

Labour's Failure

1. Corbyn's visible lack of leadership. I thought Labour would lose when he refused for a long time to define his Brexit position, and then when he did so it was to proclaim himself "neutral". To be neutral on the most important decision facing the country since WWII struck me as politically suicidal. Rule 101 for a leader is.... to lead. You have to adopt a considered position (neutral doesn't qualify), justify it in public, and persuade the unconvinced to follow you. That's what leaders do. I made this point many times to people - including at the last Labour Conference. In vain.

2. Antisemitism. Corbyn isn't an anti-Semite. But when Luciana Berger suffered antisemitic attacks in Liverpool - instead of getting on the next train to Liverpool, wrapping his arms around her, and working out with her what to do, Corbyn confined himself to stating that he had fought racism all his life. True but wholly inadequate. Again - ineptness and lack of leadership.

3. The huge influx of new members was partly a consequence of a new party policy to allow anyone to join for £3 no questions asked. Some of those new entrants appear to have been spoilers, 5th columnists - and for sure there were some anti-Semites among them. Labour wasn't geared to dealing with this and took far too long to meet the challenge. More ineptness.

4. I believe Corbyn is an honorable man with noble instincts. However, he is far from being an intellectual giant - and I found myself doubting his ability to manage either the country or even the party. He is not especially articulate - good at reading prepared questions in parliament - but poor on his feet, sincere but not quick witted, and definitely not a profound or well-informed thinker. Before he became party leader he had spent over 30 years as a backbencher, presumably a good constituency MP but without holding any senior cabinet or shadow cabinet position. He has never run a department - or indeed run anything demanding serious managerial competence.

5. The manifesto, allied to a plethora of supplementary policies, brought to mind the illusory dexterity of a conjuror pulling a succession of rabbits out of a hat. Both over

the airwaves and on the stump the promises sounded more and more improbable, certainly for a first term government. To accomplish all of them would require perhaps three or four terms in office - something that would have been clear to anyone who has ever tried to implement a complex initiative. The tabloids and the BBC, among others, fastened on the cost of carrying out Labour's manifesto. In practice, that would have been a trivial challenge as anyone who truly understand macroeconomic history would know. The idea that the country couldn't afford them is nonsense. Far trickier would have been the human and material (non-financial) resources required and, above all, the time. In politics, once you have promised something, the clock starts ticking and time is not on your side. A manifesto crowded with promises is a recipe for disbelief.

6. From the moment of Corbyn's ascension, Labour's inner circle has consisted almost entirely of London MPs: Diane Abbott, John McDonnell, Emily Thornberry, Keir Starmer, Barry Gardiner and Corbyn himself. I formed the impression - having spent a decade between 2004 and 2014 working outside the capital - that this cozy entourage suffered from a form of metropolitan myopia that restricted their ability to see clearly beyond the M25. Le Royaume-Uni "profond" as the French might say (the UK's beating heart) has often seemed beyond their experience, and present in their thoughts mainly as theory. Of the role of Seamus Milne - Corbyn's *éminence grise* - we know something but perhaps not enough. Born into privilege and educated at Winchester and Oxford, he seems to have supplied the left-wing intellectual grounding that Corbyn lacks; a grounding doubtless derived from a study of the literature (Marx, Lenin, Trotsky, Gramsci, etc.) and familiarity with grand national and international politics - but only a theoretical, if any, knowledge of how "the other half lives". As a scion of that "other half", I am especially sensitive to claims made on its behalf by people of more affluent background. Corbyn is not entirely absolved in this respect. When he showed up on Remembrance Day at the Cenotaph in 2018 wearing an anorak, I shuddered, not in harmony with the gutter press, but because my working-class aunts and uncles would have gone dressed in their ceremonial best: shoes brightly polished, ties straight, dresses and shirts crisply ironed. No one was going to look down on them. If Corbyn was showing himself to be a man of the people, he mistook the medium for the message. Those of us of a certain age will recall that Michael Foot committed a similar faux pas. In his case, however, it was of a piece with his shambolic demeanor. Unlike Corbyn, Foot was

intellectually brilliant, though careless of his appearance in the manner of an absent-minded professor. Like Corbyn he proved to be an electoral liability.