

UK: Starmer says Corbyn cannot stand as a Labour MP

The rout of Labour's "left"

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Jeremy Corbyn will not be allowed to stand for parliament as a Labour candidate, party leader Sir Keir Starmer told the media Wednesday.

His statement was a raving denunciation of Corbyn's tenure as party leader. "What I said about the party changing I meant and we are not going back," he said. Labour had gone "from a party of dogma to a party of patriotism. From a party of protest to a party of public service." It was "unrecognisable from 2019 and it will never go back."

Without a trace of irony, this dedicated servant of the corporations and NATO declared that Labour would "never again be a party captured by narrow interests."

Referring to the allegations of an anti-semitism crisis in the Labour Party used to discredit Corbyn and witch-hunt left-wing party members, Starmer added that Labour would "never again be brought to its knees by racism or bigotry."

His statement was timed to coincide with the closing of the Equalities and Human Rights Commission's politically motivated investigation of the party.

Corbyn's permanent expulsion from the Parliamentary Labour Party is the outcome of his own political cowardice and hostility to the class struggle. He not only opposed any fight by his hundreds of thousands of supporters against the Blairite apparatus of the Labour Party, but then adapted to and even implemented the anti-semitism witch-hunt that claimed many of his hitherto closest allies and saw thousands driven out of the party.

Now even the pretence of an organised left-wing presence within the Labour Party has evaporated. At least 140,000 members who joined Labour to back Corbyn have already left in disgust since Starmer became leader. Corbyn has sat as an independent since he was removed from the PLP in October 2020 for stating that allegations of an anti-semitism crisis used against him were exaggerated and politically motivated.

The Socialist Campaign Group (SCG) numbering around just 30 Labour MPs, has split in two, with the majority

saying it is no longer realistic to oppose the party leadership, which must be persuaded to implement more progressive policies instead.

The remaining 11 raised the flag of surrender for the final time in February 2022, withdrawing their signatures from a Stop the War Coalition open letter opposing NATO's role in the war against Russia in Ukraine when Starmer threatened to withdraw the party whip.

Responding to Starmer's insistence that no one could ever again criticise NATO, one of Corbyn's closest allies, Diane Abbott, declared, "Nobody wants to attack NATO" and said, "I am a loyal supporter of Keir Starmer..." Corbyn's former Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell appeared the very next day on a pro-war rally.

None of this satisfies Starmer, who smells blood in the water. He threatened Wednesday, "If you don't like the changes we have made, I say the door is open and you can leave."

Speculation in the media naturally focused on whether Corbyn would now announce that he would stand as an independent candidate against Labour in his Islington North constituency, as a prelude to launching his own party. Instead, Corbyn, who has spent the past two years seeking readmission to the PLP, issued a short statement making clear that his goal was unchanged and that he would still seek to stand as a Labour MP.

Starmer's was "a flagrant attack on the democratic rights of Islington North Labour Party members. It is up to them—not party leaders—to decide who their candidate should be."

To underscore his continued loyalty, he wrote that barring him from standing for Labour was "a divisive distraction from our overriding goal: to defeat the Conservative Party at the next General Election."

This was music to the ears of Corbyn's nominal supporters in the PLP, who have no intention of risking the loss of their own comfortable £84,000-a-year-plus salaries

and, for many, the large pensions they will receive after retiring from politics.

Abbott told LBC Radio she believes Corbyn has “no intention of standing as an independent.” Corbyn, she added, had no real political differences with Starmer, other than that he was personally in favour of Brexit. Even so, “Jeremy has always been about uniting the party” and “would have voted Remain because that was the policy of the party.”

To date, only one listed member of the SCG has so much as written a tweet protesting Starmer’s statement—Claudia Webbe, no longer a Labour member after being expelled in November 2021.

Momentum, the organisation set up to support Corbyn whose leaders then played a key role in the anti-semitism campaign, has nevertheless been identified as a prime target for expulsion. In response co-chairs Hilary Schan and Kate Dove issued a statement declaring, “The door might be open—but we’re not leaving.”

They would “not allow ourselves to be driven out of the Party,” but would continue working “with inspirational SCG MPs like Zarah Sultana, Richard Burgon, Bell Ribeiro-Addy, Nadia Whittome and many more... We know it’s not easy right now. But it’s vital we stay in Labour...”

“Not leaving” means continuing to campaign for the election of Starmer and his shadow cabinet of arch warmongers, pro-austerity economic arsonists and enemies of the working class.

There is, of course, every chance that Corbyn, after further months of prevarication, feels obliged to run as an independent once his doomed efforts to stand again for Labour have played out. But even such a move would be framed as an attempt to renew the Labour Party from an enforced and unwelcome position as an outsider. In every other constituency he would call for a Labour vote, boosting Starmer’s “party of NATO” as the supposed alternative to Tory rule.

Despite setting up his “Peace and Justice” project, he has never offered the slightest support to those calling on him to set up a new party. But even if he did this, a party led by Corbyn would be a political dead-end for the working class.

Corbyn led the Labour Party for five years, during which time he retreated without a fight on every political issue, above all in his repudiation of opposition to NATO and Britain’s nuclear weapons system.

To think that a new Corbyn-led party, likely overwhelmingly drawn from the pseudo-left groups, advocating little more than a few meagre reforms and pacifist appeals for a negotiated end to war—in alliance with the United Nations and various Latin American states—offers a genuine alternative to Labour is self-delusion. A criminal role in generating such illusions was already played by

pseudo-left tendencies such as the Socialist Party and Socialist Workers Party, which hailed Corbyn as leading a socialist rebirth of Labour, ending instead in a rout of the Labour left and the triumph of Starmer.

Despite such political miseducation, bitter experiences have convinced large numbers of workers and young people that Labour is a hostile party and that Corbyn has proved to be a political failure. Amid a major swell of the class struggle, with hundreds of thousands engaged in strike action, and the growing threat posed by NATO’s war against Russia, this urgently raises the question of building a new and genuinely socialist political leadership.

The Socialist Equality Party consistently opposed all effort to utilise Corbyn’s elevation to the party leadership to renew illusions that the Labour Party and the trade unions could be subjected to popular pressure and made to act in the interests of the working class. Our approach was laid down in a 2016 Congress Resolution, “Jeremy Corbyn and the Labour Party: The strategic lessons”.

The resolution cited a statement published in response to Corbyn’s election as leader in 2015 which argued, “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.”

As this analysis has been proven correct over the last eight years, the SEP has fought to win workers and young people to its internationalist, revolutionary socialist programme, opposed to all forms of national, social democratic and pseudo-reformist politics.

With the NATO-Russia war on a trajectory to a world conflict, living conditions being destroyed to pay for military spending and more than a decade of bailouts to the super rich, and the government preparing a barrage of repressive legislation, it is urgent that workers and young people acquaint themselves with the SEP’s analysis of Corbynism and draw the conclusion that it is time to join our party.



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