

UK Labour Party's latest purge and the myth of its “socialist transformation”

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Labour's National Executive Committee (NEC) has passed a motion proscribing four organisations operating within the party and targeting their members with automatic expulsion. The four groups are Labour Against the Witchhunt, Labour in Exile, Resist, and Socialist Appeal.

A senior Labour source told the *Daily Mirror*, which broke the story, “Under [former Labour leader Jeremy] Corbyn those from the far-left fringes with poisonous beliefs and warped world-views were welcomed into the party. Keir [Starmer, the current Labour leader] is right to stamp out anti-Semitism and toxic extremism and get the party back into the decent mainstream of Labour values... We need to be fighting to form the next government and that means cleaning out the stable.”

Labour Against the Witchhunt was founded in October 2017 and Labour in Exile in February 2021 to campaign against the suspension and expulsion of left-wing Labour members. They call for a reversal of unfair suspensions, for Labour to drop the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition equating opposition to Zionism with anti-Semitism, and for the democratisation of the party.

Resist is the vanity project of former Labour MP Chris Williamson, himself expelled from the Labour Party on bogus anti-Semitism charges.

Socialist Appeal emerged from a faction fight within the former Militant Tendency and is affiliated to the International Marxist Tendency. It has continued to work within the Labour Party, insisting, as did Militant before it, that Labour can be miraculously transformed into a socialist party because of its base in the trade unions, and dedicating seven decades of futile propagandising on behalf of the party's “left” and various trade union leaders to that end.

Labour's leading body also agreed to establish a panel of independent lawyers to facilitate future proscriptions, suspensions and expulsions. Removing supporters of the proscribed groups will be carried out with even less regard for due process than the expulsion of Militant in the 1980s. Then, each suspected member was individually investigated. Today, the party will automatically throw people out based on claimed prima facie evidence.

The motion passed by the NEC is only a foretaste of what is to come. Other expulsions will follow. The *Sun* newspaper cites one Labour MP describing the NEC motion as a “necessary first step” and adding, quoting the paper, “that Sir Keir will need to boot more hard left factions out of the party ‘before people take us

seriously again’.”

Labour MP Neil Coyle tweeted, “Not far enough. JVL [the anti-Zionist Jewish Voice for Labour group] should be gone too. And other outright Communists who have their own political party/ies they can ruin.”

According to *LabourList*, a “Labour left source” asked, “Why won't they purge the Trots that actually cause us problems?”, referring to the pseudo-left Alliance for Workers Liberty and Socialist Action groups.

Most sources estimate that the current proscriptions will affect up to 1,000 Labour members, itself an indication of how marginal the nominal “left” has become. But Socialist Appeal reports that Labour HQ has 3,000 expulsion letters ready to send. The party is hiring 30-50 investigation officers on 6-month contracts even as it plans to make at least 90 staff redundant amid a collapse of the organisation's finances.

These events are an exposure of the pseudo-left politics pursued by all the targeted groups. Calling for a protest of the NEC's actions, Norman Thomas, the founder of Labour in Exile, said, “This is just the beginning of the fightback. We are fighting for the future of the Labour Party, our party.”

But this is not “the beginning” of anything, least of all a “fightback”. The NEC motion and plans for further expulsions are the culmination of a campaign waged by the Labour Party ever since Corbyn ran for party leader in 2015. The very name of one organisation making a call for a fightback, *Labour in Exile*, is an admission of how far that campaign had gone long before Starmer became Labour leader, let alone the latest NEC vote.

Labour's recent history cannot be honestly addressed by any of those still claiming to be “transforming Labour” or by the Corbynite “left” because Corbyn never opposed expulsions while he was leader of the party.

In 2015, Labour's apparatus mounted “Operation Icepick”, expelling thousands who joined up to vote for Corbyn. The codename was a depraved reference to the murder of Russian revolutionary Leon Trotsky by a Stalinist agent, who used an alpenstock to deal the killing blow.

After becoming leader on an overwhelming mandate, Corbyn responded by adopting a raft of Blairite policies, including NATO membership, the renewal of Trident, and imposing Tory cuts, while pledging himself to maintaining “party unity”, i.e., to protecting the right-wing from demands for their expulsion.

He was rewarded with an attempted coup by Labour MPs

sparking the 2016 leadership election in which 130,000 of his suspected supporters were barred from voting, 50,000 suspended from the party and an unknown number expelled.

Corbyn won leadership again and secured a large swing towards Labour in the 2017 general election. Yet he continued to work with close ally Jon Lansman to use the supposedly “grassroots” Momentum organisation to police left-wing sentiment.

When the Labour Party began a witch-hunt of Labour members on slanderous anti-Semitism charges, in alliance with the Tory party and various Zionist organisations, Corbyn again blocked any fightback. He acceded to the expulsion of long-time allies Ken Livingstone, Chris Williamson, Marc Wadsworth and Jackie Walker, along with many others. Corbyn even argued against his critics that from 2018 his officials had “made substantial improvements, making it much easier and swifter to remove anti-Semites. My team acted to speed up, not hinder the process.”

At Labour’s 2018 annual congress, the Corbynite and the trade unions banded together to prevent the mandatory reselection of Labour MPs.

Starmer has only built on these foundations after being handed leadership of the party once the Corbyn project had ground to a halt. He has already suspended and expelled thousands more members, including Corbyn himself for timidly suggesting that the scale of anti-Semitism within Labour had been “dramatically overstated for political reasons by our opponents inside and outside the party, as well as by much of the media”. For every expelled member, hundreds more have left in disgust.

After this record of political cowardice, anyone who still believes the forces making up the much-reduced “Labour left” intend to launch an eleventh-hour fightback is deluded. They need only look at the response of its two leading figures to be disabused of such illusions.

Corbyn has meekly tweeted that the NEC’s decisions are “divisive and raise the threat of further future attacks on party democracy,” as if there is anything left standing of that “democracy”. He once again urges party unity, pathetically suggesting to Starmer, “Now is the time when all of our energy should be concentrated against the Tories and in campaigning for people’s health, jobs and livelihoods.”

Corbyn’s former Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell complained of “Standard Blairite fare to try show how strong a leader you are by taking on your own party,” before suggesting that it was “bizarre to do it by expelling people, *most of whom have left already*” [emphasis added]!

Beyond these contemptible declarations, a few pro forma statements of protest were issued by the Unite union, Momentum and the Socialist Campaign Group of Labour councillors, implying no action whatsoever.

What is exposed by this record of political prostration is not the personal weaknesses and failings of individuals, but the bankruptcy of the shop-worn perspective of capturing the Labour Party for socialism.

The entire gamut of pseudo-left organisations, including the Socialist Workers Party and the Socialist Party, proclaimed the election of Corbyn as leader and the influx of new members in 2015-16 as a golden opportunity for a left-wing transformation of

the party. The Socialist Party described the “Corbyn insurgency” as “an attempt to turn back the wheel of history, to re-establish a new workers’ party”. The Socialist Workers Party declared “the rebirth of social democracy”.

Nothing remains of such claims. Corbyn has instead left Labour more right-wing than ever before, with the Blairites firmly in the saddle.

The Socialist Equality Party, based on an historically rooted Marxist analysis of the Labour Party, insisted in 2015, prior to Corbyn taking office, “No one can seriously propose that this party—which, in its politics and organisation and the social composition of its apparatus, is Tory in all but name—can be transformed into an instrument of working-class struggle. The British Labour Party did not begin with Blair. It is a bourgeois party of more than a century’s standing and a tried and tested instrument of British imperialism and its state machine.”

We explained that the globalisation of production from the 1980s had fundamentally undermined the national reformist programmes of the social democratic parties and the trade unions, turning them into naked instruments of big business.

Events have more than vindicated this analysis. Far from representing a left-wing movement of workers and young people, Corbyn was its death sentence. His tenure was a final crushing demonstration of the absolute hostility of the Labour Party toward socialism and the working class.

With the latest round of expulsions, calls for a new party are now being made by some pro-Corbyn figures, suggesting that he steps forward to lead us all to the promised land. There is no indication that Corbyn or any of his ilk will heed such a call. But any party established by them would be just as rotten as their decades-long record within the Labour Party would suggest.

The new party the working class desperately needs can only be formed through a ruthless political struggle against the Labour and trade union bureaucracy, “left” and “right”, waged in defence of the independent social and political interests of the international working class. This perspective has been consistently fought for by the Socialist Equality Party, the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) and the *World Socialist Web Site*.



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