

The Socialist Equality Party and the anti-Corbyn coup plot: A reply to a reader

Chris Marsden
5 September 2018

Some readers of the *World Socialist Web Site* have written comments expressing concern that the August 31 perspective, “Reject the anti-Semitism slurs against Jeremy Corbyn! Drive out the Labour Party right wing!” represents an adaptation to Corbyn, the Labour left and the Labour Party.

The most extensive critique is offered by altacomposicionorganica. He warns that the perspective goes against the programme of the International Committee of the Fourth International and marks a significant difference with the line pursued by the Socialist Equality Party in the US.

The call for a struggle to drive out the right-wing, he writes, diverges from the “fundamental fight of the Party” against the pseudo-left, adding, “If the US SEP were to follow Britain’s SEP line, it would be fighting for driving out of Clinton’s faction of the Democrats, because [Bernie] Sanders, [Alexandria] Ocasio-Cortez and the DSA [Democratic Socialists of America] ‘do not fight enough against it’, and ‘they would be exposed by our more militant position towards this rightist faction.’”

He proposes as an alternative a turn to the “raw mass,” of “rank-and-file workers,” who “may or may not vote for Corbyn,” but in which “the ‘class instinct’ is most present” in the fight against “zero-hour contracts, contract labour, gig economy, trade union dictatorship, etc.”

The critique offered is a mixture of scholastic formalism and an ahistorical approach, which does not address political developments in the UK from the standpoint of the class issues involved in the offensive against Corbyn, or the problems posed in raising the political consciousness of the working class to its revolutionary tasks. The political endpoint is one of sectarian abstentionism.

Nowhere in the perspective published by the WSWWS is there a capitulation to Corbyn, nor any retreat from criticisms we have made since he became Labour leader in 2015.

We warn that Labour is “a right-wing bourgeois party... complicit in all the crimes of British imperialism and has functioned as the principal political opponent of socialism for more than a century.” We make clear that Corbyn is a bourgeois politician whose loyalty to British imperialism has been expressed time and again—in his retreats on issues such as support for NATO, maintaining the Trident nuclear deterrent

and his determined opposition to any struggle by his supporters against the pro-big business, pro-austerity, pro-war Labour MPs seeking his removal.

Based on the fact that Corbyn is a bourgeois politician with a pro-capitalist perspective, our reader advocates an abstentionist policy that would genuinely be a capitulation to both wings of the Labour Party. The orientation of the WSWWS is not to Corbyn. It is to the thousands of working people and youth who have joined the Labour Party in the mistaken belief that his victory will lead to the formation of a left and even socialist government.

We do not cede leadership to Corbyn, nor stand aside from a political fight that is pitching tens of thousands of workers and young people against a rightist cabal of pro-austerity and pro-war criminals. We offer a way to fight back, armed with the socialist policies necessary for victory.

Corbyn’s election as Labour leader in 2015, we explained, was the distorted expression of a shift to the left in the working class and indicated a broad desire for a fight against the Tories, their Blairite allies and the major corporations, banks and the super-rich, in whose interests they have imposed savage austerity, destroyed vital social services and pursued repeated criminal wars. That is why Labour membership before Corbyn became party leader was 201,000 and now stands at over 560,000—an increase of 10,000 in the past month alone, in direct opposition to the right-wing witch-hunt.

The ruling class and its political agents see things in these terms. No retreat by Corbyn has reconciled them to his leadership of the Labour Party because they see below him the seething mass of social and political discontent in the working class. Their aim is to criminalise and suppress all opposition to the dictates of the financial oligarchy. And they will stop at nothing to do so. That is why we warned, in the August 31 perspective, of the involvement of the secret services of Britain, Israel and the United States and of the threats by the military to respond to a Corbyn-led government with a military coup.

We say to those workers and young people within the Labour Party who want to take on the Blairites and Zionists: take up the demand, “Drive out the right wing!” Call branch meetings. Deselect them as MPs and expel them from the party. Demand the implementation of socialist policies!

We will lend critical support to such a struggle, but we insist that the working class needs a new and genuinely socialist party. We warn that those who take up such a fight will inevitably find themselves in conflict with Corbyn, whose pro-capitalist politics ensure that he and his clique will continue to appease, capitulate and otherwise sabotage the struggle against the right-wing.

Events will vindicate our assessment. Under such conditions, the demand to kick out the right-wing can not only provide a mechanism for advancing the class struggle, but the means for educating the working class on the difference between opportunist and revolutionary socialist policies. Our implacable opposition to the right-wing and clear call for action against the conspirators will build the credibility of our party and lay the foundation for its growth.

That is also why counterposing an orientation to the “raw mass” of “rank-and-file workers” and their struggles, to a turn to Labour Party members is false and syndicalist in character.

The UK SEP’s defence of Corbyn does not place it in conflict with our American co-thinkers and their focus on the “fundamental” struggle against the pseudo-left. The struggle waged by the SEP and all the sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International against the pseudo-left groups is not a factional conflict, but the means through which we seek to secure the political independence of the working class and take forward the genuinely fundamental struggle against capitalism and for socialism.

A central role played by the pseudo-left groups internationally is their efforts to tie the working class to the old Stalinist and social democratic parties, either by boosting their supposed “left-wing” or by supporting “broad-left” formations such as Syriza in Greece or Podemos in Spain—that are led by ex-Stalinists and social democrats. Only last month, the Socialist Party in Britain declared an end to its own electoral activity because “Building on Jeremy Corbyn’s leadership bridgehead is the clearest route, at this point, through which workers could achieve a mass party of our own.”

There are, of course, important differences in the historical origins of the Labour Party and the Democratic Party that, as our reader indicates, precludes any tactical utilisation of the demand to drive out Clinton et al. But the US SEP nevertheless wrote extensively to expose the political issues behind the scheming by the Hilary Clinton faction of the Democrats against Bernie Sanders.

Moreover, there are clear parallels between the position taken today by the SEP in calling for action against the right-wing conspiracy against Corbyn, and how our American comrades opposed the 1998 attempt to impeach President Bill Clinton. Without evincing the slightest political sympathy for Clinton and the Democrats, the SEP warned that the forces behind the Lewinsky affair were seeking the overturn of an elected leader to carry out a sharp shift to the right in US politics. Indeed, the SEP castigated the pseudo-left groups for their indifference to

the threat posed to working people from the anti-democratic measures employed by the Republican right.

We also stand firmly in line with Trotsky’s writings in *Where is Britain Going?* referenced by our reader. First published in 1926 on the eve of the General Strike, Trotsky’s polemic seeks to alert the revolutionary vanguard to the emergence of a revolutionary crisis and the necessity to advance a programme on which to intervene—above all by breaking workers from the Labour Party and its left-wing.

Anticipating that the “radicalization of the British working class will proceed apace” and possibly “prepare the coming to power of the Labour Party,” Trotsky states that the “capitalist tiger” would “soon stop purring about gradualness and start to show its claws.”

This would generate “a further sharpening of relations between the right and the so-called ‘left’ wings of the Labour Party and, what is far more important, a strengthening of revolutionary tendencies in the masses...”

The Conservatives would “have behind them not only the official state apparatus but also the unofficial gangs of fascism. They will begin the bloody work of the provocateur...” The Labour government would have to either “shamefully capitulate or crush the opposition,” while “the revolutionary wing would inevitably grow and the most far-sighted resolute and revolutionary elements of the working class would come to the top.”

The situation would develop where “a new explosion of civil war is inevitable, a sharp collision between the classes all along the line.” For the revolutionary party, the imperative was: “The masses must be educated and tempered in a revolutionary way. The first condition for this is an intransigent struggle against the corrupting spirit of MacDonaldism.”

That is the spirit in which the SEP conceives of our intervention in the present profound political crisis in the UK—to prepare the working class for the revolutionary tasks now on the agenda.



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