

# Socialist Workers Party “Marxism 2024” festival promotes Jeremy Corbyn as leader of a ‘left’ regroupment

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Britain’s Socialist Workers Party (SWP) used its “Marxism 2024: a festival of socialist ideas” on July 4-7, to promote former Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn as the figurehead for a new pseudo-left alliance against Sir Keir Starmer’s Labour government.

During the election campaign, the SWP called for a Labour vote, urging “everyone to use their vote on Thursday to smash, exterminate and snuff out the Tories. Then dance on their grave.”

*Socialist Worker* editor Charlie Kimber wrote on June 28: “We know what’s to come from Keir Starmer’s government will be continuity not transformation... But we should celebrate a shattering defeat for the open party of big business, austerity, war, NHS cuts, racism and support for Israel.”

He described Labour’s election victory on July 4 as a “historic murder of the guilty”.

These bombastic statements indict the SWP as a defender of Starmer’s Labour government, which is—no less than the Tories—an open party of genocide, war, austerity and anti-immigrant racism.

The SWP had also urged support for a handful of independents including Corbyn, former Labour MP Claudia Webbe and ex-Labour councillor Leanne Mohamad, alongside Andrew Feinstein who challenged Starmer in Holborn and St Pancras. Nearly half the independents backed by the SWP were formally endorsed by the Corbyn-backed Collective alliance.

The entire SWP leadership celebrated Corbyn’s election victory in Islington North.

The SWP’s leading theoretician Alex Callinicos marked election day with several ecstatic tweets declaring: “I’ve lived in Islington off and on since 1972. I’m very happy this morning that in Islington North we continue to affirm the values I embraced in my youth.” He followed up with: “Just voted for @jeremycorbyn -- I think for the 12th time!”, and at 6:15am with: “Oh Jeremy Corbyn!”

Corbyn was featured speaker at the SWP’s festival on Saturday, with members giving him a hero’s welcome. They applauded his entry into the main tent, singing “Oh, Jer-em-y Cor-by-n”, the same chant that accompanied his rise as Labour leader almost a decade ago.

A day earlier, Kimber had opened the SWP’s workshop session: “The election result: facing a Starmer government”. Amid cheers from the audience, he cited the names of independent candidates who had toppled Labour MPs, but he declared: “There could have been more”.

Kimber argued that an insurgent far-right across Europe and the rise of Nigel Farage’s Reform UK could only be stopped by building a broad “left” front based on vague reformist proposals, which Corbyn should lead.

“The left has to get its act together because really, we should have had 100, 120 or 150 candidates across Britain as part of a real electoral

challenge.” If Corbyn had called for an electoral alliance against the Labour Party at last November’s million-strong march for Palestine, he would have had “a national movement inside three months.”

Kimber claimed that Corbyn did not do so “because of the dead hand of Labourism, that says there is not really life outside the Labour Party.”

But the “dead hand” of Labourism is personified by none other than Jeremy Corbyn. His tenure as Labour leader was dedicated to suppressing a leftwing insurgency. He promoted the pipedream of a Labour Party fighting for “21st century socialism”, while protecting the Blairites’ grip. He upheld the interests of British imperialism on all fundamental issues, including support for NATO, retention of Trident nuclear weapons, spending 2 percent of the GDP on the military and ensuring a free vote for Labour MPs on the bombing of Syria.

Just as the SWP promoted Corbyn as Labour leader in 2015-2019, dressing his reformist palliatives in socialist colours, it has stepped forward again to promote Corbyn’s latest tentative electoral project, while offering friendly advice from the “left”.

Kimber said that he and “many comrades” were involved in the campaign to elect Corbyn, despite his campaign being “quite defensive” about Palestine, and “quite defensive” about the Labour Party. In fact, Corbyn mentioned neither the Gaza genocide nor Starmer’s support for it in his election campaign launch video, in keeping with his appointed role as political safety valve for the Labour Party and British imperialism.

Nonetheless, it was “an achievement for the whole left that he won,” Kimber said. “But we need much more than campaigns which are about individuals or campaigns which are about trying to get back inside the Labour Party. We need something that is much more serious.”

Having promoted the most craven electoral opportunism, Kimber spelled out the meaning of the SWP’s “more serious” campaign, declaiming on the need for “a left that is building on the streets and the workplaces and not obsessed with what goes on in parliament.” As usual, the SWP’s promotion of spontaneity was combined with abject deference to the Labour bureaucracy.

Thus, he concluded with an appeal, amounting to “give Labour a chance”, aimed at paralysing the working class: “Let’s see what the Labour Party is like in office, let’s see what they deliver, let’s understand that they don’t deliver for working class people and when that happens let’s make sure that it’s the left that wins out and not the right.”

In the discussion, Callinicos also emphasised that “Comrades of ours were all over the Corbyn campaign” and cited “conversations” with leading independents that “we are in a position to begin to shape”.

**Corbyn’s entreaties to Starmer**

Corbyn had been due to speak on his book of poetry, *For the Many*, co-edited with retired Unite union bureaucrat Len McCluskey. This double-act last came together at the Labour Party conference in 2018 where they blocked demands from party members for mandatory selection of MPs. This would have resulted in most Blairites being tossed out by the membership.

SWP National Secretary Lewis Nielsen gave Corbyn a glowing introduction, telling him to “take as long as you like”. Corbyn thanked SWP members for campaigning for him, saying his victory was an answer to “the haters and no hopers” and “gave people hope and an opportunity for debate and discussion and doing something unified in the future.”

He offered his stock-in-trade meagre reformist proposals including “lifting the tax-free threshold from £12,000 to £15,000 a year” [!] and raising corporate taxes by an unspecified amount to pay for health, welfare and social care, which he cynically described as “hardly revolutionary stuff”.

His anodyne depiction of the social crisis in Britain barely scraped the surface. It was pitched not as an appeal for the mobilisation of the working class against capitalism, but as a moral entreaty to Starmer’s right-wing government.

Of the genocide in Gaza, he repeated, “we are complicit”, beseeching his former Labour colleagues: “[Foreign Secretary] David Lammy, Keir Starmer: Do something about it now, and stop the fighting in Gaza!”

Pointing to the rise of the far-right in France and the UK, Corbyn concluded: “The incoming [Starmer] government and whatever government appears in France tomorrow, has to be one that starts delivering on the concerns of people over poverty, over housing and all the rest of it, and giving hope.”

## The politics of deflection

The real purpose of the SWP’s “Marxism festival” was to encourage Corbyn’s initial and reluctant steps toward a pseudo-reformist alliance, aimed at deflecting a revolutionary confrontation between the working class and the Starmer Labour government.

With Labour placed in power off the back of mass anti-Tory sentiment, though with the lowest share of the popular vote for any majority government in British history, and headed by a cabinet of hated warmongers and Thatcherites—the SWP portrayed the main threat as emanating from fascist Tommy Robinson and the far-right.

Callinicos told the conference: “Don’t kid yourself, the Tories can come back, there are all sorts of possibilities. But the critical thing is, now that the far-right has made a breakthrough, is that we hit them as hard as we can, and that starts with Robinson.”

He continued: “Robinson, having failed to attack the Palestinian demonstrations, sees his opening through the impact of Farage. That’s why he is going back to the streets and we have to make sure that on the 27 July there are thousands and thousands of us on the streets to confront him and force him back as the first step to forcing back the far-right altogether.”

Several SWP speakers emphasised that preventing Reform UK from uniting with Tommy Robinson’s fascists was the task of the hour, suggesting this could be achieved through direct action protests aimed at driving the fascists from the streets. Such rhetoric serves only to mask the SWP’s capitulation to Labour.

The biggest contributing factor to the rise of the far-right will be the authoritarian, pro-market policies of the Starmer government, backed by the trade union bureaucracy, based on “country first, party second” patriotism and militarism, anti-immigrant “border control”, and enforcing

“fiscal discipline” and mass austerity while funnelling billions more to private wealth and corporate profit.

Kimber called for a “united front” against the fascists, which “everyone is welcome to [join], on one condition, that they are prepared to be active to take part in action against Reform [UK] and against the fascists, that they are prepared to be on the streets, to argue in the workplace, to be part of a movement that takes them on. That is the sort of movement that we need to build.”

The SWP’s criteria for a “united front” are so broad as to encompass all capitalist parties to the left of the Tories. Their central function is to accommodate rump sections of the Labour “left” such as Diane Abbott and John McDonnell who remain inside the Labour Party, alongside Jeremy Corbyn and a raft of MPs and councillors expelled from the party in recent months.

Speaking in the main tent, Corbyn embraced the SWP’s call for unity against the far-right, urging a mass mobilisation against Robinson on July 27. But he declined the SWP’s feverish entreaties to spell out plans for a new party.

“I don’t want to get into some big debate or argument about the structures of alternative parties, because that will take up a huge amount of time,” Corbyn said. “The most immediate thing is the mobilisation of people around common ideas, common identity and common causes.”

The SWP were disappointed suitors, but their efforts at wooing Corbyn are not over. Kimber outlined his party’s role as follows: “we are too small in the Socialist Workers Party to be as effective as we ought to be” and must therefore provide “the revolutionary socialist spine to all the movements that we so desperately need.”

The Socialist Equality Party stands in direct opposition to these efforts. Our manifesto for the general election stated unequivocally: “The Socialist Equality Party rejects the lie that a vote for Labour is for a ‘lesser evil’ than the Tories. They represent a single party of war”. We likewise opposed the calls by Britain’s pseudo-left “to sink political differences to bring about one big Gaza protest vote”, explaining that Corbyn’s election campaign had been “carefully crafted... so as not to clash with Labour except within the boundaries of Islington North”.

We stated: “The building of a new and genuinely socialist leadership must begin now. We advance the socialist and internationalist programme on which this new leadership must be built.”

In the aftermath of the elections our party has sought to educate workers and young people on the character of the incoming Labour government, the revolutionary tasks facing the working class, and the necessity above all of drawing the lessons from the dead-end politics of Corbynism being promoted once again by pseudo-left tendencies such as the SWP.



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