

UK: Pro-Corbyn Momentum Youth and Students hold founding conference

Joe Mount
11 June 2016

Over 200 young people attended the Momentum Youth and Students (MYS) founding conference in Manchester on Sunday, June 5. Momentum is an activist network supporting the Labour Party that emerged out of the campaign for the election of Jeremy Corbyn to the Labour leadership last September.

Over 150,000 people joined Labour last year, including many youth, based on illusions in Corbyn's ability to shift the political axis of this right-wing party of big business.

The meeting was addressed by a collection of Labour "lefts" and trade union functionaries, who also touted the supposed progressive credentials of the Labour Party. The main speaker was Rebecca Long-Bailey, shadow treasury minister in Corbyn's shadow cabinet and MP for the deprived North West England constituency of Salford and Eccles. She boasted, "A movement has been created and great things have and will come from it. We won't just tinker around with the consensus. We're a party that would change your life if you voted for it."

The aim of MYS is to try and recruit youth into the Labour Party and trade unions, with workshops held on organising young workers and defending the National Health Service (NHS) via the trade unions. Of Britain's dwindling trade union membership, less than one in 10 are aged 24 or under. These organisations offer no way forward for youth and have systematically isolated and demobilised any working class opposition to the austerity agenda of successive Labour and Conservative Party governments.

Carline Hill, chair of the Labour Party youth wing, also spoke. "It is exciting to speak to hundreds of people that are passionate about fighting injustice, ready to campaign and organise on issues that matter to them. Momentum Youth and Students is new, it's autonomous, it's ready to act--and it is exactly what the Labour movement should be encouraging," she wrote on the *LabourList* blog that

day.

Hill speaks for the "left" faction of the Labour Party that recognises the urgent need to try to resuscitate Labour and the trade unions. These anti-worker husks are to be revivified with a gloss of "autonomous" paint and an injection of identity politics.

With unintended irony, she said, "Young Labour is changing: we support Jeremy Corbyn and we are not just a career conveyor belt."

It is a fact of British political life that the Labour youth and student organisations and the National Union of Students (NUS) are training grounds for the next generation of Labour apparatchiks. Momentum is no different.

The other speakers were Rhea Wolfson, a Labour National Executive Committee candidate and trade union functionary, and Hannah McCarthy, the campaigns officer at Manchester Students' Union. Both claimed to oppose the hike in tuition fees, which are set to rise beyond the current £9,000 annual rate due to the Tories' higher education privatisation agenda. This year also saw the raising of interest repayment rates and the scrapping of bursaries covering the living expenses of the poorest students.

Hill lauded Labour's education petition, saying, "I am delighted that Labour have launched a campaign highlighting the cost to students and fighting the government proposals.

"Jeremy Corbyn told MPs in the House of Commons that the government will get no support from our benches for a rise in fees. Labour is the last defence for young people who want to access the higher education that is demanded from young workers in so many industries these days."

In reality, Corbyn has acquiesced to the government's drive to convert primary and secondary schools to privately run academies. Under his leadership, Labour

ignored his pledges to remove fees and reinstate grants--with a member of his shadow cabinet stating these would not “automatically become policy.”

Much of the conference was devoted to a discussion of identity politics, with special caucuses addressing campaigns advancing the interests of people who are disabled, women, black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME,) or lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT).

Identity politics is a means of obscuring the critical class issues facing youth and promoting the interests of a narrow layer of affluent careerists represented by pseudo-left organisations such as Momentum. It is advanced by those seeking to acquire greater influence or positions in corporations, colleges and universities, the higher-paying professions, the trade unions and in government and state institutions.

Corbyn won the sympathy of many young people for his professed anti-establishment views and progressive rhetoric. MYS aims to exploit this mood to rally young people into the Labour Party, which faces a terminal crisis following its wipeout in last year’s general election. It claims that Labour can be reformed “into a more open, member-led party, with socialist policies and the collective will to implement them in government.”

MYS argues that Corbyn’s election as party leader is the means to this end, provided sufficient mass pressure can be applied.

The Labour Party cannot be reformed in the interests of the working class. It has been, since its inception, a bourgeois party devoted to the defence of British capitalism.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* noted on Momentum’s launch last October, “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, 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.”

A Corbyn-led Labour Party does not represent a political alternative to the other parties of the corporate and financial elite. His track record as leader of the opposition is one of facilitating the Tory government’s reactionary agenda and complete capitulation before the right wing of his own party. His programme is not socialist, but stands for the defence of British capitalism.

Aiding Momentum in its efforts to sow illusions in

Corbyn and Labour are Britain’s various pseudo-left groups. The Alliance for Workers’ Liberty praises the “vibrant Momentum movement” and enthusiastically participated in the conference claiming it would help “transform both Labour’s youth structures and the party more generally.”

They call for a “democratic MYS”, adding, “we will be advocating the class-struggle socialist politics we believe necessary to transform the labour movement to fight effectively for a workers’ government and a socialist alternative to capitalism.”

By “labour movement” is meant the rotten Labour Party and trade union bureaucracies. A “workers’ government” is their name for a Corbyn-led Labour government. And their “socialist alternative” is nothing of the sort.

The pseudo-left work to prevent young people from making a political break with the old organisations and the nationalist, pro-capitalist programme on which they are based. They are tied by a thousand strings to the union bureaucracy and occupy well-paid senior positions within it. They provide the labour bureaucracy with a fake-socialist cover in order to oppose any genuine revolutionary alternative to the existing order.

Corbyn is the undeserving beneficiary of the mass social opposition of workers and young people that currently finds no expression in the Labour Party, or any part of the political establishment. Youth are bearing the brunt of the crisis of capitalism. The disastrous social conditions facing youth, including unemployment, insecure jobs, student debt, poor-quality education and cuts to public services, along with the growing danger of war, are creating a mass political radicalisation among young people, which can only be advanced by turning to the international working class on the basis of a socialist programme.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact