

Letter to a Chinese Friend

Dear Tingting

Thanks for your email. You ask me how it is that the leader of our largest opposition party refuses to resign when he has suffered a vote of no confidence in the House of Commons by a margin of 4 to 1 and obviously no longer has the support of his own party.

Well, I am sorry that the newspapers have given you that impression, some of my Irish friends have obtained the same impression over here. In fact, like most newspaper stories, the truth is almost exactly the opposite of what has been printed or disseminated on the internet.

Firstly, Mr Corbyn has not lost the confidence of the party, he retains the confidence of the overwhelming majority of ordinary members of the Labour Party, which is why he is refusing to step down. Secondly, he has not lost the confidence of the Parliamentary Labour Party (which I will call the PLP) because *he never had* the confidence of the PLP. The PLP is made up at present of a large rump of mostly centre right MPs who voted for the Iraq War and for the Tory austerity budget and things like that. There is a small group of left wing members who still stand for the things the Labour Party used to stand for, the health service, education, decent working conditions and the nationalisation of industries like the railways and the power utilities and so on. This small group decided amongst themselves that they should put up a candidate for the leadership, and Mr Corbyn as it were “drew the short straw” (I am not quite sure how to translate that). On the last day before the election Mr Corbyn still didn't have enough support from the members of the PLP to put his name on the ballot, so a couple of MPs who didn't actually support him volunteered to nominate him because they thought it was only fair he should be given a chance.

What happened next was beyond their wildest expectations. Mr Corbyn was elected by a margin of 3 to 1. He had almost 60% of the vote and his nearest rival managed less than 20%. This was a political earthquake. I'm sorry, Tingting, of course I shouldn't talk about earthquakes to you, who comes from Sichuan, and who knows what earthquakes really are, of course we don't have earthquakes in England, but sometimes the tea-tray shakes and the spoons rattle, and, well, in this case the muffins went all over the floor! So that's what I mean when I say that Mr Corbyn *never had* the confidence of the PLP. Ever since he was elected they have been sitting on their hands, fuming, whilst plotting and organising to unseat him at the earliest opportunity. So the idea, propagated by the PLP and the media, that the vote happened because Mr Corbyn had somehow failed to effectively carry out his leadership was a complete “red herring”.

As you know, we recently conducted a plebiscite in which the British people were asked to vote on whether they wanted to stay in the EU or not. The establishment confidently expected the people to vote to stay in, but instead they voted by a narrow margin to leave. So, the Farrage Balloons have gone up and the Bruntergang has begun (I am sorry, I am not quite sure how to translate that but I hope you get the picture). This, of course, presented itself as the perfect opportunity to get rid of Mr Corbyn. He, of course, could be blamed for the whole thing. A vote of “No Confidence” was quickly organised. The idea of this, of course, was that Mr Corbyn would be so shocked that he would do what any ordinary person would do in the face of such bullying, and fold up his tent and run. The plotters could then organise another “leadership election”, but this time they would make sure to exclude Mr Corbyn from the ballot. Thus the Gonerils and Regans of the PLP could have another fitting of the glass slipper, this time with that odious Cinderella safely locked up back in the scullery where she belonged.

Unfortunately for them, Mr Corbyn, mindful of the fact that he represents the hopes of hundreds of thousands of ordinary Labour supporters up and down the country, was not persuaded to step down.

This was very inconvenient. He was, of course, quite willing to go into a new leadership election against anyone they wanted to nominate against him, but this wouldn't work, because then he would win. No, they needed to persuade him to resign. So then they came up with the bright idea of putting up Ms Angela Eagle, a woman who had just resigned from his cabinet. Ms Eagle confidently asserted that she had spoken to a couple of her constituents who had opined that Mr Corbyn ought to go. Not surprisingly, Mr Corbyn didn't see that as a *prima facie* reason to resign. She then started to say, "If Jeremy doesn't do something, I will stand as leader against him." She has now repeated this statement several times. I can imagine them having this conversation over a tea table somehow:

Ms Eagle: "If you don't do something, I will stand for the leadership against you".

Long silence. Ms Eagle gives Mr Corbyn a penetrating stare.

Ms Eagle (clears her throat): "If you don't do something, I will stand for the leadership against you".

Long silence. Ms Eagle *kicks Mr* Corbyn under the chair.

Ms Eagle (SHOUTS): "If you don't do something, **I will stand for the leadership against you**".

Anyway, Tingting, I hope you get the picture. By the way, things got a lot more interesting this morning when I opened the paper and read the news that Ms Eagle's constituency party (that is, the ordinary Labour Party members that she is supposed to represent) have written to her stating that they have voted overwhelmingly in support of Mr Corbyn and asking her to stop her posturing and throw her support behind the elected leader. I don't suppose she will allow such a trifling matter to stand in the way of her ambitions.

Love

Ben

7 July 2016