

DON MILLIGAN'S  
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## “Elderly Vermin Vote Tory”



**THE ELECTION RESULT** reminded me of the book, *Angels in Marble: Working Class Conservatives in Urban England*, published more than fifty years ago in 1968. Millions of working people, engaged in manual labour or routine clerical or service occupations, like driving, or shop and warehouse work, have always voted Tory. Indeed, if they hadn't the Conservative Party could not have formed as many governments, for as many years, as it has.

This hard fact has been forgotten, or simply never known on the left. One of the most dismal things I saw at around 5:30 on the evening of election day was a Facebook post from a Momentum enthusiast of my acquaintance – he's a bright young man, an inspirational school teacher – expressing his belief that Labour was going to win by a country mile. He based his optimism on the flurry of leftist activity on his Facebook and Twitter feed. Despite his experience of canvassing in several northern constituencies, and his

tireless campaigning over the last few years, he could not see beyond the rim of his enclosed world to that place where the mass of the population actually lives, thinks, and works.

After the defeat this comrade posted what he called “Some honest thoughts” on the shocking defeat. He acknowledged that Jeremy Corbyn never really looked like Prime Minister material, hampered as he was by the party’s divisions over Brexit. Apparently, Jeremy’s “baggage” in endorsing Hamas and ‘understanding’ violent Irish republicanism, while opposing NATO, inevitably made him an easy target for the mainstream press, committed as it is, 100% to “the imperial project”. However, Labour’s policies were “not to blame”. Paradoxically, this comrade thought that the party promised too much – so much in fact that large numbers of people thought that the pitch was simply implausible. A billion here. a billion there, a four-day day week, and free broadband. It certainly reminded older voters of the *Big Rock Candy Mountain* where “*the hens lay soft boiled eggs, and all he cops have wooden legs*”. It was the performer Burl Ives who used to sing this song when we were kids in the fifties:

Oh, the buzzin' of the bees in the cigarette  
trees  
The soda water fountain  
Where the lemonade springs and the  
bluebird sings  
In that Big Rock Candy Mountain

On a summer day in the month of May  
A burly bum came a hiking  
Down a shady lane through the sugar cane  
He was looking for his liking  
As he strolled along he sang a song of the  
land of milk and honey  
Where a bum can stay for many a day  
And he won't need any money

Oh, the buzzin' of the bees in the cigarette  
trees  
The soda water fountain  
Where the lemonade springs and the  
bluebird sings  
In that Big Rock Candy Mountain

Of course, this ancient song had been through many and varied changes since the middle ages, and even in the nineteen twenties and thirties had a less salubrious tone with lines like, "*To be buggered sore like a hobo's whore/ In the Big Rock Candy Mountains*".

For all its embittered irony, the song continued to express, the utopian dream of the downtrodden through the ages. Just like the 2019 manifesto of the Labour Party. Not quite utopian, but certainly outlandish. Labour offered a veritable cornucopia of good things, the bounty growing day-by-day as the campaign progressed. And day-by-day those of us long-in-the-tooth looked at it more and more askance. More than that, many voters in Labour's post-industrial heartland, worried about taxes, mortgages, pensions, and public services, just didn't believe in the Labour left's economic competence or capacity.

Most of us know that you simply couldn't deliver Labour's Manifesto, and the hurried add-ons, without a socialist transformation of society. And that would require rather more than a few hundred thousand youngsters chanting "Oh . . . Jeremy Corbyn", but a deeply rooted mass movement of working and lower middle-class people openly committed to eclipsing commercial or capitalist relations, call them what you will, by taking over and running the economy.

In sharp contrast, John McDonnell's socialist transformation was a project cobbled up by the leadership, by state-socialist advisers and economists gathered around Corbyn, by trade union leaders, by the NEC, by composited

conference resolutions, and by Momentum's movers and shakers. It was not produced with the active participation of millions of working people. Insofar as any departure from the state-socialist nationalisation of old was contemplated, worker 'participation' was conceived and planned, at board level, in processes, more likely than not, stage-managed by trade union officials.

The problem with Corbyn and McDonnell's project was that they came to the fore quite suddenly after a life on the margins, a life lived by both men on the backbenches in the Palace of Westminster, in poorly attended meeting halls, at demonstrations, and on embattled picket lines. It was a world of 'principled commitments' entirely out of touch, and out of keeping, with the life of relentless and turbulent change lived by most working people in Britain over the last fifty years.

The disarray following Labour's defeat in 2015 led to the sudden emergence of Labour's far left. It was so sudden that the new leadership had to conjure up a mass movement – from the top down – Momentum was brought into life, and like Dr Frankenstein's creature, it developed a life of its own. Thinking and feeling that it represented rather more than it ever has.

Faced with last Thursday's crushing defeat Momentum and the Corbynistas can see nothing wrong with their programme or their untethered aspirations, so the usual standbys are resorted to – blaming the right-wing press, the racists and bigots who have, so they say, proliferated so widely in recent months as to be able to win Boris Johnson an eighty-seat majority. The defeated are taking comfort in the fact that Johnson, despite winning more seats, lost the popular vote. Now, our erstwhile 'social democratic revolutionaries' are lashing out at all and sundry, but particularly at the old.

The old, apparently, by some large measure, voted Tory and for this crime "they should be sent

to a clinic in Switzerland”, or forced to give up their right to vote and transfer it to 16 and 17-year-olds. This venom is aimed at us oldies because we’ve apparently eaten all the pies!

The fact that most of my generation left school and started full-time work at 15, and may have dreamed of owning a wristwatch or a motorbike, but not a house, is by-the-by. The fact that we lived in much more limited material circumstances, often without baths, hot water, or indoor lavatories, is not known to our young critics, whose memory extends back a decade or thereabout. Now, they see us living the Life of Riley in our own houses with substantial savings and pensions – no wonder we’re prepared to “throw the youth and the poor under the bus” by voting Tory.

The truth does not, of course, live up to this leftist fantasy. Most old people manage by careful saving and frugal budgeting; they are not – unlike me – well-off and living high on the hog. On the contrary, like most of their working-age neighbours, pensioners in the seats Labour lost in its northern heartlands, are up against it after nine or ten years of austerity. Many voted Tory because they simply didn’t trust Labour to deliver; since the process of deindustrialisation disfigured their lives and their communities Labour’s traditional voters have seen the party, both its left, as much as its right, tilt towards the cultural and social outlook of the metro-middle-class of our large cities. Precisely the areas where Momentum and the Labour Party has seen its astonishing growth since Jeremy Corbyn took the helm.

This ‘new’ Labour Party rather like Tony Blair’s New Labour, is committed to a programme of transformation. The difference is that while Blair wanted to mould the party to the prior needs of investors, the Corbynistas want to mould the working class to the prior needs of the socialist leadership. Like all state-socialists the cadre of

the party and Momentum see themselves as organisers, officials, and managers, of the movement, controlling matters *on behalf* of the working class and the poor. They certainly aspire to creating a genuine mass movement, but the movement and the popular socialist culture they envisage, is one created and honed by themselves. Informed by dodgy histories and flawed historical assumptions, they engage in radical amnesia when it comes to the history of state-socialism, which has despite its colourful promise always resulted in disaster.

It is true they love traditional social democracy and the Beverage Report (1942), and claim Clement Attlee's legacy, with regard to healthcare, as their own, while ignoring Britain's nuclear deterrent (1947), NATO membership (1949), the use of troops to break strikes (1949-1950), and the start of wars in Malaya (1948) and Korea (1950).

Contemporary confusion is precisely between the revolutionary aspirations of Labour's far left, and the equally implausible social democratic ideas of the majority of the left's campaigners and activists – implausible because they appear to take little account of globalisation or the new technologies currently transforming manufacturing and commerce throughout the world.

Being radically out-of-touch is now the hallmark of the left. As they cast around for a woman with a Northern accent to lead them, they appear committed to continuing to embrace their very own range of prejudices and fore-conceptions, while lashing out; attributing all disagreement to privilege, bigotry, racism, ignorance, or old age. This is why the Labour left lost the election. It's why they lost sixty seats. They assumed they could simply ignore the practical life experience of the mass of working and lower middle-class people.