

New pro-EU party planned to oppose Corbyn and Labour

Julie Hyland
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A secret operation to develop a political formation as an electoral counterweight to Jeremy Corbyn's Labour Party has been underway for at least a year.

Involving "entrepreneurs, philanthropists and benefactors keen to break the Westminster mould," it has already secured £50 million from financial backers, gloated the *Observer* at the weekend.

The "project," as it is described, is led by multimillionaire Simon Franks, co-founder of Redbus Film Distribution. A former Labour donor, he acted as business adviser to Ed Miliband (who stood down as Labour leader in 2015). Even then, Franks was reportedly complaining that Labour was not sufficiently oriented to the needs of "entrepreneurs."

"Project One Movement for the UK" was incorporated in August 2017 with Companies House, with Franks as its sole director and shareholder. It has "consulted political experts around the world in an attempt to create a credible plan" for the proposed new movement.

The *Observer* and its sister *Guardian* newspaper have been proselytising for some time in favour of a new party—one that is avowedly opposed to Britain's exit from the European Union and is able to bring together the Labour right, pro-Remain Tories and the rump Europhile Liberal Democrats.

The majority of the British establishment, along with the military/security agencies, backed a Remain vote in the 2016 EU referendum. Alarmed at the further diminishing of British capitalism economically, militarily and politically, overturning or mitigating the Leave vote is considered vital amongst these sections.

Under conditions in which the Conservative Party is in hock to pro-Brexiteers and the Liberal Democrats have been wiped out as an electoral force, Labour's right wing has been entrusted with achieving this goal.

Having failed to dislodge Corbyn in the 2016 leadership challenge, the focus had been on pressuring him to change Labour's official policy to support a second referendum. But while Corbyn has gone a long way to assuage his right wing—backing some form of a "customs union" with the

EU—he has not endorsed a second referendum and he sacked his Northern Ireland spokesman, Owen Smith, for calling for one.

In addition to overturning Brexit, the *Observer* makes clear that this is bound up with trying to silence any criticism of austerity and neo-liberalism.

The *Observer* reports that "senior figures from business and charity are understood to be involved, as well as former supporters of the main parties, including a number of former Tory donors."

The project intends to "borrow" ideas from "both left and right," combining social liberalism with fiscal conservatism. That is, it will promote divisive identity politics—based on race, gender and sexual orientation—while championing "wealth creation and tighter immigration controls."

Small wonder that former Labour Prime Minister Tony Blair and Liberal Democrat ex-deputy prime minister Nick Clegg responded sympathetically to the project. On Tuesday, it was reported that Blair's son, Euan, is on its board. Blair senior had been "helpful in recommending potential donors," a source reported.

The *Observer* makes clear that the model is French President Emmanuel Macron and his *En Marche*.

The deserved collapse of the Socialist Party saw Macron—a former investment banker—win power in May 2017 on little more than 30 percent of the vote, amid a 57 percent abstention. Macron is now attempting to push through a major attack on workers' jobs and social rights and is leading the European push for war in Syria.

The promotion of an organisation whose supporters and financiers are largely anonymous; which does not have a name, constitution, political manifesto—not to speak of any following—and modelled on a president with amongst the lowest approval ratings in Europe, is a damning indictment of the anti-democratic and anti-working class character of Britain's liberals.

The efforts of the *Guardian/Observer* are focussed on encouraging Labour's right to split and join the project. *Guardian* columnist Andrew Rawnsley claimed that

“opportunity” was knocking for the new party, “But will anybody dare open the door?”

“What is so far lacking is a critical mass of MPs prepared to take the large risks involved in making it happen,” he complained.

Rawnsley acknowledged that Britain’s first-past-the post, winner-takes-all electoral system presented an obstacle to power. For this reason, the preferred and “simpler” method of gaining power has been “to take over one of the old parties and change it from within,” he continued, noting the example of Blair and New Labour. This was increasingly unlikely, as Corbyn’s supporters now controlled all Labour’s key positions, he opined.

But Labour’s right-wing could count on significant financial backing for a breakaway, Rawnsley suggested. Money was no object, as “There is an affluent constituency, who are both appalled by the May government and horrified by the thought of a Corbyn premiership, who are waiting to get out their cheque books.”

The difficulty, he mused, was that this might backfire if the party was seen to have support only from “business people with deep pockets.” Equally, however, if the new party continued to make an association with Labour, this would “cramp the scope to attract defectors from the Tory party and support from voters who do not naturally identify with Labour.”

Another major problem is finding anyone with credibility to lead this rotten project. Among Labour’s Blairites, former Foreign Secretary David Miliband is regarded as the “king over the water.” News of the project was preceded by an op-ed from Miliband in the *New Statesman* in which, following his mentor, he called for a second referendum on the grounds of “national security.”

But this is a man whose support for the Iraq war saw him humiliatingly defeated by his outsider younger brother, Ed, in the 2010 Labour leadership contest, since when he took up residency in New York, at the International Rescue Committee—a charitable front for US/UK neo-colonial ventures.

Such difficulties have led some in New Labour’s number to urge caution. Lord Adonis, who was among those who broke from Labour to form the Social Democratic Party in 1981, warned that Labour is “the only means to defeat Brexit.” The SDP had “failed” he said, “and we can’t fail this time, the stakes for the country are too high.”

As part of a liberal alliance, the SDP gained just 23 seats in the 1983 election and had dissolved by 1988. But it succeeded in its essential political objectives: first, in helping the Labour and trade union bureaucracy to suppress a militant movement of the working class in the early 1980s and, on this basis, preparing the way for Blair and the

reactionary monstrosity of New Labour.

The right wing has made no secret of their hostility to a Corbyn-led Labour government. Only last month, Blair made an open pitch to Remain-supporting Tories that the only way to prevent such a possibility was to join with the Labour right in vetoing Brexit.

That Corbyn has not taken a single measure against Blair and his right-wing saboteurs is an indictment of his claim to have “returned” Labour to working people. Rather, emboldened by Corbyn’s pathetic reliance on a fake “party unity,” there is no end to the right’s scheming.

Guardian commentator Peter Kellner suggested another way for the right wing to “improve the odds.” If those Labour MPs opposed to Corbyn—a sizeable majority—switched to a new party, it could overtake the pro-Corbyn rump at Westminster,” he opined. “It would then become the official opposition,” able to “command time on television and radio,” while Corbyn’s Labour would be reduced to a third party in Parliament, meaning that broadcasters would not have to include them “on news and current affairs programmes.”

The same advice is proffered by James Forsyth in the Tory right’s *Spectator* magazine. Labour “moderates” should “declare that their party has been taken over by a hard-left fringe antithetical to its real traditions,” he wrote. This would “be akin to a declaration of independence by the Parliamentary Labour Party,” which would “step into the shoes of the old one as the official opposition.”

The problem remained that few of those taking such a step have “a sufficiently large personal following” to win in any subsequent election, he stated, while talk of defending Labour’s “real traditions” would “make it harder to attract converts from other parties.”



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