

The Far Left is its own worst enemy



FOLLOWING JEREMY CORBYN'S elevation to the leadership of the Labour Party in 2015 the far left tumbled into the Labour Party from little Leninist groupuscules, from ersatz Stalinist splinters, from red-green activism, from independent socialist discussion forums, from trade union ginger groups, and from the rather confused and dismayed anarcho-syndicalist milieu that had been milling about in the shadows for years. Even before the hatchets were quite hidden from view this political menagerie that I had called home since I was fourteen or fifteen had left the revolutionary ark – jumping ship for the promise of significance on offer in the ranks of the Labour Party.

Even when little groups and publications decided to continue their autonomous existence their political focus and attention was entirely redirected to advance the fortunes of the new cabal at the head of the Labour Party.

Over the last four years the far left has moved quickly to take control of Labour organisations, constituency by constituency, and of the party's national and regional governing bodies. The 'entryist' antics of the Revolutionary Socialist League, better known as the Militant Tendency, pale into insignificance when compared to the way the modern far left has swept the board in the Corbyn-led party.

Paradoxically, it was Tony Blair's success in destroying the historic relationship between the party's conservative bulwark provided by the leaders of big trade unions, and the permanent opposition mounted by the party's small but dogged left-wing. It was a stable relationship – it was the 'broad church' – that kept the left on a lead held firmly by the party's more pragmatic elements.

It was the destruction of this 'broad church' in the decade between the expulsion of Militant leader, Derek Hatton, in 1986 and Labour's general election victory in 1997 that transformed the party forever.

It is true that the old symbiotic relationship between the left and the right had been under severe pressure for twenty years or so before Blair ditched the party's formal commitment to nationalisation and socialist objectives. It had been undermined by the attenuation of trade union influence in the labour movement, hastened by the process of deindustrialisation, and the wholesale defeat of strikers in set-piece battles between workers and employers in one sector after another throughout the seventies and eighties. From the financial crisis of 1971-73 to the collapse of communism in 1989-91 the unions experienced falling membership as defeat after defeat took their toll.

There were victories, of course, but they were few and far between, and the trend was always downwards, as globalisation gradually took hold.

So, by 2007 the Labour Party was despite divisions over the Iraq War, firmly in the grip of those who believed that class conflict had come to an end, that the gradual domestication of the proletariat was on trend, and stable bourgeois rule was the order of the

day. As we know this nonsense came to an end with the catastrophic collapse of financial markets in the crash of 2007-2008. Almost overnight the bright confidence that had been the Blair project's stock-in-trade was revealed as worthless.

There was not a sudden return to the 'class war' or to 'class conscious' politics, but there was dismay and confusion as the Labour Party was faced with coming to terms with what amounted to a political vacuum. As the sunny nostrums of the centrists vanished, and their proponents slunk back into the wings, greatly weakened trade union leaders and the centre-left were compelled to start casting around for a future. And it was the spectacular failure of this future in the defeat of Labour in the general election of May 2015 that brought an end to feeble attempts to restore Labour's fortunes as a 'broad church'.

Without warning and without a mass movement the far left suddenly found themselves in possession of the leadership of the Labour Party – they had to set about constructing a mass movement *after*, rather than *before*, Jeremy Corbyn's victory. They were greatly assisted in this effort by right-wing challenges to Corbyn's leadership which resulted in the rapid growth in party membership and the consolidation of the far left's grip on the organisation.

After some shaky starts, which have involved blocking the bad habits of Trotskyists – attempting to found parallel organisations with parallel political platforms – Momentum and other organisations have managed to build a labour movement of tens of thousands of young people with a firm focus on Labour's manifesto and Labour's bid for government. They are transforming the Labour Party into a thoroughly socialist party, in love with revolutionary rhetoric, and rather modest social democratic policies.

In this effort the far left is in danger of sawing off the branch that it is sitting upon. The ruthless rejection of anybody who questions the leadership of Corbyn, and threats to de-select Labour MPs who dare to challenge the far-left consensus in the party, has

resulted in remodelling Labour as a party that can only appeal to left-wing socialists. In doing so, the far left is narrowing the party's electoral appeal. The very reason for which the Trotskyists, Marxist-Leninists, Anarcho-syndicalists, red-green activists, and old-time Stalinists, had abandoned their own puny organisations with such alacrity over the last four years – hitching their wagons to a mainstream party that would give them the influence and significance they've always craved – is being undermined by their determination to exert complete control over Labour.

Rather than openly argue the case for communism and engaging in the struggle to build a real and substantial consciousness of the need to bring about an end to an economy organised around commercial competition for investment and markets, the far left has opted for a short cut: taking control of a mainstream party, prostrate after the defeats suffered by Gordon Brown and Ed Miliband. It has done this without reference to communism or addressing any of the difficulties inherent in attempting to mobilise public opinion around the need for the democratic control of the workplace or the popular planning of the economy.

Consequently, its manoeuvring and bad faith is never far from the surface as it attempts to pull the wool over the eyes of the electorate. Whether it is on Brexit or globalisation – on the real problems facing the country – the far left has opted for John McDonnell's emollient "It'll be all right on the night" spiel, rather than an honest engagement with the difficulties of offering modest, essentially parochial, social democratic solutions to what are in fact problems thrown up by rapid technical innovation, and global investment in global labour markets. As the manufacture of everything from motor cars to vacuum cleaners moves to the Far East John McDonnell simply smiles on . . .

This ducking and weaving, and economy with the truth, effects the party's posture on defence, on foreign policy, on its evasiveness regarding the anti-democratic character of the European Union, on the

desire to blame Russia's aggressions and annexations on NATO's expansion rather than on Putin's regime. The desire to blame the USA for the collapse of Venezuela's economy, rather than Hugo Chavez or the dictatorship of Nicolás Maduro. This and other evasions are of a piece with the foolhardy voluntarism of those in denial over the difficulties integral to attempts at replacing the capitalist system with one geared to the needs of the people rather than the market.

This self-deception and rank dishonesty has reached its nadir over the issue of Jews, Jewishness, and Jewish nationalism. Opposition to Zionism and support for Palestinian nationalism against that of the Jews in Israel, and the Jewish diaspora, has been *de rigueur* on the left for decades. In order to avoid charges of antisemitism left-wing people are often at pains to distinguish between Jews and Zionists, making the obvious point that not all Jews are Zionists or supporters of Israel. Apparently, anti-Zionism has got nothing to do with hostility towards Jews, despite the fact that eighty or ninety per cent of Jews in Israel, and throughout the world, are Zionists.

Specious arguments adduced regarding the distinction between hating Zionism and hating Jews fail completely when one realises that opposition to the idea of Zionism, regardless of anything the state of Israel does or is doing, is opposition to the idea *in principle and in practice* that the Jews have a right to nationhood. Accordingly, to most people on the left the Jews, alone amongst all the peoples on the planet, have no right to nationalism or nationhood.

This belief is the foundation of left antisemitism.

It didn't matter a great deal when it was confined to the marginal political ecology of tiny warring left wing groups. However, now that the left is leading the Labour Party its attitude towards the Jews and the competing nationalism of Israelis and Palestinians has inevitably become a prominent issue. Support on the left for 'the right of return' of Palestinian refugees from the war of 1948, and their descendants, to 'return' to

what is now Israel is actually support for the liquidation of the Jewish state and its replacement with a Muslim majority one – this is what lies behind left-wing support for the Islamists of Hamas and Hezbollah.

The sudden rise to prominence of the far left has brought antisemitism and many other issues to the fore. The Labour Party has never before had a foreign policy independent of the broad interests of the British bourgeois establishment, nor has it ever been a vehicle for overcoming capitalism. Although resolutely committed to promoting welfare, “Decisively changing the balance of wealth and power”, permanently, in favour of “working people and their families” has never been the objective of the Labour Party. Attempting to make it so by stealth – without publicly mobilising millions of people from the middle and working classes, is a recipe for disaster.

Social revolution can only occur effectively when the overwhelming majority of the population are self-consciously on board with a real mass movement openly committed to the transformation of society. The attempt of the far left to bamboozle the voting public into believing that the election of a Labour government led by Corbyn and McDonnell can bring about a decisive change for the better in the country’s affairs against the flow of international investments and the world market in goods and labour is nothing short of criminal irresponsibility.

A genuine and openly democratic communist mass movement, embracing and actively engaging millions, is required to begin to tackle these issues, not the voluntarism and ersatz radicalism of the present Labour leadership and their cheerleaders.

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