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Britain

Jez we did! – A political earthquake

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Socialist Resistance enthusiastically welcomes the election of Jeremy Corbyn as leader of the Labour Party. Such a result seemed inconceivable after the Tory victory on May 7 and represents a political earthquake in British politics with the potential to regenerate and reshape the left. [1]

The scale of Corbyn's victory in the first round, over his lacklustre opponents, [3] deals a crushing blow to the New Labour machine which tried time and again throughout the campaign to undermine his ideas and his record without success.

A diverse tide of support lies behind this remarkable development.

Young people, thrown on the scrap heap by the Tories through their attacks on students and young workers, have unsurprisingly played a prominent part.

Disabled people, whose right to benefits are under massive attack, remember that Jeremy Corbyn has been alongside them in their campaigns against these cruel assaults.

Those who have stood in solidarity with the Palestinian people, campaigned against Trident [4] and who see themselves as part of the peace movement know that Jeremy has been one of their most stalwart supporters.

Trade unionists opposing the Tories attacks on the right to strike are involved. The support of major trade unions such as UNITE, UNISON and CWU has been central. [5]

It is no accident that one of the first visible signs of the strength of Corbyn's campaign was on the massive Peoples' Assembly march against austerity on June 20. [6]

Corbyn's natural allies include those who have acted in a myriad of different ways in solidarity with refugees. The government must do more to support those fleeing war – and climate change and poverty. [7]

The Corbyn surge reflects the same processes that led to the development of Syriza in Greece or the rapid growth of Podemos in the Spanish State or with the Bernie Sanders campaign in the US as well as the Green surge in Britain. It is an inchoate cry for a real alternative to-austerity – and in the case of the Corbyn campaign with an anti-war dynamic also at its centre.

These developments have factors in common with the anti-globalisation movement that came before "but have overcome the antiparty view that characterized that phase of radicalization.

Possibly the biggest single factor was the Scottish referendum campaign, and the huge radicalisation to the left that took place, particularly amongst young people. It reflects the impact of the anti-austerity alliance between the Greens, the SNP and Plaid during the election campaign, followed by the impact of the SNP in Parliament since the where they have often provided the only real opposition to Cameron and Osborne.

Jez we did! – A political earthquake

It is a reaction against the cringing response of leading Labour figures after the election that the defeat was because Miliband had been too far to the left and the need now was to adopt a raft of Tory policies.

This was followed by the equally remarkable decision of Harriet Harman (acting leader of the Labour Party since the post-election resignation of Ed Miliband) to call for an abstention on the Budget, though it included the Welfare Bill which has brought real fear to the lives of over 13 million households with its outrageous two child cap (no benefits for the third and subsequent children in a family), withdrawal of housing benefit from young people and so much more.

Corbyn's opponents argue that his ideas are crazy and that he is unelectable as Prime Minister. Corbyn's own growing majority, that of Green MP Caroline Lucas, and most clearly the massive success of the SNP last May, demonstrate that it is a myth that radical ideas can't win broad support.

It is the ideas Jeremy Corbyn promotes which reach out to those who don't vote because they haven't seen a difference between mainstream political parties and their cronyism and corruption. He has been able to win people away from UKIP who were abandoned by the Labour Party under Blair advocating answers that are essential to their lives on questions such as housing and education

The dynamic of his campaign shows what is possible if the arguments are made.

Socialist Resistance welcomes the fact that Corbyn is going to open up a major discussion on all areas of policy, including those one which we don't entirely agree with him. But a government he led opposing austerity and based on his programme would be immeasurably better for the vast majority of people – in this country and across the world – than those of the defeated candidates for the Labour leadership, let alone those of the Tories.

Corbyn puts forward ideas which seem common sense to many people and gives them hope that they can be part of creating something better. He doesn't talk at people or even to them but with them. To many thousands of people, on the contrary it is the idea that profit comes before people that is an unbelievable lie.

Many of his detailed policy papers, which have much in common with the ideas of Tony Benn rebadged for the 21st century, ask supporters to send their comments and addition. But more importantly perhaps, the emphasis is on collective action – on building a mass movement which can transform the situation – a process which has undoubtedly started through this extraordinary summer.

Socialism as an idea and as an aspiration has a new legitimacy. Collective organisation in our communities and in our workplaces is strengthened both as an idea and a goal to defend what we have and demand what we need.

On a range of questions from Trident to transport, from migration to privatisation the left will be given space to put forward our point of view.

This also creates a better opportunity to discuss out on the left where we have differences, what vision for socialism and how best to get there.

We urge Corbyn to come out for electoral reform as a pledge of early move away from the undemocratic First Past the Post system, would open up a new constituency of support. We also think support for Scottish independence would be a positive move.

Powerful interests divided

Throughout the campaign there have been attempts to vilify Corbyn by powerful interests inside and outside the Labour Party. So far they have not succeeded in preventing his election.

Those inside the Labour Party seems to have had to revise their initial plan try to immediately unseat him if elected because of the strength of the movement surrounding him.

But of course that does not mean that there will be any softening in their objective.

The right inside the Labour Party remain determined to remove him well before 2020 so that one of their own can take them into the next General Election. It is not easy to see who they will unite around – as they were unable to do in this contest.

Powerful forces in the media and the state - a British state which thought Harold Wilson was working for Moscow and a threat - are not going to be accommodating to Jeremy Corbyn.

The battles to come

The tens of thousands who have flocked to Corbyn's campaign have done so because they want to change the way society is run. Many of them are already involved in campaigns against austerity and for social justice. Many are student activists and trade union campaigners. But there will be a new audience for both radical ideas and collective action born out of the Corbyn surge. Every campaign, every organisation working for positive change will need to ensure these people are involved and welcomed

The Labour Party which Corbyn now leads is not the Labour Party he joined. Labour Party democracy, a key axis of the left in the 1980s, was destroyed by the Blairites not only by the emblematic overturning of Clause Four but by the obliteration of other mechanisms for grass roots involvement in decision making.

Labour Party conference had become more like a rally for the media than a place where members determine policy for example. These changes were essential to shift power from Labour Party members and to Labour supporters in the affiliated unions to the New Labour machine.

And of course throughout this campaign we have seen thousands – probably the overwhelming majority of them Corbyn supporters – excluded from voting because they apparently don't support "labour values". The definition of these so-called values has all too often been in the hands of people who support austerity-lite and have been pushing cuts and privatisation.

Since Blair succeeded in closing down Labour Party democracy we have supported projects to put forward a political alternative. We have been actively involved in Left Unity since it started to be created in early 2013 and remain fully committed to it.

Left Unity has welcomed Corbyn's campaign and noted that on many questions there are large overlaps between what Corbyn stands for and what Left Unity puts forward. It is possible that a transformed Labour Party could fill the space that Left Unity tries to occupy but that's not the situation at the minute even with Corbyn at the helm.

Jez we did! – A political earthquake

Corbyn has talked about debating Clause Four again. This too would be a welcome opportunity to explore what we mean by socialism – a word he has been instrumental in repopularising.

Far more would need to be done to transform the Labour Party in a way that it could be part of the engine of such change. Genuine democracy and accountability at all levels would need to be introduced in a way that was not even achieved in the 1980s. Bans, prescriptions and exclusions would need to be overturned.

Saying never in politics is a dangerous thing – especially after a summer like this – but without these sort of changes the Labour Party for us, despite Corbyn's victory, remains a party of war and of privatisation.

We will stand full square with Jeremy Corbyn and his supporters building a mass movement to fight against austerity, war and racism and for internationalism. And in a civil war within the wider labour movement to unseat him we will be absolutely on his side.

London, 13 September 2015

[1] “Jez we can” was one of the main slogans of the campaign especially on twitter. Jez is a diminutive form of Jeremy.

[2] See [The implications of the general election results](#).

[3] Labour Party website [Results of the Labour Leadership elections](#).

[4] Britain's nuclear submarine – due for replacement.

[5] These are three of Britain's largest unions. UNITE organises across many sectors, UNISON in the public sector and CWU in post and telecoms.

[6] The first national protest against austerity after the general election with around 250,000 protestors. See Socialist Resistance "[Irreverent defiance is part of the answer](#)".

[7] The day of Corbyn's election (12 September) saw a large demonstration in London of around 50,000 under the slogan “Refugees are welcome here”. In his acceptance speech Corbyn said he was going from the conference to the demonstration where he was warmly received.