

28th September 2015, Financial Times, Janan Ganesh

# Jeremy Corbyn has risen because the stakes are low



Janan Ganesh

Country with leisure to take umbrage at scripted interviews and bloodless technocracy is doing fine



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**N**obody who asks for “authenticity” in politicians understands how decadent this sounds. Most people in most societies for most of history would have made do with administrative competence, incorruptibility and a disinclination to plunder citizens or conscript them as war fodder. Mid-20th century Britons dreamt of low inflation and heated homes before they caressed hopes of conviction politics.

A country with the leisure to take umbrage at scripted interviews and bloodless technocracy is doing fine. The modern distaste for spin, which makes heroes of plain-speakers such as Jeremy Corbyn, the leader of the UK’s opposition [Labour party](#), is like the campaign against obesity: warranted, but also a mark of how far we have come. There are worse problems to have and we had them not long ago.

[Mr Corbyn's rise](#) to eminence is not a verdict against Britain's social failures. His movement is not, as it claims, a howl at inequality and questing militarism that has been gathering wind under complacent elites for years. Corbynism is not an expression of how bad things have become but how comfortable they are. Whatever our era ends up being called — late capitalism, high modernity — it has thrown up a class of people who can afford to treat politics as a source of gaiety and affirmation. The electors who were decisive in giving him the run of the Labour party tend not to be working class or doctrinally socialist or even very political, though all three types exist in his ranks. They are public-sector professionals or students on their way to becoming the same. They are comfortable, more likely to live in London than the post-industrial north, more likely to read the broadsheet Guardian than the tabloid Mirror. And they are candid about the psychology of their movement.

When a Corbynite says there is more to politics than winning elections, they tacitly concede that Britain is tolerable as it is, at least for them. If it were not, the acquisition of power would be the alpha and omega of their cause. Press them on their lacerating dislike for Tony Blair and they say his leadership of the Labour party made them feel scuzzy. Politics, this implies, is there to make activists feel good about themselves. Everything comes back to feeling; everything comes back to the self.

A Corbyn rally is not a band of desperate workers fighting to improve their circumstances, it is a [communion of comfortable people](#) working their way up Maslow's hierarchy of needs. They have physical health and security; they crave belonging and self-actualisation. They are in politics for the dopamine squirt that comes with total belief and immersion in like-minded company. There is no disgrace in this but nor is there any residue of Labour's worldly origins, as a party devoted to the amelioration of working conditions through parliamentary means. And if Jeremianics really think they are following in the lineage of the Jarrow marchers, the Tolpuddle martyrs and other working-class rebellions of lore, it is hard not to admire their shimmering brass necks.

Corbynism is likened to [continental convulsions](#) such as Podemos in Spain and Syriza in Greece. But these countries were brutalised by the euro crisis and its remedial austerity. Britain was not. The far left cannot even stand up its claim that [inequality is rising](#) here.

Their movement has more in common with the psychic disturbances going on in anglophone democracies than with anything in Europe. Mr Corbyn became Labour leader for the same reason that Australia, which has not had a recession since 1991, cannot hang on to a prime minister; and America, with 5 per cent unemployment, is toying with the idea of President Donald Trump or President Bernie Sanders.

When there is no national crisis, politics can do strange things precisely because the stakes are so low. Nobody cared about Prime Minister Gordon Brown's authenticity when he was recapitalising banks in the emergency of seven autumns ago.

It had nothing to do with Corbynism but as Labour members convened in Brighton for their annual conference this weekend, a [hipster café](#) selling pricey bowls of cereal in Shoreditch — an east London neighbourhood that used to be as coarse as its name — was trashed by an anti-gentrification mob. A country where some fret about their area becoming too rich is extraordinarily evolved. A country where some people ask that politicians irrigate the arid plains of managerialism will be all right.

Mr Corbyn is not a strike against capitalism. By inuring people to prosperity, freeing them to make loftier demands, capitalism is exactly what keeps him in business.