

Britain: Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn outlines policies for “wealth creation”

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As the right-wing putsch against him intensifies, Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn has been outlining his economic programme for government. Having won the support of an overwhelming majority of party members and supporters for his stated opposition to austerity and war, Corbyn has been stressing the difference between his policies and those of his opponents.

Amongst the Labour right, and the corporate media that unanimously support Corbyn’s removal, his policy proscriptions are denounced as “socialist” and “extremist.” Even before the coup began in earnest—immediately following the Leave vote in June’s referendum on UK membership of the European Union—former prime minister Tony Blair denounced Corbyn’s policies saying it would be a “very dangerous experiment for a major Western country to get gripped by this type of populist policymaking, left or right.”

Blair is not alone in presenting the Labour leader’s programme in such apocalyptic terms. While this speaks volumes about the hostility of the British bourgeoisie, and especially its Labour bureaucracy, to the working class, it by no means imparts any genuine progressive, much less socialist content, to Corbyn’s prescriptions.

Corbyn routinely proclaims that he is for a “new politics,” but this amounts to only a handful of limited reformist measures that do nothing to challenge the stranglehold of the super-rich over society—the first necessary step in effecting any real redistribution of wealth towards working people.

Despite the claims of his detractors, Corbyn never identifies his policies as either socialist or anti-capitalist. In May, at a “state of the economy” conference in London, he argued in favour of a “genuinely mixed economy of public and social enterprise, alongside a private sector with a long-term private business commitment,” which would “provide the decent pay, jobs, housing, schools, health and social care of the future.”

He added, “Wealth creation is a good thing: we all want greater prosperity. But let us have a serious debate about how wealth is created, and how that wealth should be

shared.”

The BBC said, “Corbyn set out his desire to reform capitalism and said his party needed to ‘deliver the new economy that this country needs’.”

This was underscored by another speaker at the event, Corbyn’s closest ally and Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell, who said Labour’s aim in government was the “fundamental business of reforming capitalism.”

Since then, in the face of the right-wing onslaught, Corbyn has watered down even this tepid perspective.

In an interview this month with the Conservative supporting *Sunday Telegraph*, Corbyn restricted himself to arguing in favour of a top rate of income tax of 50 pence, the same rate, he said pointedly, as existed under Prime Minister Gordon Brown.

Even this was a temporary exigency forced upon the then Labour government in the wake of the 2008 crash, as a means of diverting from the vast sums of taxpayers’ funds that were being pumped into the banks in the interests of the corporations and super-rich. Even on corporation tax, Corbyn limited himself to favouring a 1 percent rise, which would still leave the UK with one of the lowest rates in the world.

The Labour leader’s talk of “public ownership” and “democratic social control” is similarly vague, and confined to public transport. Privatisation has created a major crisis in this area, especially in rail, where it has been used to hike up fares and push through attacks on workers’ conditions, while enabling massive public subventions to the private operators.

But all Corbyn sets out is a plan of waiting until the numerous rail franchises expire and then bringing them under government control. Even were this policy enacted, it would still leave around two thirds of lines privately run after the first term of a future Labour government.

Such has been the calamity resulting from rail privatisation, which has resulted in massive economic disruption to major arteries of the economy, that this move chimes in with the interests of a section of the ruling elite.

Corbyn said this month that “even some Tory politicians are now joining us in calling for Southern rail [a private franchise] to immediately be brought under public ownership.”

In the current leadership contest, forced by the right as part of their efforts to remove him, Corbyn’s main pitch has been a 10-point programme to “rebuild and transform Britain.” This centres on investing £500 billion in infrastructure, manufacturing and new industries backed up by a publicly owned National Investment Bank and regional banks, for an “economy that works for all.” The plan would “allow good businesses to thrive, and support a new generation of co-operative enterprises.”

McDonnell boasted that this is endorsed by some business groups, such as the Confederation of British Industry. Such “fiscal stimulus” policies have gained traction amongst sections of the ruling elite following the surprise vote to Leave the EU. The Bank of England is again pumping vast sums of public money into the economy, while the Conservative government is speaking of abandoning its target for “deficit reduction.” But the recouping of such “investment” demands an increase in the exploitation and impoverishment of the working class.

This week Corbyn launched further policies, including the abolition of the House of Lords and its replacement with an elected second chamber. Speaking at a rally Sunday, Corbyn proposed “citizens’ assemblies” that would “extend democracy in every part of public life: in national politics, communities, the economy and the workplace—and in our own party.”

He described this as a “democratic revolution in our politics, communities and workplaces,” in contrast to “decisions in Britain,” which are “overwhelmingly taken from the top down. And that’s crucial to why our country is run in the interests of a privileged few.”

Corbyn never explains the class character of the system he describes. Instead of a capitalist class which owns and monopolises the major economic levers of society and who are represented by the political elite in Westminster and political parties which defend capitalism, Corbyn refers only to the “millionaires” and “privileged few” at the top, who can be checked via a “democratic revolution.” Social class, however, is determined not by the scale of wealth, but by the relationship of social layers to the basic economic structure of society.

In this, Corbyn echoes US Senator Bernie Sanders, who, before endorsing Hillary Clinton for the presidency, claimed that he was fighting for a “political revolution” against a “billionaire class.” The purpose of such terminology was to divert attention from the economic system on which obscene levels of personal wealth are based, so as to channel social

opposition behind the Democratic Party—the political representative of this “billionaire class.”

Corbyn himself has described his policies as hardly “extremist, Marxist, left stuff.” On this basis, some are urging Labour’s right wing to tone down their attacks on him, and put aside threats to split.

This was the substance of the call made this week in the *Guardian* by Mark Seddon, the former editor of the Labour “left” *Tribune* newspaper and a former communications aide to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Ban Ki-moon.

Calling for Labour MPs to back Corbyn if he wins September’s leadership vote, Seddon reassured them that descriptions of his programme as “hard-left” were “nothing of the sort. It [Corbyn’s programme] more resembles a mild form of social democracy which has had its echoes in *Guardian* editorials for almost as long as I have been a reader.”

Labour’s right wing and their supporters in the British bourgeoisie are fully aware that this is the case. After all, the Labour Party accommodated him for 30 years on its backbenches without any overt conflict.

What is most important from the standpoint of the political education of workers and youth is that even the mildest suggestions of social reform cannot be tolerated. This is because it is not Corbyn that the Labour right, and the likes of media oligarch Rupert Murdoch, fear. Rather they fear the growing discontent among masses of workers and young people of which his election was a product.

This is the starkest confirmation that the defence of the most basic social conditions and democratic rights cannot be achieved through Labour, which is a right-wing, bourgeois party, committed to the interests of British capitalism.

The central issue placed before the working class is the building of a genuine socialist and internationalist party of the working class that fights for the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism on a global scale, as the necessary basis for a socialist society.



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