Pseudo-left covers for Corbyn's capitulation to Blair over Iraq war

Laura Tiernan
14 December 2016

Two weeks have passed since Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn absented himself from parliament to avoid voting on a motion to "investigate" whether Tony Blair was guilty of misleading parliament in pursuit of British involvement in the Iraq War.

It was not the first time that Corbyn has afforded protection to Blair and his backers in the Parliamentary Labour Party. Despite becoming party leader based on appeals to popular anti-war sentiment, the new Labour leader was similarly staunch in his refusal to publicly conflict with Blair after the Chilcot Report into the Iraq war was released in July.

Though Corbyn claimed as recently as May 2016 that Blair should face war crimes charges, he remained silent when the Chilcot Report provided an evidentiary basis for this. The *Financial Times* praised Corbyn's "restraint", noting the absence of "an electrifying Commons performance" and observing with satisfaction that the "B-word"—Blair—"did not pass his lips".

Most recently, on November 30, Corbyn did not even bother to show up for the parliamentary vote.

Britain's pseudo-left organisations, including the Stop the War Coalition, the Socialist Party, Left Unity, Momentum and the Socialist Workers Party, have adopted diplomatic silence in relation to Corbyn's treachery and are preventing workers and young people from drawing the necessary lessons from his de facto support for Labour's pro-war majority.

Corbyn's refusal to attack Blair is not simply a product of political cowardice. For the past 15 months, he has provided a platform for right-wing Labour MPs to argue the case for war: allowing them to back the Trident nuclear programme, supporting the NATO build-up against Russia, and enabling the free vote in November 2015 in support of bombing raids on Syria and, just last month, in support of war in Yemen.

A report in this weekend's *Telegraph* shows the consequences of Corbyn's actions. His role in blocking anti-war sentiment, handing the initiative to the right, has given British imperialism the green light for a massive escalation of militarist violence.

"RAF jets busiest for 25 years as they 'pound' Isil [Islamic State] positions in Iraq and Syria," ran the headline of an article by chief political correspondent Christopher Hope on Sunday. "A year after MPs voted to expand Britain's military activity against Isil from Iraq to Syria, the Royal Air Force is operating at its most intense for 25 years, far outstripping UK involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan…

"Ministry of Defence figures show that the Royal Air Force is now operating at its highest intensity in a single theatre of operation for 25 years with six Typhoons, eight Tornados and Reapers over Iraq and Syria. The RAF has also dropped 11 times more ordnance on Syria and Afghanistan in the past year—1,276 strikes..."

The support for Corbyn among the pseudo-left organisations has played a critical role. They have blocked any challenge to his defence of the right-wing, giving Labour a blank cheque to facilitate British military aggression.

An article posted by the Stop the War Coalition (STWC) on November 30, authored by STWC convenor Lindsey German, complained, "it is particularly shameful that so many MPs are rallying in defence of Tony Blair, including so many Labour MPs."

But German did not make a single reference to Corbyn's absenting himself from the vote. Her silence is all the more striking given that Corbyn was chairman of the STWC, resigning after he became Labour leader in September 2015. German also remained tight lipped on the cowardly absence of STWC "patron" Dianne Abbott, who joined Corbyn in exiting the chamber.

According to German, "The Labour right wing is rapidly turning itself into a war party, justifying everything from arms sales to Saudi Arabia to further interventions in the Middle East."

This is a historical fabrication. The British Labour Party has served as a party of war and Empire throughout the twentieth century, supporting two world wars that led to the deaths of tens of millions of people throughout Europe,

© World Socialist Web Site

Africa, Asia and the Middle East. For more than a century, the fight for socialism in Britain has required a relentless struggle to expose the pro-imperialist politics of the Labour Party and to break the working class from its political influence. The Stop the War Coalition is dedicated to the opposite task.

The day after the parliamentary vote on the anti-Blair motion, the STWC held a public meeting in Sheffield addressed by the group's convenor, Andrew Murray. During question time, the *World Socialist Web Site* challenged Murray on his organisation's continued promotion of Corbyn. This reporter asked, "Why have you been silent in your remarks tonight on Corbyn's cowardly decision to absent himself from yesterday's vote? Why was Lindsey German silent? Why do you continue to promote Corbyn as an anti-war figure and a socialist when Corbyn has, in relation to Trident, in defence of NATO and by arranging a free vote on Syria, ceded the initiative to Blairite warmongers such as Hilary Benn each and every time?"

Murray, a hard-line Stalinist who joined the Labour Party in 2016, responded with hostility, asserting, "In attacking Jeremy Corbyn on international policy you are lining up with the *Telegraph* and the Conservative Party."

"We were led into the Iraq war by a Labour government," he conceded, "and I was proud to be in the room this summer when the leader of the Labour Party stood up and said 'that was wrong, and the Labour Party owes the country an apology' and that leader was Jeremy Corbyn."

Murray refused to address why Corbyn now baulks at any mention of Blair's name and has dropped his earlier call for war crimes charges. As far as the STWC is concerned, a personal apology is sufficient response to a brutal, unprovoked war of aggression that has killed an estimated one million Iraqis. The *Canary*, the pro-Corbyn news site whose stated mission is to "disrupt the status quo of the UK and international journalism" was also silent on Corbyn's cave-in. Their article, "Parliament just saved Tony Blair's ass, and paved the way for more reckless wars," provoked the following response from a self-declared Corbyn admirer: "I find it odd there is no mention in the article of Corbyn's role in this outcome given the fact he is the current Labour leader and has spoken out against the Iraq war many times. His omission from the article speaks volumes."

Momentum, the "grassroots movement" founded to support Corbyn, chose not to report the debate on the motion at all. Instead, they tweeted regarding Corbyn's performance earlier that day at Prime Minister's Question Time, "Great work from @jeremycorbyn today, highlighting the failure of the Tories' 'long-term economic plan' for the people of Britain #PMQs."

The Stalinist *Morning Star* airbrushed Corbyn's role with a December 1 article that was silent on his parliamentary no-show, but which instead hailed him for introducing a one-line whip so that Labour MPs "could back [Scottish National Party MP] Mr Salmond's motion [calling for Blair to be investigated] without fear of sanction."

The one-line whip is a less-binding parliamentary maneuver that was used by Corbyn *to avoid* a confrontation with the PLP majority, enabling his key supporters—including shadow Chancellor John McDonnell—to absent themselves from the vote.

The Socialist Workers Party's Charlie Kimber attacked "cowardly Labour MPs" for voting to protect Blair, while Corbyn himself evaded any such charge—with Kimber merely noting his absence from the debate, "because he was 'committed elsewhere.'"

The Socialist Party (formerly Militant), mildly criticises Corbyn for retreating before the Blairites, describing his non-appearance for the motion against Blair as "a mistake". However, the SP's concern is that Corbyn's naked capitulation to the right-wing is exposing the political fiction underlying their bid for readmittance to the Labour Party—that Corbyn embodies the possibility of Labour being transformed into "an anti-austerity, socialist party."

"It is vitally urgent that no more concessions are made and that a clear campaign is launched to consolidate the landslide victory that Jeremy won back in September," they insist, before reprinting "the correspondence that has so far taken place between Ian McNicol, general secretary of the Labour Party, and Hannah Sell, deputy general secretary of the Socialist Party," urging the readmission of 75 SP members "expelled or excluded for their socialist ideas."

Masters of understatement, the SP writes that McNicol "has not responded positively to the application" as he has "presided over the exclusions of many tens of thousands of Labour Party members during the attempted coup against Corbyn…"

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site