

Who is the new UK Labour Party leader Sir Keir Starmer?

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If Jeremy Corbyn's leadership showed the Labour "left" at its most craven, the election of Sir Keir Starmer marks the return to a business-as-usual Blairism shorn of any socialist pretensions.

Starmer's campaign sought to trade heavily on his early career as a Doughty Street lawyer, defending human rights and trade union cases—the aim being to spin out of these efforts to hold capitalism to its own laws a radical persona.

Political commentator Paul Mason, in his absurd campaign to paint the Labour Party in socialist colours, has even tried to give Starmer a Trotskyist background. In his younger days in the 1980's, Starmer, Mason recounts, edited the *Socialist Alternatives* magazine. What this really shows is that even Starmer's youthful radicalism only extended to backing a faction of the Pabloite United Secretariat that had repudiated any pretence of a connection to Trotskyism and supported the creation of a "broad left" movement or party. One of his articles for the magazine was an interview with Labour grandee Tony Benn.

The real measure of Starmer's politics is the fact that this youthful flirtation with the pseudo-left was no obstacle to his acceptance by the security services into the highest echelons of the British state, becoming Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) in 2008.

Once appointed, this millionaire "radical lawyer" fitted seamlessly into the state apparatus and the defence of its crimes. Three years earlier, on July 22, 2005, the Metropolitan police had killed electrician Jean Charles de Menezes, an innocent man, with seven shots to the head in an underground train carriage. He had been misidentified as a terrorist in the aftermath of the July 7 London bombings. In 2006, the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), under the leadership of DPP Sir Ken MacDonald, refused to prosecute any officer involved.

After the police's account of what happened on the day was comprehensively demolished, a 2008 inquest jury into Menezes's killing returned an open verdict, refusing to rule that the police acted lawfully. They had been barred by the coroner from reaching a verdict of unlawful killing. Starmer, as the new DPP, nonetheless approved the decision not to prosecute any of the police officers involved.

He tried to do the same in 2011 in the case of Ian Tomlinson,

a father of nine who was brutally attacked by police officer Simon Harwood in 2009. Harwood hit Tomlinson, who was walking with his hands in his pockets in the other direction, across the back of the legs with a baton. Tomlinson was unable to break his fall, causing fatal internal bleeding to his liver shortly afterwards.

Fifteen months later, Starmer announced that Harwood would not be prosecuted. The CPS was forced to proceed a few months later when an inquest jury found that Tomlinson had been unlawfully killed.

In 2011, Starmer was in court to witness the collapse of a trial of environmental activists after the involvement of undercover police officer Mark Kennedy was revealed. The case began the "Spycops" scandal, which has since exposed the extensive, long-term infiltration of left-wing and environmentalist groups by police agents, who grossly abused the rights of campaigners and perverted the course of justice in countless court cases. The CPS is suspected of having been closely involved.

As DPP, Starmer refused to pursue the matter. Referring to an in-house CPS investigation, he accepted the manifestly untrue: "If Sir Christopher Rose had found systemic problems, then I would quite accept perhaps a retrospective look at all the cases. But he didn't, he found individual failings."

Starmer was no less reliable on the crimes of British imperialism. Under his direction, the CPS refused to prosecute MI5 and MI6 personnel in 2010, 2011 and 2012. The agents were suspected of participating in CIA extraordinary rendition programmes and the torture of detainees in Guantanamo Bay and Afghanistan.

Most infamously, in 2013 the CPS pressured Swedish prosecutors into maintaining a fraudulent investigation into WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange, as a pretext for securing his arbitrary detention in the Ecuadorian Embassy in London. Uncovered emails show Starmer's department writing to their Swedish counterparts, "Don't you dare get cold feet!"

The new Labour leader also proved himself a pliant tool of the coalition and Tory governments during their reign of austerity. After major student demonstrations in 2010 against the planned trebling of tuition fees were met with a brutal police crackdown, Starmer implemented new guidelines to encourage the prosecution of protestors. They read:

“Prosecutors should have particular regard to whether there is evidence that a person had come to the protest equipped with clothes or mask to prevent identification, items that could be considered body protection, or an item that can be used as a weapon...”

The terms were kept deliberately vague to allow virtually any hand-held object or face covering to be used as a pretext for an arrest. His guidelines were designed to prepare the state for the implementation of the Conservative/Liberal Democrat government’s vicious spending cuts and the mass opposition they would provoke. Explaining his actions, Starmer told the *Guardian* at the time, “There’s a potential for a number of protests over the coming years that may be quite large...”

Following the London riots in 2011 and the rubber-stamp sentencing of over 1,000 young people, Starmer praised the efforts to rush defendants through the courts: “For me it was the speed that I think may have played some small part in bringing the situation back under control.” He visited Highbury Magistrates Court in North London in the early hours of the morning to boost the morale of the prosecutors and praise their efficiency.

In 2013, after Tory Chancellor George Osborne launched a gutter-press campaign against “benefits cheats,” Starmer issued guidelines for the CPS allowing those accused of improperly drawing social security to be charged under the Fraud Act. This allowed for sentences of up to 10 years. He also removed the financial threshold on sending cases to Crown Court, meaning even the smallest “offences” could be punished with long-term jail time.

In 2014, Starmer was granted a knighthood for his services. A year later he was elected to the safe London Labour seat of Holborn and St Pancras. The same pro-capitalist, pro-state politics has characterised his parliamentary career.

In 2015, Sir Keir abstained from the vote on the Tory Welfare Bill, which left 13 million of the most vulnerable people in society an average of £260 a year poorer. The year after, he voted for retaining the Trident nuclear weapons system, against an “Investigation into Contrasts Between Public Statements and Private Policy” in the Iraq War, and for the Investigatory Powers Bill—better known as the Snoopers’ Charter. As shadow home office minister, Starmer spearheaded what he called a “constructive engagement” between Labour and the Tory government to get this mass surveillance law on the books.

The same year, Starmer joined the likes of Hilary Benn in resigning from the front bench to begin a coup of Labour MPs against the newly elected leader of the party, Jeremy Corbyn. During the subsequent leadership election, Starmer backed Blairite nonentity Owen Smith. Starmer’s leadership team includes Matt Pound, the head of right-wing pressure group Labour First, born out of the witch hunt of left-wing party members in the 1980s.

After the 2016 leadership challenge, Starmer made full use of Corbyn’s prostration before the right and appeals for party

unity to take up the role of Shadow Brexit Secretary. He used this position to champion a policy for maintaining British capitalism’s relationship with the European Union, working in alliance with pro-EU sections of the Tory Party.

Now Labour leader, he has signalled his readiness to join a full-blown government of national unity with the Tories, in response to the coronavirus crisis.

Starmer’s shadow cabinet appointments have already won the praise of their Tory counterparts, with new Shadow Home Secretary Nick Thomas-Symonds posting on Twitter: “My first act as Shadow Home Secretary has been to speak to [Home Secretary Priti Patel] this evening about the public health emergency we face and the constructive dialogue that is going to be needed in the days and weeks ahead.”

Other shadow cabinet appointments include former leader Ed (“austerity lite”, “controls on immigration” mugs) Miliband and arch-Blairites Rachel Reeves and Lord Falconer. Corbyn loyalists Richard Burgon, Dawn Butler, Barry Gardiner, Ian Lavery and Jon Trickett were removed, and Corbyn, John McDonnell and Diane Abbott jumped before being pushed. The political chameleon and loyal flunkey Rebecca Long-Bailey as Shadow Education Secretary is the supposed “flag-bearer” of the “left.”

Corbyn spent the best part of five years strangling a popular movement against austerity and war, in a stated attempt to prevent the total collapse of a discredited party of third-rate, right-wing politicians. The fruit of his labour is the election of a backroom state functionary to the Labour leadership. Starmer will make a fitting figurehead for the party’s final descent into political oblivion.

See also:

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