

Once again on Owen Jones and the coup against UK Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn

Chris Marsden
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Guardian columnist Owen Jones has been forced to defend himself, after his barely veiled support for the right-wing coup against Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn met with widespread hostility.

The *Guardian* acts as a sounding board and propaganda sheet for the clique around former party leader Tony Blair that is playing the leading role in the attempted inner party putsch.

Jones has a particular function in seeking to make political capital from his self-declared role as a “man of the left,” who has supposedly come out against Corbyn solely in the interests of the party. He made his first major intervention on this theme in a July 14 column, describing the majority of Labour MPs as those who “simply worry Labour would be defeated badly” at a general election.

He explained that his initial support for Corbyn was based on his “expectation” that he “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.”

Corbyn’s victory was a shock, which he was intent on reversing. Commenting, the *World Socialist Web Site* noted on June 27 that Jones wrote of the “national crisis” and “political paralysis” caused by the Leave vote in the June 23 referendum on membership of the European Union, echoing criticisms by the Blairite opponents of Corbyn that he had not done enough to secure a Remain vote.

He then explained, “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.”

The Brexit crisis meant this timetable was no longer feasible. We wrote, “The implication is clear. Corbyn has to go and Jones will provide the rationale for the right-wing plotters seeking this end.”

Jones’ reply to his critics confirms this appraisal, puts flesh on who was involved in his “plan” to replace Corbyn and makes clear that he is a bitter opponent of anything that threatens the domination of the working class by the Labour and trade union bureaucracy.

On August 1, in a blog entry, “Questions all Jeremy Corbyn supporters need to answer”, Jones declares, “Labour and the left teeter on the brink of disaster” and attributes this to Corbyn’s leadership of the party.

In reply to his critics, he concludes his piece, “I’m beyond caring. Call me a Blairite, Tory, Establishment stooge, careerist, sellout, whatever makes you feel better. The situation is extremely grave and unless satisfactory answers are offered, we are nothing but the accomplices of the very people we oppose.”

Jones is indeed an establishment stooge and a careerist, whose use value to the ruling class is that he is not identified as an overt Blairite.

No subject is as important to him as is the life and thought of Owen Jones. Therefore the first half of his latest piece consists of an extended self-justification, including a detailed biography replete with links to what he thinks are his more important pronouncements. He stresses his intimate connections to the Corbyn camp as proof of his supposed “left” political credentials. After leaving Oxford university in 2005, “I worked in the office of the now Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell for two-and-a-half years, and helped to run his (abortive) leadership campaign in 2006–07,” he begins, ending by stressing, “I was at the first Corbyn campaign meeting, and the last campaign meeting, too... This isn’t a milieu that I know well: it’s a milieu I’m part of.”

This does not reflect well on Jones, but rather demonstrates the political opportunism of Labour’s left “milieu” now grouped around Corbyn. Moreover, as Jones makes clear, even within this grouping he sets himself up as a political policeman—cautioning against anything that might be deemed to be a “leftist excess.”

Jones states, “When Corbyn stood for the leadership, the expectation --including Corbyn himself -- was that he would lose, but do well enough to shift the terms of debate.” Corbyn’s victory was therefore entirely unwelcome. It would raise political expectations that the “left” would act on their declared opposition to austerity and militarism, rather than hiding behind the coattails of the Labour right who lead the party.

Jones explains that he submitted a “long detailed suggested strategy for his [Corbyn’s] leadership to follow” on August 29 last year, to which he provides a link, entitled, “My honest thoughts on the Corbyn campaign — and overcoming formidable obstacles.”

His policy prescriptions amount to suggestions that Corbyn junk anything that might put him on a collision course with the right for being unacceptable to the ruling class. To cite just three examples:

* “Concerns about immigration cannot be addressed by sticking our fingers in our ears, or only emphasising the benefits of immigration... UKIP voters must be love-bombed, not treated as closet racists, but as people who feel abandoned by the political elite and who have burning concerns on issues ranging from housing to jobs...”

* “A Corbyn-led government has to pick its battles, because it already has enough of them. Take NATO: the merits of membership are so far from the mainstream of political debate, it would be pointless and self-defeating to pick a fight over it. Instead, Labour should suggest a more constructive role for Britain within the Alliance.”

* “Some people think that the left somehow hates being British or English. That simply is not true. A new approach to British — and, separately, English — traditions and values should be emphasised...”

Taken together, this constitutes the essential pillars of the platform of the Blairite wing of the party and the focus of its attacks ever since Corbyn took office. And even though Corbyn capitulated to the right whenever these issues were to be fought out, this was not enough to satisfy Jones. “When it became clear such a strategy was not going to be put into practice, I fell into despondency,” he writes. “After a few days, I was in a pit of despair.”

Jones restates his “preference” for someone from the “new intake” of Labour MPs to have taken over from Corbyn before the scheduled 2020 general election, but this time he identifies “Clive Lewis in, say, 2018” as his choice. Jones previously cites Lewis as “my friend... who I campaigned for years before the election...”

Lewis, as an infantry officer graduate from the elite Sandhurst Military Academy in 2006, who in 2009 was sent to Afghanistan for three months, fit the bill. Someone with a military background, he was also a useful asset as he was, in the parlance of Labour’s right wing, a “clean skin”. He did not vote for the Iraq war as he was not an MP during the time.

Although Lewis remained in Corbyn’s shadow cabinet, as more than 60 Blairites left it to begin the coup, Lewis abstained on the vote for the renewal of the Trident nuclear missile system during the recent parliamentary debate. During the recent debate on the Chilcot Inquiry into the Iraq war, he put down a marker to insist that criticism of the invasion must not act as an impediment to the predatory aims of British imperialism. The lesson for the future was of ensuring “the highest standard of proof for taking our country to war.”

The Jones/Lewis plan was to co-opt the groundswell of support won by Corbyn due to his stated opposition to austerity, militarism and war by replacing him with someone more acceptable to and in tune with the right wing of the Parliamentary Labour Party (PLP). In a recent video interview conducted by Jones, Lewis said that when MPs such as he “nominated Jeremy Corbyn [as a leadership candidate] we were saying we don’t want our party to shift to the right, we wanted Jeremy Corbyn in there to *bring the debate back to the centre* [emphasis added].”

For years, Jones has attended innumerable conferences and public meetings at which he insisted that the hope of a leftward shift in the Labour Party was the only realistic hope for the working class.

The Irish *Look Left* magazine in January 2014 summarises an interview with Jones in which he boasts that “he can trace his family’s radical roots back to a ‘gunrunner for Garibaldi’, through to a ‘Russian Revolution-inspired’ train driver who took part in the 1926 British General Strike, a grandfather who joined the Communist Party in the 1930s, and a great-uncle in the Independent Labour Party. He himself is literally an offspring of the Militant Tendency in the Labour Party, where his parents met in the 1960s. His mother was once editor of the newspaper of the Militant-dominated Labour Party Young Socialists, while his father became a Militant organiser in South Yorkshire and was present at the 1984 ‘Battle of Orgreave’ during the Miners’ Strike where ‘he watched police charging and batoning miners’. Jones was born just two months later.”

Jones’ father left the pseudo-left Militant Tendency, which operated for decades as an entry group in the Labour Party claiming that it could be won for socialism, that same year in the face of a purge by the Labour right wing.

Surveying his parents’ political lives, Jones asserts, “They were left ‘smashed and defeated by what happened to the left and labour movement in the 1980s’, they saw ‘defeat after defeat, and decline, and they dropped out of politics.” He has routinely cited his parents’

political demoralisation following the expulsion of the Militant and the inevitable failure of its stated objective of transforming Labour into a revolutionary party as proof that there is no alternative to an interminable campaign to rebuild the Labour “left”.

Jones insists in *Look Left* that any movement that exists outside of the Labour Party must “intersect with the Labour left, Venn diagram-like,” because “as long as there’s a trade union link there’s a Labour Party, essentially, and potential for it to represent working class interests.”

Jones has now made clear that his real concern has always been to preserve the stranglehold of the labour bureaucracy. Corbyn, McDonnell and Jones were political bedfellows as long as this was viewed by Jones as a means of preserving the illusion of a potential leftward evolution of the Labour Party. But last year Corbyn was swept to office as a distorted expression of a real shift to the left among workers and young people that saw hundreds of thousands join the party to take up the fight against the right wing. Now, in the midst of an unprecedented witch-hunt, thousands more have joined—taking Labour’s membership over half a million.

Faced with this development, Jones sides with the coup plotters with the express aim of preserving Labour as a trusted political instrument of British imperialism in the name of ensuring its “electability.”

It must be understood that Jones is overt in stating his fundamental concerns, but his fallout with his former allies does not mean that these concerns are not shared by Corbyn and McDonnell. For the past 11 months, Corbyn has made preserving the unity of the Labour Party his goal and still maintains, in the face of all evidence to the contrary, that Labour can be refashioned into an opponent of austerity, militarism and war. In propagating this lie he remains allied with Jones and Lewis even as they conspire against him—just as he continues to offer an olive branch to the rest of the PLP while they plot his downfall.



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