

Brexit: Cometh the hour, cometh Jeremy Corbyn?

For the longest time, Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn has been accused of sitting on the fence on Brexit. Now, he says he has a plan. But can he lead the UK out of its crisis? Rob Mudge looks at his credentials.



It has been a long time coming. But now, with the prospect of Britain crashing out of the EU without a deal looming large, Jeremy Corbyn has come up with a plan. Finally.

He envisages a no-confidence vote in Prime Minister Boris Johnson as soon as possible. Should Johnson lose, Corbyn would take over as a caretaker prime minister for a short period of time during which he would seek to delay Brexit and call a general election.

After sitting on the fence for so long, Corbyn has now said he would campaign to hold a second Brexit referendum which would include the option to remain.

Even those with a scant interest in Brexit would be forgiven for wondering why it

took the leader of the opposition Labour party so long to try and take advantage of what's been handed to him on a silver platter amid the chaos of Brexit.

But it's not that simple. To understand why Labour under Jeremy Corbyn has been unable to cash in on the way [former Prime Minister] Theresa May and now Johnson are dealing with the Brexit saga, it's worth looking at Corbyn's background and progression within Labour and how he managed to initially galvanize a party still stuck in the post-Tony Blair era.

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Although Corbyn resurrected Labour's fortunes, his stance on Brexit has been criticized

String of victories

From what many observers perceived to be Labour's golden years under Blair, the party went into free fall under his successor, Gordon Brown. In the 2010 general election, it lost 91 mandates in Parliament — the party's biggest loss of seats since 1931. Brown's successor, Ed Miliband, fared even worse. Labour were voted out of power in 2015.

Enter Corbyn. Against the odds, he managed to pull off three quite remarkable

victories in a row. In 2015, with the party in disarray after a disastrous election result, he was elected party leader thanks largely to young activists who paid £3 (€3.25; \$3.62 at current rates) to register as Labour supporters and take part in the leadership contest as nonmembers.

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Once Corbyn was on the ballot, his campaign manager coined the phrase "straight-talking honest politics," portraying him as an alternative to the career politicians who were his opponents. Having been a Member of Parliament since 1983 and a local councilor before that, it could, of course, be argued that Corbyn, too, was in that mold.

In the wake of the EU referendum in 2016, the party establishment tried to ditch Corbyn for his perceived lukewarm opposition to Brexit. Again, he managed to mobilize young registered supporters, who carried him to another leadership victory. In 2017 he pulled off arguably his biggest coup when Labour won 40% of the vote in the general election.

But that is essentially where the fairy tale ends. While some observers praise Corbyn for sticking to his political principles, others say it's exactly this kind of perceived stubbornness on Europe that has left Labour as an unfeasible alternative to the Conservatives.

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Corbyn's EU stance

In a nutshell, Corbyn has always been a euroskeptic, as his track record shows:

Corbyn voted for Britain to leave the European Economic Community (EEC) in the 1975 Referendum Act. He opposed the creation of the EU under the Maastricht Treaty and voted against the Lisbon Treaty on more than one occasion in Parliament in 2008.

The day after the referendum in 2016, Corbyn was out of the starting blocks quicker than former Prime Minister May, calling for the immediate implementation of Article 50 — the two-year notice to leave the EU. In December

2016, he voted in Parliament in favor of the UK's leaving the EU and for the process to start no later than March 31, 2017. In February 2017 he voted in favor of May starting the process of leaving the EU. In the summer of 2017, Corbyn opposed Britain remaining in the single market, even sacking from his team Labour MPs who favored the single market.



Delegates at last year's Labour conference showed their support

A delay to Brexit?

Even now, with a fresh campaign to oust Johnson and prevent a no-deal Brexit, Corbyn's perceived tepid position on Europe could be his undoing.

Leaving aside the fact that several Tory rebels and other party leaders would struggle to endorse Corbyn (indeed, the leader of the pro-EU Liberal Democrats, Jo Swinson, has already ruled out Corbyn leading an emergency government), the Labour Party itself is split over Brexit and there is no guarantee that it would win a snap election. An election would risk exposing the bitter tensions still further within the party.

Despite Corbyn's stated intention to campaign for a second referendum, he has never made a secret of the fact that he is, in fact, a "lexiteer" — a leftist who

wants to the leave the EU.

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