

# Tony Blair warns against “radical leftism” in Labour leadership race

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It is a measure of the political disconnect of the Labour Party from working people that some considered it wise to wheel out Tony Blair to pontificate on his desired outcome for the party's leadership campaign.

He was stirred to action in order to vent his displeasure, following the publication of a poll of Labour members suggesting that Jeremy Corbyn was on course to win.

A YouGov opinion poll published by the *Times* on Tuesday showed support for Corbyn at 43 percent, and former ministers Andy Burnham at 26 percent and Yvette Cooper at 20 percent. The Blairite contender Liz Kendall polled a miserable 11 percent. In a run-off, the poll predicts Corbyn would win 53 percent of the vote against 47 percent for Burnham.

The growth of support for Corbyn is an indication of the leftward shift of broad layers of the population. The MP for Islington North, one of London's most impoverished constituencies, is seeking to tap into popular anger over ever-rising social inequality, war and escalating attacks on democratic rights. In May's general election, the eighth he has contested, he was returned to parliament with his biggest ever majority, bucking the trend elsewhere. For this reason, denunciations of Corbyn have only contributed to his popularity.

During the leadership contest, Corbyn has put forward an economic plan involving tax increases on the rich, reducing corporate tax relief and tax avoidance, a national investment bank and using quantitative easing type mechanisms to pay for infrastructure projects—measures he himself described as the sort of “not particularly radical” policies that Germany “has been doing for a very long time.”

What is praised as the “German model” is based on a

decades-long drive to lower the wages and conditions of the working class—and Germany's leading role in imposing savage austerity in Greece. Nevertheless, even the slightest hint at redistributive measures is anathema to Labour's leadership. They insist that Labour's defeat in May was because Ed Miliband was too left-wing and had abandoned Blair's efforts to win over Conservative voters.

Blair's Wednesday morning news conference was organised by Progress, the New Labour think tank whose co-chairs include Kendall and two other MPs who dropped out early on in the contest—Tristram Hunt and Dan Jarvis. Regaling his adoring audience, guru Blair declared, “Twenty-one years ago yesterday I became leader of the Labour Party. A lot has happened since then. We discovered winning successively. And now we have re-discovered losing successively. Personally I prefer winning.”

Not at any price, however. “I wouldn't want to win on an old-fashioned leftist platform. Even if I thought it was the route to victory, I wouldn't take it,” he opined.

This was about the only part of his speech that was coherent. Most was made up of undecipherable nonsense like, “We won not because we did what we thought was wrong as a matter of principle but right as a matter of politics; but when we realised that what is right as a matter of policy is right as a matter of principle.”

Blair advised those who argue that Labour should go with its “heart” to “get a transplant”, warning that if Corbyn wins, “There's going to be a debate in the Labour Party. ... Unity does not work if you're all together in the bus going over the edge of the cliff.”

Kendall and Cooper have since indicated they would not serve in a Corbyn shadow cabinet, adding to press speculation about splits and expulsions.

Labour's leadership lives, works and plays in what has been described as "the Westminster bubble"—more accurately, in a social circle made up of the super-rich and their hangers-on. They know nothing of what the "electorate", which Blair constantly invokes to legitimise his demand for the party to move ever-rightwards, in fact thinks.

It appears to have escaped the attention of Blair and his acolytes, but he speaks on questions of what is popular as someone who is the most despised politician alive in Britain today. In his own mind and theirs, he is still the man who won Labour three terms in office—blaming its downfall in 2010 on his successor, Gordon Brown. In reality Blair is an unindicted war criminal and the chief architect of the destruction of the Labour Party.

He and his government will be forever associated with the illegal and devastating war against Iraq. Moreover, Blair's embrace of Thatcherite economic nostrums, his adviser Peter Mandelson's proud boast of being "intensely relaxed about people getting filthy rich", and Brown's claim that the era of "boom and bust" economics were over, were left in ruins by the crash of 2008.

Blair thinks he can sing the same old tune after seven years of ever worsening austerity, insisting that Labour must win back the "political centre" from the Tories. But it was in furtherance of this mission that this week Labour signed off on government plans to gauge £12 billion out of welfare payments on which millions rely—emboldening Chancellor George Osborne to announce plans for a further 25-40 percent cut to all Whitehall departments to the tune of £20 billion.

Corbyn was able to reply: "Well, I think Tony Blair's big problem is that we are still awaiting the Chilcot report [into the Iraq War] to come out. ... Yes, we did win the 1997 election. We lost support consistently after that, and he led us into a disastrous illegal war."

But in the main, Corbyn fell back on his mantra about focusing on "policies, not personalities", even as some of those personalities are preparing to cut his political throat.

An indication of what now passes for the "left" in the Labour Party is provided by the sycophantic musings of Owen Jones in the *Guardian*, who pleaded with Blair to recognise that it was the left that continued his legacy. "It is both a tragedy and a

perverse irony that it is the left defending New Labour's legacy, not New Labour's own supporters," he complained. "What a tragedy that many of Blair and Brown's supporters do not want to do the same."

Corbyn's last-minute nomination for the leadership race was a cynical manoeuvre, with right-wing MPs endorsing him in order to present the fiction of a "broad church". It has badly misfired. One of those who put Corbyn on the ballot paper, ex-foreign secretary and former acting leader Margaret Beckett, admitted, "At no point did I intend to vote for Jeremy myself—nice as he is—nor advise anyone else to do it. ... I was concerned that people would feel that they had been deprived of the opportunity for their point of view to be aired."

Beckett now says she regrets her decision.

The news that Corbyn is in the lead led to a rash of unrestrained editorials in Labour's house organ, the *Guardian*. Leader writer Anne Perkins declared, "There is room for an emotional spasm in British politics but that is for a party of protest, not of government."

Another complained about the support Corbyn was receiving—from Unite and several other unions, the general secretary of the Communist Party of Britain, more than 60 Constituency Labour Party branches, the UK Independence Party MP Douglas Carswell and right-wing commentators urging Conservatives to register as Labour supporters.

At some point this charge of "non-Labour" support may be used to declare a Corbyn victory null and void. In any event, correcting the "mistake" of allowing him to run will involve a furious backlash by the party's right wing to make sure Labour never again flirts with reformist nostrums in a conflict that could yet end in a split. If it does not, then this will only be testimony to the readiness of the forever supine "left" to hand the initiative to their opponents.



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