

Witch-hunt of Corbyn aims to silence popular opposition to anti-Russia offensive

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Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn's cautioning against a "rush to judgement" by blaming the Russian government for poisoning former double agent Sergei Skripal has prompted frenzied media denunciations, accusing him of being a stooge of Vladimir Putin.

The tone was set following Corbyn's House of Commons reply to Prime Minister Theresa May, Wednesday, with Conservative MP Mark Francois accusing him of being "a CND badge-wearing apologist for the Russian state."

Corbyn's response in a *Guardian* article published Thursday unleashed further outrage, with the *Daily Telegraph* declaring him "unworthy to be prime minister." The BBC's flagship current affairs programme, "Newsnight," "discussed" the issue under a panoramic backscreen showing Corbyn in a Photoshopped Russian hat, against a Kremlin background depicted in shades of red.

His speech to parliament was not seeking to mobilise working class opposition to the growing war danger so clearly revealed over the past two weeks. It was framed as advice to the ruling class.

Corbyn accepted the essential thrust of the government's agenda, never questioning the official account that the Skripals were attacked by a nerve agent produced in Russia and endorsing May's expulsion of 23 Russian diplomats. He framed his disagreement as support for the position taken in May's first speech on Monday, which had asserted there were just "two plausible explanations for what happened in Salisbury on the 4 March": either "a direct act by the Russian State" or the Russian government having "lost control of this potentially catastrophically damaging nerve agent."

In the *Guardian*, Corbyn was more explicit still. He supported the work of "our police and security services," asserting that May was right to identify two possibilities for the source of the attack, "given that the nerve agent used has been identified as of original Russian manufacture."

Establishing the truth was "a matter for police and security professionals." Any other course "serves neither justice nor our national security."

Appealing to the Tories and to the pro-war majority in the Parliamentary Labour Party, Corbyn said he did not wish to "manufacture a division over Russia where none exists."

He wanted only to establish a genuine basis for "a common political response to this crime." This was why the government must proceed "on the basis of the evidence," he said, before insisting that "only through firm multilateral action can we ensure such a shocking crime never happens again."

While cautioning against "resigning ourselves to a 'new cold war' of escalating arms spending, proxy conflicts across the globe and a McCarthyite intolerance of dissent," he made clear that Labour is firmly in the anti-Russia camp—urging measures that would increase "our capacity to deal with outrages from Russia."

Labour not only agreed "with the government's action in relation to Russian diplomats," but wanted additional measures "to tackle the oligarchs... We are willing to back further sanctions as and when the investigation into the Salisbury attack produces results."

By any objective criteria Corbyn's speech was that of the leader of Her Majesty's *loyal* Opposition. Had he chosen to directly oppose the government's warmongering, urging opposition to the criminal conspiracy of the imperialist powers, this would have evoked a powerful response among millions who remember all too well the lies used to justify the Iraq war in 2003, at a cost of over a million lives.

Corbyn spoke with the authority of someone who had voted against the Iraq War 15 years ago. As the former head of the Stop the War Coalition, who addressed the mass demonstration in London of over one million people, he is acutely conscious of the mass anti-war sentiment that has only deepened.

That he did not appeal to these sentiments and reject the entire framework of the May government's attack on Russia points to the essentially pro-imperialist character of his politics. Just as he withdrew from leadership of the Stop the War Coalition on becoming Labour leader, reversing his lifelong opposition to NATO and nuclear weapons, he has

endorsed stepped up measures against Russia.

But this is not enough for the ruling elite and its media. To leave open even the possibility that the attack on Skripal and his daughter could have been carried out by someone other than the Russian state is considered impermissible because it cuts across the filthy propaganda campaign now underway.

Moreover, Corbyn issued the following highly uncomfortable warning in his article in the *Guardian*:

“Flawed intelligence and dodgy dossiers led to the calamity of the Iraq invasion. There was overwhelming bipartisan support for attacking Libya, but it proved to be wrong. A universal repugnance at the 9/11 attacks led to a war on Afghanistan that continues to this day, while terrorism has spread across the globe.”

The penalty for these criticisms is that Corbyn is again being declared unfit to hold office.

A *Financial Times* (FT) editorial on Saturday was headlined, “Why Jeremy Corbyn is still blind to the truth about Russia.”

The FT branded Corbyn “culpably naive about Vladimir Putin” due to a worldview “shaped by a deep suspicion of the west in general and the US in particular.” It offered no evidence to contradict Corbyn’s sceptical position in relation to the headlong charges of Russian guilt. Instead, the newspaper asserted that which must be proved.

The “leading powers have responded with commendable unity” by endorsing May. The NATO allies agree that “there is no plausible alternative,” but Corbyn “is floating alternative theories” and “failing to face the truth.”

By refusing to play along, the FT continued, and by introducing arguments that “the west was wrong about the existence of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) in Iraq...,” Corbyn was helping Moscow to “confuse the narrative” and “delay the international response.”

The word of “world-leading experts,” who have “had the opportunity to analyse the substance used, and to trace it back to Russia” must be trusted at face value.

The FT’s reference to Porton Down as some disinterested party cannot withstand scrutiny. It is an essential component of Britain’s war machine—developing weapons of mass destruction and with the facilities and knowledge capable of producing the nerve agent used against the Skripals.

The FT concluded by expanding on the more general problem with Corbyn—his “[d]ecades of leading marches and addressing ‘peace’ rallies” (in quotes, of course), his past calls “for Nato to be disbanded.” On this basis, Corbyn is declared not fit to inherit the mantle of leadership of the party of Clement Attlee, head of the post-war Labour government that was “unwavering in its support for the western alliance and did much to lay the foundations of Nato.”

As always with such attacks on Corbyn, the concern of the ruling class is directed against the popular reaction his criticisms might evoke. The FT expressed the hope that voters will no longer treat his “views on foreign policy as harmless eccentricities,” while *Independent* columnist John Rentoul writes, “I suspect, however, that there is more support for Corbyn’s position outside the House of Commons: the Conservatives and non-Corbynite Labour MPs ought to have learned by now that his idealistic opposition to warlike words goes down well with much of the general public.”

Workers and young people disgusted by the attacks on Corbyn must understand that the Labour Party under his leadership offers no political means of opposing the ongoing drive to militarism and war. Indeed, the chief advocates of the anti-Corbyn campaign and the most frothing proponents of action against Russia sit on Labour’s backbenches and within his shadow cabinet.

At least 33 Labour MPs have lodged an early day motion “unequivocally” accepting Russia’s “culpability” for the Salisbury attack. These 33 were lent the tacit support of Shadow Foreign Secretary Emily Thornberry, who insisted in a lecture to the Trades Union Congress on Saturday that there is a “prima facie case” for Russia to answer and spoke of an “attack on our soil” by “a foreign state.”

Shadow Defence Secretary Nia Griffith said of Labour’s frontbench, “We very much accept what the Prime Minister said,” while Shadow Northern Ireland Secretary Owen Smith said “Mr Corbyn’s reluctance to share Ms May’s basic analysis of the Salisbury incident made him look eager to exonerate a hostile power.”

The Corbyn faction has no intention of fighting against this pro-war clique. Once again it is ready to capitulate and prove its trustworthiness. Sunday saw Corbyn’s number two, Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell, tell ITV’s “Peston on Sunday” that Corbyn’s response to May was a “constructive critique, I think others have misread that.”

“I agree completely with the prime minister,” he added. “Whichever way you look at it [Putin] is responsible and all the evidence points to him... [It] is highly likely this could have been a state execution.”



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