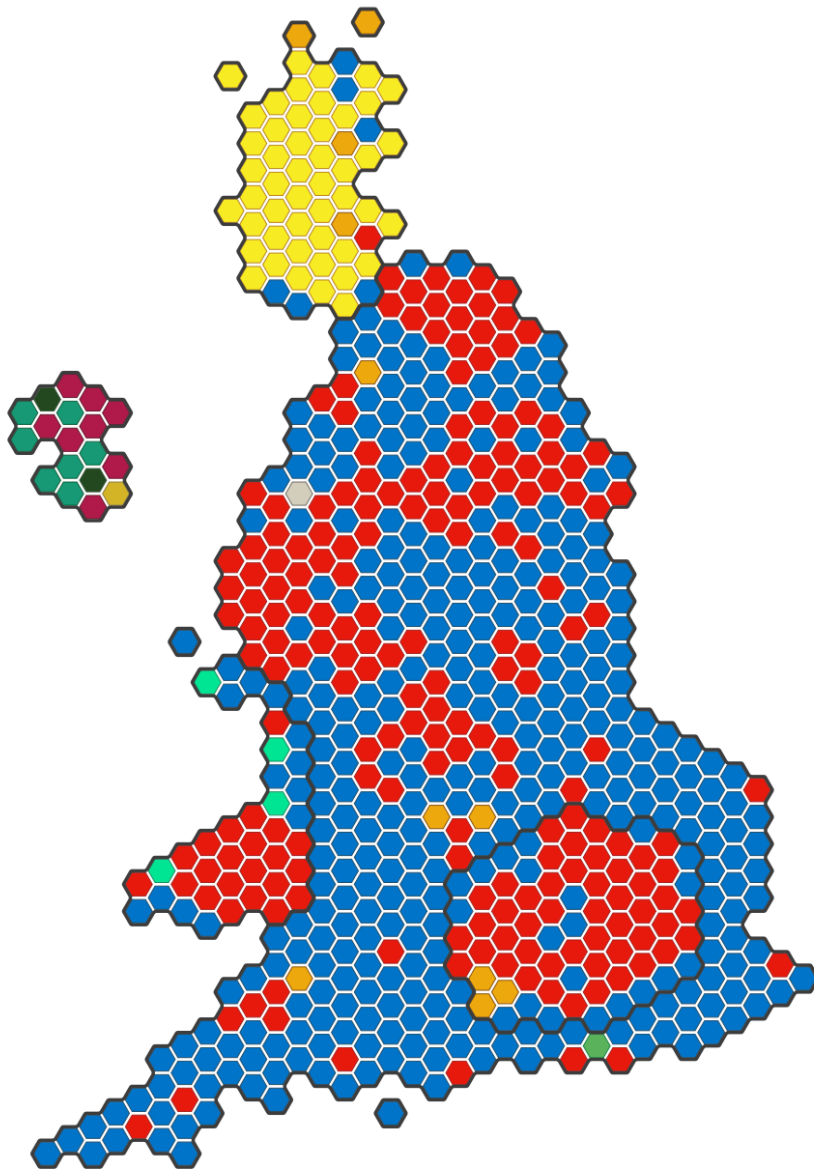# AFTER CORBYNISM

WHERE NEXT FOR LABOUR?

PAUL MASON

v1.4

INTRODUCTION

This is a devastating defeat for Labour: as bad as 1983 but amid more negative circumstances. Back then, the miners' and printers' strikes were still ahead of us. And we had no inkling of the climate catastrophe that's about to engulf us now.

The Tory victory puts them in charge of a state fine-tuned to crush resistance, in a society prone to fatalism and atomisation, and with a media wholly under the control of billionaire crooks. Their allies, even now, are moving to purge the left from the party.

The racist narratives deployed in the Tory campaign has left millions of ethnic minority Britons and EU nationals worried about their future. And we are going to lose five crucial years in the fight against climate change.

I am convinced the rising generation will look back at 12 December 2019 as the last gasp of the old world. With a different leader and a different strategy we might have limited the damage. But the election wasn't lost during the campaign.

The failure of the campaign reflected a bigger problem: **Corbynism has become less than the sum of its parts.** Corbyn's leadership became an excercise in refusing strategic choices and maintaining control.

Starting this week Labour has to lead the resistance. In fact we have to *be* the resistance. But by the next election we need a different offer: still radical but more electorally effective, drawing on new forms of organisation and making new alliances.

In the coming leadership election the questions the candidates must answer are: *Why did we lose? What are the new class dynamics of Britain? Why did Corbynism fail? Where does this leave Britain in the world? What kind of party do we need? What needs to change about the policies?*

This pamphlet, written with only the initial polling analysis to hand, is my contribution to that debate.

Paul Mason 15 December 2019 v1.0

v1.1 compiled 16 December with additions/corrections

WHY DID WE LOSE?

The results are clear. Labour gained just 32% of the popular vote and lost 42 seats. Only one of the Tory held seats we targeted in southern England fell to us; we lost heavily in the former-industrial towns of the North and Midlands of England, plus 6 out of our 7 seats in Scotland.

The simplistic narrative says: "we lost because our Brexit position alienated the working class". If we examine the evidence, not the media rhetoric, the defeat is the story of two swings:

- by Labour voters in small-town England towards the Tories
- and a bigger swing by Labour voters to the Libdems, SNP and Greens.

The stark fact is that Labour lost 2.5 million votes while the Tories and Brexit party combined picked up just 335,000 votes.

Table 1: Main party votes excluding Northern Ireland

	2017	2019	GAIN	SHARE (%)
CONSERVATIVE	13,636,684	13,941,200	304,516	43.6
LABOUR	12,877,918	10,292,054	-2,585,864	32.2
SNP	977,568	1,242,372	264,804	3.9
LIBDEMS	2,371,861	3,675,342	1,303,481	11.5
GREEN	525,665	864,743	339,078	2.7
PLAID	164,466	153,265	-11,201	0.5
BREXIT (UKIP)	594,068	624,303	30,235	2%

Where did the rest of the Labour vote go? Take a glance at Table 1 (above) and it's clear.

Allowing for the fact that some Tories switched to the Libdems, the polling analyst firm Datapraxis calulates that a maximum of 800,000 Labour Leave voters switched to the Tories.[1]

Meanwhile the Libdems gained at least 1.1 million votes from Labour, the Greens 339,000 and the SNP a quarter of a million.

Labour, in short, lost way more votes to progressive pro-Remain parties as it did to the parties of Brexit and racism.

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[1] https://www.dataprax.is/tory-landslide-progressives-split

Once Farage stood down in 319 seats, the only thing that could have stemmed the Tory advance was (a) an electoral pact between progressive parties, (b) an unprecedented turnout by young voters, or (c) tactical voting, seat by seat, by three out of every four pro-Remain voters.

Young voters did turn out in large numbers for Labour and other progressive parties: 56% of under 24s voted Labour and 55% of 24-35 year olds.[2]
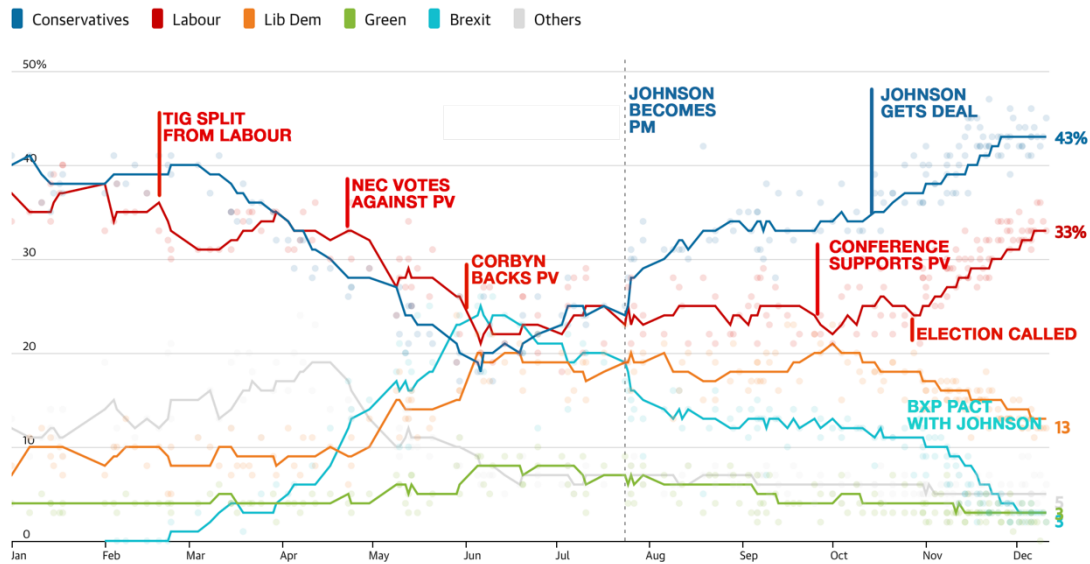
Tactical voting happened among progressives but not on the scale needed. In fact in numerous key seats - Stroud, Kensington, Chingford - votes for the so-called "Remain Alliance" of Greens and Libdems handed victory to the Tories.

Though Labour relentlessly eroded the Libdem vote during the campaign, it was not enough. Though the late Labour surge reported by the media was real, there was also, according to Datapraxis, a late surge for the Tories as Brexit party voters switched to ensure Johnson's victory.

If you switch off the radio and just think about the figures, only one conclusion is possible.

We were facing an alliance of the right and far right, with one relentless message. But the progressive parties refused any kind of tactical unity and fought each other instead.

Figure 1: Polling Averages 2019 (annotated)

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[2] https://lordashcroftpolls.com/2019/12/how-britain-voted-and-why-my-2019-general-election-post-vote-poll/

PATH TO DEFEAT

The path to the defeat is equally clear. As the Brexit crisis reached its peak, in the run-up to the original 29 March exit date, two big swings in voting intention began (see Figure 1).

- Labour's poll score slumped from 35% to 22% in the space of just three months. Most of those votes went to the Libdems, whose poll scores doubled, from 10% to 20%
- The Conservatives slumped from a high of 40% in March to 19% in June. This was a direct result of the formation of The Brexit Party (BXP) which went from zero to 25%.

From June onwards, this triggered a febrile summer of four party politics, demanding strategic action by both Labour and Conservative leaderships to regain the initiative.

The Tories took decisive action. Labour did not.

The Tories elected Johnson; staffed both Downing Street and the Shadow Cabinet with hard-right Trump-aligned neoliberals; they embraced culture war against minorities and the left; they set a course for No Deal Brexit; and when the crunch came, during the crisis over suspending Parliament, they purged their entire parliamentary party of liberal conservatives.

Labour, by contrast, floundered – and not simply because of incompetence, or sabotage by the party's right wing. It floundered because of a deep division within Corbynism itself over Brexit, and over the promise of a second referendum.

By the time we changed our line to reconnect with those Remain voters deserting us for the Libdems and Greens, it was too late.

Meanwhile the battle over the second referendum wasted time we should have been spending in our Northern and Midland heartlands. And even with a sellable position, Jeremy Corbyn and key members of the Shadow Cabinet refused to sell it. That's the short version: here's the detail.

A catalogue of mistakes: In January 2019, officials from Hope Not Hate and the TSSA union presented Corbyn's team with polling evidence that we risked losing large numbers of Remain voters unless Labour adopted the clear policy of a second referendum on any deal, and stopped trying to identify itself with delivering Brexit.

It warned: "If there is an election in 2019, Labour will get a lower share of the vote in every seat in the country if it has a pro-Brexit policy than if it has an anti-Brexit position." The warning was dismissed.[3]

Instead, the leadership adopted a strategy advocated by Unite and senior officials in leader's office (LOTO): to deliver a soft Brexit, resisting calls for a second referendum, boycotting the People's Vote marches, stigmatising Remain

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[3] https://www.newstatesman.com/politics/brexit/2019/02/labour-must-challenge-myth-working-class-supports-brexit

campaigners as "middle class" and briefing against the Shadow Cabinet members who expressed commitment to Remain. This strategy led LOTO to enter six weeks of fruitless talks with Theresa May (4 April - 17 May 2019).

Despite strong lobbying from CLPs, the NEC on 29 April voted against the call for a second referendum on any deal. Glance back at *Figure 1* (above) to understand how that vote prepared us for catastrophe.

The result was an immediate slump in Labour's polling position, the eventual loss of half of Labour's European Parliamentary seats and our score of 14% in the elections of 23 May.

Then, on 28 May, under CLP pressure, Corbyn unilaterally flipped over to the "second referendum on any deal" position.

But with Unite, the CWU and their allies actively resisting this, it took until the party conference for branch delegates to win the commitment to a second referendum. Even then it came at the cost of losing any clear commitment to Remain, and with Corbyn himself adopting a reputation-destroying position of neutrality.

Those who are now saying "centrist Remainers forced Corbyn into the second referendum position and that's why we lost" are ignoring two things:

- it was Unite, the CWU and the Momentum leadership who pushed hardest for the second referendum at Labour conference - because it was the only way to block an outright Remain position
- we lost nearly twice as many votes to the Libdems, Greens and SNP than we did to the Tories and BXP.

The unified line coming out of conference laid the basis for a steady squeeze on the Libdem vote. ***But it was the right thing done six months too late.*** Of the voters lost to the Libdems during the dithering of May-June, we failed to win back at least 1.1 million.

The battle over the second referendum consumed the energy of the left, paralysed Momentum and kept party activists totally defocused on the very communities where the Tories would attack – the Leave voting ex-industrial heartlands.

It also left Jeremy's personal poll rating irreparably damaged: having slid from -10 to -30 during 2018, it slumped to -50 in the first half of 2019 and stayed there.

Disconnecting from the streets: During the prorogation crisis, for the first time since the Brexit referendum, the left was able to steal the mantle of insurgency from the plebeian right. A cross-party #StopTheCoup movement, led by Labour activists but including Leave voters, took to the streets across more than 80 towns and cities.

With tens of thousands of young people mobilised, and with the media wavering, Johnson looked rocky. He stumbled through press conferences, was at war with his own rebels and was eventually ruled to have acted unlawfully.

But the movement was demobilised. And while pro-Remain Shadow Cabinet members joined the demos enthusiastically, Corbyn's office were continually wary, lest the leader be contaminated by association with the People's Vote crowd.

And now a widespread anti-politics mood took hold. MPs seemed remote, engrossed in procedure, incapable of making the organs of democracy function properly. People resented being locked out of a drama they could only watch.

This created the perfect platform for Johnson to do a new deal with Europe, and launch an effective, populist, anti-parliamentary election narrative which sealed victory.

Delusions of victory: By 25 October, when the election was called, Johnson had effectively seen off the Brexit Party challenge: the Tories entered the election on 35% versus the BXP's 10%. Farage's unilateral pact, withdrawing rival candidates in Tory held seats, did the rest.

By the second week of the campaign we were facing what the German philosopher Hannah Arendt once called "the temporary alliance of the elite and the mob". Labour, by contrast, proved unable to form an alliance of the social forces it needs to win. The Libdems started the campaign on 20% and in the end we could only squeeze them down to 11.5%.

Young people voted for us in high numbers. The black and minority ethic communities were rock solid. The cosmopolitan working class of big cities voted for us. But it was immediately obvious that our vote was "soft" in small towns.

The early polls predicted a big Tory victory. But the apparatus around LOTO refused to take them seriously. Ian Lavery dismissed the results, saying he had never met a real person who had been polled. Unite's Howard Beckett, tipped to replace Len McCluskey, tweeted:

> *"Looking at these polls I've decided to start one myself...Labour voters will not leave labour. Young people will not leave labour. Labour will win. My poll."[4]*

In fact, Beckett wrote, "the polls have been part of the mainstream media propaganda." Days before the election, after campaigning in the West Midlands, he wrote: "My poll has Labour first, don't knows second and Tories a distant third!!"

Reliance on guesswork and refusal to heed professional advice pervaded the core of the campaign team right through to the first big Yougov MRP poll on 28 November, when in - a panic - they switched to a defensive strategy. Once again, they did the right thing but too late.

In the end large numbers of traditional Labour voters did not vote Labour. On the doorstep the reasons given were:

- dislike of Jeremy Corbyn,

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[4] https://twitter.com/BeckettUnite

- the desire to get Brexit over with
- lack of trust that Labour could deliver its radical spending plan

No amount of money promised for the NHS and local services would shift them. Where they understood the promises they chose not to believe them.

And once Johnson and Farage, aided by the media, had framed the election around Brexit and migration, even the issues where Labour is strong - like A&E waiting times - began to work against us: they were reframed on the doorstep as migration issues.

CONCLUSION

In the end, we lost because part of the former industrial working class in the Midlands and the North has detached itself from the values that are now core to our party. That is the result of a decades long process, which began under Tony Blair, and was never going to be turned around in six weeks.

But between April and June 2019 we also managed to alienate a part of the Remain-voting skilled working class so badly over Brexit, that up to 1.5 million of them switched to the Libdems, Greens and SNP.

Let's be frank: a minority of the working class abandoned Labour for authoritarian conservatism and nativism. It may be temporary, but it should not be a surprise - since this is a phenomenon being experienced by social democratic parties all over the world.

Could they have been won over by Labour overtly supporting Brexit? I doubt it. Because in towns like Leigh, where I campaigned, the main reason people want Brexit has always been to stem economic migration.

We can go a long way to addressing the cultural insecurity of people whose lifestyles and industries have been destroyed. But when they complain there are "too many foreigners" in the queue at their GP surgery, we cannot meet the implicit demand behind it, which is for two queues.

Suppose we had, as the Lexiteers demanded, supported the Tory Brexit in the Commons? As the polling slump of June-October shows, it would have collapsed our support among what is now the core of our vote: the skilled and educated workforce, the BAME communities and the youth.

If we had adopted the second referendum position early, and enthusiastically, selected talented candidates, and spent the summer campaigning in the Midlands and the North, maybe it might have been different.

If the neoliberal right of the party had been kicked out years ago, not allowed to depart spitting hatred and sowing confusion, that too might have helped.

But the real deficit of Corbynism was its refusal to listen to, and provide answers to, the cultural insecurity being expressed by people in ex-industrial towns.

I am no latecomer to this view. I warned in May:

> *"To win back the ex-industrial towns ... Labour needs to talk about more than economics. It needs to fight personal insecurity, crime, drugs, antisocial behaviour and organised crime as enthusiastically as it fights racism.*
>
> *"It needs to sideline all voices who believe having a strong national security policy is somehow 'imperialist'. It needs to forget scrapping Trident.*
>
> *The reluctance to speak this language this is, I believe, what left Labour over-reliant on triangulating to accommodate the pro-Brexit views of some voters in these towns." (Guardian, 28 May 2019)*

For writing this I was accused by Unite's leaders of "pandering to social authoritarianism and foreign interventionism" and "speaking the language of the right".

<u>Remember that when you hear them blame the internationalist left for this defeat.</u>

In the end, the reason we lost is the reason Labour voters gave for deserting us: Corbyn destroyed his own reputation for honest and principled politics; he surrounded himself with bureaucrats who could suppress dissent but never work to professional standards. The Brexit position was muddled. And people didn't believe real change was possible.

Unfortunately this resulted in an estimated 300,000 Labour Remain voters also switching to the Tories simply to keep Corbyn out. This was something never factored into the polling of the pro-Remain camp.

In hindsight, it means the only way we could really have won is if Corbyn had been replaced in the May-June crisis - and there was no support for that anywhere. [5]

We wasted half a year trying to fudge the issue of Brexit; we tried to assuage our traditional voters' worries over crime, migration and national security with an economic offer that was too big to be believed.

Now the Tories have an 80 seat majority. The strategy of "one more heave", which has underpinned every election campaign since we lost in 2010 - will no longer work.

To go forward we have to deal honestly with the new class dynamics of Britain, break with nostalgia and form a new social alliance.

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[5] Addition after study of new research, and after discussions with colleagues.

NEW CLASS DYNAMICS

The central issue we have to face is class. You can critique the tactics, the MPs, the leader – but until we understand the new class dynamics of a our busted neoliberal system, we're going to stay disoriented.

Many veteran Labour activists are wedded to an implicit theory of class struggle that no longer describes reality. It goes like this:

- capitalists exploit us primarily through work
- the traditional manual workforce is the backbone of resistance
- out of economic struggles over wages and conditions we should expect a socialist consciousness to emerge
- reactionary ideas like racism, nationalism and misogyny are the result of a "labour aristocracy" of well-paid skilled workers, and can be dispelled through economic struggle
- students, ethnic minorities, feminism, transgender rights and the struggle for national self determination are all secondary to the economic struggle (or in the worst version of this theory, a distraction)
- any cultural disconnect between workers and the left can be overcome by left wing economic policies at election time

If you believed this, your world view would be pretty much shattered by by the election results. They show, on the contrary:

- Our core vote now is among skilled and educated workers, plus students, ethnic minorities, precarious young workers and the lower middle class of big cities
- The same groups are in the vanguard of all struggles – from Extinction Rebellion to renters unions and independent unions like the IWGB, to public sector strikes - and they form the bulk of the actual membership of the party
- Reactionary ideas are strongest among older, ex-manual workers in former industrial towns; they are not a product social privilege but, in fact, the legacy of a failed imperialism, and Labour's failure to challenge them
- The economic struggle in the workplace is weak, and where it happens just does not generate political radicalism like it did in the 1970s and 1980s
- Above all, the cultural insecurity that drives people to the right is currently proving stronger than left wing answers over economic insecurity.

None of this makes sense unless we grasp the central fact of neoliberal capitalism: it exploits us through many channels, not only work. In fact, the financial channel - through rents and interest payments - is arguably the most important to capital than

work itself. It can be kept going through rain and shine through money creation by the central banks.

And over three decades of relentless class struggle and indoctrination, this multi-channel form of exploitation has produced a mindset prone to fatalism and atomisation.

Though the workplace is still a powerful site of resistance, for many working class people it is no longer the primary battlefield. The historic defeat of organised labour in the 1980s, and the move by unions to partnership with employers, means strikes are short, infrequent and almost never generate an anti-capitalist narrative. Even the best organised, most left-led unions - like Unite, the PCS and CWU - cannot counteract these effects alone.

If you stick to the idea that semi-skilled low paid workers are the core of the left project, and you watch some of those workers move to the authoritarian right – you can end up where MPs like Lisa Nandy did: advocating they be given a moral veto our Brexit policy, because their grandfathers "built the coal mines and the cotton mills".[6]

If, however, you accept that capital exploits us through many channels – work, credit cards, student loans, mortgages, rents, culture, data extraction and technological control - you can begin to understand what's fragmenting the loyalty of Labour voters.

The working class of big cities have not become core to Labour's electoral base and membership by accident. In their struggles over wages, rent, zero hours, women's rights, migration rights, LGBTQ+ issues and above all the climate, this new, diverse and networked workforce is the strongest agent of change we have. They have achieved exactly what, in the old theory, the pure economic struggle was supposed to achieve: a common progressive consciousness.

And they don't just exists in cities. All over the north of England, even in small towns like Leigh, Shipley and Bury, this new working class formed the backbone of our electoral support.

So when the media claim "the working class of the north deserted Labour" it's just not true.

From experience on the doorstep it is likely that a majority of those who work actually supported Labour, even in the towns we lost. But the power of nativist and social-conservative ideology among retired workers is strong and growing.

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[6] https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/may/20/brexit-britain-labour-remain-european-elections-leave-voters

THE REAL CLASS STRUCTURE

If you look at the real structure of the UK working class it is completely different to the picture in the heads of many left activists.[7]

There are 33 million people in the workforce: if you discount the 11% that are managers, the biggest groups are:

- 35% "professional and technical"
- 20% "skilled trades and administrators"
- 16% working in personal care or sales.
- 6% in factory-style jobs
- 10% in "elementary" work - for example food processers and office cleaners

This heavily stratified workforce was **actually designed by neoliberalism** to replace the old one, where 40% of people worked in factories, and trade unions could keep the wages share of the economy high.

Labour is, even now, able to score 32% because it can appeal across these stratifications, mobilising both the office cleaner and the office manager, the university lecturer and the personal care worker. But our membership base lies overwhelmingly in top two tiers of the list above, and among young people who are destined for those jobs.

But let's consider the cultural stratification that overlays this. This matters because, once you accept we are exploited through multiple channels, the beliefs, lifestyles and cultural identity of working class people have are important for shaping the way they resist.

In the old industrial economy, Labour was clearly a tribal alliance. It could only win if it mobilised the votes of the factory working class, the population of big cities, almost the whole of urban society in Scotland and Wales, and then - on rare occasions - attract the votes of the educated, progressive middle class.

This was the source of Tony Blair's landslide in 1997, of Attlee's landslide in 1945 and of Wilson's victories in the 1960s and 70s.

But as the neoliberal system began to fail, this old tribal alliance became impossible.

First, and most importantly, **a large part of the working class in Scotland has embraced progressive nationalism**. From here until Scottish independence it is likely that this primarily cultural nationalism will predominate, even if the SNP were to split. The conclusion has been a long time coming but is real: we can't form a progressive government in Britain without the SNP.

Second, most keenly felt in England and south Wales, **the life experience of workers in small towns has diverged from those in the big cities**. In Leigh, where I come from, there is no university, no students, not even a sixth form college. There are few non-white people, almost no high-skilled employment and public

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7 https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/reports/lmp/gor/2092957698/report.aspx

cultural space is limited. Public transport links are poor and, above all, there is very little money flowing through the shops and small businesses. Gross average pay is £22,000; male life expectancy at birth is 77. Massive disconnection between isolated towns and diverse cities is the second big cultural fact of British politics.

The third and distinct new reality is **the radicalisation of the big city workforce**. It is younger, ethnically diverse, and while its employment is often precarious, the sheer volume of money and investment in a big metropolis can make this surviveable. Culturally, its values have diverged from those of the small-town workforce. Politically it is wedded to social liberalism, the environment and social justice, and since 2008 has become radicalised in a way that leaves it open to left social democracy, but also left liberalism and Green politics.

If this election teaches us one thing above all, it is that the new cultural divisions of Britain cannot be overcome by economics alone.

Yet that was Jeremy Corbyn's mantra. Time and again, on stump speeches and in intereviews, he riffed on the theme that "whether you live in Tottenham or Mansfield... you're up against it, but you're not up against each other".[8]

But one glance at the demographic data shows that life in Tottenham and Mansfield are very different. The age profile is different; the life expectancy is different; everyday life is different; the diseases people die of are different. It was Labour's failure to recognise that which has cost us not only this election but the last four.

The Datapraxis report (15 December) contains a more detailed analysis, segmenting British voters into 14 "tribes", ranging from *Empire 2.0 Brexiteers* on the right to the *Green Left*. There was a time when leftwing strategists could scoff at these cod-sociological categories borrowed from marketing. But they deserve attention now.

What they show is, outside the big Labour-held cities, there is no "typical" Labour voter, nor any certainty about what you're going to hear when you knock on their door.

Your job, your wage levels and your family history still determine how you're going to vote, but not as much as they did before.

And that should be equally worrying for Labour activists in big cities as much as in small towns.

As we found on the doorstep a "labour pledge" - a voter marked down as Labour for several elections in a row - is no longer permanent. Both Leavers and Remainers, town-dwellers and city-dwellers, are now prepared to vote either tactically or on specific policies - but much less out of party loyalty.

What this means is stark. At the next election we have to win between 80 and 100 seats from the Tories. To construct a new social coalition that can do that, we have to think beyond Corbynism starting today.

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[8] https://labour.org.uk/press/jeremy-corbyn-brexit-speech-wakefield/

JEREMY'S LEGACY

Jeremy Corbyn achieved many things, and I am proud to have supported him:

- He broke the party from neoliberal economics, allowing us to break the political consensus, throw aside voter apathy and turn politics into a contest about economic models
- He rebuilt Labour as a left-leaning mass party of 500,000 members, avoiding the electoral collapse of other European social-democratic parties. Even on 32% we are one of the most successful left parties in Europe.
- He reacted swiftly and positively to the IPCC report of October 2018, reframing Labour's fiscal policy entirely around the Green New Deal
- He committed Labour to opposing the Brexit deals of both May and Johnson - standing up for the interests of working people even in the face of the referendum mandate.

But none of these achievements were enough to weld together social alliance that could achieve victory.

That was not Corbyn's fault. The Cold War right-wingers who smeared and slandered Labour as they quit the party, urging votes for the Tories; the neoliberals who defected to the Libdems; the hand-wringing liberal media who could not bring themselves to vote Labour even in the face of the right wing threat - all share responsibility. But we have to face facts.

Faced with an alliance of the right and the far right, the only effective response is a temporary alliance of the centre and the left.

That's the lesson of the 1930s, and it has been received as reluctantly today as it was by the far left then.

The class dynamics of neoliberalism have not only stratified those exploited by capitalism; not only turned culture, finance and everyday life into forms of exploitation. They have eroded people's belief in the possibility of change.

That can be overcome through struggle, but we're going to have to learn from the people who are making it happen: from renters unions, Deliveroo drivers' unions, community organisers, climate activists - as well as traditional union organisers, Labour grassroots campaigners, and left parties in the USA and Europe.

Even if we succeed, turning Labour into a million-strong party connected to struggles everywhere, we're still going to need a stronger electoral alliance of progressive parties. As the Datapraxis report concludes:

> *"British progressives need to look long and hard at the consequences of their divisions and bickering over the last decade. A dose of realism is required. It may be time to think the unthinkable: either the centre and the left can somehow be reunited under a single banner, or better cooperation and alignment is required among a diverse flotilla of progressive parties and movements."*

Corbynism was an alliance of three political ideologies that cannot cohere around the new political reality described above:

- The economic nationalism and anti-imperialism of an older generation of activists, who were let back into the party after years of exclusion and alienation under Blair
- The networked anti-capitalism of the generation inspired by the student revolts of 2010, and subsequent generations attracted by Labour's openness to antiracism, feminism and eco-socialism
- The highly effective but hierarchical left trade unionism of Unite, the CWU and the GMB.

What worked in 2017, against a disunited and incompetent May government, and a demobilised far right, failed in the face of a competent and ruthless populism of Johnson and Farage.

Over the next five years we need a realignment, both within the party and without, around a new political strategy.

A NEW LEFT STRATEGY

Let's start with the certainties. Brexit will happen. Free movement will end. Scotland will spend five years in constitutional conflict with Westminster, at the end of which it will either go independent or achieve maximum devolution.

The coming battle over the form of Brexit will either leave Britain attached to the EU single market, mirroring its laws and regulations, or cast adrift as a client state of Trump's America.

Meanwhile the Tories will attack the welfare state, re-start the privatisation machine, drive real wages downwards, continue the social cleansing of big cities, and despoil the climate - doing little or nothing to achieve the 2050 decarbonisation target.

During the next five years, if we get things right, we can maintain a mass, left-oriented and radical social democracy in the face of this. We can maintain trade union density and deepen Labour's connections with the social movements that will spring up to resist the Tory onslaught.

But it is possible that we do all of the above and still stay out of power for a generation.

Because alongside our social movements there is another: the far-right inspired authoritarian populism of Farage. From the 2010 election onwards, Farage assembled a coalition of four million voters around not just Brexit but English nationalism, racism and authoritarianism. He deployed them twice to win the EU parliamentary elections, and then swung them behind the Conservatives in 2019.

In the process, the Conservative Party itself has been transformed. Its grassroots are populated by ex-UKIP-ers, its parliamentary party stuffed full of hard-right neoliberals. Meanwhile the liberal bourgeoisie - typified by Peoples' Vote leader Roland Rudd, or Airbus boss Thomas Enders - have no party to represent them. Nor do many decent, liberal minded Tories - their parliamentary avatars having been ejected from parliament by Johnson's purge.

In this situation it is highly likely that the pro-European, liberal section of the managerial elite will either seek to form a new centre party, or try to reconquer Labour for a form of neo-Blairism, by flooding the party with centrist voters. This is the stated intention of the people behind Jess Phillips' candidacy.

So our first tactical priority must be to resist a Blairite takeover. If we succeed, we'll then have to fight the emergence of new centrist party.

When it comes to the leadership race, regardless of names and faces, the obvious task is to build a functioning Shadow Cabinet of competent politicians, prepared to deploy professional advice and expertise in a way that LOTO under Corbyn failed to do.

But in an age of right wing populism, names and faces matter.

One of Corbyn's failings was his inability to reach personally across the cultural divides. He bombed in Scotland, bombed in small-town England, and bombed among that section of the workforce where professionalism, detail and expertise are valued above rhetoric. Tragically, even 300,000 "Remain Labour" voters seem to have voted Tory in order to stop him becoming PM, according to Datapraxis.

The next Labour leader must be a person of stature, who can inspire crowds, read a briefing paper and manage a team. The list of candidates who match these criteria is short - but all human beings can learn if they want to.

Beyond a new leader, what we need is a new politics of the left. Though designing that project will be a big task, the work strands only need to be few in number:

- a fiscal and monetary policy that can deliver growth and redistribution a Green New Deal, funded by borrowing and money creation, which can be turned into workable, shovel-ready energy, transport and infrastructure projects
- an offer to small town Britain that is a mixture of economic and cultural revival, containing solutions to the real problems people are obsessed with, not the ones we would like them to be obsessed with
- a clear design for constitutional reform and the defence of human rights, including rights over data and in the face of technological control
- a security and defence policy that rests on the reality that we are a major nuclear power, faced with threats from both Russia and jihadi terrorism, and which assures voters that, whatever changes we want to make, we will maintain the institutions and multilateral alliances of the post-1945 order

Working through this task list needs to be an inclusive process. One of the unspoken failures of Corbynism was the attenuated process of policymaking. The National Policy Forum met once and produced almost nothing; party conferences were politically thin.

We should defend the principles that lay behind the 2019 Manifesto, and build on them. But we should learn the lessons of its failure to "land", as the 2017 one had.

The Labour thinker Richard Tawney once wrote, after the debacle of 1931, that Labour manifestos had become "glittering forest of Christmas trees with presents for everyone". That, despite the best intentions of those who wrote it, is what the *Real Change* manifesto sounded like. In the event, half the population wanted only one Christmas present - Brexit - and we could never offer that.

As we begin the policy debate we should learn a bigger lesson. The Conservatives won the election on a single policy: get Brexit done - because they had a clear and compelling narrative. In the end, Jeremy Corbyn made the same mistake Ed Miliband had made: that policies win elections, and if you are losing, the answer is to throw another policy into the mix.

Policies do not win elections, narratives do. And because we have some critical elections to win in May, and a rearguard action to fight over Brexit, there can be no delay in formulating a narrative. Here, for me, are the components of it.

THE NARRATIVE

Brexit is going to happen. It will reshape Britain's relationship with the world and unleash a wave of victimisation narratives as it goes wrong. From now on, whether its long queues at the GP surgery, or pressures on housing and A&E, migrants and ethnic minorities will be stigmatised. Our parliamentary and legal institutions will be blamed for every complication. Meanwhile the entire process will be used to erode our human rights and enrich a narrow financial elite. That is the threat.

The protagonist in resisting this are the ordinary, decent majority British working people. They are no longer culturally united, but strongly divided. So the movement that resists Johnson, and the electoral alliance that eventually defeats him, will have to emerge as an explicit deal between very different sections of the working class.

Blair's genius was, for a few short years, to keep Labour's working class base on board while delivering very little to them, while attracting the swing voters of the urban middle class. **But what Blair never offered, nor delivered, was agency: the power to change things from below.**

We must now take our voting coalition on a journey to increased agency: the offer to Scotland should be the power to leave the UK, or to remain in it with a new, devolved constitutional settlement. To the beleaguered ex-industrial communities, we have to offer hope - and the means to rekindle it through local action.

To the young, cosmopolitan new Labour heartlands in the big cities, we need to offer a party that does not flinch from representing their values - but which asks something back in return, just as Blair asked it of the working class: concentration on the task in hand.

For the forseeable future, Labour's main objective in England and Wales is to reconnect with the communities who ceased to trust us, and where far-right ideology has begun to seep into the everyday culture. We need to put money, organisers and narrative power into those communities until it pays results.

That means we are going to talk about crime and rehabilitation; about domestic violence and the need for shelters and better policing; about bus services as well as wind farms. But we are never going to stigmatise migrants or minorities.

We will reassure those communities that we support NATO, the nuclear deterrent, a well-equipped military rooted in civil society, a police force that cares about the victims of crime, and an intelligence service that can fight terrorism effectively.

Above all we have to accept Brexit as a fact. We can fight for an economic model that leaves us capable of rejoining Europe, if a future generation can create political consensus around doing so.

But rejoining is off the agenda today. As a consequence of that, the era of free movement will soon end.

We should protect the rights of three million EU citizens who live here, and fight for their right to vote in general elections, but future Labour migration policy will have to be moulded around the new reality.

It should put the rights of refugees first, because they are absolute under international law. It should be generous and tolerant, with no arbitrary objectives and caps on migration. But it won't be based on the principles of either free movement or "open borders".

We are now fighting a strong and virulent nativism: the assumption by older white workers that their family history entitles them to go to the front of the queue for public services, and veto over who can live and work in their community.

This ideology is growing all over the developed world, and if the election shows one thing it is that pure cultural liberalism has no effective answer to it.

The antidote is to create a community based around citizenship: where the fact that you live and work in Britain entitles you to use services and benefits from day one, and where refugees and migrants are welcomed into a single civil society, composed of diverse groups that respect each other.

If we create agency in the diverse communities we represent then, even if their cultural values and lifestyles diverge, there is a chance that - at the crucial moment of the next election - **their separate narratives converge into a single story: of hope, social justice and a plan to meet the climate emergency**.

In that spirit I am prepared to work with all wings of the Labour Party to redesign our programme, and with activists from the Greens and progressive nationalist parties; on the condition that there can be:

- no return to freemarket economics;
- no concessions to racism and xenophobia;
- no return to the victimisation and exclusion of the left;
- and no attempt to sideline the trade unions whose resources, education programmes and activist base have helped transform Labour into a mass party.

WHAT KIND OF PARTY?

Jeremy Corbyn promised a people-driven, data-focused campaign and we delivered it. But it didn't work.

The changing demographics described above, the coming boundary changes and the possibility of Scottish independence mean it's likely we have to change the party's way of operating radically to win the next election.

A party built for delivering the loyal votes of working class people has to become an organisation that mobilises people on the ground, across many diverse communities, and where every vote has to be fought for.

We cannot become a social movement, because winning elections needs a command structure, legal entities, a disciplinary code and rule-book etc. But we can emulate social movements, create them, work through them. In fact, from the Bernie Sanders movement through to Syriza and Podemos at their best, the model known to academics as the "directed network campaign" looks like the obvious solution.[9]

The four principles of such campaigns are:

- they are open to grassroots power
- they are run with focus and discipline over a long period
- they are driven by a compelling narrative
- they are co-ordinated through network hubs whose influence reaches across the movement.

To turn these principles into organisation change, I suggest the following reforms to the party structure.

1. **A million member Labour Party.** During the campaign it is likely we contacted hundreds of thousands of potential members. The shock of defeat, and the prospect of five years of Tory savagery - plus the prospect of a leadership election - will prompt many people to join or rejoin. We should scrap the £3 associate member scheme and encourage everyone who wants to take part to be full members. In some CLPs, like Bristol West, we already have membership figures around 3,000. But we need new structures and processes to recruit and retain a million members: internet voting, formalised WhatsApp groups etc. CLP meetings are unweildy and bureaucratic and we need to streamline the business of policy formation.

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[9] https://netchange.co/networked-change

2. **Adopt the Momentum organising style throughout the party**. Momentum played a transformational role in this election, mobilising thousands of activists, defeating the Tories on social media performance (while the official party HQ came in third). That is because it is relatively unencumbered by routine, and is able to put on talented freelance, temporary and volunteer staff as needed. And because its organisers have a background in horizontal movement work, and are highly politically educated. The job of grafting this onto the central party structures will not be easy but should be one of the main tasks of the new leader.

3. **Set up a network of social movements** allied to Labour. Many people want to be active on a single issue, among like-minded people: democratising football, fighting rip-off landlords, defending refugees, or just organising a festival like *Merthyr Rising*, or the *Corbynomics* festival in Lewes or the *Diggers Festival* in Wigan. At their best, such movements interact with the party spontaneously, on the unstated assumption that their work helps ours. But we now need to adopt overtly the methodology of the directed network. The most successful political parties think strategically about how to use local or single-issue movements to mobilise people at elections, and we need to learn from them.

4. **All political factions should be affiliated societies**. Momentum, Progress and other such political groupings should be invited to become affiliated like the Fabians; they should be open to party members only and with complete financial transparency. That way any disciplinary problems arising within them can be dealt with centrally. The party HQ should allow them, where appropriate, to spend money on behalf of the party at election time. But at the same time we need to create a single line of democratic accountability. The anomaly whereby these socialist societies can send delegates and block a deselection at the CLP level needs to end. The party branches and the union affiliates should be the main organisations of democratic control, not the societies.

5. **Open Selections for parliamentary candidates.** For two elections running, the party bureaucracy has used the snap election process to impose candidates, often with major unions making deals behind closed doors. The result, in some places, was poor-quality candidates. The long-term result is going to be a PLP without sufficient talent. Yes, there are problems with MPs having to spend time being reselected rather than campaigning, but that's the overhead cost of having a PLP accountable to the members. By conference, every one of our 100 target seats should have a nominated prospective candidate, whose job is to work the seat.

6. **The Green Party should be offered the same status as the Co-Operative Party**, with CLPs having the right to nominate "Labour and Green Party" candidates, and the Greens being allowed to submit resolutions to Labour Party conference. We are substantially aligned on the need for a Green New Deal, and it is madness that we stood against Caroline Lucas in Brighton, and that the Greens refused to stand down in Stroud, splitting the vote. Though we are always able to squeeze the Green vote at General Elections, their votes

in the local elections and mayoral contests split the progressive electorate needlessly.

7. **A political education unit**, organised at arms-length from the party, based on The World Transformed (TWT), but drawing on the excellent political education wings of the trade unions and TUC. The syllabus shoud be designed by acknowledged experts, contain a range of views and interpretations of key issues, and validated by an academic institution. As with TWT, we should adopt fun, flexible ways of teaching and learning, with activities at a local, regional and national level. Education should become a major part of the experience of Labour membership, not an add-on.

8. **A super-HQ in the North of England**, covering the East Midlands plus the three northern regions. This is the battleground we have to win back from the Tories next time, and it needs more than just four regional organising teams. It needs *strategists, press teams, economists, digital specialists and community organisers* to work together, in situ, to a plan - liaising with councillors, mayoral teams and regional trade union offices. If we can move half the Treasury to northern England we can do the same with the party apparatus.

9. **A Labour weekly newspaper.** It should be editorially independent, as the newspapers of other major left parties in Europe are, and demand access to the circulation system used by mainstream weeklies, and inclusion in the "tomorrow's headlines" on TV news. It will cost millions, but with a mixture of party, donor and crowdfunding, we can combine the efforts of the many alt-media sites operating now, but begin to produce professional newsgathering operation, which can spin up into an internet radio station and a daily news website. Unless we do it, we are leaving the entire professional media scene to the right, and to liberal media platforms that can no longer be relied on to support us.

10. **Transform our local government offer**. Whether it's boroughs or mayoral elections, Labour's practice in local government has lagged behind the political revolution that began under Jeremy Corbyn. We need a new wave of young activists to become councillors; copying inspirational projects like the Preston Model need to be mandatory for Labour council groups, and learning from Jamie Driscoll's mayoral campaign on North Tyneside. We need to end the scandal of Labour councils and mayors tacitly collaborating with property speculation. The refrain "I'm not voting Labour because the council does nothing for me" heard widely throughout northern England and South Wales, needs to become unjustified.

Thank you for reading this. Please discuss it with progressive people across all parties and if you don't agree with me, don't hold back. My Twitter handle is @paulmasonnews

ABOUT

Paul Mason is a freelance journalist writing for the *New Statesman, the Guardian, Vice* and the *iPaper* among others. He is a member of the Labour Party, the NUJ and Momentum. His latest book is *Clear Bright Future: A radical defence of the human being* (Penguin 2019).

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