

Workers and youth speak on Corbyn and the British Labour Party

Our reporters
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World Socialist Web Site reporters spoke to a number of those attending the Jeremy Corbyn rally in Sheffield on Friday.

The comments reflected growing opposition among workers and young people to social inequality and war, while at the same time expressing the illusions that Corbyn is seeking to promote in the Labour Party.

There was a significant and glaring contradiction between the comments of those attending the rally—including opposition to the right-wing attack on Corbyn—and the remarks of Corbyn himself, which avoided any mention of the coup against him and its political significance.

Joe is 30 and a former University of Nottingham student who recently started a small business. He was previously employed in retail jobs and said he thought regular employment was now too precarious.

“I’ve always been on the left but was never in Labour,” Joe said. “I always voted for them. Living in the north of England, people have always voted Labour.”

Asked why he supported Corbyn, Joe said he endorsed his policies on nuclear disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation. “He was one of the minority of Labour MPs who didn’t vote for the Iraq war. I’d never heard of Corbyn before he became leader, but nobody would have unless they’d been following closely politics for 30 years.”

Asked what he thought was behind the coup being carried out against Corbyn by Labour’s right, Joe said, “There’s a lot of entrenched interests in the country and they want to maintain a false spectrum of debate in the media about the crucial things in society like economic equality and rights for people. They want to maintain an unjust situation. Corbyn seems to be challenging that false spectrum of debate we have in

the media. They really seem to dislike anyone who challenges the false spectrum of debate.

“The Labour and Conservative politicians doing this [attacking Corbyn] are the same. They are not representatives of the people.

“The Westminster ‘bubble’ that people talk about is real. We have a broken democracy, and I think Corbyn is going some way to help fix some of the problems in society.”

Joe said he believed that the Labour right were fearful of the growing left-wing sentiment in society that Corbyn’s election reflected.

“There is a lot of disaffection in politics. Even the left of our politics is not necessarily left-wing. Corbyn is not an extreme left human being. He is for capitalism. Despite being quintessentially reasonable in many ways, he is painted as extreme because politics has gone so far to the right. [Labour leadership challenger] Owen Smith might as well not bother to pretend as he is just a career politician with no principles. He is a Blair with less charisma.”

Referring to the 130,000 members and supporters who have been banned from voting in the leadership contest, Joe said, “It provides a very good lens into the mentality of these people [the right-wing]. How arrogant are these people? They are saying they are right and hundreds of thousands of people are wrong, and then all those people are being branded as extremists. The people here are not extremists.”

Joe said he voted for the UK to remain in the European Union (EU) in the June 23 referendum vote, “even though I don’t necessarily like the EU as an institution. I didn’t like the context in which they were doing it. It seemed too right-wing and xenophobic.”

Ben is in his early 20s and an artist who works in a call centre. He joined the Labour Party shortly after the

June 23 referendum on British membership of the European Union, which resulted in a Leave vote.

Ben said that many young people joined the Labour Party in order to elect Corbyn as leader, and many more had recently joined to defend him against the right's attempt to remove him.

Asked why he thought this was the case, Ben said, "Jeremy Corbyn is the only option at the minute to defend us against the move to the right shown in the Brexit vote. This showed the way people were thinking about politics.

"A lot of my friends have joined for the same reasons as me. Labour under Corbyn is saying things that we're thinking—that the world should be a fairer place."

Asked what he thought of the coup, Ben said, "I think it's shocking the way the Blairites are moving against him."

Ben said he opposed war and had "read part of the Chilcot report [into the Iraq war]. Jeremy Corbyn is anti-war. I support the left wing. I don't want racist and fascists taking control. Trident [the UK's nuclear weapons system] is a complete waste of money—imagine what could be done with that money.

"They only want to use it to coerce other nations to agree with their political agenda. This has been happening a long time since the [British] Empire. It's about time somebody said to put a stop to it all and let's be nice to each other."

Joey is 27 and works in retail. He also joined the Labour Party following the Brexit vote. He opposes the Parliamentary Labour Party who "are the right-wing of Labour."

He said, "I'd like to think Corbyn will get elected but don't think it will happen." He added, "That's what we need. Not the right-wing like Tony Blair who are in it for themselves and for the rich getting richer and poor poorer."

Joey said the ruling Conservatives were claiming that the minimum wage was going up "but I can't see it happening."

Although he supported Corbyn, he thought he should have campaigned more strongly in favour of a Remain vote in the Brexit referendum, "the outcome would have been different as the Leave campaign had stuck together.

"I know a lot of people voted Leave as a protest vote as they didn't think that it was going to happen but

now regret it." Joey said he believed the Leave vote "was more about a vote against the establishment than anything else."

James is a student in his 20s and said he was not in a political party. He had come to the rally to support Corbyn. "I think Corbyn is in some way different, but whatever you think of him, the way the Labour Party is treating him is disgusting.

"Corbyn has been criticized for not being a good leader, but how can you lead people [the Parliamentary Labour Party] that don't want to be led? That's the issue here."

He had voted Labour, even though he didn't agree with his local MP. "I do not want to support those that supported austerity. That's not the message you want to put forward."

James said, "Some of those within the Labour Party that are carrying out the cuts are just career politicians, they are not really Labour."

"If Corbyn is not 'electable' as they say, they have nothing to worry about. If he is electable, he is going to make changes, in which case they are worried. That is why they attack him."



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