

UK: Corbyn protects Tony Blair from a demand that he account for his Iraq war lies

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In an act of rank political cowardice, Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn absented himself from Wednesday's debate on a parliamentary motion calling for an investigation into former Prime Minister Tony Blair for "misleading" parliament over the Iraq war.

Since his election as Labour leader on a platform opposing austerity and war, Corbyn has capitulated to the warmongers in the Parliamentary Labour Party at every juncture. This reached its nadir yesterday.

A motion put forward by Scottish National Party (SNP) MP Alex Salmond stated that the Chilcot Inquiry into the Iraq war, published four months ago, "provided substantial evidence of misleading information presented by the then prime minister and others on the development of the then government's policy towards the invasion of Iraq as shown most clearly in the contrast between private correspondence to the United States government and public statements to parliament and people."

It called for a parliamentary sub-committee—the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee—to "conduct a further specific examination of this contrast in public and private policy and of the presentation of intelligence, and then to report to the House on what further action it considers necessary and appropriate to help prevent any repetition of this disastrous series of events."

Of a 650-seat parliament, just 45 MPs—mostly from the SNP—signed Salmond's motion. Just two Labour MPs, Kate Hoey and Kelvin Hopkins, signed it.

The SNP brought the motion not out of any principled concerns. Rather, Salmond speaks for those sections of the political elite who fear Blair's ambition to lead a pro-EU campaign will discredit their own attempts to portray this as a "progressive alliance." Salmond said in a statement prior to the debate, "At a

time when Blair is planning his political comeback, it is high time that this Parliament and its committees at long last brought this dark stain on UK foreign policy to a close."

However, despite Salmond's intentions the motion was accurate in its charge that Blair had lied systematically in order to pave the way for war with Iraq. This again placed Corbyn in a position of either taking a stand on principles he claims to defend, or striking yet another rotten compromise with the Blairite wing of his party.

Corbyn had famously declared in July regarding Chilcot, "We now know that the House was misled in the run-up to the war and the House must now decide how to deal with it 13 years later, just as all those who took the decisions laid bare in the Chilcot Report must face up to the consequences of their actions, whatever they may be."

True to form, Corbyn was instrumental in making sure that there would be no consequences, for Blair or anyone else. Prior to the debate the Blairite PLP majority reportedly demanded a three-line whip, forcing Labour MPs to attend the debate and to vote against the motion. *The Guardian* reported that even those Labour MPs who had voted against the Iraq war in 2003 were vociferous in their defence of Blair now. Sources said that chief whip Nick Brown had apparently "asked for an indicative vote on where MPs stood" at a meeting of the PLP, "and MP John Cryer, the left-wing chair of the parliamentary Labour party, which opposed the Iraq war, condemned the [SNP] motion to loud applause."

A Labour spokesperson told *The Independent* that, instead, there would be only a one-line whip, meaning that attendance and voting against was not mandatory. According to a source cited by the same newspaper, the

Shadow Cabinet had nevertheless decided “to oppose” the SNP motion. Corbyn’s spokesmen said he would miss the vote because he was “committed elsewhere.”

It is yet to be revealed what this vital commitment consisted of. But the prior appointment did not prevent him attending the weekly Prime Minister’s Question Time immediately prior.

Corbyn’s exit was a fitting prologue to the disgusting events that followed.

Only around 50 MPs attended the debate, with this number constantly dwindling during the three-hour session. At one point, fewer than 10 Tory MPs remained on the government benches, with barely any more on the Labour side. For three hours various Labour MPs and Tories took turns to praise an unindicted war criminal and to denounce any notion that Blair, or anyone else in ruling circles who backed the war, had anything whatsoever to answer for.

The main speech defending Blair was given by Fabian Hamilton, Labour’s shadow defence and foreign minister. Hamilton is a signatory of the pro-war Euston Manifesto group and a member of the neo-conservative Henry Jackson Society. He was given his present ministerial post as part of Corbyn’s efforts to “reach out” to his opponents. Hamilton beat the drums for war in opposing the motion stating, “With instability growing throughout the Middle East, Eastern Europe and beyond, we may face even bigger challenges tomorrow, and that is why I cannot support the motion.” He never, “for one second” thought that Blair “acted in bad faith.”

Phil Wilson, who succeeded Blair in his Sedgefield seat, said he was “proud” to be called a Blairite despite it “being a term of abuse” and that the entire House should “be proud of Tony Blair.”

Labour MP Ben Bradshaw said, “I am delighted that my own party is having none of this nonsense,” and concluded, “History will prove our former Prime Minister right” over Iraq.

At one point, Labour’s Ian Austin shouted at Salmond, “Sit down! We’ve heard enough from you. Sit down!”

The motion, when finally voted on, was opposed by 439 MPs, with 70 in favour. Just five Labour MPs supported the motion with 158 voting against.

Wednesday’s events must serve as the starkest warning.

Corbyn is not merely defending Blair, the individual, or even acting solely in order to maintain his rotten alliance with the Labour Party right. This requirement flows from the necessity to preserve Labour itself as a party of war.

Corbyn may on occasion call for opposition to this or that element of the government’s austerity agenda, but on the fundamental issue of war he acts at all times in defence of the strategic requirements of British imperialism. In 2003, Blair acted as the political representative of the British ruling class, which regardless of party allegiance continues to view its military alliance with Washington as the only means through which it can secure its share of global markets and strategic resources. That is why the lauding of Blair was endorsed by leading Tory Michael Gove, who offered his support to those Labourites who warned that the continued focus on Iraq was preventing British imperialism from stepping up its ongoing military interventions.

Gove insisted that “at no stage was there a deliberate attempt to mislead this House” by Blair. Any claims that he had agreed in advance with US President George W. Bush to go to war, were false.

British inaction in Syria had followed the Iraq war and allowed Assad, Russia and “anti-Semitic Iran” to “unleash hell on innocent people of Aleppo.” It was a “dereliction of duty” to be looking backwards rather than accepting “the responsibility on all of us do something to help the people of Aleppo who are suffering now.”



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