

Paul Mason launches campaign for UK Labour to pledge itself to nuclear war

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Paul Mason was, until recently, economics editor of Channel Four News and is a regular columnist in the *Guardian*. He used the newspaper to launch a video April 6 entitled, “The leftwing case for nuclear weapons.”

Mason is widely regarded in what passes for the “liberal left” as one of their own. He brings with him the political cachet of a long stint in the now defunct Workers Power tendency, an anti-Trotskyist group advocating the formation of a Fifth International. The organisation liquidated itself in September 2015, leaving a farewell note declaring its support for “key elements of Jeremy Corbyn’s programme” and urging all socialists to “join the Labour Party.”

His past membership of this outfit provides Mason with the politically useful ability (for the bourgeoisie) to pose as a former “Marxist” who has seen the error of his ways, along with open channels to various pseudo-left groups. The *Green Left Weekly*, for example, recently wrote of his “seriousness about economic theory and a respect for Marxism... Mason is on the progressive side of the barricades.”

Mason’s latest political utterances are therefore a devastating political exposure of this entire fetid milieu. Like this entire political crowd, he is an apologist for Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn and was recently appointed as an adviser to Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell. It is in this capacity that he frames his litany in praise of nuclear weapons, NATO and military aggression against Russia.

He begins his video with the bald statement, referring to Britain’s nuclear submarine missile programme, “I think Labour should vote to keep Trident.” His first argument is a pragmatic one that will be close to the heart of Corbyn and all his hangers-on. “If Jeremy Corbyn can bury this issue, Labour can in 2020 form

the first radical left-wing government in a major country,” he declares.

Corbyn is, it should be remembered, formally opposed to Trident, a member of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and a founder of the Stop the War Coalition. But Mason (who is himself still a member of the Stop the War Coalition!) knows this counts for very little when compared to Corbyn’s overarching loyalty to the Labour Party and his proven readiness to junk any and all past political positions when this is demanded of him.

Mason is not calling for a mere “tactical” retreat in order to assume office. He is positively advocating for Britain to retain and even strengthen a nuclear and conventional force directed against what he defines as the “rapidly evolving threats” of “Terrorism” and “A newly aggressive and unpredictable Russia.”

He argues that nuclear weapons are a more cost and militarily effective policy than a Conservative defence policy based upon expeditionary warfare that is “dangerously incoherent” and has failed in Afghanistan and Iraq.

He proposes to concentrate all of the UK’s conventional forces in Europe—not just its existing troops, but all the manpower and weaponry “we can afford once we’ve paid for the nuclear deterrent...”

He then urges Labour to adopt a policy of specifically threatening nuclear war:

“Instead of the Cold War policy of keeping Russia guessing about how the nuclear deterrent will be used we need to communicate a clear set of conditions for using it. That’s what President Obama did in his nuclear posture review in 2010.”

In an accompanying essay on his blog site, Mason makes some aspects of his proposed policy clearer still. He urges a “new NATO Strategic Concept” that

includes support for an enhanced “ballistic missile defence” system positioned in the East European and Baltic states bordering Russia and “new, permanent *non-aggressive* [!] deployments to NATO forces in Europe.”

To portray this in the nicest possible democratic terms, he writes of “embedding the legitimacy of defence and security forces deeper into society.” In reality, this means the militarisation of society, rather than the democratisation of the military—as is made clear by his call to “Expand domestic anti-terror capabilities, with advance legal and operational permissions for UK armed forces to deploy in case of a Paris-style marauding attack.”

For those opposed to such a naked embrace of militarism, Mason has nothing but contempt. In the language of Cold War anti-Communism, he complains, “Corbyn’s rise has attracted back into the Labour Party people who think, on principle, there should be no military action at all; others who believe that commitment to national defence is a betrayal of proletarian internationalism; others who think the sun shines out of Vladimir Putin’s posterior. These are all perfectly defensible positions to hold: it’s just that it’s unwise to try and govern Britain as a capitalist state if you hold them.”

Mason appropriately concludes his argument in favour of capitalist realpolitik by citing Syriza in Greece:

“When faced with the possibility of forming the first left government in modern history, Syriza leader Alexis Tsipras not only faced down the anti-militarists and pro-Putinists in his own party but persuaded them to formally end the party’s historic opposition to NATO. The logic was clear: a true radical left government is such a huge departure from the neoliberal consensus that it must focus on one thing — the economic transformation of the country... a government prepared to make significant inroads into the power and wealth of the elite needs to demonstrate it can safeguard national security.”

What can be added to such a devastating self-indictment? More than half a year after it finally betrayed the anti-austerity promises on which it was elected and signed up to cuts more devastating than even its predecessors had agreed, Mason holds up Syriza as a political role model. This is because his

remarks are aimed at the Corbyn wing of the Labour bureaucracy as well as its pseudo-left backers—for whom Syriza’s ability to stake out a position in the corridors of governmental power is what counts.

“Tell me what you think. I’m trying to start a debate here, or rather open out the debate that’s going on prior to Labour’s defence review,” he states at the end of his blog.

Mason himself paints a vivid picture of the privileged, complacent and politically reactionary circles for whom he speaks in a diary written for the April 14 edition of the pro-Labour *New Statesman*.

As part of a “gruelling European tour to promote my book *PostCapitalism*,” he explains how, on Tuesday in Berlin, he delivers the annual Democracy Lecture at the Haus der Kulturen der Welt and then attends “a reception with numerous left, liberal and trade union people.” Here “the discussion is doomy: German social democracy is dying a death. As the nationalist right rises, the concern is that the vast liberal-left salariat, with their careful recycling habits and moral opposition to GDP growth, just won’t find the will to resist.”

On Wednesday, he rails against critics of his pro-nuclear statements: “There’s a segment of the left who just don’t realise how close we are to a 1930s-style meltdown, in which it’s not a question of slogans but of wielding political power.”

On Monday, at a Milan book launch where, “I argue for ‘revolutionary reformism’... There’s great interest in Corbyn, Bernie Sanders, Pablo Iglesias and Yanis Varoufakis...”

Mason’s political mission is to urge that the “left,” this broad swathe of bourgeois forces including social democratic parties, the trade union bureaucracy and groupings such as Podemos in Spain, must prepare to meet the responsibilities of government at a time of acute crisis for world capitalism. Their task is not to challenge austerity and war, but to suppress the opposition this will generate from an increasingly restive and hostile working population.

Paul Mason’s video can be viewed here.



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