

Corbynistas prefer denouncing critics to engaging with criticism – David Hirsh

[This piece by David Hirsh is in the Jerusalem Post and on Jpost.com](#)

Jeremy Corbyn looks like he might win the contest for the leadership of the Labour Party in the UK, making him Labour's candidate for prime minister at the next general election. Corbyn is very English in manner; softly spoken, self-effacing, a kind of left-wing Hugh Grant but without the charm. Unlike his losing predecessor Ed Miliband, he will never appear "too clever by half" but neither does he have anything of the blue collar about him.

He's like the guy who assigns allotments for the local council; and he can't be bought.

His rhetoric centers on opposing what he calls "austerity" and he is surfing a growing wave of radical energy and excitement.

This is in one sense surprising because he seems to be very austere in his personal life.

Nobody suspected Corbyn of over-claiming his expenses; he is the last person to be worried about the Ashley Madison leak; he is said to buy his clothes at a charity shop.

Corbyn wants the rich to be made to suffer the austerity which the recession and the Conservatives have already forced on the low paid and on social security claimants; slightly different from austerity which he and his supporters already embraced as a life-style choice. He says that instead of cutting public spending the government should borrow more money, invest in people, skills, jobs, infrastructure and kick-start the economy. He says that he will grow the economy, expand the tax base, give generous benefits to the needy and nobody will have to suffer. Except perhaps the greedy, the bankers and other moral failures.

Well good, this is a Keynesian social democratic politics which should be offered to the British people as an option. Tony Blair's New Labour, the only kind of Labour to have won a general election in the era of color TV (he won three), was famously "intensely relaxed about people getting filthy rich."

The problem, however, is that these current challengers of the Thatcher/Reagan economic consensus appear to be intensely relaxed about anti-democratic politics, so long as it is anti-American; anti-Semitism so long as it is anti-Israel; and jihadi Islamism, which is seen as a defensive response to the real enemy, imperialism.

Pictures of Corbyn arm in arm with Hugo Chavez have been published. Corbyn has called for a warmer British relationship with Vladimir Putin's Russia. Youtube videos have emerged of Corbyn hosting a show on Press TV, the propaganda channel of the Iranian regime. Tweets have been published in which he commends Russia Today, the Russian equivalent.

Corbyn has come under criticism for hosting spokespeople for Hamas and Hezbollah in Parliament, people he addressed as "friends." When challenged, he claims that this was just diplomatic language, he wants to encourage peace negotiations he says, even with Hamas. But he does not host Likudniks in Parliament and he does not refer to them as friends. In truth, Corbyn says that Hamas and Hezbollah are "dedicated towards the good of the

Palestinian people.” He says that they are dedicated to “bringing about long-term peace and social justice and political justice in the whole region.” He presents himself as a democratic supporter of a two-state solution but actually he supports and embraces those in Palestine who oppose peace with all the resources of their Iranian paymasters.

Corbyn does not understand the distinction between criticism of Israel and anti-Semitism, and the distinction does not seem to interest him.

His political support for anti-Semitic movements leads him into a series of encounters with anti-Semitic individuals.

He says he is being smeared by association, a backbencher is busy, anyone who supports liberation movements meets some strange people along the way. But his associations with anti-Semites are not random accidents.

Raed Salah is a Palestinian Islamist who visited the UK. The Jewish community warned that Salah had a record of employing medieval blood libel to incite against Jews. Corbyn leapt to Salah’s defense, saying that he was “far from a dangerous man.”

Steven Sizer is a vicar with a record of pushing anti-Zionist conspiracy theory who was finally banned by the Church of England from social media after sharing an anti-Semitic article claiming: “9/11: Israel did it.” Corbyn had also jumped to Sizer’s defense, saying that Sizer was under attack by a “pro-Israel smear campaign.”

Corbyn recently pulled out of a meeting where he was due to appear on a platform with Latuff, second prize winner in Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad’s Holocaust Denial cartoon contest, and Azzam Tamimi, a London defender of Hamas who says that suicide bombing is a “noble cause” and he would do it if he had the opportunity.

Corbyn is a patron of the Palestine Solidarity Campaign, an organization dedicated to fighting for a boycott of Israel and which has a record of tolerating anti-Semitism within its ranks. Corbyn supported Deir Yassin Remembered for years after it had become clear that its founder Paul Eisen was an open Holocaust denier.

Corbyn is the national chairman of Stop the War, the organization which selectively opposes Britain, Israel and America in any war in which they are involved. Corbyn, for example, opposed the Royal Air Force playing what turned out to be a pivotal role in saving Kobani and the Yazidis from Islamic State.

Corbyn was pictured hosting spokespeople for the IRA days after that organization had tried to kill prime minister Margaret Thatcher in the Brighton bombing. Pictures have emerged of Corbyn sitting next to Dyou Abou Jahjah on a platform, a man who says that the “death of every British soldier is a victory.”

How can it be that hundreds of thousands of socialists, greens, trade unionists and peace activists are so excited by the Corbyn candidacy? Diane Abbot, a prominent left-wing Labour MP angrily dismissed criticism of Corbyn. She claimed that these are all smear tactics mobilized by the “political class” which is terrified of this new wind blowing.

Rather disarmingly, Corbyn calmly announces that he “doesn’t do personal” and he isn’t going to respond to these vulgar personal attacks. He is for peace. He is against war. He is for the underdog. He opposes imperialist wars against oppressed peoples. He promises to issue an apology on behalf of the Labour Party for going to war against Saddam Hussein and the Taliban.

Corbyn’s claim not to indulge in personal abuse deserves closer examination. The Corbyn campaign tends not to engage directly with the examples, evidence and argument which its opponents raise. It prefers to respond with a counter-charge of bad faith, saying that people who make these wicked accusations are enemies of the progressive; they have hidden political motives. The worry is not only that the Corbynistas fail to recognize and to oppose totalitarian politics around the world. The worry is also that in their response to mounting criticism here in Britain, the Corbyn campaign is happiest denouncing its critics – as Tories, neo-liberals, Zionists or Blairites. It prefers to de-legitimize opponents than to relate rationally to their criticism.

In other words Corbyn’s supporters are tempted by totalitarian methods and practices, as well as alliances and worldviews.

Some Labour activists believe that if Corbyn wins then this will condemn Britain to decades more Tory government. They imagine the dismal fate of a Labour candidate in a general election who is associated with people who hope for the death of British soldiers, with anti-Semites, with homophobes and with woman-haters. But we should not entirely discount a more troubling possibility. Perhaps Corbyn could be successful in knitting together the resentments and the prejudices of those who feel all at sea in today’s frightening world: those who are anti-European Union, anti “Westminster elite,” isolationist, anti-banker, anti-Zionist, anti-American, anti-democracy and pro-conspiracy theory.

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