

Britain: Pseudo-left TUSC reaffirms support for Labour

Julie Hyland
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Late last month, the steering committee of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) reluctantly agreed to stand candidates in May's local authority elections.

TUSC is a coalition between the Rail, Maritime and Transport (RMT) union, the Socialist Party (SP) and the Socialist Workers Party (SWP). It was formed in 2010, supposedly to provide a socialist alternative to a neo-Thatcherite Labour Party.

This pose of independence was exposed by the election of Jeremy Corbyn as Labour leader in September 2015. Corbyn's surprise victory gave limited expression to a leftward shift among layers of workers, and particularly young people. For this reason, the Labour right-wing tried by every method—bureaucratic, electoral and legal—to overturn Corbyn's leadership.

Corbyn—a loyal backbench MP for more than 30 years—had no intention of leading a fight against the right-wing. His leadership victory was the unintended consequence of attempts by the Labour left, with the support of the Stalinist *Morning Star* and the pseudo-left, to prevent the party from complete collapse following its electoral debacle in 2015. Nevertheless, Corbyn's election was seized on by the pseudo-left to regroup around Labour.

The Socialist Party claimed it was a step towards the party's re-founding "as a democratic, socialist, anti-austerity party." It penned an open letter to Labour, signed by 75 of its current and former leading members—led by Peter Taaffe and Hannah Sell—calling for them to be admitted to membership to help "consolidate Jeremy Corbyn's victory."

The SWP did its usual political book-keeping. Publicly it maintained an organisational distance from Corbyn, and even reprinted extended quotes from Leon Trotsky dissecting the insidious political role of the Labour left. But this was only so the SWP could maintain credibility among workers and youth unconvinced by Labour's proclaimed "socialist transformation" so as to better corral them behind the prospect of a possible Corbyn-led government.

In line with these manoeuvres, TUSC was all but wound up. In the May 2016 local elections, TUSC candidates ran

only against carefully selected right-wing Labour candidates, as the self-professed "electoral wing" for the "Corbyn insurgency." This was followed in autumn by an SP proposal that TUSC's preparations for the 2017 elections should be placed on hold, "pending discussions with Jeremy Corbyn and his supporters..."

While the right-wing failed in their immediate objective of removing Corbyn, his response has been one of wholesale political capitulation. Corbyn has supported, or facilitated, the victory of the right on party policy—from war in Syria, to retaining nuclear weapons, to the campaign in support of the European Union and now on restricting immigration. This is despite the fact that Labour's right is a tiny minority within the party, which has grown by hundreds of thousands of members in response to Corbyn's campaign.

Leon Trotsky warned of such a situation in 1926 in the wake of the betrayal of the British general strike by Labour and the Trades Union Congress, which was followed by Labour Party conference's decision to bar Communists from membership.

It would be the "crudest" blunder, Trotsky warned, to think that the task of establishing a united front against the right-wing consisted in obtaining a victory for a "left" candidate. "Such an objective would contain within itself a contradiction," he wrote. "The left muddleheads are incapable of power; but if through the turn of events it fell into their hands they would hasten to pass it over to their elder brothers on the right. They would do the same with the state as they are now doing in the party."

He continued, "The extreme rights continue to control the party. This can be explained by the fact that a party cannot confine itself to isolated left campaigns but is compelled to have an overall system of policy. The lefts have no such system nor by their very essence can they. But the rights do: with them stands tradition, experience and routine and, most important, with them stands bourgeois society as a whole which slips them ready-made solutions." [Trotsky, Notes on the situation in Britain 1925-1926, *Where is Britain Going?*]

Trotsky's prognosis has more than stood the test of time as

Labour has proven its role as the principal political prop of British capitalism, irrespective of whether led by Clement Attlee, Tony Blair or Jeremy Corbyn.

As for Momentum, the pro-Corbyn campaign into which much of the pseudo-left liquidated, last month its chairman, Jon Lansman, engineered the dissolution of the group's structures—including the national committee and the planned congress--and the imposition of a new constitution seeking Momentum's affiliation to the Labour Party. His aim, and that of the leadership team around Corbyn of which he is a part, is to purge the pseudo-left from Momentum, as previous or current political affiliations are grounds to be barred from Labour membership.

Corbyn sanctioned this in an email to Momentum members, in which he sanctimoniously called on them to “not let internal debate distract from our work that has to be done to help Labour win elections.”

Labour now faces two by-elections on February 23, in Copeland and Stoke Central, triggered by the resignation of right-wing Labour MPs. Polls indicate it could lose both. According to Polly Toynbee in the *Guardian*, this is the intention of the party apparatus, citing rumours that some “Labour MPs secretly hoping a Stoke loss would ignite a ‘Corbyn must go’ move.”

Labour MP Clive Lewis, who Corbyn has promoted as his ally, has positioned himself for this eventuality, resigning from Labour's front-bench last week in opposition to the party's support for triggering Article 50, beginning Britain's exit from the European Union.

Despite Labour having shut down all means of opposition to the right, Hannah Sell called on TUSC's steering committee to maintain its “cautious approach” to standing against the party, claiming that it consists of “two parties in one.”

The SWP's Charlie Kimber opposed standing any candidates at all. While reportedly agreeing that Labour was not a means of transforming society, he argued that TUSC must not stand against Labour, because “we need to allow contradictions within Labour to develop further.”

This is all sophistry to cover for the fact that the SP and SWP fear nothing more than the collapse of the Labour Party and will do all in their power to prop it up.

As for the RMT, executive member Paul Reilly went out of his way to stress the union's backing for Corbyn—highlighting that it was the second largest donor to his leadership campaigns despite not being affiliated to Labour. But National President Sean Hoyle said Corbyn “can't keep his socialist principles intact and the Labour Party intact at the same time” and councillors needed to be challenged at the ballot box.

Two factors motivate this position. The RMT has

complained that Labour does not currently have “structural/constitutional arrangements that would make affiliation in the union's interests.” In other words, due importance is not being given to the union in terms of its weight within the party apparatus.

Secondly, Labour councils across the country are implementing massive spending cuts, laying waste to vital services and jobs. Last year, Labour-controlled Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service Authority threatened to sack firefighters en masse and impose worse contracts before being forced to back down. The situation in many Labour-controlled towns and cities is even worse today, under conditions in which Corbyn has instructed Labour councillors not to defy Tory cuts and to impose austerity.

For these reasons, the RMT wants to keep its freedom to manoeuvre, backing TUSC, Labour or other candidates on a “case-by-case” basis. Likewise, the SP argues that Corbyn's “biggest Achilles heel is the Labour councils up and down the country which are implementing Tory cuts” and warns that “we could see anti-cuts campaigners concluding that they have no choice but to stand in elections themselves” if the Labour candidates are seen as “just another pro-austerity establishment politician.”

In reality, the only areas where TUSC is seriously considering running candidates are in Scotland and Wales, where Labour is all but wiped out. TUSC's political efforts are instead going to be directed towards advising Labour councillors how to save their political skins. This is the purpose of a “briefing document” prepared by TUSC to inform Labour councillors how they can “easily—legally—prevent cuts by using reserves and borrowing powers to set legal no-cuts budgets...”



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