

Jeremy Corbyn: Britain's anti-socialist witch-hunter

Lessons from the last ten years

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Former Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn and his “The Many” faction of Your Party are leading an anti-socialist witch-hunt against their factional rivals.

Following a wave of expulsions on the eve of the founding conference in November, aimed at securing a bureaucratic stitch-up, more have followed during the party’s leadership elections. These include Rob Rooney, expelled for his membership of the Socialist Party, who was a leadership candidate in the South West. Other candidates have been barred from running on similar pretexts.

The Corbynites’ justification for this anti-democratic rampage was given in an X post and email from the Peace and Justice Project, founded by Corbyn and run by Karie Murphy, who also runs the Your Party bureaucracy. Declaring “The future of Your Party is in the balance,” it attacked Zarah Sultana’s rival “Grassroots Left” slate for advocating “A narrow fringe party shouting from the sidelines.”

Former Labour MP Laura Smith wrote against “closed circles that speak only to themselves”, drawing a line between The Many’s “open, democratic” vision and “one dominated by organised cliques” turning branches into “the fiefdoms of small groups exercising disproportionate power.”

Mark Serwotka, former general secretary of the Public and Commercial Services Union, wrote in the *Morning Star* to denounce “a purity programme made up of a long list of demands which seek to attract the already committed core of left-wing activists”. The “small sectarian groups, who themselves bear much responsibility for the alienation of the wider working class from the left” could not “be allowed to dominate Your Party.”

This is the standard anti-socialist trope: that the working class is too right-wing or stupid to respond to left-wing policies and the only way to succeed politically is to abandon such “sectarian” aims and embrace right-wing politics, political cowardice and betrayal.

The Socialist Equality Party opposes from the left the groups targeted by the Your Party witch-hunt, mainly the Socialist Workers Party and the Socialist Party. They have spent years sowing illusions in Corbyn—and continue to do so while lending their main backing to Zarah Sultana’s reformist palliatives and policy of polite disagreement with “Jeremy”.

In this context, however, Corbyn’s attacks against them underscore how far to the right he is. The former Labour leader does not want any complications to his project of creating a middle-class pressure group on the Labour Party, or any indication given to the working class and young people that Your Party could offer anything else.

The Many’s model for suppressing left-wing organising

What is presaged in these initial expulsions is a wholesale purge. That is what Corbyn and his allies are openly planning should they win a majority on Your Party’s leadership body. Should they not, they have made it clear that they would rather pull the plug on the whole initiative, taking the money and the membership lists with them.

The first of The Many’s proposals to get “Your Party back on track” attacks existing “proto-branches”, formed in response to the Corbynite apparatus’ refusal to organise local bodies of members or release the membership data to make this possible.

The Many says of the current organisations, “Many are run by the Socialist Workers Party and other sectarian groups which comprise the Grassroots Left slate. These groups are more organised than ordinary individual members, who are effectively excluded from equal participation. They are seeking to exert control of the party through control of the branches.”

Given the power to do so, the Corbynites will trash these local bodies, expel swathes of their current memberships and re-establish Your Party on their own terms—and to hell with the decisions of the founding conference. The “official branches” they set up will be powerless cheer groups for a party run from Parliament by Corbyn, who The Many say they will christen as Your Party’s “leader in Parliament”—an invention of their own.

The second proposal continues the theme, attacking Grassroots Left for being “deeply hostile” to one member, one vote (OMOV): “they want power to be in the hands of delegates from branches, because the sectarian groups who make up the Grassroots Left believe they have more chance of controlling a branch than controlling the whole membership.”

The OMOV model the Corbynites want to establish is aimed at rendering the party’s membership passive and atomised, “participating” through online votes carefully stage-managed from the centre.

A third proposal aims at removing policymaking power from the national conference and the branches to Policy Commissions, in the style of Corbyn’s beloved Labour Party.

Having been deprived of Labour’s century-old apparatus for expelling socialists and repressing the party membership, Corbyn and his allies are endeavouring to create a new one.

Bounced into launching Your Party before they were ready to stamp their authority on it, they have set about making up for lost time. Today, of the original 850,000 newsletter sign-ups, just 50,000 have become even paper members, and just 11,000 regularly participate in internal voting—and far fewer attend meetings in person.

The pool is small enough that one of those able to rise to the top and get himself on the ballot for the leadership body is Corbyn’s brother Piers—a prominent anti-vaxxer who attacked health workers during the pandemic and has now shifted his attention to provocations against asylum seekers.

This loathsome individual has escaped the attention of Your Party's witch-hunters.

Corbyn's ten years suppressing socialist sentiment

Ever since Corbyn became Labour leader in 2015, the most significant anti-socialist purges in the UK have proceeded with him at the helm.

In 2016, during the second Labour leadership election triggered by a Blairite coup to remove Corbyn, the work was organised by the apparatus of the Labour Party, which worked feverishly to suspend and expel potential Corbyn supporters on flimsy pretexts. Corbyn gave these right-wing saboteurs the space to work, refusing to intervene against them and insisting on preserving Labour as a "broad church".

Having secured a second and more massive popular mandate to fight the Blairites, Corbyn's allies intervened instead to consolidate their witch-hunt through Momentum, under the direction of John Lansman. Setting up the model for Your Party, Lansman controlled the organisation's membership list, kept out as best he could members of other tendencies and gutted it of any democratic life.

Momentum and the trade union bureaucracy combined at Labour's 2018 conference, under Corbyn's leadership, to nix a move for mandatory reselection of MPs seen as a first step towards clearing out the Blairites.

By the final years of Corbyn's leadership, his allies running the National Executive Committee had largely taken over the "left antisemitism" witch-hunt begun by the Blairites. From allowing his supporters to be witch-hunted out of the party, his camp shifted to directly implementing expulsions.

These actions paved the way for the election of Keir Starmer as the leader of a Blairite Labour Party utterly unchanged by Corbyn's tenure.

Corbyn planned on retiring quietly to the backbenches and dissolving oppositional sentiment into his Peace and Justice Project. Even when Labour forced him to choose between his parliamentary seat and his party in the 2024 election, he tried to square the circle by running a purely localist campaign.

Deeply reluctant to consent to the formation of a new party, he eventually did so only to police it when popular anger and frustration with the Labour government made it inevitable.

The working class has suffered enormously for these betrayals. It has been given a long and harsh lesson in the forces which suffocate left-wing sentiment in the UK.

Corbyn represents a social milieu and political apparatus which has bedevilled the British working class for decades, an amalgam of the anti-socialist Labourism of the Fabian Society and the anti-socialist Stalinism of the *Morning Star*. Both are committed to preserving the control of Labour and trade union bureaucracy, in which Corbyn has spent his political lifetime.

The Russian Revolutionary and founder of the Fourth International against the Stalinist betrayal of that revolution, Leon Trotsky, understood the Fabians' role very well. In writing against Stalin's adaptation to these figures in 1925, he described the Jeremy Corbys of the time perfectly:

These pompous authorities, pedants, and haughty, high-falutin' cowards are systematically poisoning the labour movement, clouding the consciousness of the proletariat, and paralysing its will. It is only thanks to them that Toryism, Liberalism, the Church, the monarchy, the aristocracy, and the bourgeoisie continue to survive and even suppose themselves to be firmly in the saddle.

"The Fabian politicians and their yes-men"

No socialist movement can be built in the working class without waging political war against these forces. But a second political bloc exists to obscure this fundamental truth: comprising, most prominently, the Socialist Workers Party, Socialist Party and the Revolutionary Communist Party (formerly Socialist Appeal).

These groups hailed Corbyn's leadership of the Labour Party as the basis for its transformation into an instrument for socialist struggle. Every episode of his rotten record in office was excused as an error, or the result of pressure from the Blairites, to be corrected by polite advice that paved the way for his next betrayal.

This type of politics was skewered by Trotsky as it manifested in the 1920s in the work of the left journalist H. N. Brailsford—the editor of the Independent Labour Party's newspaper for several years. "His historical mission," Trotsky wrote, "consists in 'correcting' [trade union leader J.H.] Thomas and [Labour leader Ramsay] MacDonald, in creating a safety valve for the discontent of the masses, in blurring the edges and in dissolving cogent thought into a formless 'leftism'."

By "fraternising" with communist ideas, Trotsky added, "Brailsford camouflages his adherence to a party which expels British communists."

Pushed on their adaptation to Corbyn, the SWP et al would protest that Corbyn was a necessary stage in the development of a left-wing movement in Britain. He was, in the most elaborate justification given by the SWP, part of the "new birth" of the "life cycle" of reformism.

Again, Trotsky was scathing of this "passive, conciliatory, wait-and-see attitude towards the treacherous leaders on the pretext that they reflect the present stage of development of the working class, that 'they are the best there is,' that 'there is no one yet ready to replace them,' and so forth."

The championing of Corbyn went into overdrive after his meek expulsion from the Labour Party. All of what passes for "left" politics was framed around exhorting action from Jeremy, the patron saint of the British left without whose benediction nothing could proceed.

A "Summit of Resistance" organised by the SWP, SP, Counterfire and others hailed Corbyn as "The People's Prime Minister", giving him pride of place to prattle about a movement of local communities based around the "dignity statement" of his Peace and Justice Project. Always a fixture of the SWP's Marxism Festival, Corbyn's appearance at the events in 2024 and 2025 was greeted with special rapture and chants of "Oh Jeremy Corbyn!"

Corbyn attended each of these events with gritted teeth, briefly surrounding himself with people he despised to burnish his "left" credentials. He thanks them today with a kick in the teeth.

Vote for Jeremy!

Yet nothing Corbyn and his allies have done in Your Party will shift the line of these tendencies.

Instead, during the party's founding conference, the SWP published "Battle for future of Your Party as leadership witch-hunts left", which goes on to speak in the politest terms about "different visions of what the new party could look like".

The *Socialist Worker* calls for a "united" Your Party "with a collective leadership with both Corbyn and Sultana." Directing members how to vote, the SWP backs Sultana's slate but also calls for a vote for Corbyn.

The SP squirms over Corbyn and Sultana that "[T]o vote for one but not the other would accelerate the possibility of an early split—without a

sufficiently clear demarcation—which would set back the role Your Party could still play”.

What a fraud! Just as Corbyn told his supporters to bare their necks to the Blairites, these organisations tell theirs to do the same to Corbyn.

With the capitalist class facing deepening hostility among millions of workers to its agenda of austerity and war, this neutering of left-wing sentiment plays a vital role for imperialism. Describing the role of the left trade union leader and Labour MP A.A. Purcell during the events leading up to the British General Strike, Trotsky explained:

[T]he highest post in the mechanism of capitalist stabilization is no longer occupied by MacDonald and Thomas, but by Pugh, Purcell, Cook and Co. They do the work and Thomas adds the finishing touches. Without Purcell, Thomas would be left hanging in mid-air and along with Thomas also Baldwin. The chief brake upon the British revolution is the false, diplomatic masquerade “Leftism” of Purcell which... is always ready not only for retreats but also for betrayal.

Criticising the policy of the Communist Party under the influence of Stalin, Trotsky said, “For one year we tried to hammer into your heads the meaning of the Anglo-Russian Committee. We told you that it was ruining the developing revolutionary movement of the British proletariat.”

Yet they threw their support “on the scales in support of Purcell. You will say, ‘But we criticize him!’ This is nothing else than a new form of support to opportunism... You ‘criticize’ Purcell—ever more mildly, ever more rarely—and you remain tied to him.”

How much worse to have done so for a decade, for a figure so incomparably further to the right, so much more disconnected from the working class, as Corbyn.

The record of the Socialist Equality Party

The Socialist Equality Party has maintained from the moment Corbyn gained traction in the 2015 Labour leadership election: “The issue placed before the working class is not a return to the Labour Party or the fashioning of a new pro-capitalist formation that employs socialism purely as a rhetorical trick, but the building of a genuine socialist and internationalist party of the working class.”

We said this based on an analysis of the fundamental features of contemporary capitalism, knowing that it clashed with the popular mood of the movement but that this was the necessary line of march out of the betrayals and defeats into which Corbyn would lead it. We defended the point against all the other organisations named above, who confirmed Trotsky’s identification of the “principal psychological feature of opportunism” as “its inability to wait”:

In periods when friendly and hostile social forces, by virtue of their antagonism and their interaction, create a total political standstill... in such periods opportunism, devoured by impatience, looks around for “new” ways and means of putting into effect what history is not yet ready for in practice. Tired of its own inadequacy and unreliability, it goes in search of “allies.” It hurls itself avidly upon the dung-heap of liberalism [or Corbynism]. It implores it, it appeals to it, it invents special formulae for how it could act... It rushes from place to place, grabbing possible allies

by their coattails. It harangues its own adherents, admonishing them to be considerate towards all potential allies. “Tact, more tact, still more tact!”

Trotsky’s was not a passive waiting, but an energetic “policy of accumulating forces which can only be fully realized in periods of open revolutionary conflict.” This is the task now. What has been squashed or left dormant in the working class by the politics of adaptation, subservience and apologia can be animated by the politics of intransigence, rebellion and ruthless criticism.

We call on our workers and young people to read our recent statement, “The Mandelson-Epstein crisis and the socialist struggle against the Starmer government”, to study our arguments—take up, circulate and advocate for them—and above all to join the SEP in the fight to build it.



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