



ESTABLISHED 1855

Former PMs give Corbyn a lifeline

When this election campaign began, many assumed it would be solely about Brexit – and mostly it has been. But in any election in which Jeremy Corbyn is a candidate for No 10, there is a moral dimension to consider. Are opponents of Brexit and critics of Boris Johnson really prepared to enable that man to form a government?

Apparently, yes. Tony Blair and Sir John Major have called for tactical voting to deprive Mr Johnson of a majority. They are throwing a lifeline to Mr Corbyn, a man who has completely repudiated the centrism both men liked to think they stood for, in favour of Marxism stained by anti-Semitism.

If their argument is that Brexit will undermine the economy and harm the Union, Mr Corbyn is almost guaranteed to sink both. He would hike taxes, nationalise utilities and spend money like it is going out of fashion. Nicola Sturgeon has made it clear that the SNP's price for a coalition would be a second referendum on independence, and given Mr Corbyn's ambivalence towards the Union, who doubts that he would permit it? The Labour leader would drive a stake through the heart of the kind of cosy, managerialist consensus that Mr Blair and Sir John are desperate to save. Advocating a vote that gives him even the slimmest shot at winning is an act of metaphorical self-immolation.

Then again, Brexit has driven some politicians quite mad. Doubtless these former PMs are motivated by a fanatical love of the European project, but also perhaps a terror that if Britain leaves the EU it will cast their own careers as failures – as placeholders between Margaret Thatcher and Boris Johnson. As Charles Moore writes, Britain is on the verge of a seismic political change. It has the capacity, if Mr Johnson delivers a successful Brexit, to cast everything that came before as lacking in vision. We are sure that Mr Blair doesn't want to be remembered solely for the Iraq War – or Sir John for the traffic cone hotline.

If one puts aside vanity or obsessive Remainism, however, it is obvious that Mr Johnson is a vastly superior choice to Mr Corbyn – and that it is only by getting on with Brexit, as he proposes, that the country can heal. Sir John's army insist that they are the real Conservatives because they want to stay in the EU. What utter, self-regarding nonsense.

A sentencing fiasco

Britain's broken criminal justice regime is a disgrace and a danger to the public. Yesterday, a court found Joseph McCann guilty of a string of sex attacks on women and children. His crimes were horrific and he should not have been free to commit them.

McCann was convicted in 2008 of aggravated burglary and was given a sentence with a minimum two-and-a-half years; his application for release was rejected by the Parole Board three times and he was only let out in March 2017, on a 10-year licence. In August 2017 he was arrested for burglary and theft and given three-and-a-half years in jail – and when he hit the halfway point in that sentence, in February 2019, he was automatically released.

On the terms of his original sentence, McCann should have been recalled to prison when he reoffended, which would have ensured that the Parole Board knew about his case. This didn't happen. Just two months after he was freed, in April 2019, he began his spree. One of his victims was an 11-year-old boy.

The issue isn't just the grotesque error of oversight, it is the fraudulent concept of automatic early release. It means that courts hand out sentences that the public, particularly victims, might reasonably assume are spent inside – only for that person to walk out of jail on licence.

It should not require horrific crimes, such as McCann's or that of the London Bridge attacker, to highlight this injustice; it is difficult to fathom why Labour created automatic early release at all.

The next government must restore sanity to sentencing and take every measure necessary to keep men like McCann off the streets.

Fair ploughshares

Beating swords into ploughshares has long been regarded as an attractively peaceable thing to do. First they took away our swords. Now they've come for the ploughshares. Scientists, we report today, have used satellite surveillance to see how crops of maize get on without ploughing. Farmers, particularly in drier climes, are making do with much-reduced tillage, perhaps planting seed by a drill in a slit cut for the purpose – and their yields increase. But we'll miss the furrows of a well-ploughed field. How could we understand the poetry of Edward Thomas or Seamus Heaney without the sight of them? "Sheer plod," wrote Gerard Manley Hopkins in one of his typically hard lines, "makes plough down sillon shine." But the sillon or furrow polishes the ploughshare no more and the sword rusts in its sheath.



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Corbyn vs Johnson presents a crossroads like Callaghan vs Thatcher

SIR – In the frightening years following the British Winter of Discontent of 1978-79 (as the Conservatives under Margaret Thatcher were elected in place of Labour under James Callaghan), one of my employees said to me: "Are we going to be all right?"

I said that we were lucky enough to have outstanding customers, both in Britain and overseas, and that he and I together were going to deliver extremely attractive products to all of them, which would then give us all the future opportunities that we could handle.

And so it was. **Graham Clifton** Kingston upon Thames, Surrey

SIR – Not without some incredulity, I read that Labour's plan to help small businesses is to place "a network of small business advisers in Post Office branches".

The small businesses I work with are clear. They need an immediate end to the senseless impasse around Brexit that dogged the last parliament,

resulting in uncertainty and suppression of confidence.

Who are all these advisers? Would they be allowed to help sort the mail while they await the next victims of the dither and delay of the most Left-wing Labour government in living memory? Or would that send the postmasters out on strike?

Joseph Hill Gloucester

SIR – Having personally enjoyed and taken for granted 38 years of moderate government and the benefit it brings of security, safety, freedom and prosperity, I am extremely concerned that Labour's policies will take us back to an era of paralysis.

We must stand united to protect our families, communities and core values from the threat of Labour's extreme policies.

Derek Shedden Sutton Coldfield

SIR – You were kind enough to print my letter (November 29) suggesting

that Michael Gove be unleashed against Labour as a modern Norman Tebbit. Yet nothing has happened.

As Sherelle Jacobs complains in her column (Comment, December 5), the Tory campaign remains anaemic. Boris Johnson alone still seems to carry the whole weight of it.

The manifesto was a wasted opportunity. The Tory vision of post-Brexit Britain remains hazy. Even Harold Wilson could conjure up the "white heat of the technological revolution". Can't the Tories tell us what today's unprecedented investment in technology is primed to bring about?

We need to be told about a glorious future, not that Tories might recruit more nurses and teachers than Labour. No one actually believes such pledges. Promises to try harder in the future aren't good enough. Vision is needed.

Remember George HW Bush? He was the American conservative who lacked "the vision thing" – and lost. **Professor Alan Sked** London School of Economics

British Railways

SIR – Recent correspondents (Letters, December 3) have unfairly denigrated British Railways (BR), originally formed to rationalise the railways exhausted by the Second World War.

BR pioneered concepts since copied worldwide, such as inter-city passenger services, bulk freight, the high-speed train (introduced in 1975 and, with a top speed of 125mph, then the world's fastest diesel), and the tilting train (regrettably abandoned at trial stage and now foreign-built).

BR in 1975 was run by railway engineers who knew what they were doing, unlike today's accountants. The separation of train and track ownership fragmented the network.

Today's train operators must lease trains – by law they cannot own them. Leasers charge around £70,000 per annum per carriage (excluding repairs), even for the most basic, clapped-out Pacer.

Privatised railways cost the Exchequer twice what BR did. Nationalised foreign railways such as Deutsche Bahn can run British trains, but apparently BR may not (unless, as on the East Coast Main Line, private operators fail and the state intervenes).

Britain built railways worldwide, yet today we import expensive foreign-made trains, as we no longer have the engineering skills or manufacturing base to build our own. **Roger Croston** Chester

Quitting MEPs

SIR – You report (December 6) that four Brexit Party MEPs have quit the party. Is it right for them to retain their seats in the European Parliament?

Unlike our MPs in Westminster, MEPs are appointed from party lists by proportional representation. In other words, people vote for a party, not an individual. If sitting MEPs leave their party, it would be logical for them to lose their seats so that the party could appoint replacements. Otherwise the electorate is defrauded of the representation for which it voted. **Iwan Price-Evans** Croydon, Surrey

Pedant's petard

SIR – This went viral online, made all the more poignant by the final word (Letters, December 6): "Text from wife: 'Your great! Reply from me: 'No, you're great! She's been happy all day. Should I tell her I was only correcting her grammar?'"

David Leech Balcombe, West Sussex

The Left are attempting to deflect attention from their vile anti-Semitism by smearing their opponents

QANTA AHMED



Of all the responses to the shocking allegations of anti-Semitism against Jeremy Corbyn's Labour Party, one of the most repugnant and cowardly has to be: what about Tory Islamophobia? Unwilling to confront the disgusting racism within their own ranks, Labour supporters seek to deflect attention by suggesting some sort of "moral" equivalence with the Prime Minister's satirical remarks about the niqab.

As a pluralist, observant Muslim, I did not find the Prime Minister's comments offensive. Let me remind you of the context: in an article for this newspaper he compared women who wear the niqab to bank robbers and letter boxes. It is conveniently forgotten that he did so in a column defending the right of women to wear that particular garment. I found his remarks funny and not in the least mean-spirited. If anything, I disagreed with Mr Johnson's tolerance towards a piece of clothing that I believe has

no legitimacy in Islam. The Prime Minister was in no way racist or anti-Muslim, in his intent, or his actions. Quite the opposite.

Can we say the same about Jeremy Corbyn's attitude towards Jewish people? Devastating evidence given to the Equality and Human Rights Commission by the Jewish Labour Movement is a damning indictment of Labour's endemic institutional racism and the failure of its leadership to expunge systemic Jew-hatred.

The JLM's evidence details the hostility faced by Jewish people in Corbyn's Labour Party, the denial of voice to Jewish party members, the singling out of Orthodox Jewish members for "vetting", the appalling, repetitive, explicitly anti-Semitic hate speech used and directed at Jews both in person and online, and the tolerance of a rankly anti-Semitic climate within the party. And at the heart of it all is Jeremy Corbyn.

"Since Jeremy Corbyn became leader of the Labour Party," the JLM says, "he has made the party a welcoming refuge for anti-Semites. He has done that in a number of ways, including by publicly supporting anti-Semites and anti-Semitic tropes." He has defended an anti-Semitic mural, is linked to Holocaust deniers, and has said Zionists do not understand "English irony". And let's not forget Corbyn's embrace of militantly Islamist Hamas. They are committed to the eradication of the State of Israel, but perhaps we should not be surprised that Corbyn has called them

manufacturers started to produce honey-based wound-care products.

I dress all of my skin grafts with honey and the wound-infection rate has plummeted. Unlike antibiotics, honey attacks bacteria in multiple ways and has a very low incidence of resistance. It is also relatively inexpensive.

Sarah A Pape FRCSEd (Plast) Longwiton, Northumberland

SIR – Some years ago, I caught MRSA following an operation that left a gaping hole on my leg. The pad to cover it was coated with manuka honey, which did the trick, and I can now walk my working cocker spaniel every day with no problem. **Jack Marriott** Churt, Surrey

The case for cutting down more of our trees

SIR – There are many calls for planting more trees (Letters, December 5). Can I make a plea for cutting them down?

On motorways I see hundreds of examples of woods planted in the Seventies that were never thinned. The result is tall, thin stems suitable for nothing but logs or wood chips. Had they been progressively thinned, the best stems would make useful timber, saving imports, and the forest floor would welcome both flora and fauna.

John Blunt Ashby-de-la-Zouch, Leicestershire

SIR – I may be missing something about the drive to plant millions of trees to mitigate climate change.

Seedlings are placed very close to each other to ensure enough survive.

When a plantation is 10 or 15 years old, it is thinned to allow the remaining trees to thrive. The thinnings are not commercially viable and so are probably burned, which returns the captured carbon dioxide to the atmosphere. Fifteen years later, the plantation is thinned again to ensure the remaining trees reach maturity, the thinnings burned and the carbon dioxide returned whence it came.

There is also the matter of fallen leaves, which decay and release gases such as nitrous oxide, which is several times more potent as a greenhouse gas than carbon dioxide. Has the net carbon capture of this process been authoritatively defined?

JR Ball Hale, Cheshire

Labour is the racist party, not the Tories

at the Conservative Party conference in Manchester this year, on a panel including the Muslim Tory MP Nusrat Ghani, and the event was predictably disparaged as Islamophobic by Islamist activists.

QANTA AHMED



But don't be fooled. There are, of course, instances of anti-Muslim hatred that should be investigated and punished. But the Islamists are fuelling a grievance industry that both seeks to paint the West, wrongly, as a hostile place for Muslims and to suggest that liberal democracies are incompatible with Islam itself. Thus, the Conservative Party, which is a welcoming home to British Muslims, with a Muslim-born Chancellor of the Exchequer and a leader who has shown exceptional tolerance, is somehow portrayed as "equivalent" to a party so rank with anti-Semitism that many Jewish people no longer feel they can remain a member of it. Forty-seven per cent of Jews say they would consider leaving the country if Corbyn gets into power.

We see through you, Jeremy Corbyn. Now Britain must, too.

his "friends". Today's new breed of anti-Semites hide their hate behind the thin mask of anti-Zionism.

Flippantly comparing Labour anti-Semitism with supposed Tory Islamophobia plays into those Islamists' hands. What is so disturbing about Labour's inaction is that the hatreds it has allowed to fester are so obvious and so chilling. "Islamophobia", on the other hand, is an intentionally vague concept. But it is also a concept that Islamists – who masquerade as Muslims but are really totalitarian ideologues – employ to shut down all debate of Islam itself.

They deliberately conflate anti-Muslim bigotry or discrimination – contemptible and harshly prosecuted as a hate crime in Britain – with all, and any, criticism of Islamist institutions or entities. Thus the cry of "Islamophobia" acts as both a modern-day blasphemy law and a political and judicial shield protecting the Islamists themselves from scrutiny.

It is a concept that is swallowed by the educated classes, who claim to believe in free speech and free expression. And yet they are yielding the rules of the game to people who are fundamentally opposed to secular, liberal democratic values.

Muslims combating Islamism know better. We see freedom of speech and freedom of religion being exploited to advance an Islamist ideology at the expense of religious and political pluralism. We have faced our own accusations of "Islamophobia". I addressed this issue

On hold for hours

SIR – British Gas took an hour and two minutes to answer my call, easily beating the 41 minutes for an energy company mentioned by Which? (report, December 3).

I had thought that, given advances in technology, phones should be answered in under 20 rings, if only as part of good customer service.

Energy CEOs should ring their companies from outside in order to experience the standard of service they provide.

It is totally unacceptable to leave customers swinging on the phone and having to listen to inane messages for an hour.

Michael Lenthall Watlington, Kent

Labour anti-Semitism

SIR – The sad truth is that many people will vote Labour despite its anti-Semitism (Letters, December 6) and, worse, others will do so because of its anti-Semitism.

John Frankel Newbury, Berkshire

SIR – The Jewish Labour Movement claims that 47 per cent of Jews who live in this country will consider leaving if the Labour Party under Jeremy Corbyn gets into power (report, December 6). They will not be on their own.

Ken Culley Marlborough, Wiltshire

Syria crisis

SIR – All parties involved in the general election are guilty of ignoring the genocide and crimes against humanity happening in north-west Syria.

In this past week alone, 14 children have been killed by regime strikes on refugee camps, and all but one hospital has been destroyed by Russian and Syrian air strikes in the Idlib province, where three million people are trapped with about 5,000 jihadists.

All politicians engaged in this election seem content to allow these atrocities to go without comment, but they must surely be concerned, particularly after the recent London Bridge attack, about the potential for the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (Isil) to be reborn in Idlib. Scant time has been given to defence and security during this election, but it is the first duty of government to protect our nation. Without this commitment there is no future for a vibrant and global Britain for all.

Col Hamish de Bretton-Gordon (ret'd) Director, Doctors Under Fire Tisbury, Wiltshire

Fishermen's plastic

SIR – It is a sad fact that a large proportion of the plastic waste found on our beaches comes from commercial fishermen.

Nets, rope, floats and fish boxes can be found littering most beaches. I regularly pick up hundreds of yards of perfectly reusable rope that has been dumped at sea. They should know better.

Peter Sweetman Leigh-on-Sea, Essex

No 10 in three words

SIR – Robin Graham (Letters, December 5) recommends the website what3words for getting an accurate location anywhere in the world.

I was playing with it and put in 10 Downing Street, SW1. The square at the entrance is labelled: "input.caring.brain".

Lee Angus London W4

Dr Qanta A Ahmed is a member of the Committee on Combating Contemporary Anti-Semitism Through Testimony at the USC Shoah Foundation



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