

Insider account of Corbyn's suspension confirms his prostration before Labour's right-wing

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Novara Media has published an insiders' account of Jeremy Corbyn's suspension from the Labour Party, written by Oliver Eagleton, an editor at the *New Left Review* and author of *The Starmer Project*.

It is an unserious article, subtitled "It's just as much of a shitshow as you thought", and written as an apologia for Corbyn. But its attempted defence of the former Labour leader, focusing on his efforts to placate Labour's right-wing and their rebuffing of his every entreaty, is an unintendedly damning account of his political cowardice and deceit.

Corbyn was suspended from the Labour Party in October 2020 after saying the scale of anti-Semitism in the Labour Party had been "dramatically overstated for political reasons by our opponents inside and outside the party, as well as by much of the media." His comment came shortly after the publication of a politically motivated Equalities and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) report on the subject. Readmitted by a National Executive Committee panel three weeks later, he then had the Labour whip withdrawn by his successor as Labour leader, Sir Keir Starmer, forcing him to sit as an Independent MP.

An initial falsification in Eagleton's review of this event must be cleared up. Eagleton claims that Corbyn's expulsion was made inevitable by his refusal to "toe the line" on Starmer's response to the pandemic. He writes, "While the leader of the opposition took a proudly abstentionist approach to the pandemic—allowing Johnson to unlock early in pursuit of herd immunity—Corbyn and the rest of the Socialist Campaign Group called for social protections and virus containment measures."

The truth is that Corbyn did as much as Starmer to facilitate Johnson's murderous policy. He kept silent on the fact that herd immunity was being openly discussed in government meetings early in the pandemic, which he participated in as leader of the opposition. When Corbyn did speak, it was to lay down the framework of the de facto coalition with Johnson. He stated in parliament, "Our immediate task as the Opposition is to... support the government's public health efforts while being constructively critical where we feel it is necessary to improve the official response."

This policy of "constructive criticism" was taken on seamlessly by Starmer. And neither Corbyn nor the Socialist Campaign Group organised any opposition to Starmer over the pandemic or any other issue, only issuing the occasional entirely inconsequential statement to cover themselves. It was not until May 2021, a year too late, that the SCG even politely suggested, "the role of Labour in this crisis should

never have been to primarily support the government."

Eagleton invents a record of opposition in a desperate attempt to paint Corbyn in a flattering light, as someone who waged at least one principled fight. As his account makes clear, this is impossible to do over the issue of the anti-Semitism witch-hunt itself.

The EHRC report, he writes approvingly, "identified various problems with Labour's disciplinary process, but responsibility for these faults lay with two right-wing former officials... whereas Corbyn's allies had largely fixed them. The EHRC also noted that, under Corbyn, the leader of the opposition's office (LOTO) had 'interfered' in a small number of antisemitism complaints cases; but it conceded that the aim of such interference was to speed up processing times and hand down harsher penalties."

It was no action of Corbyn's that prompted Starmer's determination to have him expelled from the Parliamentary Labour Party. For large numbers of workers and especially young people, Corbyn became a focal point for hostility to the right and demands for progressive change. And despite Corbyn's best efforts to suppress such sentiments and maintain the right's position in the party, the Blairites were intent on ending all opposition inside the party and proving to big business that they were firmly back in the saddle and equally firmly on message. To this end Corbyn had to go.

Starmer therefore laid a trap with the publication of the EHRC. The account Eagleton gives of Corbyn's response is a picture of increasingly degrading political capitulation.

On the evening before the EHRC report was due to be released, Starmer rang Corbyn to ask what his response would be. Corbyn was eager to accommodate his successor and "asked to see an advance version of Starmer's press statement so he could make sure his own comments would not conflict with it." Starmer promised to send a copy but never did. Corbyn's close Stalinist adviser Seumas Milne later tried to secure a copy from deputy leader Angela Rayner "so they could amend Corbyn's [statement] accordingly", again without success.

The next morning, shortly after the EHRC report was published, Corbyn issued his prepared response. He clearly believed he had given the right all they could ask of him, declaring, "Anyone claiming there is no antisemitism in the Labour party is wrong. Of course there is, as there is throughout society, and sometimes it is voiced by people who think of themselves as on the left." Only then did he suggest that the scale of the problem had been exaggerated, "by our opponents inside and outside the party, as well as by much of the media." The EHRC report he had read specifically said that he was allowed to do so

without fear of retribution under Article 10 of the European Convention of Human Rights on free speech and political comment, noting specifically that “Article 10 will protect Labour Party members who, for example, make legitimate criticisms of the Israeli government, or express their opinions on internal Party matters, such as the scale of antisemitism within the Party, based on their own experience and within the law.”

However, Starmer gave a press conference shortly afterwards and delivered a clear attack on his predecessor for minimising the issue of anti-Semitism. “Corbyn’s team,” writes Eagleton, “began to wonder whether Starmer had deliberately withheld the transcript of his speech, hoping Corbyn would say something that could be used to justify his foreordained suspension.”

Starmer suspended Corbyn from the Labour Party within hours. Corbyn and his team’s automatic response was to wish they been given the opportunity to surrender in advance. Eagleton quotes one of Corbyn’s aides as saying, “If Keir had sent us his statement, we would have cut Jeremy’s line about the scale of the problem being ‘dramatically overstated’.”

Upon hearing of his suspension, Corbyn quickly conferred with his closest allies. The original version of Eagleton’s article read, “He high-tailed over to a nearby shop owned by his son, where [Corbyn’s chief of staff Karie] Murphy set up a conference call with John McDonnell and Diane Abbott, both of whom encouraged Corbyn to apologise.” It was later amended to say that the three “discuss[ed] next steps”, with a note explaining, “Since publication, this piece has been amended to remove the claim that John McDonnell and Diane Abbott encouraged Jeremy Corbyn to apologise”. However, even the new version states, “According to sources, he [McDonnell] also encouraged Corbyn to apologise for his comments in meetings over the coming days.”

Whatever his denials related to Eagleton’s sources, Corbyn was readmitted briefly by the NEC only after he retracted his earlier statement, declaring, “To be clear, concerns about antisemitism are neither ‘exaggerated’ nor ‘overstated’”. Moreover, McDonnell himself said in public, on a podcast in November 2020, “Mistakes have been made, we accepted that. Apologies have been made time and time again and I repeat, even now the number of apologies we’ve made to the Jewish community, and we need to keep on apologising to them as well.” He even criticised the language and timing of Corbyn’s remarks.

At no stage did McDonnell or Corbyn entertain the idea of appealing to the party’s membership, then being witch-hunted out of the party for even discussing Corbyn’s suspension, to fight back against Starmer’s purge. As the *World Socialist Web Site* reported, their next step was to arrange a series of behind-closed-doors meetings between Labour “lefts” and trade union leaders and members of Starmer’s staff to hopefully reach an accommodation.

According to Eagleton, these discussions involved Unite General Secretary Len McCluskey, Communication Workers Union general secretary Dave Ward, Labour MP John Trickett, the chief whips Nick Brown and Alan Campbell, and Starmer aides Morgan McSweeney and Simon Fletcher. Between them they sought to draft a “revised statement” from Corbyn with a “wording they could all agree on”, and “choreograph” his readmission to the Labour Party.

Such sordid manoeuvring is antithetical to socialist politics, which demands a wholesale exposure of the anti-Semitism witch-hunt and political war against its perpetrators. No external factors prevented Corbyn from launching that struggle. He and the “Labour left” chose

to proceed as they did because of what they are—a clique willing to do anything to win the good graces of their Blairite masters so they can continue in their allotted role as a safety valve for dissipating opposition to Labour’s right-wing and its allies in the Tory Party.

Whether Corbyn does ultimately make his way back to the Labour backbenches or not, Eagleton’s account confirms what the former Labour leader’s entire record has shown. The mythologized image of Corbyn as a principled fighter—for anything, let alone socialism—is a cynical fraud.

A principle is not a talking point for holiday speechifying. It is a position uncompromisingly defended and fought for, whatever opposition is faced. By this standard, Corbyn has only one: unwavering allegiance to the right-wing Labour Party, in service to which everything else is negotiable.

What Corbyn lacks in principle he makes up for in a talent for political duplicity, which he put to good use mounting a five-year political charade as a “socialist” Labour leader. Corbyn specialised in empty left-rhetoric about “For the Many, not the Few,” but always while insisting on party unity and opposing any genuine struggle by his supporters, who made up the overwhelming majority of the party. He left the party as he found it, a pro-imperialist, pro-capitalist formation led by the right, and the country still run by a hated Tory government.

Reviewing the experience of Corbynism in a public meeting last November, Socialist Equality Party National Secretary Chris Marsden explained: Corbyn is “the tattered modern-day representative of a school of thought, of a political tendency, Fabianism, based on the fine art of the possible, class collaboration, a worshipping of parliamentary procedure, a liberal variant of a religious ‘turn the other cheek’ approach to politics.”

Describing Corbyn’s appeal as one “based on a constant attempt to suppress the realities of contemporary society based on ruthless class struggle”, Marsden concluded, “If you are fighting for socialism, which is the overthrow of the capitalist order, then this passivity, this complacency, defeatism and cowardice should be purged from the workers’ movement. It should be anathema to anyone who considers themselves a genuine socialist.”

Workers and young people should read Eagleton’s account in this light and make the decision to contact the Socialist Equality Party.



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