

Jeremy Corbyn appeals to UK Labour's Blairite wing for unity

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There does not appear to be any limit to what Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn will do in order to appease his right-wing opponents.

On Saturday, he agreed to give the keynote address to the annual conference of Progress, the Blairite faction of the party whose leading members have spent the past seven months seeking his removal.

Progress was set up by former Labour prime minister Tony Blair's right-hand man, Peter Mandelson, and is funded by his millionaire friend, Lord David Sainsbury. This is truly a marriage made in heaven, with Mandelson infamous for his declaration that Labour was "intensely relaxed about people getting filthy rich" and Sainsbury for being worth £1.3 billion net.

Progress is generally reviled by what passes for Labour's "left". In 2012, the general secretary of the GMB union, Paul Kenny, led calls at the party conference for Progress to be "effectively" outlawed. One year later, Unite union leader Len McCluskey accused Progress of manipulating the selection process for Labour parliamentary candidates. The group backed Liz Kendall, who was trounced by Corbyn and finished last, in last year's Labour leadership contest.

Its leading figures read like a who's who of Corbyn's most bitter critics, including Alan Milburn, who said Labour had a "death wish" if it elected him; Caroline Flint, who said his leadership would "destroy" the party and described Labour as being "in denial" for not listening to concerns about immigration; Rachel Reeves, who accused him of a "dereliction of duty" for opposing the renewal of the Trident nuclear programme; John Woodcock, who called him a "f***ing disaster"; Chukka Umunna, who said in response to Corbyn's opposition to war against Syria, "If you cannot keep the people safe, in their eyes that is a disqualification from office"; and Tristram Hunt, who

told a Progress meeting that "moderate" Labour MPs felt like "the inside of a pig's head" after Corbyn's victory—in reference to the alleged sexual practices of Prime Minister David Cameron while at University. He said to his fellow thinkers, "Don't let ever let some fly-by-night Trot say we aren't Labour."

Speaking in January, in response to resignations from the Labour cabinet, Corbyn's shadow chancellor, John McDonnell, said, "They do all come from a narrow right-wing clique within the Labour Party, based around the organisation Progress largely. I don't think they've ever accepted Jeremy's mandate really."

Alison McGovern MP, the chair of Progress, resigned as a member of his review into child poverty in protest at his comments, accusing Corbyn and McDonnell of presiding over a "messy and divisive reshuffle." It was fitting, therefore, that Corbyn was introduced by McGovern as he abased himself before the Blairites.

As so often in the past, his speech combined a few platitudes about fighting poverty and the rest, with appeals for "unity" against the Conservatives.

Asked about McDonnell's comments, Corbyn then went into full "turn the other cheek" mode. "I don't do any kind of personal abuse," he said. "I want to see our party even bigger and even stronger but above all united in the fundamental determination to challenge the economic strategy of this government. Our party is big, our party has wonderful traditions, our party has people with unbelievable levels of brilliance. Working together they achieve a great deal. A democratic policy making process that everyone feels part of and can come into is a very important step forward on this."

The central theme of the party was "inclusive politics", he concluded.

For good measure, in response to a hostile question from the audience, he declared, "There's a huge private

sector, there's always going to be, and we're going to have to work with that.”

The response to Corbyn's kow-towing was not long in coming. The right-wing Tory *Daily Mail* cited one of those present describing his speech as the “same, rambling, boring, 1980s Leftie rhetoric,” while Peter Kyle MP declared baldly, “I won't be bullied into uniting around a losing leader.”

Another Labour MP commented, “Peter is only saying what the rest of us think.”

Corbyn is a coward not a saint. His lofty pretence at being above personal insults would carry more weight if it was not routinely employed to justify his latest political capitulation—whether granting a free vote to the Blairites on Syrian military intervention or McDonnell's pledge that Labour will operate under a “fiscal credibility rule” and “commit to always eliminating the deficit on current spending in five years.”

Corbyn's appearance before Progress, it should be noted, occurred one day after his participation in a “Labour In” rally campaigning for a Remain vote in the June 23 referendum on UK membership of the European Union (EU). He is pledged to handing over a large youth vote to the Remain campaign in defence of the big business, pro-austerity pro-war EU—describing this as vital to protect workers' rights and internationalism.

None of this will give pause to Corbyn's cheerleaders in the pseudo-left groups. Quite the reverse. In an exceedingly rare initiative, the *Socialist Worker*, the newspaper of the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), which usually only posts online on Tuesdays in line with its print edition, put out an “exclusive” report on Saturday, entitled, “Corbyn and McDonnell challenge the Labour right.”

It began with the assertion that “Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn and shadow chancellor John McDonnell have hit back against their critics from the right of the party.” But this hitting back consisted solely of Corbyn stating that Labour was “getting back to the business of winning elections” and McDonnell adding, “We won elections last week.”

The main aim of this political fiction was to frame an apology for Corbyn speaking “at the conference of right wing Labour faction Progress” later that afternoon. The article continued:

“He told Socialist Worker he was going to the conference to ‘show that as the elected leader of the party I'm prepared to go anywhere to make my case. I was invited and I'll go there and make my pitch as to what I think the Labour movement should be about’.”

Without comment, the *Socialist Worker* reported, “McDonnell also said that the Labour leadership should use ‘whatever platform we can.’ But he added that he and Corbyn were ‘changing the Labour Party not just into an electoral machine, but also a social movement’.”

This meaningless phrase was music to the ears of the SWP, which is ever anxious to portray Corbyn as the potential leader of a mass oppositional movement to capitalism. It can be offered up as “proof” that he can be pushed to the left by what another article lists as “more solidarity with the junior doctors,” a campaign of defiance against the new anti-union laws,” “teachers' strikes to defend education,” “resistance against racism,” “pressure to force Cameron to let in more refugees,” “a fightback in the workplaces and the streets,” etc., etc.—none of which has anything to do with the political reality of what Labour under Corbyn is doing, or ever will do.



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