

Corbyn's six months as UK Labour leader: A record of capitulation and betrayal

Robert Stevens
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After half a year in office, nothing remains of the platform Jeremy Corbyn put forward in his election campaign for the leadership of the British Labour Party. He won the leadership contest by appealing to mass opposition to war and austerity, gaining 60 percent of the vote and trouncing three candidates associated with the former right-wing leaders of the party, Tony Blair and Gordon Brown.

The most recent example of Corbyn's abandonment of all of his campaign promises was the pro-austerity pledge made earlier this month by his closest political ally, Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell. McDonnell's statements had more in common with the economic nostrums of Margaret Thatcher than even the thin gruel of mid-twentieth century Labour Party reformism.

On March 11, in advance of the March 16 budget of Conservative Party Chancellor George Osborne, McDonnell cast Labour as a party that could be trusted by the ruling elite to continue imposing austerity. Labour should "show how we can account for every penny in tax revenue raised and every penny spent," McDonnell declared.

To erase any doubt about the Corbyn leadership's commitment to permanent austerity for the working class, McDonnell went on to pledge that Labour would operate under a "fiscal credibility rule" and "commit to always eliminating the deficit on current spending in five years."

Speaking to the *Guardian*, he baldly declared, "Socialism is about planning, and planning is about making sure every penny is spent effectively." On March 12, six months to the day of Corbyn's election, McDonnell told the BBC, "Let me make it absolutely clear. I will be absolutely ruthless about how we manage our spending."

His statements on economic policy are in line with an unbroken chain of reversals by Corbyn of the pledges on which he was elected, carried out in the name of preserving "party unity"—that is, capitulating to the party's right wing on all fundamental issues.

Corbyn set the rightward course of his tenure immediately after his election by naming a shadow cabinet prominently featuring various Blairite warmongers, including Hilary

Benn as his foreign secretary. He stood down from the Stop the War Coalition, of which he was a founding member and chairman from 2011.

At Labour's annual conference later that month, Corbyn agreed to cancel his proposed debate on scrapping Britain's Trident nuclear submarine missile system after the UK's three biggest unions said they opposed ending Trident. Corbyn proceeded to junk other policies he has advocated for years, including a promise to renationalise the public utilities privatised by the Tories under Thatcher.

His response to the November 13 terror attacks in Paris was to cancel a speech he was to make the next day criticising the UK's foreign policy as one based on perpetual war. The Paris attacks were utilised by Tory Prime Minister David Cameron to push for a "yes" vote in parliament to intervene militarily in Syria. Just prior to the December 2 vote, Corbyn commissioned a survey of Labour Party members showing that 75 percent were opposed to air strikes in Syria.

Despite this backing, Corbyn authorised a free vote by Labour MPs, meaning they would not be censured or disciplined for supporting war. He did so knowing that a large contingent of Labour MPs would line up behind the Tory war resolution. In the event, 66 Labourites backed military action, giving the Tories the significant majority they politically required to start bombing Syria.

That same month, Corbyn and McDonnell issued a letter instructing local Labour councils to abide by the law and impose austerity cuts demanded by the government.

Within two weeks of assuming office, Corbyn had already abandoned his lifelong opposition, based on a programme of economic nationalism, to the European Union (EU). He has now pledged Labour to campaign for the UK to remain in the EU in the June 23 referendum called by Cameron.

The significance of these retreats was underscored within days of McDonnell's pre-budget utterances. Osborne's attacks on disability allowances, even as he gave further tax breaks to the rich, was used by the anti-EU wing of the Tory Party to stage a rebellion—including the resignation of Iain

Duncan Smith as secretary of state for work and pensions. Duncan Smith, who railed against a budget that was “deeply unfair” and criticised the government for targeting the poor because they “don’t necessarily vote for it and may never vote for it,” was able to posture as more sympathetic to the poor than Labour, adding fuel to the efforts of the ultra-right forces leading the “Leave” campaign ahead of the June referendum on EU membership to tap into working class anger over austerity and inequality.

With the Tories torn apart by factional conflict, widely despised and resting on a wafer thin majority, Corbyn and McDonnell are seeking to position Labour as trusted guardians of the interests of the British bourgeoisie should a general election be called. Their sole aim is to preserve social order, while carrying out the anti-working class policies required by the ruling elite, dressed up in the language of “equal sacrifice.”

There is a stark symmetry between the treacherous and cowardly course of Corbyn’s tenure and the betrayal carried out by the Syriza government in Greece, which similarly repudiated all of its campaign promises and imposed a European Union austerity package more savage than those that had preceded it. It is as if the fake-left Labour Party leader were following a script penned by his brother in arms Alexis Tsipras.

Notwithstanding the fact that Corbyn operates within a long-established social democratic instrument of the British bourgeoisie, while Tsipras heads a “left” bourgeois formation that rose to prominence due to the shipwreck of the social democratic PASOK, the two figures, both promoted by the entire fraternity of pseudo-left parties internationally, play identical roles.

They both serve as lightning rods for social discontent and political instruments for diverting it into harmless and impotent channels. These two strategic experiences of the European and international working class—first in Greece and now in Britain—demonstrate the utterly reactionary and anti-working class character of the pseudo-left.

Syriza’s betrayal was neither an aberration nor the result of mistakes or misconceptions on Tsipras’ part, as various pseudo-left organisations now claim. The treachery of Corbyn underscores that these experiences reveal the class character of all of the anti-Marxist, fake-left tendencies, speaking for privileged layers of the middle class—the Socialist Workers Party in Britain, the New Anti-capitalist Party in France, the Left Party in Germany, the International Socialist Organization in the US—which have integrated themselves into bourgeois and imperialist politics.

Their essential function in behalf of crisis-ridden capitalism is to preempt and prevent the emergence of an independent political movement of the working class for

socialism.

Corbyn’s evolution has completely vindicated the analysis made by the *World Socialist Web Site* and the Socialist Equality Party of Britain during his campaign for the leadership of the Labour Party. In August of 2015, prior to Corbyn’s election victory, we wrote:

“Above all else, what has been proved by the bitter experience made by Greek workers with Syriza is that it is impossible to defend anything—jobs, wages, essential social services—without breaking the stranglehold of the financial oligarchy over economic and political life. It demands the independent political mobilisation of the working class against the major corporations and banks and their government—which Greece has also proved will stop at nothing to safeguard their interests, even if this means destroying a country and plunging millions into abject poverty.”

“Corbyn offers no such struggle. Should he win the leadership of the Labour Party, or become the focus of a political regroupment of the pseudo-left, he will betray all of those who voted for him just as surely as did Alexis Tsipras of Syriza.”

The claim of the pseudo-left that Corbyn’s election showed it was possible through pressure from below to transform the Labour Party into an instrument of working class struggle and progressive change lies in tatters. The turn is to the building of the Socialist Equality Party in Britain and the International Committee of the Fourth International around the world to arm the emerging mass struggles of the working class with a revolutionary socialist and internationalist programme. This is inseparable from the struggle to expose and defeat the pseudo-left defenders of the capitalist status quo.



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