

# UK Labour Party coup plotters make public their split preparations

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Leading Labour Party figures involved in the right-wing coup against party leader Jeremy Corbyn told the *Daily Telegraph* this weekend they plan to organise a “semi-split” if he wins the September leadership contest.

The coup involves the vast bulk of the Parliamentary Labour Party (PLP), which precipitated the leadership contest by first attempting to force Corbyn to resign by resignations from his Shadow Cabinet. Some 172 Labour MPs then voted against Corbyn in a no-confidence motion, with Corbyn winning the support of just 40.

Corbyn has mass support among the party’s members, however, with polls showing he stands to defeat the PLP’s “unity” challenger for the leadership, Owen Smith, by more than 20 percentage points. Smith was put forward as the “clean skin” by the Blairite coup plotters since their previous choice, Angela Eagle, was too tarnished by her support for Blair’s greatest crime, the 2003 invasion and occupation of Iraq.

The Conservative-supporting *Telegraph* states, “Senior Labour rebels are so convinced that Jeremy Corbyn will win the leadership contest that they are planning to elect their own leader and launch a legal challenge for the party’s name.”

The newspaper continues, “The move would see them create their own shadow cabinet and even elect a leader within Parliament. ... They would also approach John Bercow, the Commons Speaker, and argue that having more MPs than Mr Corbyn means they should be named the official opposition.”

The *Telegraph* quotes a “senior moderate” MP stating, “Essentially, the majority of MPs will formally set up their own grouping under an alternative Labour banner. It is not a ‘we’re off to set up a new party’, it is a ‘this is our party, we’re not leaving but our current

situation is intolerable’.”

The MP strongly hinted that Smith, who is seeking to portray himself to be “as radical as Jeremy” in an attempt to win at least some backing, is only a stalking horse. “The Parliamentary Labour Party would elect a leader which may or may not be Owen [Smith]. Other candidates could come into the frame at that point,” said the MP.

A major fear of the right wing is that if they carry out a formal split now ahead of the September result they could lose any right to be called the “Labour Party” and to secure its assets. The MP told the *Telegraph* that if Corbyn defeats Smith there would be a series of “graduated responses” that could eventually see the coup group “legally apply still to be called Labour.”

Labour’s last available accounts in 2014 show the party’s annual income at nearly £40 million, including £6.5 million in government grants, £3.5 million in commercial income and “tangible assets” of £6 million. As a result of the right wing forcing more than 100,000 Labour members to pay £25 to vote in the current leadership contest, the party’s coffers have grown by another £4.5 million.

Another MP revealed talk of backbench Labourite MPs being placed in “direct competition with Mr Corbyn’s shadow ministers, creating a ‘party within a party’ with independent policy positions and a whipping operation.”

What is being referred to as a planned “semi-split” by the *Telegraph* is proof that a de-facto split is already in place.

The Blairites know it is not possible for them to remove Corbyn via a democratic vote of the party’s membership. Based on his stated opposition to austerity, militarism and war the vast majority of the party’s more than half a million members and

supporters endorse Corbyn. Since he became leader, more than 300,000 people have joined the party. More than 184,000 joined in just two days as the coup got underway immediately after the referendum vote for the UK to leave the European Union.

Last weekend Corbyn spoke to sold out events called in support of his leadership campaign, with thousands of people attending in the cities of Hull and Leeds. Hull saw 3,000 attending. In Leeds, people queued down the street to get into the Royal Armouries meeting hall venue with 1,000 unable to enter due to it reaching its 2,000 capacity. In contrast, Smith addressed a few dozen on a patch of land in front of an ice cream van in Liverpool.

With virtually no support within the Labour membership and wider population, the coup plotters are playing to their strength by preparing to remove Corbyn through various parliamentary manoeuvres and legal means.

However, these plans depend above all on the fact that Corbyn, his main ally Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell and their supporters, have done nothing to seriously challenge the right wing.

Every significant move Corbyn has made as leader has been to oppose any struggle against the right, in defiance of the strivings of those who elected him last September to do so. He set the course of his tenure in office immediately after his election by naming a shadow cabinet prominently featuring various Blairite warmongers, including Hilary Benn as his foreign secretary.

The nadir of Corbyn's betrayal of his mandate was his authorisation of a free vote last December by Labour MPs, meaning they would not be censured or disciplined for supporting the bombing of Syria. In the event, 66 of the Blairites backed military action.

At every stage, he has insisted on "party unity" with the right wing. In response to the *Telegraph* article, Corbyn described the revelations as "fairly bizarre" and called on the Blairites to "Think on and think again." McDonnell said all candidates "must commit to respecting the outcome of this election" and called on Smith, the front man for the coup plotters, to condemn "the minority of MPs supporting his campaign who are threatening to subvert the outcome of this election and cause enormous damage to the Labour Party."

On Sunday, McDonnell made further pleas for unity

saying, "If Owen truly wants to unite our party like Jeremy Corbyn does, then he needs to denounce those who are plotting to divide it." He added, "Owen Smith therefore needs to immediately distance himself from those people saying they want a split, which is causing huge damage to our party at this time. Anything short of this will make him the 'disunity candidate'."

In an article this week, pseudo-left Socialist Workers Party leader Alex Callinicos sought to underplay the coup, which is backed by the UK and US intelligence agencies, by describing its ringleaders as "useless." He continued, the "[L]abour right have seen their power in the party drain away, and haven't an idea to their name. Their only real weapon is to split Labour, which will probably mean their own eclipse."

Following such a split, Callinicos urged Corbyn and "his allies" to "make a reality of their promise to turn Labour into a 'social movement'."

The real lesson of Corbyn's period as party leader is that his absolute refusal to mobilise the mass support he enjoys against the right wing is evidence of his overarching loyalty to the Labour and trade union bureaucracy, of which he is a left-talking representative.

Corbyn seeks, at all costs, to tie the working class to the Labour Party, which, regardless of who is its current leader, is a pro-capitalist and pro-war party. As he stated in Leeds Saturday, "There's no alternative, there's no other party. We are the Labour party, and I'm very proud to be the leader of the Labour Party."

Should a split occur in the Labour Party, despite Corbyn's appeals, any movement he leads based on his watered-down reformist prescriptions would prove no more effective in defending the working class and opposing capitalism than he has been as Labour leader. The issue is not the transformation of Labour into a "social movement," but for the working class to adopt a genuinely socialist and internationalist programme, which the Socialist Equality Party alone fights for.



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