

'New new Labour?' Jeremy Corbyn's second bite at the Labour leadership

[Oliver Alderton](#) explores the implications of Labour's leadership election

Tuesday 4 October 2016

JEREMY CORBYN, once again leader of the Labour party, emphatically defeated Owen Smith in the recent Labour leadership election.



Jeremy Corbyn speaking at a "No More War" event in Parliament Square, August 2014
Photo: Garry Knight

It appears to be a tagline that Corbyn wears proudly, and almost as a representation of what he stands for; the 'unelectable' candidate has now been elected twice in succession and, with some calling for early elections, Corbyn appears focused on mounting a challenge to the Conservative party. In his post-victory speech Corbyn has pledged to campaign for a "socialism for the 21st century".

The result of the leadership race was never realistically in doubt; Smith's challenge to Corbyn never took off with the same fervour which surrounded Corbyn and the Labour leadership elections following Ed Miliband's departure. In part, this may be simply because the discontent arose only from the Parliamentary Labour Party; not so much from Labour Party members. From them, Corbyn has continued to enjoy an overwhelming amount of support.

Soon after Corbyn's first election victory, I argued that he would be instrumental in returning the political Labour Party to adversarial politics. While it has been admittedly divisive within his own party, it appears

the Labour Party is doing its best to return to its roots. One thing that no one can deny after this second victory is that Jeremy Corbyn has managed to reshape the Labour party completely. With Theresa May leading the Conservative party, decisions have already been made within the cabinet that signify a change in direction.

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In all, it surely seems that the days of the 'New Labour' dynasty are dead and the nature of the Conservative Party remains unclear, perhaps even a little lost, but certainly different from Cameron's party. This change in the mindset of British politics is perhaps demonstrated by the breakdown of Corbyn's votes. 68 percent of those who became a member of the Labour Party after Corbyn's previous victory voted for Corbyn, and he also holds a majority among those who did not vote Labour in the 2015 general election. It is decidedly a demographic with different values than those who were members before Corbyn's election victory, from whom he received significantly less support.

Despite this change, in June of this year a YouGov poll for *The Times* found that 29 per cent of Labour voters would rather have Theresa May as Prime Minister than Jeremy Corbyn. However, these recent figures may be a symptom of the torn image of the Labour Party rather than a prophecy of an electoral disaster. Corbyn still has the task of uniting the party. Divisive issues include how Britain is to deal with the terms of Brexit, immigration, the NHS and even more mundane issues such as the unfair party membership payment.

On Brexit, Corbyn was effectively a Remain campaigner but admits himself that it was not a primary concern for him. As such, criticisms have been levied against him for relative passivity and not campaigning hard enough for the party's official position. With 'Brexit' ultimately having divided the nation, it is no surprise that it has divided the Labour Party also. Corbyn is far more popular among Leave voters than he is Remain voters. This may be a sign that Corbyn's efforts were viewed as inadequate by those who felt sorely let down by the results.

These are the problems that Corbyn has to remedy before mounting a successful challenge in the next general election. With the Labour Party currently in a transitional phase it might be unfair to label it as broken and Corbyn as a weak leader; no doubt the MPs of the old guard will leave now that Smith's bid, or failed coup, for Labour leadership was unsuccessful. Irrespective of how long it will take, we now know for certain that Corbyn's 2015 victory was no mere protest vote.

It was a vote for a change, for Labour, which had abandoned the left, to go back to its roots. It was a vote which has won yet again, just over a year later, almost as if it was inevitable.



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