



Corbyn, McDonnell and the IRA: A History of Extremism

A Report by Mainstream - The Campaign Against Extremism



Foreword

At 2.54am on 12 October, 1984, a 20lb bomb hidden under a bath in the Grand Hotel Brighton, was detonated.

The long-delay bomb had been planted by IRA terrorist Patrick Magee with the intent of killing the then Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and her Cabinet, staying at the hotel for the Conservative Party conference.

The blast ripped open the front of the hotel sending masonry crashing down on guests below. Five people died and 31 more were injured. The Prime Minister and her Cabinet survived.

The IRA, claiming responsibility for the bombing the following day, issued a chilling warning: “Today we were unlucky, but remember we only have to be lucky once. You will have to be lucky always.”¹

Thirteen days after the atrocity, Labour backbench MP Jeremy Corbyn hosted a reception for two convicted IRA terrorists at the House of Commons.

The timing of the reception caused widespread revulsion and was condemned on all sides of the House.

At the time the Labour party’s Chief Whip warned the Islington North MP that he risked people “thinking you are actually indifferent to

the outrage, the suffering, the killing and the maiming which is the direct consequence of the actions of people who are terrorists.”²

It was not the last time Corbyn would capture the headlines while the IRA waged its bloody campaign in Northern Ireland and on the mainland.

The full extent of Corbyn’s links to and support for Sinn Féin, is today laid bare on the 35th anniversary of the Brighton bombing.

It reveals new details about Corbyn’s controversial Parliamentary meeting with convicted IRA terrorists just days after the horrific attack.

And, using previously unpublished material, it reveals Corbyn’s links to those who glorified in one of the worst terror attacks ever to take place on British soil.

It charts how, over two decades, Corbyn used his position as an MP to promote the republican cause during the height of the Troubles and it catalogues his damaging political intervention, as senior politicians worked to achieve a lasting peace for Northern Ireland.

Finally, a brief mention is made of fellow traveller John McDonnell, whose own track record on the matter at hand speaks for itself.

Jeremy Corbyn and the Brighton Bombing

The invitation:

Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher was working on her conference speech in the early hours of October 12 when the IRA bomb ripped through the Grand Hotel Brighton.

Refusing to cancel the final day of conference, the Prime Minister delivered her leader's speech before visiting victims of the terror attack at the Royal Sussex County Hospital.

She removed the attack passages aimed at Labour and told delegates that "attempts to destroy democracy by terrorism will fail".³

Thirteen days after the bombing Jeremy Corbyn invited two convicted IRA terrorists to the House of Commons.

Gerard MachLochlainn was imprisoned in 1981 and had served 32 months of a six year jail sentence for conspiracy to cause explosions.

Linda Quigley had two terrorist convictions for bomb and firearms offences, including helping to plant a bomb at a hotel in Northern Ireland.

Asked by the media about her view of the Grand Hotel Brighton attack, she said: "I support the right of an enslaved people to resist an occupying force and its Parliament."⁴

Corbyn had met both previously, Quigley at a Labour fringe event in 1983 and MachLochlainn had become a constituent after his release from prison. Corbyn had helped secure Government funds for 'community groups' that MachLochlainn was

involved with. MachLochlainn was also the official Sinn Féin spokesman in London.

Corbyn met the pair in the Commons central lobby and took them to a committee room. At the time Corbyn told reporters the meeting concerned no jury trials and strip searches.

He said: "The denials of justice in Northern Ireland are very serious. My purpose in discussing them with Mr MachLochlainn and Linda Quigley was to get a first-hand account of what is going on and the best way to do that is to speak to ex-prisoners."⁵

Corbyn was to later claim the pair had told him they were not members of the IRA.

News of the meeting sparked outrage on all sides of the House and MPs raised concerns the visit could be used to gather intelligence for a potential Commons attack by the IRA.

Corbyn was branded a "dupe" of the Sinn Féin propaganda campaign and then Labour leader Neil Kinnock said the backbencher had acted "stupidly".⁶

Hauled in to see Michael Cocks, then Labour Chief Whip, Corbyn was given a 30-minute dressing down. Cocks described Corbyn's sponsorship of the meeting as "thoughtlessness of the highest order".

He added: "I think that unless you are very, very careful any contact with people of this sort gives credence to their case, and unless you are very careful that can lead to people thinking you are actually indifferent to the

outrage, the suffering, the killing and the maiming which is the direct consequence of the actions of people who are terrorists.”⁷

Corbyn was unrepentant, emerging from the meeting to insist he would be prepared to meet them again.

Corbyn’s actions were debated in the Commons and condemned on all sides of the House as furious Conservative MPs and Ministers demanded Labour withdraw the whip.

Then Under Secretary of State for Northern Ireland Nicholas Scott said Corbyn “had shown himself totally unfit to be an MP.”⁸

The then leader of the Democratic Unionist Party, the Rev Ian Paisley, said: “Every right-thinking person in Northern Ireland utterly abhorred the action taken by the hon. Member for Islington North.”⁹

Mid Ulster DUP MP William McCrea said: “It ill becomes any Member of the House to give succour or encouragement to murderous, butchering groups such as Sinn Féin and the fellow travellers of the IRA.”¹⁰

Ulster Unionist Ken Maginnis told Corbyn : “I noted your pen portrait in the Parliamentary Yearbook stated you liked animals... The IRA whom you have brought into this House are animals in the worst possible sense of the word.”¹¹

Corbyn responded: “Are you saying that MPs do not have a right to talk to people from Northern Ireland or anywhere in Britain about conditions in prisons or about their political views?”¹²

The newspapers were equally outraged, The Guardian accused Mr Corbyn of a “sordid romantic infatuation with the Provisional IRA” and that “it was a very stupid political gesture from someone who is an elected member of a party opposed to terrorism. It was appallingly timed, so soon after the Brighton hotel bombing”.

It continued: “The right thing for somebody in Mr Corbyn’s position to do (and he has some clout in these fringes) would have been to spare his party this embarrassment and, even more, to have used his influence to denounce the IRA openly at such a time. However, that seems too much to hope.”¹³

The Times was equally scathing saying “anyone who shares the moral sensibility of the vast majority of British citizens will despise and condemn the action of Mr Jeremy Corbyn’ and questioned his ‘moral vision’.”¹⁴

Corbyn insisted he would do it again and dismissed the furore as an attempt to “stir up some non-story as a way of avoiding the real causes of the problems of Northern Ireland.”¹⁵

The editorial:

In October, 2015, the Telegraph established Corbyn’s links to the hard-left magazine London Labour Briefing.

The Briefing, which still survives to this day, gained notoriety in the 1980s for calling in the wake of the Brixton riots for a better riot next time.

Briefing operated an ‘open editorial board’ policy but in reality it centred on a few people,

including Corbyn and its Political Editor Graham Bash.

Corbyn has insisted he was never a member of the editorial board but he was one of the magazine’s founders.

In December, 1984, the magazine’s editorial board wrote an article under the title: ‘Briefing and the Brighton Bomb’.



It went on to praise the terror attack saying the atrocity showed “the British only sit up and take notice [of Ireland] when they are bombed into it.”

Corbyn wrote the front-page story in the same edition of the Briefing and it carried a letter praising the “audacity” of the attack. “What do you call four dead Tories?” the letter asked, “A start.”

It went on to mock Lord Tebbit who had been injured in the blast, his wife Margaret was left paralysed by attack.

Lord Tebbit had famously urged people to ‘get on their bike” to look for work “Try riding your bike now, Norman,” the letter added.¹⁶

In May, 2017, Corbyn was handed a copy of the controversial edition during an interview with Sophy Ridge on Sky News.

She asked the Labour leader if he was general secretary of the Briefing’s editorial board at the time.

He replied: “No, I wasn’t even a member of the editorial board”.¹⁷

Below are six items that appear to reveal Corbyn’s links to the Briefing in the early 1980s.

1. The Economist reported Jeremy Corbyn as general secretary in a 1982 article.

2. A London Labour Briefing Conference advertisement December 1981 appears to be organised by Jeremy Corbyn.
3. An article by Corbyn in LLB from March 1983 inviting contributions to London Labour Briefing showing he dealt with the mailing list.
4. A 2004 Parliamentary Profile report shows Corbyn as both a member of the editorial team and as General Secretary.
5. Corbyn is described as part of the editorial team according to Wolmar, Goss and Lansley as part of their book, *The Rise of the Municipal Left* (1986).
6. The Sunday Times describes Corbyn as a member of the editorial board.¹⁸

The controversial article was published in the National Briefing, a supplement publication that featured within regional publications of Labour Briefing, including London Labour briefing.

Six earlier copies of the monthly magazine, held by the British Library, all contain this National Briefing supplement.

The December editorial denounces a previous editorial statement published in the November issue of the magazine.

No copy of this issue is available but the December editorial suggests it denounced the bombing.

It refers to an “overwhelmingly hostile” response from readers.

It goes on to call the attack the “big bang” and concludes “the British only sit up and take notice when they are bombed into it.”

Crucially, two references are made in the text that indicate the editorial position of the board at the National Briefing.

Referring to the November editorial, the introductory paragraph states: “the National Editorial board meeting dissociated itself from the statement”.

It continues: “The national Labour Briefing Editorial Board has subsequently condemned the November editorial and reaffirmed its support for, and solidarity with, the Irish republican movement though we may not always agree with all their tactics or policies.”¹⁹

In March two pieces of evidence were published linking Jeremy Corbyn to the editorial board.

One was an issue of Socialist Action from 8 July, 1983, that described that on 3 July, 1983, Corbyn led the discussion at the founding meeting of National Briefing.

A second from Socialist Action, published 29 July, 1983, which mentions that Jeremy

Corbyn spoke at a 23 July, 1983, meeting of the National Briefing Supplement editorial board.

We can now publish additional evidence linking Corbyn to the board.

In the 28 January, 1983, issue of Socialist Challenge advertising the National Labour Briefing Conference to be held in February 1983, it states: “Speakers will include: Ken Livingstone, Ann Bliss, Jeremy Corbyn. Details from London Labour Briefing, 23 Leghorn Road, London NW10.”²⁰

On 4 November, 1983, Socialist Action published an article entitled ‘National Labour Briefing marks successes’. It describes a meeting of the National Labour Briefing editorial board on the 23 October, 1983. The article describes that at the meeting Corbyn was nominated to issue a “reply for Briefing outlining a basis for unity. The basis of this unity would be action against the Tories, for the defence of conference policies and a concrete commitment to fight the witch-hunt. Briefing was also to have an editorial specifying its own views.”

This new evidence strengthens the case that Jeremy Corbyn was involved with the National Briefing editorial board.

The arrest:

In 1986, Brighton bomber Patrick Magee was tried and convicted at the Old Bailey of planting the bomb that murdered five people.

The trial had attracted a protest by hard-left groups demanding ‘Troops Out’ of Northern Ireland.

Among the protestors were the Revolutionary Communist Group, who held a minute’s silence in 1984 to honour the

IRA dead. Corbyn, who also observed the minute’s silence, has since insisted he joined the Troops Out protest to highlight the plight of prisoners.

This was not the first time that Corbyn’s Sinn Féin sympathies had led him into trouble with the law. In 1984, he was threatened with arrest during a Troops Out demonstration at Trafalgar Square.

The panel:

In October, 1989, Corbyn shared a panel with Sinn Féin leader Gerry Adams at a fringe event during the Labour party conference.

The conference was being held in Brighton, five years after the bombing.

Adams views about the Brighton bombing were well known.

In August the same year Adams, appearing in a BBC documentary, said the failure to wipe out the Cabinet on that October morning was “a blow for Irish democracy”.

He added: “It was an attempt to bring about the end of the British Cabinet, which was maintaining, undemocratically, the partition of this country, and which is now in charge of 20 unbroken years of direct military occupation”.²¹

Corbyn announced Adams planned appearance to the Press Association on 30 September, 1989.

He told the PA the meeting had been organised by the Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom and Labour’s Northern Ireland Committee.

However, the Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom denied organising or co-sponsoring the event. A spokesman for the group said it was a participant of the event at the invitation of the Labour Ireland Committee.

The group, of which John McDonnell was on the steering committee, was not affiliated to the Labour party.

Labour’s then Northern Ireland spokesman, Kevin McNamara, told Adams to stay away.

He said: “The IRA committed one of the greatest crimes against democratic politics ever in Brighton when it bombed the Grand Hotel. Now its apologist is seeking to come to gloat. There is no place for him or for people

who support his policies at a Labour party conference.”²²

Adams’ presence was even more provocative as it followed swiftly on from the IRA’s bombing of the Deal barracks on 22 September, 1989. The attack, just eleven days earlier, had killed eleven Marine bandsmen. On 3 October, 1989, the Guardian reported: “The Labour left-wingers Jeremy Corbyn and Joan Maynard shared the platform with Mr Adams, who had told a press conference that Sinn Féin took no satisfaction from any deaths involved in the Deal, Brighton and other bombings. But he supported the IRA’s right to engage in armed struggle and said the bombings were a legitimate tactic.”²³

In his half hour speech, Adams described the victims of the Deal bombing as “Marines first, musicians second”.

He added: “I haven’t come to gloat over Deal.”

He continued: “Sinn Féin takes no satisfaction either from what happened at Deal or what happened at the Grand Hotel.”²⁴

Adams’ speech won a standing ovation from the room.

During the May, 2017, Sky News interview with Sophy Ridge, Corbyn refused to directly and specifically condemn the IRA, saying instead that “all bombing is wrong”.²⁵

It is an oft used line by the Labour leader. In 2015, the BBC’s Stephen Nolan asked Corbyn five times to condemn IRA violence. All Corbyn could muster was: “I condemn all bombing. I condemn what was done by the British Army as well as the other sides as well.”²⁶

Corbyn's Commons Campaign

Corbyn was elected to Parliament as Labour MP for Islington North in June, 1983.

The Conservatives, buoyed by Prime Minister Thatcher's popularity following the Falklands War, achieved their biggest Parliamentary majority of the post war era.

Labour leader Michael Foot was accused of pursuing too left-wing an agenda and stood down in October, ushering in the more centrist Neil Kinnock.

A year before his election, Corbyn had hoped to host a meeting for Gerry Adams at the North Islington Labour Party.²⁷

Foot, writing to Greater London Council (GLC) leader Ken Livingstone about a similar invitation to Sinn Féin, stated the party was "absolutely opposed to the barbarous methods of the provos and other terrorist groups."

He added: "Their activities have involved wanton murder of many people."²⁸

The links between Sinn Féin and the IRA were not in doubt.

Adams was quoted in 1982 as saying: "Sinn Féin and the IRA have the same objectives. The IRA engaged in armed struggle. Sinn Féin would not only defend the IRA's right to wage armed struggle but have the job of popularising support."²⁹

These invitations were not taken up after senior members of Sinn Féin were placed on travel bans in the wake of the murder of eleven British soldiers and six civilians at the Droppin Well disco in Ballykelly.

When the bans were lifted a year later, Corbyn was now an MP and extended his invitation again to Adams – this time to the House of Commons.

This was the first time Adams had been to London since the IRA leadership demanded he was present for a temporary ceasefire discussion with then Northern Ireland Secretary Willy Whitelaw in 1972.

Corbyn travelled to Heathrow to meet his guest at the airport.

The timing of the invite was designed to overshadow a visit by then Irish Foreign Minister Peter Barry and gain maximum publicity for IRA and Sinn Féin.

Corbyn invited all 209 Labour MPs to the Commons reception held in Adams' honour. Only six turned up, all members of the hard-left Campaign Group.

Corbyn and his neighbour, Islington South MP Chris Smith, also arranged a meeting at Finsbury Town Hall for their guest where he received a standing ovation. But the celebratory event soured when Smith insisted he could not condone IRA violence. He was heckled and booed by the 350 strong crowd.

In 1987, Corbyn hired a Commons researcher to investigate police misuse of prevention of terrorism legislation, a recently finished doctoral student Ronan Bennett.

In 1974 Bennett had been convicted of the murder of an RUC inspector, which was quashed in 1975.

Soon after his arrival in London he was tried for conspiracy to cause explosions and armed robbery but was acquitted.

The trial judge found the result: "a remarkable result in the face of the evidence"³⁰.

Bennett confessed to having IRA sympathies and described himself as an anarchist.

When the Sunday Times broke the news that Bennett had been given a pass to access restricted and secure areas of Parliament, it sent shockwaves through the estate and prompted debates about the rights of an MP to employ who they wanted.

This was less than a decade after the 1979 murder of MP Airey Neave by Republican terrorists in the precincts of Parliament.

During the debate, Conservative MP Ian Gow condemned Corbyn's lack of concern for the safety of fellow MPs.

"This episode is yet another example of the irresponsible way Labour's left-wing gives aid to the IRA," he said.

Mr Gow was murdered on 30 July, 1990, after 4lbs of Semtex was placed under his car, parked outside his East Sussex home.³¹

Labour leader Neil Kinnock called the assassination a "terrible atrocity" while Prime Minister Thatcher, in her autobiography, described his murder as an "irreplaceable loss".³²

The IRA, claiming responsibility for the killing, said Gow had been targeted because he was a "close personal associate" of the Prime Minister.³³

If the Commons was shocked by Corbyn's decision to hire an IRA sympathiser, the media was scathing.

Even the Guardian, which backed Corbyn's right to hire Bennett, mocked the backbench MP and his "profoundly wonky record on Irish questions" and his determination to "wallow in a pathetic romantic attachment to the Provisional IRA".³⁴

The then Speaker George Thomas took different view. On the advice of the security services he withdrew Bennett's Parliamentary pass.

Shortly after the Bennett pass furore, the IRA committed one of its worst attacks in Northern Ireland.

On 8 November, 1987, an IRA bomb exploded at the Enniskillen war memorial, as people gathered for a Remembrance Day ceremony to commemorate British military war dead. Ten civilians and a police officer were killed and 63 more people were injured. The IRA said it had made a mistake and it had meant to target British soldiers parading to the memorial.

In the aftermath of the attack, Ken Livingstone called for troop withdrawal from Northern Ireland.

This brought a scathing response from Labour leader Neil Kinnock who, in a speech to the Labour party, ridiculed those who made "a leap of logic" by equating Northern Ireland with colonialism, saying it showed a "fundamental, permafrost" ignorance.

He added: "Anyone would think that the IRA is a liberation army. It is not. They like the other paramilitaries, are a few hundred armed gangsters who commit political atrocities and spend the rest of their time in graft, corruption and protection rackets, ruling by fear because they have got the guns".³⁵

Despite the Labour leader's warnings the socialist Campaign Group of Labour MPs, led by Tony Benn and Jeremy Corbyn, backed Livingstone and just 16 days after the massacre at Enniskillen signed an Early Day Motion (EDM) saying that 'the violence in Northern Ireland and bloodshed in Northern Ireland stems primarily from the long-standing British occupation'.³⁶

Four months later the Corbyn and other Campaign Group MPs tabled another EDM – this time condemning the SAS ambush of three IRA terrorists in Gibraltar as "an act of terrorism".³⁷

Between 1987 and 1996 there have been 20 EDMs tabled condemning the actions of the IRA. Corbyn did not signed one.

Between 1986 and 1992, Corbyn attended the annual Sands-Connolly event every year.

This was a republican ceremony to honour IRA dead and its “prisoners of war” organised by the Wolfe Tone Society, a London based Irish republican support group.³⁸

In 1987 Corbyn’s attendance made the front page of the Sunday Express when he joined a minute’s silence was to honour eight IRA terrorists killed in an SAS ambush in an attack on a police station.

Corbyn insisted “there was a period of silence for everyone who died”.³⁹

Despite the media furore and in defiance of Labour party policy, the following year he again attended the Sands-Connolly event, this time sharing a platform with Sinn Féin’s Richard MacCauley.

The 1998 event came just days after the funerals of servicemen killed by the IRA in the Netherlands. The programme states they believe they were now in the “conclusive phase in the war to rid Ireland of the scourge of British imperialism”.

It adds that “force of arms” is the only way to bring this about.⁴⁰

The programmes also include a list of those IRA “prisoners of war” to be honoured, including Brighton bomber Patrick Magee.

Corbyn was interviewed by the BBC’s Andrew Neil after the Sunday Telegraph reported M15 had opened a file on Corbyn in the 1990s and claimed he met IRA members nine times.

Asked why anyone would support Corbyn to be Prime Minister given his support for the IRA, he answered: “I didn’t support the IRA. I don’t support the IRA. What I want everywhere is a peace process. What I want everywhere is decency and human rights.”⁴¹

Corbyn and The Peace Process

The 1985 Anglo-Irish Agreement between the British and Irish Governments can be seen as the first major political step towards the eventual peace process and the Good Friday Agreement more than a decade later.

But it was opposed by the Unionists, who did not want to give Ireland any influence over Northern Ireland, and by the IRA and Sinn Féin.

In a Commons debate, Corbyn condemned the Agreement, echoing the arguments of Sinn Féin.

He said he opposed the Agreement because it confirmed the border and “those of us who wish to see a united Ireland oppose the agreement for that reason”.

He claimed it would “endanger Irish neutrality” and meant the “the Republic will be forced to support and accept barbarous methods being used in Northern Ireland”.⁴²

On the 15 December 1993, then British Prime Minister John Major and the Irish Taoiseach Albert Reynolds issued the ‘Joint Declaration of Peace’ - the Downing Street Declaration.

In what is considered as the start of the peace process, its key clause stipulated: “Peace must involve a permanent end to the use of, or support for, paramilitary violence.”⁴³

In response, Corbyn, along with Tony Benn, arranged a Parliamentary meeting for Sinn Féin chair Tony Hartley who said he would not support the Downing Street declaration.

He added there could be no end to IRA violence until the declaration was clarified - a Sinn Féin demand already rejected by the Cabinet.⁴⁴

At the same meeting the Sinn Féin delegation, sat alongside Corbyn and Benn, attempted to embarrass the British Government by revealing ceasefire talks had originally begun in late 1990, earlier than had previously been thought.

Conservative MPs were furious accusing Corbyn and Benn of “abuse of privilege” and of an organised a “publicity stunt”.⁴⁵

A Downing Street spokesman accused Sinn Féin of putting up a smokescreen.

He added: “They should answer the principal question of why the IRA doesn’t stop killing people.”⁴⁶

The IRA continued attacks until they signed the first ceasefire in April, 1994.

This ceasefire was shattered on 9 February, 1996, when a truck bomb was detonated at London’s new financial centre, Canary Wharf.

The attack, which claimed the lives of two people, initiated a new mainland bombing terror campaign and over the next few months the IRA planted bombs at Aldwych in London and in Manchester.

In the aftermath of the Manchester attack, Corbyn tried to arrange for Gerry Adams to launch his autobiography on Parliamentary premises.

It was anticipated that Adams would make in excess of £100,000 from his autobiography which included a ‘fictionalised account’ of an IRA terrorist killing a soldier.

Then Labour leader Tony Blair said: “I condemn this event without reservation and totally disassociate the Labour Party from it”.⁴⁷

Then Shadow Northern Ireland Secretary Mo Mowlan also condemned the proposed



action “unreservedly” and urged Adams to focus his efforts on encouraging “the IRA to restore its ceasefire”.⁴⁸

Corbyn, accused of “traitorous behaviour” by enraged MPs was only blocked by an intervention by the Serjeant At Arms.⁴⁹ Just as the Speaker had intervened more than a decade ago, the Parliamentary authority withdrew its permission for the event to take place.⁵⁰

Corbyn insisted the event would go ahead but the pressure increased after the police raided an IRA weapons cache and found ten tonnes of explosives, the largest haul ever discovered on the British mainland.

The discovery of this ‘one-stop bomb shop’ - which also included Semtex, detonators and trucks to be loaded with explosives - was clear proof of a new IRA terror campaign, with London and Conservative Party Conference suspected targets.

It was Adams who called off the Parliamentary book launch after Labour Chief Whip Donald Dewar threatened to remove the whip from Corbyn and Benn.

Speaking at a press conference on College Green, Adams admitted they were “far more valuable to him if they remained with the party whip”.⁵¹

One of the IRA’s victims injured in Manchester, Melanie Russell gave her verdict on affair:

“If you find yourself bleeding and screaming for your unborn baby in the back of an ambulance after an innocent morning’s shopping, you learn more about the IRA than Adams could ever tell you.”⁵²

The newspapers were equally scathing of Mr Corbyn’s Sinn Féin propaganda coup.

The Guardian editorial said: “These occasions always provide a showcase for Mr Corbyn’s abiding abilities: his lack of wider political and moral judgement, his predilection for gesture politics, his insensitivity to the feelings of most Londoners and his indifference to the policies of his party.”

It continued: “Mr Corbyn’s actions do not advance the cause of peace in Northern Ireland and are not seriously intended to do

so. It is surprising that a politicians as clever and important as the Sinn Féin leader should be bothered with him.

“Mr Corbyn is a fool, and a fool whom the Labour Party would probably be better off without.”⁵³

Novelist and journalist, Eilis O’Hanlon, writing in the Times commented: “For Gerry Adams the Labour MP Jeremy Corbyn is what Lenin wickedly called a “useful idiot”.⁵⁴

A second furore erupted on 30 October, 1996, when Corbyn, together with Ken Livingstone and Nottingham South MP Alan Simpson, invited another delegation from Sinn Féin to meet them in Parliament.

Two of the delegation were suspected by the security services of being on the IRA’s ruling army council. Despite this, one was allowed to roam unescorted around the Parliamentary estate for 20 minutes, after saying he needed the toilet.

Clearly frustrated, Prime Minister Major said of Corbyn: “I think it is stunning naivety of any Honourable Member not to realise the connection between Sinn Féin and the IRA.”⁵⁵

The Good Friday Agreement, which brought peace to Northern Ireland was signed on 10 April, 1998.

In an interview with Hassan Alkatib for the VIP show, Corbyn appeared to lay claim to helping to deliver the peace accord.

“I think the dialogue with Sinn Féin in the 80s was an important turning point in bringing about what is difficult at times but is a relatively peaceful situation.”

He added that while the Agreement was an important “staging post” it was not the end of the story.

“Ultimately I think Ireland has to be united and I think Ireland will be united.”⁵⁶



The Fellow Traveller – John McDonnell

It is not just Mr Corbyn who had a long flirtation with Sinn Féin, for much of the 80s and 90s he was joined by fellow travellers, including the current shadow chancellor, John McDonnell. For example, it was not just Mr Corbyn who had invited the Sinn Féin leadership of Gerry Adams, Martin McGuinness and Danny Morrison back in December 1982; John McDonnell was also one of the signatories of the Greater London Council's invitation to them.⁵⁷

It was as the finance chair of the GLC that Mr McDonnell would have signed off all major grants, including one of £53,000 to the pro Sinn Féin 'Troops Out' movement (of which Mr Corbyn was a member). The grant, coming

from the police budget was for the Troops Out Movement to investigate any alleged abuses of anti-terror legislation by the Metropolitan Police. It drew widespread condemnation before it was abandoned, including from the Labour leader Mr Foot who condemned the grant and said: "The Troops Out Movement is committed to policies which could cause immense suffering in Northern Ireland".⁵⁸

Despite the condemnation by the Labour leadership McDonnell, like Mr Corbyn continued to defy Party orders. In 1985, he once again clashed with the leadership over Sinn Féin, this time accused by the Labour national agent, Mr David Hughes, of exercising "an outrageous dictatorship" and

of “subverting the decisions of the London Labour Party”. Mr Hughes was attempting to block an invitation sent by Mr McDonnell and others, inviting Sinn Féin ‘as the representatives of the majority of Republican opinion’ to participate in a number of public meetings in London. Mr Hughes said that if anyone was to be invited it should be SDLP, who had 2/3 of the Republican vote and which was the ‘sister party’ to the Labour Party.⁵⁹

According to the Times, at a meeting in London in 1986 McDonnell “called for the “ballot, the bullet and the bomb” to unite Ireland at the height of the IRA’s terrorism campaign against Britain”.⁶⁰ The Times also noted its discovery of a local newspaper report on the 1986 meeting which said: “McDonnell went on to describe the Lewisham Labour councillors who had boycotted the meeting as ‘gutless wimps’ and joked that knee-capping might help to change their minds.” A Sinn Féin councillor from Northern Ireland was a guest speaker at the meeting.

In 1987, McDonnell again courted trouble with his support for the republican cause: Writing in the Revolutionary Communist Party journal he declared himself a Marxist and argued that “the Irish war bill be renewed with increased vigour.”⁶¹ The next year at the Labour conference in Blackpool, Mr McDonnell hosted a poorly attended fringe ‘pro-republican meeting’.⁶²

Mr McDonnell kept up his support for Sinn Féin until the end of the ‘troubles’. In 2003, with the peace process well underway Mr McDonnell at a Bobby Sands commemoration event reflected back on the dark days of the troubles and once again shocked the Labour Party and the country with his views:⁶³

“We are in the last stage of imperialist intervention in Ireland and only armed struggle has stopped it. It is about time we started honouring those people involved in the

armed struggle. It was the bombs and bullets and sacrifice made by the likes of Bobby Sands that brought Britain to the negotiating table. The peace we have now is due to the unilateral action of the IRA”⁶⁴

After news of this broke there were calls for Mr McDonnell’s expulsion, and David Trimble saying:

“Mr McDonnell’s remarks about the IRA apart from being completely wrong, are crass, insensitive and an insult to the thousands of British people, police and servicemen who have been murdered, maimed or bereaved by the actions of terrorists.”

He continued:

“To label terrorists as brave and to lay blame for the murders, bombs and beating of Irish republicans at the government door, is a disgusting accusation.”⁶⁵

Mr McDonnell was largely unrepentant and made his case in a Guardian article with a headline of ‘Why I stood up for Bobby Sands: Expulsion would be an odd reward for telling hard truths.’⁶⁶ In it he argued that these were just ‘hard truths’ and again reiterated that ‘negotiations would not be taking place if had not been for the IRA.’ Although Mr McDonnell was widely vilified for his remarks, there were of course a small number who publicly supported his position. Mr Corbyn along with several other hard Left MPs wrote to the Guardian praising the ‘superb parliamentarian’ John McDonnell and defending his right to speak ‘uncomfortable truths.’⁶⁷ Although largely forgotten for many years, the incident was brought up again on BBC Question Time in September 2015. Though his current analysis of events however, does not quite tally with his 2003 article, it should be noted that Mr McDonnell did accept that ‘his choice of words were wrong’.⁶⁸

Conclusion

This report documents Corbyn's sympathies for violent Irish republicanism and how he used his position as an MP to advance, promote and publicise the goals of Sinn Féin.

He invited convicted IRA terrorists to the Commons less than two weeks after the appalling attack on the Grand Hotel Brighton in 1984 and stood for a minute's silence in 1987 for eight IRA terrorists killed by the SAS.

Corbyn claims never to have met the IRA and insists his courting of Sinn Féin helped bring about the Good Friday Agreement.

But his actions throughout the 80s and 90s attracted fierce criticism from all sides of the House.

Three Labour leaders have condemned Corbyn's support for Sinn Féin as, at best, naïve while horrified Unionists and Conservative MPs have branded him unfit for public office.

He has played host to convicted terrorists and apologists for terror attacks, he has strong

links to those who glorified in the Brighton bombing atrocity and was a frequent speaker at republican events to honour IRA "soldiers of war".

Swift to condemn attacks on IRA suspects, slow to show sympathy for the innocent victims of IRA atrocities. The Troubles claimed the lives of 1,800 innocent people, both in Northern Ireland and in mainland Britain.

During his long Parliamentary period as a self-professed campaigner for peace, Corbyn has seemingly never directly condemned the IRA's campaign of terror. And, 35 years on from the horrific Brighton bombing, Corbyn has yet to unequivocally condemn the IRA's murderous attack on Government.

As further shown, Corbyn is joined in such unsavoury sympathies by his current Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell, whose own long track record on the matter speaks for itself.

Endnotes

- 1 Guardian, 13 October 1984, p. 1
- 2 Daily Mail, 18 December, 1984, p. 9
- 3 Margaret Thatcher, Conservative party conference speech, 12, October, 1984
- 4 Liverpool Echo, 17 December 1984, p. 6
- 5 Times, 17 December, 1984, p. 2
- 6 Hansard, HC debate, 17 December, 1984, c585; Daily Mail, 18 December, 1984, p. 9
- 7 Daily Mail, 18 December, 1984, p. 9
- 8 Hansard, HC debate, 20 December, 1984 c647
- 9 Hansard, HC debate, 20 December, 1984 c598
- 10 Hansard, HC debate, 20 December, 1984 c666
- 11 Hansard, HC debate, 20 December, 1984 c609
- 12 Hansard, HC debate, 20 December, 1984 c610
- 13 Guardian, 18 December, 1984, p. 10
- 14 Times, 18 December, 1984, p.13
- 15 Guardian, 21 December, 1984, p. 4
- 16 London Labour Briefing, December, 1984
- 17 Sophy Ridge interview, Sky News, 21 May, 2017
- 18 See: The Economist, Volume 283, 3 April 1982;
<https://i.imgur.com/C8atpf4.png>;
<https://i.imgur.com/YfJEkca.png>;
<https://i.imgur.com/siO5QDM.png>;
<https://i.imgur.com/8fMMHpU.png>;
<https://i.imgur.com/YiTTZjB.png>
- 19 London Labour Briefing, December, 1984
- 20 Socialist Challenge, 28 January, 1983, p. 2
- 21 Independent, 14 August, 1989
- 22 Times, 30 September, 1989, p. 16
- 23 Guardian, 3 October, 1989, p. 6
- 24 Press Association, 2 October, 1989
- 25 Sophy Ridge interview, Sky News, 21 May 2017
- 26 Stephen Nolan interview, BBC Radio Ulster, 6 August, 2015
- 27 Socialist Organiser, 8 December 1982, p. 4
- 28 Times, 7 December, 1982, p. 1
- 29 Socialist Challenge, 17 December, 1982, p. 4
- 30 Times, 21 December, 1979, p. 1
- 31 Times, 31 July 1990, p. 1
- 32 Margaret Thatcher, The Downing Street Years, 1993
- 33 Times, 31 July 1990, p. 1
- 34 Guardian, 23 October, 1987, p. 14

- 35 Times, 19 November, 1987, p. 2
- 36 HC EDM 'Irish Unity and Independence' 24 November, 1987
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- 39 Sunday Express, 17 May, 1987 p. 1
- 40 Sunday Telegraph, 10 October, 2015
- 41 Andrew Neil interview, BBC One, 26 May, 2017
- 42 Hansard, HC Deb 27 November 1985 cc 939, 943, 946
- 43 Downing Street Declaration, 15 December, 1993
- 44 Daily Mirror, 18 January, 1994, p. 5
- 45 Telegraph, 18 January, 1994, p. 11
- 46 Independent, 18 January, 1994, p. 8
- 47 Independent, 17 September, 1996, p. 2
- 48 Daily Mirror, 26 September, 1996, p. 4
- 49 Daily Mail, 16 September, 1996, p. 2
- 50 Daily Mirror, 22 September 1996, p. 2
- 51 Daily Mail, 27 September, 1996, p. 19
- 52 Sun, 27 September, 1996, p. 6
- 53 Guardian, 26 September, 1996, p. 16
- 54 Times, 26 September, 1996, p. 18
- 55 Daily Mail, 22 November 1996, p. 31
- 56 Hassan Alkatib interview, The VIP Show, 25 July, 2015
- 57 Daily Mail, 7 December 1982, pp. 1-2
- 58 Times, 23 February 1983 p. 1
- 59 Guardian, 3 April 1985, p. 6
- 60 Times, 27 November 2015
- 61 Daily Mail, 5 May 1987, p. 2
- 62 Telegraph, 7 October 1988, p. 15
- 63 Guardian 3 June 2003, p .20. Mr McDonnell states he was at a republican meeting, a Bobby Sands commemoration event. These were usually held by the Sinn Féin supporting Wolf Tone society in May, to commemorate dead IRA terrorists (in particular Sands) and any 'political prisoners'. Mr Corbyn had been present at up to six meetings in the 1980s and 90s.
- 64 Guardian, 31 May 2003, p. 6
- 65 Ibid
- 66 Guardian, 3 June 2003, p. 20
- 67 Guardian, 4 June 2003, p. 23
- 68 Question Time, BBC One, 17th September 2015

Mainstream

THE CAMPAIGN AGAINST EXTREMISM

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