

Off The cuff

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Don't be downhearted . . .



THIS IS NOT AN EXERCISE IN 'BLITZ SPIRIT', but despite all our many troubles – troubles which reveal the utter bankruptcy of our politicians – we can be confident about the capacities of our people.

It is true that we have a Labour Party committed to shadowing the idea that the British state can be insulated from globalisation by the determinations of yesteryear. Just like Tory Brexiteers Labour's current leaders are committed to project 'Great Britain'. Of course, they do not want the buccaneering 'free trade' beloved of Boris Johnson and Jacob Rees-Mogg. Instead they plan a radical social democratic transformation of the country in which we will restore

manufacturing by building our own warships, buses, and railway carriages; we'll drastically reduce the need for foreign workers with innovative training schemes for indigenous British folk, and a skills-based immigration regime. Diane Abbott will close the "two main" migrant detention centres (and keep the other eight open), while her fellow Labour ministers make universal credit, foodbanks and homelessness history.

All this will be boldly done in defiance of the UK's low productivity, the movements of international capital, and the protective tariffs imposed by competitors.

The Remainers, are of course, no more imaginative. They want the *status quo ante* where they can embrace the modernity and forward thinking which they think distinguishes the European Project. It's true that there is not much room for detailed public engagement or democracy, but professional expertise and technical competence must trump the scepticism and ignorance of the rude multitude.

Remainers are remarkably silent about the manner in which the European Central Bank pushed Greece into penury, promoting a slump of 1929 proportions and the common ruin of the Greek middle and working classes. Similarly, they have little to say about Italy's current economic disarray; it is, after all a country whose economy has grown by only nine per cent over the last twenty years, compared to 32 per cent in France and Germany, and 42 per cent in Britain (an economy safely outside the Eurozone).

Ironically, Remainers and Brexiteers, like trade union leaders, and the Labour left, depict themselves as resolute democrats. Everyone from Spiked Online and the European Research Group, to the 'People's Vote' wallahs, or Jeremy Corbyn and Jon Lansman, wish to restore the fortunes and independence of the British people.

They all trumpet the virtues of democracy, consultation, and engagement, without reference to the extraordinary changes wrought in our culture and institutions by the transformation of the labour process, distribution, communications, and the organisation of

world trade that has taken place over the last forty years. All the elements of our political class are held firmly in the grip of self-deception in this regard. Most prominent amongst the fantasists are the Labour left and its ginger group Momentum.

Because they have recruited tens of thousands of new members, making Labour the largest political party in Europe, because Momentum has settled the hash of the old-style Trotskyists with on-line opinion-polling of its members, rather than delegate conferences, they have been able to harbour the illusion that by breathing life back into formerly moribund local Labour Party organisations they have changed something fundamental about the relationship of the left to the population at large.

This, of course, is not true at all, as analysis of the social composition of the Labour Party and the officials and activists of the trade union movement would reveal. The Labour left is a closed world – to be sure a very large one, which is in no sense hermetically sealed off from the wider population, but one that has failed disastrously to engage effectively with a population deeply suspicious of the political establishment, and dismayed by current developments.

Labour might win a general election, but it would do so entirely within the parameters of the debate established by the present political class. This is because Labour is held entirely within the embrace of our establishment and our state. Apart from periodic proposals for the abolition of the Lords, and support for devolution, there has never been the slightest attempt by Labour to propose reform of the Monarchy, Judiciary, or the House of Commons; this tradition has continued under the leadership of McDonnell and Corbyn. Despite extensive think-tankery there is little new thinking, or authentic hard policy proposals for fundamental reform of existing political or economic arrangements.

The deep irony inherent in the conspicuous terror rattling the Tories, and large sections of the capitalist class, when contemplating the possibility of Jeremy

Corbyn's entry into Downing Street, is that Tory panic provides excellent cover or radical camouflage for Labour's rather dog-eared social democracy.

Left activists use their refusal to ever be friends with Conservatives, or their boast to have never kissed a Tory, to stimulate entirely faux class hatreds and hostilities in which the left's virtues are contrasted with the moral turpitude inherent amongst those on the right. Of course, the real class hatreds which abound in our society remain largely unaffected by virtue-signalling and posturing on the left. The dispossessed and embittered are just as likely to break Labour's windows and those of the Tories.

The left's vacuous hostility towards 'the establishment' reached new levels this year in opposition to poppy wearing and ceremonies at war memorials in cities, towns, and villages, up and down the country. Corbyn surely knew that his hoodie was inappropriate at the Cenotaph on Whitehall. He, and his advisers, are perfectly capable of acquiring a black dress coat for the occasion. But no, they'd rather Corbyn pose as an 'ordinary member of the public' rather than a Privy Councillor, an aspiring member of the establishment, and the lifelong member of the political class that he undoubtedly is. The mourning of the war dead and the inescapable entanglement of these ceremonies with our colonial history, the militarism of our imperial past, and of our fractured present, require a more nuanced form of engagement than the sartorial raspberry offered by Labour.

Yet when it comes to Christmas the Labour Party is entirely on board with the significance of tradition and ceremony by promoting the idea that the Christian message is really a socialist one of equality and common sharing. In a broadcast saturated with unctuous sentiments worthy of Uriah Heep, Jeremy Corbyn, at his oiliest, claimed Christ's support for the many, not the few. Shamelessly abandoning all except the moral high ground, Corbyn was able to imply that the high and mighty, like Christ's rich man, would find it

harder to enter the Kingdom of God than a camel passing through the eye of a needle.

Something similar happened on Twitter with regard to the Queen's Christmas broadcast, where she was chastised – *not for being a hereditary monarch* – but for making her broadcast from a gilded drawing room in Buckingham Palace. She was even attacked for talking about the plight of those languishing at the bottom of the heap from such sumptuous surroundings – when in truth she never mentioned the poor in a broadcast which was dedicated entirely to a meditation on her family and the role of “Peace and Goodwill” in society's affairs. Rather than think about poverty the old lady dwelt upon the social harmony offered by a commitment to “Faith, Family, and Friendship”.

Irate attacks upon the Monarchy by the left would indeed be much more compelling if there had ever been a hint of sustained or serious republicanism on the British left (apart, of course, from uncertain and irresolute association with republicans of the Irish sort). Labour has never campaigned for the removal of the Queen as head of state, as the head of the Church of England, the convenor of Parliament, the appointee of Judges, or in her role of approving and signing all Acts of Parliament. These apparently merely ceremonial functions of the monarch underpin the arbitrary and undemocratic powers and patronage of our serving Prime Ministers, both Labour and Tory, and of the House of Lords.

A good case for removing the Monarch from all political and constitutional roles and powers, while retaining the ambassadorial role of the Royal Family as the wildly popular ornament of our state that it undoubtedly is, could be made – but Labour with its long leftist tail has never done so. They have always preferred joining the Privy Council, bending the knee, and accepting knighthoods and peerages.

Brexit has revealed the cultural crisis at the heart of our political class and the failure, common on the left, right, and centre, to deal with the realities of the British state, a state in need of dramatic reform to make it fit for

purpose; fit for the management for a medium sized power, that will inevitably become less important as other states across the world mobilise the resources of their truly enormous populations. Cleaving to the European Union in its present form, setting out as a mid-twentieth century social democratic state, or as a buccaneering free trader, will not address the problems which our people, our political and economic arrangements, and our state will have to contend with in the near future.

It is striking the degree to which current political discourse on all sides exhibit a profound incapacity to think effectively about our low productivity, the quality of our training and education, our relatively poor infrastructure, and regional economic dissonance. It is true, of course, that all these matters figure in one way or another in the political rhetoric and agendas of all the major parties, without connecting or making significant contact between these issues, and our domestic institutional disarray, our democratic deficit, or the role which international finance and world trade play in our internal affairs.

The Brexit debate – the sovereignty chimera – is a ludicrous distraction from the profound problems of our three countries, and the six Irish counties.

However, the reasons to be cheerful are many. After all this nonsense is cleared away, our towns and cities will continue to be hubs of extraordinary cultural diversity, creativity, and dynamism. Nothing is going to rob them of their vivacious vitality, let alone restore the deadening homogeneity of yesteryear. Our people will continue to invent extraordinarily novel fashions, music, artworks, machines, and new ways of working together. The palsied state of our politics will not stop any of this from happening. The revolutions taking place in technology, and the organisation of the labour process, will in due course produce modern forms of trade unionism, and a political response, characterised by reforms and renovations, worthy of the times in which we live.