

Labour Party Conference: Blairites on a rampage thanks to Corbyn

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Witch-hunts, armed police everywhere, hymns of praise to Tony Blair, law-and-order rhetoric and militarism. Such was this year's Labour Party conference.

This was a leadership at war with its own members, as it careens to the right and deals ruthlessly with all opposition.

Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer was under instruction from big business and its media to prove that the ghost of his predecessor Jeremy Corbyn and any suggestion of a left turn by the party was finally exorcised. He did not disappoint his masters.

Conference began with changes to the party's rules to prevent any repeat of a left-wing candidate getting on a leadership ballot ever again.

Starmer's reforms mean that anyone wanting to stand for the leadership must first win the backing of 20 percent of Labour members of parliament, rather than the current 10 percent. This veto for the Parliamentary Labour Party is hardly necessary, given the absence of any significant number of even nominally "left" MPs—Corbyn only got on the ballot in 2015 because some MPs thought it wise to put a token left in the race to replace Ed Miliband. But it was demonstrably bolting an already closed door. The motion passed against majority opposition from members thanks to the block vote of Unison, Britain's largest trade union, with 53.7 percent in favour overall.

That day Shadow Security Minister Conor McGinn said that people who had joined the party to support Corbyn's nominally left push—300,000 and the overwhelming majority of the party's membership—had been "misguided, or misled" by others, though some were "not irretrievable".

The process of deselecting Labour MPs was also made more difficult, and votes in leadership elections denied to "registered supporters".

There were also changes to Labour's disciplinary process with the declared aim of speeding up the witch-hunting of members on bogus charges of anti-Semitism for opposing Israeli repression of the Palestinians. Labour sources told the *Times* that "defending the party against legal action relating to anti-Semitism" had cost around £2 million, "with an extra £1 million spent on responding to a backlog of complaints."

The next day, conference overwhelmingly passed a motion calling for sanctions against Israel, which was promptly disavowed by Shadow Foreign Secretary Lisa Nandy. She made clear that this position will never become party policy. And neither will an emergency motion describing the formation of the AUKUS military pact with the US and Australia as a "dangerous move that will undermine world peace", which was passed by 70.35 percent to 29.65 percent, or votes supporting public ownership of energy companies, a £15 an hour minimum wage or anything else that contradicts Labour's pro-business, pro-imperialist agenda.

The livestream of the conference debate on Palestine was cut. That day, Louise Ellman, the leading Zionist who quit as a Labour MP in 2019 in furtherance of the anti-Semitism witch-hunt, announced that she had rejoined after Sunday's vote to set up an independent complaints process for claims of racism.

Ellman, who famously claimed that anti-Semitism had become 'mainstream' within the Labour Party under Corbyn, praised Starmer as someone in whom, "Britain's Jews can have trust." She was joined in attending the conference by Police Federation Chief John Apter.

In contrast, at least 20 delegates were excluded for alleged membership of the recently proscribed groups, Socialist Appeal, Labour in Exile Network, Labour Against the Witchhunt and Resist. The bans also led to the disaffiliation from Labour of the small 17,000-member Bakers, Food and Allied Workers Union. Its president, Ian Hodson, was expelled from the party over alleged links with proscribed groups, amid bogus accusations of anti-Semitism for pointing out the Zionist Jewish Labour Movement worked with the Israeli embassy to undermine Corbyn's leadership of the party.

After the conference ended, Labour announced that some of those who heckled Starmer during his address to conference also face suspension. His risible performance brought a fitting conclusion to the conference debacle.

As he spoke, armed police positioned themselves in the conference aisles in an intimidatory fashion. Parts of the conference hall were closed off, and additional day visitors bussed in to give an illusion of popular support.

Starmer began by saying to Ellman, "welcome home", before segueing into his customary trite homilies explaining how his "humble" working class beginnings had somehow helped shape his right-wing politics, with unambiguous pledges that Labour was "back in business" as a potential party of government for Britain's ruling class.

Pointedly targeting Corbyn, he said, "To the voters who thought we were unpatriotic or irresponsible or that we looked down on them, I say these simple but powerful words. We will never under my leadership go into an election with a manifesto that is not a serious plan for government."

Labour had got "our own house in order this week," he said, before stressing his credentials as having "the great honour of becoming this country's chief prosecutor, leading a large organisation: the Crown Prosecution Service. Three very important words."

Starmer would not stand for "the 2 million incidents of anti-social behaviour this year," or knife crime, unsolved crimes and the loss of 8,000 police officers under the Tories.

His nebulous plans for the National Health Service were only a preamble for a promise to work with the pharmaceuticals, materials, defence, chemical engineering, consumer goods environmental technology, transport and biotechnology industries under "Labour's Buy, Make, Sell in Britain programme... good business and good government are partners".

All public spending would be "scrutinised by an Office for Value for Money... There will be no promises we can't keep or commitments we can't pay for." For good measure, Labour's own "levelling up" agenda would be modelled on the record of Tony Blair. "You want levelling up?

That's levelling up."

"In this party we are patriots," said Starmer." Regarding "Our military," he declared, "Labour is the party of NATO" and "will do right by the Great Britons who serve in our armed forces".

The Blairites' response to conference was ecstatic.

Zionist former MP Ruth Smeeth said, to a standing ovation in the expected quarters, "Today we need to send a message to the vile racists and bullies who thought that our party could become a place for Jew hate."

Shadow Defence Secretary John Healey declared, "It was Labour that established NATO and the nuclear deterrent. With Labour and Keir Starmer, the country will get the leadership to forge a new and powerful role for Britain in the world. We will insist on the UK's say with the US as our most essential ally, stepping up Britain's leadership in NATO."

Writing in the *i* newspaper, Ian Dunt crowed, "It was a full spectrum-attack on Corbynism: a commitment to tackling crime, celebrating patriotism, prioritising defence and embracing the record of New Labour. All the things which had alienated voters from Labour were addressed in turn. It was like we were watching Corbynism being buried."

However, to anyone outside the political bubble in which the Labourites operate, informed only by the opinion of fellow thinkers and a right-wing media, it is becoming ever clearer that it is the Labour Party that is being buried, not merely "Corbynism".

Wes Streeting MP, touted in some circles as a future party leader, boasted of taking the fight to the "left." But the Blairites' "victory" was only made possible by the deliberate refusal of the Corbynites to fight them on anything. Capitulating on every policy issue, including NATO membership, Trident and war against Syria, Corbyn and his allies opposed all efforts to drive out the Blairites and allowed their own supporters to be driven out instead.

Without the fig-leaf provided by Corbyn, the stage is being set for a direct confrontation between the Labour and trade union bureaucracy and the working class, from which the former will never recover.

Corbyn, having had the Labour whip removed by Starmer, was of course still busy touring fringe meetings at the conference such as Momentum's *The World Transformed*, where he was joined by some of his inner coterie and most uncritical fans among the pseudo-left tendencies. But he had nothing to say. In a September 28 opinion piece in the *i* newspaper, he described the party conference as "a time for our movement to come together". His only oblique reference to Starmer et al was to write, "So far this week, Labour's leaders have shown they want to prop up, not challenge that wealth and power."

Corbyn's most prominent ally, former Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell, marked the start of conference with advice to Starmer in the *Guardian*.

Celebrating his and Corbyn's determination not to rock the boat, he recalled, "When Jeremy Corbyn and I stood down from the leading positions in the Labour party, we agreed Keir Starmer should not be treated the way we were by some Labour MPs, doing all they could to undermine us." He advised Starmer against "blundering around stoking up internal disputes" when he "should be setting out the argument for radical change" at the head of a united party.

Nothing Starmer does will call into question the slavish loyalty of Corbyn and company to the Labour and trade union bureaucracy, of which they are an integral part. This was the central lesson of Corbyn's five years as party leader, which proved a decisive refutation of the claims of the pseudo-left groups that he could lead a progressive transformation of the party.

The shattering of that lie has forced the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) and Socialist Party to change rhetorical tack.

The Socialist Party has reverted to its pre-Corbyn position of calling for the trade unions to "fight for a new workers' party," while still portraying

"Corbynism" as having been a "threat" to "the defenders of capitalism." It continues to work with the leadership of the "RMT rail union and others in the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition to take steps in that direction"—tiny steps that will never arrive at the SP's stated destination.

The SWP's *Socialist Worker* commented, "The question for the Labour left is whether that's a party they want to stay in." Last November, Charlie Kimber wrote, "We need a party that puts struggle first and that sees the streets and the workplaces as more important than elections," but listed only participation in various protest movements as the basis for building, "politics on struggle and revolutionary socialism to change the whole set up."

Their rhetorical shift has a broader significance, however. The embrace of Corbyn by the pseudo-left was a desperate attempt to reinforce the grip of the Labour and trade union bureaucracy over the working class. He was one of a series of similar figures relentlessly promoted as representing a "broad left" alternative to the building of a genuine socialist leadership in the working class.

Kimber now presents this as the catalogue of disaster it proved to be.

"It was certainly extraordinary when Corbyn, so recently leader, was expelled," he writes. "Most of the Labour left will now stay in the party and push for Corbyn's reinstatement," but there is "some talk of a breakaway from Labour, perhaps based on some councillors and trade union officials." While "That talk should be turned into reality," according to Kimber, "it will be no solution to set up a Labour Party 2.0, the same animal in different clothing."

Podemos, formed in Spain in 2014, "was hugely successful" but "now sits in a government with the right-wing PSOE social democratic party" administering "a disastrous coronavirus strategy where profits come before people." In Greece, Syriza's Alexis Tsipras implemented "a worse round of austerity than those imposed by his Tory predecessors."

"In the US, much hope was invested in Bernie Sanders. But, working inside the Democratic Party, he has ended up as a frontman for neoliberal Joe Biden."

One would never know that the SWP et al boosted the political credentials of every one of these political bankrupts. They are only belatedly taking their distance from Corbyn, Tsipras, Sanders and their ilk because many workers and youth have already concluded that they are worthless.

Today their musings over possible "left" splits from Labour only disarm the working class in face of the dangers they confront from a de facto alliance between the Conservative government and Starmer's Labour Party, implementing a pandemic policy of deliberate mass infection, illness and death, and the ramping up of tensions with China and Russia.

The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) was alone in systematically opposing the concerted attempt to subordinate the working class to Corbyn and other "left" defenders of capitalism. We advanced a critique based on an historically grounded understanding of Labourism/social democracy, of Stalinism, and of the pseudo-left groups which serve as the last line of defence of the labour and trade union bureaucracy's domination of the working class. It is essential that this record, collected on the *World Socialist Web Site*, is carefully studied, assimilated and then acted on through the building of the SEP as the genuinely revolutionary, socialist and internationalist leadership workers need.



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