

Corbyn and the Epstein-Mandelson crisis: An essential lesson

Robert Stevens
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The crisis over Peter Mandelson's links with Jeffrey Epstein is roiling Keir Starmer's Labour government in Britain, threatening its survival. On Sunday, Downing Street's Chief of Staff Morgan McSweeney—a protégé of Mandelson who played a prominent role in him being handed the position of Ambassador to the US—resigned in an attempt to take the heat off Starmer.

It has also served to expose the Labour "left", particularly its figurehead Jeremy Corbyn, as a pivotal prop of capitalist rule.

Arch-Blairite Mandelson resigned from the Labour Party and stood down from the House of Lords last week when the latest batch of Epstein files released by the US Department of Justice revealed that he had passed confidential UK government information to the convicted paedophile. Mandelson—until last September Starmer's Ambassador to Washington—is being investigated by the police with allegations of "misconduct in public office".

Speaking in Parliament last week, Corbyn told MPs that from 2015-2020 "when I was Leader of the Opposition and leader of the Labour Party... that under my leadership, Mandelson had no role, no influence and no part to play, because I do not trust the man or believe him. We need to make that very clear, because his role in British politics has been basically malign, undermining, and a very corrupting influence altogether."

Corbyn's response was not to call for a political break with the Labour Party which spawned Mandelson and the entire rotten parliamentary set-up. Instead, he stated, "Today, we have to be very stern and clear that there needs to be the fullest possible inquiry into all of this."

As to who would run it, Corbyn declared that "it has to be judicially led, independent and, for the most part, in the public eye—rather like when the Government were eventually forced to undertake the Chilcot inquiry into the Iraq war; that is the nearest parallel I can find." He added, "It is up to us as MPs to 'fess up to what has happened

and to make sure there is a genuinely open, independent inquiry."

"Genuinely open," but only "for the most part". This stipulation is Corbyn letting everyone in ruling circles know that he agrees with Starmer that the dirty laundry of British imperialism cannot be allowed to be aired without any controls.

Starmer first tried to prevent such files concerning Mandelson that compromised "national security or international relations" from coming out at all, and only under pressure referred their possible release to Parliament's Intelligence and Security Committee.

Corbyn's "for the most part" caveat is clear that there are "national security" implications regarding Mandelson's dealings that could threaten the British state. So, let's only hear about that behind closed doors.

This is the second time in the space of a year that Corbyn has insisted on holding a public inquiry: a favoured mechanism of Britain's ruling class to extricate itself from a crisis. Last March, as hundreds of thousands of people were regularly marching in London against the genocide of the Palestinians, Corbyn called on Starmer to establish "a Chilcot-style inquiry into the UK's involvement in Israel's assault on Gaza".

The Chilcot Inquiry was established in 2009, in the final months of his Labour government, by Gordon Brown. After funding the illegal invasion of Iraq for 10 years as Tony Blair's Chancellor, Brown succeeded him as prime minister in 2007. Seven years after it was called, and long after the fall of Brown's government to the Tories, Sir John Chilcot's findings confirmed that UK government officials led by Blair manufactured claims about Iraq's "Weapons of Mass Destruction" to make the case for war.

But as the WSWS noted, the Chilcot inquiry was always a creature of the ruling class. Overseen by a lifelong stooge of the establishment, it was "engineered to protect the guilty. It had no legal powers, gave amnesty to those

testifying, and its terms of reference precluded any findings on the legality of the invasion. Documents later obtained under Freedom of Information and analysed by the *World Socialist Web Site* showed how the inquiry was the tame offspring of the very state agencies which plotted Britain's illegal war."

Labour MP Richard Burdon, Corbyn's erstwhile colleague (until Starmer expelled Corbyn from the party) in the Socialist Campaign Group parliamentary caucus was clear what was at stake in Mandelson's exposure. He told MPs, "The risk that Peter Mandelson posed to national security, and his deep inappropriateness for the role of ambassador to the US, should have been put first."

Corbyn's former shadow chancellor John McDonnell complained that the central issue is that not only is Starmer's political career jeopardised but that his right-wing government could soon fall—which everyone must now rush to save. McDonnell posted on X on Saturday, "If we are to save our party & Labour in government we need a thorough cleansing process which exposes not just the role Mandelson played but also the influence of other wealthy individuals & corporations & the way a brutal political culture has undermined party democracy."

That Corbyn now leads Your Party—supposedly offering a "left" alternative to Labour—has not made a jot of difference to his political loyalties or his bankrupt politics.

Corbyn's latest performance continues his historic role of refusing to wage any struggle against the Blairites and the Labour Party apparatus, confirming him as a loyal defender of British imperialism.

In February 2017, Mandelson—as an unreconstituted Blairite and worshipper of the super-rich—declared of Corbyn, "I work every single day in some small way to bring forward the end of his tenure in office." Yet Corbyn made it a point of principle to not only keep the Labour right firmly in place, despite his massive popular mandate to boot them out, but included as many of them as he could in his shadow cabinet.

At least a third of Corbyn's initial cabinet consisted of right-wingers, including Starmer, Hilary Benn, Angela Eagle, Maria Eagle, Lord Falconer, Michael Dugher, Chris Bryant, Ian Murray, Lucy Powell, Vernon Coaker, Catherine McKinnell, Nia Griffiths and Luciana Berger. Another was John Healey, who now plays a major role in Starmer's war and austerity government as Defence Secretary.

Blair government veteran Yvette Cooper, along with another Blairite, Liz Kendall, were trounced by Corbyn in the 2015 leadership contest. After she refused to serve in

Corbyn's shadow cabinet as a minister, Corbyn still handed Cooper a role advising him on immigration policy. As home secretary in the Starmer government, Cooper rolled out anti-immigration policies while solidarising herself with far right-led protests that besieged asylum seekers in hotels, demanding their deportation.

Even after the Labour right mounted a coup against him in 2016, after military top brass let it be known they favoured his removal, Corbyn grovelled before them. Starmer, who was Corbyn's shadow home office minister, was among those who resigned en masse from Corbyn's Cabinet in the effort to remove him. After surviving the coup, Corbyn appointed Starmer as shadow Brexit secretary.

In his September 2018 conference speech, as the WSWs noted, Corbyn namechecked leading right-wingers, including Starmer, Healey and Tom Watson "as being integral to his shadow cabinet, figures who would play a vital role in government."

Corbyn insisted, "Our movement has achieved nothing when divided," adding that "If we are to get the chance to put those [Labour] values into practice in government we are going to need unity to do it."

The servility to Mandelson's mates was never ending. "We are on a journey together and can only complete it together... Labour is a broad church and can be broader still. I lead in that spirit", Corbyn concluded his paean to the Blairites.

His embrace of the Labour right, and refusal to lay a finger on them for five years, led to Corbyn's replacement by Starmer within 18 months of that speech.



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