

Pseudo-left line up behind efforts to fashion Labour as Britain's "Syriza"

Julie Hyland
25 August 2016

Momentum, the "network" formed within the Labour Party to support Jeremy Corbyn, has called a four-day "fringe" meeting, to run parallel with the party's special conference next month, both in Liverpool.

Billed as a means of connecting "grassroots groups" to Labour, "The World Transformed" will be addressed by four members of the party's shadow cabinet, including Corbyn himself, along with numerous other Labour politicians, trade union bureaucrats, economists and journalists. It is timed to coincide with the result of the leadership election, forced by the right-wing putsch against Corbyn, at the official Labour event on September 24.

Despite the vicious, anti-democratic methods used by the right to rig the outcome of the election—including barring more than 130,000 members from voting—Corbyn is expected to win comfortably. If so, the right wing have threatened to form a separate group in parliament—the name "True Labour" is suggested—and obtain recognition as the official opposition. Should Corbyn win narrowly, or unexpectedly lose, a wave of expulsions against his supporters will follow.

Whatever the result, just one year after Corbyn was elected leader, his stated aim of transforming Labour into an anti-austerity, anti-militarist party is in acute crisis. The overwhelming majority of Labour MPs—working in concert with the highest echelons of the state, and supported by all the bourgeois press—have made clear they would rather destroy the party than tolerate its association with nominally "left-wing" policies.

These events confirm that the fight for even the most minimal social reforms can only be waged independent of, and in conflict with, the Labour Party. But it is to try to prevent workers and youth drawing this necessary political conclusion, and acting upon it, that is behind Momentum's "grassroots" initiative.

Corbyn and his supporters make no secret of the fact that their model for Labour is Syriza in Greece. This is the bourgeois party founded in 2004 by ex-Stalinists and various pseudo-left tendencies as a supposedly "radical coalition". With the social democratic PASOK reviled due to its implementing austerity measures, Syriza used populist rhetoric to come to power in January 2015. Within months, Syriza was

itself imposing the diktats of the Greek and European bourgeoisie.

By recasting Labour as a Syriza-type movement, Momentum aims to politically confuse and disarm workers and youth under conditions in which the shock Leave result of June's referendum on UK membership of the European Union presents an existential crisis for the ruling elite.

Its efforts to this end similarly rely on Britain's Stalinists (the *Morning Star* is a participant at the event) and the pseudo-left.

Film director Ken Loach, who heads Left Unity, is a keynote speaker. The brainchild of Alan Thornett, leader of Socialist Resistance, which is affiliated to the Pabloite United Secretariat, Left Unity was founded in 2013 on the explicit basis of creating a British Syriza. With Corbyn's election, Left Unity decided that the Labour leader provided the best means of achieving its goal, officially encouraging its members to sign up to the Labour Party.

Loach is currently going around the country arguing that Corbyn "offers hope for Britain", and will "return the country to the kind of society people would like to live in, as we did after the Second World War before Margaret Thatcher came in and tore it all up."

Other speakers are Leo Panitch, "Marxist" academic and leader of Canada's Socialist Project, who—as with all the pseudo-left—specialises in providing political apologies for Syriza's abject betrayal. Another is Richard Seymour, of the Lenin's Tomb blog, who split from the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) in 2013. Amongst Seymour's complaints was the SWP's apparent hesitancy in participating in the formation of a Syriza-style coalition in Britain.

While the Socialist Party and SWP have yet to make an official statement on the Momentum initiative, there is no doubt that they are also seeking a regroupment around the Labour Party.

Both these organisations played a lead role in covering for Syriza in Greece and are now seeking to encourage illusions in the supposedly socialist character of the Corbyn campaign.

For decades Militant, the Socialist Party's forerunner, worked inside Labour, claiming it was the vehicle for achieving socialism in Britain via "an enabling bill" in Parliament. For its

ministering, it was proscribed and forced out of the party following a wave of expulsions in the 1980s under Neil Kinnock.

In the ensuing period, as Labour was refashioned as an openly right-wing party of big business, the Socialist Party claimed to stand for the building of a new workers party. This pretence is now being abandoned on the basis that, thanks to Corbyn, Labour is in the process of becoming that party.

Under the hashtag #KeepCorbyn: stand firm for socialism, the Socialist Party speak of the “fight for a Labour Party for the working class”. This is to be achieved through a “return to the founding structures of the Labour Party which involved separate socialist political parties coalescing with the trade unions and social movements like women’s suffrage campaigners and the co-operative movement,” it argues.

Peter Taaffe, leader of the Socialist Party, told the *Guardian* that he had held unofficial talks on his organisation being readmitted to Labour if Corbyn wins September’s leadership election.

The *Guardian* reported that Taaffe had “sounded out Corbyn indirectly, including through Mark Serwotka, the leader of the PCS union”, another speaker at the Momentum meeting, and the Socialist Party “had received a warm welcome from some in Labour.”

“I know Jeremy, he’s a good bloke,” Taaffe said. “He’s principled. He’s on the left.”

The fundamental issue, as Taaffe well knows, is not Corbyn’s personal character—and even here it should be noted that the Labour leader has retreated on numerous of his “left” principles over the last months—but the political character of the party he heads.

In peddling the claim that Labour—the principal political prop of British imperialism for more than a century—can be refashioned in the interests of the working class, the Socialist Party is returning to its origins as a political adjunct of the Labour bureaucracy.

The Socialist Party openly proclaims that its model for a “re-founded anti-austerity Labour Party” is the “Greek party Syriza”, which “went from under 5% to winning a general election in just a few years...”

There is no mention of the role Syriza is playing in leading the attack on Greek workers, with good reason. As the International Committee of the Fourth International explained in its statement, *The Political Lessons of Syriza’s Betrayal in Greece*, the pseudo-left internationally supported Syriza because they represent “the same affluent layers of ‘left’ academics, union functionaries, parliamentarians, and professionals, and sought to advance their class interests through similar policies. When the ruling class allowed Syriza to take power, all of them saw this as a model and hoped that they would be given the opportunity to play a similar role in their own countries.”

Taaffe boasts that Socialist Party members have played a lead

role, working with Momentum within the trade unions to move motions in Corbyn’s defence. For months, the SP has called for a conference of “Corbyn’s supporters” to provide a “giant step towards creating a new workers’ party out of the dying embers of New Labour.”

Nominally, the Socialist Workers Party is maintaining its pose of distance from Labour.

Writing in the *Socialist Worker*, SWP leader Alex Callinicos argues that whereas the “Labour left exists in order to achieve socialism by winning elections ... It is because the Socialist Workers Party gives priority to building mass struggles that we remain outside Labour.”

But the remainder of his statement makes clear that, like Taaffe, this is a purely tactical stance that can be reversed as required. Calling on “everyone on the radical left to rally round Corbyn,” he argues that if the Labour leader wins re-election, “there will be a real chance to transform the British left on a more militant and principled basis.

“But seizing this opportunity will confront us all, inside or outside the Labour Party, with tough strategic and tactical choices.”

This is typical of the political double bookkeeping the SWP specialises in.

It was the SWP that provided the platform in Britain for Syriza representatives to justify Syriza’s repudiation of the massive mandate delivered by the July 5, 2015 referendum opposing EU austerity. Just days after Syriza had drawn up an even greater package of spending cuts, on July 12, Callinicos stood by approvingly as Syriza Central Committee member Stathis Kouvelakis told a London rally that the word “betrayal” in relation to his government’s action was “inappropriate if we are to understand what is happening.”

Rather, Syriza leader “[Alexis] Tsipras honestly believed that he could get a positive outcome by putting forward an approach centred on negotiations and displaying good will, and this is also why he constantly said he had no alternative plan.” No doubt Callinicos will attempt the same apologies for Corbyn’s inevitable betrayal.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact