Corbyn victory used to boost illusions in UK Labour Party and trade unions

Our reporters
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At Sunday's demonstration against austerity outside the Conservative Party conference, the *World Socialist Web Site* spoke with many people who declared their support and sympathy for the new Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn.

Corbyn was elected last month in a landslide vote, winning with the support of hundreds of thousands of Labour Party members and registered supporters. The tens of thousands who attended the demonstration, organised by the Trades Union Congress (TUC), included many young people who are not members of a trade union but who came as a result of Corbyn's victory.

For the most part, the youth were not brought to the rally as a result of appeals from the trade unions, which, since 2008 have systematically suppressed any opposition to austerity. Hardly any young people, trapped in the main in cheap-labour, dead-end jobs, are members of unions that long ago abandoned any struggle to fight for decent, well-paid jobs. As a result, union membership has halved since 1979 and is now mainly confined to those employed in the public sector.

The left-talking union leaders have therefore seized with both hands the prospect of using Corbyn's personal popularity and his anti-austerity rhetoric to shore up their tattered credentials. But there are definite limits to such efforts, set by the bankrupt perspective Corbyn advances of transforming what continue to be the right-wing, pro-business organisations they were before his election.

There is already a sense of these political truths, despite the enthusiasm generated by Corbyn's election. A number of those who expressed support for him said he would be restricted in terms of implementing his programme.

Alice, a former student, said everyone she knows "likes Jeremy Corbyn", and even those that don't "can see that change needs to happen." Asked if she thought Corbyn would be able to deliver on his promises, she said she thought he would, "but it's not just one person's job. If one person steps forward, that inspires others to make change happen."

Alice's friend **John,** added, "Anyone coming up with alternative ideas has been branded as crazy or fantasists, but those ideas are part of a new debate. Whether Jeremy Corbyn is the one to activate change, I am not convinced, but I'm hopeful that we are moving in the right direction."

Geoff, an ex-steel worker from Middlesbrough, was aware that Corbyn was not going to take up a struggle against the right-wing of his party.

"Corbyn has no idea of how to take on the machinery of the Labour Party, defending the left from attacks by the Labour machine," he said. "I can't see where there's any progress in this. It's good that people joined and wanted to do something, but it's not just wanting to do something, it's making changes that matter."

Phil, who is self-employed and lives in Warrington, identified himself as a supporter of Corbyn. "He will help get rid of the 1 percent who is screwing everyone over."

However, he went on to say, "If he does not succeed, another party will have to come out of it. Labour has not looked after the working class, and [former Labour leader Tony] Blair is just another Tory. Society is not working and it cannot carry on this way."

Sara, who has read the *World Socialist Web Site* previously, said she came to the rally because she is "sick of the way austerity is being imposed on the poorer people within our society."

She remarked of the leaflet distributed by the

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Socialist Equality Party at the TUC rally, The fight against austerity is the fight for socialism, “Socialism is the only answer. The question is, do we do it by constitutional means or by revolution? It would be good if we could do it by constitutional means, but I know that isn’t going to happen. I’m not sure revolution would be embraced by the masses.”

She added, “I’m a great fan of Jeremy Corbyn. His political campaign has woken people up. But is that enough? I’m not sure it is enough.”

The People’s Assembly (PA) plays a critical role in the ongoing attempt to resuscitate the Labour Party and trade unions. Backed by the TUC and supported by the UK’s two largest trade unions, Unite and Unison, it is made up of a loose coalition of groups such as the Green Party, Counterfire, the Communist Party of Britain, Left Unity and the Stop the War Coalition. It is organising a series of events around this week’s Conservative conference in Manchester.

On Monday evening, the People’s Assembly held a meeting urging a campaign to defend the postal service at which Corbyn was the featured speaker.

The Communication Workers’ Union (CWU) were the joint organisers of the PA rally, with no less than three CWU bureaucrats selected to address the crowd of several thousand. Those listening could be forgiven for not knowing that the CWU had collaborated at every stage in the privatisation of Royal Mail, as history was rewritten from the platform.

Dave Ward, CWU General Secretary, said, “I would say to the Tory party that privatised us, we will never accept that privatisation comes before the service that we provide to the public. You may have privatised the ownership of Royal Mail. You may have given it to a few people in the boardroom and a few people in the financial institutions *but the service still belongs to the people of this country. It always will be the people’s post.”* [Emphasis added]

Ward was greeted by whooping and applause, organised by the deeply cynical union officials, exploiting the political inexperience of a young audience.

Corbyn in his speech asserted that Labour was now “committed to opposing austerity” and “committed to opposing the privatisation of Royal Mail,” based upon nothing but a few mealy-mouthed pledges issued at its conference last week.

He said nothing about the virulent attacks waged in recent days on him by leading figures in his own party and the media over his statement that he would never authorise the use of nuclear weapons.

Corbyn is opposed to any attempt to mobilise the overwhelming support that won him the leadership in a struggle against the right-wing fanatics who remain within the leading bodies of the Labour Party. Speaking of his opponents, he told the rally, “[W]e go into politics, we go into our union work and into our lives on the basis that what we say we hope is of value and what the other person says we hope is of value, and we engage in an intelligent, civilised debate.”

Corbyn assiduously promoted the trade unions, saying he was “proud to have been a trade union member all my life and I see the relationship between my party and the unions as a strong organic link.”

Membership of the Labour Party and the unions was “growing fast all the time as people realise there are collective solutions to collective problems”, he claimed.

The PA rally ended with an appeal by Clare Solomon of Counterfire, “If you’re not in a union, join one.”

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