

# UK Labour leader Corbyn and Shadow Chancellor McDonnell offer unity talks with right-wingers Blair and Mandelson

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9 March 2017

We are witnessing the final political and moral collapse of Jeremy Corbyn's leadership of the Labour Party.

On February 27, Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell wrote on the Labour Briefing website of a "soft coup" being mounted by "an alliance between elements in the Labour Party and the Murdoch media empire." He went on to say that "their objective is to ensure Jeremy trails in the polls and can't win elections. In this way they can destroy morale among party members and their confidence in him."

McDonnell's remarks were hardly controversial. He was only confirming what everyone knows: that efforts to remove Corbyn, which provoked last year's leadership contest, are continuing.

The focus of moves against Corbyn was the run-up to February 23 by-elections in Copeland and Stoke on Trent. Just days before the vote, Peter Mandelson, co-architect of the New Labour project alongside former party leader Tony Blair, told an event organised by the *Jewish Chronicle* that he "works every single day to bring an end to his (Corbyn's) tenure in office."

Blair, a vociferous supporter of Britain's membership of the European Union, declared earlier that Corbyn facilitated Brexit by not opposing the triggering of Article 50. He urged those in favour of EU membership "to rise up and fight Brexit at any cost," adding, "The debilitation of the Labour Party is the facilitator of Brexit."

After having denounced Blair and Mandelson for sabotaging Labour's election campaign in Copeland, leading to a victory for the Tory Party, McDonnell went into sharp reverse.

On March 2, he said he was "holding out hands" to Mandelson and wanted a "constructive relationship." He continued, "I will be inviting him to come and have a cup of tea and discuss issues around common concern." This

would be part of a dialogue with Progress, a Blairite think tank.

Three days later, McDonnell, appearing on Sunday's *Andrew Marr Show*, extended the hand of friendship to Blair himself. When the host asked if Blair as well as Mandelson was welcome to a cup of tea, McDonnell replied, "Of course, I'm willing to talk to anybody, we need advice from everybody. I'm happy to go along and talk to Progress at any stage as well."

He added, "We have got to unite the party to provide an effective opposition, so we can then form a government. I think Tony Blair, Peter Mandelson and myself, Jeremy Corbyn realise the responsibility on our shoulders and we're going to bear that and work together to do that."

In an accompanying article in Sunday's *Mirror*, McDonnell wrote, in an act of self-denigration, "Let us drink tea, not make war."

Corbyn has distinguished himself from McDonnell only by remaining silent throughout the latest efforts to remove him. Instead, at a conference of the Scottish Labour Party following the Copeland defeat, he meekly declared, "We need to remain united."

Last Saturday, Corbyn had the opportunity to address a rally of up to 250,000 people in London called to oppose the destruction of the National Health Service. Corbyn, the vicar of Islington, made allusions to the Parable of the Good Samaritan with regard to the need to defend the NHS. But not one word of criticism was directed against the Labour governments of Blair and Gordon Brown, whose embrace of the "internal market" and the Private Finance Initiative did so much to advance the free-market agenda, paving the way for the Tory assault. Nor was there any call for a struggle against their co-thinkers in today's Labour Party.

Corbyn didn't attend a meeting of the Parliamentary

Labour Party Monday night, where McDonnell, on his behalf, reportedly showed “contrition” when questioned by various Blairite MPs about his earlier accusations of a “soft coup.” He made a point of praising the work of former shadow ministers Rachel Reeves, Caroline Flint and Angela Eagle, coup plotters all.

“What the Tories fear most is a united Labour Party,” he declared. That same night, his spokesman told the *Labourlist* website that he had already approached Mandelson: “I won’t give out any details, but, yes, we have begun our ‘tea offensive.’”

So complete is the prostration of Corbyn and McDonnell that columnist Daniel Finkelstein in Murdoch’s *Times* was able to comment, “If he’s going to go down, for goodness sake go down fighting. I mean, this? This is pathetic.”

Corbyn was elected Labour leader in September 2015 after defeating three challengers, including a rout of the most overt Blairite, Liz Kendall.

As soon as he was in office, moves were initiated—backed by the UK and US intelligence agencies—to remove him. In the aftermath of the Brexit referendum, a leadership contest was provoked by a vote of no confidence in Corbyn by the overwhelming majority of Labour MPs, based on accusations that he was not sufficiently pro-war or pro-European Union. Corbyn defeated his challenger, Owen Smith, by an even greater margin than in his first victory. Hundreds of thousands had joined the party to support him because he was viewed as someone who would lead a struggle against the Blairites.

Instead, Corbyn and McDonnell opposed every demand made by their supporters for the deselection of right-wing MPs and capitulated on every occasion to their opponents, including granting a free vote on war in Syria and on replacing the Trident nuclear weapons system, and instructing Labour councils to implement Tory austerity cuts. Now they offer unity discussions over tea and biscuits.

Britain’s pseudo-left groups have played a politically criminal role in boosting Corbyn’s standing among workers and young people, portraying his election as proof that a fight was underway for the “soul” of the Labour Party. Today, the Socialist Party is warning somewhat belatedly that Corbyn’s latest backsliding poses the danger of a right-wing victory!

For its part, the Socialist Workers Party channels the spirit of John Lennon, declaring, “Mass revolts can’t just be conjured up. But imagine if Labour had mobilised all

its MPs and its vast membership on last Saturday’s demonstration. Imagine if Labour councils refused to make cuts, or if constituency offices organised to support strikes.”

This conscious deception was opposed from the outset by the Socialist Equality Party. In its very first statement on Corbyn’s 2015 victory, the SEP warned of Labour: “No one can seriously propose that this party—which, in its politics and organisation and the social composition of its apparatus, is Tory in all but name—can be transformed into an instrument of working class struggle. The British Labour Party did not begin with Blair. It is a bourgeois party of more than a century’s standing and a tried and tested instrument of British imperialism and its state machine. Whether led by Clement Attlee, James Callaghan or Jeremy Corbyn, its essence remains unaltered.”

Writing on Corbyn’s re-election in 2016, we explained, “Corbyn’s overarching commitment to unity proves he is not an opponent of the Labour bureaucracy, but its last line of defence. His political role is a rebranding of Labour, which has become politically toxic as a result of its rightward lurch to overtly pro-business and pro-war policies. His aim is to prevent the emergence of a genuine struggle by workers and youth that would inevitably lead to a break with Labour.”

Last October, the SEP’s Third National Congress endorsed a resolution, “Jeremy Corbyn and the Labour Party: The strategic lessons.” We urge all workers and youth to study this document. It provides an essential foundation for the development of a new socialist leadership in the British working class.

*“Jeremy Corbyn and the Labour Party: The strategic lessons,” published together with the other resolution passed at the SEP (UK) Congress, “For a new socialist movement against militarism, austerity and war,” can be purchased here.*



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