

UK: Labour leader Corbyn calls debate with coup plotter Owen Smith “comradely”

Robert Stevens
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UK Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn and his challenger, Owen Smith MP, held a hustings Thursday before an audience of party members in Cardiff, Wales.

During the debate, Smith insisted that Corbyn’s continued leadership of the party threatens a split as he does not have the backing of Labour MPs. In contrast, prior to the debate, Corbyn, when asked by the media if Labour will split if he defeated Smith, said, “I’m sure no Labour MP would even dream of breaking away from the family of the Labour Party, the family of the Labour Party that helped to put them into parliament.”

He continued, “I will work with anybody in our party in order to ensure that we come together and win a general election for the good of the majority of this country.”

Denying that a split is on the cards has become the central theme of Corbyn’s leadership campaign. This is under conditions in which the Blairite wing of the party are using every means possible to remove him.

After MPs resigned en masse from his shadow cabinet, 172 members of the Parliamentary Labour Party (PLP) voted for a motion of no-confidence in Corbyn in an attempt to force his resignation. They then attempted without success to keep him off the ballot.

This week it emerged that tens of thousands of the 183,000 people who applied to be “registered supporters” of the party, in order to vote in this leadership contest, will be barred from doing so. Some 40,000 of the 183,000 applicants have already been barred under Labour’s undemocratic constitution for such “crimes” as previous support for a rival political party candidate, absence from the electoral register or because their payments supposedly bounced. Another 10,000 cases are to go before Labour’s National Executive Committee “Oversights Panel” for

consideration, where they will be assessed as to whether they are in compliance with the party’s “aims and values”.

The Blairites carried out a similar purge of left-wing members and supporters ahead of last year’s leadership contest. They dubbed that purge “Operation Icepick” in a sinister reference to the assassination of Leon Trotsky.

The latest purge of new supporters follows the setting up of an e-mail “ratline” by Labour General Secretary Iain McNicol in the run-up to the September 24 election for members to report those they deem to have carried out “abusive behaviour” online or at meetings. Those charged will not get a vote in the leadership election. All Labour Party Constituency branches have been barred from meeting for the duration of the leadership contest.

In the debate, Smith stated that he wanted to be Labour leader in order to unify the party. In an indication of the support that Corbyn could mobilise were he to oppose the right-wing, he said to loud cheering from the audience, “What I don’t understand is how you can complain about disunity in the party when you and others are the ones who resigned from the shadow cabinet.”

Smith claimed that he had nothing to do with the coup attempt, before stating of the MPs who voted against Corbyn, “They aren’t ‘Red Tories’. These are people who want to see the party back in power. They are not Blairites. They are just Labour MPs.”

Presented with this opportunity to give a blow-by-blow account of the coup, and Smith’s role within it, Corbyn instead spent the next two hours pleading for unity with his opponents.

In one of his few references to the coup, Corbyn did his best to play down its significance. “A majority of

Labour MPs want us to be the opposition [to the government],” he said. “It’s a very small number of MPs who are filling up the airwaves with the fearful announcements they constantly make.”

This is a lie. Fully three quarters of the PLP voted against Corbyn because even his watered down reformism is anathema to Britain’s ruling elite.

Under conditions of a growing economic crisis in the UK following June’s referendum vote for the UK to leave the EU, along with mounting social inequality, Corbyn sees it as his central mission to keep Labour afloat at all costs. He said to Smith that he had “appointed a shadow cabinet that reached a long way in the party, way beyond the politics that I’d adopted beforehand.” Now, the “best thing” was for “us to work together... If I win I will be putting together a broad shadow cabinet as I did before.”

It was Corbyn’s decision to place leading Blairites in his shadow cabinet, such as the warmonger Hilary Benn, which enabled them to launch the coup in the first place. He now proposes to accept the Blairites back if he wins again, with all polls showing he will do decisively.

Were Corbyn to win, even if his opponents did not immediately declare a formal split they would only remain in his precious “Labour family” to create the best conditions for seizing control of Labour’s substantial assets. Once again, instead of waging a struggle against the right-wing and kicking them out of the party as he was mandated to do by his supporters, he continues to allow them to dictate terms from their sole stronghold in the PLP.

The only reason why Smith, a human oil slick who is wholly a creature of the party’s right-wing, is standing is in order to create the pretext for a split when this is to the best advantage of the right-wing.

In the meantime, through dissembling and outright lies, Smith tries to portray himself as a steadfast opponent of austerity “as radical as Jeremy”. A former PR man for big pharmaceutical conglomerates, he has put forward a programme including £200 billion in public sector investment, claiming it as “Keynesian” and standing in the best traditions of “left” Labour leaders of the past, Keir Hardie and Aneurin Bevan.

This tack to the left has garnered criticism from sections of the media, including the *Times* and the *Financial Times*. But others have accepted that such a

left feint is necessary to win some support in the leadership contest. Tom Harris, a Blairite and former MP, wrote in the *Telegraph*, “But fear not. All Labour leadership contenders do this sort of thing. They dance the dance, say what has to be said in order to win their mandate... then do and say what they need to do in order to win a general election.”

The Blairites, in any case, view Smith as a stalking horse—to be replaced by someone more to their liking at a later date.

Corbyn writes on his Labour Party web site profile, “Let’s have a comradely debate this summer—and emerge stronger and more united...” He followed up the event in Cardiff by lauding a “positive and comradely debate.”

Such nonsense says everything that needs to be said about the real political agenda being pursued by Corbyn and his supporters. What are described as “comradely debates” are the product of the attempt by pro-austerity and pro-war MPs, in collusion with state intelligence forces, to engineer a dramatic rightward shift in political life and to prepare Labour to assume a governmental role on behalf of the ruling class should this be required. Corbyn, in concealing the essential character of these events, politically disarms working people in order to maintain the political stranglehold of the Labour Party and the trade unions.



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