

Where Is Our Jeremy Corbyn?

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The politics of Jeremy Corbyn, [elected by a landslide](#) Saturday to lead Britain's Labour Party after its defeat at the polls last May, are part of the global revolt against corporate tyranny. He had spent his long career as a pariah within his country's political establishment. But because he held fast to the socialist ideals that defined the old Labour Party, he has risen untarnished out of the ash heap of [neoliberalism](#). His integrity, as well as his fearlessness, offers a lesson to America's self-identified left, which is long on rhetoric, preoccupied with accommodating the power elites—especially those in the Democratic Party—and very short on courage.

I will not support a politician who sells out the Palestinians and panders to the Israel lobby any more than I will support a politician who refuses to confront the bloated military and arms industry or white supremacy and racial injustice. The Palestinian issue is not a tangential issue. It is an integral part of Americans' efforts to dismantle our war machine, the neoliberal policies that see austerity and violence as the primary language for speaking to the rest of the world, and the corroding influence of money in the U.S. political system. Stand up to the masters of war and the Israel lobby and you will probably stand up to every other corporate and neoliberal force that is cannibalizing the United States. This is what leadership is about. It is about having a vision. And it is about fighting for that vision.

Corbyn, who supports negotiations with Hamas and Hezbollah and once invited members from those organizations to visit Parliament, has called for Israel's leaders to be put on trial for war crimes against the Palestinians. He has expressed support for the boycott, divestment and sanctions movement (BDS) against Israel and the call for an arms embargo against that nation. He would scrap Britain's Prevention of Terrorism Act, which, like the Patriot Act in the United States, has been used to target and harass Muslims. He wants the United Kingdom to withdraw from NATO. He cannot conceive of any situation, he has said, that would necessitate sending British troops abroad. He was a vocal opponent of the invasion and occupation of Iraq and a founder of the [Stop the War Coalition](#). He denounced the United States for what he called its "assassination" of Osama bin Laden, saying the al-Qaida leader should have been captured and put on trial, and he assailed the British government for using militarized drones to [kill two British jihadists](#) in Syria in August. He advocates unilateral nuclear disarmament and has urged the elimination of Trident, his country's nuclear weapons system. He opposes any British military intervention in Syria and wants to put pressure on "our supposed allies in the region"—read Saudi Arabia—that support Islamic State. He has called for talks with the leaders of warring factions in Iraq and Afghanistan to end the conflicts.



Jeremy Corbyn waves in London after he was elected the leader of the Labour Party on

Saturday. (Kirsty Wigglesworth / AP)

“There is no solution to the killing and abuse of human rights [in the Middle East] that involves yet more Western military action,” [Corbyn has written](#). “Ultimately there has to be a political solution in the region which bombing by NATO forces cannot bring about. The drama of the killings and advances by ISIS in the past few weeks is yet another result of the Bush-Blair war on terror since 2001. The victims of these wars are the refugees and those driven from their homes and the thousands of unknown civilians who have died and will continue to die in the region. The ‘winners’ are inevitably the arms manufacturers and those who gain from the natural resources of the region.”

Corbyn says he will back significantly increasing taxes on the wealthy and ending the unfair tax breaks of corporations. He is for imposing safeguards to protect those on welfare and instituting a “maximum wage” for corporate executives in order to fight “grotesque levels of inequality.” He would install widespread rent control to stop what he calls “social cleansing” caused by gentrification. He has called on the Bank of England to carry out what he terms a “People’s Quantitative Easing,” demanding it invest billions in housing, energy and other infrastructure projects. He supports the creation of a sanctuary in the Antarctic to prevent mining and oil drilling there. He opposes [fracking](#). He calls for government investment to build renewable energy based on solar and wind, and “global regulation” to prevent the export of carbon products. And he would end the steps to privatize parts of his country’s universal health care system, known as the National Health Service.

As Labour veered to the right and became dominated by corporate money and neoliberalism under Prime Ministers Tony Blair and Gordon Brown—a process also carried out by the Democratic Party under Bill Clinton and Barack Obama—Corbyn became a rebel in his own party. Between 1997 and 2010, as a member of Parliament, where he has held a seat since 1983, he voted against bills or challenged positions championed by the “new” Labour Party leadership more than 500 times. Blair, who detests Corbyn, warned that if Labour backs Corbyn in the next election for prime minister (which is set for 2020 but can be held any time a no-confidence vote occurs in Parliament), it will face “annihilation” at the polls. Corbyn responded by suggesting that [Blair should be prosecuted](#) as a war criminal for his role in the 2003 invasion of Iraq.

Corbyn, in the course of his roughly 40 years on the fringes of the British political establishment, has called for the abolition of the British monarchy and has described Karl Marx as “a fascinating figure who observed a great deal and from whom we can learn a great deal.” He wants to nationalize energy companies and renationalize the post office and the rail service. “Without exception, the majority electricity, gas, water and railway infrastructures of Britain were built through public investment since the end of WWII and were all privatised at knock-down prices for the benefit of greedy asset-strippers by the Thatcher and [John] Major-led Tory governments,” [he wrote in a column](#) for the Morning Star newspaper.

He has raised the possibility of the U.K. leaving the European Union, citing the EU’s draconian assault on the Greek people in the name of austerity. “Look at it another way,” Corbyn said. “If we allow unaccountable forces to destroy an economy like Greece, when all that bailout money isn’t going to the Greek people, it’s going to various banks all across Europe, then I think we need to think very, very carefully about what role they [the EU] are

playing and what role we are playing in that.”

Corbyn has proposed a National Education Service that would, with increased taxes on corporations, provide free universal education starting with day care and going up through vocational schools, adult education programs and universities. He would abolish the British equivalent of charter schools and end the tax-exempt status of the elite private schools. He would bring back state funding for the arts. He [issued a statement](#) in August titled “The arts are for everyone not the few; there is creativity in all of us.” It is worth reading.

The arts community in the United States, like that in Britain, is in deep distress. Actors, dancers, musicians, sculptors, singers, painters, writers, poets and even journalists often cannot make a living. They have few spaces where they can perform or publish new work. And established theaters, desperate to make money to survive, produce tawdry spectacles or plays that are empty pieces of entertainment rather than art. The war on the arts has been one of the major contributions to the dumbing down of America. It shuts us off from our intellectual and artistic patrimony, contributing to our historical and cultural amnesia. The parallel removal of the arts from school curriculums, now dominated by vocational skills and standardized testing, has cemented into place a system in which Americans have been taught what to think, not how to think. Self-expression and creativity, disciplines that make possible self-awareness, transcendence and the capacity for reverence, are anathemas to the corporate state. The imposed dogma of neoliberalism must be unquestioned.

“Under the guise of a politically motivated austerity programme, this government has savaged arts funding with projects increasingly required to justify their artistic and social contributions in the narrow, ruthlessly instrumentalist approach of the Thatcher governments,” Corbyn wrote in the August statement. “During the 1980s, [then-Prime Minister Margaret] Thatcher sought to disempower the arts community, attempting to silence the provocative in favour of the populist. The current climate of Treasury value measurement methodologies (taken from practises used in the property market and elsewhere) to try to find mechanisms appropriate to calculating the value of visiting art galleries or the opera are a dangerous retreat into a callous commercialisation of every sphere of our lives. The result has been a devastating £82 million in cuts to the arts council budget over the last 5 years and the closure of the great majority of currently funded arts organisations, especially outside London.”

He went on:

Beyond the obvious economic and social benefits of the arts is the significant contribution to our communities, education, and democratic process they make. Studies have demonstrated the beneficial impact of drama studied at schools on the capacity of teenagers to communicate, learn, and to tolerate each other as well as on the likelihood that they will vote. The greater involvement of young people in the political process is something to be encouraged and celebrated. Further, the contribution and critique of our society and democracy which theatre has the capacity to offer must be protected. To quote [David Lan](#), ‘dissent is necessary to democracy, and democratic governments should have an interest in preserving sites in which that dissent can be expressed.’

Corbyn says he would also reverse the government cuts that gutted the BBC. He understands that the destruction of public broadcasting, which is designed to give a

platform to voices and artists not beholden to corporate money, means the rise of a corporate-dominated system of propaganda, one that now controls most of the U.S. airwaves.

“I firmly believe in the principle of public service broadcast and am fearful of following the path tread in the United States, where PBS has been hollowed out, unable to deliver the breadth of content to compete with the private broadcasters, and where Fox News has as a result been effectively allowed to dominate and set the news agenda,” he wrote. “I want to see the Labour Party at the heart of campaigns to protect the BBC and its license fee. When we [Labour] return to power we must fully fund public service broadcasting in all its forms, recognising the crucial role the BBC has played in establishing and supporting world class domestic arts, drama, and entertainment.”

Corbyn became a vegetarian at the age of 20 after working on a pig farm and witnessing the abuse, torture and slaughter of the animals. He champions animal rights. He does not own a car, bicycles almost everywhere and is notoriously frugal, usually filing the lowest expense of any member of Parliament. His favorite novelist is the late Nigerian writer [Chinua Achebe](#), who wrote “Things Fall Apart,” an exploration of the destructive force of colonialism. Corbyn speaks fluent Spanish and comes from a left-wing family. (His parents met at a rally in support of the Republicans fighting Franco’s fascists during the [Spanish Civil War](#).)

He is acutely aware of the problem of male violence against women. He would halt the government’s closure of domestic violence centers for women, fight discrimination against women in the workplace and bolster laws against sexual harassment and sexual assault. He says his Cabinet would be 50 percent women.

Corbyn’s ascent to the head of the Labour Party has already triggered a backlash against him by the forces of the neoliberal political order. These forces are determined to prevent him from becoming prime minister. The entrenched elites within his own party—a number of whom have already [resigned from party leadership positions](#) in protest of Corbyn’s election—will seek to do to him what the Democratic establishment did in 1972 to George McGovern after he won the party’s nomination. The rhetoric of fear has already begun. Prime Minister David Cameron on Sunday [tweeted](#): “The Labour Party is now a threat to our national security, our economic security and your family’s security.” This battle will be ugly.

Corbyn, like [Syriza in Greece and Podemos in Spain](#), is part of the new popular resistance that is rising up from the ruins of neoliberalism and globalization to fight the international banking system and American imperialism. We have yet to mount this battle effectively in the United States. But we, especially because we live in the heart of empire, have a special responsibility to defy the machine, held in place by the Democratic Party establishment, the war industry, Wall Street and groups such as the Israel lobby. We too must work to build a socialist nation. We may not win, but this fight is the only hope left to save ourselves from the predatory forces bent on the destruction of democracy and the ecosystem on which we depend for life. If the forces that oppose us triumph, we will have no future left.

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