

Are real changes now possible: where next for Corbyn and Labour?

Michael Rustin

How do we build on the hopes raised in the June election?

Jeremy Corbyn's election campaign, and its outcome, is without doubt the most positive development that has taken place in British politics for more than twenty-five years - since Tony Blair became leader of the Labour Party. The reason for this is that it is the first substantial challenge to neoliberalism that has emerged from Labour in all those years. Corbyn's campaign has now demonstrated that a politics based on the rejection of neoliberalism - the contemporary version of 'full capitalism' - and the development of an alternative to it - is capable of electoral success.

The publication of Labour's recent Election Manifesto was an astonishing moment of hope. Here are some of its proposals:

- ◆ To reject the doctrines of austerity and deficit-reduction which have crippled the British economy since 2008
- ◆ To tax the top 1 per cent of income earners to provide funds for restoring public services in health, education and other services

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- ◆ To increase corporation tax
- ◆ To restore some workers' rights
- ◆ To establish a National Care Service
- ◆ To abolish university tuition fees, thus renewing the idea that the education of the young should be an entitlement, and a gift between generations, and not a form of individual investment in the self
- ◆ To restore the Educational Maintenance Allowance, restoring opportunities for young people without family means to continue their education beyond 16
- ◆ To renationalise the railways, and by degrees other utilities, instead of enabling private (or foreign state-owned) corporations to turn public subsidies into private profits
- ◆ To set up a state investment bank, to begin the long-neglected programme to improve infrastructure and to develop a productive economy.

This programme represented an unmistakable shift in the entire agenda of public policy in Britain. It was of course attacked as a 'far left' programme, alleged to be an indicator of the deep polarisation and division in British society. However, the reality is that it proposed no more than a return to what would once have been seen as a moderate version of social democracy. That is, to the idea that government has a necessary role in a modern economy, and to a degree of restored progressiveness in fiscal and social policy, in a context in which inequalities of income and wealth, and the disintegration of key public services, are now reaching destructive and unsustainable levels.

What is remarkable is that so wholly incorporated had the Labour Party become within the ideology and governmental practice of neoliberalism that this distinct but in fact quite modest departure from the political status quo could now be effected only by the small remaining faction of the left in the Parliamentary Labour Party, and was opposed by its other fractions and tendencies. It should not be forgotten that it was only through acts of reluctant tolerance by some of Corbyn's nominees (actions which some of its performers later said that they regretted) that he was even allowed to stand for the leadership in 2015, after the failure of Ed Miliband's election campaign. The majority of Labour MPs, and a large chorus of commentators,

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insisted that a programme as radical as Corbyn's could not possibly succeed. Until, on 8 June, to most people's surprise and astonishment, it did - at least to the degree that Labour's proportion of the vote exceeded that achieved in Blair's third general election of 1992, not to mention Brown's and Miliband's subsequent campaigns, and that Labour deprived the Theresa May of an overall majority.

There seems no reason to believe in the existence of a collective electoral will, since votes are cast by millions of individuals. Nevertheless, the outcome of a hung parliament does seem to be exactly what one would (and did) expect, from the election campaign as it evolved: May proved herself a very poor campaigner, but it was unlikely that the credibility problem which Corbyn faced was going to be solvable within the space of six weeks, brilliantly though he campaigned.

Both in his own two leadership campaigns and in the general election, Corbyn has found support in a new political generation, whose members have recognised that neoliberalism now offers them the bleakest of futures.¹ Among the rejected aspects of this system are these: a declining number of secure and fulfilling jobs; the inflation of house prices beyond many young people's means to rent, let alone buy (increasing numbers of young people have to live in their parental home well into their twenties, while for those who do rent there is no control over the behaviour of private landlords); an enormous incubus of debt to pay for university education; xenophobic attitudes to minority populations and migrants; and the threatened loss of free travel within Europe, which is now felt by many young people to be an almost unthinkable state of affairs. And there are many other reasons why there has been a generational divide in this election, since the old, whether rich or poor, have in many ways been the protected beneficiaries of Conservative government.

The principal objection made to Corbyn and his leadership team, within the Labour Party, was not, at least overtly, to his political platform. Indeed, until the Election Manifesto was published it was not even clear what that platform was going to be. The widespread objection was to his alleged 'unelectability', to his non-conformity to the standard 'suited' norms of the political class, and to his allegedly extreme background and sympathies. It will be remembered that in the leadership election after Labour's 2015 defeat, and Ed Miliband's over-hasty resignation, the three candidates who stood before Corbyn entered the ring - Liz Kendall, Yvette Cooper and Andy Burnham - had virtually nothing to say to party members except that Labour now needed an *electable* leader, in a thinly veiled reference to the alleged

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lack of this quality in Ed Miliband. There was hardly a smidgen of insight into what had actually gone wrong with Labour's opposition to Cameron's Tories over the preceding five years. It was as if the majority of the Parliamentary Party had become concerned only with returning to office, and with the means to (supposed) power, and not at all with what its political ends should be.

This withholding of parliamentary support made it very difficult for Corbyn to establish political authority in the country. While the Labour Party in parliament was at best lukewarm, where not overtly hostile, towards his leadership, public support was always going to be hard to win. On the 7 June *Today* programme, almost the last question which John Humphrys put, in his most *Daily Mail* vein, to Keir Starmer (previous questions on terrorism and human rights having failed to unsettle him) was, why should people be expected to vote for Jeremy Corbyn when 172 of his MPs had said they had no confidence in him?

Europe

There has also been severe criticism of Corbyn's leadership on Europe and of his weak presence during the referendum campaign. There are various reasons why Corbyn and Labour did not show well in that episode. Perhaps the most important is that they had learned painfully in the Scottish independence referendum that an alliance with David Cameron's Tories could be politically catastrophic. The Scottish Labour Party was decimated by its occupation of this position during the Scottish referendum campaign. The Liberal Democrats had also been destroyed by taking up a role as Cameron's allies, and had been ruthlessly dispatched when they were no longer of use to the Tories. The political beneficiaries of the European referendum, the proposal for which was a straightforward act of Cameron opportunism (reportedly implemented against George Osborne's advice), were intended to be the Cameron Tories alone. There was no suggestion that the Tories were prepared to make any concessions to Labour, for example in regard to austerity and public services, in return for their support in the referendum - no provisional 'broad alliance' was on offer. There were thus great difficulties for Labour and Corbyn in giving vigorous support to the Remain campaign in any way that would not also have been a gift of enhanced credibility to the Tories, should the referendum have been won. Faced with these difficulties, the decision seems to have been made by

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the Corbynites to leave most of the campaigning to Cameron himself.

It is likely that Corbyn and his allies were in any case ambivalent about the whole Remain project, and indeed about the European Union itself, as it is currently constituted. It is now an entity almost entirely dominated by neoliberal ideas and policies. Its economy has been stagnant since the financial crisis. It has imposed austerity economics on its southern European members, and ruthlessly crushed democratic resistance to its crippling programmes, in Greece, and, as far as it could, in Spain. A progressive response to this from the left would have been a programme for the reform of the European Union that might better enable it to move in the social democratic direction which at one time it seemed to have the possibility of taking. This possibility, poorly realised as it actually is in the institutions and policies of the EU, has always been one of the reasons for right-wing hatred of it.

But the idea of a progressive reform of the EU was not in the slightest degree in the Tories' minds when they were offering people the choice whether to stay in or leave it. They offered a referendum, hoping to win it, because of the severe pressures on the Cameron government from UKIP and the Tory right; and they saw little threat from the Union to their own neoliberal commitment to the virtual destruction of the British welfare state.

The Tory Remain campaign for continued EU membership was in fact aggressively nationalistic. Like Thatcher's, Cameron's arguments were always for special treatment for Britain, and opt-outs from the EU's common policies, never for the reform of the Union to make it more expansionary, inclusive and effective. For example, has any senior British politician ever suggested that a modest measure of national jurisdiction over migration might be to the benefit of the entire European Union, rather than demanding it merely as the special need and entitlement of the UK alone? One can interpret the history of Britain's involvement with the EU as another enactment (like the Falklands and Iraq wars) of post-imperial nostalgia, and of the inability of the majority of the political class to accept Britain's diminished power in the world. Governments waste money on pointless weapon systems, like Trident and eminently sinkable aircraft carriers, pursue delusory trade deals with former colonies, plan to support further military interventions (in Syria for example), and hate immigrants ('Go Home', said May's vans) from places which Britain once dominated. Paul Gilroy has insightfully described this state of mind

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as one of post-imperial melancholia, though this is covered over by delusions and enactments of omnipotence. (Trump's United States - 'Make America Great Again!' - suffers from a more extreme version of this state of mind.)

The underlying cause of most of the antipathy to the EU in Britain is the failure to restore levels of growth and prosperity in Britain after the financial crisis of 2007-8, and the need to find someone or some thing to blame for this. Prosperous regions have been much less antipathetic to the EU and migrants than those which have suffered economic decline. This failure is in part the transmitted effect of the austerity economics of the European Union itself (though the UK has always been a champion of such policies). The neoliberal model has allowed regions - indeed nations like Greece - to virtually die, while at the same time exposing their dispossessed people to race-to-the-bottom competition from migrant workers from Eastern European nations with even lower wage levels than theirs. Or indeed exposing them to the need to move country to find work themselves. One can see why the Union remained more popular among well-educated, cosmopolitan metropolitans than among displaced industrial workers. The European Union as a whole has as much need of an interventionist, redistributive, expansionary and investment-focused economic programme as Britain itself.

It is possible that the Corbynites' ambivalence towards Europe, and their unenthusiastic role in the Remain campaign, may indeed have made the small fraction of difference that determined the narrow Brexit victory. But this outcome, understandably disappointing to many, and also now threatening to Britain's economic prospects, has exposed deep contradictions in the entire political system. And this situation has, paradoxically, created a political opportunity which the left has not seen for a generation. The victory of the right in the referendum, and its continuing political leverage since then, has led to the Tory Party becoming, for the moment, dysfunctional. Its recent political positions and commitments appear to be in contradiction with one another. Indeed even senior members of the Cabinet are publicly disagreeing with one another on key issues.

May came into office unexpectedly proclaiming her distance from the anti-government, free market ideology of the Cameron Tories. She was partly able to do this because the proclaimed problem of 'the deficit' had never been much more, in its seven years of political life, than a weaponised instrument to legitimise the bleeding to death of public services and institutions. Cameron and Osborne had

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made explicit their goal of reducing the share of public expenditure in the economy down to 38 per cent by 2019 (a continuation of the Thatcherite project at a level far beyond what Thatcher herself was able to achieve, and one which would have made public expenditure in the UK among the lowest levels in Europe). This is one reason why the deficit-reduction targets were always the goal of their policy but never met, since it meant that more restraints on public spending were always needed. A balanced budget could therefore be virtually dropped as an objective by May and Hammond, without explanation. (Under Miliband's leadership, however, Labour attacked the Coalition for failing to reach its deficit targets, instead of denouncing their entire purpose.)

May's key advisors, Nick Timothy and Fiona Hill, seem to have pushed her towards a version of 'Red Toryism', whose political goal was to reconstitute a Tory-voting working class.² (Perhaps this was May's Anglican vision of Christian Democracy - like Brown she was the child of a clergyman.) Osborne's Northern Powerhouse project, influenced by Heseltine's interventionist approach to the political economy of large cities, had already made some Labour strategists anxious that the Tories were about to take over their own progressive political ground. May seemed to be taking this approach further than Osborne, at one point proposing the appointment of workers on corporation boards, though soon dropping the idea. (We would support not only the idea of workers' representation on corporate boards, but also the presence of a public trustee, to represent wider social interests.) Although on the one hand this might seem politically threatening to the left, a more hopeful view was that the significance of this change of agenda, in an anti-market direction, outweighed whatever immediate electoral benefit it might bring to the right. Better to be attacking and outbidding the Tories on their failure to deliver on working people's rights and well-being, than to be following them down Austerity Lane as Labour did for five years under Ed Balls and Ed Miliband.³

However, what May chose to say, about her post-Thatcherite vision, had little connection to what she actually started to *do*. Any programme seeking to win working-class votes, anywhere near a general election, surely needed to address the growing scale of shortfalls in funding for schools and the NHS if it was to have the slightest credibility. What political sense was there for the Tories to propose a large redistribution (by definition therefore in many geographical areas a reduction) in school budgets, and the abolition of free school lunches, when about to go to the

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polls? Or doing nothing as hospital waiting lists started to hit the ceiling? There was, it is true, a policy to address the financial crisis in social care, but this 'dementia tax' was so unfair and arbitrary in its impact that it was dropped by May within four days of its announcement.

The logical outcome of the 'hard Brexit' position which May opted for is an economy which competes by being even less regulated than it is already, based on a model of low taxes and low wages that seeks to compete with the economies that have the higher levels of social protection (and thus alleged competitive disadvantages) of the EU. It seemed also that the government no longer expected to deliver on its key promise to the right of reduced immigration, because of the indispensability of migrant workers to the British economy, both in many specific sectors (health, universities, social care, agriculture, tourism and hospitality) and in terms of the overall age and energy profile of the labour force. How is this remotely consistent with a politics aimed to recapture the support of working-class voters? It seems to have been the reverse of a consistent or workable programme. Jeremy Corbyn was certainly fortunate in his opponent.

Leadership

It is possible that the extreme inarticulacy and evident hollowness of Theresa May in her role as leader was not simply a deficit of character and charisma, but rather followed from the internal contradictions of the political position she had adopted. (One should not rule out a partial recovery of her authority.) It is very difficult for a politician to be eloquent or convincing if they have nothing coherent or of substance to say. A parallel can be drawn with Gordon Brown's period as prime minister, when he had so tied himself up in anxieties that he should not be vulnerable to accusations of being to the left of Tony Blair, that he entered an election bereft of a programme, and with his authority lost. This was in some contrast to his formidable presence when he did have a solid programme to defend. Contrarily, one can see how ineffective Corbyn was in opposition to the government until the Labour Manifesto provided him with a script to which he could speak with enthusiasm and confidence. (One hopes that the sure-footedness that Corbyn possessed during the election campaign will be sustained during the less dramatic days which may follow it.) In terms of experience and articulacy, Liz Kendall, Andy

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Burnham and Yvette Cooper all had a starting advantage over Corbyn in the post-election leadership contest in 2015, but they were undone by having no evident political programme other than their 'electability'. The developments of the last few months have shown that it is, after all, policies and programmes, not merely personalities, that matter most. It is ideas which enable politicians to speak to the people with conviction and passion. We underestimate the vision, coherence and meticulous preparation of the early New Labour project if we think that Blair was an exception to this principle.

What next?

After Neoliberalism was the main title of the *Kilburn Manifesto*, and the main political task of *Soundings* over the last many years has been our analysis and critique of neoliberalism. From our perspective, the rise of the far right, the crisis of xenophobia and nationalism, the growth of social division and inequality and the loss of opportunities which have overtaken much of Europe and the United States are the symptoms and effects of the domination of a society by financial markets and corporate interests, and the ideologies which justify them. We have seen social-democratic parties becoming effectively absorbed within this new consensus, and, as Gary Younge has pointed out, often destroying themselves and their rapport with their supporters as they did so. In some places their destruction has been nearly total - Pasok in Greece, Hollande's Socialists in France - in others more limited - PSOE in Spain, the PD in Italy. Some defeats at the hands of the right - Clinton's, Miliband's, the Remain campaign's - have been close calls, but nevertheless highly consequential. The failure of orthodox social democrats to make progress, despite or because of their adaptation to the 'middle ground' and their conformity to the austerity-fixated 'common sense of the age', has been quite general.

Now a limited partial breach has been made in this oppressive edifice, through the demonstration by Corbyn, McDonnell and their allies that a programme and leadership that challenges these orthodoxies and proposes alternatives to them can do better electorally than those which conform to it. Something similar was true for the campaign by Bernie Sanders for the Democratic nomination in the United States. The crucial question is, what has to happen for this partial breach in the walls of the fortress to become a more substantial one? There is also a simpler question, which

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is, what will it take for Labour, or a progressive coalition with Labour, to be elected should another general election take place in the next year or two?

Once elected to power, the more difficult problem may be working out how to set out and hold to a path which breaks with the neoliberal ideology which has ruled for the past four decades. Just as Rome was not built in a day, it is unlikely that this Rome will be unbuilt in a day. Labour in Britain has an unmatched record for snatching defeat out of the jaws of victory, even in the limited sense of electoral victory - Callaghan in 1979, Brown in 2010, Miliband in 2015. One should hardly be complacent about the prospect of this new opportunity being grasped. Down this road, but not even mentioned during the campaign so unlikely did a Corbyn victory seem, are the likely sanctions which 'the markets' - the forces of capital - would bring to bear were even a mildly radical programme to be implemented. Vince Cable, for his own reasons, justified the Coalition government's austerity programme by pointing to the example of Greece, and dire warnings of this kind will be heard again, should Corbyn enter 10 Downing Street.

One serious problem is that Corbyn and his supporters (in which we include ourselves) have achieved their partial success in the face of the disbelief or outright opposition of the large majority of elected Labour MPs. (One wonders how it is that these MPs have been able to sustain their position thus far, given that we know the majority of the party membership has supported Corbyn, but they have done.) There were virtually no public admissions during the election campaign that Corbyn's problems of 'leadership credibility' had been in large part inflicted on him by his own Parliamentary Labour Party.⁴ James Curran, in a pertinent letter to the Guardian on 7 May, pointed out that Labour was catching up with the Conservatives in the spring and early summer of 2016, with four polls in the first half of June registering that the gap had shrunk to between 1 and 3 per cent. But after the mass shadow cabinet resignations, the vote of no confidence in Corbyn passed by the large majority of Labour MPs and the new leadership contest, Labour's poll rating plummeted and did not recover before the election, which of course was why it was called by May.

It is true that MPs are now coming forward to 'give credit' to Corbyn for his campaign, and some of those who resigned from his shadow cabinet are now offering to serve in it again. One could have hoped to see a spirit of Truth and Reconciliation alive in the Labour Party during the election campaign itself - it might have made the necessary difference between a partial success and winning. However, this spirit was

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largely absent. Did some MPs, one wonders, hope that while they would hold on to their own seats, Corbyn would fail and could be promptly replaced once the election was lost? Even now, some MPs and commentators are saying that with a better candidate than Corbyn, Labour would have won, although there was no candidate in sight who would have put forward a Manifesto like Corbyn's, or who would have won his enthusiastic support. The problem is that skin-deep or opportunistic conversion to the reality of Corbyn's leadership is not going to be enough. What is needed is the recognition that Corbyn's programme and its challenge to the dominant neoliberal consensus was the crucial break that has to be made with the past. It is now necessary to build on this programme so that it becomes the basis on which Labour could both win an election and conduct a successful government, as re-electable and enduring as New Labour's was. However, progressive governments are unlikely to succeed unless they are extremely well-prepared for office.

It is an alarming fact of our present situation that a programme like Corbyn's - which would hardly have disturbed Anthony Crosland in the 1950s - can now be regarded as 'far left' not only by the Daily Mail and the Sun, but even by some Labour 'moderates'.⁵ Contrary to appearances, and to ideological definitions of the natural state of affairs, the 'centre ground' is not a fixed location, but moves with the political climate. Its base used to be support for the mixed economy, the combined role of markets and state, and the effective social protections and public services of the post-war consensus. Corbyn's programme proposes a return to something like that position of coexistence and compromise. It is only because the political consensus, including most of the Labour Party, had moved so far away from this, to the right, that it could be attacked as in any way 'extreme'. (Although it should be noted that more of the attacks were on Corbyn and his past affiliations than on the Manifesto, whose galvanising popularity disconcerted his opponents.)

A progressive and sustainable political programme

The most important issue which is coming into prominence, post-election, is the state of the economy. Conventionally, this is an area of Labour weakness. The left is accused of being pleased to spend resources, but clueless about creating them. This was the basis of May's 'Magic Money Tree' gibe, and continues to be the last Tory line of defence of the public pay cap. But it is now coming to light that British productivity

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levels are among the lowest in Europe. It is apparent that the economy managed by the Coalition and the Tories since 2010 has cripplingly low levels of investment. Workers on part-time and zero-hours contracts turn out not to be the most productive, since they have little reason for commitment to their employers or their work. It seems that a low-wage economy, with diminished social services and social protection, does not automatically become a world-beater, especially if its goods may have to cross tariff barriers and its lorries queue for thirty miles to reach Customs and Excise at the Channel. Once again (just as after 'Black Wednesday' in 1992, which came a few months after the Tories had just narrowly won an election), Labour should be able to demonstrate that, after all, the Tories are not capable of running a successful economy, and that a radically different economic model is needed.

If this can be established, many changes could and should be instituted. For example:

- ◆ A prioritising of investment over consumption
- ◆ A diversion of resources from speculation in house prices to building houses and other real assets
- ◆ A commitment to post-school education and training, supporting pathways additional to the traditional academic route
- ◆ A tax on financial transactions, to divert resources from the financial to the real economy
- ◆ A commitment to secure and high-wage employment
- ◆ A prioritising of infrastructural investment in regions (and nations) other than London and the South-East, to promote economic regeneration and equality across Britain
- ◆ A change in corporate governance, towards a 'stakeholder' model that would include workers and representatives of the public interest (public trustees), and would lessen the short-termism of corporate behaviour.
- ◆ The conception and development of education and health services not so much as forms of 'consumption', but as part of the humanly productive economy.

John McDonnell's committee of expert economic advisers should be publicly

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reconvened and invited to deliberate, to give substance and legitimacy to such an alternative economic programme. It will be important to state that such a programme would not be anti-capitalist or anti-business, but rather would have the purpose of ensuring that corporations and businesses serve the public good as well as their own, and would seek to enhance the role of democratic government in order to make this happen.

Implementing the 2017 Manifesto

The relative restraint of Corbyn's Manifesto does not of itself make it easy to fill out or implement. There are many areas where the transition from present arrangements to more just ones would be complicated and difficult. University tuition, the funding of universal pre-school provision, and social care in old age, are examples. Although the idea of a tax on the top 1 per cent of incomes is indeed the best starting-point to find the additional revenues required for new expenditures, this seems unlikely to be a sufficient source to fund all the commitments which Labour has now made. It is likely that what is now needed, in addition to higher rates of tax on the highest incomes, is some form of tax on wealth, since we know that asset values (property and stocks and shares) have been rising at a much higher rate than incomes from work. (Cable's proposed Mansion Tax was an example of such a measure.) This view is consistent with Thomas Piketty's influential argument that the trend of contemporary capitalism is for stocks of accumulated wealth to rise faster than incomes.

Solutions will be needed to the problems of insufficient housing provision, regional inequalities, a school system which has been subjected to structural fragmentation and a regime of narrow curricula and excessive assessment, and an NHS whose resources are failing to keep up with demographic need and demand. There is also an even deeper problem, affecting all OECD economies, of how to deal with the displacement of work - skilled, administrative and professional as well as unskilled - by automated machines, and the deep adjustments in the social economy which this will call for.

The financial crisis which destroyed the last New Labour government was the consequence of the financialisation of the economy, and the failure - which goes all the way back to the governments of the 1960s and 1970s - to create an economy

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which was competitive in manufacturing and other spheres.⁶ One of Labour's main failures in opposition after 2010 was to allow it to be alleged that it had overspent on public services, when its real fault had been its over-dependence on an under-regulated City. (Perhaps Ed Balls and Ed Miliband had been too implicated in that policy, as Brown's closest advisers, to be able to acknowledge its disastrous outcome.) Yet the prospects of instituting a new social compromise, distinct in its priorities from those of the decades of neoliberalism, depends on what is achieved in the sphere of production, not on redistribution only. So serious are these challenges, which reflect decades of weakness in the UK economy, that it is perhaps fortunate that Labour did *not* take office on 9 June but instead may well have a period of a year or two to prepare itself for the problems that lie ahead. They may also be fortunate in being able to leave the Brexit negotiations to a precarious Tory government.

It will be necessary to create a new consensus around several of the areas of policy referred to above. Labour should create intermediate institutions which can share responsibility for these, drawing in stake-holders in the relevant areas (housing, schools, universities and the environment are examples) to provide expertise, legitimacy and authority, additional to their own. Surely, in the sphere of social care for example, it is time to return to the idea of compulsory mutual insurance against universal risk.⁷ No-one can imagine that a tortuous policy-making process which takes place only within the interstices of the Labour Party (like that which took place during Ed Miliband's leadership) would be sufficient to address such problems. It may be that the method of deliberation to be adopted should have a substantial open dimension, taking the form of Public Hearings, in which areas of programme development could be debated and reported, indeed put out through Social Media. This would have the advantage of generating public interest, and also of enabling those who have become part of the movement around Corbyn to take part developing the new agenda. The old Labour Party model of participation in policy formation via branch resolutions sent up to the Annual Party Conference has for a long time been inadequate, and may now have been made obsolete by modern forms of communication (leaving aside for one moment the fact that the Party Conference was long ago disabled as too democratic by New Labour).

Although it seems that the two largest parties have returned for the moment to their earlier dominant position in terms of vote share and membership of the House of Commons, the larger story of the last few months is surely the discrediting

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of the political class as a whole by large swathes of the population. Even Corbyn's anti-establishment success reflects that public sentiment. The reality is that the complexity of the governmental political problems which need to be faced are far beyond the capacity of the existing party apparatuses themselves to deal with. Although Jeremy Corbyn and his supporters have mobilised great energy and enthusiasm, the translation of this movement into a capable and transformative system of government requires more human resources than it currently possesses.⁸

Even though the Labour Party's membership been greatly increased, revitalised and rejuvenated through Corbyn's election, it is not realistic to believe that the Labour Party can deliver major change by its own agency alone. The arguments for a broad social alliance, and even for electoral alliances, have not lost their relevance because of the outcome of this campaign.

When *Soundings* began its two current series, *Critical Terms* and *Soundings Futures*, we anticipated a time-scale of several years for the discussion and debate to which we intended to contribute. It now seems that there might in fact be no more than one or two years before a Corbyn-led government might have to face the problems involved in holding power. We believe it was right to move on from the phase of analysis and critique of neoliberalism, to answer the question 'what then would you do instead?' The general election has made these programmatic tasks even more urgent than they were before. One can say, however, that the implosion of the Conservative Party, and the rise of a quite new energy and hopefulness on the left, has created a political space which we have not seen since the crises and political defeats of the 1980s. Everything possible must be done to seize this moment.

Michael Rustin is a founding editor of *Soundings*.

Notes

1. The instalment of *After Neoliberalism: the Kilburn Manifesto* by Ben Little, 'A growing discontent: class and generation under neoliberalism', was prescient in identifying this line of social division.
2. Maurice Glasman has drawn favourable attention to the convergences between this 'Red Tory' and his own 'Blue Labour' agenda.

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3. One recalls Ed Miliband's unfortunate television appearance during the 2015 election campaign when he refused the invitation of Nicola Sturgeon, Natalie Bennett and Leanne Wood to join them in opposing austerity.
4. One also recalls the cluster of Labour grandees, including Neil Kinnock, Gordon Brown and both the Milibands, who unwisely called on Corbyn to stand down during the second leadership election. Peter Mandelson said at one point that no day passed on which he did not hope for Corbyn's departure.
5. David Owen, a Croslandite social democrat if ever there was one, expressed his approval for Corbyn's election manifesto.
6. The great opportunity to repair these weaknesses came with the arrival of North Sea oil, whose riches were largely squandered by the Thatcherites, in effect consumed in the management of de-industrialisation. Norway took a more strategic path, with its large sovereign wealth fund. The SNP rose to power too late to be able to base its project of independence on this windfall.
7. And also perhaps to the idea of hypothecated taxation which Robin Murray and Geoff Mulgan put forward in a Demos pamphlet in 1993.
8. It is notable that Momentum, which had been disparaged as a partisan faction, proved itself capable of mobilising a remarkable level of support for the Labour Party during the campaign. The virtual defeat of the tabloid press by argument conducted through social media - a success of democratic communication - has been a significant feature of these weeks, momentous indeed.