

Labour right and Tories unite in new parliamentary group

Robert Stevens
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The political character of the split carried out by seven Blairite Labour MPs on Monday to form the Independent Group (IG) in parliament, was confirmed Wednesday, when they were joined by three Conservative MPs, Anna Soubry, Heidi Allen and Sarah Wollaston.

On Tuesday, another Blairite, Joan Ryan, joined the IG. An arch right-winger, Ryan lost a no confidence vote demanded by Labour members in her constituency last September—making her one of four IG MPs who had faced deselection calls from Labour Party branches. Until resigning, she was the chair of Labour Friends of Israel, the Zionist group connected to the Israeli government that has been at the forefront of the campaign to oust Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn utilising bogus claims that he and his supporters are anti-Semites.

The three Tories have all supported the savage austerity imposed against millions of workers over the past decade by Conservative-led governments. Allen shed crocodile tears as she claimed such policies must now come to an end, but Soubry was unrepentant. She believed the policies of the 2010-15 Conservative and Liberal Democrat coalition were “marvellous.”

The new right-wing, pro-European Union (EU) formation was offered the backing of Liberal Democrats leader Sir Vince Cable, who called for “some form of joint working in Parliament” and a “dialogue” across the UK. “[We should] make it very clear we don’t see these people as enemies or a threat but are people we want to work with,” he said.

The formation of the IG confirms there are no principled political difference between the Tories and the Blairite right—including the dozens of MPs who remain in the party thanks to the refusal of Corbyn to drive them out.

Another right-winger, Ian Austin, resigned from Labour Friday. Austin said he agreed with the eight departed MPs that things “have got to change,” but he is pro-Brexit and

recently defied a Labour whipped vote to back Prime Minister Theresa May’s proposed withdrawal deal with the EU. For this he suffered no consequences from the Corbyn leadership.

Austin is a renowned warmonger and provocateur. His previous most debased moment came in July 2016, when he was reprimanded by the Speaker for shouting at Corbyn, “Sit down and shut up” and “You’re a disgrace” after his party’s leader criticised the 2003 invasion of Iraq. This followed publication of the Chilcot Inquiry report which found that the “intelligence” on weapons of mass destruction was hyped up, that the process of deciding the legal basis for war was flawed and that invasion was unnecessary.

The Blairite splitters have each cited their opposition to Corbyn for enabling Theresa May’s Brexit policy to prevail but have wrapped this in denunciations of anti-Semitism and left-wing extremism.

Austin asserted as he left, “I am appalled at the offence and distress Jeremy Corbyn and the Labour Party have caused to Jewish people. Corbyn should never be prime minister,” he said, adding, “It is terrible that a culture of extremism, anti-Semitism and intolerance is driving out good MPs and decent people who have committed their life to mainstream politics.”

Once again Corbyn’s response is to appease the right-wing, with Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell outdoing him in political self-abasement.

In the aftermath of the resignations, the first target for sanctions weren’t the Blairites who applauded their departing colleagues, but the former deputy leader of Liverpool City Council in the 1980s and former leading figure in the pseudo-left Militant Tendency, Derek Hatton.

Hatton had tried several times to be readmitted as a member since Corbyn became leader. On Monday, his membership was accepted 34 years since he was expelled

by Neil Kinnock in 1986, along with other leaders of Militant.

Within 48 hours, Hatton's brief rehabilitation came to an end when he was suspended because of a tweet posted in 2012 reading, "Jewish people with any sense of humanity need to start speaking out publicly against the ruthless murdering being carried out by Israel!"

Hatton was responding to the week-long Operation Pillar of Defence, during which 174 Palestinians were killed and hundreds injured by the Israeli army.

Hatton has long been an embarrassment to his former comrades in Militant, now the Socialist Party, thanks to his subsequent career as a property speculator and other get-rich-quick attempts. But this hasn't stopped them from seeking their own readmission to the Labour Party based on the assertion that Corbyn is leading a fight to restore socialism.

In a statement this week, "Eight Blairites split - Now kick out the rest", the Socialist Party (SP) declared, "The Labour leadership must now go on the offensive. As well as urgently mobilising the unions and working-class people to fight for a general election and to kick out the Tories, they must also mobilise to take on the Blairite saboteurs, most of who continue to don Labour rosettes."

They continued breathlessly, "The Socialist Party calls for the convening of a labour movement conference, in which all anti-austerity forces, including trade unions and socialist groups such as our own, could participate."

The SP proposed that these "anti-austerity forces" discuss "building mass action to fight for a general election, deselecting Blairite MPs and their replacement with fighting socialist candidates, and building the struggle to transform society along socialist lines."

Noting that Hatton had been readmitted to the party, the SP also pleaded for political redemption. In a press release Wednesday, the SP stated, "The re-admittance of Derek Hatton, Liverpool deputy council leader 1983-86, to the Labour Party poses the re-occurring question under Jeremy Corbyn's leadership of opening the party up to socialist fighters and the need to transform it into a 100% anti-austerity party."

It urged Labour to reinstate the membership of SP leader Peter Taaffe, Public and Commercial Services Union assistant general secretary Chris Baugh and another former expelled Liverpool Labour councillor, Tony Mulhearn. Before the ink was even dry on the press release, Hatton had once again been kicked out in a right-wing witch-hunt.

The SP and similar pseudo-left groups such as the

Socialist Workers Party are conscious purveyors of fantasy politics. Corbyn has not and will not expel the Blairites. He would rather see them walk out and set up new parties than raise a finger against them. Only more capitulation from Corbyn and McDonnell is on the agenda.

McDonnell responded Tuesday to the walkout by declaring that he and Corbyn had got the message and would engage in a "mammoth, massive listening exercise and... address some of those criticisms that have been made [by the Blairites]." There was nothing that he and Corbyn were not prepared to surrender. "If there's issues that we have to address, we will address them... If it's about the style of the leadership, we will address that. If it's about policy, we will listen to that as well."

Speaking to the *Evening Standard* Friday, McDonnell pledged that any members behaving in a way "construed to be anti-Semitic... will be dealt with. Full stop. They are not welcome."

Given that any expression of anti-Zionism has now been redefined as anti-Semitism, this is a pledge to implement an accelerated witch-hunt of Corbyn's own supporters. "We've got to be quicker, and we've got to be fiercer. I think there's been a lot of listening but not enough action. That's the problem," he added.

Such prostration is only ever the cue for the Labour right to up the ante.

On Friday, Lord Levy, Tony Blair's former special envoy to the Middle East, told the BBC he would not leave the party because he had been urged by Labour's leader of the House of Lords Angela Smith and Labour's Deputy Leader Tom Watson to remain on the inside and destabilise Corbyn. Levy said that right-wing Labour MPs should "fight from within" and "deal with this leadership."

The author recommends:

Seven Blairite MPs resign from UK Labour Party
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