British Medical Association officially winds up junior doctors dispute

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Last month, the *World Socialist Web Site* detailed the despicable role of Britain's pseudo-left groups, in alliance with Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn and his supporters, in the defeat of the struggle waged by 50,000 junior doctors.

The Junior Doctors Committee (JDC) of the British Medical Association (BMA) includes several Corbyn supporters who hold leading positions. The JDC's calling off, at the end of September, of 15 days of strikes set for October, November and December was essential in allowing the Conservative government to impose a vastly inferior contract on the doctors. Junior doctors who joined the health service in the summer have been working under the new contract since October, with all others to follow.

The contract includes the reduction of unsocial payments for weekend working, with Saturday and Sunday between 9 a.m. and 9 p.m. reclassified as normal working days and nightshift rates reduced, along with the elimination of automatic pay progression.

For more than a year, junior doctors—all those below consultant grade—fought with determination to oppose the contract, striking on five occasions in the face of a right-wing media campaign aimed at demonising them for daring to oppose the destruction of their jobs, terms and conditions. Opposing a relentless battery of government-led propaganda, they took the first all-out strike, without emergency cover, in the nearly 70-year history of the NHS.

Dr. Ellen McCourt was then the JDC interim chair. She stated that the BMA were .now planning a range of other actions in order to resist it …" On Wednesday, the JDC announced that neither strikes nor any other forms of protest will now take place. The existing mandate for industrial action was terminated, with the JDC stating that another mandate will not be sought.

Yesterday, the head of the BMA Council, Dr. Mark Porter, told BBC Radio 4's "Today," "We need to move ahead, work with the government and employers on protecting our members as they move across to this contract."

Junior doctors took to social media to denounce the BMA, with one accusing it of "selling a generation of doctors out." Another said it had "failed completely and utterly." A further posting read, "Corruption on the highest scale. Collusion with government for own aims. Betrayal of all doctors." Another doctor stated, "Membership cancelled."

A short statement posted on the BMA's web site confirming the end of the dispute included a "message" from new interim chair of the JDC, Dr. Peter Campbell. Campbell is a supporter of the pseudo-left Alliance for Workers Liberty. He said, "With the contract being introduced as existing contracts expire, we believe the best way of achieving the best outcome for all our members is to work with the Government and NHS Employers to monitor the implementation of the contract and raise additional issues."

Campbell made the statement as the new interim JDC chair, due to the resignation of McCourt from the post on November 4. McCourt stated upon resigning, "I have continued to listen to junior doctors and it has become increasingly apparent to me that my position is untenable." This was a reference to the mounting hostility of junior doctors to the enormity of the BMA's betrayal.

In July, McCourt took over from previous JDC chair, Dr. Johann Malawana, following his resignation when a poll of junior doctors rejected the contract he had backed. Malawana attempted to sell the deal to an angry membership, which had thrown out the virtually

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unchanged contract months before. Prior to her own sell-out, McCourt was described invariably as a “left” alternative to Malawana.

Similarly, when Campbell took over, the *Daily Telegraph* wrote that McCourt “will be replaced by her deputy Dr. Peter Campbell, a Momentum supporter from the more militant wing of the union.”

The truth is that there is nothing “militant” or even slightly oppositional about Campbell or any pseudo-left flunkey in the BMA leadership. Their role is to suppress every struggle by workers.

Campbell’s first act in taking over as JDC chair, at the JDC’s meeting on November 5, was to collaborate with the union’s right wing to ensure a crushing defeat for the doctors.

Campbell and fellow Momentum figure Yannis Gourtsoyannis played a critical role in bolstering the union bureaucracy at every stage, with the backing of the Socialist Workers Party and Socialist Party. In July, Campbell, as McCourt’s deputy on the JDC, was claiming the BMA was being transformed into a fighting organisation. He enthused, “Six months ago I couldn’t get the BMA to make a placard. Today we have taken 8 days of industrial action and won significant concessions from a first year Tory government. If the BMA can do this, imagine the labour movement pushing together in one direction.”

As the BMA called off the strike dates in September, Campbell was quoted by the *Telegraph* stating that the JDC was unable to continue strike action that “all of the feedback said was wrong.”

Everything was done by the JDC to limit the doctors’ struggle and isolate their strike, under conditions where it had widespread, deep support in a general population opposed to the break-up and privatisation of the NHS.

In recent blog postings, Campbell gives details of his own role in the sell-out. He writes, “On the 24th September a newly elected JDC met for the first time. Following elections the strategy for Industrial Action was debated. Following the feedback from the Northern Region I argued for a reduction in the length of industrial action to 3 days [from a proposed five]. That this was the best compromise between the action required and what juniors were willing to take.”

Campbell’s “compromise” was rejected. He continued that the JDC “voted to suspend all industrial action, and to consider other methods of resisting imposition.”

Campbell writes as if junior doctors were less ready for struggle than the BMA bureaucracy. But in his October 11 blog posting, he was drawing the attention of the union bureaucracy to the growing anger and rebellious mood of BMA members in opposition to the betrayal of their fight. He noted that the JDC’s suspension of industrial action “has been followed by a huge amount of criticism from some junior doctors …” He continued, “Some junior doctors are extremely angry. Within the Junior Doctors Contract Forum on Facebook, just short of 2000 have been advocating the reinstatement of industrial action …”

Giving a foretaste of the betrayal less than a month later, Campbell wrote, “Currently industrial action is suspended. In reality it would be very unlikely for the JDC to call more industrial action without going back to the membership for a new mandate.”

Hostility to the class struggle is what really unites the pseudo-left behind Corbyn as their chosen leader. Since his election as Labour Party leader 14 months ago, Corbyn has capitulated to the Labour right wing at every turn. Never once did he make an appeal for action by Labour’s half a million members or the working class more broadly in defence of the junior doctors, supporting instead Labour’s official position of urging compromise by the Tories.

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