

UK: Corbyn allows vicious Tory Immigration Bill to pass

Thomas Scripps and Chris Marsden
31 January 2019

Labour's response to the Conservative government's post-Brexit immigration legislation was a devastating exposure of all claims that Jeremy Corbyn is leading a "socialist revival" of the party. Corbyn and his allies, such as Shadow Home Secretary Diane Abbott, are political opportunists, entirely devoid of principle, and purveyors of a variety of left-nationalism that is antithetical to the fundamental interests of the working class.

On Monday, Labour MPs were instructed to abstain from a vote on the second reading (the penultimate stage before a bill clears the House of Commons) of the Tory White Paper on immigration, which would guarantee its passage.

The flagship plans for post-Brexit Britain were announced late last year. The legislation ends freedom of movement of labour from the European Union (EU) and establishes an income threshold of £30,000 a year for any foreign worker wishing to migrate to the UK. Workers earning less than this amount will only be able to apply for short-term, one-year visas and Downing Street insists that overall net migration will be capped at 100,000. No one allowed to enter the UK under the new system will have the "right to access public funds, or to settle permanently in the UK." EU citizens already in the UK will be forced to apply for "settled status" and seek permission from the government for their families to join them.

Abbott had taken to the pages of the Stalinist *Morning Star* January 26 to denounce the legislation, saying that "many migrant workers who come to Britain will in effect have no rights" and calling it "one of the most serious threats to all workers for decades."

"The risk of super-exploitation will be built into the legal system," she continued. Government policy "amounts to a permanent campaign against migration

and migrants as a scapegoat for the effects of their own austerity policy... Their real agenda is an immigration system which intensifies the exploitation of migrant workers, and lowers pay and conditions for all.

Indicating other, less noble concerns, she added that "lots of blood-curdling rhetoric about migrants" would be the norm, "*while at the same time encouraging just as many migrants to come, if not more.*" [Emphasis added.] This half-sentence says more about Labour's attitude to migration than all of Abbott's platitudes.

Corbyn and his Labour Party are both opposed to free movement of EU labour and for what Corbyn has termed "managed migration." In a speech in January 2017, Corbyn declared, "Labour is not wedded to freedom of movement for EU citizens as a point of principle..." The Labour manifesto for the general election that year reads "Freedom of movement will end when we leave the European Union" and commits the party to supporting "management of migration". In other words, allowing only that migration which contributes to the bottom line of UK businesses.

What this means is that Labour supports the first pillar of Tory immigration legislation—ending free movement—and disagrees with the second pillar only on the £30,000 income hurdle—they want low paid workers with the required skills to enter the UK—and the arbitrary cap which could also impinge upon the economic requirements of UK business.

Corbyn et al. were determined that the party would not be criticised by the Tories and the right-wing media for opposing ending of free movement. The Labour leadership therefore called on its MPs to abstain on the bill—on the deliberately vague basis that "we accept that a new immigration system is required post-Brexit, but do not support the government such wide powers to introduce a new system."

However, Labour’s stance met with sustained criticism throughout the day—mainly from the party’s Blairite wing, who support free movement based on their desire to remain within the EU.

Abbott stood her ground for some time, citing Labour’s official stance. “The Labour party is clear that when Britain leaves the single market, freedom of movement ends, and we set this out in our 2017 manifesto. I am a slavish devotee of that magnificent document: so on that basis, the front bench of the Labour party will not be opposing this bill this evening,” she said in the morning. “LAB accepts ... Free Movement ends if we Leave Single Market,” she tweeted later that day. “Labour wants to amend bill substantially. Today isn’t a final vote!”

Ninety minutes later, the line was changed and a text sent out to Labour MPs reading, “Those colleagues who remain on the estate [in parliament] may wish to be aware that we will be voting AGAINST the Second Reading of the Immigration Bill.”

This message was delivered less than three hours before the vote was held at 10pm. And it was enforced by a single-line whip, as opposed to the original three-line direction to abstain. A three-line whip is an instruction to vote according to policy. A single-line whip is a non-binding indication of preference. As a result, 78 of Labour’s 256 MPs were not present when the vote was called. The vote was only carried by a margin of 63 thanks to these absences—or more precisely thanks to Corbyn and Abbott.

The exposure of Corbyn is at the same time an exposure of his pseudo-left apologists. In the January 22 edition of *Socialist Worker*, the Socialist Workers Party’s ideological leader Alex Callinicos had urged Corbyn to “break the impasse over Brexit” by backing free movement of labour. Backing May “in arguing that Brexit means ending free movement for European workers” was “a disastrous mistake.” A shift in policy “could have a huge impact. May’s impasse can still lead to a general election that puts Corbyn in the driving seat.”

And after such pious suggestions were ignored and Labour had secured the passage of the Tories flagship policy? The *Socialist Worker* wrote of “Labour’s shameful betrayal of migrants” in an article that accuses Abbott of “backing down,” and “fudging” Labour’s policies while not even mentioning Corbyn’s

name. This is a lie. Labour’s and Corbyn’s “betrayal” on this issue came long ago—and had no impact on the SWP’s effort to promote him as the anointed leader of the working class.

Nothing will change on this score. The pseudo-left are divided on Brexit, and some will complain that Corbyn should be taking a pro-Remain stand. But they and the “Left leave” groups such as the SWP and Socialist Party will continue to insist that workers trust their fate to Corbyn—not because they genuinely believe he has transformed the Labour Party or will galvanise the trade union bureaucracy into action, but because they are opposed to any independent movement of the working class that threatens their privileged position within the existing social order.

In its Fourth National Congress resolution in 2018 the Socialist Equality Party explains:

“The SEP has a special responsibility to champion the rights of immigrant workers, above all the refugees made homeless by the social and economic devastation created by imperialist intervention in their countries. The SEP defends the right to free movement, not just for European citizens but for workers throughout the world. It opposes the whipping up of anti-immigrant chauvinism, from the open xenophobes on the far right and the EU’s inhumane ‘Fortress Europe’ policies, to Corbyn’s specious advocacy of ‘managed migration.’ The fight against the persecution of immigrants must be based on the recognition that their scapegoating is an attack on all workers, and that the brutal measures taken against them strengthens the state in its suppression of social and political dissent. Their defence is the cutting edge of the struggle to unite the working class across national boundaries in the struggle for socialism.”



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