

Labour “lefts” capitulate as Starmer targets sick and disabled

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In response to the biggest cuts to disability benefits in British history, announced by Labour’s Work and Pensions Secretary Liz Kendall on Tuesday, the Labour “lefts”—including Jeremy Corbyn and others similarly sacked or suspended by the party—surrendered to the dismantling of the welfare state.

Following Kendall’s presentation in the House of Commons of £5 billion in cuts to sick and disabled benefits, John McDonnell MP rose to his feet.

He began by declaring, “We all agree with the Secretary of State’s objectives of trying to ensure that disabled people have the resources they need for a decent quality of life, and that those capable of work have support to get into work.”

Warning of the immense suffering and “loss of life” caused by £5 billion in cuts, McDonnell asked Kendall: “What independent monitoring will take place and be reported to the House, and what threshold of suffering is needed before an alternative route is taken to supporting disabled people?”

His agreement with Kendall’s “objectives” followed her vicious 17-minute harangue vilifying the sick and disabled as work-shy scroungers who are a drain on taxpayers. The “resources” and “support” she offered were Labour’s plans to slash Personal Independence Payments (PIP) for up to 1.2 million disabled people who will lose an estimated £4,200-£6,300 per year by 2029-30.

She announced Labour will scrap the health component of universal credit for those under the age of 22, and tighten eligibility requirements for sickness and disability support through draconian “reassessments” by “employment coaches” that will be recorded, like a police interview of criminal suspects.

In response to these hostile measures, McDonnell politely requested a “report to the House” on whatever

pain monitoring exercise the Blairites can cobble together in support of their war on the disabled. It is impossible to conceive a more gutless and supine response; framed as an appeal to Starmer and Kendall to change course.

McDonnell’s reply is all the more significant as he has extensive ties to disability rights groups and is a frequent speaker at meetings and rallies in defence of the disabled.

On March 9, he addressed an online campaign meeting called by Disabled People Against Cuts (DPAC), where he claimed a U-turn was possible on proposed disability benefit cuts leaked by government sources to the press.

McDonnell told activists there was “an opportunity here for us really in campaigning terms to turn this around and defeat these proposals”. His comments were reported by *Disability News Service* which described McDonnell as a long-time supporter of DPAC.

Claims about a “government U-turn” and a “backlash from Labour MPs” (also reported last Saturday by the *Guardian* newspaper) predictably failed to materialise.

McDonnell’s appeal for a “threshold of suffering” epitomises the collapse of any serious challenge by the Corbynite “left” to the Starmer government’s class war measures. Their talk about U-turns and pressuring the government are aimed at blocking a political break by workers and young people from the Labour Party.

Empty gestures and moral hand-wringing are all that is on offer. Diane Abbott declared during Prime Ministers Questions: “There is nothing moral about cutting benefits for what may be up to a million people...This is about the Treasury’s wish to balance the country’s books on the back of the most vulnerable and poor people in this society.”

She resumed her seat, putting forward no strategy to challenge Starmer's savage measures, not even her resignation from this rabidly right-wing party. Similar milquetoast statements were made on Tuesday by Richard Burgon ("Is it not wrong to balance the books on the backs of sick and disabled people in such a way?"), Clive Lewis (Labour), Rachael Maskell (Labour), Dawn Butler (Labour), Zarah Sultana (Independent) and Ian Byrne (Labour) among others.

Social reality intruded momentarily when Colum Eastwood, MP for Northern Ireland's Social Democratic Labour Party, cited the case of a female constituent paralysed from the waist down, who relies on her children's help to wash and go to the toilet. She qualified for PIP under the Tories, but will receive nothing following Labour's cuts, "After 14 years of the Tory Government and many of us wanting to see the back of them, can the Prime Minister answer one question? What was the point, if Labour is going to do this?"

Starmer was unable to answer. Labour has no mandate for its assault on the disabled, pensioners, and the NHS. Its dismantling of the remnants of the welfare state removes the entire historical justification for the party's existence in the eyes of millions.

An explosive confrontation is developing between the working class and the Starmer Labour government. The essential role of the "lefts", led by Corbyn, is to prevent the necessary political break with the Labour Party and block a genuine socialist alternative to capitalist militarism, war and austerity.

On the day of Labour's announced cuts, Corbyn issued a statement in the *Mirror* newspaper, "Slashing disability benefits is a cruel political choice that will cost lives". He declared: "This is a seminal moment".

And Corbyn's response? He explained: "This government could tax the super-rich to end poverty, build social housing and fix our NHS. Slashing disability benefits is a cruel political choice to go after the most vulnerable people in society instead."

He asked rhetorically, "Why is it that 'tough choices' are always about harming the poor and disabled, and never about making the very wealthiest pay their fair share?"

Corbyn knows the answer to this question. Starmer's government represents a capitalist oligarchy that will stop at nothing to defend its vast wealth. In the United

States, the Trump presidency is serving as the cockpit for efforts to overturn the Constitution and establish a dictatorship. Trump's measures are the sharpest expression of a global process of capitalist breakdown.

The policies and decisions of the Starmer government, including its support for genocide in Gaza, its brutal crackdown on asylum-seekers, and its targeting of pensioners, the sick and disabled, demonstrate Labour's unswerving defence of British capitalism.

This is what dictates the "choices" of Starmer and Chancellor Rachel Reeves, just as it dictated the "choices" of Jeremy Corbyn when he was Labour leader. He extended an olive branch to the Blairites, even as they launched a witch-hunt to expel and drive out his supporters from the party. His refusal to organise his millions of supporters to defeat the Blairites has paved the way for the present savage measures.

No struggle to defeat Labour's cuts to disability benefits, welfare or the NHS can be waged without a political struggle by the working class to break the grip of the financial oligarchy over social and economic life. This means repudiating the billions pledged to the military, including plans for British "boots on the ground and planes in the air" to fight Russia.

The working class must mobilise its enormous strength to put a halt to war, austerity and the drive toward dictatorship. Such a struggle demands a break with the bankrupt, reformist soporifics offered by the likes of Corbyn and McDonnell who are out-and-out defenders of capitalism.



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