

Jeremy's Questions?

IT IS WELL KNOWN that Jeremy Corbyn is a man of peace. Unlike most of us he doesn't like the idea of pressing the nuclear trigger, and he is famous for always preferring negotiations to bombing campaigns. In a similar vein he clearly doesn't like apportioning blame without cast-iron proofs and incontestable evidence of wrongdoing.

As a consequence of Jeremy's commitment to being on the right side of history he has refused to support Teresa May's assertion that the Russian state was responsible for releasing the nerve agent that injured at least three people in Salisbury city centre earlier this month. He has refused to support the government's position and has instead raised a number of interesting questions:

The evidence points towards Russia on this. Therefore responsibility must be borne by those that made the weapon, those who brought the weapon into the country, and those that used the weapon. What I was asking was questions, questions about the identity of the weapon, questions about reference to the weapons convention, and also the support of other allies in this. Those are the questions I was asking, that's what oppositions are there for.

In this interview with the BBC on sixteenth of March the Labour leader was simply asking for clarity. He also called for the involvement of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons.

In expressing caution regarding Russian state responsibility for the Salisbury attack Jeremy was

simply being his eminently reasonable self – Calling for incontrovertible proof before committing himself to supporting Teresa May’s assertions of Russian guilt.

Lady Chakrabarti, shadow attorney general for England and Wales, in a bid for Labour Party unity has insisted that Jeremy and his questions are at one with the rest of the party because “we all believe that Russia is responsible for the use of the chemical weapons it holds, or for any loss of control of chemical agents it may have produced in the past.” In this way the good baroness has sought to smooth over the difference between those saying that the Russian state was responsible for the Salisbury attack and those arguing that we must wait for more evidence before we can say with any certainty that Russia has attempted to murder people on our streets.

Recently, Jeremy explained his thinking in the *Guardian*:

As I said in parliament, the Russian authorities must be held to account on the basis of the evidence, and our response must be both decisive and proportionate. But let us not manufacture a division over Russia where none exists. Labour is of course no supporter of the Putin regime, its conservative authoritarianism, abuse of human rights or political and economic corruption. And we pay tribute to Russia’s many campaigners for social justice and human rights, including for LGBT rights.

However, that does not mean we should resign ourselves to a “new cold war” of escalating arms spending, proxy conflicts across the globe and a McCarthyite intolerance of dissent. Instead, Britain needs to uphold its laws and its values without reservation. And those should be allied to a foreign policy that uses every opportunity to reduce tensions and conflict wherever possible.

“But let us not manufacture a division over Russia where none exists.” This is an interesting thought,

given that Russia has invaded and continues to occupy two provinces of Georgia, has violated Ukrainian sovereignty by annexing the Crimean peninsula, and sending troops, weapons, and irregular forces to fight an undeclared war in the country's eastern provinces. This is without regard to Russia's substantial cyber attacks on her neighbours, or sending bombers, jet fighters, and logistical support to Damascus, in order to sustain Assad's war on most of the people of Syria.

The incoherence of Jeremy's questions and thoughts do not stop here. Despite opposing Teresa May's policy of assigning responsibility for the Salisbury attack to the Russian state, he has unaccountably agreed with the government's expulsion of twenty-three Russian diplomats. This is difficult to square with his assertion that he does not yet have sufficient proof of Moscow's role in the Salisbury attack.

Things get even stickier with regard to Jeremy's call for the involvement of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons. This is because Jeremy must surely know that the OPCW at The Hague ratified Russia's destruction of 39,967 metric tons of chemical weapons, in November last year; this was purportedly Putin's entire stock.

Jeremy knows that the OPCW will be unable to to accuse Moscow of holding stocks of the nerve gas, Novichok, or of continuing to manufacture it. Jeremy must also surely know that no unequivocal proof of Russian state involvement in the Salisbury attack will ever be forthcoming, not unless he expects Vladimir Putin to suddenly start fessing up to his crimes.

It is in the nature of this attack, that no absolute proof will ever be forthcoming. Jeremy is also open to the suggestion of Mafia-like criminal involvement in the attack rather than it being the direct act of the Russian state. In this he seems to be assuming some kind of independence or autonomy of Russian criminals from Vladimir Putin's regime. This is surprising given that the Labour leader must surely know of the symbiotic

relationship between Russia's criminal cartels, legitimate business activity, and her state institutions.

From all this, one has to conclude that Jeremy's questions spring from a confusing mixture of guile, and naivety. He calls for more evidence from Theresa May, and yet as a Privy Counsellor he can arrange to go into the cabinet office to see all the papers and evidence gathered by the security services. He knows full well that Russia is a state in which the rule of law does not run, which is why London is home to thousands of Russians sheltering their millions from Vladimir Putin under the sturdy protection of British contract law.

Jeremy Corbyn knows all this, so why does he insist that we do not have sufficient proof of Russian state involvement? He presumably agrees with Craig Murray, the former British ambassador to Uzbekistan, when he recently said, "There is no evidence it was Russia. I am not ruling out that it could be Russia, though I don't see the motive. I want to see where the evidence lies."

Here, the former ambassador is lending support to the notion that Vladimir Putin does not have a motive to kill those Russians who prove disloyal to Moscow.

Clearly the evidence of Russian state involvement in the Salisbury attack is circumstantial, the nerve agent is likely to have been produced by a state, and those targeted by the weapon, were Putin's enemies. So, we can conclude that either it was Russian criminals working in support of Putin, or it was carried out directly by agents of the Russian state. The only other possibility is that the attack was planned and executed by British or American secret services in order to discredit Vladimir Putin. This, however, seems extremely unlikely because he does a pretty good job at discrediting himself, without the assistance of dastardly acts by our own spooks and spies.

So, one is brought back to the conundrum of Jeremy's questions and contradictory responses to Theresa May's assertions and actions. Why is he so reluctant to offer unequivocal support to the British

government and the British state in its conflict with Russia?

The answer has to be that he is deeply sceptical about the role of those who run Britain on behalf of the capitalist class. He believes that Britain and America, as leading exponents of free enterprise and the virtues of the profit motive, are enemies of working people and as such should always be opposed whenever they clash with external enemies or forces. This is not because Jeremy is planning to overthrow capitalism, but he along with John McDonnell are committed to running Britain and British capitalism in the interests of those earning around £28,000 a year or less – the great majority of our people.

Despite the authoritarian communists and latter-day Bolsheviks on the far left of the Labour Party, Jeremy and John, have no intention of doing anything other than attempting to reorganise British capitalism and the balance of state economic involvement in order to improve the prospects of “the many, not the few”. Yet this modest social democratic aspiration has inevitably become entangled with historic commitments on the left to ‘fight imperialism’, Washington, Nato and all its works.

This is the source of the guile, naivety, and incoherence of Jeremy’s position. He cannot campaign to run the British state without being unequivocal about the defence of private property and the sanctity of contract law. Consequently, he cannot advocate nationalisation without compensation, he cannot canvas for the seizure of private property or the abolition of capitalism, but yet he must also burnish his credentials as a man of the left – one who has always been on the right side of history. As a result he must not be seen to slide into comfortable alignment with the powers that be, he must be seen as a resolute opponent, not simply of the Tories, but of the British state, and its nefarious allies around the world.

In line with the attempt to maintain his radical *élan* Jeremy is at pains to point out that wealthy Russians have already bankrolled the Conservative Party to the

tune of around £800,000. This is why he suggests that caution is required when Tories start pointing the finger at Moscow.

Consequently, Jeremy has brushed aside the role of the Criminal Finance Act introduced by Teresa May's government and the 'unexplained wealth orders' due to come into force later this year. By shifting the focus on money laundering and insinuating reluctance on the part of the Tories to deal with corrupt oligarchs, Jeremy and the Labour Party can rest comfortably upon the moral high ground.

In this way Jeremy is able, simultaneously, to advocate the renovation of British capitalism, and yet pose as a resolute opponent of the system and all it's works. This, not a love of Russia, Venezuela, or Assad, is the source of Corbyn's slippery incoherence. It is his need to both, attack British capitalism, while campaigning for the right to govern it that leads him towards contradictory and unanswerable questions.