

Jeremy Corbyn attacks Zarah Sultana's demand for nationalisation against the billionaires

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Zarah Sultana's call at Your Party's founding conference for the nationalisation of the entire economy and for the working class to run society has come under vicious attack from party leader Jeremy Corbyn and political scoundrels Owen Jones, George Galloway, and Tariq Ali.

Speaking at the founding conference in Liverpool last Sunday, Sultana stated:

"We are not here for tweaks of a broken system. We are not here just to lower some bills and sprinkle a wealth tax. We are here for a fundamental transformation of society to replace capitalism with socialism.

"That means democracy in every workplace, every community, every corner of life. So yes, we will reverse the failed experiments of Thatcherism by taking water, energy, our railways, transport and communications back into public ownership. But that cannot be the limits of our ambition. We must seek new horizons—the banking industry, food production, construction and so much more. Because we know this fundamental truth, the working class can run society better than the billionaires, the profiteers and the war criminals who rule over us today."

She delivered similar remarks during her pre-conference rally on Friday night.

Millions of workers and young people would likely agree with Sultana's sentiments. This year's *Sunday Times* Rich List reveals 156 billionaires in Britain hold a combined wealth of £772.8 billion, while 21 percent of the UK population (14.3 million people) live in poverty. Globally, 3,028 billionaires hold \$15.8 trillion, and 81 have more wealth than the bottom 50 percent of the world's population.

Public support for re-nationalising Britain's railways, post, buses, water, and energy companies—privatised and run into the ground by successive Tory and Labour governments—is overwhelming. Capitalism is widely discredited, with 38 percent of the population supporting socialism, according to YouGov. Among 18–34-year-olds, 56 percent believe socialism would improve life, and 20 percent of 18–24-year-olds view communism favourably (compared to just 2 percent who have a favourable view of fascism).

Owen Jones reacts

Calls for "renationalisation" have long been a staple of Labour "left" backbenchers and trade union bureaucrats. However, Sultana linked her call for public ownership to capitalism's replacement by socialism, insisting it was a "fundamental truth" that the working class can run society better than billionaires.

Guardian columnist Owen Jones, a vapid pseudo-left commentator regarded fondly in upper-middle-class circles, was visibly agitated by her proposals. He interviewed Sultana on Saturday, "You were asked yesterday about policies for the country, and you said, 'nationalise the entire economy'. So, I mean, what does that look like?"

Sultana replied, "That looks like a socialist transformation of the country where we nationalise utilities, we nationalise energy, we nationalise transport, we nationalise communications, including the internet. But we also have to broaden our horizons—" Jones interrupted, countering, "But not the entire economy."

Sultana continued, "We have to have a socialist economy. That includes workers running their workplace through cooperatives." Asked if that meant democratic ownership, she replied, "It means the whole economy run by workers, not the billionaires and the corporations that run it today."

Jones could barely conceal his hostility, "So that means, I'm just interested, because, I mean, like, kiosks, like small, little café kiosks, that kind of thing?" Sultana replied, "Workers' cooperatives", before he cut her off again. She confirmed, "The entire economy under the control of workers, whether that is nationalisation, workers cooperatives... And when we look at, especially things like food, that means looking at the entire food production system and bringing that under the control of workers."

Jones posted his interview with Sultana to X on Monday night with a strapline, "Nationalise the entire economy?" It received 1.7 million views.

Responding to Sultana's suggestion that the working class should govern society, Jones was unnerved. His thoughts turned to those things most dear to him, with visions of his local coffee shop being seized by workers' councils.

Jeremy Corbyn: "I don't know what nationalisation means"

The next morning, Jones posted a follow-up interview with Corbyn, who ridiculed Sultana's statements. Jones tweeted, "It's fair to say that Jeremy Corbyn doesn't agree with a policy of nationalising the entire economy."

Seated alongside Corbyn, Jones cited Sultana's call to "nationalise the entire economy", asking Corbyn, "What do you think of that?" Corbyn replied, "I'm not sure what that means. I'm honestly not sure." [Jones

laughs]

Corbyn continued, “I would want to see public ownership of major industries like energy, and public services like mail, rail and water. And I would want to see the sort of stuff that John McDonnell and I worked on before the 2017 and 19 elections, on the Investment Bank.” He concluded, “We’ve got to be clear, the priority is poverty and inequality in this country”—as if these were not the direct outcome of private ownership of wealth by the capitalist oligarchy!

Corbyn’s citing of Labour’s 2017 and 2019 election manifestos, drafted under his leadership (and supported at the time by Sultana), is revealing. Despite a toothless call for renationalisation of rail, water and energy (after their private contracts expire, naturally!) Corbyn’s manifestos pledged to “make Britain a better place to do business”, invoked immigration quotas, and committed to NATO spending targets and retention of the Trident nuclear weapons programme.

Accompanied by a pre-election “tea and biscuits charm offensive” among City of London executives, Corbyn’s Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell had boasted during the 2017 election campaign, “In some ways, it’s a bizarre situation. They are coming to us for reassurance against a government that is falling apart. So, Jeremy Corbyn and I are the stabilisers of capitalism.”

When he was Labour leader, Corbyn’s apologists shamelessly boosted his manifesto while excusing its “shortcomings” (yes, Corbyn’s support for NATO was described as such), arguing he could “go no further” due to fierce opposition from the dominant Blairite wing in the Parliamentary Labour Party. Now liberated from their control, with a party of his own, Corbyn presides over pseudo-reformist policies every bit as tepid and evasive as those he held to under Labour.

Tariq Ali attacks socialism

On Monday night, ageing political bankrupt Tariq Ali joined the attack on Sultana. Responding to her call for public ownership against the billionaires, he tweeted:

“Well-meaning but pure rhetoric. Both [Tony] Benn and [Ken] Livingstone had some very good socialist economist [sic] working for them who came up with credible plans. The entirely nationalised economies in the former Soviet Union and China (Cuba too) simply did not work simply did not work [sic]. WE had huge debates on this within the global left. Zarah has to get some help on this one. What she’s saying will be laughed at and understandably. Given the experiences of the 20th century we know this type of maximalism destroys economies. It should be debated in open and comradely fashion. I groaned when I first heard her saying this.”

The “huge debates” in “the global left” Ali mentions were led by Pabloite and state-capitalist parties and pseudo-left academics who supported the restoration of capitalism by the Stalinist bureaucracies in the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, and China. Ali dedicated his 1988 book *Revolution from Above* to Boris Yeltsin, claiming that, “Gorbachev represents a progressive, reformist current within the Soviet elite, whose programme, if successful, would represent an enormous gain for socialists and democrats on a world scale. The scale of Gorbachev’s operations is, in fact, reminiscent of the efforts of the American President of the 19th century: Abraham Lincoln.”

Lincoln’s victory in the Civil War led to the abolition of slavery, expropriating US\$4 billion in wealth from the Southern slavocracy, equivalent to US\$42 trillion today. Gorbachev’s Perestroika, culminating in the dissolution of the USSR in 1991, eradicated the remaining social gains of the 1917 October Revolution. Yeltsin’s appointee as Finance Minister, Yegor Gaidar, oversaw pro-market “shock therapy”, privatising state assets, abolishing price controls, and collapsing working-class living standards, giving rise to a regime of capitalist oligarchs.

Ali’s insistence that nationalised economies “don’t work” is a cynical deception. As Leon Trotsky wrote in *The Revolution Betrayed: What is the Soviet Union and Where is it Going?* (1935), the nationalisation of production and state planning introduced by the workers’ state demonstrated socialism’s “right to victory, not on the pages of *Das Kapital*, but in an industrial arena comprising a sixth part of the earth’s surface – not in the language of dialectics, but in the language of steel, cement and electricity. Even if the Soviet Union, as a result of internal difficulties, external blows and the mistakes of leadership, were to collapse – which we firmly hope will not happen – there would remain an earnest of the future this indestructible fact, that thanks solely to a proletarian revolution a backward country has achieved in less than 10 years successes unexampled in history.”

For Lenin, Trotsky and the Bolsheviks, the seizure of power in Russia was just the opening shot of the world revolution. Opposing Stalin’s national-autarkic programme of “socialism in a single country”, Trotsky and the Left Opposition insisted that socialism could be built solely on the basis of the resources, technology, and cooperative labour of the world economy, through the extension of the revolution onto the world arena. Without this, Trotsky later warned, the Soviet bureaucracy, acting as the agency of imperialism and striving to place its privileges on firm foundations, would move to restore capitalism.

According to Ali, the main lesson of the 20th century is that “maximalism” (i.e., the overthrow of private ownership of the means of production) destroys economies. He is a garden-variety anti-communist. For Marxists, the real lesson of the 20th century is that imperialism, based on the capitalist nation-state system, plunged mankind into fascism and two world wars, killing an estimated 85 million people, and must be overthrown and replaced by socialism.

The working class, which came forward last century in their millions to put an end to the capitalist order, were betrayed by social democracy and Stalinism. For Ali, a lifelong anti-Trotskyist, this history is anathema. He now “groans” at the mere mention of nationalisation, and why wouldn’t he? Ali sold his six-bedroom mansion in north London’s Highgate a decade ago for shy of £5 million and is the embodiment of today’s affluent pseudo-left.

Galloway hails the China model

On Tuesday morning, George Galloway joined the pile-on, tweeting in reply to Jones’ interview with Sultana:

We don’t want to ‘nationalise the whole economy’ or as she earlier put it ‘take the fucking lot’. When we ceased to be children we put away childish things. We want an economy like China. Where the state has a decisive role in the mixed economy and where the people come first...”

Galloway is a defender of Chinese capitalism and its exploitation of the

working class, administered by the Stalinist Chinese Communist Party (CCP) on behalf of global corporations and investors. The “mixed economy” he holds up as a model boasts 450 billionaires, the second highest globally, whose interests are defended ruthlessly by the CCP, suppressing the social and democratic rights of the working class.

Demanding that Sultana “put away childish things”, Galloway speaks as a lifetime member of Britain’s Labour and Stalinist milieu, and as the leading proponent of “left-right” unity. Galloway allied with Nigel Farage and the Tory Party right-wing during the Brexit referendum and subsequently courted an electoral agreement with Farage’s Brexit Party, the immediate precursor to Reform UK. He is politically toxic.

Labour’s Clause 4 and the Russian Revolution

Britain’s leading “lefts” attack Sultana because they fear the working class, especially its youth, breaking from the Labour Party and turning toward socialism. This process of reorientation is forcing a confrontation with fundamental historical and political questions. That is why, in response to Sultana’s calls for nationalisation against the billionaires, her critics rush to declare that any such discussion must be closed down.

In doing so, they attack Sultana for upholding the reformist agenda they themselves once championed and which the Labour Party, at least nominally, still upheld until 1995, when Tony Blair’s New Labour repudiated Clause 4 of the party’s constitution. This defined Labour’s ultimate aim as follows:

To secure for the workers by hand or by brain the full fruits of their industry and the most equitable distribution thereof that may be possible upon the basis of the common ownership of the means of production, distribution, and exchange, and the best obtainable system of popular administration and control of each industry or service.

Sidney Webb drafted Clause 4 in November 1917, in direct response to the Russian Revolution. He worked with Independent Labour Party (ILP) leaders Arthur Henderson and Ramsay MacDonald to revise Labour’s programme, constitution, and structure to better channel the working class away from revolution and toward what Henderson called “ordered social change through constitutional methods.”

The worldwide impact of the Russian Revolution was immense, and Britain was no exception. Labour leader Aneurin Bevan later recalled seeing Welsh miners “rushing to meet each other in the streets with tears streaming down their cheeks, shaking hands and saying, ‘At last it has happened’... the revolution of 1917 came to the working class of Great Britain, not as social disaster, but as one of the most emancipating events in the history of mankind.”

Nationalisation of industry and production from above, whether carried out by reformist governments or (more extensively) by the Stalinist regimes in Eastern Europe after World War II, cannot bring about socialism. It requires the conscious revolutionary mobilisation of the working class to overthrow the capitalist state and establish workers’ power.

During the 20th century, and especially after World War II, the British ruling class depended on the Labour bureaucracy to promote the vista of a parliamentary road to socialism. The 1945 Atlee Labour government nationalised one-fifth of Britain’s industry. It established the welfare state, including free universal healthcare, public housing, and state

pensions, not out of altruism but to stave off revolution and divert the working class from Marxism. That period has ended. Today, neither Corbyn nor Labour’s discredited “left” make such promises. The urgent task is to resolve the crisis of working-class leadership and to build a genuine mass socialist party that unites workers worldwide and completes the epoch of world socialist revolution that began in 1917.

Suggested reading:

The Historical and International Foundations of the Socialist Equality Party (Britain)



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