

Britain: Labour's anti-Corbyn plotters plan rival parliamentary grouping

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The attempted coup against Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn is gathering steam, as ballot papers for the September 24 party leadership contest were released Monday.

The election is the outcome of efforts, initiated by the Blairite right wing of the party, to overturn the result of last year's leadership contest that saw Corbyn elected with an overwhelming majority.

According to a report by the Rupert Murdoch-owned *Sunday Times*, Labour MPs are plotting to sit as a new group in parliament if the Labour leader wins again. The overwhelming majority of the Parliamentary Labour Party is opposed to Corbyn, with 172 MPs having supported a motion of no confidence in him, with only 40 opposed.

Having failed to pressure Corbyn to stand down, they forced a leadership contest, with Owen Smith selected as the "stop-Corbyn" candidate. Despite the resort to anti-democratic methods, however, including barring more than 130,000 Labour members and supporters from voting, Corbyn is considered the favourite to win.

Under these conditions, the *Sunday Times* reported that his opponents will form a "party within a party," through the mechanism of the Co-operative Party.

The Co-operative Party, which promotes businesses owned by workers and customers, is a separate entity from the Labour Party. However, since 1927, it has had an electoral agreement with Labour that members of both parties can contest elections as representatives of the Labour Co-operative Party.

Currently, there are 25 Labour MPs who are Co-op members, but the aim is to increase this to 100-plus. As a legally distinct entity that is recognised by the Electoral Commission, the Co-operative Party fits the requirement laid down by the Speaker of the House of Commons, Conservative MP John Bercow. He has reportedly stated that he can only recognise a different parliamentary opposition if it is registered with the Electoral

Commission.

By gathering the support of more MPs than Corbyn can muster, the coup plotters hope to prevent any moves to de-select them from the Labour Party (removing them as candidates in the next election) and to apply to become the official opposition.

As members of the Labour Co-op, the group will appoint their own parliamentary whips and draw up their own policies in areas "including Brexit and national security," it is reported. Thus would enable them to change "the rules to elect the shadow cabinet so they can 'surround' and 'smother'" Corbyn on the front benches, the *Sunday Times* reported.

Labour's right wing was bitterly hostile to Corbyn's election last year, especially his stated opposition to austerity and war. But attempts to overthrow him took off in the wake of the June 23 referendum on the UK's membership of the European Union (EU).

The majority vote to Leave has presented an existential crisis for the British bourgeoisie, as well as for US imperialism, as it jeopardises the stability of NATO at a time when it is ratcheting up its provocations against Russia and China, as well as in the Middle East.

As part of efforts to prevent Brexit (British exit from the EU), a section of the bourgeoisie hopes to refashion Labour as the party of the "48 percent" who voted to Remain. But this only intensifies the need to remove Corbyn, who has said the Brexit vote must be respected.

At the weekend, London mayor Sadiq Khan and Scottish Labour Party leader Kezia Dugdale threw their support behind Smith.

Writing in the *Observer*, Khan repeated the claim of the right that Corbyn is unelectable, despite Labour having won the last four by-elections, and all four mayoral elections in the past 12 months. Khan's own victory in the May 2016 mayoral contest—in which he won the largest number votes of any single candidate in the history

of the UK—has been largely attributed to the support generated by Corbyn’s leadership victory.

Khan, a Remain supporter, attacked Corbyn for failing “to show the leadership” pro-EU campaigners “desperately needed” during the referendum.

Simultaneously, Dugdale, writing in the *Scottish Daily Record*, also insisted that Corbyn was incapable of winning a general election. This from the woman who presided over Labour’s worst-ever election defeat in Scotland in May 2016, placing third behind the Scottish National Party and the Conservatives.

The Labour Co-op plan is presented as a means by which the party right wing can avoid moving straight to a breakaway grouping—forming a new party outside Labour—that would see them struggle to muster any support and threaten their ability to claim party assets.

But the prospect of Smith losing badly in the leadership contest means that this is not the only plot underway.

Last week, the *Financial Times* editorialised in favour of a breakaway. It is also the preferred option of Murdoch’s *Times* and *Sun* newspapers, which excoriate Smith for attempting to borrow some of Corbyn’s “left” policies in his leadership pitch.

The *Sun on Sunday*—which backed Leave—editorialised that “the country is at a critical moment. The full after-effects of Brexit are not yet being felt. Nor have the terms of our withdrawal from the EU been sorted.”

Yet, in the face of Corbyn’s “awfulness,” all Labour could muster as an alternative “is Owen Smith—a dire [former Labour leader Ed] Miliband clone who also wants to saddle the country with billions of pounds of extra debt and thinks he can negotiate with IS [Islamic State].”

“The wise old heads of Labour must wrestle back control of the party machinery from the armchair anarchists and student protesters,” the newspaper insisted.

Likewise, the *Sunday Times* complained of a “whiff of the desperados” around the anti-Corbyn coup plotters, urging them to agree on “a more inspiring figurehead than Owen Smith, whose leadership bid looks doomed.” The “moderates’ problem,” it continued, is “that they have no heir to Blair.”

In the *Daily Mail*, Blairite Dan Hodges denounced Smith as “spineless, incoherent, incompetent,” citing specifically the MP’s insistence, “I am not a Blairite, I am a socialist just the same as you. I have never been a Blairite.”

Rather than hurling himself “at Corbyn with an unbridled political ferocity,” this was proof that Smith was trying to “cower and wheedle and ingratiate himself

towards the Labour leadership.”

Behind the scenes, it is reported that some Labour MPs are attempting to secure agreement with Tory MPs to force an early general election as the only means to ensure they can “get rid of Jeremy Corbyn.”

Tory MP Andrew Bridgen, a Leave supporter, reported that he had been approached by three Labour MPs who asked him to step up his campaign for a snap general election, in the hope that Corbyn would be “wiped out” and they could take back control of the party.

“I’ve had very senior Labour MPs come to me and they have begged me to push for an early general election to finish Corbyn off. They say, ‘Put us out of our misery. It would be a mercy killing’,” he told the *Sunday Times*.

Prime Minister Theresa May has a working majority of just 17 MPs. With parliament due to resume in two weeks, Tory eurosceptics have begun complaining that she is dragging her feet on starting negotiations with the EU on a British exit. Iain Duncan Smith, a leading Leave campaigner, has said this must begin in early 2017, to ensure the referendum result was not turned into a “neverendum.”

Ruth Davidson, Scottish Conservative leader, has suggested that an early election might be the best means to prevent the “usual suspects” on Tory backbenches causing “problems” for May.

Tom Watson, deputy leader of the Labour Party, has also made clear that he thinks May not only would, but should, call a snap election. With Labour in disarray, and the prospect of unrest amongst Tory eurosceptics, this was her best option, he opined.

His remarks were made in an interview with the *Guardian*, propagandist-in-chief against Corbyn. Watson has been the lead figure in the moves against the Labour leader, including efforts to restrict the ballot.

In his August 11 interview, he asked pointedly, “If you were Theresa May, why wouldn’t you [call an early election]? Honestly, why wouldn’t you? You’d get your own mandate, you’d have the easiest run at the election you could imagine, and in all likelihood you’d come back with a bigger majority. Why wouldn’t you do that?”



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