

UK: Labour leader Corbyn kowtows yet again to the party's right wing

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Last week, the *Observer* ran an “exclusive” based on a secret recording of Jon Lansman, the founder of Momentum. Momentum is the grassroots organisation that backed Jeremy Corbyn’s two successful challenges for Labour Party leadership.

In McCarthyite tones, the Sunday sister paper of the *Guardian* presented the recording as proof of a “hard-left plot” by Momentum to take over the Labour Party, by winning the affiliation of the Unite union and the Communication Workers Union (CWU).

Lansman told supporters that he expects Unite, along with the CWU, to affiliate to Momentum if Len McCluskey wins his battle for re-election as Unite general secretary. McCluskey faces a challenge from Gerard Coyne, who is supported by the Labour right wing.

Speculation that Unite—Labour’s largest donor—“is preparing to give money, as well as organisational support, to Momentum” would “alarm” critics of the Labour leader, the *Observer* wrote, who worry that “left-wing activists and some Unite insiders are laying plans to deselect them in a mass purge before the next election.”

The article cited Labour deputy leader Tom Watson condemning Lansman’s plans as proof of “entryism” and a secret “left-wing” plot to “take control of the Labour party, as well as organise in the [trade unions] GMB and Unison.”

“I warned last year of entryism and no one can now doubt that threat is a real one,” Watson said. “For Unite to affiliate to Momentum it would require the approval of its executive committee. I hope Len McCluskey hasn’t made promises without clearing them through the democratic structures of our union.”

The entire article is a stitch-up. Lansman was speaking publicly, so there was no reason to covertly tape him. The hype about a “secret” recording that the newspaper then leaked was solely to suit its portrayal of factional intrigue. As for his comments about the potential of union

affiliation to Momentum, there is nothing in the rules—either of that organisation or Unite—which forbids such a link-up, the prospect of which, moreover, was entirely speculative on Lansman’s part.

The *Observer*’s “exclusive” was manufactured to provide a pretext for the Labour right to repeat their charges of a “left-wing” plot so as to insist on preserving their own domination over the party.

Watson thundered that Lansman’s plan, if successful, “will destroy the Labour Party as an electoral force. So you have to be stopped.” Taking to the airwaves, he questioned whether Corbyn knew of the “secret plan” between Lansman and McCluskey to “take control of the Labour Party.” It appeared to have the “tacit approval of the leadership,” he claimed, although it was not clear what Corbyn “knows and doesn’t know.”

Vowing to demand answers, he said: “I regard this is a battle for the future existence of the Labour party.”

McCluskey has been a key backer of Corbyn, so Labour’s right wing regard the prospect of his defeat as general secretary as a staging post in the moves against the Labour leader himself.

Coyne joined Watson in denouncing “This shocking revelation [that] reveals a secret hard-left plot by Len McCluskey to seize control of the Labour party in perpetuity using cash taken from hard-working members of Unite.”

McCluskey said the claims were a “complete fabrication” and “there are no plans to fund anybody.” He had not “met Jon Lansman—there have been no secret meetings with anybody about Momentum,” he said, accusing Watson, his former close friend and flat mate, of “a deliberate attempt to sensationalise something in order to influence the outcome of the general secretary election of Unite.”

The depiction of McCluskey and Momentum as “hard-left” is false. As head of Unite, Britain’s largest union,

McCluskey has done his utmost to stifle and suppress any offensive by workers against the austerity measures imposed by successive Labour, Liberal and Conservative governments. He fears, however, that the Blairite right will succeed in alienating the working class entirely from Labour altogether, which is why he backed Corbyn as necessary for salvaging the party.

Lansman's establishing of Momentum was similarly aimed at trying to prop up Labour's right-wing husk. Indeed, having supported Corbyn's two leadership challenges, Lansman closed the organisation down in January as proof of his commitment to the Labour apparatus. Utilising claims of a "Trotskyist" and "extremist" plot as his justification, and without any prior discussion, Lansman liquidated Momentum's structures and drew up a new constitution stipulating that people would only be allowed to join if they are "a member of the Labour Party and no other political party."

As the *World Socialist Web Site* explained, "The Lansman faction has carried out a purge of the pseudo-left more ruthless than that of the Labour right during its moves against Corbyn's supporters."

The real "exclusive" in the Lansman recording was his acknowledgement that this purge was ordered by Corbyn and McDonnell. The pair had "personally asked him [Lansman] to exclude members of the Socialist Party (the successor to the Militant Tendency) from Momentum owing to the embarrassment they were causing," the *Observer* reported.

Lansman explained to his audience that he had rewritten Momentum's rules to ensure that only Labour members could join as the price for getting Unite and other unions' backing. "It was important to require Labour Party membership in the rules. ... It was important, for example, for Unite," he said. "That's why we introduced those bits. It was to get Unite."

Lansman also made clear that Momentum was getting ready for Corbyn's departure as party leader. Blaming the "man at the top" for Labour's defeat in the Copeland by-election last month, he said, "Ensuring that when Jeremy ceases to be leader, and at some point he will cease to be leader, I hope at a time of his own choosing, we have a fair election where candidates who have support among the membership can get on the ballot paper and we will be able to vote for them."

Lansman was referring to efforts by Momentum and others to ensure party rules that currently require leadership candidates to get the backing of at least 15 percent of MPs be changed to 5 percent. His statements

underscore that the Labour "left" accepts that Corbyn must go, but want to try to ensure a fairer playing field in the resulting leadership contest. Even this is considered beyond the pale by the Labour right.

Corbyn's response has been yet another call for party unity. Claiming that the row was the result of "high spirits," he penned a joint statement with Watson stating that after "a robust and constructive discussion," the shadow cabinet "agreed on the need to strengthen party unity."

While Corbyn and Watson "recognised the right of groups across the spectrum of Labour's broad church to discuss their views and try to influence the party so long as they operate within the rules," they stressed that the "leadership represents the whole party and not any one strand within it."

This filthy operation against rank-and-file members, by Momentum, Corbyn, his Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell and Watson et al, has only drawn the pseudo-left closer to Labour.

Earlier this month, the Socialist Workers Party announced that it had suspended its membership of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC)—a coalition between the Rail, Maritime and Transport (RMT) union, the Socialist Party (SP) and the SWP.

TUSC was supposedly founded to provide an alternative to Labour. It largely abandoned this approach following Corbyn's election and, in January, it reluctantly committed to stand some candidates against Labour in May's local authority elections, on a "selective basis."

This was too much for the SWP, which complained that it "is a barrier to united front work with Labour people. Our small electoral united front would make it harder to achieve a larger united front with the Labour left." The SWP explained it had called for a vote for Labour in last month's by-elections even though the party's "candidates were from the right."



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