



HOW WE GOT HERE

[Mike Phipps reviews *Corbyn's Campaign*, edited by Tom Unterrainer, published by Spokesman, price £7.95 pbk]

HOW DID HE DO IT? How did a long-serving Labour backbencher, with negligible support from the overwhelming majority of his parliamentary colleagues, come from being a 200-1 outsider to win the biggest mandate any British party leader has ever achieved in an internal election - all in the face of a hysterical media barrage and attempts by his own party to prevent his supporters registering?

One obvious reason was the rule changes introduced under Ed Miliband, originally to distance the Party from its affiliated unions. But the reform had the added effect of removing entirely from the electoral process the weighted vote of Labour MPs, formerly one third of the electoral college, whose stranglehold would now be solely on the nomination process. Meanwhile creating a new category of supporters who could pay £3 to vote gave a feeling of ownership of the election to a much wider layer, which also benefited the Corbyn movement.

Crucial to victory was the social media operation that can be traced back to the establishment of a Red Labour Facebook page in 2011. By 2012-3, a group of younger Labour Representation Committee activists expanded this into a populist and accessible network. Red Labour was centrally involved in framing the petition calling for an anti-austerity leader following the 2015 election, which gathered thousands of signatures

within days of its launch. Once Corbyn had agreed to stand, a massive effort was mobilised to secure the requisite number of nominations, which the mainstream media lazily assumed had been "gifted" to him out of MPs' magnanimity - not so.

The #JezWeCan social media campaign was, says Ben Sellers, "the biggest single campaign for an individual politician this country has ever seen." Up to two million people were seeing its Facebook posts every week, with on average 200,000 liking, sharing and commenting on them.

On Twitter, the campaign gained 64,000 followers and in one Twitter storm it was mentioned 22,500 times in two hours. At the last televised hustings in Gateshead, the campaign had 69% of all Twitter mentions, compared to Yvette Cooper and Andy Burnham on 14% each. The extraordinary attendance at campaign rallies was partly generated by the online campaign, which was continuous, inventive and very witty, helping create the sense of a real movement.

Lastly there was the candidate himself and his anti-austerity message, driven home by his vote against Tory welfare cuts while Labour frontbenchers abstained. His support for an alternative economic model, including public ownership, a National Investment Bank and tax justice were popular positions, a clear rejection of the old leadership's cuts-led approach. This

helped develop a clear narrative as to why Labour lost the election, particularly in Scotland where it had been trounced by an SNP often campaigning on policies to the left of Labour - while other leadership contenders were concluding we needed to be more like UKIP. Corbyn's proposals to solve the housing crisis, his welcoming of support from the trade unions which other candidates disdained, his long-held belief in a peaceful, demilitarised world and his concrete proposals on protecting the environment all helped broaden his appeal.

But beyond the popular programme, Jeremy Corbyn is also the antithesis of the modern career politician - selfless, collegiate and principled. This allows him to resonate not just with Labour's grassroots, but among many who voted for other parties in 2015.

Corbyn's campaign policies are appended to the end of this useful book. What's much harder to pin down is his new inclusive way of doing politics that cuts through left-right divisions and signals a real revolution against the old order. The challenge now goes way beyond supporting the new leader in his battle with the more unyielding elements of the parliamentary party and apparatus, crucial though that will be. It's about expanding the movement that helped secure him the leadership into one that can put him into Number Ten and start the transformation of the country.