

The Guardian's Paul Mason advises Labour's Jeremy Corbyn on how to prepare for government

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Guardian columnist Paul Mason has issued what he describes as “[a] five-point plan to bring about a Labour victory—and soon.”

Written on the day after Labour under Jeremy Corbyn secured major advances that left Prime Minister Theresa May's Conservatives as a minority government, Mason offers a programme for political betrayal—and soon.

No one would guess from reading the article that Mason was one of those who backed a “Progressive Alliance” in the election. This was a campaign for Labour to stand aside in certain areas to ensure a pro-European Union candidate won against pro-Brexit Tories.

Mason is a former member of the Workers Power group. He campaigned for a Remain vote in last June's referendum on British membership of the European Union (EU), along with Labour's Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell. He is also a leading light in Another Europe in Possible—the pro-EU grouping led by Yanis Varoufakis, the former finance minister in Greece's Syriza government. Mason has even adopted the posed louche style of his mentor Varoufakis, complete with leather jacket, musings on economics and contempt for the working class, Marxism and hostility to social revolution.

His “Progressive Alliance” was to comprise Labour, the Scottish National Party, Liberal Democrats, Greens and others, predicated on support for the overturning of the Leave referendum vote—either through a second referendum or winning a deal for Britain remaining in the single market.

He insisted that this Alliance should be based on the promotion of cultural “values”, specifically support for identity politics based on race, sex and sexuality. Aside from this, it must be a comfortable berth “for those who support nuclear deterrent” or want “restrictions on free

movement post Brexit.”

This encompassed the political right, with Mason insisting, “[I]t is not enough for liberal Conservatives from the Cameron-Osborne generation [a reference to the former Conservative prime minister and chancellor] simply to move on to better jobs. They should now lend their votes to the progressive parties.”

Mason's model, as with all supposedly progressive liberals and the pseudo-left, was Syriza in Greece and Podemos in Spain. His particular complaint with Corbyn and those backing him was the fact that on occasion they could resort to “using the classic, old left rhetoric that parties like Podemos and Syriza represent a break from.” Any attempt to pose as socialists and condemn capitalism in even the mildest terms would alienate the “free market elite”, who largely backed Remain and whose support was vital, Mason insists.

Corbyn, who for years has been a columnist for the Stalinist *Morning Star* and whose leading advisers are Stalinists, also claimed Syriza as his model. But rather than one that would displace the Labour Party, he set out to construct a similarly broad “social alliance”—tying the working class to capitalism—within the framework of the Labour Party. In the process he has accepted all the demands placed on him by the party's right wing—on retaining nuclear weapons, support for NATO, membership of the Single Market, implementing £7 billion in welfare cuts, more money for the police, army and secret services, etc.

This has earned him both Mason's gratitude and a series of helpful hints on how much further to the right Corbyn must now go in order to prepare for a government role.

His *Guardian* column begins by hailing the “coalition of voters” won by Labour as “unique”—comprising the

young, former UK Independence Party (UKIP) supporters and Remainers. He argues that Labour is now “confronted with a historic opportunity” to “solidifying that accidental coalition into a progressive majority.”

Mason cautions that, so far, Corbyn has only won voters because he “told a story” that was “vague enough to allow a million Greens and possibly a million ex-Ukippers to believe they could be part of it,” before warning, “that won’t cohere into a single story unless Corbyn and the Labour bureaucracy are prepared to make compromises.”

What are these compromises?

Some of his suggestions are anodyne nonsense—such as “Concretise the anti-austerity programme,” “Understand the power of data” and “Learn how to campaign in a modern way.” But he gets down to the real business at hand when he insists that the first condition for Labour to govern is to “Neutralise the issues of defence and security”—that is, to reassure the ruling elite that Corbyn is serious in abandoning his pacifist squeamishness about Trident nuclear weapons and his newfound commitment to NATO and strengthening the armed forces.

This means beginning a “strategic defence and security review” that takes particular account of “Russian diplomatic brinkmanship.”

This cannot be entrusted to anyone vaguely left: “Put both home affairs and defence in the hands of capable shadow ministers from the soft and centre left, and let technocrats handle the redesigns needed.”

In April last year, Mason was already making what he described as “the left-wing case for nuclear weapons.” His video demanded that Labour adopt a “new NATO Strategic Concept”, including threatening nuclear war to confront a “newly aggressive and unpredictable Russia.”

Mason’s second imperative is that the “pro- and anti-Corbyn groups” within Labour should be rebuilt as an “alliance.” To this end, the pro-Corbyn Momentum must be affiliated to Labour alongside the Blairite think-tank Progress and Labour First, which declares its mission to be “to ensure that the voices of moderate party members are heard while the party is kept safe from the organised hard left.”

Momentum, by posing as a supposedly “grassroots network” independent of the party machine, was able to build up significant support for Corbyn among youth in particular. Having fulfilled this mission, Mason urges that it is brought into Labour’s apparatus to help discipline any members who oppose Labour’s lurch to the right.

Mason concludes by insisting, “Corbyn’s compromise

should be the one Nye Bevan made in the 1950s, and which Alexis Tsipras made in Greece in 2015: you do the radical economics first—everything else you do cautiously.”

He warns, “To attack the elite networks of the oldest imperial power in the world is to invite failure. Corbyn should find shadow ministers who will enthusiastically engage with modernising and equipping the police, intelligence and military, and leave the rest to experts. Dismantling the economic power of the UK elite will be hard enough, without trying to bust up their political power networks at the same time.”

To cite Bevan is to reinforce Mason’s pro-militarist message. Credited with the formation of the National Health Service under the 1945 Labour government, Bevan was the acknowledged leader of Labour’s left before 1957, when he abruptly reversed his long-standing support for unilateral nuclear disarmament, arguing, “It would send a British Foreign Secretary naked into the conference-chamber.”

To cite Alexis Tsipras has the same significance for Corbyn’s anti-austerity rhetoric.

Mason’s claim that you can somehow dismantle the economic power of the elite while leaving its political power unchallenged could only be made by a political scoundrel of the worst stripe.

As he knows full well, Syriza did neither. Having won the election in January 2015, and an even larger anti-EU austerity mandate in the referendum it called in June that year, Syriza betrayed its supporters completely. That is what earns the fulsome praise of someone who believes attacking the elites is “to invite failure” and why Mason recommends Tsipras as a model for Corbyn and Labour to emulate.

Paul Mason is a man with a highly developed sense of his own self-importance. But the truth is that nothing he says is very original. He is only one among many bourgeois media pundits and policy advisers who are presently directing Corbyn along the route he must travel to be acceptable to the powers-that-be as Britain’s future prime minister. And having begun his long march to “respectability”, Corbyn will need very little persuading to go the extra mile.



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