

Britain's pseudo-left line up behind Corbyn Labour leadership bid

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Next Saturday, results in the election for Labour Party leader in the UK will be announced. Though the polls have yet to close, many party and media commentators calculate that the victor will be the veteran "left" MP Jeremy Corbyn.

For weeks there has been talk of legal challenges should Corbyn win, and even threats of a coup or a split in the Labour Party. Many of the MPs who agreed to nominate him did so in order to lend a democratic veneer to a race that was intended to legitimise a further shift to the right under any of his contenders, Andy Burnham, Yvette Cooper and Liz Kendall. Since then, the Labour leadership has done its utmost to weed out any so-called "hard left infiltrators", whom they claim are behind Corbyn's apparent success in the polls.

Nonetheless, Corbyn reportedly began talks with other MPs about joining his potential cabinet last week. Stressing that party unity matters above all else, he has promised to take an "inclusive" approach as part of his own bridge-building with the right.

This has solicited a positive response from MP Chuka Umunna, who had previously endorsed Kendall, the most Blairite candidate, for leadership. Speaking in the Netherlands on Tuesday, Umunna called for solidarity in the party and did not rule out serving in a Corbyn cabinet. This would depend on whether Corbyn renounced policies he had advocated in the past, "such as the UK's withdrawal from NATO, Britain unilaterally doing away with its nuclear weapons, increasing taxes on small businesses significantly and, most importantly, whether... we will be arguing for the UK to stay in the EU," Umunna said.

Corbyn has already made clear he will not increase taxes on business and the super-rich, and has begun to modify his stance on NATO and the EU. While describing NATO as a "cold war organisation", he says

only that he would try to "restrict" the role of the military alliance. Similarly, on the EU he has refused to say whether he favours withdrawal.

Umunna's olive branch is motivated by the same concerns that animate the Corbyn campaign. Under conditions of deepening economic crisis and growing social polarisation, Corbyn has warned that the party's overtly right-wing policies have left it completely alienated from working people. If Labour is to remain "relevant" he argues, it needs to build relations with "social networks" that can provide it with a base of support.

In his remarks, Umunna acknowledged that Labour had "allowed itself to be characterised as an elite project" and failed to "build a base for its support within the party across the country..." Those who have signed up as Labour supporters to vote in the election should be welded into a "community army", he said, urging the party to rehire the services of former Barack Obama "mentor" Arnie Graf to this end.

Graf worked as an advisor to former Labour leader Ed Miliband between 2011 and 2013, trying to help rebuild the party's membership. Last month he wrote revealingly of the difficulties he faced, describing how the party could not find a "single minimum wage worker" with which it had relations to engage with Miliband in a televised encounter. This "stunning" incident, he wrote, was evidence of how "the Party remains out of touch with the vast majority of people throughout the country."

The manoeuvres around the leadership contest are a damning indictment of the right-wing, moribund shell that constitutes British Labour. The party long ago abandoned any program of social reform, and has diligently advanced the interests of the financial elite at home and abroad. Corbyn's claim that it can be

“revived” as a party of working people is a political fraud aimed at maintaining the political credibility of the Labour Party and of the entire state apparatus in the UK.

Step forward the pseudo-left.

The WSWS has commented previously on the speed with which these organisations have sought to ditch any pose of opposition to Labour in the wake of Corbyn’s candidacy. Their role is not only to endow his leadership bid with a radical and even socialist veneer; they are offering the services of their organisations and their various front campaigns to create the impression of a popular movement behind Labour.

Thus, Duncan Thomas, writing on the Left Unity blog, eulogised Corbyn as a “fantastic politician, a committed man with sound principles”, who “needs and deserves all the support that we can give him.” But the rottenness of the existing Labour Party, he warned, meant that it was up to Left Unity to provide Corbyn with the “social mobilisation” needed for his success.

While claiming this should be based on Left Unity’s “autonomous capacities” as an “independent and self-reliant movement,” he made clear that this was only so as to be “able to offer Corbyn meaningful and lasting support...” Otherwise, “Corbyn will be a sitting duck and our hopes will go down with him.”

For Alex Callinicos of the Socialist Workers Party, Corbyn’s victory “would be a great democratic success”, but it is “the extra-parliamentary movement that has grown up around him that will remain his source of strength.”

His reference to an “extra-parliamentary movement” is pure sophistry. By conflating meetings of one or two thousand people that the “left” MP has addressed over the last month with a broad-based social revolt by workers and youth against the existing set-up, Callinicos is trying to justify the SWP’s decision to jump onboard the Corbyn bandwagon.

So too the Socialist Party (SP), formerly the Militant tendency. Previously the SP argued that Labour could not be revived and that a new party, based on the trade unions, was needed. That was the basis for its formation, along with sections of the trade union bureaucracy, of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) electoral front.

Now it argues in the editorial of its journal, Socialism Today, that the “Corbyn insurgency” has “transformed

the political situation in Britain”. Efforts to reverse Labour’s right-wing course will require mobilising, “the maximum possible support from across the workers’ movement, with the aim even of going back to the founding structures of the Labour Party...”

The SP advises that a conference of all “Corbyn’s supporters should be organised along with the many trade unions...and political parties including those involved in TUSC, which support a fighting anti-austerity programme.” The objective is to “take on... the forces of capitalism who have organised themselves in the Labour Party” as a “giant step towards creating a new workers’ party out of the dying embers of New Labour.”

As proof of its credentials in this operation, the SP boasts that it was TUSC’s “very existence” that aided Corbyn’s leadership bid, because the Unite trade union’s decision to back Corbyn, rather than Burnham, was “partly motivated to counter the growing support for TUSC members campaigning in the union for a new party”!

Just to reinforce its loyalty, the editorial is accompanied by a lengthy article in which the SP pledges that the TUSC will act as the “electoral wing” for the “Corbyn insurgency” in next May’s local elections, whether he wins the leadership election or not.



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