

# UK Labour Party leadership contest begins after general election meltdown

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The Labour Party is to elect a new leader by the end of March, following its debacle in the December 12 general election. The contest is set to start on January 7, the day after the next full meeting of Labour's National Executive Committee.

Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn is to stand down following an election in which Labour lost 60 seats—including many in its northern heartlands—with the Conservatives winning a majority of 80. His faction is pushing for the election of Rebecca Long-Bailey, the shadow business secretary and MP for the northern seat of Salford and Eccles, portraying this as the way to preserve Labour's supposed "leftward" shift.

Corbyn's shadow chancellor and main ally, John McDonnell, declared his own intention to leave the shadow cabinet and named Long-Bailey as his favoured candidate to preserve Corbyn's political legacy. The other possible Corbynite challenger, Angela Rayner, has indicated her intention to run for the position of deputy leader. Long-Bailey and Rayner only became MPs in 2015 and owe their positions to Corbyn's inner circle rather than enjoying any real standing in the party.

The bogus character of all claims that this is a leadership contest between "left" and "right" is epitomised by the fact that the two most prominent Blairite challengers are Corbyn's Shadow Brexit Secretary Sir Keir Starmer and his Shadow Foreign Minister Emily Thornberry.

The real "continuity" a Long-Bailey victory would bring is of an entirely nominal "left" leader acting as a front and apologist for a right-wing party of big business and imperialist militarism. If she loses to Starmer or Thornberry, this will only confirm the party's real character, four years after Corbyn was elected with a popular mandate for change.

Starmer did an interview Tuesday with the *Guardian*, described as his leadership election pitch, while

Thornberry declared on Wednesday that she would be standing—the first MP to do so.

The second MP to declare is Clive Lewis. As an infantry officer graduate from the elite Sandhurst Military Academy, he served in Afghanistan in 2009. As Corbyn's shadow defence secretary, he supported renewal of the Trident nuclear weapons system and pledged that a Labour government would fulfil its commitments to NATO, including those under Article 5 pledging to go to war in defence of another NATO ally. An ardent supporter of the UK remaining in the European Union, Lewis became shadow business secretary but resigned in 2017 over Corbyn's decision to support triggering Article 50 to quit the EU.

Others thought to be considering leadership bids are all right-wingers—the arch witch-hunter Jess Phillips, Corbyn's former leadership challenger Yvette Cooper and Lisa Nandy. In 2016, Nandy appeared at a conference of the Blue Labour group alongside a host of right-wingers including its founder, Labour peer Maurice Glasman, and Steven Woolfe, a former UK Independence Party MEP for North West England.

While workers will face the onslaught of the Johnson government, another departing the Labour leadership for greener pastures is Andrew Fisher—Corbyn's former executive director of policy from 2016 up until the election.

In a *Guardian* article Tuesday, Fisher presented a glowing assessment for the future of the Labour left. "There is a lot to criticise. But Corbyn and McDonnell have transformed Labour," he declared, waxing lyrical about how "in the time since Corbyn won the Labour leadership and appointed McDonnell as shadow chancellor, they have changed Labour. It became a party comfortable with public ownership and redistributive taxation, and one that spoke confidently about ending austerity, tackling climate change, raising wages and

living standards, and investing in public services. It stopped aping the divisive rhetoric of ‘skivers and strivers’ and started talking about social security.”

Fisher declared that after four years in office, Corbyn’s legacy was safe and a left succession could take place, as, “The left now has thousands of talented organisers, policy people, creatives and yes, bureaucrats who can run things. Jeremy and John made that happen.”

Who does Fisher think he is kidding?

Corbyn transformed nothing during his four-year tenure. After trouncing his Blairite opponents in the 2015 leadership contest—with the backing of hundreds of thousands of Labour members and supporters, based on his professed opposition to austerity and war—Corbyn betrayed that mandate.

He not only refused to kick out the Blairites but opposed those who tried even as they drove his own supporters and closest allies out of the party using trumped-up allegations of anti-Semitism.

Corbyn rapidly ditched his opposition to austerity, instructing Labour councils—who had already carried out billions in cuts to jobs and public services—to continue imposing austerity measures. In both the general elections he fought, Corbyn stood on a militarist agenda, with pledges to increase defence spending by at least the 2 percent demanded by NATO and to renew Britain’s Trident nuclear system.

Long-Bailey would, if anything, be a more willing and pliant tool of the party apparatus than Corbyn. As shadow business secretary, she was selected by Corbyn and McDonnell to participate alongside them for six weeks of talks over Brexit with Theresa May’s collapsing Conservative government in response to May’s desperate appeal for “national unity” talks to “deliver the national interest.”

The talks functioned to prop up May until she was forced to resign to be replaced by Johnson.

A former solicitor who plays on her working-class background, Long-Bailey’s claims to be anything different to the Blairites have already been exposed before she ever comes to office.

According to the *Jewish Chronicle*, at the height of the anti-Semitism campaign last summer, Long-Bailey met officials of the anti-Corbyn Jewish Labour Movement in Manchester. The JC states that their discussion included a statement by Long-Bailey that she supported the expulsion of Labour MP Chris Williamson—a member of the Labour Party for 44 years and a staunch supporter of Corbyn—based on bogus claims that he made anti-Semitic

comments. An article dated July 1 headlined, “Rebecca Long-Bailey, tipped as next Labour leader, says Corbyn has lost trust of Jewish community,” states that she told “JLM national vice chair Stephane Savary and northwest chair Dena Rynes that she believed Mr. Williamson should not be a member of the Labour Party and that she did not know how he had not already been expelled.”

Corbyn attended a Parliamentary Labour Party meeting Tuesday evening to receive ritual humiliation. A man without an ounce of political fight in his body, Corbyn apologised to the Blairites who have done nothing but plot his removal for four years for the loss of some of their number.

“I am very sorry for the [election] result for which I take responsibility,” he said. “I want us to have the smoothest possible transition for the sake of the party as a whole.”

Corbyn sat in silence as the assembled pro-austerity warmongers queued up to denounce him. Blairite Rachel Reeves declared, “The biggest drag on our vote was you,” with others following suit including Jess Phillips, Stella Creasy, Liz Kendall—a Blair acolyte he crushed in the 2015 leadership vote, and Dame Margaret Hodge, who famously called Corbyn to his face “a f\*\*\*ing anti-Semite and a racist.”

Creasy, Kendall, and Hodge were among the 66 Labour MPs who voted to bomb Syria after Corbyn allowed them a free vote in Parliament to do so, less than three months after he was elected Labour leader.

While kowtowing before the Blairites, Corbyn has made no accounting before the working class for his disastrous leadership, which has led to a government of arch-Thatcherites led by Boris Johnson. Instead he issued a video Monday insisting, “To those who feel disheartened and feel like giving up I say stay and fight for a better society. And to those who haven’t yet joined us. Join the Labour Party today.”

The working class has no dog in the fight over the Labour leadership. The central issue for workers is not to pick sides over who leads this rotten, collapsing, pro-capitalist party, but building a genuinely socialist alternative.



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