

## Left-wing Candidate Corbyn is likely Labour Leader SEPTEMBER 11, 2015 • UNITED KINGDOM • BY DAVID SMITH



The veteran socialist backbencher has risen quickly from obscurity and he is almost

A few weeks ago, few people in Britain had heard of Jeremy Corbyn MP outside his

constituents in London's Islington North. However, the veteran backbencher - who has never even served in a shadow cabinet - is likely to be announced as the next Labour

Party leader tomorrow. Corbyn rose from obscurity and surged into the lead in the Labour Leadership contest on the back of an astonishing swell of public support. Although few Labour MPS supported him, his arrival prompted a renewal of interest in politics among

away his rival centre-left candidates.

certain to become the opposition leader this weekend. His passionate rhetoric has blown

the public and more than 600,000 people applied to vote. Corbyn's speeches around the UK played to packed houses and polls show he has overwhelming support across the Labour Party. Not only is he the preferred candidate of Labour supporters, but he also has the widest appeal to the Scottish Nationalist Party (SNP) and the anti-immigration UK Independence Party (UKIP). Most of all, he has galvanised support among the younger generations, disillusioned as they are by the governing Tory Party's harsh austerity policies.

Corbyn is almost a left-wing political cliché. Bearded and casually dressed, he professes old-fashioned socialist views and is passionate about growing vegetables on his allotment. Nevertheless, he has always had integrity, which is one reason for his appeal in a world grown tired of the perceived insincerity of politicians. Always an outsider to the British establishment, Corbyn has voted against the Labour leadership more than 500 times since his election in 1983. He was a prominent opponent of the Iraq war and an outspoken critic of Tony Blair. Arguably, he is the most rebellious MP in the UK Parliament.

The assumption was that such "extreme" views made Corbyn the rank outsider. Most MPs

that backed his candidature did so only to enliven a contest dominated by centre-left

candidates. He almost did not take part, scraping together the required 35 nominations with minutes to go before the noon deadline on June 15. The British bookmakers gave odds of 200-1 against Corbyn becoming Labour leader. However, what happened next surprised everyone. In the debates around the UK, Corbyn's rivals were so keen to capture the centre ground that it was difficult to distinguish between their views. Their speeches came across as calculating and anaemic. Meanwhile, Corbyn's heartfelt lambasting of the economic elites struck a chord. Standing ovations greeted him everywhere he went. He also showed his principles in voting against the Tory proposals for drastic welfare cuts. All his rivals were too timorous to follow suit, fearing a loss of credibility on economic matters.

"Corbyn's overtly left-wing stance offers supporters a fresh basis upon which to build a clear and lively opposition to austerity," said Charles Masquelier, a lecturer in sociology at Surrey University. "The previous Labour leader Ed Miliband and Corbyn's leadership rivals are offering an austere realism which fails to inspire voters or present a strong enough opposition to current Tory policies. The perceived danger is the election of a leader

embodying the middle-of-the-road-stance that Labour supporters saw as the key reason

The tone of Corbyn's speeches has much in common with those of Democrat candidate

inequality, the predominance of the 1%, and right-wing media power. As such, they are

alienated so many voters, according to Lawrence King, Professor of Sociology and

"It comes down to Bill Clinton and Tony Blair moving Labour and the Democrats to the

alienated average people," he said. "Non-economic elites have now had a couple of

right and the left. The current elites are not telling the truth and not really serving the peoples interests. It's the same reason Donald Trump has so much appeal in the US."

centre and aligning themselves with the financial sector, rather than labour unions. They

decades of neo-liberal policies. This disaffection with the status quo is affecting both the

King said the resentment could inspire voters to move to the left, or right. Corbyn's surge ties to the rise of left-wing parties in Europe such as Podemos and Syriza, but also to the rise of nationalist movements, such as the UK Independence Party, the French National

To question the cross-party neo-liberal consensus in the UK, however, invites ridicule and members of his own party have viciously attacked Corbyn's idealism. Critics say he is a

His rival leadership candidate Yvette Cooper has accused him of offering "old solutions to

dinosaur politician with a feeble grasp of economics and he would lead the party into

old problems" and singled out one of his flagship economic policies – a massive

1983 or 2015 at the next election. It will mean rout, possibly annihilation."

reacting against the political changes to both the Democrat and Labour parties that have

Bernie Sanders in the US. Both men are tapping into widespread anxieties about

for Miliband's failure."

Front and the True Finns.

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left-wing politics.

case."

Political Economy at Cambridge University.

infrastructure investment programme possibly funded by quantitative easing (QE) – for particular criticism. "Quantitative easing to pay for infrastructure now the economy is growing is really bad economics," she said. "Quantitative easing was a special measure when the economy collapsed, liquidity dried up, interest rates fell as low as they could go. But printing money year after year to pay for things you can't afford doesn't work – and no good Keynesian would ever call for it." Former Labour leader Tony Blair has been even more vitriolic. He wrote in the left leaning The Guardian "The party is walking eyes shut, arms outstretched, over the cliff's edge to the jagged rocks below.... If Jeremy Corbyn becomes leader, it will not be a defeat like

Blair's claim is that under Corbyn, the Labour Party will become little more than a protest group. Labour has to appeal to the middle-class English, he says, in order to win elections.

Unless Labour gets into power, he says, it can do no real good. Blair's criticisms that

Charlie Masquelier, at University of Surrey, says Blair has not taken into account the

Malcolm Sawyer, an Emeritus Professor of Economics at Leeds University finds the severity of Blair and Cooper's criticisms difficult to comprehend. Sawyer says that although Corbyn has been caricatured as a Trotskyist 1980s throwback his domestic

economic policies are not particularly radical. "He's not that left-wing if you compare him with previous Labour Party positions. The manifesto of 1974, for example, proposed taking

25 of the largest 100 companies into public ownership. It was far more left-wing than

Corbyn's politics are outdated carry weight because he won three general elections by

moving the Labour Party to the centre ground. But others argue that it is Blair who is out of step with the times. They say that Blair and Clinton helped to create the climate for a more

possibility of a change in the socio-economic climate. "Blair's dismissal of Corbyn is short-sighted. Although the appeal might be restricted to disillusioned labour voters for the moment, what if another economic crisis unfolded? Social and economic conditions shape public opinion and 10 years of predominantly Conservative rule may have created conditions favourable for a left-wing programme of political action. That could make Corbyn's anti-austerity programme appealing to a wider electorate than is currently the

anything Corbyn has proposed, which includes a relatively mild element of renationalisation of the big six energy firms and the railways." Corbyn has promised an end to the Tory politics of austerity, which have disproportionately affected the poor through massive welfare cuts and he is proposing raising the top rate of income tax from 40% to at least 50%, but that is still well below the 83% it reached under Labour in the 1970s. Corbyn is also planning a new crackdown on tax avoidance and tax evasion, as well as "corporate welfare", tax breaks for companies. He claims this plan could recoup an extra £120 billion a year.

His economic policies may not be extreme, but Corbyn faces a hard task to convince the bulk of British voters that his plans to increase public expenditures are financially sound. Poll data suggests that the Labour Party lost the battle on economic credibility during the 2015 general election. The Tory Party managed to convince the British electorate that the previous Labour Government's overspending led to the financial crash of 2008. This may

well be an inaccurate analysis of the root causes of the crisis, but the British media is

Daily Mail, and the best-selling broadsheets The Times and The Daily Telegraph. All

reinforced the Tory messages.

tighter regulation of the banking system."

dominated by right-wing newspapers, including the best-selling tabloids The Sun and The

Professor Sawyer says Corbyn will have to change the nature of the economic debate to

switch the debate over to other grounds - achieving full employment, greater equality and

To stand a chance in the next general election, Labour must also act with one voice, he says. There is a danger that disunity could undermine the party following the criticisms of

Cooper, and others. The Blairite leadership candidate Liz Kendal has already refused to

serve on the front bench under Corbyn since their political differences are too

succeed. "Labour need to redefine what is meant by 'economic credibility'. If it means having to balance the budgets, Labour will find it hard to gain credibility. They have to

fundamental and a wider group of senior shadow cabinet members have collectively agreed to refuse to serve. Aware of the dangers of disharmony, Corbyn has proposed a collegiate coming together of the Party and is to offer shadow cabinet posts to all wings. "Whether Corbyn has a chance in the next general election depends to a large extent on how the internal parliamentary Labour Party responds," said Professor Sawyer. "Speeches such as Cooper's don't help. I would advise him to set up policy groups to hammer out an alternative economic plan that would get widespread support." The economy is not the only element of Corbyn's politics that will face a backlash in the media. In many ways, his foreign policies make him more vulnerable. Corbyn has called for a radically different international policy, based on "political and not military solutions". In

the Middle East, he says you have to "talk to everybody" to secure peace. He would look to withdraw from NATO and he is opposed to air strikes against so-called Islamic State in Iraq

Corbyn faces acute challenges to win back thousands of voters lost to Labour in the 2015 national election. Scotland saw Labour wiped out, one of its traditional strongholds. The

SNP won 56 Westminster seats in 2015, up from six seats in 2010. Huge Labour majorities

Labour also lost votes to the anti-EU UKIP. Here again, a more left-wing agenda could win

back working-class voters who feel marginalised. Perhaps the most challenging task awaiting Corbyn is to seduce the great swathes of middle-class Southern England who voted en masse for the Tories. An area stretching hundreds of miles across the South of

Despite the multitude of challenges, Professor King says the course of history is so

unpredictable that it is possible Corbyn could win the next general election for Labour. "It

became huge SNP majorities. However, disillusionment with Labour's establishment politics motivated much of the support for the SNP. Corbyn's more left-wing policies

and Syria. Corbyn is also setting out plans for nuclear disarmament. Unsurprisingly, the Tory Chancellor George Osborne is branding Corbyn a danger to national security. The

right-wing media will undoubtedly continue this line of attack.

should have greater appeal.

England contains not a single Labour MP.

the fight against the right-wing media."

See also: Being the Next Labour Leader

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seem like things can never change until they do. The 1970s Keynesian consensus seemed unmovable with neo-liberalism in the margins. Nevertheless, that all turned around. "No one thought Barack Obama was going to win, but then we had the financial collapse right before the election and it fell into his hands. If Corbyn is running and things fall his way and there is another economic collapse then he could possibly win. Social media and grassroots politics also raise the possibility of counteracting negative media coverage. We saw that with the Occupy movement and, globally, social media has been important in

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