

Labour's NEC votes against reinstating Jeremy Corbyn as a Labour MP

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The Labour Party's National Executive Committee (NEC) has reaffirmed the suspension of former leader Jeremy Corbyn as a Labour MP. He has sat in parliament as an independent for the last 14 months.

A motion calling for the party whip to be restored to Corbyn was tabled by NEC members Ian Murray, President of the Fire Brigades Union, and Nadia Jama. It called his suspension "deeply divisive" and "extremely disrespectful to the people of Islington North who have overwhelmingly elected Jeremy Corbyn as their Labour MP for nearly four decades."

The motion was convincingly defeated yesterday evening by 23 votes to 14, with one abstention.

Before the meeting, Corbyn's backers on the NEC wrote that they were "heartened to hear that there are many members of NEC who seem willing to find a solution to this situation and we look forward to hearing their views today and securing their support for this motion."

Corbynite news site *Skwawkbox* was more circumspect, but still wrote that the vote was "on a knife edge". Revealing just how disconnected the campaign over Corbyn's suspension is from any popular campaign in the working class, it placed the "key to the outcome" in the hands of the GMB's new general secretary Gary Smith, who almost no one would know from a bar of soap.

In the end, the Blairites used the motion as an opportunity to demonstrate to the ruling class their full control of the party, refusal to compromise with the dwindling "left", and draw a line under the pose of radicalism associated with the Corbyn era.

The NEC majority refused to even discuss the motion, offering no answer to its supporters and blocking moves to organise a separate meeting to debate the issue or defer the vote.

Chief Whip Alan Campbell, whose power it is to reinstate Corbyn as a Labour MP, turned up to give an "update". He said that Corbyn had not answered his November 2020 letter demanding a fulsome apology for saying that the scale of anti-Semitism in Labour was "dramatically overstated for political reasons by our opponents inside and outside the party, as well as by much of the media". Corbyn said this after the release of a politically motivated investigation by the Equalities and Human Rights Commission (EHRC). Campbell had also insisted on "an assurance that you will cooperate fully with the Labour Party as it seeks to implement the recommendations set out in the EHRC report." He then refused to take questions from the NEC.

At the same meeting, Labour's ruling body defeated by 20 votes to 14 a motion to end the retrospective application of bans on four Corbyn-supporting groups within the Labour Party. In July last year, Labour announced that anyone associated with Socialist Appeal, Labour Against the Witchhunt, Labour in Exile and Resist would be removed from the party.

The NEC also approved new rules on the selection of MPs designed to appropriate powers from local party organisations. Earlier in the week, the *Mirror* reported, "Sources say the new guidance, to be discussed by party chiefs next week, was drawn up in response to 'slack' procedures used by Jeremy Corbyn, which allowed MPs which 'brought the party into disrepute' to stand."

This dismal rout is further proof, should it be needed, that the Corbynite project of pushing Labour to the left is a shipwreck. Before the vote, Corbyn's former shadow chancellor John McDonnell pleaded, "By expressing its support for the restoration of the whip the NEC could make a major contribution to tackling this

injustice & uniting the party.”

Chair of the Socialist Campaign Group of Labour MPs (SCG) Richard Burgon tweeted, “You can’t say the Labour Party should be a broad church and then not restore the whip to a former Party Leader.”

Fellow SCG member Jon Trickett urged, “Restore the whip to Jeremy Corbyn. Prove that Labour is sincere about being a broad church.”

But the “broad church” was never the Blairites’ policy. The formulation was employed by Corbyn and his allies when they were in the party leadership to justify their fawning defence of Labour’s right-wing from a hostile membership demanding their expulsion. Burgon and co are essentially pleading, “We bowed and scraped before you when we were in power, could you extend us some courtesy now that we’ve let you back in the saddle?” To which the Blairites have responded with a deserved kick in the teeth.

The only “broad church” Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer is interested in is one that includes the Conservative Party. Howls of anguish went up in the Labour “left” last week when he “warmly welcomed” Tory defector Christian Wakeford MP into the party. Wakeford had reportedly called the Labour Party “a bunch of c***s” just a day previously for opposing the scrapping of a £20-a-week uplift to the Universal Credit benefit payment made during the pandemic.

As for the party’s attitude to the “left” in its ranks, this was summed up by Shadow Chancellor Rachel Reeves in a January 19 interview with the *Financial Times*. Asked about the 200,000 plus Labour members who have left in disgust since Corbyn’s capitulation handed Starmer the leadership in early 2020, Reeves replied, “Membership in my constituency is falling and that’s a good thing.” These were, she said, people “who should never have joined the Labour Party. They never shared our values.”

The FT reported that Reeves “pledged that a government led by Sir Keir Starmer would be proudly ‘pro-business’ and committed to fiscal discipline.” She headed to Wakeford’s constituency, Bury, the next day to unveil “Labour’s Plan for a Stronger Economy”.

Yesterday, responding to the SCG’s call for Corbyn’s reinstatement, Cal Parrish, staffer to senior Labour whip Chris Elmore, tweeted, “The day all the MPs in this group are out of Labour will be a day to celebrate.”

Corbyn and the Labour left’s response to the NEC vote has been characteristically spineless, summed up by the statement issued by his supporters on the ruling body. They lament that their colleagues “failed to grasp this opportunity to heal some of the self-inflicted wounds of the last two years”. However, they write, “the current leader of the Labour Party and his Chief Whip still have the opportunity to correct this wrong... If they care about the future of the Labour Party, and removing this Tory government, they should make every effort to bring our movement together.”

Corbyn himself, who had maintained his silence prior to the NEC meeting as part of his policy of ingratiating himself with the right, tweeted, “Today’s NEC vote and Keir Starmer’s ongoing decision to bar me from sitting as a Labour MP is disappointing.”

He continued, “The struggle for peace, justice and sustainability goes on,” begging the question as to precisely where? His choice of words points to his Peace and Justice Project talking shop, set up in December 2020 to pacify calls for him to found a new party and shore up the campaign to keep disaffected Labour members under Starmer’s thumb.

There is something deeply repulsive about the campaign to reinstate Corbyn, characterised as it is by the naked ferocity of the right and the political cowardice and servility of the “left”. The Corbynite fraud of a left-wing, even “socialist”, transformation of the Labour Party is ending not with a bang, but a prolonged whimper.

Whether Corbyn is ultimately reinstated or not, or whether he embarks on some other political venture, is irrelevant to the working class. Neither he nor anyone in the SCG have anything to offer.

The Socialist Equality Party argued from the first that any claim that a progressive movement could emerge out of the Labour Party was a lie and that an independent socialist party of the international working class had to be built to fight social inequality, war, dictatorship and now the pandemic. Those who now see this warning confirmed should contact the SEP today.



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