

That VICE Corbyn film: beware your friends in the media – especially if you are paranoid and incompetent

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Critics of Jeremy Corbyn have understandably leapt upon the evidence of the [VICE News fly-on-the-wall film](#) about the Labour leader as providing yet more evidence of his team's internal divisions and incompetence. But people have missed that this is also an adroit piece of documentary-making that uses VICE's stylistic informality to give us some very effective political journalism.



VICE's Ben Ferguson is transparent. He says at the start of the film that he is a Corbyn fan and a Labour party member. He calls him 'Jeremy'. Much of the film is an affectionate, even sentimental tribute to Corbyn's ability to connect to grass roots supporters and constituents. There are moments when you beg him to ask a tough follow up question when people like Seumus Milne talk nonsense in the wake of yet another political open goal blasted over the cross-bar.

But that's the nature of access filming. Clearly it was a tense process, even with such a sympathetic reporter. At key periods the film crew are excluded, only to return to pick up more journalistic gems. Like any good documentary-maker Ferguson allows the subjects to hang themselves.

The Opposition Leader's Events Officer Gavin Sibthorpe talks about allowing Corbyn to 'fail in his own time'. Milne and his team, who affect to despise mainstream media, are shown tracking the Westminster Twitterati's instant punditry and are perplexed at how to respond when their media antagonists actually give Corbyn a good PMQs review. The Corbyn Crew's rehearsals for this most tedious of parliamentary rituals are amateurish to the point of self-indulgence. All of this unfolds before VICE's clever camera work.

Loves The Attention

There are several other moments when the access pays off. Corbyn preens himself in front of the cameras as an honest bloke who only cares about real people and plain speaking. But his Events aides Gavin Sibthorpe speaks truth when he says that his boss really 'loves the attention'.

Just like Gordon Brown before him, Corbyn affects to ignore mainstream media but in that phone call in the car when he talks about Jonathan Freedland's article it is clear that he is more obsessed about the detail of the coverage than the issue (of alleged anti-semitism).

When Ferguson pushes Corbyn, 'as a Labour Party member' about the tactical disasters, Corbyn rapidly becomes irritable and terminates the interview. So much for transparency, even with an obviously sympathetic chronicler.

Good Looks

Stylistically, this is quite a traditional film. Of course, Ferguson's good looks and enthusiasm will help draw in the younger end of VICE's audience but putting himself personally in the picture as a way of getting access and then taking the viewer into the drama is something that people like John Sweeney and Louis Theroux have done in the past. It's just that Ben is, commendably, more up front about it.

It may well be that core Corbyn supporters will watch this and ignore Corbyn's hatred of media oversight, the internal splits and his delusional avoidance of awkward truths. They will see this as a tribute not terminal.

But that's fair enough. Ferguson has done his job rather brilliantly. You can judge for yourself. However, for Corbyn's handlers, I suspect that Ben will now be placed on the list with Jonathan Freedland and George Easton as journalists who can't be trusted.

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