

Anne Power

Open letter to Jeremy Corbyn: grassroots movements have a place, but they are not the key task of parliamentary opposition

Blog entry

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Open Letter to Jeremy Corbyn: Grassroots movements have a place, but they are not the key task of parliamentary opposition

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By Democratic Audit UK

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*As Labour gears up for another leadership contest, **Anne Power** makes an appeal to Jeremy Corbyn to stand down as leader of the opposition. She writes that although she respects him as a good local MP, his divisiveness in the PLP and weak performance during the Brexit campaign indicate he is unsuited to leading the party. She writes that the UK must have a functioning parliamentary opposition now, in order to sort out Europe.*



Jeremy Corbyn speaks at Stop Trident rally. Credit: [Garry Knight](#) CC BY 2.0

Dear Jeremy,

I am a long-standing constituent of yours and know your work and talents from close quarters. I was on the Islington Fairness Commission (2010), was a founding member of the Holloway Tenant Cooperative (1972), and helped set up the Martin Luther King Adventure Playground in Holloway in 1968! All my neighbours recognise your commitment, kindness, truthfulness and sense of fairness. You are a remarkably honest and sincere local MP. These qualities are rare and I have voted for you as a good local MP.

But these qualities do not make you a suitable leader of the Parliamentary Labour Party. Your current job is to represent in parliament the main opposition to a powerful and patently privilege-oriented government. Your voice is drowned out, not by the opposition but by your ineffectual efforts to protest. Your fellow MPs are paralysed by a lack of unifying leadership.

The overwhelming majority of Labour MPs have openly expressed no confidence in your leadership. Several of your would-be allies withdrew from their jobs in your office. Many MPs previously working with you and in your cabinet are no longer with you and asking you to go. You must listen to what they are saying. What at first was seen as a divisive move to oust you unfairly is now widely seen as a brave attempt to reunite the party and create a viable parliamentary opposition. These MPs are our representatives, elected by us. For all the deficiencies in this system,

it is closer to representative democracy than the current £3 quick sign-up membership with no questions asked.

As a long-time Labour supporter and former member, I joined with £10 to be able to vote for a different leader – I honestly thought you would damage your unblemished record of protest by becoming leader, and you would not manage the conflict-prone demands of parliamentary opposition. You yourself confirmed this view in your seeming reluctance to stand, in your widely recognised lack of public appearances in spite of being leader of the opposition, and in the constant “spokesman role” being played by your great friend, John McDonnell.

So feeble was your endorsement of the Remain campaign that you were virtually invisible. Labour supporters began to suspect a plot in your HQ to allow the defeat in the referendum, so that Labour could surge into power on the back of the Conservative-created chaos. That could still happen, but what would happen to 45 years of slow building across Europe; North and South, East and West? It is easy to comfort yourself about your opponents with “too right wing” or “too Blairite”. But you no longer command the support of the Parliamentary Labour party, including those from all sides of it, so you have to step out of the leadership role in Parliament.

Momentum is not at all representative either of parliamentary democracy or the wider grassroots as I know them. They have made many progressive Labour supporters feel intimidated and threatened. They did not speak out on Europe, yet every progressive movement in Europe wanted us to stay in, because we can help Europe as the **United Kingdom**, with Scotland and Northern Ireland united with us. So much is put at risk by this failure to speak out that you must bear some responsibility. Your messages were so diluted as to suggest, as many did, that you did not believe what you were saying. This would indeed be a betrayal of your record of scrupulous honesty. Why did you allow so many to believe you were insincere on such a critical issue? And why was Alan Johnson, who many truly respect as an honest MP so angry with your office over the campaign he was asked by you to head and organise?

Some of your sympathisers feel sorry for you and hate to see you so “humiliated” and “knocked down”. One of my local friends who voted for you wants you to “go with dignity” before you are forced to go. Please listen.

As it stands, even if you run without the required parliamentary backing and win the leadership contest again, the Parliamentary Labour Party will be in even worse disarray – your cabinet comprised mainly of inexperienced, unknown MPs who have not yet cut their teeth on government responsibilities; your “consensual” approach to leadership causing disintegration at every turn.

Many things are wrong with this country, with the European Union and the world – your outspoken opposition to many evils is both admirable and valid. Protest and grassroots movements have their place and can play a vital role in democratic change, but that is not the key task of parliamentary opposition. Nor is it the role that you currently fill.

Surely it is vastly better to do this in collaboration, and not in dogged deafness to the pleas to change your role. The job of Parliamentary Leader of the Opposition requires vastly more than protest. It requires a different kind of leadership. Please do what you do best. Let others, a large majority of MPs, form the government-in-opposition. You can protest within and outside our parliamentary democracy as you have done throughout your career.

We must have a functioning parliamentary opposition now, to help sort out Europe. It is the continent to which we belong, for which we have fought and which has prevented war for the longest time in its bloody history. Now it fights to avert catastrophic climate change. Please, again – go.

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Note: this post represents the views of the author and not those of Democratic Audit or the LSE. Please read our comments policy before posting.

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Anne Power is Professor of Social Policy and Chair of the National Communities Resource Centre.

