

UK Labour leader Corbyn appoints opponents to cabinet as Blairite right wing continue to plot

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Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn has appointed a number of critics and opponents to his shadow cabinet in what he described as “a government in waiting.”

Corbyn appointed Owen Smith as Shadow Northern Ireland spokesman immediately following June’s general election. Smith challenged Corbyn in last year’s second putsch attempt by the party’s right wing.

Among the latest brought back into the fold are Karl Turner (Transport), Gloria de Piero (Justice), Roberta Blackman-Woods (International Development), Nick Thomas-Symonds (Home Affairs) and Rachael Maskell (Rail). All had resigned from the cabinet at various points after complaining that Corbyn’s “left” credentials meant Labour had become unelectable. This from a party whose association with the criminal invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the multi-billion pound bailout of the banks and super-rich after 2008 had seen it haemorrhage support over years, crashing to a record low in the 2015 election.

The new appointees will join fellow Corbyn critics, such as Jack Dromey and Fabian Hamilton, who were brought into cabinet last year. Dromey supported Owen Smith in the 2016 leadership contest, while Hamilton quit his position as Shadow European Minister in June 2016, before being brought back in as Peace and Disarmament Minister in November the same year. Hamilton’s responsibility is especially galling, given that he is a signatory to the right wing, neo-con Henry Jackson Society.

Although Labour lost June’s general election, Corbyn’s anti-austerity, anti-war pitch saw the party win its largest share of the vote, at 40 percent, since 1997. Moreover, he did so despite a significant section of the Parliamentary Labour Party (PLP) mounting alternative election campaigns aimed at ensuring their party’s defeat.

This included the so-called “Progressive Alliance” initiated by arch warmonger Tony Blair. This cross-party initiative, which sought to bring together all those who oppose Britain leaving the European Union (EU), saw some

Labour MPs demanding the party withdraw from the election in marginal seats in favour of Remain candidates from the Liberal Democrats or Greens.

Other Labour MPs, such as Joan Ryan (Enfield North), circulated a letter to constituents disassociating themselves from Corbyn and the party leadership and claiming that Conservative Prime Minister Theresa May would win the election with a massive majority.

Neither Corbyn’s overtures, nor his electoral performance, have seen off the threat to his leadership from the right wing.

The Grenfell Tower inferno has ignited widespread anger over the record levels of social inequality—deliberately encouraged by successive governments—that allowed working class people to live in a death trap. However, Labour’s right wing is bitterly hostile to any perceived change in course away from austerity, lest it encourage more wide-reaching demands for wealth redistribution at the expense of the rich.

Last week, Chuka Umunna, another former leadership contender and a Blairite, tabled an amendment in defiance of the Labour leadership opposing a “hard-Brexit” during the debate on the Tory government’s legislative programme.

Umunna had no chance of winning his amendment, which was intended as a public declaration of ongoing hostility to Corbyn. According to the *Daily Mail*, Umunna has held secret talks with “leading figures on the Europhile wing of the Tory Party last week to thrash out a joint strategy on the critical Brexit legislation about to come before the Commons.”

The *Mail* cited a source saying, “Chuka sees himself as the leader of the Remain fight back and is rallying troops on all sides of the House. He has got much more in common with open-minded Tory MPs than he does with Corbyn anyway.”

Umunna intended to hold a second challenge for leadership if, as hoped, Corbyn had presided over an electoral disaster for Labour. Instead, May has only been

able to assemble a government by stitching up a “confidence and supply” deal with the right-wing, ultra-loyalist Democratic Unionist Party, in return for a £1 billion [US\$1.3 billion] additional “public expenditure” package for Northern Ireland.

Umunna’s Tory co-conspirators made it clear they did not want to “rock the boat” until the government’s legislative programme had gone through parliament, so none broke ranks to support his amendment. The PLP had no such qualms, however, with 49 Labour MPs defying Corbyn to back the motion.

Corbyn was forced to sack three members of his cabinet shortly afterwards, but these were third-rank players whose removal will have no impact whatsoever on right-wing plots.

Umunna is thought to be among a group planning a breakaway from the Labour Party. According to the *Sunday Times*, Labour “moderates” have approached donors to back a new “centrist party.” No names are disclosed but the *Times* reported that the former foreign secretary, David Miliband, has been “tipped as a possible leader” and that “Blair is likely to make an intervention on Brexit soon to rally support for an alternative.”

This comes as delegates are meant to be elected this week by Constituency Labour Parties (CLP) for the autumn’s annual party conference. Shadow Chancellor and Corbyn ally John McDonnell has sponsored a rule change to the conference that will lower the number of nominations required for an MP to stand in leadership contests.

This is to try to prevent a repeat of 2015, when the PLP—overwhelmingly right wing—almost blocked Corbyn standing as a candidate. He only made it in the end after several MPs agreed to support his nomination to give the contest a democratic veneer.

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The right wing is now bleating it is the victim of a “hard-left” plot to deselect them as MPs—after they carried out two attempted coups to depose Corbyn, including legal action and the suspensions and expulsions of members and supporters. In fact, not a single MP has been deselected so far, regardless of how disloyal they have been.

According to the pro-Corbyn SKWAWKBOX blog, the right wing is using “undemocratic and downright deceitful tactics” to ensure their predominance at the conference. This includes a drive to limit CLPs to a single delegate and the “outright disenfranchisement” of Labour Party MPs.

It reprints an email sent out by the executive of Enfield North CLP, the seat of Joan Ryan, “informing them after the fact that it has appointed a delegate.”

Under the subject “Events and meetings,” the letter to members informs them they “may advise the CLP Delegate

to Conference [name withheld] who with the approval of the Conference Arrangements Office, was appointed by the EC in order to meet the conference timetable.”

The truth is that no action is being taken against the right wing. This was underscored last weekend during a conference of the Blairite think-tank, Progress, which initiated much of the anti-Corbyn campaign. Its title, “Beating the Tories, Beating Hard Brexit,” makes clear that for the right the drive to overturn the result of the June 2016 Brexit referendum is inextricably bound up with Corbyn’s removal.

One of the main speakers was *Times* chief leader writer and former Blair advisor, Philip Collins, who has called on “moderates” to form a new party. Setting out his plan in the *Times*, Philips called for a “bold man or woman” to come forward to help initiate the new party. This “would have to be more than a statement about Britain in Europe but the negotiations [over Brexit] may well provide the crack to let the light in,” he writes, bewailing “a sense that the politics of the country are a mess, that an uninspiring generation of politicians have made a mockery of a proud nation.”

Collins’ model is Emmanuel Macron’s *En Marche!* in France. Thanks to the electoral collapse of the hated and sclerotic Socialist Party, Macron was able to win the presidency and recent legislative elections, amid record levels of abstention. Having extended the state of emergency, Macron now intends to enforce vicious anti-labour legislation—despite having the support of just 16 percent of the electorate.

For Collins, Macron’s lack of political legitimacy is a matter of indifference. All that counts are the services rendered for French imperialism. Thus, he writes jealously about Macron, “Just across the water Paris will be bathed in sunlight with its shiny new president who had the courage to start a revolution and is now providing strong and stable government.”

The Policy Network is among a number of right-wing Labour think-tanks involved in these moves. It has launched “the Next Progressive Project for Britain”—a regurgitation of Blair’s so-called “Third Way” that in turn was warmed over Thatcherism.



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