

Corbyn and Sultana's new party—In their own words

Thomas Scripps
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Jeremy Corbyn and Zarah Sultana have given their first interviews on the new party they announced last week. They make clear that the organisation, with the placeholder name “Your Party”, will offer the working class no change from the political spinelessness displayed by Corbyn as leader of the Labour Party.

Sultana's role is to put on a more militant face than Corbyn can offer. She told Novara Media, “To me, the Labour Party is dead. It's dead morally, it's dead politically, and it's dead electorally as well.”

This is radical-sounding window dressing. She spent much of the rest of the interview stressing her “preferences” and “opinion”—because everything will supposedly be decided democratically by the members at a founding conference in the autumn—that the party follow a “tactical alliance method” to “stop [Reform UK leader Nigel] Farage getting into power, because that has to be the guiding principle.”

“Your Party” would have to “identify where we can win and where others who have the same goals and values around progressive politics, around defeating Reform, where we can work together... that will be, I imagine, a negotiation.”

This is a recipe for subordinating workers’ interests to a “Stop Farage” platform of alliances with all manner of “lesser evils”, from Independents, the Greens, Plaid Cymru and the Scottish National Party to Labour “lefts” that will only prepare the way for betrayals.

Sultana cited as a model the “New Popular Front like we've seen in France”. Led by Jean-Luc Melenchon's Unsubmissive France, the NPF has smothered opposition to “President of the Rich” Emmanuel Macron and allowed the Socialist Party (part of the NPF) to prop up Macron's chosen prime ministers and their austerity agenda—all in the name of stopping the

far-right National Rally.

What Sultana alludes to amid uncompromising declarations that “We are the left; we're going to take all the left”, Corbyn admits without a trace of political embarrassment. Advocating “some kind of federal” structure for the new party, he says, “I'm very conscious that there are lots of independent groups around the country, independent groups of councillors, independent party activists... There's also People's Assembly and many other groups... We're not going to get involved in a turf war.”

This is not a plan for a new kind of party, let alone a socialist one, but an umbrella organisation for the old politics of pressuring the Labour Party. Asked specifically by Owen Jones, “Do you think Labour's dead?”, Corbyn refused to say so. Instead he described how “a lot of Labour MPs come and search me out in the library” and whisper furtively, “‘Jeremy, I think you're doing the right thing’... Are they going to come over to my party? No. But are they going to work with us? Yes.”

Corbyn is still so wedded to Labourism that he can talk about Tony Blair in almost wistful tones, telling Jones that his 1997 government—which Margaret Thatcher called her greatest achievement—was an “interesting conundrum”.

He recalls voting against Blair over single-parent benefit and being told by the Chief Whip Nick Brown, “I'm here to assure you that tomorrow there will still be a Labour Party and tomorrow you will still be part of that Labour Party.” The cuddly feelings were clearly reciprocal, with Corbyn continuing, “Until he [Blair] got involved with Iraq and so on, the social justice system was an improvement.” With Iraq, Blair had simply “got totally off the wall”.

The arrangements proposed by Corbyn will be made

possible by studied vagueness and the burying of class questions. “The way you keep a party together,” says Corbyn, “is by going forward campaigning on fundamental issues,” listing “peace”, “social justice”, “environmental sustainability”, “protecting human rights and opposing the far-right”.

What he really means is campaigning *without* addressing the fundamental issues. A prime example is given by his and Sultana’s description of British militarism, which they oppose but never link to the intensifying imperialist struggle for the redivision of the world. It is presented as the fault of “arms dealers” which “can tell governments what to do,” in Sultana’s words—as if British imperialism is a cat’s paw and is not acting in its own interests.

By the same token, social inequality and impoverishment are never linked to the interests not just of a few greedy corporate culprits, but of an entire capitalist class. A class which has orchestrated a decades long counter-revolution against all the social gains of the working class, aided by the trade union bureaucracy, which can only be thrown back by a massive industrial and political mobilisation of workers and youth.

Sultana and Corbyn cleave to the politics of the golden mean, a fair social contract which can be struck in Parliament while avoiding a struggle between classes. No dividing political lines are drawn, except with Farage, disarming the working class in the face of their political opponents, to whom “Your Party” will extend the hand of friendship.

Corbyn summed up the approach by describing his relationship with the Independent Alliance in parliament. They had decided, “Where we agree we’ll work together. Where we don’t agree, we’ll say no more about it, we’ll just park that and move on.” This held true even as Alliance member Ayoub Khan called on Prime Minister Keir Starmer to mobilise the army to break the Birmingham bin strike.

The evasion of these critical issues by which a party’s character is defined is complemented by Corbyn’s absurdly narrow and localist politics. In a moment of unintentional self-parody, he tells Jones, “I always think of Finsbury Park—located within his Islington North constituency—as the centre of my universe.”

He says he resisted pressure from his allies to form a

new party in 2021-22 ahead of a 2024 election because “I would have had to spend two years doing a lot of travelling around”, which would “not have played well in the local community” in Islington North. His own seat in parliament meant more to him than mounting a national challenge to Starmer’s incoming government of repression, war and austerity.

However much Corbyn and Sultana talk about democracy in the new party—and whatever procedures are implemented for the founding conference—it is their politics which will define it. No one looking to participate in “Your Party” is challenging their role as its guiding lights, in which they will be backed by the milieu represented by their interviewers.

Jones, writing in the *Guardian*, was a key figure in the “left antisemitism” campaign which led, with Corbyn’s help, to the driving out of the Labour Party of many of his supporters, and ultimately his own ouster. He initially backed Starmer as Labour leader, and has spent the last year supporting the “We Deserve Better” initiative calling for a diffuse “electoral alliance of the Left” including “Green and left-wing independent candidates, as well as socialist Labour MPs.”

Novara, which established itself during Corbyn’s rise to Labour leadership as the house paper of the Labour left, has been more insistent on the need for a new left party, but also championed the Greens as a possible way forward.

Both will be happy with Corbyn’s statement on prospective Green Party leader Zack Polanski: “Will we work with him? Yes, on issues, generally we’d agree on environmental issues, we’d agree on social justice issues.”

The Socialist Equality Party rejects the idea that the left-wing, anti-war aspirations of millions of workers and young people can be advanced through these forces: the semi-reformist dregs of a prolonged period of political reaction. What is required is a revolutionary party built on the principles of uncompromising class struggle and socialist internationalism.



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