

THE CAERULEAN

'Is Corbyn on the brink of entering No. 10?'

From our President, Thomas Barton

Listening to the Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn's speech at the Labour Party Conference (Brighton, 27/09/17), you would be forgiven for assuming Corbyn and the rest of the Shadow Cabinet were on the cusp of forming the next Government.

The Labour Party Conference reflected a profound sense of optimism and self-confidence among the party faithful, with leading members of the Shadow Cabinet taking turns in announcing Corbyn as the next Prime Minister of a Labour Government, all while jubilant Labour members chanted their leader's name.

The days of seemingly endless Shadow ministerial resignations and failed leadership challenges are but a distant memory. This year's conference showcased a Labour Party united behind its leader, with previous Corbyn critic Sadiq Khan receiving a warm reception from party activists. Even Labour's centrist deputy leader Tom Watson gave Corbyn his fall-backing and even instigated a series of "oh Jeremy Corbyn" chants during his conference speech.

Corbyn certainly thinks highly of his chances, telling his party audience that Labour was "on the threshold of power". But despite finally managing to unite the Labour Party, is Corbyn truly on the brink of entering No 10, or is he simply preaching to the converted?

We are the political mainstream now

Corbyn made a bold claim during his conference speech, acknowledging British politics is usually won in the centre ground yet claiming the centre had shifted to the political left, making the Labour Party the political mainstream.

That is an ambiguous assertion, given that Corbyn

President's Foreword

From our President, Thomas Barton

I would like to welcome both new and existing members to the UCL Conservative Society. The oldest university Conservative society in England, our society was first established in 1908. We have therefore organised plenty of extremely varied and interesting weekly events for the year ahead to celebrate our 115th anniversary.

The purpose of the UCL Conservative society is to provide a platform for Conservative politics at UCL, while simultaneously being open to all political views. UCL Conservatives are first and foremost a politics society and our mission is to arrange events of a political nature, whereby the entire student body feels welcome to engage with, and participate in, our events.

We are extremely fortunate to be able to attract leading Conservative voices to UCL, with former speakers including Sir Michael Fallon and Ian Duncan Smith. We have some fantastic speakers lined up for the year ahead, including Zac Goldsmith and Jacob Rees-Mogg.

Talks and Q&A's with leading Conservative politicians are but a part of what we do. The society hosts debates and panel discussions on topical political issues, in addition to our multitude of social evenings including termly dinners, pub quizzes, and of course drinks! We are also organising a charity fundraiser for later in the year.

I am eager to encourage as many of you to get directly involved in our society, which is why we provide the opportunity for students to speak at our Port and Policy debates or write for our brilliant Caerulean paper. Campaigning events are arranged during election periods for the activists among us to take part in.

So whether you are a Conservative, or simply interested in politics and wanting to take advantage of truly fantastic events, it would be a pleasure to welcome you to our historic UCL Conservative society.

Very best wishes,

Thomas Barton
President of UCL Conservatives

has been depicted as a member of Labour's hard-left wing ever since entering the political limelight.

It must be acknowledged, Corbyn has certainly compromised in certain policy areas in his efforts to keep the Parliamentary Labour Party onside. While dedicating much of his political activism to the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, the Labour Party's manifesto pledged to maintain Trident- Britain's nuclear deterrent. A lifelong Eurosceptic, Corbyn campaigned to remain in the European Union during the referendum, albeit in a half-hearted fashion. On NATO, Corbyn has committed to remain in the alliance, despite labelling it a "danger to world peace" in 2011.

Nevertheless, Corbyn veering away from his more extreme political positions does not necessarily equate to his manifesto reflecting moderate, mainstream political thinking. The Labour leader still advocates a series of radical policy measures, from re-nationalising the railways and utility companies, to abolishing tuition fees. The Telegraph claimed Corbyn's pledges would cost an eye-watering £312 billion.

That being said, is Corbynism truly rooted in hard-left radicalism? While Corbyn talks of tax hikes, his focus has been on increasing taxes for the richest 5%. On corporation tax, Corbyn has committed to setting the rate to its pre-2010 level of 26%. While rent controls seem pseudo-socialist, young people are frustrated by the imbuing housing crisis and cities such as New York already have them in place.

Only time will tell

While the Labour Party used conference to celebrate its recent electoral result, it is important to acknowledge that the Conservatives won the largest number of seats and votes. Corbyn may have increased his party's share of seats in Parliament to 262, but that still falls far-short of the Conservatives' superior tally of 318 seats. Even when amassing the seats won by the supposed progressive parties, the Conservatives remain in pole position with more seats than Labour, the Liberal Democrats, the Scottish Nationalists, Plaid Cymru, and the Greens put together.

The arithmetic is not all doom and gloom for Corbyn and his loyal supporters. Labour only needs to gain 7 Conservative seats to terminate the prospect of the Conservatives forming a coalition. Furthermore, the polls place Labour ahead of the Tories, with Corbyn polling more favourably than Prime Minister May.

But if we have learnt anything from the last year in British politics, it is that the political landscape is riddled with uncertainty. The pollsters may yet again be wrong, the next General Election is scheduled for 2021 and the overarching Brexit negotiations will surely dictate the standing of Theresa May in the eyes of the British public.

One thing is for certain. The Labour Party Conference demonstrated that Labour's members are dancing to Corbyn's tune, and in Tom Watson's case, they are even singing to it.



Chimera or nightmare? © Daily Express

Upcoming Event: LUC Inter-University Quiz Night

- Location: King's College London, Campus TBC
- Time: Thursday October 12 – from 19:30 to 21:00
- Admission: Free

We are inviting all of our members and anyone else who would like to join this politically-themed quiz between various Conservative Societies at our friends at King's College. Admission is completely free and turnout is always great, so do join!

The media misrepresentation of the Catalan independence referendum

From our Social Action Officer, Kirill Dashkovskiy

Over the past week, news outlets left, right, and centre addressed the issue of the failed independence referendum in Catalonia and the surrounding political debate. The referendum, called by the Catalan Generalitat and blocked by Spain's Parliament and Constitutional Court, resulted in a day of public unrest and violent struggles with the police. This culminated with the King of Spain addressing the matter personally in a televised message.

As expected, the reaction was heavily polarised, with most liberal sources overwhelmingly in support of the Catalan separatists and critical of the government's response to the situation. Interestingly enough, numerous conservative sources have both condemned law enforcement for their tactics and the European Commission for its apathy.

One aspect of the referendum that a surprising number of sources have consistently failed to mention is the unquestionably illegal nature of it. In addition to the Spanish government and the Constitutional Court blocking the referendum on no uncertain terms, Spain's Constitution itself does not include provisions for secession from the Kingdom. Instead, it unequivocally defends the country's unity. As such, it is misleading to compare the vote with either the referendum on leaving the European Union or that on Scottish independence. Both of these examples have either had provisions put in place for them – in accordance with Article 50, for instance – or have been cleared by Parliament, as was the case with the Scottish referendum. Sympathy for the Catalan cause is understandable in light of

A word from the editor

Maurits Westbroek

On behalf of the whole Committee, I would like to welcome all new students to UCL, and for those returning, I'd like to say: welcome back. We are looking forward to welcoming all of you at our debates, talks and events. The Conservative Society aims to provide a platform for free and well-informed political debate and, more generally, an inspiring environment for politically-minded students.

The *Caerulean* is intended both to reflect and promote the activities of the Society at large. This year, we have decided to circulate our society newsletter on a bi-weekly basis. We intend to organize the content as follows: there will be space, firstly, for opinion pieces on a variety of topics, written by our own Committee members. Additionally, we cordially invite all our members to contribute a piece of their own, of no more than 800 words, to the *Caerulean*. You are welcome to submit your piece to maurits.westbroek.15@ucl.ac.uk.

Secondly, we will advertise our events, both previous and upcoming, brilliant as they will be. In this way, we will keep you up-to-date and give everyone a taste of what our events are like.

As you can tell, we have decided to keep the new *Caerulean* fairly straight-forward. However, as a democratic society through and through, we are open to suggestions from our members if there are any other items you would like to see. Indeed, we do hope to see as many students as possible join our society.

All that remains for me to say for now is that we hope to welcome you soon to our events. Being both one of the most social and most stimulating societies on campus, the Conservative Society presents an excellent way to get involved at UCL. On behalf of the entire Committee, I hope everyone will have a splendid time. May the Society grow and prosper – and the *Caerulean* along with it.

the police brutality and the fashion for referenda, but it fails to recognise the constitutional differences. Furthermore, whilst one may sympathise with the people's wish to determine themselves by democratic means, one must consider the fact that the Catalan authority (somewhat provocatively) went directly against the Spanish Constitution and the rule of law.

Another aspect that caught the media's attention was the televised address to the nation made by the King of Spain, in which His Majesty addressed the matter in his capacity as Head of State. Most sources rushed to criticise the King for interfering in politics and for abusing his constitutional position, contrasting it with the Queen's decision to remain outside the debate surrounding Scottish independence. This reaction on behalf of the media, often strongly worded and accusatory, showed a staggering lack of understanding for the functioning of constitutional monarchy as a system. Under the constitution of the Kingdom of Spain, the King's role is explicitly stated as "Head of State, the symbol of its unity and permanence", on top of which upon proclamation, the King swears to carry out his duties and "sustain and see to it that the constitution is sustained". As such, His Majesty's address was made fully within the boundaries of his constitutional position and in full accordance with his duty to defend the Constitution and the rule of law. One could even go so far as to say that refusing to comment, or else supporting the referendum, would be a greater breach of the King's constitutional role. If anything, the King's speech ought to be seen as a breath of fresh air and a prime example of a constitutional monarch exercising his duty with dignity and grace.

Aside from ignoring the illegal nature of the referendum, the media has also failed to mention two of the most important parties in the conflict: the Catalan unionists and the rest of Spain. Reports focused almost exclusively on the separatists and the conflict between the Generalitat and the government in Madrid, playing into the separatists' hands by presenting them as victims and the issue as an exclusively Catalan problem. As such, the concerns of millions of Spaniards outside Catalonia, not to mention those within, surrounding the unity of their country were largely ignored. Indeed, contrary to what most media

outlets suggest, the independence sentiment in Catalonia is not as widely spread as one might think. For example, the recent unionist demonstration in Barcelona showed the highest level of support for the union since the separatist issue was first brought into public debate. The question of unity is a personal one for Spain: only less than a decade ago, ETA, the Basque separatist group responsible for multiple terror attacks, announced their disarmament after years of tormenting the Spanish people in the name of separatism. It is therefore understandable that the aforementioned King's speech was welcomed by the majority of the population.

The Catalonian independence question is indeed far from being solved, and the situation far from being under control. After a failed illegal referendum and brutal overreaction on the part of the Madrid government, the unionist sentiment is still strong both in Catalonia and the rest of Spain. However, Catalan separatism also continues to grow and the police brutality has only helped fuel this fire. In the end, whichever stance one takes on the issue, one needs to recognise that any future proceedings will have to be carried out strictly within the framework of rule of law and in accordance with the Constitution of Spain.

Event Recap: Tuition Fees Port and Policy (03/10)

From our Treasurer, Robert Nash

Last Tuesday, the UCL Conservative Society hosted a debate on the motion ‘This house believes university tuition fees should be abolished’. We were pleased to welcome several excellent speakers who made some very compelling and informative arguments on either side of the debate. Speaking for the proposition were Surya Kumaravel and Declan Pollard, whilst Sam Sherwood and Alex Wallitt spoke for the opposition.

Whilst the audience overwhelmingly opposed the motion at the beginning of the debate, the proposition made a valiant attempt to change their stance. Declan made the argument that education is a right and that to put financial barriers in the way of education is deeply unfair and damaging to society.

Surya, however, made an alternative argument instead proposing that the current system of tuition fees be replaced with a graduate tax. This, he hoped, would pose a less daunting burden for prospective students, particularly those from less affluent socio-economic backgrounds, as well as raising more revenue from higher earners. He also hoped to disincentivise universities from putting profit over quality, such as by prioritising places on courses such as Law, which do not cost universities much per additional student.

The opposition, however, argued that the best way of helping people access education was to keep the current fees system. It was argued that with the already enormous cost of providing university education it was best to prioritise spending. Abolishing tuition fees, Sam argued, would effectively mean increasing support for more affluent students who do not need it.

Alex went on to argue that money would be better spent on increasing support for vocational training such as apprenticeships. This would more fairly support everyone’s life prospects, not just those of an academic leaning and help to alleviate the skills shortage this country faces.

After the main speeches the floor was then opened to the audience who made valuable contributions to the discussion too numerous to mention individually. The passion and calibre of these arguments was exciting to watch and proved that this is clearly an issue about which people care passionately.

Whilst ultimately the proposition were unable to convince the audience to change their position, both sides certainly put forward several very thought-provoking arguments and perhaps even changed some people’s views on a very important issue.

This is merely a summary of the debate and is by no means exhaustive. Whilst every effort has been made to fairly record both sides of the debate and fairly attribute all arguments made it is not a verbatim account of events.

The Committee 2017/2018

Contact us at **conservative.society@ucl.ac.uk**;

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