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Corbyn is Being Destroyed, Like Blowing Up a Bridge to Stop an Advancing Army



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The latest “scandal” gripping Britain – or to be more accurate, British elites – is over the use of the term “Zionist” by the Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn, the head of the opposition and possibly the country’s next prime minister.

Yet again, Corbyn has found himself ensnared in what a small group of Jewish leadership organisations, which claim improbably to represent Britain’s “Jewish community”, and a small group of corporate journalists, who improbably claim to represent British public opinion, like to call Labour’s “anti-semitism problem”.

I won't get into the patently ridiculous notion that "Zonist" is a code word for "Jew", at least not now. There are lots of existing articles explaining why that is nonsense.

I wish to deal with a different aspect of the long-running row over Labour's so-called "anti-semitism crisis". It exemplifies, I believe, a much more profound and wider crisis in our societies: over the issue of trust.

We now have two large camps, pitted against each other, who have starkly different conceptions of what their societies are and where they need to head. In a very real sense, these two camps no longer speak the same language. There has been a rupture, and they can find no common ground.

I am not here speaking about the elites who dominate our societies. They have their own agenda. They trade only in the language of money and power. I am speaking of us: the 99 per cent who live in their shadow.

First, let us outline the growing ideological and linguistic chasm opening up between these two camps: a mapping of the divisions that, given space constraints, will necessarily deal in generalisations.

The trusting camp

The first camp invests its trust, with minor reservations, in those who run our societies. The left and the right segments of this camp are divided primarily over the degree to which they believe that those at the bottom of society's pile need a helping hand to get them further up the social ladder.

Otherwise, the first camp is united in its assumptions.

They admit that among our elected politicians there is the odd bad apple. And, of course, they understand that there are necessary debates about political and social values. But they agree that politicians rise chiefly through ability and talent, that they are accountable to their political constituencies, and that they are people who want what is best for society as a whole.

While this camp concedes that the media is owned by a handful of corporations driven by a concern for profit, it is nonetheless confident that the free market – the need to sell papers and audiences – guarantees that important news and a full spectrum of legitimate opinion are available to readers.

Both politicians and the media serve – if not always entirely successfully – as a constraint on corruption and the abuse of power by other powerful actors, such as the business community.

This camp believes too that western democracies are better, more civilised political systems than those in other parts of the world. Western societies do not want wars, they want peace and security for everyone. For that reason, they have been thrust – rather uncomfortably – into the role of global policeman. Western states have found themselves with little choice of late but to wage “good wars” to curb the genocidal instincts and hunger for power of dictators and madmen.

Russian conspiracies

Once upon a time – when this camp’s worldview was rarely, if ever, challenged – its favoured response to anything difficult to reconcile with its core beliefs, from the 2003 invasion of Iraq to the 2008 financial crash, was: “Cock-up, not conspiracy!”. Now that there are ever more issues threatening to undermine its most cherished verities, the camp’s response is – paradoxically – “Putin did it!” or “Fake news!”.

The current obsession with Russian conspiracies is in large part the result of the extraordinarily rapid rise of a second camp, no doubt fuelled by the unprecedented access western publics have gained through social media to information, good and bad alike. At no time in human history have so many people been able to step outside of a state-, clerical- or corporate-sanctioned framework of information dissemination and speak too each other directly and on a global stage.

This new camp too is not easy to characterise in the old language of left-right politics. Its chief characteristic is that it distrusts not only those who dominate our societies, but the social structures they operate within.

This camp regards such structures as neither immutable, divinely ordained ways for ordering and organising society, nor as the rational outcome of the political and moral evolution of western societies. Rather, it views these structures as the product of engineering by a tiny elite to hold on to its power.

These structures are no longer primarily national, but global. They are not immutable but as fabricated, as man-made and replaceable, as the structures that once made incontestable the rule of a landed aristocracy over feudal serfs. The current aristocracy, this camp argues, are globalised corporations that are so unaccountable that even the biggest nation-states can no longer contain or constrain them.

Illusions of pluralism

For this camp, politicians are not the cream of society. They have risen to the surface of a corrupted and corrupting system, and the overwhelming majority did so by

enthusiastically adopting its rotten values. These politicians do not chiefly serve voters but the corporations who really dominate our societies.

For the second camp, this fact was well illustrated in 2008 when the political class did not – and could not – punish the banks responsible for the near-collapse of western economies after decades of reckless speculation on which a financial elite had grown fat. Those banks, in the words of the politicians themselves, were “too big to fail” and so were bailed out with money from the very same publics who had been scammed by the banks in the first place. Rather than use the bank failures as an opportunity to drive through reform of the broken banking system, or nationalise parts of it, the politicians let the banking casino system continue, even intensify.

Likewise, the media – supposed watchdogs on power – are seen by this camp as the chief propagandists for the ruling elite. The media do not monitor the abuse of power, they actively create a social consensus for the continuation of the abuse – and if that fails, they seek to deflect attention from, or veil, the abuse.

This is inevitable, the second camp argues, given that the media are embedded within the very same corporate structures that dominate our societies. They are, in fact, the corporations’ public relations arm. They allow only limited dissent at the margins of the media, and only as a way to create the impression of an illusory pluralism.

Manufactured enemies

These domestic structures are subservient to a still-bigger agenda: the accumulation of wealth by a global elite through the asset-stripping of the planet’s resources and the rationalisation of permanent war. That, this camp concludes, requires the manufacturing of “enemies” – such as Russia, Iran, Syria, Venezuela and North Korea – to justify the expansion of a military-industrial machine.

These “enemies” are a real foe in the sense that, in their different ways, they refuse to submit to the neoliberalising reach of the western-based corporations. But more significantly, they are needed as an enemy, even should they want to make peace. These manufactured enemies, says the second camp, justify the redirection of public money into the private coffers of the military and homeland security industries. And equally importantly, a ready set of bogeymen can be exploited to distract western publics from troubles at home.

The second camp is accused by the first of being anti-western, anti-American and anti-Israel (or more mischievously anti-semitic) for its opposition to western “humanitarian interventions” abroad. The second camp, it says, act as apologists for war criminals like

Russia's Vladimir Putin or Syria's Bashar Assad, portraying these leaders as misunderstood good guys and blaming the west for the world's ills.

The second camp argues that it is none of these things: it is anti-imperialist. It does not excuse the crimes of Putin or Assad, it treats them as secondary and largely reactive to the vastly greater power a western elite with global reach can project. It believes the western media's obsession with crafting narratives about evil enemies – bad men and madmen – is designed to deflect attention from the structures of far greater violence the west deploys around the world, through a web of US military bases and Nato.

Putin has power, but it is immeasurably less than the combined might of the profit-seeking, war-waging western military industries. Faced with this power equation, according to the second camp, Putin acts defensively or reactively on the global stage, using what limited strength Russia has to uphold its essential strategic interests. One cannot reasonably judge Russia's crimes without first admitting the west's greater crimes, our crimes.

While the whole US political class obsess over "Russian interference" in US elections, this camp notes, the American public is encouraged to ignore the much greater US interference not only in Russian elections, but in many other spheres Russia considers to be vital strategic interests. That includes the locating of US military bases and missile sites on Russia's borders.

Different languages

Two camps, two entirely different languages and narratives.

These camps may be divided, but it would seriously misguided to imagine they are equal. One has the full power and weight of those corporate structures behind it. The politicians speak its language, as do the media. Its ideas and its voice dominate everywhere that is considered official, objective, balanced, neutral, respectable, legitimate.

The other camp has one small space to make its presence felt – social media. That is a space rapidly shrinking, as the politicians, media and the corporations that own social media (as they do everything else) start to realise they have let the genie out of the bottle.

This camp is derided as conspiratorial, dangerous, fake news.

This is the current battlefield. It is a battle the first camp looks like it is winning but actually has already lost.

That is not necessarily because the second camp is winning the argument. It is because physical realities are catching up with the first camp, smashing its illusions, even as it clings to them like a life-raft.

The two most significant disrupters of the first camp's narrative are climate breakdown and economic meltdown. The planet has finite resources, which means endless growth and wealth accumulation cannot be sustained indefinitely. Much as in a Ponzi scheme, there comes a point when the hollow centre is exposed and the system comes crashing down. We have had intimations enough that we are nearing that point.

It hardly needs repeating, except to climate deniers, that we have had even more indications that the Earth's climate is already turning against humankind.

Out of the darkness

Our political language is rupturing because we are now completely divided. There is no middle ground, no social compact, no consensus. The second camp understands that the current system is broken and that we need radical change, while the first camp holds desperately to the hope that the system will continue to be workable with modifications and minor reforms.

It is on to this battlefield that Corbyn has stumbled, little prepared for the heavy historic burden he shoulders.

We are arriving at a moment called a paradigm shift. That is when the cracks in a system become so obvious they can no longer be credibly denied. Those vested in the old system scream and shout, they buy themselves a little time with increasingly repressive measures, but the house is moments away from falling. The critical questions are who gets hurt when the structure tumbles, and who decides how it will be rebuilt.

The new paradigm is coming anyway. If we don't choose it ourselves, the planet will for us. It could be an improvement, it could be a deterioration, it could be extinction, depending on how prepared we are for it and how violently those invested in the old system resist the loss of their power. If enough of us understand the need for discarding the broken system, the greater the hope that we can build something better from the ruins.

We are now at the point where the corporate elite can see the cracks are widening but they remain in denial. They are entering the tantrum phase, screaming and shouting at their enemies, and readying to implement ever-more repressive measures to maintain their power.

They have rightly identified social media as the key concern. This is where we – the 99 per cent – have begun waking each other up. This is where we are sharing and learning, emerging out of the darkness clumsily and shaken. We are making mistakes, but learning. We are heading up blind alleys, but learning. We are making poor choices, but learning. We are making unhelpful alliances, but learning.

No one, least of all the corporate elite, knows precisely where this process might lead, what capacities we have for political, social and spiritual growth.

And what the elite don't own or control, they fear.

Putting the genie back

The elite have two weapons they can use to try to force the second camp back into the bottle. They can vilify it, driving it back into the margins of public life, where it was until the advent of social media; or they can lock down the new channels of mass communication their insatiable drive to monetise everything briefly opened up.

Both strategies have risks, which is why they are being pursued tentatively for the time being. But the second option is by far the riskier of the two. Shutting down social media too obviously could generate blowback, awakening more of the first camp to the illusions the second camp have been trying to alert them to.

Corbyn's significance – and danger – is that he brings much of the language and concerns of the second camp into the mainstream. He offers a fast-track for the second camp to reach the first camp, and accelerate the awakening process. That, in turn, would improve the chances of the paradigm shift being organic and transitional rather than disruptive and violent.

That is why he has become a lightning rod for the wider machinations of the ruling elite. They want him destroyed, like blowing up a bridge to stop an advancing army.

It is a sign both of their desperation and their weakness that they have had to resort to the nuclear option, smearing him as an anti-semitic. Other, lesser smears were tried first: that he was not presidential enough to lead Britain; that he was anti-establishment; that he was unpatriotic; that he might be a traitor. None worked. If anything, they made him more popular.

And so a much more incendiary charge was primed, however at odds it was with Corbyn's decades spent as an anti-racism activist.

The corporate elite weaponised anti-semitism not because they care about the safety of Jews, or because they really believe that Corbyn is an anti-semitic. They chose it because it is the most destructive weapon – short of sex-crime smears and assassination – they have in their armoury.

The truth is the ruling elite are exploiting British Jews and fuelling their fears as part of a much larger power game in which all of us – the 99 per cent – are expendable. They will keep stoking this campaign to stigmatise Corbyn, even if a political backlash actually does lead to an increase in real, rather than phoney, anti-semitism.

The corporate elites have no plan to go quietly. Unless we can build our ranks quickly and make our case confidently, their antics will ensure the paradigm shift is violent rather than healing. An earthquake, not a storm.