To Build a New Jezrusalem: an historical institutionalist analysis of the origins of the Corbyn era in the Labour Party.

Abstract

Now that Corbynism has passed, an institutional explanation for his sudden control of the British Labour party allows for a richer understanding of the process by which his leadership came about. In particular this analysis develops on the established institutional theory ideas of reactivation, invasion and veto players; and adds the role of "veto complacency". These theoretical mechanisms are key to understanding why the British Labour party changed so radically after its 2015 electoral defeat, and why it is suspect to argue that its then leader, Jeremy Corbyn, represented merely a return to the past. The ideas of the Corbyn movement can be understood as having been a *contemporary* adaptation of socialism, namely "new socialism". This case study highlights the usefulness of applying institutional theory mechanisms to explanations of party change; and seeks to expand on current dominant theories of institutional change that appear less capable of explaining sudden radical endogenous change—as exhibited here by the British Labour party.

Key words: institutional theory; veto players; reactivation; Labour party

Introduction

As Corbynism drifts from the headlines of today into the footnotes of tomorrow the need to understand the origins, causes and nature of Labour's experiment are paramount. Was it a blast from the past, as argued by Kerr et al (2018), or a herald to the future, as Byrne (2019) suggests? Was it a radical experiment or a more diverse coalition (see Maiguashca and Dean 2019)? Will it prove to be ephemeral or epochal? This article argues that one way into to tacking such questions is to turn to institutional theory. Indeed, the host of empirical questions

raised by Corbynism highlights the need for a more regular theoretical sorting box in the study of British politics. The analysis in this article briefly begins, therefore, by arguing for the applicability of historical institutionalism (HI) to the study of political parties. It then focuses on a theoretical mechanisms borrowed from institutional theory: reactivation—and from this, it also introduces the term "veto-complacency" into institutional theory to explain the circumstances under which a veto actor does not use their veto power—despite their interest in doing so. Using the mechanisms of reactivation and veto complacency this paper develops upon established institutional theory and argues for increased attention to the processes of change that are driven from within, in particular when these processes lead to radical change. At its conception, HI initially focused on radical exogenous change at critical junctures (Lowndes and Roberts, 2013: 112-115); and then went on to develop a more nuanced approach which addressed exogenous and endogenous incremental change (see, for example, Hall and Thelen, 2009; Capoccia, 2016). What has been less focused upon, however, is the possibility for (though it is uncommon) radical change from within: that is to say endogenous causes of radical change. All too often institutional theory, and historical institutionalism most notably, settles for a convenient binary: exogenous causes for radical change, and endogenous causes for incremental change. What this paper argues is that, on occasion, radical change can come from within, without the presence of a crisis, and without significant (at first) external drivers—though these kick in once the change is in motion to form a positive feedback.

The paper goes on to apply these mechanisms to a study of the post-1979 British Labour party. Whereas Podemos in Spain and Syriza in Greece are new formations the ascendance of a left-wing faction in the UK has come through an established catch-all party. Yet at the same time many established left-wing catch-all parties on the continent—the Socialist Party in France, the SPD in Germany—have seen significant electoral decline. So, there is an outlier event here: radical change emerging from *within* a large mainstream party. I argue, however, that this event, though unusual, is not inexplicable if we apply institutional theoretical mechanisms to an analysis. Indeed, for institutionalism to be a rigorous theoretical approach it must be capable—using the same logics—of explaining both typical and atypical

occurrences, with the variable merely being one of chance. Through examining changes in the British Labour party once can see the *potential energy* of institutions towards radical endogenous change – an energy that can be realised through internal contingencies and external selection. This potential, moreover, is not the mere reversion to past roads not taken: rather a new formulation emerges which applies vestigial institutional paths to new purposes—and in doing so changes the institutional faction that has led on the change to operate anew in a new environment. By mapping changes in the Labour party since 1979, and using the developed (and empirically tested) mechanisms of institutional theory, we can begin to fully understand how Corbynism emerged in the Labour party.

Applying institutional theory to political parties

Political parties have long been examined with a mind towards institutional or organizational properties (though there has not been a sustained application of institutional theory per se, with due reflection on the range of mechanisms that institutional theory has developed). Panebianco (1988), most notably, emphasises ideological origins as being restrictive, the role of internal party organisation formed over time and how this directs party adaptivity, and the process of "institutionalization" in empowering leadership agency. This logic emphasises, as Hopkin and Paolucci (1999) write, that political parties 'remain rooted in their original identities, and are unlikely to jeopardise their electoral and social foundations for unpredictable short-term gains'. All of which slants towards the sort of path dependent explanation favoured by historical institutionalism. There is much evidence to support Panebianco's (and Hopkin and Paolucci's) reading, but their explanations cannot be easily applied to political parties that experience sudden radical change. Panebianco (1988: 35), though emphasising founding identities (which echoes work in institutional theory—see Pierson, 2011: 11) as being of crucial importance in shaping later activity, does not see these origins as deterministic: rather he writes of a "zone of uncertainty" when it comes to rules: 'few rules', he writes, 'have a self-evident meaning; a rule almost always necessitates an

interpretation'. Nonetheless, the change that can be engendered within this zone of uncertainty is more often incremental than radical. Panebianco, moreover, favours a dominant coalition as the key driver of change when it occurs. Gunther and Diamond (2003: 172ff) have examined the agency of party leaders within party types—however, their useful typology is somewhat static and does not seek to explain how a leadership might radically change: indeed, their study implies that party type significantly constrains the choice of a leader, so that change is overdetermined by the electoral environment. Similarly, Harmel and Janda (1994) largely emphasise these external stimuluses for change alongside the importance of rotating party factions. Harmel and Janda acknowledge the mixed relationship between internal and external drivers of party change but are unable to provide a satisfying theoretical explanation for how this process proceeds. In general, Harmel and Janda (1994: 267) see parties as 'basically conservative organizations' that experience 'a wall of resistance to change'. Though they suggest that policy change can be driven from within, Harmel and Janda (1994: 270ff) see this as more characteristic of smaller and newer parties, rather than mainstream catch-all parties.

Examining parties through the frame of institutional theory sharpens the focus of analysis and allows us to develop upon some of the classic models of party change. Steinmo, Thelen, and Longstreth (1992: 2) define institutions as 'both formal organizations and informal rules and procedures that structure conduct'. In this conception, the behaviour of actors is limited by ideas within an institution; a party, therefore, cannot be nimbly positioned within a changing electoral environment at will. Rather, leaders must draw upon prevailing ideas within the institution, which can only be altered with difficulty. Consequently, the analyst must be sensitive to how established ideas tend to function within a party institution to limit the available options of the leadership and restrict change. So far, so in keeping with the established observations of party change theorists. However, an understanding of endogenous change has developed within HI, which, though acknowledging critical-junctures caused by moments of crisis as a prime driver of change, also allows for change between these junctures

(see Mahoney and Thelen, 2010). Within the literature, however, endogenous change is most often understood as being incremental rather than radical. Work done by Streeck and Thelen (2005) and Mahoney and Thelen (2010) posits useful mechanisms to explain how this endogenous incremental change occurs, namely: by displacement, layering, drift, reactivation, conversion and exhaustion. Where I develop on Streeck and Thelen, and Mahoney, is in my argument that the mechanism of displacement, and in particular the subcategory of "reactivation", can serve to explain both endogenous incremental change (on which Streeck and Thelen concentrate) and endogenous *radical* change.

The mechanism of displacement, as defined by Streeck and Thelen (2005: 20), is as follows:

> While some institutional arrangements may impose a dominant logic of action, these typically coexist with other arrangements, created at different points in time and under different historical circumstances, that embody conflicting and even contradictory logics…Beyond this, and equally important, even within dominant frameworks there will normally remain possibilities of action that institutions neither prescribe or eliminate. Where either of these is the case, institutional configurations are vulnerable to change through displacement as traditional arrangements are discredited or pushed to the side in favour of new institutions and associated behavioural logics. Such change often occurs through the rediscovery or activation—and, always, the cultivation—of alternative institutional forms…what Barrington Moore once called 'suppressed historical alternatives.'

Displacement can occur through a number of means—but it is the mechanism of displacement through reactivation that is of interest to the present argument. Crucially, the mechanism of reactivation can be used to explain radical change in an institution (in this case the Labour party) despite that institution operating in a non-crisis environment. Displacement by reactivation is the process by which an institution changes by embracing historical alternatives. Such change is amenable to political parties in first-past-the-post systems who can harbour dissenting factions on their backbenches for considerable time. Looking for endogenous sources of change is also amenable to political parties who find their ideas widely accepted—

there has been no disconnect with the long term ideational interests of their environment—but are nonetheless trailing in the polls, and therefore not achieving a key institutional goal. There can be in this scenario no radical influx of new ideas (for that could not be justified), but there can be reactivation of dormant ones, thus creating change by displacement, not revolution. However, dormant ideas do not re-emerge unsullied; rather they are altered by the contemporary environment into which they re-emerge—for the contemporary electoral landscape selects only those aspects of the dormant historical alternative that work for it. As Streeck and Thelen (2005: 22) write, 'exogenous change is often advanced by endogenous forces pushing in the same direction but needing to be *activated* by outside support'. Indeed, a political party's ability to enact change in a non-crisis environment is limited by the internal historical resources within the institution. Change can occur to any aspect of an institution; dominant and currently useful ideas and policies may indeed be altered to new purposes by the perceived demands of the electoral environment. But in this scenario, we would likely not see a *radical* change of policies and ideas. The likelihood of the sudden alteration of dominant policies and ideas is generally low due to standard institutional mechanisms of vetoing, inertia and path dependence. Therefore, I argue that it is only vestigial ideas (that is to say, old abandoned institutional paths) that are amenable to reactivation within institutions that leads to radical change. Indeed, the perceived vestigial nature of old abandoned ideas is key here—this is due to the role of human agents, who, as I will show, tend to be unable to read clearly the potential energy of these seemingly moribund factions.

Radical endogenous change in the Labour party

I will now go on to give empirical detail to the brief theoretical outlines. I will begin by establishing how a far left wing faction continued as a dormant path within the British Labour party after the party's historic 1983 general electoral defeat. I will highlight how this alternative path was harboured within the institution despite the hegemonic rise of the reformist and centre left faction known as New labour. I will focus on the unforseen effects of

leadership election rule changes, and then emphasise the specific decisions of certain MPs in the nomination of Jeremy Corbyn for leader. At this point I will introduce a final theoretical term from institutional theory, "veto players", (which is best placed for clarity within the flow of the empirical section) and in particular suggest the developed term "veto complacency", to explain how actors can act against their preferences despite having control of the formal rules of an institution, and consequently create radical change against their interests. Finally, I argue that one should be sceptical that any institution can simply return and reactivate a past path long abandoned. Rather we see that the reactivated path is put to a new use. With the British Labour party, the old far left faction was itself been adapted to new circumstances, and indeed might be better understood by the label "new socialism".

How a vestigial path survives: the far left after 1983

Before the ascendance of Jeremy Corbyn in 2015, the early 1980s was the only time that a far left faction had headed the party. A leadership reign that led to an historic landslide defeat in the 1983 general election. After this defeat, however, there was not an immediate repudiation of past practices. This observation is key in beginning to outline why ideational paths may not be wholly discarded by institutions *all of a sudden*—despite a seeming exogenous shock. The devastating election defeat (a 60 seat decline on the 1979 result) could have mandated a wholesale abandonment of the policies presented to the electorate: but the transition away from far left policies was more prolonged. The initial reading of the result—even on the party right—was that it was caused as much by the emergence of the centrist Social Democratic Party and poor organisation as Labour's actual policies (see Heffernan and Marqusee, 1992: 34ff). So, at the moment when the party's far left faction was at its potentially most vulnerable (its policies having been put up to the electorate and found wanting) it managed to survive. As Heffernan and Marqusee (1992 :42) write: 'although the Party wanted a new start following the general election, it had no wish to jettison agreed policies…The [annual party] conference reaffirmed a wide range of the very policy commitments that…cost it the general election.' This

continuation with far left wing policies can also be seen in the leadership election of 1983: Neil Kinnock, who won the leadership election and would rule as a largely centrist leader until 1992, ran as the *left* candidate at this election and he was to receive 71% of the electoral college vote. Two alternative options would have more clearly affected the far left faction in the party at this moment: either an outright change of path at the moment of crisis after the 1983 election defeat; or an absorption of the ideas into other more moderate ones through the compromise actions of an institutional entrepreneur. As Streeck and Thelen (2005: 26) write of institutional change driven by conversion—wherein institutions are directed to new goals—'typically involves compromise'. As a result of compromise, residual paths can cease to have a clear independent identity. But neither of these options (of decisive expulsion or compromise) were possible: the former because the moment of public repudiation was missed; the latter was tried in part, with MPs Michael Meacher and Margaret Beckett, both of whom initially identified with the far left Socialist Campaign Group (SCG), being brought into the shadow cabinet. Yet this also had the effect of leaving behind those die-hards seen as unabsorbable to consolidate and solidify their internal opposition.

Ultimately, the tactic chosen by the leadership to address the dwindling far left path was one of material confrontation—seeking not to persuade but to deracinate. We see this in Neil Kinnock's drive to remove the far left from the National Executive Committee, Labour's internal organising body; his defeat of the radical local campaign group "Militant"; and John Smith's, Kinnock's replacement as leader in 1992, introduction of one member one vote for candidate selection rather than union block voting (see Hayter, 2005). Yet far left rebellion in the 1980s (and more so under New Labour) could not be punished to the point of victory. The federal party structure ensured that these MPs had the backing of their constituency offices and would remain in the institution. Tony Blair, in particular, enacted strong informal power over candidate selection in an attempt to drive out the far left from the Parliamentary Labour Party (see Minkin, 2014). Yet his power was not absolute: he could only ever seek to influence rather than direct constituency choices. And so one is left with a vestigial path of ideas—an historical oddity—that is marginalised and aggrieved, and yet never fully eradicated.

Institutional theory has understandably paid more attention to how new paths emerge within institutions: for this is the source of clear innovation and change. However, it is instructive to also study how paths are reduced in importance, and what happens to them when they are abandoned in an etiolated state: for this process is key in understanding how they can survive in the background of an institution and potentially re-emerge. What can be seen with the Labour party is the manner in which a path is abandoned is crucial: with the far left faction in the party there was no initial clash of ideas or *mea culpa*—indeed, the incoming leader Neil Kinnock was initially supported for his left wing credentials (though with a modern dynamic makeover) (see Heffernan and Marqusee, 1992: 41). Consequently, the path of the far left marched on past the potential critical juncture that might have halted it. The process then became one of slow, incremental change, where Neil Kinnock sought to remove the far left faction from material power in the party: an internecine move which though successful left recalcitrant those democratic socialists who survived on the back benches. The vestigial path here is sustained by grievance, a sense of having been unfairly levered out of positions of influence, which keeps the flag flying despite the lessening of hands to carry it.

The second key explanation for how a vestigial path manages to survive in the background is that the path reaches outside the institution for sustenance. A vestigial path, as it declines within an institution, can look increasingly moribund—but only, perhaps, if one is looking internally. When we understand institutions as operating within a symbiotic ecology, wherein one institution feeds into, supports, and exchanges ideas with others, we can see that small factions within a political party may actually have a wide array of external networks. It is theses surrogate institutions within which abandoned paths can be sustained—so that they are in fact stronger than they seem and capable of re-emergence given the opportunity. As Alan Simpson (2014)—a former MP and member of the Labour party's far left faction—writes: '[We] were the MPs you would always find on picket lines, at trade union and social movement rallies, on anti-war marches and at the forefront of campaigns to restore rather than exploit the planet.' It was these connections with the larger left movement (facilitated initially by the Labour Representation Committee founded in 2004) that sustained this small faction within

the parliamentary party despite marginalisation within the party's formal institution. Indeed, Alex Nunns (2007), writing at the start of Gordon Brown's leadership, clearly saw this as the way forward for the far left: 'Many argue,' he states, 'that it is in opening practical and intellectual connections with campaigning movements that the future of the Labour left lies.' One key institutional group where the far left faction found connection was the unions. As Quinn (2016: 763) observes: 'Labour's radical-left faction had been excluded from intra-party power for decades and had minimal support among MPs. However, it had gained traction in the unions and its anti-austerity message chimed with many in the party.' So we see that as the influence of the far left faction was dimming within the parliamentary party, an affirming flame was being lit with the wider left. By the mid-2010s, the far left had become *a latent potential* for change in the party institution. Of course, potentialities are not deterministic—or indeed some may not be even likely: but neither are they wholly random. Historical forces coupled to institutional structures and agential decision making can produce possibilities for change that need only be triggered. This was the case with the British Labour party by 2015. What I will now examine are the effects of institutional decisions that acted as the trigger for the realisation of this potential for change.

Leadership selection changes

In 2014, the Labour party replaced the electoral college (which disproportionately empowered the unions and parliamentary party) for one member one vote (termed "OMOV+" by Quinn (2016: 762) in order to 'capture the participation of affiliated and registered supporters alongside full members') in the selection of its party leader. The motivation for the change was a belief that the unions were an overly influential leftist grouping. The desire to remove the unions from block power led to the sacrifice of the equal power Labour MPs had at picking a new leader—the only means by which an agreement could be reached by all parties (see Nunns, 2018: 44). So, rather than the Unions and MPs commanding one third of the electoral college vote a piece, the entire vote would now be handed over to hundreds of thousands of ordinary

people. There was however a safety net to this: 'To compensate MPs for this loss of voting power,' writes Quinn (2016: 768), 'the nomination threshold was increased to give them more gatekeeping power. Previously, each candidate for a vacant post required the nominations of 12.5% of Labour MPs. Under OMOV+, that was increased to 15%.' But this gatekeeping power was not used. A 15% nomination threshold should have made it highly difficult for a far left candidate to get on the ballot. It is important to note, therefore, that an unintended consequence does not occur merely because actors do not understand the material rule changes they are enacting (though this can also happen); but rather that they do not anticipate how actors will play those rule changes. The Labour leadership had every reason to believe that the parliamentary party would act as a control over the far left—especially with the increased nomination threshold. It is an irony, therefore—but one which institutional theory must conceptualise—that informal comfort with the enacting of veto powers can lead to them not being enacted: that is, to "veto complacency". This was the unintended consequence of the rule change: not that it directly led to making it easier for a far left candidate to get on the ballot, but that it led to a veto complacency that then made it easier.

Veto complacency

As Mahoney and Thelen (2010: 19) write '…veto possibilities are high where there exist actors who have access to institutional or extra institutional means of blocking change'. Indeed, it is common in the literature on institutionalism to create a binary of actors: they are either veto players (including the subset of agenda setters) (see Tsebelis, 2002) *or* variously titled policy/institutional/political entrepreneurs (see Lowndes and Roberts, 2013: 127). So, actors are seen as either stopping/delimiting change or advocating for it. This taxonomy is useful and often accurate. But it does not quite fit the behaviour of some of those crucial actors in the Labour party who nominally supported Corbyn immediately after the 2015 election. They did not enact a veto on his leadership intentions; but neither can it be said that they were entrepreneurs for change. Of the 35 MPs who nominated Corbyn, only 11 were members or

former members of a far left faction in the party, more than double, at 24, were not. It is the motivations of these 24 that can be labelled veto complacency. Evidence after the successful nomination suggests that many of these 24 were unhappy with what they had done (see Hope, 2015). MPs Jo Cox and Neil Coyle (2016) both wrote in *The Guardian* of their regret. Future London mayor, Sadiq Khan stated he would nominate Corbyn but not vote for him (BBC, 2015a). Margaret Beckett identified herself as one of the "morons" to have made the nomination (BBC, 2015b). So why then did they do it—their actions seemingly contrary to the predictions of institutional theory?

Outlining his view of the mechanisms of institutional change, Tsebelis (2001: 3) writes: 'If we know the preferences of veto players, the position of the status quo, and the identity of the agenda setter…we can predict the outcome of the policy making process quite well.' Similarly, Capoccia (2016: 17) notes how 'current theories of endogenous institutional change…emphasize the possibility that political entrepreneurs and "losers" of previous institutional battles may assemble coalitions exactly to put reform on the agenda. When this happens, incumbents that control the timing of decision making on institutional reform are likely to be in a position to preserve the institutional status quo.' Such a schema requires a high degree of ability for an actor to police threats to their preferences—however, the schema does not allow for complacency: a complacency engendered by dominant institutional values which make the need to veto any moves towards capturing the formal rule structure of the institution appear less urgent. In this scenario, knowing the actors and preferences Tsebelis outlines will not be predictive. In short: it is the case that in highly socialised institutional environments veto players may not act to protect their preferences for the status quo by setting agendas or vetoing action along formal rule structures. Consequently, we are presented with the paradox that a relatively entrenched informal path dependency around norms and values could be the cause (though it is uncommon) of sudden radical change. What is clear is that mere formal rule changes in an institution are not deterministic of change. As Quinn (2016: 760) rightly notes: 'although the [Labour] party's selection rules, used in 2015 for the first time, did have some impact, this result cannot be put down entirely to institutions, as the system

could easily have been used to stop Corbyn's candidacy in the first place'. However, when we introduce agency, and recognise how material rule changes are *interpreted through* the perceptions of actors and dominant path dependent norms and values, we see how complacency can lead to discrete rule changes precipitating wider institutional shifts. A number of actors failed to recognise that though the formal rules permitted their nomination of Corbyn, the norms of behaviour had long since delegitmised such a move—and it was these informal rules that should have guided their behaviour; a secondary explanation is that these actors failed to see the consequences of their actions—their inability to read the intentions of the membership, and the sudden increase in that membership—meant that they did not act to veto the Corbyn advance. In both these explanations we have the complacency of veto players: indeed, it was the very hegemony of (broadly defined) soft left/centrist Labourism in the party that caused a lack of worry over nominating Corbyn: it was to be a mere sop, a superficial act to include all views, no matter how outlandish. And so we have the interesting scenario wherein the dominance of certain informal ideas (in this case the ideological direction of the party along the soft/centre-left) actually served to weaken the policing of the formal rules that led to power. As a result, the ideationally path dependency carries within it the means of its own radical disruption.

It should be noted that veto complacency is often unpunished, either because an actor has an opportunity to correct their mistake, or the consequences of the complacency are not radical. Since, of course, parties elect their leader—unlike many institutions—the cost of veto complacency at leadership elections is far greater (and *was* far greater for Labour) than if such complacency occurred in an institution without such internal democracy. Most often veto complacency in institutions would not lead to radical change—however, it can. Similarly, most institutions would have multiple veto points for a decision. Indeed, under the old electoral college of leadership nomination there were two veto opportunities for the parliamentary Labour party: at the nomination stage and through their weighted influence on the election stage. An extended range of veto points increases veto power and lessens the possibility of unintended consequences, since an actor has an opportunity to correct mistakes (see Mahoney

and Thelen, 2010: 18ff). So it can be seen that mere informal veto complacency is not enough to engender radical change; neither is a rule change that reduces veto points: but when combined latent possibilities can be realised.

However, all of this only gets us to Corbyn's nomination. And it is only the nomination that can be explained by referring to internal institutional mechanisms. For the unintended consequence to become a moment of radical change the environment would need to favour the new positioning of the institution. And so, what needs to brought into the analysis is a favourable electoral environment. Yet, what will also be emphasised here is that the far left faction that began to interact with that electoral environment was itself inevitably different to that which had last been prominent in the party in the early 1980s.

Radical change for the far left

The Labour party did not change in 2015 because of a perceived crisis. In historical institutionalism, radical change invariably comes from an outside cause—an economic crash, a war, *force majeure*. But to say that Corbyn's advance to the leadership and his subsequent radical change of the Labour party's membership and policies was precipitated by a *non-crisis* environment is key to an institutional argument based on an endogenous causality. It was the very absence of a sense of panic that made the requisite number of MPs support his nomination. Had there been a moment of crisis no such easing of ideational discipline would have occurred. A crisis concentrates the mind: and can lead to a shutting down of alternatives. It is ironic, but explicable, that due to the continuous presence of latent paths in political parties, complacency can provide the ground upon which sudden radical streams burst forth. The change in the Labour party can be understood as endogenous not exogenous because Corbyn's nomination *generated* to a large extent his electoral support, not the other way round. There was certainly already present an untapped demand for far left policies in current Labour members (a plurality of whom went on to vote for Corbyn)—as well as a desire in the wider electorate. But more importantly the Labour party changed over the summer of 2015 by an

influx of new members, affiliates and supporters. This is not the old left resurgent—that old left in the form of a wide membership no longer exists; but rather it was a small grouping of the old left within the PLP facilitating a new membership to join and a new party faction to emerge. The changed electoral environment of the post 2008 crash (and moreover the austerity years it precipitated) enacted strongly when presented with an adaptation of the Labour party that *fit*: causing almost immediate positive feedback through new membership, and path dependent lock-in. And it is this changed, this adapted, party that was to continue on in the electoral environment. This empirical process is neatly outlined by James Schneider (Burtenshaw 2016), co-founder of Momentum:

> At first his campaign appealed to me because it was populist, everyday people versus the elites who governed them. As he began to be attacked it was clear that this was about democracy and our right to choose something different. But I had a lot of more developed ideas by that stage and when I heard Jeremy and John McDonnell explicitly calling themselves socialists, I think a generation of us began to say, "Okay, they use that term and it represents what I think too, I'm a socialist."

To a degree, this activity can be theoretically modelled by Streeck and Thelen's (2005: 21-22) idea of displacement of current institutional practices by the *invasion* of new ones. And unique to political parties, this can be an almost literal invasion by new members. But what is missed theoretically here is the amalgamation of the reactivation and invasion mechanism. The new members would not have joined the party had there not been an unexpected reactivation of past practices—therefore the change is ultimately endogenous; indeed, as Schneider notes, new members may not even have thought of themselves as socialists had Corbyn's leadership bid not come about. And, consequently, the invasion was somewhat different from the reactivation that was occurring. Reactivation of old practices and invasion of new practices happened at the same time, facilitating each other but also changing each other. The change that occurred in Labour in 2015 was not just radical for the party as a whole (in its sudden influx of new members and its move to the left) *but also* for the leftist faction that was leading it. For what we saw from Corbyn was a departure from the identity of his faction when they were powerlessly on the backbenches—not through absorption and compromise with the

centre but through the invasion of outside ideas, becoming something wholly new. The electoral environment of party members selected the faction in 2015 and 2016—and the wider electorate to some extent in 2017; but in the process the faction changed too. So, it is not as simple as saying, along with Streeck and Thelen (2005), that old alternatives are reactivated—though this is initially so—but to develop this by adding that when reactivation occurs it is to new purposes; the old does not merely return, but it returns to undertake a new function. What Corbyn perhaps never fully realised at the time was that his time in leadership signalled a change in the far left too—its meaning, goals, policy, marketing, and supporters—as much as the far left changed the Labour party. A new far left has been formed: and though it may now return to the margins of the PLP, it will remain in the country and the membership as an ongoing political movement. This is why clear identification of its nature and origins is important: for if we label it (à la Kerr et al 2018) as a mere return to the past, we miss the particular articulation and formulation of this movement. And miss, moreover, that Corbyn's own repudiation is not likely to signal the decline of a political movement that is forward not backward looking, and consists of many members who have little experience with Old Labour politics.

Indeed, I would argue so far as to say that a vestigial path must *by necessity* change into something new if it is to re-emerge as dominant. An electoral environment—in its complexity—could never return to the structural conditions of the past. The very factors, both internal and external, that initially rendered a faction vestigial still remain. The far left faction in the party could not merely *re-emerge* in splendid resurrection; it exists now in an environment shaped by the very decline of (and the knowledge of the decline of) socialism. Rather, to re-emerge, and to gain the popularity that it did, it had to offer something new—yet tempered by an awareness of the old faction from which it stems. This new socialism, as I term it, operates in a suspension of its own disbelief: aware both of its sincerity and the impossibility of sincerity; of the dangers of the marketplace, and the triumph of the marketplace. It is a statist programme after the retrenchment of the state—and an historical working class faction supported most emphatically by a young middle class. There is a metamodernism underlying

new socialism—a temperament outlined by Vermeulen and van den Akker (2010) as 'characterized by the oscillation between a typically modern commitment and a markedly postmodern detachment'. It is this sentiment that led to supporters holding life-sized cut outs of Corbyn; of chanting Corbyn riffs or buying Corbyn colouring books. It speaks of an ironic self-awareness that would not have been given to Foot in the 1980s, or Nye Bevan, say, in the 1950s (see, for example, the Corbyn colouring book, cut-out book, comic book and annual—Nunn, 2017; Mackie, 2015; Rowson et al, 2017; Goodwin et al, 2017, respectively). And yet this ironic self-awareness is itself ironised—for what is wanted is not clever apathy, but knowing commitment. It is quite new a thing. It is a sentiment that is at the heart of Novara Media—founded by James Butler and Aaron Bastani—which became the go to news source for the socialist devotee (see Barry 2019). The tone of the shows on Novara Media is one of serious political engagement mixed with an acknowledgment that seriousness cannot be taken seriously, until that is—it is (Judah 2018)…

> First up: how popular Corbyn is. In a YouGov poll on the world's most admired public figures, UK respondents have just ranked the Labour leader fifth in the male list. "Absolutely phenomenal," says Bastani. "If you have to give us in three words why people warm to Corbyn, what would those words be?" asks Sarkar. "Ohhh . . . cheeky," says Walker. "He's warm." "Me? Consistent, values-driven," says Bastani. "I've got three words," says Sarkar. "Werther's Original grandad."

The changed nature of the old left once it had become popular under Corbyn can be both evidenced empirically and understood theoretically. Empirically, it can be seen in the 2017 and 2019 manifestos that contained a range of policies—from a reformed House of Lords, to free broadband, to free University tuition, to action on climate change—that had little to do with the union politics of the 1970s. Theoretically, it can be stated that abandoned institutional paths can only re-emerge if they are changed in the process—this is because the re-emergence of an abandoned path requires low veto behaviour by senior actors, and this behaviour will only take place if the external electoral environment appears, by and large, to be still amenable

to their dominant ideas. If the electoral environment seemed readily suitable to older forms of socialism, then vetoing behaviour would have increased to prevent its rise. But what was not spotted by senior actors was the ability of the current electoral environment—through new members entering the institution—to change the old far left faction towards new purposes: and it was this that allowed it to rise suddenly and cause radical change. The old left was never likely to be popular and never proved to be. It was a new socialism, that mix of Corbyn and the sentiment exhibited by the likes of Novara Media and the younger members of Momentum, which, at least momentarily, captured the imagination of so many. Institutional change by the *amalgamation* of reactivation and invasion mechanisms, therefore, is the key to an understanding of how radical endogenous change can occur. The current institutional literature sees these two mechanisms as operating separately. As a result, we are at risk of too readily understanding the resurgence of abandoned institutional paths as merely being one of reactivation – of a return to the past. Yet, when we understand the internal dynamics that can allow reactivation to occur – the dynamics of veto complacency – we can understand more clearly that successful reactivation in a non-crisis environment can only occur if the reactivated path (in this case, far left socialism) is able to change in the process. This change occurs by the secondary process of unexpected invasion (had this invasion been anticipated then veto complacency would not have occurred); and it is the interactive effect of reactivation and invasion that creates a radical institutional change.

Conclusion

By analysing the British Labour party it can be seen that it is possible that stable institutions can suddenly produce radical change at non-crisis moments through a series of processes taking place: there are changes to formal rules; there is a need for reform (though no crisis) due to suboptimal achievement of goals so alternative policies are discussed; during this review dominant informal values cause veto complacency around formal roots to power; abandoned ideational paths that have nestled in the institution through low level actors are

reactivated; the consequences from the formal rule changes are exploited; the reactivated path encourages an unanticipated invasion of new members and ideas – which are different from reactivated path; the amalgamation of the reactivated path and the invasion ideas becomes dominant and radically changes the institution. Though these steps can be set out, and all can take place causally, the unlikelihood of each step increases so that the final consequence of radical change based on the preconditions of institutional stability in a non-crisis moment can be seen as essentially contingent to a degree. This article has outlined how sudden endogenously-driven radical change in a stable institutional environment can take place—thus implying that it is a theoretically knowable phenomenon and not random. At the same time, the unlikelihood of such an event makes it sensible to avoid any sense of determinism or knowability. Essentially, we must talk of potentialities. That institutions which maintain low level vestiges of past paths are *potentially* vulnerable to sudden radical change; that institutions which engage in rule changes are *potentially* vulnerable to unforeseen consequences; that institutions which have a high level of compliance around informal values and beliefs are *potentially* vulnerable to veto complacency; and that reactivated paths have the *potential* to be changed by an influx of new ideas that they themselves engendered. That all these things should happen in sequence is, perhaps, but once in a blue moon—or, should I say, a red moon. But it is the institutionally theorised sequence that helps us understand the origins, causes and nature of the Corbyn moment in the Labour party.

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