Jeremy Corbyn’s silence on Europe in revolt

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Over the past two months, mass protests and strikes have spread across Europe, involving millions of students and workers. A teachers’ strike over staff shortages at the Lycée Antoine-de-Saint-Exupéry in Paris on September 17, followed by student-led strikes and protests in the south-eastern suburbs, spread by the first week of October to hundreds of schools, colleges and universities.

By mid-October, striking fuel and public-sector workers joined students, with more than one million demonstrating across France. They were met with violent police repression and mass arrests.

Simultaneously, a protest in Madrid against the eviction of 87-year-old Maricarmen from her apartment on September 23 led to coordinated demonstrations by October 3 in more than 50 cities, culminating in this week’s Spanish general strike involving more than 3 million workers.

In Germany, 150,000 students in 35 cities joined the *Gen Z regelt* protests over military conscription, impossible living costs, rearmament and war.

In Albania, a wave of student protests swept the country against cuts to education and financial aid, and poor job prospects. These built on earlier protests over the Sazan Island Resort being developed by Jared Kushner and Ivanka Trump, in a country where workers’ average annual gross income is just €11,300.

Strikes and protests have also developed in Belgium, Portugal, Italy, Serbia, Greece, Austria and Ireland.

As Alex Lantier, national secretary of the Parti de l’égalité socialiste (PES), wrote on the *World Socialist Web Site* on October 22, “There is an echo in the present events of 1848, a year of revolutionary upheavals across the continent. This is, of course, an analogy, not a concrete comparison. The world of 2026 is vastly different from that of 1848. But the rapid spread of mass protests from France across Europe and beyond expresses the essentially global character of the movement now unfolding. More fundamentally, its emerging social and political essence is working class and socialist, not bourgeois-democratic.”

In Britain, support for the protests and strikes is widespread. At street campaigns, workplace leafleting and campus literature stalls run by the Socialist Equality Party (UK), workers and young people have expressed admiration for the revolutionary traditions of the French working class and support for their struggle.

Millions can see that youth in Europe are fighting the same problems as in the UK: a severe cost-of-living and housing crisis, brutal austerity, the complicity of governments in genocide, escalating global war, attacks on immigrants and the rise of the far-right.

Statements such as “I wish the same would happen here” are common, as are questions about why this is not the case. This identification with the European protests registers the objective unity of workers and youth across national borders, against the toxic nationalism, xenophobia and wars promoted by capitalist governments.

But while workers and youth in Britain have followed the wave of European protest on social media, posting messages of support, Britain’s labour and trade union bureaucracy, including its “left” wing, has been virtually silent. This goes a long way toward explaining why the protests and strikes in Europe have not yet developed in Britain.

Britain’s labour and trade union bureaucrats have watched with hostility and fear an emerging process of social and political radicalisation in the working class, above all its youngest generation, against governments—whether led by Sanchez, Merz or Macron—which function, in the words of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, as “a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie”.

Fear of the class struggle, and the danger of “contagion” from Europe, is epitomised by the response of Jeremy Corbyn and his co-leaders of Your Party. Likewise, Zack Polanski’s Green Party, Labour’s Socialist Campaign Group, and trade union “lefts” have acted in concert to block British workers and youth from joining a developing pan-European movement against war, austerity and authoritarianism.

Behind Corbyn’s silence

In two months, Corbyn has issued not a single tweet in solidarity with the European protests. The train from London St Pancras to Paris Gare de Nord takes two hours and twenty minutes. Yet Corbyn’s response to hundreds of thousands of students and workers protesting just across the Channel was to pretend it wasn’t happening. Addressing 250,000 people at the national rally for Palestine on October 10, Corbyn said nothing of the events sweeping France and Europe. Not even the international dockworkers’ strike against Israel’s genocide in Gaza, the largest coordinated action by port workers in history, was deemed worthy of a tweet by this self-declared champion of the Palestinians.

Corbyn’s Your Party, founded last November and pledged to “internationalism” and “socialism”, has issued no statement supporting the protests and strikes. On October 30, it posted a single message about the international dockworkers’ action against genocide, but made no call on the Trades Union Congress or its affiliated unions for practical measures (strikes, work bans, and emergency aid shipments) to paralyse the Israeli war machine and save Palestinian lives.

Corbyn’s only extended comment was to the independent outlet Breakthrough News (BTN) on October 14, supporting the youth

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protests and describing them as directed “against the war machine of Europe”. He described Ursula von der Leyen, head of the European Union, as “leading the idea that Europe should become a military alliance itself and should be directly involved in wars in Africa and Ukraine”. A month of silence has followed.

His statements to BTN are, in any case, pro forma. Despite threats of nuclear retaliation, the Burnham Labour government is escalating UK involvement in the NATO-Russia war in Ukraine, declaring that Britain has 1,000 days to prepare for a major military conflict. It has deployed Royal Air Force (RAF) fighter planes to Saudi Arabia’s war in Yemen and is providing logistical and military backing for the US-led war on Iran.

If Corbyn were a genuine socialist, he would have seized on the strikes and protests across Europe and called for the broadest political and industrial mobilisation of the working class and youth in Britain against the catastrophic war and austerity policies of the Burnham government, waged as a common struggle with workers and youth across the continent.

Corbyn is no such leader. Instead, his activities have focused on demands for a parliamentary inquiry into British complicity in the Gaza genocide. On October 19, Burnham formally rejected Corbyn’s call for a Chilcot-style inquiry into the UK’s military, economic, and political cooperation with Israel since October 2023. As under Starmer, the Foreign Office stated it “does not believe that the proposed inquiry is necessary”.

Despite Labour’s continued backing for the Gaza genocide, including RAF intelligence and supply missions over Gaza for the Israel Defense Forces, Corbyn has stepped up his futile pleas to the government. Responding to Burnham’s rejection of a public inquiry—whose terms, as under Chilcot, preclude any legally enforceable findings—Corbyn has spent weeks promoting Your Party’s parliamentary petition, gathering more than 100,000 signatures to trigger a parliamentary debate.

Corbyn is a master of doomed-to-fail initiatives, content in his allotted role as a backbench critic. His ineffectual moral hand-wringing is joined to parliamentary cretinism, seeking always to redirect anti-war sentiment behind appeals to the Labour Party and the British state.

Left-wing and anti-capitalist sentiment in Britain was expressed last year through mass support for Zarah Sultana’s announcement of a new left-wing party co-led with Corbyn against Starmer’s Labour Party. She wrote: “Billionaires already have three parties fighting for them. It’s time the rest of us had one”. 850,000 people signed up in support.

The potential for a mass political break by workers and youth from Labour was deliberately sabotaged by Corbyn and his backers. Having blocked the formation of a mass “socialist” party for years, when he could no longer prevent it, Corbyn ensured it would offer no serious challenge to the Labour Party and British capitalism.

Sultana, who spoke repeatedly last year against the “failures of Corbynism”, advances no alternative to Corbyn on Europe or anything else. In two months, her online X account has offered just four words on the mass protests in Europe, posted October 6: “Solidarity with the students!”, alongside a raised-fist and French flag emoji. On October 8, she retweeted Jean-Luc Mélenchon’s post, “The Bastille has been retaken”, showing thousands of students occupying the Place de la République.

This, like Corbyn’s celebration of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva’s presidential election victory in Brazil, or Sultana’s cheering of the German Left Party’s victory in Berlin, is not “internationalism” but the promotion of pseudo-left politicians devoted to upholding capitalist rule. Mélenchon has responded to the deepest crisis of French capitalism since May-June 1968 not with calls for a general strike to topple Macron and bring to power a workers’ government, but with nationalist calls for a Sixth Republic to be achieved via next year’s presidential elections.

Corbyn and Sultana’s silence mirrors that of Labour’s rump Socialist Campaign Group of Labour MPs, including John McDonnell and Diane Abbott, and the Green Party under Zack Polanski, which has issued no appeal to its many young supporters to take part in a continent-wide struggle against war, austerity, and environmental destruction.

Corbyn, in his appeals to the alleged good conscience of the Labour Party and the parliamentary institutions of the British state, represents the fag end of Fabianism. His exhortations to end war, genocide and oppression, and for a society “of the many, not the few”, are directed not to the working class but to the ruling class and its trusted servants.

Trotsky wrote more than a century ago of Fabianism as a “mental junk shop” whose advocacy of evolutionary socialism (via parliamentary and municipal reform), liberalism and religion was directed against the class struggle. The early Fabians (Sidney and Beatrice Webb, George Bernard Shaw, Ramsay MacDonald) regarded the struggle between capital and labour as a positive evil, because its outcome, as Marx predicted, was socialist revolution and the abolition of class society.

For the Fabians, social change would be introduced from above, by the high-minded representatives of the propertied classes. Trotsky observed, “Throughout the whole history of the British Labour movement there has been pressure by the bourgeoisie upon the proletariat through the agency of radicals, intellectuals, drawing-room and church socialists and Owenites who reject the class struggle and advocate the principle of social solidarity, preach collaboration with the bourgeoisie, bridle, enfeeble and politically debase the proletariat.”

Driven by the third major breakdown of the global capitalist system since 1914, the working class across Europe is stirring. Mass student strikes and youth protests anticipate a new period of revolutionary struggle, one that the working class in Britain will inevitably join. The urgent task facing humanity is the resolution of the crisis of working class leadership. In Britain, this means a conscious political break with the pro-Labour, pseudo-reformist politics of Corbynism and the building of the Socialist Equality Party, based on the strategy of the United Socialist States of Europe and the world.

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