

UK: Corbyn barred from standing again as a Labour MP

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3 April 2023

Former Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn has been barred from standing again as a Labour MP.

Last Wednesday the party's National Executive Committee (NEC) voted 22 votes to 12 to refuse to endorse him as a candidate, passing a motion claiming the party's electoral chances would be "significantly diminished" by his standing.

Current party leader Sir Keir Starmer made clear afterwards, however, that the NEC had in effect endorsed the slander of Corbyn as an anti-Semite. He told *Sky News*, "The first words I said as Labour leader is I would root out antisemitism in my party and I have been absolutely ruthless in that... I said I'd root it out and I am delivering on that pledge."

Wes Streeting, the shadow health secretary and Starmer's de facto deputy, drove home the point, telling *Times Radio*: "If he had accepted the Equality and Human Rights Commission's damning verdict into anti-Semitism in the Labour Party that put the Labour Party next to the British National Party, the BNP, as only the second political party in history to be found to be breaking the law when it came to tackling racism within its ranks... things might have been different."

This is a tissue of lies. Bogus claims of an antisemitism crisis in the Labour Party under Corbyn's leadership (2015-2019) spearheaded a campaign by the Blairite right-wing, the Tories, Zionists and the media to purge any trace of left-wing sentiment from the Labour Party.

Starmer was more honest when he told *Sky News*, "Whether it is rooting out anti-Semitism, being absolutely clear we are pro-business, pro NATO, [or] facing the voters and being fit to serve the country, I make no apologies for that."

As the *Times*'s Janice Turner wrote gleefully Wednesday of the "trap" Starmer had set for the former leader, forcing him to choose between remaining an MP or a Labour member, "A wider net could ensnare Corbyn's followers" if they were to support him as an independent candidate against the Labour Party.

The "trap" is entirely of Corbyn's making, set by his refusal to fight the right-wing when in power. This political cowardice continues today, both in Corbyn's refusal even now to launch any real challenge to the Labour Party and in his nominal allies' refusal to back him if he did so.

Corbyn responded to the NEC decision with a statement condemning the "shameful attack on party democracy, party members and natural justice", which "shows contempt for the millions of people who voted for our party in 2017 and 2019 and

will demotivate those who still believe in the importance of a transformative Labour government."

Starmer had broken "his pledge to build a united and democratic party that advances social, economic and climate justice."

Corbyn's only response was to state that he would "not be intimidated into silence. I have spent my life fighting for a fairer society on behalf of the people of Islington North, and I have no intention of stopping now."

This has been widely acknowledged as a statement of intent to stand as an independent candidate in Islington North, which would mean expulsion from the Labour Party. But Corbyn has given no indication of anything further. His loyalty to Labour is such that he can only bring himself to challenge it within the boundaries of Islington North—while still insisting on the "importance of a transformative Labour government" for the rest of the country.

What Corbyn seeks to conceal is that Starmer's anti-democratic move to block his candidacy, coupled with his antisemitism slurs, expresses the utter hostility of the Labour Party to any remotely left-wing politics. Like Corbyn's five years as party leader, it confirms the impossibility of reforming a party of war, big business, the super-rich and austerity into a "transformative" instrument for the working class.

Corbyn still presents his expulsion as a Labour MP, inevitable since Starmer took office, as a nasty shock, as do his key allies. Former shadow home secretary under Corbyn Diane Abbott complained, "The day Starmer won leadership of the Labour Party, he described Jeremy Corbyn as a friend and a colleague. Now he wants to throw him out of the party."

Momentum, an internal Labour Party organisation originally set up to support Corbyn's leadership of the Labour Party, writes, "Three years ago to the day, Keir Starmer thanked Jeremy Corbyn for his service to the Labour Party and called him a friend."

Zarah Sultana, Richard Burgon, Nadia Whittome, Apsana Begum, Jon Trickett, Beth Winter, Andy McDonald, Ian Lavery, Ian Byrne, and Kate Osborne of the Socialist Campaign Group (SCG) also spoke against the Labour NEC's decision, making this their biggest collective outing in over a year.

By contrast, the SCG has been uniformly silent over the NATO-Russia war in Ukraine and Starmer's persecution of Corbyn and the Stop the War Coalition for opposing it—except the half dozen members who actively support NATO's war effort.

The Corbynites are more vocal over his suspension because it strikes at the heart of the myth on which their political careers

rely—that there is space in the Labour Party to advance a left-wing programme. But for the same reason their opposition to Corbyn’s exclusion is framed in terms of appeals to Starmer and the NEC, and a call to uphold the best interests of the Labour Party.

Abbott writes in the *Morning Star*, “Labour has shot itself in the foot over Corbyn,” arguing, “There is an alternative. It would begin with our main task, which is to unite our party in preparation for the next general election and to fight the Tories.”

Corbyn’s shadow chancellor John McDonnell summed up their attitude by telling *TalkTV* in mystical language of his “great belie[f] in the powers of conversion,” that is, of Starmer and co, adding, “I think we can reverse this decision”.

The most craven intervention came from Jon Lansman, the founder and former chair of Momentum, who set out a plan for Corbyn to retire to the position of a Labour grandee in the model of Corbyn’s political mentor, Tony Benn.

Writing that “I very much hope that he follows Tony Benn’s course of action rather than standing as an independent against the Labour Party when we all want a Labour government,” he adds, “I imagine that is what every Socialist Campaign Group MP would like him to do since, apart from any other consideration, they wish to remain Labour MPs.”

Lansman is particularly worried about the optics if Corbyn were to stand, since he knows none of the SCG would back him if he did. He told Sky News himself that he “certainly wouldn’t” campaign for Corbyn since “I want to see Keir Starmer elected.” What the Corbynites want above all is to avoid a fight with Starmer while keeping their “left” talking shop together inside the Labour Party.

The *Telegraph* writes, “Labour sources warned left-wing MPs that supporting him in such circumstances [Corbyn if he were to run as an independent] would ‘cross a line’ and could mean they face disciplinary action.”

“Insiders have similarly said the pro-Corbyn campaign group Momentum would be proscribed if it backed him over the party’s candidate.”

Streeting threatened openly, “If his allies and friends are disappointed, they should share their disappointment with Jeremy Corbyn.”

In answer, reports the *Guardian*, “A large number of leftwingers believe there is little point in ‘incriminating themselves’ on broadcast media if they want to stay in the Labour party. ‘We’re not scared, but who wants to follow Corbyn out the door? We have constituents to represent here in parliament,’ one leftwing MP said.”

The Corbynites will, in short, continue collecting their £84,000 a year salaries and generous pensions while making ever more irrelevant comments from the backbenches in order to provide a political cover for Starmer’s right-wing party and to oppose any political break by the working class from it.

The rout of the Corbynite left is clear to everyone. The question now is what conclusions should be drawn by workers and young people.

The pseudo-left Socialist Workers Party (SWP) and Socialist Party (SP) continue to sow illusions in Corbyn as the de facto leader of the working class and a political alternative to Labour.

This is most naked in the case of the SP, which calls for “trade unions to organise their own workers’ list for the general election, including Jeremy Corbyn and other debarred left Labour MPs.” It does so while acknowledging that three unions represented on Labour’s NEC voted to bar Corbyn—the GMB, Usdaw and the Musician’s Union—and one, Unison, abstained.

Absurdly, the SP claims that this “bloc of MPs... could quite rapidly become a pole of opposition to an incoming Starmer led-government.” They are referring to only three people—Corbyn himself, Claudia Webbe who was expelled after being convicted of harassing her husband’s lover; and Chris Williamson, who was expelled on trumped-up charges of anti-Semitism with Corbyn’s active collusion.

The SWP’s *Socialist Worker* admits, “If Corbyn stands against Labour at the next election, it’s doubtful that Labour’s left wing MPs will support him publicly.” But it then pledges that “Socialist Worker will”.

Workers can only begin to build a socialist movement by rejecting everything Corbyn and his allies represent politically, endlessly willing to surrender to the right-wing and watch millions of workers pay the price for their betrayals.

In November 2020, the Socialist Equality Party held an online public meeting under the title “The anti-Semitism witch-hunt and the failure of Corbynism”.

In the discussion at that meeting, SEP National Secretary Chris Marsden identified Corbyn as 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... soporifics to blunt the class struggle, to suppress any initiative by the working class, to encourage its subordination to the labour and trade union bureaucracy, to wed it to a parliamentary perspective at all costs.”

Marsden concluded that the lessons of Corbynism “should be ingrained in the working class. Workers have gone through enough bitter experiences to know that the ruling class will give you nothing, will not cede an inch outside of a political struggle. And that if you are fighting for socialism, which is the overthrow of the capitalist order, then this sort of stuff, 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 who agree should contact the Socialist Equality Party today.



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