

# Jeremy Corbyn comes out firmly against a break with Starmer's Labour Party

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Jeremy Corbyn has launched a media blitz to make clear his opposition to any political challenge to Sir Keir Starmer's Labour government.

He has repeatedly insisted in the pages of the *Guardian* and other smaller publications that he has no intention of leading the formation of a "left" and anti-war party, despite the constant entreaties of his backers in Britain's pseudo-left groups.

For years to come he will instead advocate various local initiatives to supposedly rebuild a "politics of hope" at a "grassroots" level, while he carries out manoeuvres in parliament to protest the filthiest of Labour's policies in ad hoc alliances with other MPs, with the stated aim of pressuring the government to the left.

Standing in the general election as an Independent in Islington North, Corbyn beat Labour by 24,120 votes to 16,873—around 50 percent. Elsewhere, four other pro-Palestinian Independents were elected against Labour candidates, all in predominantly Muslim areas—Iqbal Mohamed, Adnan Hussein, Shockat Adam and Ayoub Khan.

Labour suffered major setbacks in other seats, including now Health Secretary Wes Streeting beating Leanne Mohamed by just 500 votes, Jess Phillips seeing her majority slashed from 13,000 to 693 and Starmer's having his vote halved while former African National Congress (ANC) MP Andrew Feinstein came second with 19 percent of the vote.

This took place in the context of Labour securing a massive 170-seat majority, with 412 seats in total, but on just 33.8 percent of the national vote—the lowest of any incoming government in British history.

Faced with a government resting on such weak foundations but nonetheless determined to implement policies of war and savage austerity, Corbyn considered his most urgent task to be quashing any expectations of him leading a fightback against his former party. In a July 12 *Guardian* column, "People-power led to my re-election. It is the start of a new politics", he insisted that strength "is built from below" and only after this can we "challenge those at the top."

He declared, "Here in Islington, we are planting the seeds for a new way of doing politics. That starts with our first People's Forum. It will be a monthly opportunity for residents to hold me, their elected representative, to account." This would be followed by other formless local campaigns for an indefinite but prolonged period in a deliberate effort to "channel", i.e., control, mounting working-class opposition:

"Public discontent with a broken political system will only grow as the government fails to make the real change that people expect. That energy needs somewhere to go. It needs to be channelled. It needs to be mobilised... Once our grassroots model has been replicated elsewhere, this can be the genesis of a new movement capable of challenging the stale two-party system."

Addressing directly his admirers, sycophants and apologists, Corbyn added, "I have no doubt that this movement will eventually run in elections," but then insisted, "to create a new, centralised party, based around the personality of one person, is to put the cart before the horse."

On its face, this would be interpreted as a rebuke for tendencies such as

the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) and the Socialist Party (SP) who, at least since Corbyn's rout as Labour leader after the 2019 general election, have mooted him as the head of a "broad left" alternative party, like Syriza in Greece or Podemos in Spain.

But Corbyn is speaking to forces as committed as himself to preventing escalating hostility among workers to Labour from becoming a revolutionary break with reformism.

## Championing a "progressive alliance"

In a June 2 article, "Britain's pseudo-left endorse a vote for Starmer's Labour Party", the Socialist Equality Party detailed the position of the SWP that the protest candidates it backed were endorsed with the aim of sending "strong signals to Starmer and to the ruling class generally that they cannot continue their international and domestic policies without a challenge."

The SP, for its part, argued for a continued orientation to Labour beyond July 4, insisting that "like any pro-capitalist government" it can "be forced to give concessions under mass pressure from the working class" and citing as the political representatives of this strategy "a bloc of workers' MPs, including Jeremy Corbyn and others," who "could be elected and from day one force Starmer to at least look over his left shoulder."

The entire pseudo-left in fact already knew full well what was coming from Corbyn and would just as surely make only the most token complaints.

At the height of the election campaign, Corbyn was interviewed by Oliver Eagleton in the June 26 *New Statesman*. Eagleton asked politely whether, "Given how Labour has treated its aspiring left-wing candidates," Corbyn thought that others "should have broken ranks sooner."

Eagleton reports, "Corbyn recognised the argument, but said he understood why many of his comrades were reluctant to leave. 'The Labour Party has always occupied a particular cultural place. I've been in it since I was a teenager, and I've had my ups and downs. But it is a place where you make many friends and it becomes your social milieu. That is now being broken up, which is counterproductive in the long run.'"

Accepting that the Labour left remain firmly ensconced in Starmer's party, Corbyn nevertheless proposes some "Labour MPs, though they might be nervous initially" as allies in a fight against issues such as "the two-child benefit cap and Gaza," alongside the Scottish National Party, Plaid Cymru, George Galloway, and the Liberal Democrats.

A week before Corbyn's *Guardian* op-ed was published, he was the featured speaker at the SWP's "Marxism 2024" event where he was promoted as "our prime minister" and met with rapturous applause.

Leading SWP figure Charlie Kimber had before the meeting written that Corbyn could have built “a national movement inside three months” had he called for one. But he then offered the get-out clause, “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.”

These were the terms of engagement set by Corbyn on July 6 in an interview published in that day’s *Socialist Worker*, “What next? Here’s what Corbyn thinks”. In answer to the question, “Will there now be a wider electoral challenge?” he replied that he and the four other independents were “talking to each other already” before focusing on “the worry of the far right,” rather than the Starmer government.

“There will be discussions about future electoral challenges,” the *Socialist Worker* was forced to reassure its readers.

On July 14, Scotland’s pro-separatist *The National* published its own interview with Corbyn in which he painted a telling picture of how he was going about assembling a “left coalition… looking to hold Starmer’s government to account.”

“Obviously, five of us independent MPs on our own are going to be quite limited in what we can do,” he said. ‘But add to that the Greens on many issues, the SNP and Plaid Cymru and a significant bunch of Labour MPs, and I think you’ll rapidly see a progressive alliance developing. I’ll be encouraging that.”

Corbyn explained, “I take myself to the SNP table in the tea room occasionally. We enjoy tea together and we have a chat,” he said. ‘And yes. I have had a chat with a number of colleagues elected from the SNP and Plaid Cymru.”

His “People’s Forums” project, he stressed, was “just the beginning of a movement which can win with—and for—communities all over the country.” But this “won’t necessarily be a political party”.

## Still loyal to the Labour Party

In a July 17 video interview with Novara Media, Corbyn insisted that his “politics of Hope” was “not about party labels, it’s about community voices.” His monthly forum initiative in Islington North was by then not even to be considered a “prototype” to be emulated but was only “what I want to see in my community.”

Corbyn then made the extraordinary statement that a turn to representing “communities” was “what I tried to make the Labour Party into, because my biggest struggle with the Labour Party was even uttering the words community organisers.”

Citing this as his biggest battle in the Labour Party comes from someone who stood by as hundreds of his supporters were witch-hunted from the party as “antisemites”, who was supposed to have been fighting against the party’s commitment to austerity and war.

Corbyn’s enthusiasm for community politics should be taken in the context of his refusal to fight the Blairite cancer within Labour’s “broad church”, even as they were rampaging against him despite his capitulating again and again on the central issues on which he had won mass support—above all on opposition to NATO and nuclear weapons.

But this was the product of decisions taken decades earlier by someone who has now been in the Labour Party since he was a schoolboy, and a Labour MP for 42 years since 1982. He has moreover been opposing any break from Labour since 1985.

In the July 17 edition of *Jacobin*, Corbyn was asked about his participation in the Independent Left Corresponding Society (ILCS) meetings in the 1980s, alongside Tony Benn, sociologist Ralph Miliband and the Pabloite Tariq Ali. After noting that Miliband “maintained a

sceptical—and at times emphatically pessimistic—attitude toward Labour’s prospective potential as a really viable vehicle for socialist transformation,” Corbyn was asked whether he now shared this “pessimistic” position and whether Labour was still “an avenue for the pursuit of socialist politics”.

He replied, “The debates were then, after the 1984-85 miners’ strike, about what socialists in Britain should do, because the labour movement had suffered a massive defeat in the strike. Tony [Benn] was very strongly of the view that the Labour Party could still be a vehicle for socialist transformation...”

Corbyn supported Benn’s position and the past four decades have not given rise to any Damascene conversion for the now 75-year-old man, even now that Labour advances itself as heading the “most business friendly” government in history and as Zionist defenders of genocide and “the party of NATO” and of nuclear war.

He merely states that “neither Tony Benn nor I ever saw it as completely an either/or… it’s unnecessary to pose the question as a binary choice; it’s not. You fight for elected positions to try and achieve change within them, and if blockades are put in your way, then you mobilise people to try and overturn those.”

Corbyn ended his interview with a piece of friendly advice to Labour. Describing the mass protests over Gaza “as an amorphous but nevertheless united voice for peace and for social justice,” he suggested that Labour listen to this voice for its own good. “Labour won a huge majority of parliamentary seats on the lowest-ever popular vote for a governing party… So, it’s actually a very fragile situation, however masked it is by the huge parliamentary majority. I think that thoughtful people in the Labour Party need to reflect on that.”

## The SEP’s critique of Corbyn in the general election

During the election campaign, the Socialist Equality Party subjected Corbyn’s role as leader of the Labour Party to sustained criticism and identified the essential purpose of his electoral challenge to Labour in Islington North and his setting up of a loose coalition of like-minded candidates elsewhere, most prominently Andrew Feinstein in neighbouring Holborn and St Pancras.

We explained that Corbyn occupied a central position for the pseudo-left groups in a complex political fraud that supposedly reconciles opposing Labour on Gaza while still backing a Labour victory.

“Why is the Socialist Equality Party standing against Andrew Feinstein?” published on June 28 explained that the central demand of the pseudo-left groups, “‘No Ceasefire, No Vote’ means supporting some protest candidates while calling for a vote for Labour everywhere else. It ends with the formation of a government that will continue backing Israel and waging NATO’s wars...”

Of Corbyn’s political role, the article continued: “The only reason Starmer is poised to enter 10 Downing Street is that Corbyn and his backers, elected by a landslide to lead the Labour Party in 2015, faced down demands from workers and youth to drive out the Blairites. Corbyn capitulated on all fundamental issues, including NATO membership and nuclear weapons, and then politely handed the party over to Starmer.”

We noted that the loose electoral front that Corbyn and Feinstein were affiliated, “Collective” was only founded in May, after Corbyn declared he would be standing against Labour in Islington North. It calls for Corbyn to come to the head of a new party. But for now this is left at the level of a fond wish for the future, because even after being expelled Corbyn refuses to mount a national challenge to the Labour Party—advancing himself as the historic candidate for Islington North while still supporting the

election of a Starmer government.”

We then addressed Feinstein’s own promotion of the type of local initiatives Corbyn now espouses as his own policy:

“His [Feinstein’s] is a ‘People’s Manifesto for Camden’, advocating the locally determined politics of a ‘community MP’ as the basis for a new system of ‘representative democracy’ that ‘should serve local people, not party machines or corporate interests.’ This is the tired rhetoric of so many populist and pro-capitalist tendencies that rely on broad hostility to the parties of big business in order to oppose the fight for socialist political representation for workers...”

Ultimately: “He now wants workers in Britain to repeat, under a rerun of Corbyn’s disastrous leadership of the Labour Party, the bitter experience of creating ‘broad left’ formations such as Syriza in Greece that sabotaged the struggle against International Monetary Fund and European Union dictated austerity.”

More can be said about the Feinstein/Corbyn concept of local “people’s assemblies” as a road forward. In his memoir *After the Party*, Feinstein makes clear the actual function of the People’s Forums established by the ANC ahead of the 1994 general election marking the fall of apartheid was to manage, i.e., suppress, demands made by workers for genuine social change:

“At these forums Mandela spoke to an audience hungry for material change of the magnitude of the task facing a democratic government in South Africa. He stated the ANC’s desire to redress the inequities of the past but explained that real, material change would be slow in coming and that people would need to be patient for many years to come.”

Parenthetically, Feinstein comments: “While delighted that the nation was in such trustworthy hands I did silently pray for more tub-thumping performances to ensure my own political future.”

The concept promoted by Feinstein and Corbyn mirrors one recently embraced by Martin Wolf, writing in that most capitalist of institutions, the *Financial Times*. “Citizens should be asked to do more in UK politics,” Wolf wrote, as a means of controlling social and political discontent, given that “The UK has a new government, with a huge majority. But only just over a third of the voters voted for it,” and Starmer “has won power in a country that has lost confidence in democratic politics...”

Wolf warns that the “crisis for democratic politics” means that Starmer “will find it hard to turn around the tide of discontent.” He praises “an excellent ‘Citizens’ White Paper” produced by the Demos public consultancy in partnership with participation charity Involve, which supports “panels, assemblies, juries, workshops and wider community conversations” as a way to “negotiate what the public will tolerate” and “build back trust in politicians.”

## Corbynism and the crisis of working class leadership

It is nine years since the “Corbyn insurgency” was proclaimed by Britain’s pseudo-left as the basis for Labour to become a “new workers’ party” (SP) and the “rebirth of social democracy” (SWP). Today the left of the Labour Party is a spent force, able to mobilise only seven votes against the government maintaining the very two-child benefit cap Corbyn suggested as one of the key issues on which to organise united action.

Corbyn will not lead a movement against the Labour government. He will support it, while making the occasional criticism to supposedly pressure it to the left. But the Labour Party is impervious to such pressure, functioning as the unalloyed representative of the financial oligarchy and of British imperialism.

Starmer made this clear once again when he responded to the mini revolt

over the benefit cap by removing the party whip from the seven rebels for six months, pending a review.

Corbyn and the four other Independents then sent an open letter to the seven looking “forward to working closely with you as you represent your constituents more effectively than ever as Independent Members of Parliament.”

He did not explain why, if it is possible to represent constituents “more effectively” as Independents, he did not call on the seven to resign from Labour and would not dream of doing so. His aim is to act only as His Majesty Sir Keir’s ever so loyal opposition.

Corbyn and his pseudo-left backers are not the answer to the crisis of leadership facing the working class. They are the sharpest expression of that crisis. The answer lies elsewhere.

Explaining the fundamental basis of its critique of Corbynism, the SEP rejected the simple explanation of Corbyn’s undoubtedly political cowardice. Far more was at issue than merely poor leadership:

“The development of transnational production and the global integration of finance and manufacturing has dramatically undermined the viability of the old trade unions and Stalinist and social democratic parties that were embedded in the nation state system, to which they all responded by junking their former reformist programmes.

“The Labour ‘left’ shares the right-wing’s nationalist and pro-capitalist programme, differing only in their advocacy of a few of the reforms the Blairites have abandoned.

“Today, only a socialist and internationalist programme offers a way forward for the working class.

“Every fundamental problem confronting workers is rooted in the deepening crisis of world capitalism. Above all, the danger of a new world war arises out of capitalism’s fundamental contradictions—between the development of an interconnected global system of production and the division of the world into antagonistic nation states based on upholding private ownership of the means of production.”

The international working class is the only social force that can stop the global eruption of war:

“The same contradictions driving imperialism to wars of global conquest provide the objective basis for social revolution by unifying the workers who produce all of society’s wealth in a global system of production. This pits them against the common enemy of giant transnational corporations and banks that dictate the policy of every national government.”

This demands the building of the Socialist Equality Party as the new socialist and internationalist leadership of the working class, dedicated to the formation of a mass movement against genocide and war and linking this to every struggle against inequality, poverty, the attacks on wages, jobs, healthcare, education and all the social and democratic rights of the working class.



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