UK Guardian's Owen Jones offers apologia for anti-Corbyn coup

Julie Hyland
16 July 2016

Owen Jones, the "left" author and journalist, finally gave his take on the right-wing putsch against Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn in his *Guardian* column Thursday.

In "Labour's right is a shambles—but Corbyn has questions to answer too," Jones portrays himself as even-handed, someone prepared to pose the difficult questions that few on the Labour "left" are otherwise willing to acknowledge. But his pose of impartiality is a fraud.

Jones downplays the origins of Labour's crisis in the efforts by the Blairite right-wing in the Parliamentary Labour Party (PLP) to overturn the result of last September's leadership election, won by Corbyn with an overwhelming majority on an anti-austerity, anti-militarist agenda. While "[s]ome on Labour's hard right who launched the coup against Corbyn are opposed to his politics full stop," Jones says, there are many other MPs, "including those on the left," who "simply worry Labour would be defeated badly" at a general election.

This is the same spurious justification utilised by the coup plotters. Jones' claims are in marked contrast to the warning he made, on August 4, 2015, just one month before the leadership result. Should Corbyn win the election, he wrote at the time, he would "come under attack from the media establishment, the Tories and much of his own party. That's because he presents a dangerous threat to the post-Thatcher political consensus."

Such would be the "firestorm" unleashed that Corbyn could face a potential "strike" by the shadow cabinet and Labour MPs, and "an attempt by some members of the PLP to stage an instant coup," he continued.

Now that this has happened, Jones is at pains to deny it.

If the result is a "shambles," this is only because the right have been desperate to avoid another leadership contest—knowing they will almost certainly be defeated—and so have resorted to threats, mass resignations, bars on members voting, the suspension of constituency Labour Party (CLP) meetings and numerous other instances of gerrymandering.

Jones goes so far as to take issue with those pointing out that Corbyn's "detractors are motivated by opposition to his politics," especially their argument that in the "battle between right and left" people must "pick an unambiguous position; anything else is capitulation and betrayal."

As for his criticism of the right, Jones' complaint is not with the coup per se, but rather its timing. Why, he asks, didn't the right wait "two or three weeks and launch a stalking-horse challenge instead of shutting down the workings of the official opposition in the midst of Britain's greatest crisis since 1945?"

This is just not good enough, he continues: "…if you can't mount an internal party coup effectively or competently, what hope of taking on the Tories?"

There is in fact nothing accidental about the timing of this putsch. While the right-wing has long wanted to overturn the leadership result, the trigger for their uprising is precisely the "greatest crisis since 1945" that has been caused by the seismic shock of the vote to leave the European Union (EU) in the June 23 referendum.

The Leave vote has accelerated the global financial crisis and the disintegration of the EU, presenting a direct threat to the strategic interests of the ruling elite in Britain and the United States—especially as regards NATO and its military provocations against Russia. It is this that is behind the decision of the highest echelons of the British state, in conjunction with the US State Department and the CIA, to mobilise their right-wing assets in the PLP. The aim is to expunge any trace of oppositional sentiment to austerity and war and reposition the Labour Party as the primary pro-EU, anti-Brexit party—around which a supposedly "progressive" and "globally oriented" alliance can coalesce.

The professional purveyors of identity politics and

© World Socialist Web Site

postmodernism at the *Guardian* have functioned as the mouthpiece for this operation. Now Jones has been activated to play the role of Pontius Pilate and provide legitimacy to a right-wing political crucifixion.

Jones played a lead role in advocating a Remain vote in the referendum, portraying the EU as a "progressive" alternative to the nationalism and xenophobia of the official Leave campaign. He was the main speaker at meetings organised by Another Europe is Possible, an adjunct of the Democracy in Europe Movement 2015 (DiEM25), founded by Yanis Varoufakis, the former finance minister in Greece's Syriza government. Jones' central argument in favour of the EU was in fact that a future Corbyn-led Labour government would enable its reform and guarantee workers' rights.

In reality, the support extended by Jones, Varoufakis and the Pabloite pseudo-left for the EU has nothing to do with concern for working people. It expresses the social interests of a section of the upper middle class who regard the EU as the most effective means of defending their class privileges through its enforcement of austerity and militarism.

Jones was prepared to bask in Corbyn's reflected glory so long as this served his own ends. But his support was always conditional on the movement that has developed around Corbyn not jeopardising the status quo by leading to a genuine, socialist opposition to the Labour Party and the capitalist system it defends.

He makes this clear when writing in regard to September's leadership contest, "The original expectation was that Corbyn would shift Labour's political direction without winning—much as Bernie Sanders has with the Democrats in the US—and lay the foundations for a leadership challenge from Labour's left wing new intake in a few years' time."

Jones hoped that Corbyn would "do a Sanders," i.e., use the groundswell of support he had built up on an ostensibly "socialist" platform only in order to deliver it behind a reactionary party of the state and its real leadership of arch-warmongers.

Jones has previously made clear that he did not expect Corbyn to win the leadership contest and didn't even "want a 'left' candidate" in the race. Writing on August 29, 2015, he described how Corbyn's success at getting on the leadership ballot filled him with "nervousness and trepidation." Though he felt "pretty much duty-bound to be helpful" to Corbyn's bid, he expected he would come third.

No one could have "predicted this huge grassroots movement," that helped propel Corbyn into the leadership, he wrote.

Even at this early stage, Jones was advising Corbyn that it would not be enough to focus on issues that affect those at the bottom of society. A new Labour leader must make a pitch to the self-employed people and entrepreneurs, building a grassroots movement on positivity and inclusivity, love-bombing those who disagree, and certainly not attacking others as Red Tories and the like.

A prospective Corbyn-led government had to pick its battles, he warned, including recognising that the merits of NATO membership were so far from the mainstream of political debate, it would be pointless and self-defeating to pick a fight over it.

Just four days after the referendum, on June 27, Jones wrote bewailing the "national crisis" and "political paralysis" caused by the Leave vote and confessed that far more was involved than merely the "expectation" that Corbyn would lose the leadership race. Rather, he writes, "There was a plan that, along with others, I subscribed to. The general election was scheduled to take place in 2020; two years or so before, a younger left-wing member of the new intake would take Jeremy Corbyn's place."

Learning from the "inevitable mistakes of the Labour leadership", they would "present a fresh message that could resonate with a wider section of the country."

Who are the "others" that subscribed to this plan? Jones doesn't say. However, he continues, "We have run out of road. A general election is now inevitable, whether it be later in the year or the spring of next year."

The implication is clear. Corbyn has to go and Jones will provide the rationale for the right-wing plotters seeking this end.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site