

## The Project for Peace and Justice



**DURING THE COLD WAR**, in the grizzliest of ironies, Stalin's murderous regime became the standard bearer of world peace. The Communist Information Bureau's 'World Congress of Intellectuals for Peace' was staged in Wroclaw in 1948, and this was followed a year later by the World Congress of Partisans for Peace in Paris. Pablo Picasso did his drawing of the dove for the occasion, *and the rest, as they say, is history.*

Ever since, "Peace and Socialism" have, like love and marriage, always gone together, like a horse and carriage. After all, it was Doris Day who insisted in 1955, "This I tell you brother // You can't have one without the other."

Neither the rumbling tanks of the Soviet dictatorship, nor the millions slaughtered by Mao Zedong, the Chinese invasion of Tibet in 1950, or the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, have disturbed the idea that the USA and the NATO powers are

uniquely committed to waging war, while the left – the forces of socialism – have always been committed to peace. This mythology is today experiencing something of an afterlife as Russia's jets swoop down to unload their bombs on Syrian homes and hospitals, we on the left continue to be convinced that the warmongers are always to be found in London and Washington, rather than Moscow or Beijing.

Jeremy Corbyn revived this pairing of peace and socialism once again last week by announcing the launch of his new think tank, and activist project. He has adapted the old slogan by substituting the word "justice" for "socialism" – so it is now a Project for Peace and Justice, rather than socialism, but it's the *same old, same old*, derived from its Cold War predecessors. It's gaze will be, like that of the Stop the War Coalition, firmly held upon the crimes of the West, as it studiously avoids the wholesale murders committed by other regimes. Jeremy puts it like this:

. . . we've got a growth of Cold War rhetoric on both sides of the Atlantic, and I suspect a reassertion of NATO versus Russia. I have many criticisms of the Russian government – I'm realistic about the situation there. But there is no secure future for anybody if we get into a war of rhetoric between the US and Russia or China.

Corbyn said this in a wide-ranging interview conducted for *Jacobin*, the socialist journal, by David Broder, in which both interviewer and interviewee, managed to avoid a number of ticklish questions. Although Chile, Brazil, and Bolivia were mentioned, there was not a word about Venezuela. Although China was mentioned, not a word about the mass persecution of the Uighurs, or of Russia's active role in bombing Syrian towns and villages.

In similar vein, Broder asked:

Without getting into the details of your suspension, these last few months have brought

a particular McCarthyism. Is there something new in this – is it different from what the left suffered in the 1980s, under Margaret Thatcher?

With this question David opened up the opportunity for Jeremy to remind us of the attacks upon all of his predecessors, from Kier Hardy, through George Lansbury, Nye Bevan, to Tony Benn. He stressed how it was worth bravely suffering the brickbats and insults of the right-wing press in order to get “out the message of social justice that gives people hope and optimism.”

So, like Tony Benn, Jeremy Corbyn is principally concerned with the morale of those on the left in times of defeat and dismay. Consequently, there was no mention in the interview of antisemitism, the right of Jews to nationalism and nationhood – or any of the more troubling questions that beset the world. David Broder could have asked Jeremy Corbyn, now an Independent MP, why he thinks he lost the party whip, or the last general election, but no, that would have been unseemly. Particularly, during the launch of an inspiring new project committed to rehearsing the line of march established long ago by the Cominform regarding McCarthyism, issues of war and peace, and the natural, or spontaneous, association of the left with peace, justice, and equality, regardless of anything that is actually happening in the world today, or has happened since the nineteen forties.

The interview has provided an opportunity for lazy assertions about ‘big pharma’, the provision of vaccines to poorer countries, without any detail about the policies of companies or governments in this regard. Similarly, there are general assertions about the climate crisis in a conversation conducted as if the capitalist class is doing nothing much about global warming from California to Norway; these are standard asides on the left, asserted without context, data, or general facts.

Jeremy Corbyn’s Project for Peace and Justice is designed to promote research and activism around

the causes he has spent his life defending. If he was better read, Jeremy might have endowed a library, but activism is more his bag. I'm not sure what the 'research' will be into, nothing was said about this in the interview, but I imagine that it will be into poverty and the iniquity of Western governments with regard to inequality and war.

However, it is difficult to escape Corbyn's sanctimonious tone in which platitudes about peace and poverty come thick and fast, as if there are many upon the planet who favour war and poverty. I don't know of anybody who actually cheers-on the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. Nobody, apart from psychotic individuals, or perhaps *The Joker*, welcomes the idea of wholesale killing or mass starvation. It's true that there are rather too many mad and enraged killers roaming Africa and Asia, but these murderous individuals only flourish in the context of political turmoil and the collapse of states. So, it is worth seriously asking why states fail, and what can be done to ensure better governance.

The United States and Britain have certainly played a major role in the collapse of the state in Iraq and Libya, and neither has done much towards reconstructing an effective or stable government in either country. However, the catastrophic dictatorship of Asaad in Syria, the disorder and instability in Lebanon, the war in Yemen, the conflict between Saudi Arabia and Iran, the mayhem in Ethiopia, and Southern Sudan cannot be laid at the door of the Whitehouse without the most arcane and Byzantine of reasoning. Similarly, the dictatorship in Byelorussia, the annexation of Crimea, the war between Armenia and Azerbaijan, the gathering storm over Beijing's suppression of the rule of law in Hong Kong, or its moves in the South China Sea, cannot simply be charged to the West.

Peace and Justice cannot be thought about without discussion of the ubiquitous and endemic corruption in many countries, which undermines the stability of governments and the rule of law. This is true also of

the need for discussion on the nature of Iran's theocratic government, the insipient decay of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, the struggles between Shia and Sunni Islam, the fate of Wahabi regimes, and the desire of Zionists to defend Israel against all comers.

We have to ask what can be done about food queues in Caracas, or the need of those pulling the strings in the Forbidden City to ensure that all China's millions, on pain of incarceration or worse, sing along in praise of the Communist Party. All these questions, and many more will have to be addressed by those concerned to establish the reign of peace and justice in law-governed states.

It would be extremely unfair to upbraid Jeremy Corbyn or David Broder for failing, in what is admittedly a short interview, to cover much discussion of what has to be done to confront, constructively, the disorder and mayhem immiserating billions throughout the world. But they could have made a start, perhaps by setting out what they think the principal obstacles standing in the way of peace and justice actually are.

Unfortunately, Corbyn and Broder have simply relapsed into the world outlook and Cold War rhetoric of the nineteen forties with talk of McCarthyism and international solidarity, rather than anything more concrete. The avoidance of a precise encounter with the vast array of problems confronting the world in preference to generalised virtue-signalling is par-for-the-course.

Yet Corbyn's "global launch" of The Project for Peace and Justice on January 17<sup>th</sup> might prove to be more interesting, but the auguries are not good, for a political milieu that seems incapable of reflecting on the nature of its defeats, correcting its missteps and mistakes, or of boldly facing up to its failures.