

UK Labour's right wing mounts pro-EU, anti-immigrant offensive against Corbyn

Robert Stevens
11 October 2016

The Labour Party right wing and its media backers have stepped up their campaign against Jeremy Corbyn, following his September 24 re-election as Labour leader with an even bigger majority.

Corbyn's accommodation to the right has never ceased. He set out to form his shadow cabinet with the declared aim of bringing back into leadership some of those who resigned en masse as part of the coup to remove him, and which precipitated this summer's leadership contest. Corbyn has now welcomed back at least 15 of those who resigned to his new cabinet, with further announcements yet to be made, in a reshuffle that began at the weekend. But even as his first appointments were announced a new round of attacks began.

Corbyn decided to install a right-wing Labourite, Nick Brown, as chief whip, in place of Rosie Winterton. Winterton opposed Corbyn in voting—along with 139 other Labour MPs—in support of the government's policy to renew the Trident nuclear missile system. As well as removing Winterton, Corbyn moved another MP who had opposed him on Trident, Clive Lewis, from shadow defence minister to shadow business minister. Corbyn also installed a number of his closest supporters in the main shadow cabinet jobs, including Dianne Abbott as shadow home secretary.

Brown had served as chief whip from 2008 to 2010 in the government of Gordon Brown, but Corbyn's downgrading of Winterton prompted the resignation of two whips, Conor McGinn and Holly Lynch, who had served for a year under him since first being elected MPs. Asked by the BBC if he believed Corbyn should not be leader, Alan Johnson, the former Labour home secretary under Brown, said, "Me and many of my colleagues."

Former Blair adviser John McTernan wrote that the "reshuffle ... shows that he [Corbyn] intends to bring not peace but a sword to the Parliamentary Labour Party (PLP)."

Of the MPs returning to the shadow cabinet, the most high profile job—shadow Brexit secretary—was given to Keir Starmer. Speaking to the BBC Sunday, Starmer demanded a vote in parliament on whatever terms are proposed by the government for its Brexit negotiations, but then utilised the interview to attack Corbyn, who has opposed setting caps on immigration as demanded by those calling for an end to the free movement of labour within Europe. Starmer said, "There has been a huge amount of immigration over the last 10 years and people are understandably concerned about it. I think it should be reduced and it should be reduced by making sure we have the skills in this country that are needed for the jobs that need to be done."

Asked by BBC interviewer Andrew Marr if he accepted that limiting immigration would result in a forced departure from the European Union (EU) Single Market, Starmer stated, "We have to be open to adjustments of the freedom of movement rules and how they apply to this country."

Along with former Corbyn leadership challenger Andy Burnham, Starmer began a "listening tour" of the UK last year, centred on immigration, and is preparing a report on Labour's immigration policies.

Corbyn's spokesman responded to Starmer by stating, "He [Corbyn] is not concerned about numbers."

The coup attempt that began after the June 23 vote by the UK to leave the EU, organised by the Blairites and Brownites in concert with the UK and US intelligence services, used as its justification the assertion that Corbyn was responsible for the defeat of the Remain campaign because he was not sufficiently enthusiastic in declaring support for the EU. But since then, the charge has become one that he does not pander to the noxious anti-immigrant sentiment fuelled during the referendum campaign by both sides.

Last month, a number of coup plotters, including

Stephen Kinnock, Angela Eagle and Chuka Umunna, backed a pamphlet produced by Labour's Fabian Society on the basis "that the sacred cow of free movement of people may have to be sacrificed."

With unanimity over immigration controls the order of the day, the issue of the continued access of the UK banks and big business to the European Single Market of 500 million people has become the central demand of the Remain camp. They have the support of large sections of big business.

The main propagandist in this pro-EU campaign is the *Guardian* and its Sunday sister paper, the *Observer*.

On Friday, *Guardian* columnist Jonathan Freedland penned a piece headlined, "We're marching towards extreme Brexit. Someone must speak for the 48% [who voted Remain]." He opined, "The key arena for this battle will be parliament. Labour has a national duty to challenge the government's every step." He raised that Starmer and coup plotter Hilary Benn "could deliver sharp scrutiny. But they are impaired by the Labour leadership's perverse readiness to jettison single market membership..."

The *Observer* reported this weekend that an "extraordinary cross-party alliance" of Labour, Tory, Liberal Democrat and Scottish National Party MPs "has formed since ministers made a succession of speeches at the Tory party conference in Birmingham last week, which left the clear impression they would press ahead with a hard Brexit."

It reported that "former Labour leader Ed Miliband held discussions with pro-EU Tory MPs Saturday, and was said to be considering tabling an urgent question in the Commons demanding that May appear before parliament to explain its future role in Brexit decisions, when MPs return on Monday."

Editorialising, the *Observer* commented, "Despite much of what was said last week, Brexit was not a vote to scrap free access to the single market, thereby alienating Japanese and other overseas investors."

"Rarely has the country required a purposeful, effective opposition as badly as it does now," it continued, "Stand up, Jeremy Corbyn, newly re-elected Labour leader. Except, on Europe, the defining issue of our time, Corbyn has consistently failed to stand up, show a lead or demonstrate an appreciation of the wider issues."

In his weekly column last Thursday, *Guardian* columnist and coup plotter Owen Jones demanded that Corbyn move to adopt anti-immigration policies in order to compete with the "populist right" assembled at the

Tory conference. Jones wrote that Corbyn "toyed with progressive patriotism in his leader's speech; he should persist with that and he must be positive. For as Labour thinker [!] Jon Cruddas has pointed out, the party wins when it presents an optimistic vision of national reconstruction."

Over the weekend, Jones, who has manoeuvred for Lewis to become Labour leader before the scheduled 2020 general election, denounced Corbyn's decision to speak at a Stand Up to Racism (SUTR) event commemorating the anniversary of the 1936 Battle of Cable Street, where 20,000 people drawn from an alliance of various left-wing groups, including the Labour Party and the Communist Party, united with Jewish groups to forcibly prevent a march through London's East End by Oswald Mosley's British Union of Fascists.

The *Guardian* falsely described the meeting as a "Socialist Workers Party (SWP) event." Jones, who was listed as one of SUTR's "initial signatories and supporters," withdrew and tweeted Saturday of Corbyn, "A left politician, however venerated, who speaks at SWP events will swiftly fray the patience of some of their most committed supporters."

The SWP supports the SUTR, which is led in the main by senior Labourites and trade union officials, on the basis of developing closer relations to and sowing illusions in the Labour and trade union bureaucracy. In 2003, at a time of acute crisis for Labour, which was haemorrhaging support as Blair took the country to war in Iraq, the SWP performed an invaluable service for these forces in founding Unite Against Fascism on the basis of combating a growth in support for the now largely defunct British National Party. It was considered so respectable and safe that it was endorsed by former Tory Prime Minister David Cameron.

Now, however, the Labour Party and its liberal mouthpieces such as Jones, have moved so far to the right that they use the anniversary of Cable Street as an opportunity to mount an anti-communist witch-hunt.



To contact the WSWWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)