

What is the Jeremy Corbyn *Momentum*?

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The *Momentum* network was launched earlier this month, with the declared aim of making “Labour a more democratic party” so as to ensure it can win the general election in 2020.

In its origins and personnel, it draws on the “Jeremy Corbyn for Labour leader” group that helped organise the successful leadership bid of the “left” Labour MP. Its current directors include Jon Lansman, who was an ally of the late veteran Labourite Tony Benn during both of his failed deputy leadership bids in the 1980s.

Lansman is now editor of the *Left Futures* web site, which publishes material from all the “left” groupings and individuals supportive of the Labour Party. *Momentum*’s other supporters include Labour MPs Katy Clark, Clive Lewis, Richard Burgon, Rebecca Long-Bailey and Kate Osamor.

The grouping has been endorsed by Corbyn and Labour’s shadow chancellor, John McDonnell. But despite its roots in a faction of the Labour apparatus, *Momentum* is at pains to stress that it is “independent” of the leadership and the party itself.

Its web site describes the formation as being at the “embryonic stage of a network organisation.” It encourages the setting up of support groups nationally, encompassing Labour members and those “who may not have been involved in political activities.”

When this is achieved, it says it will establish “democratic governance” structures based on agreement with “opposition to austerity, the promotion of equality and participatory democracy,” the principles *Momentum* states are represented by Corbyn.

That such an organisation has had to be brought into being underscores the deep crisis of Labourism.

Corbyn’s leadership bid was a response to the party’s defeat in the May general election, which saw it all but wiped out in Scotland and lose significant support in other areas of the country.

Through his criticism of war and austerity, Corbyn sought to end the identification of Labour as just another Conservative Party that had damaged it so badly. But

while this ensured his overwhelming victory in the leadership contest—attracting some 120,000 new supporters to his campaign—Corbyn’s success has not changed the bourgeois character of Labour, which, for more than a century, has acted as the principal political opponent of socialism in Britain.

Even before the result was in, *Left Futures* was fretting that the Labour “left” was “too weak” and did not “have the infrastructure to support and channel the momentum and huge numbers” created by the campaign.

That is an understatement.

The party that *Left Futures/Momentum* is trying to encourage new forces to join is a right-wing shell. Most of the Parliamentary Labour Party (PLP) is vociferously hostile to any struggle against austerity and war. Only last week, 21 Labour MPs rebelled against Corbyn to vote in support of the government’s pro-austerity “fiscal charter”, while a larger number are said to be planning to join with the Tories in supporting the bombing of Syria.

Similarly, across the country, Labour-run councils are either implementing government spending cuts, and/or are working directly with their Conservative counterparts to such ends—as with the plans for greater devolved powers for northern England.

At the party’s base, many local branches barely function, and where they do so, they have no say in party policy and are largely removed from any involvement in the day-to-day struggles of workers and youth.

This is why *Momentum* has to pledge to “Assist members in making their voice heard in Labour Party debates” and to work to “help build and support organisations” outside of the party “that can make concrete improvements to people’s lives.”

In short, *Momentum* is perpetrating a fiction: namely that the Labour Party “can transform our society for the better,” rather than being an obstacle to such a change.

This fiction is made all the more pressing by changes to the electoral registration system. *Momentum*’s first public campaign is a voter registration drive under the banner of “Democracy SOS.” This is in response to legislation

requiring that each eligible adult must register individually to vote (rather than be registered as previously by the “head of household”) by December 1.

This change is forecast to cut the electoral rolls for 2016 by 2 million people. These rolls are to be the basis for redrawing electoral boundaries so that constituencies have a similar number of voters. This could reduce the number of constituencies by 50 nationally, a disproportionate number of which are expected to be Labour seats.

Even so, *Momentum’s* initial efforts to try to rebuild Labour have already come under attack from the so-called grassroots e-network *Labourlist* and the more overtly New Labour *Progress* pressure group.

These represent the dominant forces within the PLP who had hoped to utilise Labour’s electoral defeat to take the party even further to the right. Several individuals among their supporters threatened legal challenges, coups and splits in the event of a Corbyn victory.

Now, Richard Angell of *Progress* has questioned whether *Momentum’s* real aim is “changing the Labour Party”, while Luke Akehurst of *Labourlist* thundered against attempts to “fundamentally change the composition of all the democratic structures of the party,” in particular the PLP and the National Executive Committee.

They are particularly incensed by Lansman’s remarks supporting “reselections to ensure the accountability of MPs.”

Pointing to the fact that the Blairite candidate, Liz Kendall, had received just 4 percent of the vote in the leadership contest, Lansman said he would “Obviously...want to see MPs who better reflect the wishes of the party.”

In opposition, the right wing are insisting that the vote by the majority of members and supporters in the leadership contest against the policies of New Labour must not have any impact whatsoever on party policy, personnel or organisation. Any attempt to do so is attacked as a “hard left” conspiracy that will be resisted, with Akehurst warning, “They [Corbyn’s supporters] might find that there are more of us and that we’re better organised than they expected.”

Lansman had stressed that with Corbyn “not actively in favour of the idea, it [reselection] was unlikely to happen any time soon.”

Just to be certain, Corbyn issued a statement making “it absolutely crystal clear that I do not support any changes to Labour’s rules to make it easier to deselect sitting Labour MPs.”

Corbyn’s intervention amounts to a blank cheque to the right wing, that they will not be held to account for their actions. It follows on from the Labour leader’s silence on those MPs who had blocked with the Tories in last week’s vote on fiscal policy.

All this makes a mockery of what *Momentum* declares to be Labour’s values of “opposition to austerity, the promotion of equality and participatory democracy.”

Despite this, the pseudo-left groups have redoubled their pledge of support to Corbyn. While the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), Socialist Party and others such as Left Unity argue that his victory reflects widespread social outrage, they insist that it is not possible to build a revolutionary alternative.

While some formally criticise the claim that Labour can be turned into a vehicle for working class opposition to austerity and war, in practise all their efforts are directed at reinforcing this illusion.

Thus the SWP’s National Committee recently agreed to help the Labour “left” “resist the pressures to retreat” in face of the right wing by building a “greater level of real struggle” in Corbyn’s support.

Directing its members to engage in “united front activity,” the SWP wrote appreciatively of the *Momentum* initiative as the “most significant to date” attempt to “re-launch the Labour left.”

Likewise, the Socialist Party has said its Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition, which it proclaimed as an independent alternative to Labour, will join *Momentum*.

This has immediately drawn a sharp rebuke in an article on *Left Futures*, advising *Momentum* that the SWP and Socialist Party “should be told to sling their hook.”

Penned by Phil Burton-Cartledge, former SP member turned caseworker for Blairite Labour MP Tristram Hunt, it stressed that *Momentum* “might work as a useful community organising tool,” but that “ultimately, its success will rely on the work of established left Labour activists who share the leadership’s view.”



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