

# Trades Union Congress in Britain silent on anti-Corbyn coup plot

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At the height of the vicious, right-wing coup plot against Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn, the trade union bureaucrats gathered at the Trades Union Congress (TUC) in Manchester said not a word about it.

For more than two years, the Blairite right—working in league with billionaire oligarch Rupert Murdoch, the Tory Party and the military-intelligence apparatus—have sought by every means to remove Corbyn. They are so hostile to his professed opposition to austerity and war, fearing that it will embolden working class resistance, that they are slandering him and his supporters as anti-Semites and even Nazis.

Yet even as the TUC crowed that this year's congress marked the 150th anniversary of its founding, not a single platform speaker even referred to the attack on the leader of the party established by the trade unions to represent their voice in parliament.

Their veil of silence is even more striking considering that many of the 5.5 million members in the TUC's affiliated unions are members of the Labour Party and pay a political levy through the unions.

Speaking from the platform, TUC leader Frances O'Grady made her usual token criticisms of the Conservative government and called on Prime Minister Theresa May to "stand down." But who would replace her was conspicuously avoided, with O'Grady refusing to even name Corbyn and only saying that if May did not deliver a Brexit to the satisfaction of the TUC, it would do "everything in our power to elect a new prime minister who will."

The sole reference to the coup plot was at a fringe meeting addressed by Unite union leader Len McCluskey. But even here there was no attempt to alert workers to the dangers involved in these moves, much less mobilise against it.

Rather than demanding the expulsion of the Labour right, McCluskey pleaded for unity, requesting they "turn your attacks away from our leader and turn them on to the government who are attacking our communities. ... Those people who don't want to unite in this great cause that goes ahead of us should leave and go elsewhere and let the rest of us fight on."

What the TUC did make clear is that they are ready to fall into line with the dominant sections of big business who are demanding continued access to the European Union's Single Market after Brexit, even if it means reversing the 2016 referendum result to exit the EU.

To this end, the TUC endorsed the demand for a second referendum on whatever terms the Conservative government reaches with the EU. Central to this agenda is pushing the Labour Party to commit to a second referendum—dressed up as "the People's Vote"—that Corbyn has so far failed to endorse.

O'Grady offered up a paean to the EU, casting it as some sort of bastion of opposition to neo-liberalism. One would never know from her remarks that the EU has been in the forefront of the vicious austerity programmes over the last decade that has reduced workers in many countries, such as Greece, to penury. Nor that it is imposing anti-migrant measures that have caused the deaths of thousands, while forcing tens of thousands more into prison camps.

The real basis for O'Grady's support for the EU was made clear in her insistence that continued access to the trade bloc was essential for British capitalism. "Now, countries don't have to belong to the European Union to be in the single market," she said. "But if they want to trade inside the market, every worker must get these rights. They are the rock that national laws and union agreements build on."

Warning that "now we face Brexit ... in exactly 200

days,” she added, “The risk of crashing out is real.”

O’Grady said the TUC was demanding that May reach an agreement with the EU for an extension of the Article 50 legislation that allows two years of negotiations on the UK’s terms of EU exit. If its demands were not met, “We’ll throw our full weight behind a campaign ... and demand that the terms of the deal are put to a popular vote.”

Prior to the TUC Congress, the GMB became the first of the main unions to formally commit to a second vote to overturn Brexit. The largest public sector union, Unison, is also committed to a second vote, with its leader Dave Prentis stating on Monday, “When and if an agreement is reached, asking the public for their views is definitely one option ...” The UK’s largest union, Unite, has also made statements in favour of a second referendum, “depending on political circumstances.”

Among another five of the larger unions to endorse a second referendum in recent weeks is the TSSA. Its leader Manuel Cortes is currently speaking, along with former Communications Workers Union leader Billy Hayes, at a series of meetings of the “Left against Brexit” to demand a “People’s Vote.” Backed by the pro-EU Another Europe is Possible group, it is an amalgam of Labour and Green Party MPs and Members of the European Parliament, in alliance with sections of the pro-Corbyn Momentum group and *Guardian* newspaper columnists.

Significantly, Corbyn was not invited to address the TUC this year. Despite leading Labour’s official Remain campaign in 2016, his previous opposition to the EU and unacceptability to the right-wing makes him untrustworthy regarding the strategic requirement of the corporate and military elite to overturn the referendum result.

Invited instead was Corbyn’s closest ally, Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell, who was also silent on the coup plot in his address to congress. Prior to mounting the podium, and fresh from meeting Goldman Sachs on Monday as part of Labour’s overtures to big business, he issued yet another plea for unity with the right. “I keep saying to people: don’t mistake democracy for division, because that’s what democracy is all about, people get up and say: this is what I feel.”

The unmistakable message is the TUC do not want, and will do everything to prevent, a fight against the

right wing. This is not merely because they are political cowards. It is because the mobilisation of workers and youth against the representatives of the financial oligarchy threatens their own highly privileged positions.

For decades now, the TUC has not organised a single significant struggle against the drastic decline in workers’ living standards. Their hostility to any fight back has become even more marked in the wake of the 2008 financial crash, as they have played the key political role in enabling Tory austerity.

This was made apparent by the opening remarks by TUC president and leader of the University and College Union, Sally Hunt.

In a speech that would have the early pioneers of the labour movement turning in their graves, Hunt name-checked virtually all of the major strike struggles of the past 150 years. This from a union leader whose members, only in March, protested en masse at the union’s headquarters to denounce her dirty deal with university chiefs to sabotage their struggle in defence of pensions. It was to avoid any accountability to her members that in May, at the UCU’s own annual congress, Hunt led a series of walkouts by fellow bureaucrats to prevent a debate on her conduct during the strike, eventually forcing the event to close early.



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