

CORBYN: The unvarnished truth

JEREMY CORBYN is, like “Communism haunting Europe”, troubling the fevered imaginations of the *Mail On Sunday* and probably on every other day of the week too. Stephen Pollard has even been predicting a Labour attack upon Parliamentary democracy led by the ‘Leninists’, John McDonnell, Seamus Milne, and Jeremy.

I have to admit that there is something engaging about a British revolution led by somebody as reassuringly middle class as Corbyn. No minor Tsarist gentleman called Vladimir for us, but a hapless ‘Jeremy’ pottering about the kitchen while the homemade jam simmers on the stove. Indeed, Jeremy always reminds me of George Orwell’s cautionary tirade against

sandal-wearing vegetarians, who he believed would damage socialism in the eyes of most working people.

So far Orwell's apparently outmoded insight has proved surprisingly correct. Corbyn: the adulation, and the resulting hagiographies, have little purchase beyond the RMT, public sector trade unions, and university-educated working-class youth, who have merged seamlessly with their lower middle-class comrades gathered together in Momentum. Astonishingly, the Labour Party, in the face of the most dysfunctional Tory government in living memory is merely running neck-and-neck in the polls and more often than not, several points behind. Despite Stephen Pollard's fevered imaginings the great mass of working people remains untouched by the Corbyn magic.

However, so desperately worried are the editors of the *Mail On Sunday* they have decided to serialise great chunks of Tom Bower's biography of Corbyn revealing the terrible truth about Jeremy's financial ineptitude, his ascetic mode of life, his eccentricities, and the unromantic nature of his heterosexual liaisons. His friendships with Irish Republicans and Islamist fighters inevitably make an appearance, but the focus is resolutely upon his ignorance, academic failure, and the shabby, late bohemian aspects of his life.

Strikingly, Tom Bower's new biography, *Dangerous Hero: Corbyn's ruthless plot for power*, appears to have very little to say about Corbyn's politics. As a matter of course, he mentions the ersatz Stalinists that Corbyn has surrounded himself with, and the fact that he, a lifelong vegetarian, actually ate meat when banqueting with Fidel Castro – this is, I think, meant to highlight the shocking hypocrisy of the man, rather than his penchant for assiduous diplomacy when dealing with Anti-American dictators.

But Bower, the biographer of Klaus Barbie, Mohamed Al-fayed, Robert Maxell, Simon Cowell, and numerous others, is peculiarly unsuited to write about the politics of social democrats or their historic association with heading off revolutions. He evidently, has no compass when it comes to Corbyn's kind of

politics other than to issue dire warnings concerning the unfitness of the man for high office.

Bower tells us the unvarnished truth about Jeremy Corbyn's dislike of reading, his dim-witted incompetence, and the disorder which characterises political life in Islington. However, he has little to say about social democracy and the Labour Party's plan to "shift the balance of wealth and power" decisively towards the many not the few. Bower's critique rests squarely on the man, and not upon his arguments or his policies. *Ad hominem* attacks, and book length character assassination, are deployed in place of discussion of Jeremy's approach to the country's problems.

Don't get me wrong, I harbour a visceral hostility to Jeremy Corbyn and his kind of moral grandstanding as he echoes the *Morning Star's* appeal "For Peace and Socialism" while supporting the Russians fighting to keep Bashar Al-Assad in power, and defending dictators and dictatorships throughout the world. Then there is his belief, widespread upon the left, that Jews, alone amongst the world's peoples have *in principle and in fact* no right to nationalism, and no legitimate claim to nationhood.

Perhaps more nauseating is his harping on about the poor and the need to save those who (in Teresa May's memorable phrase) are struggling to make ends meet. There is no doubt, no doubt at all, that grim penury is the lot of millions at the bottom of Britain's heap. Ingrained poverty is widespread amongst the low paid and those dependant on pensions or benefits.

However, the Labour Party's assertion that this is all the fault of heartless Tories is absurd, as absurd as the idea that such misery will be magically swept away within a few years of Jeremy Corbyn's entry into Downing Street. The haggard faces, weary with worry, abound on embattled estates and throughout down-at-heel neighbourhoods. The relentless poverty of some 12 or 13 million people is undoubtedly caused by the nature of the capitalist economy and is exacerbated by

the massive changes taking place in the organisation and nature of the labour market.

The need for capital to expand has always tended to crush those that are unable to contribute to the so-called “self-expansion of capital”. To put it bluntly, if you can’t contribute to the investors’ need for profit then you are not much use to the capitalist, and you will be condemned to linger more or less in unrelieved misery outside of society’s mainstream. The labour of the low skilled and the low paid is cheap to reproduce, and easily replaced, while the need for doles for those who can’t work is kept at the minimum necessary to avoid riots and disturbances.

Yet the revolutionary rhetoric of John McDonnell and the Corbynites fares badly beside the modest social democratic measures planned for the many, not the few. We are asked to believe that a public investment bank, the revival of British industry, and the introduction of fair and truly progressive taxation will, along with substantial housebuilding, set all to rights, sweeping away poverty and despair.

This is to be accomplished by extensive nationalisation of utilities and transport, the reestablishment of ‘direct labour’ in big towns and cities, strengthened by the deployment of ‘contracts compliance’ where the state or local council as the major or sole customer can insist that the private firms who they buy from have good employment practices and high wages.

At first sight this all sounds rather reasonable. The programme rapidly falls apart, however, when it meets the reality of global investment and global labour markets, the rapid rise of exceedingly smart machines, and the more or less spontaneous transformation of the workplace and the labour market – the disappearance of much warehouse work, of checkouts at supermarkets, the wholesale closure of bank branches, and the huge loss of jobs in shops and offices.

By and large the trade unions have ignored the wisdom of King Canute by ordering the relentless tide of capitalist innovation not to come in – campaigning to

retain the right of the second person of train crews to be able to open and close the doors, opposing the closure of ticket offices, demanding an end to zero hours and other flexible contracts facilitated by GPS satellites and mobile phones. With few exceptions trade unions have by and large behaved like Luddites incapable of thinking beyond attempts to defend the *status quo*, rather than developing strategies in keeping with contemporary developments.

Capitalism really is the problem. The dominance of international commercial competition for investment and markets inevitably means that many will fall under the wheels of the juggernaut. Corbyn, McDonnell, and the Labour Party are not going to change that with a national investment bank, or 'contracts compliance'.

Bringing an end to capitalism – an extraordinarily progressive and successful system – has proved to be very difficult indeed. From Lenin to Hugo Chavez and Nicolás Maduro, from Mao Zedong to Fidel Castro – dictatorship, rule by political police, vast prison estates, massacres, cultural stagnation, society-wide shortages, and endemic poverty, have been the result of all root-and-branch attempts to overcome the capitalist mode of life.

Yet communism remains an urgent necessity – a means where we can transfer the wealth created in increasingly automated enterprises to those areas where human empathy, creativity, and imagination cannot be replaced by machines – to activities that make few if any profits: care work, teaching, fire brigades and policing, parks and recreation, pure science and academic research, theatre, medicine, nursing, and the arts in general.

These problems are not discussed seriously or in depth by Corbyn or the Corbynistas. The reasons for their reticence are varied, extending from those who see few problems with Labour's rather wan social democracy, to those leftists who harbour the illusion that they are simply hiding their true communist light under a bushel until the day dawns and the

revolutionary masses march out to destroy the state and rebuild the world anew.

What is clear from *ad hominem* attacks on Corbyn and the hagiographic defences mounted by his supporters is that politics is more or less entirely absent from the to-and-fro and argy-bargy between the rival camps. The real difficulty of overcoming capitalism and of developing political and economic strategies capable of edging us towards a system in which commerce and commercial impulses do not dominate the production of goods and services is simply not discussed.

See the pamphlet: *Revolution and the difficulty of overthrowing capitalism* at www.studiesinanti-capitalism.net