

A balance sheet of Corbyn's leadership of the Labour Party

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December 12 marks three months since the election of Jeremy Corbyn as leader of the UK Labour Party.

Corbyn, one of the party's remaining handful of nominally "left" MPs who had been a backbencher for 32 years, won the leadership in a landslide vote, trouncing his three opponents. Hundreds of thousands of Labour members and registered supporters gave him an unprecedented mandate to carry out the policies he campaigned for.

His stated opposition to austerity and militarism appealed to those opposed to Labour's support for the US-led illegal wars in Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya. Liz Kendall, the candidate most openly associated with the despised former Labour Prime Minister and unindicted war criminal, Tony Blair, suffered a humiliating defeat in the leadership contest, winning less than 5 percent of the vote.

Within days of becoming leader, Corbyn set out on a course that has seen him utterly betray the very anti-war sentiment and hostility to the ruling elite that his election as party leader reflected.

Significant sections of the ruling elite, including prominent figures in the military, were on a war footing and preparing to reverse Parliament's 2013 vote against military action in Syria. At that time, under conditions of huge opposition to war among the population, and divisions in the political establishment as to its efficacy, Labour, along with 30 Conservative Party rebels, were obliged to oppose British military intervention against Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.

On September 14, Corbyn named a shadow cabinet in which he gave prominent positions to right-wing supporters of war—Hilary Benn as shadow foreign secretary and Maria Eagle as shadow defence secretary—positions that would prove decisive in clearing the path for war in Syria.

In 2001, Corbyn was a founding member of the Stop the

War Coalition (STWC) and acted as its chair from 2011. He is a declared opponent of nuclear weapons and opposed to the renewal of the UK Trident missile system.

However, one week after taking office, he stood down as STWC chair, writing, "It is now my job to lead the Labour Party, including in the struggle for peace and international justice, and that is demanding my undivided attention."

One day later, on September 20, an unnamed "serving British general" told the *Sunday Times* that if Corbyn came to power, "There would be mass resignations at all levels and you would face the very real prospect of an event which would effectively be a mutiny."

Corbyn did not even call for an investigation into the general's identity, let alone demand action be taken against him.

At September's annual Labour conference he was denounced by the party's right wing, the Tories, and their supporters in the media for declaring that if he became prime minister he would not use Britain's nuclear weapons in any circumstances.

Corbyn had wanted to hold a debate at the conference on scrapping the Trident missiles, while pledging that he would accept it if his own position was defeated. However, the debate was ditched after he was told that the UK's three biggest unions, including Labour's biggest donors, Unison and the GMB, were opposed.

The conference held a 20 minute debate on Syria, in which delegates passed a motion to oppose air strikes unless approved by a United Nations resolution. The motion, put forward by the Unite trade union, was worded as evasively as possible in order to allow the parliamentary party room to support war at a later date. Corbyn was fully aware of the consequences. His main ally, Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell, immediately stated his belief that there should be a free vote on Syria so MPs could vote "with their conscience" and without

instruction from the party.

The Conservative government used Corbyn's capitulation to go on the offensive.

On November 8, the head of Britain's armed forces, General Sir Nicholas Houghton, in a clear breach of constitutional principles, made an extraordinary public declaration that Corbyn's refusal to authorise a nuclear strike "would worry me if that thought was translated into power."

Corbyn made a show of calling for Houghton to be censured for his comments, while expressing a desire to meet him for discussions.

On November 13, the terrorist attacks in Paris took place, with the events utilised by Prime Minister David Cameron to push for another vote in parliament to intervene militarily in Syria targeting Islamic State (ISIS, or ISIL).

Corbyn did everything to appease the widely despised warmongers in his party, who were working openly with Cameron.

Rank-and-file Labour Party members and the population at large remained firmly opposed to war. Just prior to the December 2 vote, Corbyn commissioned a survey of Labour Party members with the result showing that 75 percent were opposed to air strikes in Syria.

Despite this backing, and with polls showing that a majority of the population opposed military action, Corbyn authorised a free vote by Labour MPs. This meant they would not be censured or disciplined in any way for supporting war.

The government responded by denouncing him as a threat to national security and anyone who opposed war as a "terrorist sympathiser."

The outcome was that 66 Labour MPs backed military action, granting the Tories the significant majority they politically required to start bombing Syria.

Calls by Labour Party members to deselect those MPs who supported war were immediately denounced by Corbyn. In the name of "party unity" Corbyn and his Labour Deputy Leader Tom Watson, one of the 66 who supported air strikes, wrote to party members warning that calls to remove pro-war MPs was "abuse and intimidation" that "have no place in politics."

Corbyn's betrayal of his mandate parallels that carried out by the pseudo-left Syriza in Greece. In July, the Syriza-led government repudiated the Greek population's landslide "no" vote in a referendum on the European Union's austerity demands called by Syriza leader and prime minister, Alexis Tsipras. Within days, Tsipras

agreed to an even more savage austerity programme than that rejected by nearly two thirds of the electorate in the referendum.

In a *World Socialist Web Site* Perspective September 14, two days after Corbyn's election, we explained, "The lessons of Syriza's abject capitulation in Greece must be understood, so that workers are not blindsided by the manoeuvres, compromises and betrayals that will inevitably follow Corbyn's victory."

We opposed the claims by myriad pseudo-left outfits that Labour could be refashioned into a vehicle that defended the interests of working people:

"No one can seriously propose that this party—which, in its politics and organisation and the social composition of its apparatus, is Tory in all but name—can be transformed into an instrument of working class struggle. The British Labour Party did not begin with Blair. It is a bourgeois party of more than a century's standing and a tried and tested instrument of British imperialism and its state machine. Whether led by Clement Attlee, James Callaghan or Jeremy Corbyn, its essence remains unaltered."

"From this standpoint, Corbyn's insistence in the aftermath of the election that party unity matters above all else is a declaration of solidarity with an organisation that has proven itself, time and again, to be the principal political opponent of socialism in Britain."

This assessment has been vindicated.

Anyone who thought that, in Corbyn, Labour at last had a leader who would transform the party into a force representing the working class must now be disabused of such illusions.

Instead, it has taken just three months for Labour under Corbyn to throw its support behind another imperialist onslaught, which is set to last for years. Far from his election signaling a final reckoning with the hated Blairites, it has ended up with the strengthening of these neo-conservative, pro-business warmongers.

The struggle against war and austerity is a struggle against capitalism and for socialism. That struggle can only proceed independently of and in opposition to the Labour Party.



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