

Corbyn's capitulation to the right wing and the lessons of the UK Labour leadership contest

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On Saturday, September 24, Jeremy Corbyn secured a massive popular victory in his re-election as UK Labour Party leader. His triumph was secured in the face of a vicious witch-hunt by Labour's right wing, which included denying a vote to more than 180,000 registered members and supporters. He won thanks to the political mobilisation of hundreds of thousands of workers and young people seeking to take on the political heirs of Tony Blair and Gordon Brown and support Corbyn's declared aim of committing Labour to oppose austerity, militarism and war.

Yet just four days later, Corbyn's victory might well have never happened. He gave the closing speech Wednesday to a Labour Party conference at which his opponents carried the day on every single issue of substance.

Most telling of all, Corbyn's shadow defence secretary, Clive Lewis, not only publicly endorsed the renewal of the Trident nuclear weapons system, but pledged that a Labour government would "fulfil our international commitments, including those under Article 5" of NATO's constitution. This commits the UK to come to the aid of any NATO member facing attack. Given the escalating US-led provocations against Russia, involving Ukraine, Poland and the Baltic states, this is a commitment to wage nuclear war against a nuclear power.

This left Deputy Leader Tom Watson to crow that Labour was "reaffirming our commitment to NATO—a socialist construct, as our defence spokesman, Clive Lewis, reminded us yesterday—and trying to persuade our EU colleagues to do the same."

Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell outlined an economic policy based on protectionist measures to ensure that British industry is globally competitive. Watson praised him for "deftly" explaining that "Labour

is a market socialist party."

He added, "I don't know why we've been focusing on what was wrong with the Blair and Brown governments for the last six years... Capitalism, comrades, is not the enemy."

The hours leading up to Corbyn's final appearance were monopolised by a former leadership challenger, Andy Burnham, demanding that the party oppose the free movement of labour in Europe and recognise that working people "have a problem" with "unlimited, unfunded, unskilled migration which damages their own living standards."

After such a display, any further protest by Corbyn, any refusal to endorse this or that measure, only proves him to be a left-talking figurehead for a right-wing party of militarism and war.

Corbyn made clear how consciously he seeks to utilise left rhetoric to conceal the real character of the Labour Party and prevent the working class breaking from it. His speech was once again peppered with calls for unity with the right wing in a rebuilt "Labour family."

But more revealing still was how he detailed the political concerns that animate him. The support he has won, he explained, was not "unique to Britain." He stressed that "across Europe, North America and elsewhere, people are fed up with a so-called free market system that has produced grotesque inequality, stagnating living standards for the many, calamitous foreign wars without end, and a political stitch-up which leaves the vast majority of people shut out of power."

He continued: "Since the crash of 2008, the demand for an alternative and an end to counter-productive austerity has led to the rise of new movements and parties in one country after another."

What he had accomplished was to make sure that "In

Britain, it's happened in the heart of traditional politics, in the Labour party, which is something we should be extremely proud of."

By preventing a break from Labour at a time of such acute crisis for British and world capitalism, Corbyn could boast that "We meet this year as the largest political party in Western Europe, with over half a million members."

Making a direct appeal to his opponents, he said, "Some may see that as a threat. But I see it as a vast democratic resource."

There is nothing democratic in any of this. Corbyn is steering the aspirations to genuine democracy and an end to austerity and war felt by millions of workers behind a party that he admits views its new members as a "threat," and does so because it is a party of the state and the financial oligarchy.

Moreover, Corbyn wants to channel this desire for change behind policies that are wholly geared to the interests of British capitalism. His appeal was framed around calls for state investment to end the situation where "Britain lags behind France, Germany, the US and China" in research and development and productivity. "A Labour government will never accept second-best for Britain," he declared. "We will also be pressing our own Brexit agenda," he added "including the freedom to intervene in our own industries..."

Corbyn's defence of the Labour Party's grip on the working class and his continued opposition to any struggle against the right wing is a vindication of the political stand taken by the Socialist Equality Party.

From the very beginning of his first leadership bid last year and throughout the attempts to remove him, the SEP opposed all efforts by groups such as the Socialist Party and Socialist Workers Party to portray support for Corbyn as a means of transforming the Labour Party. To cite just three examples, we wrote:

"However, those looking to a Corbyn victory to provide an alternative to austerity will be cruelly disappointed. The real measure of his campaign must be judged not on stated intentions, but on the essential criterion of the class interests served by the party and the programme he defends. Labour is a right-wing bourgeois party. It is complicit in all the crimes of British imperialism and has functioned as the principal political opponent of socialism for more than a century..." What does the "Jeremy Corbyn phenomenon" represent? (August 15, 2015)

"No one can seriously propose that this party—which, in its politics and organisation and the social composition of

its apparatus, is Tory in all but name—can be transformed into an instrument of working class struggle. The British Labour Party did not begin with Blair. It is a bourgeois party of more than a century's standing and a tried and tested instrument of British imperialism and its state machine. Whether led by Clement Attlee, James Callaghan or Jeremy Corbyn, its essence remains unaltered." The political issues posed by Corbyn's election as UK Labour Party leader (September 14, 2015)

"Those workers and young people who have rallied behind Corbyn in the hope that they could 'recapture' Labour from the Blairites have been misled. It is the upper-middle class clique that constitutes the PLP [Parliamentary Labour Party]—and which is accountable only to the military-intelligence state apparatus—that determines Labour's class character, not its members." Lessons of Labour's leadership contest (September 24, 2016)

Our appraisal was not rooted in an estimation of Corbyn's subjective intentions. We based ourselves on an historically-derived understanding of the nature of the Labour Party and of a contemporary world situation in which the demands of the ruling elite for ever greater exploitation of the working class and the pursuit of a military offensive to secure control of the world's resources mean there can be no return to a reformist past.

The crucial task placed before workers and young people is to secure their political independence from all those who seek to subordinate them to the profit system, which is the root cause of austerity and war. We urge all readers of the *World Socialist Web Site* to study the record of the SEP and take the decision to join us in building the new and genuinely socialist and internationalist leadership that is urgently required.



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