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Book Review – Is Socialism Possible in Britain? By Andrew Murray

Reviewed by Victoria Honeyman, University of Leeds

Corbyn's time as leader of the Labour Party often elicits a strong reaction. For some, he was the best thing to ever happen to the Labour Party; a left-leaning leader who was sabotaged by his own party, who were undeserving of him. For others, he was the worst thing to ever happen to the party, exacerbating factions and divisions that many had hoped would learn to live alongside each other – eventually. Murray was seconded to Corbyn's political office and this book is partly a review and reflection on his time with Corbyn and partly a polemic on the shortcomings of the British Labour party and parts of the Labour movement.

This account makes no attempt at either even-handedness or balance, nor does it need to. It is an account of Murray's work with Corbyn, his own views on socialism and Britain and he needs make no apologies for those. For those who disagree with his views and, perhaps his actions, this book is almost a work of fiction. There is a tendency within the book to blame those who support socialism or social democracy in all its wide forms as 'not doing it properly', 'not pushing hard enough', 'not fighting hard enough'. These criticisms are often made when beloved ideologies or revered leaders fail to achieve their ends. Corbyn's supporters are following a rich tradition in their repeated criticism of everyone else.

Murray is critical of everyone who stood in the way of Corbyn, or his predecessors, with criticism heaped on current members of the Labour Party as well as more historic figures. Attlee, the much-loved and widely respected post-war leader led 'a normal capitalist government' (p.18) and nationalisation of industry wasn't socialist enough (pp. 18/19). Wilson and Callaghan are both criticised for their demotion of Benn and Blair's leadership of the party is described as 'akin to a coup within the party by a remarkably small number of politicians...' (p.26). Throughout most of the book the electorate are treated as a secondary consideration, a group who should be made to understand what is in their best interest rather than political parties having to be influenced by the people they ultimately serve.

All that being said, this book is really interesting. It can be challenging. It will draw a rue-smile or even exasperation in some readers (including this reader) but without challenge how can we begin to understand different points of views? To ignore Murray's book would be to learn nothing from the Corbyn years, which cannot be good for either the Labour party or the people who supported Corbyn. The book itself is extremely readable and really thought provoking for anyone who is interested in the period. While I disagree with Murray's political views, this book provides an insight into those who think as he does, who supported Corbyn and who were surprised he wasn't more popular with the wider electorate. It paints Corbyn as a good man, a man keen to make change, and he probably is.

The assumption of the author is that socialism will automatically, almost inevitably, improve the lives of working people in Britain, and therefore it should, it must, be achieved. Leaders such as Corbyn should be supported, their mis-steps and mistakes forgiven for the greater fight. Ultimately, they are the knowers of truth and have the answers we all desperately seek. That belief is not necessarily correct, and for those who question its truth, and the

truth of politicians such as Corbyn, this book will provide an interesting if ultimately frustrating window into the opposition camp.