

Britain, To the Barricades Comrades?

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"From nowhere, a grassroots power base of [60,000] left-wing activists overturned Blair's 20-year "New Labour" project, which took the party into the Clintonite center ground, and ultimately to three straight general election victories, No.10 Downing Street, and government. As the leader of Britain's main opposition, Corbyn is technically the next prime minister in waiting. This is not a trivial achievement.

"It has left his party's establishment stunned." - ["Momentum: The Inside story of how Corbyn took control of the Labour Party"](#), Business Insider, March 3, 2016

Millions of people put their faith in Jeremy Corbyn (less so the Labour Party I venture to guess). But whether you want it or not, when you get Jeremy Corbyn, you get the Labour Party, the two are joined at the hip. So the question all Labour supporters need to ask is; will a Labour government deliver anything close to Corbyn's Manifesto, even the neoliberalised version, had they won power? An end to austerity, investing in the health service, in jobs, in housing and in education and ending our imperialist adventures abroad? In other words, not only addressing the basics of life in this, one of the richest countries on the planet, but halting our murderous pillaging of the planet.

To the Barricades? I don't think so, but...the 'grassroots' mobilisation that Momentum, 38 Degrees *et al* spearheaded shows just what can be achieved once you move outside the Parliamentary straight-jacket and address the real concerns of working people, where they live and work.



British comedian Francesca Martinez (C) speaks at a rally in support of Labour Leader Jeremy Corbyn by the grassroots group Momentum at The Troxy on July 6, 2016 in London, England (Source: [Labor Union TV](#))

Apparently, as I suggested in my previous outings on this subject, it was the youth vote that turned the tables, adding around 1.2 million votes to the Labour total (55% of the under-35s and 2 million would have made it a Labour victory). It made the difference, to what exactly, I'm not sure, given how the Parliamentary Labour Party remains light-years away from the millions mobilised by Momentum, 38 Degrees etc. Can the gap (chasm) be bridged?

Of course Momentum and 38 Degrees are over the Moon. The results vindicate their strategy of targeting the youth vote. I got this missive from 38 Degrees following the election result:

My name's David, I'm executive director of 38 Degrees.

At 6am this morning, I sat down with the 38 Degrees staff team to try to make sense of the general election result.

I don't know about you, William, but I was pretty surprised it's a hung parliament. [1] I'm still trying to decide exactly what to do next - and I'd like your help with that.

As 38 Degrees-ers, our strength comes from the fact there are millions of us, and we choose our campaigns together. We don't make these decisions alone.
- email from 38 Degrees

No you surely don't! The emasculation of Corbyn's [Draft Election Manifesto](#) is proof of that, and it was a compromise to start with. And this is the problem. Momentum mobilises people essentially using a deception. They've used the deception that Corbyn's Draft Manifesto is the Labour Party's programme but it isn't, not that of the Labour MPs in Parliament who are, by the way, not bound to reflect the views of the constituencies that nominated them, if indeed they did actually select them.

Rank and file members and supporters of Corbyn's Labour Party have absolutely no control over the Party's final programme, that's all decided behind closed doors by the Party's hierarchy, *with* Corbyn. Furthermore, the Momentum/38Degrees campaign was not *for* Corbyn *per se* but for the Labour Party and its bureaucracy of which Corbyn is an integral part.

As proof of this, any attempt at incorporating other progressive voices that are not totally subordinate to the Labour Party will be silenced/removed (as they were during the election process, more on this below).

Progressive voices within the Labour Party, even at the constituency level will be under the watchful eye of the Party bureaucracy for signs of any deviation from the 'true path'. The mechanism is called [Bans and Proscriptions](#) and it's been used time and time again to remove any 'toxic' influence i.e., those to the left of the Labour Party. This is not to say that there aren't political groups who practice what is known as '[entryism](#)', we saw this during the year-long battle over Corbyn's leadership of the Party that started in 2015. But such tactics are limited to individual Labour Party branches and hardly constitute a threat to the Labour Party itself. Now I don't want to get into a tussle over whether such tactics are legitimate, personally, I think that it's unethical and frankly opportunist, it's not something I would do. It's the old, means justify the ends versus the ends justifying means.

As the 1950s came to an end, the number of proscribed organisations continued to grow. In 1959 the Socialist Labour League, of which Gerry Healy was a leading member and whose comrades were also Labour Party members, was proscribed. SLL influence over the Labour Party's youth organisation, the Young Socialists, led to the Labour right closing YS in 1964. In the 1960s, proscribed organisations included the British-Soviet Friendship Society, the World Peace Council and the World Federation of Trade Unions. In 1965, Labour's NEC expelled 18 members of Paddington South CLP following allegations of a Trotskyist takeover.
- [Labour Party Marxists](#)

The problem with the various 'extra-Parliamentary' structures setup to help put the Labour Party back in power, the so-called grassroots structures and actions, is that all are geared to

work with the Labour Party, and *only* the Labour Party. So to talk of 'grassroots' campaigning is somewhat misleading. The entire campaign was *all* about returning a Labour government, but not necessarily a Labour government that the 40% voted for.

Momentum

It is likely that as Momentum grows and if it takes to the streets, the political space available to the SWP will continue to shrink. What Corbyn has unleashed is not an electoral machine, but a movement. What happens to this movement is the single most important consideration for the immediate future. If it remains tied to the apron strings of the Labour Party and is subordinated to the electoral whims of the bureaucracy it will dissipate. If on the other hand it goes beyond electoral politics, if it supports workers in struggle, if it revives student protests, if it leads the fight against privatisation, if it organises in the community, if it builds solidarity between all sections of workers including between the youth and the elderly who are going to be under siege, it can change Britain. - ['MAYfly, Brexit, the Economy and the SWP'](#)

But using the Labour Party as the vehicle?

So what is Momentum and why is it important to understand its role? Is it a campaigning group, a political action committee (PAC) or even a political party? In some respects it's all of these things and then none of them. To some extent it's modeled on PACs and very much the product of the 'social media' generation, it has proved incredibly effective at utilising so-called social media tools. I suspect also, that the Labour/Tory/Lib-Dem, you name it, political parties, are clueless about such things and can only gawp, when, for once, the tools of manipulation and control are turned against them.

And who are Momentum? Well you've got the Left of the Labour Party posse, who still see the Road to Socialism as running through 10 Downing Street. Then you've got an assortment of Leftie 'marxist' types, I hazard a guess mainly from the SWP (Socialist Workers Party), who have a long and rather tawdry history of opportunism, ready to jump onto whatever bandwagon rolls past their front door and then jump off whenever it no longer suits them.



Source: [Labour Party Marxists](#)

But most important of all, you've got a lot of young people who are entirely new to political activism. These are the important people and hopefully, the SWP's antics won't put them off.

But have Momentum really created a movement as the guys at [planningmotive.com](#) assert? And if so, how does it relate to the Labour Party and any future Labour government? It's one thing to motivate a lot of youngster via Twitter or Facebook (they don't read newspapers and probably don't watch TV either), but as they say, 'If [Momentum] remains tied to the apron strings of the Labour Party and is subordinated to the electoral whims of the bureaucracy it will dissipate. If on the other hand it goes beyond electoral politics, if it supports workers in struggle, if it revives student protests, if it leads the fight against privatisation, if it organises in the community, if it builds solidarity between all sections of workers including between the youth and the elderly who are going to be under siege, it can change Britain'.

But will Momentum take to the streets and what will be the Labour Party's hierarchy's response? It would after all, be a challenge not only to their control of the Labour Party but to the Labour Party itself!

Momentum arose because of the unlikely and unexpected election of Jeremy Corbyn to the head of the Labour Party. Once in place, those on the left saw an opportunity to shift the Labour Party away away from its neoliberal, Blairite position. But toward what? 1945? A return to Keynesian economics and the Welfare state? Is this possible in the current climate? Moreover, do it using the Labour Party? This is after all, where Corbyn's (draft) Manifesto sat, effectively in the past 'glories' of a post-war Labour government.

Game Over?

Late-breaking news, the death of Momentum? Apparently, from the 1st of July all Momentum members will *have* to be Labour Party members. This was the result of a bitter power

struggle within Momentum. In effect the Labour Party will control who belongs to Momentum.

The new voters?

Let's take a look at these new, young voters: Who are they? What do they want? Is it an homogenous sector of British society? Where do they come from? On the face of it, they clearly want/need what Corbyn was offering them. But assuming Corbyn had actually won the election (for) the Labour Party, would these young voters have been satisfied with what this newly invigorated Labour Party/government had to offer them, in the current climate?

So it's clearly going to take more, much more than electing the Labour Party, even with Corbyn (theoretically) at its helm, to start the ball rolling and bring about a real, fundamental transformation of society.

Now you may well think me some kind of utopian fool at this point in my investigation but just look at the attempts at overcoming this neoliberal madness; Syriza in Greece, the Bolivarians in Venezuela, Podemos in Spain. All tried to reverse the tide of austerity utilising *only* the tools of Parliamentarism and all failed. These are the failures of a reformist left that continues to operate within the confines of a so-called democracy.

So what is possible and is Parliament really the best starting point?

Assuming that the 'Corbyn effect' is just the beginning of the process of bringing about revolutionary transformation, given that Momentum/38 Degrees etc are really exclusive conduits for the Labour Party, either they have to broaden their base (would the Labour Party tolerate this?) or, here's a thought: perhaps Corbyn has to carry the constituency parties who supported him, plus the millions who voted for him and create a new mass structure independent of the Labour Party?

Even assuming that this is possible, it's clearly a long term project that has very little to do with voting for these characters every five years (or whenever *they* feel like it).

It strikes me that in the UK there are two kinds of lefties; there are the lefties who have no problem with our imperialist antics abroad (see the [Labour Party Manifesto](#) for examples), preferring to advocate for 'socialist' remedies at home. And this approach goes all the way back to the very foundation of the Labour Party, that once it accepted the so-called Parliamentary road to socialism [*sic*], it was firmly embedded (read coopted) into the capitalist state.

The brief period of the post-WWII Labour government saw it adopting socialist methods (much as capitalists have done and still do) and for two reasons: firstly because the UK was bankrupt, therefore it was essential for the state to step in (when capitalists are broke, they have no problem accepting the public's largesse) and secondly, to stave off a *real* revolution, or at least the possibility of one.

This was the setting of the Cold War and our 'socialist' Labour Party had no qualms about its red-baiting tactics used against 'comrades' and it's still being used to this day. But it was our actions abroad where it dived in with gusto to protect the Empire's assets, in [Africa](#) and Asia and wherever 'our' interests' were threatened.

Of course it can be argued that even the emasculated Manifesto that was finally presented

to the electorate is the best we can hope for under the circumstances, but is this true? The question Labour voters have to ask themselves is whether the Labour Party programme that they voted for, would ever materialise? And if it didn't, what means do we have, those who voted for the Labour Party, to enforce our will? In other words, is the Labour Party and this future Labour government democratic?

Richard Seymour, well known on the left has written what is actually more of a historical timeline on the rise of Corbyn than it is an analysis of the election and its result, '[Where do we go From Here?](#)'. So we read:

"The result [of the election] now is that Labour is just a two percent swing away from power, with a popular left wing agenda, and ahead in the polls."
[bid] (my emph. WB)

A popular leftwing agenda after Corbyn's manifesto had been trashed by the Labour Party bureaucracy? I'll repeat here how the Draft Manifesto was mangled by the hierarchy (with Corbyn's collusion):

The draft, produced by the team around Labour's nominally left leader Jeremy Corbyn, was subject to ratification by the party's top officials on May 11. It sought to marry a watery commitment to certain social reforms and a slight relaxation in the Conservatives' austerity agenda with a raft of measures demanded by the Blairite right wing. In particular, it committed Labour to the £200 billion renewal of the Trident nuclear weapons system, and to supporting NATO, and included a declaration that Corbyn would be prepared to launch a nuclear attack—albeit while being "extremely cautious" about it.

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However, the concessions contained in Labour's draft manifesto have since been revealed as only a staging post for Corbyn in what his shadow foreign secretary, Emily Thornberry, described as a "[journey](#)" towards accepting NATO and nuclear war.

The qualification on the use of the armed forces contained in the draft version,

"That's why we will never send them into harm's way unless all other options have been exhausted," is removed in the final manifesto.

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Nothing Corbyn says is worth a damn. At the launch of the manifesto, he pledged that Labour would end the brutal Tory policy of a freeze on working-age welfare benefits.

"Clearly we are not going to freeze benefits. That is very clear," he proclaimed. One hour later, he was in full reverse, baldly stating, "We've not made any commitment on that." By the end of the day, Thornberry was stating, "I don't think we can reverse it entirely. We shouldn't be promising things we can't afford."

In spite of this, Seymour ends on this upbeat note:

“Jeremy Corbyn took the leadership of the Labour Party at a moment when its secular crisis had become crystal clear, offered a diagnosis and a cure, and made it take the medicine even against stubborn resistance. Organisationally and electorally, he has begun to turn it around, much faster than anyone would have expected. He has found hidden reservoirs of support and strength for the Left, raw materials for social transformation. In doing so, he has also exposed the inherent fragility of the supposedly indomitable, terrifying Tory machine, accentuating its inherited crises and long term decline, and potentially hastening the end of its role as a viable party of government.

“This is a once in a lifetime moment, wherein mobilisation and activism could fundamentally change the whole direction of the country, giving a socialist inflection and shape to popular discontents and aspirations. The Left has nothing better, or more important, to do than make this happen.”

But in reality, these stirring words are more wishful thinking than an accurate reflection of the state of play. Seymour still sees the Parliamentary Labour Party as the vehicle to carry out social transformation, when it’s clear that the Labour Party has no intention of doing anything other than try to assure its own survival and the survival of capitalism. We need look no further than the duplicitous history of the Labour Party stabbing its supporters in the back.

Postscript: I had intended to include an interview I conducted with someone who joined the Labour Party as a direct result of the rise of Corbyn, but firstly this essay is already nearly 3000 words and I could easily see the interview doubling that. So I decided to publish it as separate essay shortly.

Featured image: In Defence of Marxism

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