‘Don’t tell me you weren’t warned about Corbyn’, *Observer*, 19 March 2017.
3. John Harris, ‘Back to the future’, *The Guardian*, 29 September 2015.
4. See Marina Prentoulis’s and James Doran’s essays in this volume. Also James Doran, ‘5 Things you need to know about Pasokification’, www.novaramedia.com, 28 January 2015.
5. Polly Toynbee, ‘Never mind who leaked it, this Labour Manifesto is a cornucopia of delights’, *The Guardian*, 11 May 2017.
6. Editorial, *The Guardian*, 17 May 2017.
7. Michael Rustin, ‘The prospect of change’, *Soundings* blog, www.lwbooks.co.uk, 16 June 2017.
8. Peter Kyle MP, quoted in Cowley, *ibid.*, p28.
9. Gary Younge, Stuart Hall Foundation Keynote Speech, www.stuarthall-foundation.org, 28 November 2015.
10. Gary Younge, ‘A shock to the system’, *The Guardian*, 17 June 2017.
11. Hywel Francis, *History on our Side: Wales & The 1984-85 Miners Strike*, Lawrence & Wishart: London, 2015, p80.
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