

A tale of two UK Labour MPs—Chris Williamson and Tom Watson

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On Wednesday, twice-suspended MP for Derby Chris Williamson resigned from the Labour Party after its National Executive Committee (NEC) refused to endorse him as a candidate. Later that day Labour's deputy leader and arch-Blairite Tom Watson announced his own resignation from the leadership and said he would not stand to be a Member of Parliament in the December 12 general election.

Taken together, Wednesday's events represent a devastating indictment of all claims that Jeremy Corbyn represents a leftward turn in the British Labour Party.

Williamson, a Labour Party member for 43 years, has been Corbyn's most prominent defender against the efforts by Labour's Blairite wing to remove him as leader. He has praised Corbyn's brand of left-populist politics as "common sense socialism." In 2018, he organised "Democracy Roadshow" meetings across the UK calling for "open selection" of MPs by Constituency Labour Party (CLP) branches. Thousands of rank-and-file members turned out, demanding mandatory reselection as a means of breaking the Blairites' hold over the Parliamentary Labour Party.

Williamson was the only Labour MP to publicly oppose the Blairites' manufactured campaign against "left-wing anti-Semitism," used to witch-hunt and remove Corbyn supporters from the party. In 2017, he described the mass expulsion and suspension of members on this basis as, "proxy wars and bullshit... I'm not saying it never ever happens, but it is a really dirty, lowdown trick, particularly the antisemitism smears. Many people in the Jewish community are appalled by what they see as the weaponisation of antisemitism for political ends."

In February 2019, Williamson arranged a screening of *Witch Hunt*, opposing the expulsion of black Jewish Labour member Jacqui Walker. He later told a meeting of the pro-Corbyn Momentum group in Sheffield that Labour was being "demonised as a racist, bigoted party... we have backed off too much, we have given too much ground, we have been too apologetic." Applauded by rank-and-file members, he was accused of anti-Semitism and suspended by Labour's NEC.

One after another, Ken Livingstone, Jacqui Walker and Marc Wadsworth were suspended and expelled by the NEC, while Corbyn stayed silent. When it came to Williamson, Corbyn again did not hesitate to throw his supporter to the wolves. He offered no defence of the MP for Derby—who entered politics via the Anti-Nazi League—against manufactured anti-Semitism charges. Readmitted to the party in August after formal sanction by the NEC, he was re-suspended just two days later. A judicial review in the High Court—crowd-funded by hundreds of supporters—ruled last month that his first anti-democratic suspension was unlawful. Yet Corbyn maintained his silence on the matter.

On the morning of this week's NEC proceedings to decide Williamson's fate, Corbyn was asked at an election campaign event whether Williamson should be allowed to recontest his Derby seat for Labour. He replied: "I do not dictate to the party, I lead the party... The NEC will come to its decision today."

What Corbyn neglected to say was that Labour's NEC is dominated by his supporters after elections in September 2018 produced a clean sweep of all nine positions open.

The NEC ruled against Williamson's endorsement on Wednesday morning, a decision hailed by the frothing right-wing elements in the Labour Party. Williamson resigned from Labour hours later, announcing he will contest Derby as an independent.

The coup de grâce delivered by Corbyn's NEC to Williamson is the true measure of Corbynism. In their backroom plotting with the intelligence agencies of Britain, the US and Israel, in their constant briefing of media proprietors and journalists, and their collaboration with Tories, Liberal-Democrats and others, the Blairites identify those who will be hounded and removed. Corbyn is their chief enabler, washing his hands like Pontius Pilate.

Over the past four years, thousands of Labour members who joined to fight austerity, war and social inequality have been suspended, expelled or quit. Yet even this vicious witch-hunt has failed to cow the membership or restore absolute control of the apparatus previously enjoyed by the Blairites.

Not only did left-wing sentiment continue to grow in the Constituency LP branches, it also provided the basis for Corbyn to take control of the NEC. But if any Labour member thought this would provide the basis for dealing with the Blairites, they were to be cruelly disabused. After 50,000 party members submitted a petition to Labour's annual conference in September 2018 demanding mandatory reselection to get rid of the hated Blairites, it was the Corbynites on the NEC, working with Unite General Secretary Len McCluskey, who ensured the motion was blocked at conference with Corbyn's backing.

Corbyn's domination of the NEC was used not to fight the right wing, but to create a safe space for the Blairites. His defence of the right wing was maintained in the face of the most overt provocations imaginable, with Corbyn and his supporters alike denounced as anti-Semites, violent extremists, supporters of terrorism and a threat to national security.

The expulsions and suspensions continued. Meanwhile, the witch-hunt's chief architects, led by war criminals, remain comfortably ensconced in their positions of power. Others left of their own volition to join the Liberal-Democrats or the now-all-but defunct Change UK. Yesterday, ex-Labour MP Ian Austin told Sky News that Corbyn is "poisonous" and that "people should vote for Boris Johnson." He was joined by another ex-Labour MP John Woodcock who called for a Tory vote "to stop [Corbyn] getting his hands on the levers of national security and defence." Woodcock this week was appointed by Tory Home Secretary Priti Patel as a "special envoy," charged with "improving the UK's response to violent extremism." Patel said Woodcock would bring "a range of skills and experience to the role."

Another Blairite, John Mann, claimed Livingstone's scalp in 2016 and was later awarded a peerage by Prime Minister Theresa May. He is now Johnson's new "Anti-Semitism Tsar". Mann said he was not prepared to tell voters that "Corbyn is appropriate to be prime minister. Because I don't think he is."

Tom Watson's announcement Wednesday that he was quitting the party leadership will have been greeted by millions of workers and youth with "good riddance to bad rubbish." Not so Corbyn! In a letter to the man who has worked openly to knife him in the back for the past four years, Corbyn thanked Watson, claiming that "Few people have given as much to the labour movement as you have and I know that many thousands of members and trade unionists that you have inspired and worked with over the years will be very sorry to see you go."

He concluded: "I've always enjoyed our very convivial chats about many things, including cycling, exercise and horticulture, I hope the horse radish plants I gave you

thrive."

To this despicable record of cowardice and betrayal must be added the central political abomination—that while Williamson has been driven from the party, Tony Blair is still a card-carrying member. Last week Blair penned an article in the *Financial Times* calling for "tactical voting" in favour of pro-European Union parties and candidates. This includes support for the Lib-Dems whose leader this week declared that Corbyn could not be trusted because of his stated opposition to pushing the button to launch nuclear war. It is an expellable offence under Labour's rule book to call for a vote for other parties, but Blair—unindicted war criminal—is given carte blanche to do and say as he pleases.

Tony Blair is a Labour Party member. And Chris Williamson is not. Workers and young people will undoubtedly be drawing political conclusions from these facts.

From day one, the Socialist Equality Party opposed all claims that Corbyn was leading a rebirth of Labour. We warned that someone who would not even take on the pathetic and isolated forces of the Blairites in his own party would never wage a genuine struggle against big business. In power Corbyn would do exactly as he was told by big business and the banks.

The SEP is intervening into the 2019 general election to advance a socialist and internationalist program for the working class against austerity, militarism and the drive to authoritarian forms of rule. We appeal to workers and young people to draw the necessary revolutionary conclusions from the exposure of Corbynism, study the program and history of our party and join its ranks.



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