

Labour and Liberal Democrats plot new party in event of Corbyn's re-election

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The *Mail On Sunday* reported that a breakaway party is being discussed in secret, involving up to 150 Labour MPs, who would align themselves with the Liberal Democrats, with just eight MPs, in a pro-European party of the “progressive centre”.

The *Mail* states that the name “Continuity Labour” is under discussion, involving Stephen Kinnock, the son of former Labour leader Neil Kinnock and MP for Aberavon, and former Lib Dem leader Paddy Ashdown. Ashdown is also said to have the support of present Lib Dem party leader, Tim Farron. The plan would be put into operation in the event that Jeremy Corbyn succeeds in being re-elected as party leader in the contest triggered by the no-confidence motion endorsed by 170 Labour MPs and triggered by a tight-knit group of coup plotters, of which Kinnock junior is a leading figure.

Kinnock has allegedly met with Ashdown in secret talks about “safeguarding the interests of our country.”

Glen Owen reports that Kinnock is “tipped to head” any new formation and that “MPs are poised to make approaches to Labour’s top 50 donors to fund the new party if the Labour leader fends off challenges from Angela Eagle and Owen Smith.”

Lord Ashdown did not deny that the talks have taken place, but said the discussions did not include “the formation of a new centre-ground party.”

The *Mail* cites a “senior source” stating, “If Corbyn wins, the party is finished in its current form. There are at least 150 MPs who would break away, and many are already discreetly sounding out donors about what they are calling ‘Continuity Labour’. Stephen is central to the plans. The plotters have calculated that they could start a new party, debt-free, while leaving Corbyn’s rump mired in financial problems.”

Kinnock strenuously denied the report, but there is no

reason to believe him.

There has been widespread speculation and even calls for such a move for weeks. Janan Ganesh wrote July 4 in the *Financial Times*, for example, “By all means, Labour MPs must try to remove Mr Corbyn and replace him with a plausible prime minister. But if the mission fails, political logic and the national interest both argue for a breakaway...”

He and others have pointed to the example of 1981, when Labour’s Roy Jenkins, David Owen, Shirley Williams and Bill Rodgers formed the breakaway Social Democratic Party (SDP) and then later an alliance with the Liberals that itself gave birth to the present-day Liberal Democrats. Their actions helped ensure that Margaret Thatcher’s Tory government was re-elected in 1983.

It is a measure of Labour’s degeneration and its incessant shift to the right that this time the talk is not of a “Gang of 4”, but a “Gang of 150”.

The *Mail*’s report, moreover, follows a series of open statements on the possible formation of a new party by the Lib Dems—who have less to hide and more to gain than the Labour plotters by revealing the truth.

Ashdown announced July 3 his plans for a cross-party “progressive platform”, aimed at bringing together politicians from different parties to back a grassroots organisation dedicated to advancing a pro-EU line in the aftermath of the June 23 referendum vote to leave the EU. “It would only be a start,” he told the *Times*. “But with a general election perhaps soon, who knows where a start could lead...”

On June 29, Farron told the BBC, “Amongst the things that I think we’ve got out of the referendum is that we’ve discovered, lots of us, who have worked across party boundaries, that we’ve enjoyed doing so. ... We shouldn’t put any construct or constraint on what

might happen next. People could come to us, they could set up another party, who knows.”

The *Guardian*, the main backer of the Labour coup plotters, gave Farron a prominent place in its July 18 edition, one day after the publication of the *Mail On Sunday* piece, to state that he was looking “seriously at a credible new party or alliance to oppose the Tories, saying he would ‘write nothing off’.”

Ashdown is someone who has pursued the possibility of unification with Labour in one form or another for most of his political career. He supported the Lib-Lab pact in 1977 that kept James Callaghan’s Labour government in office for two years—as it imposed International Monetary Fund-dictated economic policies against the working class and paved the way for the election of Thatcher in 1979. He supported the SDP-Liberal Party alliance, and then became party leader following the 1988 merger to form the Liberal Democrats. He was elected party leader in 1989.

Most significantly, Ashdown engaged in secret talks with Tony Blair between 1994 and 1999 on what he referred to as “the project”. The ultimate aim of both was for a political merger of the two parties, possibly preceded by a coalition.

Blair, who was heavily influenced by Roy Jenkins, declared to the first Labour congress after the 1997 general election that the split with the Liberals that led to the formation of the Labour Party had been a historic mistake. It was a view that was evidenced by his earlier success in 1995 in securing the ditching of Clause Four (regarded as the “Socialist Clause”) of the party’s constitution, which pledged Labour:

“To secure for the workers by hand or by brain the full fruits of their industry and the most equitable distribution thereof that may be possible upon the basis of the common ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange and the best obtainable system of popular administration and control of each industry or service.”

However, Labour’s landslide victory prevented his and Ashdown’s plans reaching fruition, as he could not convince his own inner circle that a merger was either now necessary or acceptable to Labour members. A Joint Cabinet Committee was briefly formed between the two parties and Ashdown offered a post on it, which he declined.

Blair’s acolytes are now contemplating whether this

long desired shift has now been made both possible and necessary in order to engineer a sharp political shift to the right. Their target is not merely Corbyn, but to reinforce and make permanent the exclusion of the working class from political life that has been the real abiding “project” of the Blairites for more than two decades.

Those who are busy counselling against these plans—Corbyn with his constant appeal for “unity”, Len McCluskey of the Unite trade union, and even leadership challenger Owen Smith, all fear that such a move would destroy what little political credibility Labour retains as an alternative to the Tories and a vehicle for opposing capitalism’s worst excesses. But with reports that Corbyn would be re-elected even if the right fielded a single candidate, and Labour MPs in open revolt, as evidenced in the 140 that on Monday supported the renewal of the Trident nuclear weapon system, a permanent split is possible.



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