

Corbyn's new left party—What it is and what it isn't

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On Thursday July 24, Jeremy Corbyn finally confirmed the creation of a new left-wing party in Britain. Within three days, over 500,000 people had signed up to a mailing list to build “Your Party”, ahead of an inaugural conference expected to be held this autumn.

The announcement is a milestone in the ongoing breakup of the Labour Party. Millions of workers and young people have drawn the conclusion that Labour, under the leadership of Keir Starmer, is an irredeemably right-wing, pro-business party of warmongers and defenders of genocide in Gaza.

The new party's brief launch statement, signed by Corbyn and recently resigned former Labour MP Zarah Sultana, declared, “It's time for a new kind of political party. One that belongs to you.” It points to the millions living in poverty as “giant corporations make a fortune” and the government provides “billions for war”, and to “the government's complicity in crimes against humanity”.

The statement calls for a “mass redistribution of wealth and power”, for the defence of “the right to protest against genocide”, and opposes the scapegoating of migrants and refugees and the “fossil fuel giants putting their profits before our planet”. It is “ordinary people who create the wealth,” it continues, “and it is ordinary people who have the power to put it back where it belongs.”

Millions agree and see the need for a new party to put these ideas into action. But this is not that party. Although Corbyn has been forced to make an organisational break from Labour, his new party does not represent a political break from Labourism. It advocates only limited reforms to be pursued through parliament—a Labour Party Mark II.

The character of the party is shaped above all by its leadership. It has been developed over the last months under the direction not only of Corbyn, but many of the staff from his time as leader of the Labour Party, including Karie Murphy (his former chief of staff) and Pamela Fitzpatrick, who heads Corbyn's Peace and Justice Project.

To this old guard is added Sultana, representing the new generation of Corbynite MPs that entered parliament in 2017, and Corbyn's Independent Alliance of four other MPs elected based solely on their opposition to the Gaza genocide and not on any record of struggle for leftist policies. One of these,

Ayoub Khan MP, notoriously asked Labour's Deputy Prime Minister Angela Rayner whether the army could be used to clear Birmingham's streets during the ongoing refuse collectors' strike.

This apparatus will be charged with managing the inaugural party conference so that only a lowest-common-denominator programme is adopted, largely based on the minimal social reforms included in Labour's 2017 and 2019 general election manifestos under Corbyn.

None of this is changed, or will be changed in the future, by the immediate and universal support for this initiative given by numerous pseudo-left tendencies which profess to be revolutionary. The role of groups such as the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP) and Socialist Party (SP) will be as cheerleaders and apologists for this new reformist party. It is they who will adapt to the politics of Corbyn, and not the other way around.

The RCP's national campaigns organiser Fiona Lali, in an appeal to “Jeremy and Zarah” which purported to offer revolutionary advice toward the new party's programme, insisted that “Now is not just a time to look backwards.”

But let's not move on so quickly. It is of exceptional importance to the working class that the record of the de-facto leader of this new party is one of continuous retreat before his right-wing opponents.

As Labour leader, Corbyn went into two elections committed to NATO membership and the maintenance of Britain's nuclear weapons. He and Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell combined their proposed reforms with a “tea and biscuits offensive” courting support in the City of London, while instructing Labour councils to implement cuts demanded by the national Conservative government.

Corbyn's refusal to defend his supporters against a “left-wing antisemitism” witch-hunt paved the way for a campaign which is claiming victims to this day.

This was the use Corbyn made of a no less popular groundswell than the one which has greeted his announcement of a new party: 600,000 people paid to join Labour in 2015 and 2016 specifically to defend him and take up a fight against the Blairite right-wing.

To the extent that any reference is made to these experiences

today by Corbyn's many apologists, the only lesson drawn is that Corbyn's best intentions were sabotaged by the right-wing, and that, in a new party independent of Labour, his agenda can now be realised. This is why the same veil of historical amnesia is drawn over the bitter experiences workers have made with similar left breaks from discredited reformist parties: Podemos in Spain, the Left Bloc in Portugal, but above all, Syriza in Greece.

Corbyn said explicitly in 2015 that his leadership of the Labour Party meant it was not necessary to repeat the Syriza experience in Britain. The collapse of the old social democratic party in Greece, PASOK, could be avoided in Britain by Labour's revival as a "socialist" organisation. After supporting Corbyn in this effort, the SWP, RCP and SP now declare that a left-of-Labour party is required after all—and Corbyn is the man to lead it.

They do so under conditions in which Syriza and its international counterparts have carried out devastating attacks on the working class. Elected in 2015 in Greece with a promise to oppose the austerity demanded by European finance capital, after just a few months Syriza utterly betrayed this mandate.

Writing in the *Socialist Worker*, Tomáš Tengely-Evans claims that this betrayal could take place because Syriza "prioritised winning elections over building struggle," when, "Socialists need to use electoral politics to champion struggle and movements and raise working class people's confidence to fight back."

But Syriza *was* backed by an enormous popular "struggle". Hundreds of thousands demonstrated on the streets in support of a landslide "No" vote against austerity in a referendum cynically called by Syriza Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras and his Finance Minister Yanis Varoufakis. Far from this popular pressure pushing Syriza's leaders to the left, it pushed the party into an ever firmer alliance with imperialism.

The standpoint of the SWP and similar organisations is that workers are now engaged in an experience which revolutionaries must share as a critically supportive faction of Corbyn's new party. Having spent five years supporting Corbyn's plan for the socialist transformation of the Labour Party, and four years and eight months convincing him to form a new reformist vehicle, they are now pledging themselves to support Corbyn for another four years, up to and including a general election.

Somehow, this is meant to prepare the working class for a revolutionary break with Corbyn's reformist politics. Even if honestly pursued, this objectivist approach would represent an extreme danger for the working class, leaving it paralysed for years to come by Corbyn while the capitalist class prepares a vicious counteroffensive.

As the Socialist Equality Party has consistently argued, Labour's degeneration and transformation into a party no less reactionary than the Tories, and similarly despised, is not the product of mistaken ideas and bad leaders. It is rooted in

fundamental shifts within the foundations of world capitalism. The development of globalised production, falling profit rates and rampant financialisation backed by public debt have ended any possibility of combining a defence of the capitalist profit system with securing reforms, however limited.

The working class in Britain and internationally faces a world in which the super-rich oligarchy monopolises an ever greater percentage of the world's wealth and the imperialist powers build up their militaries for wars for territory and resources. Workers' collapsing living standards are the price to be paid, and police-state measures deployed and right-wing parties cultivated to repress resistance.

Attempts to implement any of the reforms advocated by Corbyn's party will be met with a combination of economic warfare, and far-right and military violence. Even the prospect of a Prime Minister Corbyn—managed then by his majority-Blairite parliamentary party—was enough to prompt threats of assassination and a military coup.

The ruling class will respond to any challenge to the destruction of living standards and imperialist war with savage repression. This has been demonstrated by the Starmer government's arrest of hundreds of anti-genocide protesters and banning of Palestine Action under anti-terror laws. Victory will require a revolutionary mobilisation of the working class—nationalising critical industries, confiscating the wealth of the billionaires and an international socialist strategy.

Mortally afraid of such a movement, Corbyn and the leadership of his new party would follow the example of Syriza—likely in even more prostrate fashion. The role of the SWP, RCP and SP is to disarm the working class in the face of these political realities.

The Socialist Equality Party will do everything possible to alert workers to the situation and arm them with the necessary programme and leadership. We will not be advocates of and apologists for "Your Party". It is not ours. We will engage energetically with the many workers and young people who currently look to Corbyn for leadership and seek to educate them in the fundamental historical experiences of the past decade and beyond, which point to the necessity for a revolutionary, internationalist and socialist perspective and party.

Our aim is to ensure that the working class does not spend its energies in a demoralising campaign for a party which will lead them to betrayal and defeat, to ensure that illusions in Corbynite reformism are dispelled as quickly as possible in preparation for the revolutionary class battles ahead.



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