

UK: What happens if Corbyn wins? What happens if Corbyn loses?

The Left in the Global North Will Continue to Get Stronger

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The ascension of Jeremy Corbyn to the leadership of the British Labour Party constitutes one of the most sudden and dramatic politics shifts in recent times. While in many ways a stunning victory for the Left, it has also unleashed an unrelenting and vicious campaign against him, both within his own party and from the British establishment. Through a combination of adroit maneuvering, a simple and compelling political platform, and the continued degeneration of the Tory party, Corbyn has withstood the myriad attacks on him thus far. But how secure is his control over the party, and how prepared is he for power?

How do you think things have gone for the British left in the two years since the 2017 election?

GB | I think there are a couple of different trends that are worth attending to. On the one hand, we have the deepening of the Corbyn project's social base. Organizations like Momentum and The World Transformed have built out, with a much greater engagement in political education in particular. You're starting to see The World Transformed operate as a locus for the political education of the Left in the UK, and events springing up in various places all around the country: Birmingham Transformed, Newcastle Transformed, Brighton Transformed, and so on.

There is an increasingly self-confident movement that is able to discuss ideas and conduct political education in a way that we haven't seen in a very, very long time. I think that will only deepen as time goes on. As the social and resource basis of these organizations expands, the movement will further deepen and broaden out.

At the same time, the basis of the success in 2017 — a focus, after it had been avoided for forty years, on class — is being blurred, if not eradicated, by the debate around and process of Brexit. The Brexit division is not primarily based on class — this is the biggest struggle we face. It cuts across the class divide in this country, and undercuts the relevance and precision of the economic message that we've been putting forward.

In 2017, the big ideas that resonated broadly were nationalizations and taking a vast swath of goods and services, from public services to housing provision, outside of the market mechanism. It was the attack on vested interests, on big business, on finance. This added up to a picture of what a good life might look like, on socialist terms.

The division of the many and the few, as I flesh out in the book, is essentially an effort to bring together a coalition of people who live off work versus people who live off wealth — effectively workers versus owners. The divides over Brexit, which cut across both class and identity, along with a whole load of other things like geography, make that message much more difficult to effectively communicate. As finance and investment is allowed to flow much more freely around the world, we

see parts of cities like London, Dubai, or New York sucked up into this ethereal realm of the global economy, while many other communities in the rest of the country are left behind.

Today we're seeing something of a reversal of globalization as it runs up against its political contradictions. We are in a crisis moment of the neoliberal political-economic model, which has resulted in novel political trends like this mass movement against an international, bureaucratic organization like the European Union. Rather than attempting to fit the concerns that motivated the Leave vote in Northern working-class communities into an identitarian frame, one that portrays Northern working-class people putting their cultural interests in front of their economic interests, we should say, "No, these people are perfectly right to recognize that the last thirty years of financial globalization has significantly harmed them, while benefiting other parts of the working class in different areas of the country."

The fact that we've been unable to do that has turned the Brexit cleavage into something like a culture war. From there, you can envision a situation in which the UK left ends up in a situation not unlike the US left.

This is not to say the specific interests and concerns of black, Asian, and minority ethnic (BAME) members of the working class do not have a significant place in the socialist project. Obviously they do, because capitalism is not just a system of economic exploitation, it's also a system of social, cultural, gender, racial, and other forms of oppression. But the question that we have today is whether we have a project that is able to combine a critique of imperialism, white supremacy, patriarchy, and economic exploitation into a wider critique of capitalism, or if those issues are treated separately and we end up with a tug-of-war between those who want to frame the major political cleavage on grounds of identity and culture, and those who focus specifically on economics.

What hasn't happened in the last two years is a big uptick in strike activity, a rising tide of labor movement activity at the base. Corbyn's leadership of the Labour Party has coincided with one of the least active periods in the recent history of the British left, in terms of social and street mobilization. How much has that contributed to the inability to stem the rise of cultural conflicts?

GB | It's an oversimplification to suggest that there are two poles of political contestation in this country, one of which is economic and one of which is identity-based, because those sets of issues interact with one another in incredibly complicated ways. We have failed to deliver a cohesive critique of capitalism that is able to overcome that quite simplistic identity/economic dichotomy. Why have we failed? We have often consistently refused to combine race and class into a narrative that says, "There is a tiny elite that benefits from the fact that different sections of the working class are scapegoating one another — we all have more in common with each other than we do with those on top." There's lots of very interesting work on that kind of combined race/class narrative in the United States which suggests it's very powerful. The same can be said for gender as well.

Additionally, we fail to connect a critique of domestic capitalism with an analysis of imperialism. This is, in part, due to the success of the 2017 campaign, which pitted workers against owners, which said capitalism isn't working, which said we need to be able to move towards a democratic-socialist system if we are going to combat any of the major challenges facing humanity. This message worked so well at the time that we thought we didn't need to take it any further. We should have continued toward a much broader critique of capitalism that incorporated an understanding of how contemporary capitalism subjugates and divides the working class into different categories that can be subject to differential levels of exploitation.

This is very difficult to achieve in practice because any viable democratic-socialist project needs to

include progressive Remain voices, as well as those sections of the working class that voted to leave. It needs to include everyone who works for a wage. And that requires, as I said, a very holistic view of capitalism.

So that's the discursive challenge. But movement-building and mobilization is really the biggest challenge the Left faces today. We've been having this debate for a very long time about who the revolutionary subject is in modern capitalist systems. And for a long time there's been this idea that the working class, for whatever reason, is no longer going to be that subject. Many have argued that this question doesn't even matter in the first place, because of the rise of social movements that mobilize based on the multiple forms of oppression that capitalism generates, whether that's race, or gender, or something else, and that these can complement class-based movements. But as you say, we have yet to see the levels of social disruption and contestation that we last saw in Britain during the 1970s.

GB | I think there are two reasons for that. First, the vast majority of the global proletariat does not live in the Global North. Capital ownership, however, is concentrated in the Global North, and because of the political economy of financialization, the benefits of capital ownership have been extended to a wider group of upper middling earners through homeownership and pension funds. And that is a very real problem.

It's likely that any revolutionary attempt to overthrow capitalist power relations will have to happen in the Global South, which is why anti-imperialism is such an important part of socialist movements in the Global North. At the same time, I do not think that the nature of imperialism prevents socialist organization and mobilization in countries in the Global North. And that's partly to do with reasons that I outline in the book, partly to do with financialization.

The kind of political/economic bargain that I just mentioned, which is based on the extension of asset ownership to a larger number of higher wage earners, was premised upon the liberalization of credit and the privatization of a huge number of formerly collectively owned assets. That model created a limited fix that encouraged capitalist growth from the end of the 1970s through the crisis of 2007-2008. That fix increased returns to the top 1 percent, consolidated the power and hardened the boundaries of the 1 percent, so we now have a much more monopolistic form of capitalism than we have ever had in the past.

What we are now seeing results from the fact that this model has reached the limits of its ability to placate a large enough section of workers in the Global North. You're seeing this with the housing crisis, you're seeing it with continued austerity that's eroding public services and reducing living standards. There are many people in Britain today who increasingly have an interest in moving away from the status quo. And those contradictions are only going to accelerate as the system deteriorates. How do we turn that discontent — which can be mobilized either by the far right or the far left — into a potential base for socialist transformation in the Global North?

GB | This is the impetus behind Corbynism, which is an attempt to use those tensions and sources of conflict to gain control over the state, to rebalance power away from capital and towards labor. And in doing so, increase the social and political confidence of labor. That's really the task of a parliamentary socialism today. The question then, which has been obviously the question on the Left since the days of the Independent Labour Party, is whether parliamentary socialism is possible absent a mass workers' movement that is disrupting capitalist relations outside the formal political system.

In 2017 we came a lot closer to the Left winning office than we have in a very long time. Obviously, had we gained control over the state then, we would have faced all the same problems that people like Ralph Miliband have been writing about for decades. The Labour Party was and probably still is insufficiently democratic to prevent the rightward drift that inevitably takes place when a workers' movement collides with the power of the British state.

We have made inroads, definitely, over the last couple of years. We're still not really there.

So where is the Labour Party? The Labour right has had a resurgence over the last year or so, partly because of Brexit, partly because of the antisemitism claims. How strong is the Left's current position within the party? And what reforms has it failed to achieve since 2017?

GB | When we're talking about the Labour Party, we have to take different parts of the organization in turn. The Left's position in the Parliamentary Labour Party (PLP) remains pretty weak, not just because right-wing MPs predominate, but also because only a minority of the socialist MPs have an understanding of what socialism really is, and what the role of the Labour Party is in furthering that. A lot of the leading lights of the Corbyn front bench came out of this Unite program, that started before the Corbyn surge, in 2010. That is one of the only reasons why we've actually ended up with more left-wing MPs than we've had in a while.

Some progress has been made on the selection process. This has obviously not gone far enough because we're not at open selections, but the trigger ballots process combined with the fact there are lots of more Constituency Labour Parties (CLPs) in which the Left has control, means that in the next election, even if we lose seats, we will gain more left-wing MPs. This will start to shift the balance of power within the PLP.

But on the current trajectory it would take decades for the Left to be in a position of power within the PLP. Then there's obviously all the other elements of the Labour Party. There is the National Executive Committee (NEC) and the National Policy Forum (NPF); you've got administrative and bureaucratic positions within the party itself. The Left has actually made substantial inroads in all of those areas, and I think that will continue.

Then there is the relationship between the unions and the party, which over the last decade has been positive. But I would say that most of the unions are at the moment insufficiently internally democratic to facilitate the kind of left-wing push they would need to for the Labour Party to maintain a left-wing orientation in a confrontation with the state.

Finally, there's the membership. The left-wing members are now predominant. The question is how the Left's numbers and energy are organized and mobilized within the Labour Party. The Democracy Review was a step forward, but it wasn't enough to ensure that the predominance of left-wing Labour members ensures a left-wing Labour Party. The question of internal democracy is crucial in this regard. And unfortunately, I don't think we are going to get to the level of internal party democracy we need to reach by the time we are able to enter government.

The Corbyn project faces a unique difficulty in getting its message across because of the deep hostility of the British media. The British press has always been right-wing, but the Labour Party has typically been able to rely on the Daily Mirror and the Guardian to back it up. Whereas now, the Guardian in particular is arguably more hostile to Corbyn than the right-wing press. In the absence of any major British media outlet that is reliably pro-Corbyn, how do you go about getting that message across?

GB | On the one hand, a hostile media could be seen as an asset, because a hostile media can reliably be used to project your message to the public. They will constantly turn to the public and say “Oh my God, Corbyn’s going to do this policy, it’s absolutely insane.” They made a massive misstep when they started talking about rail nationalization in 2017. All it did was project the message, and people started saying, “Oh they want to nationalize the railways, that’s great.” They’re amplifying the message that we want to be heard.

Even so, that isn’t close to being enough on its own. We need ways of communicating our message in a positive and constructive way, which combine policy proposals with a broader vision of what a socialist future would look like. And I think the most important way of doing that, and again we saw this in 2017, is exciting and mobilizing Labour’s base. Most people distrust, and in many cases actively loathe, the media as a whole. It’s one of the least trusted institutions in society. So when it’s attacking you that’s not necessarily a bad thing. But it also means that it’s a less useful medium for getting your message across. People have reacted to the reduction of interest in the mass media by going to a whole variety of different sources for their news, particularly social media.

That’s helped some left media organizations like *Tribune* or *Novara*. But I think that the party itself has been less effective at using the grassroots energy of the members to communicate its message. Because in the context of that mass distrust of the media, what is going to convince people more? Hearing someone like me go on *Question Time* and say, “This is what the Labour Party is going to do,” or hearing your friend, neighbor, coworker, say, “Have you heard about this thing that the Labour Party has considered doing?”

The 500,000 members of the Labour Party are our biggest asset. That’s why I’m taking my book to 75-plus CLPs and Momentum groups all across the country. I can go and do as many BBC shows as I like, but it will only have an impact on a tiny portion of the population. If I’m going to a CLP group that has maybe fifty people in attendance, they listen, they ask questions, they think, they engage, they go out and discuss these things. That’s infinitely more powerful over the long run. And I think Labour has missed a bit of a trick in figuring out how to use the membership and the wider movement for that purpose. The issue with Brexit, again, is that as long as the movement is divided against itself on this question we are not focused on projecting our message outward.

If, and it’s a big if, the next election goes well and the Labour Party manages to return a majority government, do you think the Corbyn leadership is prepared for the challenges of government? Do you think it’s prepared for the level of hostility, for the economic warfare that would be waged against a left government? Do you think it’s prepared to take the radical measures it has been promising to take up for years now?

GB | A Labour government that came to power during this point would have to do the inverse of the Thatcherite project: use the state to effect class war, but on behalf of the workers against capital. And that takes real guts. Even Thatcher encountered unremitting hostility during the beginnings of her project, not just from the media or the unions, but from elements of the Tory party that didn’t understand the kind of hegemonic shift that she was attempting to undertake.

There would undoubtedly be the same sort of thing within Labour, and it would be rendered more powerful by the fact that Labour has to, in one way or another, operate in a more democratic way than the Conservative Party. Thatcher could effectively run a kitchen cabinet and control everything from within that. A Labour government would find it much harder to do that. There are people in positions of power in the Labour Party who understand that that is what the next Labour government would have to do. They understand that it would effectively be having to undertake this class-war project from inside the state. But they don’t have the social base that a socialist project from below would need to rely on to achieve its most ambitious goals. Which as you said, would be a

combination of the labor movement, various social movements, a coalition of the most active and class-conscious members of the working class. So you've got the issues of internal Labour Party democracy. You've got the absence of a strong and well-developed social base, and you've got the fact that you are taking on the power of the British state, supported by global capital and US imperialism.

In terms of the social base, the Brexit question matters there too, right? Because many working-class people in some of the most deprived parts of the country who are most inclined to support change voted to Leave.

GB | Yes. There are people that would say it doesn't matter if we lose working-class heartlands in the North, because we can rely on social movements who are much more class-conscious than perhaps large parts of what traditionally would have been Labour's base. I don't think that the same kind of militancy can be expected from large parts of what would constitute those groups in Britain today. I don't think you can rely on just one or the other — we need to mobilize all sections of the working class.

Let's look at that question of a left government in a different way. If Labour wins the election, what should it do? How should it approach power, what should its first measures be, and how should it secure itself against the onslaught?

GB | The basic strategy would entail a combination of the labor movement with various other social movements supporting and pressuring the government from below. So that would be the revolutionary subject, I suppose. And the support of that coalition would be necessary for any project that would aim to shift power relations away from where they currently stand. In Thatcher's day, you had effectively a tripartite system of unions, business owners, and the state, with the state committed to full employment, based on mediating between those different interests. Thatcherism was about subverting that arrangement and giving the clearly predominant share of power to capital in general — international financial capital in particular — backed by the British state. The Corbynite analog of that would be the executive of the Labour Party, supported by an expansive social movement, working to shift power away from people who live off wealth, towards people who live off work.

There are two main sets of tasks related to that project: the first is eroding the power of your enemies, and the second one is strengthening the power of and expanding the consciousness of your base. In the UK, today, eroding enemy power involves a whole host of measures to constrain the power of capital, and particularly of the most powerful section of capital, which is financial capital. There is not, as some people might argue, a division between financial and industrial capital the Labour Party can exploit in order to ally with the latter to defeat the former. That's not how financialization works. Today, finance acts as the coordinating mechanism for the whole of capital.

In terms of specific policies, this includes first and foremost the imposition of capital controls. I argue for qualitative capital controls that operate as a tax. So if you take £100,000 out of the country, we'll tax you at a rate of 50 percent. You must give £50,000 over to the Exchequer. And that level of taxation could obviously be increased and decreased based on circumstances.

Another policy is proper bank regulation that limits private credit creation. Cheap and almost limitless private credit is what allows people who already own large amounts of wealth, large amounts of collateral, to expand excessively over into other parts of the economy. Capital controls, limiting private credit creation, loan-to-value ratios for housing, leverage ratios, all these sorts of things are technically simplistic ways to reduce the power of the finance sector.

Then there is a question of ownership in the rest of the economy. I've laid out the idea of a people's asset manager that operates as a mechanism to socialize ownership without resorting to mass state nationalizations of everything. Nationalization is obviously appropriate in many cases, but it's not appropriate for everything. You combine that with all the stuff that's already underway in terms of alternative forms of ownership, and you start to get towards a situation in which the power of finance capital as allocator of investment, as owner, is substantially reduced.

At the same time, you have to undertake measures to strengthen the power of your base. And that means both increasing people's capacity to mobilize and reducing the power of the market mechanism to determine the scope of government action. So it's a process of improving and expanding collective bargaining, removing the regressive anti-union laws that have been implemented recently, alongside a program of decommodification. This entails taking the means of subsistence out of allocation by the market mechanism. That means mass expansion of social housing, free transport, free utilities, a certain basic amount of food, clothes, etc. Everything that you need to subsist is provided to you for free outside the market mechanism.

There is a lot that nation-states can do. Capitalism today is hugely, arguably more than ever before in history, reliant on the coordinating capacity of the nation-state. Look at the way in which the private sector has changed in terms of its relationship with the state since the financial crisis. It's not just that you had the bailouts, you had quantitative easing to sustain the conditions that allow finance to continue to be profitable.

The nation-state is incredibly important in modern capitalism, and control of it is vital to effect a shift towards socialism. But unless you start to see things happening internationally at the same time, there's only so long that that process can continue. Ideally, you would see a Corbyn government in the United Kingdom at the same time as a Sanders government in the United States. That's the absolute utopian ideal. What's more realistic is a process that would slowly aim to increase the already latent but repressed energy of movements in the Global South to effect social transformation in their states. In my book I write a bit about how a Corbyn project could build new alliances with social movements, with labor movements, all over the Global South. It means international development banks that support global Green New Deals, withdrawing support for neocolonial institutions like the IMF and the World Bank — and yes, the European Union — it means resisting US imperialism at every turn, which is going to be more effective in the context of the continuing conflict between China and the United States. Boosting the power of labor movements in the Global South is key to social transformation in the long term. Just doing it in the United States and the United Kingdom isn't going to be enough.

What happens if Labour loses the next general election? The likelihood is that Corbyn loses his position as leader of the Labour Party. In that situation, are we going to see the Left completely marginalized, or has it made enough gains to hold on inside the party structures?

GB | There is generally a lot of pessimism about the use, not just of the Labour Party but of political parties in general, as vectors of socialist transformation. There is also pessimism about their ability to act as potential vehicles for the rebalancing of power that would facilitate stronger social movements. Many of these doubts about the ability of parties to actually use the powers of the state to rebalance power relations in society came from the very particular moment that we found ourselves in between 1980 and 2007. This was, of course, the "end of history" moment, where one could not even imagine a political party, of whatever kind, that had any sort of mass support, challenging in any fundamental way the social relations that underpin capitalism. Today it's implausible to say that a political party could never be used to rebalance power in the way that I'm attempting to lay out here.

It's a different thing to say that the Labour Party, or other left political parties, may or may not be explicitly socialist parties. But the idea that the Left could completely move away from electoral politics altogether is farcical. The prevalence of those attitudes prior to 2007 was really determined by the historical juncture in which we found ourselves. So whatever happens, the Left is going to continue to have a relationship — a strong relationship and an important relationship — with the Labour Party in the UK. Whether the Labour Party remains the locus of socialist organizing in Britain, which is a really historically unusual situation, is another question. I would argue that it would not be a positive development if the Labour Party continued in the role it's playing now in coordinating different social movements and the labor movement to attempt to disrupt capitalism.

We really want that mantle of disruption, of agitation, of political education, to be passed from Labour, which is always going to have to have a more managerial and less revolutionary tinge, given what we're expecting it to do, to the movements, regardless of what happens in the next election.

I think that is what will happen if Labour loses the next election. I don't think the revitalized movement for socialism will dissipate. As I said at the very beginning of this interview, there is a lot of energy at the grassroots. I think someone like me, who is spending a lot of time talking at different CLP meetings, talking at different events and groups, engaging with the people who are ultimately currently the base of this project, can see that that energy is not going to go away.

The experience of the financial crisis, followed by the emergence of Brexit, followed by the emergence of Corbynism, is central to people's political identity. This, combined with the fact that my generation is going to continue to get worse off, that this model we have is not going to be able to provide an increase in living standards for the vast majority of people, means that the impetus towards social transformation is going to grow and continue to expand.

The Labour Party's future, on the other hand, is obviously much more contingent. We've seen this with left political parties all over the world. The emergence of the left movement is much more dependent upon underlying socioeconomic conditions. The relationship between those movements and parties is much more contingent, and related to historical change, related to the way in which those parties function, the relationships between individuals in those spaces. And there is nothing to suggest that Labour will continue to play the role that it currently does on the Left.

If we lose, Corbyn's likely to be forced out. And Corbyn being out will be a significant dent in the self-confidence of the membership. But, I'm still fairly optimistic about Labour's future, even if we do lose the next election. In part, this is because if we do win the next election, it wouldn't be ready to implement the kind of projects and provide the return on the hope that people have invested in it, in the way that people expect of it.

And the leadership contest after Corbyn will, I think, potentially surprise a little bit. I think there are a lot of people in the Labour Party who genuinely do think getting rid of Jeremy Corbyn means getting rid of all their problems. And there are, if not a lot of very good potential candidates, at least some candidates. I'm thinking primarily of someone like Laura Pidcock, who is inexperienced but really gets it in terms of strategy and policy, who could carry on the mantle effectively.

Whether or not that happens, again, it's contingent and dependent. Who knows?

Does the British left come out of Corbynism in a better place, even if Corbyn loses this next election?

GB | Yes, it does. Partly because of Corbynism itself. Partly because of the structures that have been put in place, the institutions that have emerged, the self-confidence, the new narrative, and all the

rest. But partly just because of the historical juncture that we find ourselves in today.

I don't want to paint a deterministic view of the reemergence of socialism around the world, because it's happened very differently in different places depending upon particular national histories, the relationship between movements and parties, the impact of the financial crisis, etc. But there are trends which suggest that the Left in the Global North will continue to get stronger. And there are reasons to suspect that even had it not been for the rise of Corbynism, the Left in the United Kingdom would still have been getting stronger, and we would still likely be talking about socialism today, where we haven't been able to talk about it for forty years.

In 2008, neoliberal, financialized capitalism reached the peak of its contradictions. There is no way of reviving a model that sees the 1 percent gain the vast majority of the increases in growth, while also rendering that model stable by providing greater levels of asset ownership to upper-middle earners. Because doing so would require the creation of double the amount of debt that's already been created. It would require the expansion of credit creation beyond the capacity of the economy that we currently have to expand credit.

Household debt is already at 150-something percent of household disposable incomes, and that was up from 80 percent in the 1970s. You'd have to have a similar sort of increase, which is not only implausible on its own terms. It's implausible in the sense that there aren't enough assets of any level, in the context of a fairly unproductive capitalism, for that amount of credit to purchase to facilitate the kind of political economy that emerged in the precrisis period. So the model is failing on its own terms, and you see that now in terms of falling productivity, falling levels of production investment, falling wages, a slowdown in globalization as the driving force of all this financialization before the crisis.

And it's also failing politically. There is now a growing constituency, and a constituency that will grow every year, that has more to gain from a fundamental rupture with the status quo, than a continuation of it. At the moment you're seeing this often in generational terms. And that is basically to do with the fact of which generation was able to jump on the ladder of the housing crisis during the asset price inflation boom. Obviously people who are now retiring — a lot of the wealthier members, and actually middle-earning members of that generation — were able to jump on the housing ladder, were able to benefit from capital gains that now allow them to retire comfortably.

But increasingly that is not going to be the case. If we moved to a system of asset-based welfare, the individualization of risk rather than its socialization, then that system is going to become less and less effective as more people are prevented from being able to own assets, and as asset price inflation reaches its limits. We talk a lot about the housing crisis, but the pensions crisis is something that is really completely not commented upon. But most pension funds have unimaginably large deficits, not enough assets to be able to invest in, partly because governments aren't creating enough debt, partly because capitalism isn't working, so there aren't enough assets that create the returns that fund people's retirements. And no one's doing anything about it, because we see it as a problem for ten or twenty years down the line.

The environmental crisis is something that is only going to continue to radicalize people as it gets worse. We are obviously now at a point where we are attempting to control climate change, while also recognizing we are going to have to adapt to it. Add to that an austerity project that has led to the erosion of the National Health Service, the deterioration in schools, rising crime, and so on. All of these issues are becoming very hot political topics that people want to address in a radical way. The concatenation of all these things means that there's going to be an increasingly large constituency of people that want fundamental rupture with the status quo, rather than its continuation.

So I don't see why we shouldn't be optimistic about the potential of socialism, because capitalism is literally eating itself. There is the question of who benefits from that politically, of course. Because unless we're able to get over all the massive problems that we've discussed during this interview, it's likely that the far right will be the biggest beneficiary, at least in the short term. By the time the far right has been dealt with, you get to the point of climate change and environmental degradation that means the capacity of a socialist project is, if not completely destroyed, massively limited.

So what happens in the next couple of years is really important. We can't just say, fine, let's forget Brexit for now and lose the next election, and then come back again in five years and ride to victory. What happens next is really very important, and I hope it goes our way. But I'm not sure that it will.

I do want to end by saying that it is also the case that what we believe and what we tell one another, and the way we make sense of our world and our trajectory and the state of our movement, has power in determining what happens next. So I don't accept a pessimistic narrative that focuses relentlessly on our weaknesses and the constraints that we face. As socialists we have a duty to be optimistic, and to communicate that optimism to one another and to the world — even when it seems insane to believe that what we're talking about could ever happen. So yes, there are lots of challenges, and I'm very worried about what could happen in the next couple of years. But I am also optimistic about our capacity as a movement and as human beings to work together to build a better world.

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