

Corbyn opposes Momentum leader Jon Lansman's bid for Labour's general secretary post

Julie Hyland
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A back-room stitch-up by Labour's National Executive Committee (NEC) to anoint the party's new general secretary has been thrown into turmoil by competition between two nominally left candidates.

Far from marking a breach in the bureaucratic apparatus, however, the contest between two supporters of leader Jeremy Corbyn underscores the anti-democratic, right-wing character of Labour as it prepares for potential government.

Former Labour General Secretary Iain Nicol resigned in February after seven years in the post. Nicol played a key role on behalf of the Labour right, and its backers in the ruling elite, in trying to prevent Corbyn standing in the second leadership election in 2016—going to the courts to prevent more than 100,000 of his supporters from voting.

Nicol's announcement came shortly after the pro-Corbyn Momentum pressure group won three posts on the NEC. Headed by Momentum founder Jon Lansman, the slate—including Yasmine Dar and Rachel Graham—won a combined total of almost 200,000 votes.

Many new and returning Labour members have responded enthusiastically to Corbyn's declared aim of building a "social" movement against austerity and militarism. Having won two leadership contests, the result has given Corbyn a significant majority on the 39-member NEC taken together with the vote of sympathetic trade unions.

But as the *World Socialist Web Site* warned at the time, "Now that Corbyn is so clearly in control, any failure to take a stand against the right will expose before millions of workers the real character of his leadership—a means of suppressing a mobilisation of the working class, rather than leading one."

The last weeks have confirmed this warning.

Jennie Formby, regional secretary for the union Unite in

the South East region was intended as a shoo-in for the general secretary post.

Formby's anointing was to be sold as further proof of left-wing consolidation. Unite is the main financial backer of Labour, and Unite General Secretary Len McCluskey is considered a key ally of Jeremy Corbyn (Formby is McCluskey's former partner).

In addition to three members on the NEC, Labour's Treasurer, Diana Holland, is Unite's assistant general secretary. Andrew Murray, McCluskey's chief of staff, was recently seconded to work for Corbyn's office on a part-time basis. Corbyn's own chief of staff, Karie Murphy, is another close associate of McCluskey.

But contrary to the pseudo-left groups' claims that the unions provide the "working class" base of Labour, historically the trade unions have been the critical bedrock for the party's hostility to socialism. This is not changed one iota by the fact that sections of the union bureaucracy are currently backing Corbyn. It is a key political component of its efforts to suppress the class struggle through holding out the possibility of a future "left" Labour government.

Unite, together with the entire trade union bureaucracy, has presided over almost a decade of savage spending cuts that have seen tens of thousands of workers lose their jobs and pensions, producing a historic reversal in living standards, without lifting a finger.

In supporting Corbyn's efforts to "rescue" the Labour Party from complete annihilation, the same unions hope to preserve the fiction of opposition while politically and organisationally disarming the working class. Formby's professed feminism, like her declared support for the Palestinians, provides a pseudo-progressive garb for her role in helping police both Unite and Labour's membership on behalf of the bureaucracy. She has been a

member of Labour's NEC for seven years and a former political director of Unite.

That Formby was to be anointed through backroom manoeuvres refutes all the pretensions that Labour has been reborn as a "grassroots" movement. It is this that forced Lansman to announce his own candidacy.

Momentum was established to try and save British Labour from the same fate as its counterparts in Greece, Spain, France and now Germany. Mobilising young people behind Corbyn's bid for leadership, Lansman claimed Momentum would "sweep away the old machine politics" and democratise Labour based on left wing policies.

Lansman was a longstanding supporter of Tony Benn, the former Labour MP and one-time Cabinet minister. Benn spent the last 35 years or so of his life, until his death in 2014, claiming to be seeking the "socialist" rejuvenation of Labour, even as it completed its transformation into a right-wing bourgeois party under Tony Blair.

Like his mentor, Lansman's loyalty is to the Labour Party, the main political instrument of capitalist state rule in Britain, not the working class and socialism. That is why, as soon as Corbyn's re-election was secured, Lansman liquidated Momentum's structures and threw out anyone who was, or had been, a member of another organisation.

Justified on the grounds of preventing a take-over by "extremists" or "Trotskyists," the purge was Lansman's pledge of loyalty to the Labour apparatus.

In a secret recording made by the *Observer* in March last year, Lansman explained that Corbyn and Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell 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."

In the same recording, Lansman said he had rewritten Momentum rules to ensure the backing of Unite, which he boasted was preparing to affiliate to Momentum.

Almost two years on from his first leadership win, Corbyn has yet to take any action against the Labour right. It is no accident that Nicols was allowed to resign, rather than being thrown out in disgrace, and is said to be in line for some form of honours. The overwhelming bulk of Labour MPs and Labour councillors remain committed to austerity, militarism and war, and wherever they are in positions of control, such as in Haringey, north London, they are not only imposing Tory cuts but implementing measures of their own.

Lansman has been trying to conceal this record by pushing for support for Labour's Democracy Review, which he claimed represents a "turning point in Labour's history" that will enable the party's "hugely expanded membership" to become "a mass movement."

Such assertions are at odds with the NEC's anointment of its chosen successor for general secretary, which Lansman reportedly faced difficulties in getting Momentum members to accept. He announced that his candidacy was a means to "open up the contest" and reassure party members that they are "trusted, listened to and empowered."

Lansman is styling himself as a "unity candidate... both in touch with the membership and able to work with all the different unions that sit on the NEC."

Corbyn and the Labour Party are having no truck with such pretensions. They are preparing for government under conditions in which the dysfunctional and deeply divided Conservative administration is increasingly seen as unable to defend the interests of British imperialism.

In his keynote speech last week, in which he committed Labour to forging a "close" post-Brexit relationship that safeguards access to the Single European Market, Corbyn sought to convince the ruling elite that the party could be trusted with government.

Both Corbyn and McDonnell have called on Lansman to withdraw from the contest. At the weekend, the "left" Campaign for Labour Party Democracy, of which Corbyn and Lansman are both members, passed a resolution supporting Formby and stating, "In the interest of Left unity we urge that no other candidate in support of Jeremy Corbyn's progressive politics stands against her."

The motion asserted, "It would take seconds for that news to reach the ears of hostile press—who would have a propaganda 'open goal' to claim that Momentum's take-over of the Labour Party was complete... Labour's focus should be on a smooth, straightforward process that does not distract from the impending local elections [in May]."

The Labour Representation Committee has also endorsed Formby, stating that it "is perturbed to hear of a bid by Jon Lansman to be candidate for the same post. This would be a huge mistake on his part and we urge him to withdraw."



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