

DON MILLIGAN'S  
**Off The cuff** September 13, 2015

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## **A Momentous Event . . .**

Jeremy Corbyn's victory on Saturday is a landmark event. He won sixty per cent of the vote for the leadership of the Labour Party, and came first among party members, trade union affiliates, and supporters. Only amongst the party's MPs did he want for a majority. More significant perhaps is the fact that many thousands of people attended meetings and rallies, and more than 420,000 took part in the election. From any point of view this is a startling achievement. As Paul Mason recently put it, we're in "unchartered territory".

I have no doubt at all that the Tories will, from day one, attempt to trash the leftwing leadership, but they will, initially at least, find it tough going as Jeremy Corbyn changes the rules of engagement, and the terms of the argument, at the dispatch box, in local councils, in trade unions, and in countless struggles up and down the country. There will also be considerable maneuvering as both Labour's traditional right, and the Blairites, attempt to pick up the pieces and grab the party back from the socialist abyss that they will accuse Corbyn of careering towards.

I have to admit to being astonished by all this. Until a month or so ago it never entered my head that there could be such a turn of events. Last week I was ambushed by some young Corbynistas and roundly jeered at for referring to Labour as a "reactionary party". Clearly these young comrades thought I had an old fashioned, even an atavistic, view of the party they are engaged in transforming. Indeed, they see enthusiasm for Corbyn as a harbinger of the "rebirth of the socialist movement", and want to decry skeptics and faint hearts as mere 'by-

standers' about to be swept aside by multitudes waving banners, and insurgent throngs singing the chorus and first verse of the *Red Flag*.

However, this spat gave me a useful way of reading these events, because it is clearly the belief of these resolute comrades of mine that a party is simply made up of the people who join it. They believe that what might be called 'the Corbyn levy' - the waves of new members rallying to the Labour Party - will make possible the rebuilding of the party on entirely new foundations. No longer will it be a party committed to the supervision of capitalism in a way that seeks to bring the maximum benefit possible to working people and their families. On the contrary, if the Corbynistas of my acquaintance get their way, Labour will be an entirely new anti-capitalist party.

I think what they are missing out on here is not the battle between Corbyn on the one hand, and the Blairites and Labour's traditional right, on the other, but the significant battles, which will emerge *within* the Corbyn camp, and *within* the broad left, around the European Union, military tensions and incursions along Russia's borders, the role of those supporting Assad's dictatorship, the necessity of the armed struggle against Islamist insurgents, and the extent to which the priorities and concerns of business can be reconciled with those of working people. Communist pressure groups and campaigns in the Labour Party will, as of old, collide with the priorities and outlook of the party's leadership, its MPs and councilors, who will inevitably be engaged in the horse trading and compromise inherent in the exercise of power in capitalist society.

This is because the Labour Party is not a neutral arena for socialist discourse, it is a political party committed to winning elections and winning the right to direct the affairs of the British state.

It may well be that it is the intention of many of Corbyn's supporters to transform the party into a genuinely socialist organization - a revolutionary party capable of challenging private property and the rule of the capitalist class. But, this is not Corbyn's intention, nor does it describe the outlook of the great majority of those who've recently rallied around him. Corbyn stands for fairness, reduced inequality, progressive taxation, increased social investment, free education, improved housing, lower rents, equal rights for all, peace in our time. This is the basis of his victory and of his popularity.

However, the fight for these things will involve bitter struggles which will try the patience of many who are simply committed to kindness, togetherness, and human-centered values, and produce ragged, jarring rows, as Labour Party communists attempt to raise the consciousness of those around them to the necessity of going beyond what Corbyn calls the core beliefs and values of the Labour Party. It will also throw the far left into some disarray as the centre of gravity moves decisively into the Labour Party. Initiatives like Left Unity and the Trade Union and Socialist Coalition, will lose their *raison d'être* as all efforts among the broad left will focus upon the People's Assembly and other trade union and labour campaigns seeking to gain advantage from the party's decisive shift towards social democracy.

This development will undermine all efforts to create a coherent anti-capitalist party and, far from constituting 'the rebirth of the socialist movement', will instead consign it to many more years of irrelevance in the shadows.

Evidently we've entered entirely new political terrain, because not since George Lansbury was ousted as Labour leader in 1935 has the party been led by a pacifist. Lansbury, an opponent of rearmament, was replaced by Major Clement Attlee who had fought gallantly at Gallipoli and in

Mesopotamia in the Great War. He worked in Winston Churchill's war cabinet, and is fondly remembered by a great swathe of the British left for winning a landslide victory for Labour in the summer of 1945. They recall the foundation of the National Health Service, the nationalization of coalmines and railways, but omit to mention that on January 8, 1947 a secret government committee chaired by Clement Attlee decided to proceed with the development of nuclear weapons in order to ensure Britain a seat at the top table in world affairs. In 1948 Labour also sanctioned the war against communist forces in the British colony of Malaya. In April 1949 Labour took Britain into Nato, and in 1950 sent conscripted soldiers into the Korean War.

In the summer of 1949, in response to a dock strike Attlee prevailed upon the King to declare a state of emergency, which enabled the Labour Government to send in soldiers, sailors, and marines to unload strike-bound ships, and deploy the police to attack strikers and their supporters. In fact he'd issued similar orders in 1948, but on that occasion the men had gone back to work before George VI could sign the relevant proclamations.

Plainly, Jeremy Corbyn is not promising us 1945 with its independent British nuclear deterrence, colonial wars, and fulsome alliance with the United States. On the contrary, he is promising us, starting in 2020, unilateral nuclear disarmament, withdrawal from Nato, closer ties with Russia, stronger trade unions, fairness for all, and an arms embargo on Islamist insurgents around the world. It's a hefty programme, and it remains to be seen if a majority of British people will vote for it, if they do then I am certain that we'd better prepare for 'a very British coup'.