

NATO's proxy war on Russia and the death of the Corbynite 'left'

Chris Marsden
1 March 2022

On the afternoon of Thursday, February 24, the Corbynite "left" of the Labour Party committed collective political suicide. The rump of the Socialist Campaign Group (SCG) of Labour MPs died on their knees, cowering before party leader Sir Keir Starmer's pro-NATO witch-hunt aimed at silencing anti-war sentiment in the working class.

Seven days earlier just 11 Labour MPs and three peers, plus former party leader Jeremy Corbyn and Claudia Webbe—who have both already had the party whip withdrawn—had signed an open letter from the Stop The War Coalition (STWC) opposing "any war over Ukraine" and calling for "a negotiated settlement" recognising "the right of the Ukrainian people to self-determination" while addressing "Russia's security concerns."

The statement, published prior to the February 21 Russian invasion of Ukraine, condemned the British government for pouring "oil on the fire", talking up "the threat of war continually", sending arms to Ukraine and "troops to Eastern Europe". It urged that "NATO should call a halt to its eastward expansion" and rejected "the idea that NATO is a defensive alliance", citing "its record in Afghanistan, Yugoslavia and Libya over the last generation, not to mention the US-British attack on Iraq."

The 11 signatories already constituted only a third of the SCG's entirely notional membership of 35 MPs. On January 21, eleven other SCG MPs had announced a new group, still affiliated apparently to the SCG, which would try to "pressure" and "steer" Starmer "rather than resist or remove him," according to a leak by the pro-Corbyn *Skwawkbox*.

The SCG's holdouts, including Corbyn's former Shadow Home Secretary Diane Abbott, former Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell, and SCG leader Richard Burgon, fell into line at the first direct challenge from Starmer, in a move ordered by no less than Prime Minister Boris Johnson.

In parliament that day, Johnson told Starmer that he must remove the whip "from the 14 members of the Labour Party who say that the aggressor in Ukraine is NATO." Starmer did as he was told, with chief whip Sir Alan Campbell sending a letter to the MPs threatening to expel them from the parliamentary party. Reports of how long it took these cowards to obey vary from one hour to as little as 30 minutes.

The Blairites were ecstatic. One Labour source declared that the SCG members "can be a mouthpiece for the Kremlin or a Labour MP, but not both". "An hour after being told to, all these

grandstanders have withdrawn their signatures. Let there be no doubt whose party this is now," said another.

Just one day later, Starmer made his second attack, this time on the party's youth wing, Young Labour. The group's Twitter account was suspended "until further notice", its funding cut and annual conference scrapped. Its crime was criticising Starmer for "backing Nato aggression" over the Ukraine crisis, declaring support for Stop The War "and other pro-peace activists" and calling on the UK to withdraw from NATO.

Young Labour was accused of actions "actively detrimental to the Party's core objectives: to promote Labour candidates and policies, and to win elections." A party source told *The Mirror* more bluntly, "Young Labour is supposed to be a place for younger members to get away from factional rubbish... Labour will no longer tolerate the selfishness of those who aren't focused on winning the next election."

Yesterday, Starmer made clear that the witch-hunt would continue to expand, targeting anyone who opposed Russia's invasion while refusing to endorse NATO's own warmongering agenda. "Let me be very clear—There will be no place in this party for false equivalence between the actions of Russia and the actions of Nato," he declared.

The Corbynites are responsible for this witch-hunt and its intended consequence—the silencing and suppression of political opposition as NATO conducts a proxy war for regime change in Russia.

The very next day, every single SCG MP was on message, tweeting necessary demands for the withdrawal of Russian troops shorn of a single word of criticism of NATO, the Johnson government, or even a caution against the threat of a wider war. None have made any protest against Starmer's witch-hunt, even to defend themselves let alone Young Labour or the STWC.

For several days, only McDonnell offered an apology for withdrawing his signature from the open letter. He tweeted February 24, "This is not the time for focussing on events in the Labour Party. Our focus should be on supporting and showing solidarity with the people of Ukraine & these courageous Russians demonstrating for peace."

This was accompanied by an announcement that he would be joining a February 26 pro-Ukrainian demonstration in London, speaking alongside the notorious pro-NATO warmonger Paul Mason, who is in the forefront of Starmer's McCarthyite offensive.

A more degraded statement of apostasy is hard to imagine. McDonnell declares his solidarity with Ukrainians and Russians opposed to war by agreeing to abandon all opposition to the imperialist powers organised in NATO now funding and organising the Ukrainian regime's armed forces, while threatening a military offensive against Russia.

As for the claim that events in the Labour Party are a distraction, McDonnell will fool no one. Starmer's declared aim is to ensure that "Labour is the party of NATO", which he is purging of all remaining dissent.

McDonnell's tweet unleashed a torrent of hostile comment. He was denounced as a "spineless fraud", a "careerist", a "traitor", a "liar" and a "scab". Others drew the necessary conclusion regarding both Labour and its supposed "left" wing:

"We expected better, Then we hoped for better, Now we know better, John"; "The SCG might as well disband... I'm ashamed I ever supported you"; "I initially gave Corbyn the benefit of the doubt, I thought he would shift the locus of political debate back to the left. As time went on, I realised how wrong I had been, and left the party"; "This is indeed not the time for focussing on Labour Party. It is the time to leave the Labour Party"; "I left the Labour Party some time ago, but I no longer expect to see calls from you for people to stay and fight. There's nothing left in the Labour Party to fight for"; "This is a very good time to say @UKLabour is beyond broken. We have all wasted far too much time on it. Leave it to @Keir_Starmer and the rest of the war mongering, neoliberal maggots to fight over."

It took until yesterday for anyone to demonstrate more unbridled political cynicism than McDonnell. Challenged on the BBC's *Politics Live* that Starmer's threat to withdraw the whip was directed at her, Diane Abbott gave a loyalty oath: "I am a loyal supporter of Keir Starmer, and it will never come to that."

She declared of her signing the STWC letter, "That was before Russia invaded Ukraine. That was a letter superseded by events and we were happy to take our names off... Nobody wants to attack NATO. Having a debate around NATO strategy is one thing, attacking NATO is another... Everybody in the Labour Party supports a defensive alliance."

The abject capitulation of the SCG MPs blows apart the central perspective of the STWC and all Britain's pseudo-left groups that some faction of the Labour and trade union bureaucracy will lead an anti-war campaign to convince British imperialism to pursue a less warlike foreign policy, one less subordinate to the US and more pan-European.

In this spirit, Lindsay German, the STWC's national convener declared pathetically that she "didn't agree" with the Labour MPs decision because this "will be the start of further attacks on the left over this and other issues", over a statement "completely justified in terms of democratic debate" and "within the remit of 'free speech' which is so lauded by Johnson and his Tories."

Alex Callinicos of the Socialist Workers Party begged pathetically, "We need people like Diane Abbott on platforms campaigning against this war, on the kind of basis that Stop the War has been laying out."

Instead of the "lefts" persuading the pro-NATO warmongers of the error of their ways, it is they who now march in lockstep with

Britain, the US and the European powers on the path to war.

Corbyn as always has remained silent on the betrayal of the SCG MPs. And it would mean nothing even had he criticised them. They collectively make up his closest political supporters and are, moreover, only building on his own record of political capitulation to the Blairite's agenda for war.

Of all Corbyn's retreats from his stated principles, none was more significant than the way the former head of the STWC was prepared to immediately accommodate himself to militarism in a way that set the tone for his five years as party leader. As the Socialist Equality Party explained :

On every key issue—war in Syria, NATO's military build-up against Russia and the renewal of Britain's nuclear weapons programme—Corbyn has given way to the dictates and demands of his right-wing critics... Corbyn prepared for the Trident [nuclear missile] vote in July [2016] by abandoning his opposition to NATO membership and telling Labour's conference, "We're not going to divide and ruin ourselves as a party over this." He allowed Labour MPs their second free vote since taking office, and three-quarters (140 to 47) backed Trident's renewal. This *volte-face* has placed Britain in the front line, in Europe, of a potential nuclear war with Russia. In response to a question as to whether she would personally authorise a nuclear strike, Prime Minister Theresa May replied, "Yes... the whole point of a deterrent is that our enemies need to know that we would be prepared to use it..."

It is thanks to Corbyn and his pseudo-left backers' demobilisation of anti-war sentiment and sowing of political confusion on fundamental issues of perspective that Starmer and Johnson have been able to go so far in their criminal mission as joint heads of Britain's "Party of War".

But the discrediting of Corbyn et al clears the path for a new mass anti-war movement to emerge based on the international working class and animated by a politically conscious struggle against capitalism and for socialism. Such a movement, led by the SEP and the International Committee of the Fourth International, will unreservedly oppose the invasion of Ukraine by Moscow, while remaining intransigently hostile to British, US and European imperialism and their ex-left political stooges.



To contact the WSWP and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)