

Union boss offers to broker “peace” deal with Labour’s anti-Corbyn plotters

Robert Stevens
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A frantic last-ditch effort is being made to force the resignation of UK Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn so as to avoid a fresh leadership contest.

Working with the UK and US intelligence agencies, the right-wing core of the parliamentary party grouped around former Prime Minister Tony Blair moved against Corbyn immediately following the June 23 referendum vote for the UK to leave the European Union (EU).

The Blairites led a campaign of resignations from Corbyn’s shadow cabinet—attempting to make it impossible for him to function as an opposition to the ruling Conservatives. The campaign reached its crescendo when an overwhelming 170 MPs delivered a vote of no-confidence in Corbyn. Only 40 voted for him.

A leadership challenge was threatened, but posed the likelihood that Corbyn would win the contest, which would be determined by a popular vote.

To avoid this, deputy party leader Tom Watson intervened in an attempt to get Corbyn to resign in a “negotiated settlement.” More than a week after the operation began, Corbyn, who has the support of hundreds of thousands of Labour members and supporters, has so far refused to stand down.

With their initial failure to remove Corbyn, the Blairites planned to put up a challenger to his leadership, with former shadow cabinet ministers Angela Eagle and Owen Smith mooted as contenders. On Monday, Eagle said Corbyn had to resign and that she would stand “if something isn’t done soon.”

Over the weekend Len McCluskey, the leader of the UK’s largest trade union and Labour’s biggest donor, Unite, intervened to call for an accommodation between the Corbyn and Blairite factions of the party to avoid a split.

McCluskey speaks as a defender of the fundamental interests of British imperialism. In an article last week for the *Guardian*, he explained, “Labour mutineers are betraying our national interest.”

He made clear that the fear of the union bureaucracy is that a Labour split would mean there is no political instrument for preventing the development of an independent movement of the working class. “Unite has been warning about working-class alienation from politics all this century,” he wrote. “There was the plummeting turnout in 2001 general election, the further Labour core vote losses in 2005 and 2010, followed by the growth of Ukip [UK Independence Party]. How many canaries did this coalmine need?”

Corbyn was “better placed to address this crisis in Labour’s heartlands than any of his critics,” McCluskey insisted, threatening them with deselection.

On Sunday, McCluskey upped the ante when, speaking on the BBC’s “Andrew Marr Show,” he stated that Blairites were organising a “coup” and a “political lynching.”

The majority of Labour MPs had been “seduced by sinister forces,” he said. “If the BBC want to do an investigatory programme of a company called Portland then feel free to do so,” he went on, adding, “This is a PR company with strong links to Tony Blair, right-wing Labour MPs, who have been critically involved in this orchestrated coup.”

Portland Communication is a public relations company set up by Tim Allan, a former adviser to Blair and director of communications at Rupert Murdoch’s BskyB. Other Murdoch figures include Tony Ball, former CEO of BskyB and Fox, and George Pascoe-Watson, former political editor of the *Sun*.

Calling on potential leadership contenders to “desist,” McCluskey said the trade unions were “professional

negotiators” and could “broker a peace—with Jeremy as our leader and the genuine concerns of the PLP, we can bring people together.”

On Wednesday, the long-delayed findings of the inquiry by Sir John Chilcot into the 2003 Iraq War will be published. The inquiry has no legal powers, and was specifically constrained from determining the legality of this pre-emptive invasion, based on a tissue of lies about Iraq having “weapons of mass destruction.” But it is expected to make criticisms of Blair and other leading Labour MPs for their role commissioning and justifying this act of aggression. The favoured contender against Corbyn, Angela Eagle, voted for the invasion of Iraq.

The imminent release of Chilcot’s report underscores that Blair and his cohorts, including figures central to the coup against Corbyn (Hilary Benn, Jack Straw, David Blunkett and Alistair Campbell) are unindicted war criminals, despised by millions of people. Prior to the coup moves there had been speculation that Corbyn would use its publication to officially apologise for the Iraq War on behalf of the Labour Party and even back calls for Blair to be investigated for war crimes.

Whether his silence on this issue now is part of McCluskey’s “negotiations” remains to be seen. Nonetheless, the right-wing media are apoplectic that Corbyn remains in place and are making increasingly hysterical calls for his removal.

Times journalist Robert Harris, fearful that the majority of the 60,000 people who have joined Labour since the coup began support Corbyn, called on his readers to join Labour to “help topple Corbyn.” His colleague, Oliver Kamm, tweeted Sunday, “Now we must go in & overthrow him.”

David Millward, in the *Daily Telegraph*, called on Corbyn to emulate US Senator Bernie Sanders. The former Democratic Party contender has traded in the support he won from millions of workers and youth by presenting himself as a socialist—denouncing the “billionaire class” and calling for a “political revolution”—to back the right-wing Democratic presidential nominee Hillary Clinton. Millward wrote, “Rather deftly, Bernie Sanders has somehow managed to combine defiance with admitting that the game is up.... Bernie Sanders is ready to deliver his vast army of supporters to the greater good of the democratic left in the US, putting aside any personal ambition. It is an

example that Jeremy Corbyn would do well to follow.”

The Blairites view Corbyn’s removal as imperative so as to suitably refashion the Labour Party as a government or part of a coalition that can overturn the result of the referendum and ensure British membership of the EU. This must be done while imposing further savage austerity measures and dealing ruthlessly with the social and political opposition this would provoke.

Corbyn’s election as Labour leader was reflective of a marked shift to the left by workers and young people. This is backed up by polling statistics showing that about half of all referendum voters, whether Leave (51 percent) or Remain (49 percent), felt capitalism was a force for ill rather than a force for good.

The latest Social Attitudes survey, published last week, testifies to the depth of such anti-capitalist sentiment and the growing chasm between the working class and ruling elite. The NatCen Social Research, which collected its data last summer and autumn, found that more than three out of four people thought the class divide was “very” or “fairly” wide, and that they had very little chance of social mobility.

The *Financial Times* noted, “Exactly the same proportion—60 percent—identify themselves as working class as did in 1983, a year before a bitter miners’ strike which heralded a wave of deindustrialisation that wiped out many traditional working class jobs.”

Support for higher taxation and public spending was also rising, the report noted, with a majority opposing welfare cuts.



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