

# RED PAGES

● Labour Party Conference 2019 ●

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## Walk out on Watson!

Today's protest against Labour Party deputy leader Tom Watson is long overdue. Since he was elected in September 2015, Watson has played a despicable role in the 'anti-Semitism' witch-hunt (he is a member of the Labour Friends of Israel, naturally enough) and has from day one connived with the scab majority of the Parliamentary Labour Party to undermine, discredit and ultimately remove Corbyn.

Of course, we have our own criticisms of Jeremy. He has been weak, irresolute and has made far too many important concessions to the squalid, anti-socialist right of the party and their human teleprompters in the mainstream media. In his speech to conference yesterday, John McDonnell commented that an important aspect of Corbyn's persona is the way he embodies the "kind and gentle politics that he advocates".

In truth, we could do with a lot less otherworldly kindness and forbearance, when it comes to the likes of Watson and the PLP. The left needs to take the fight to the right.

That said, we would take an educated guess that Jeremy will allow himself a wry smile today when comrades turn their backs on Watson, sing 'Oh Jeremy Corbyn' and/or walk out.

Sadly, we have to put on record that a disappointing feature of the preparation for today's protest has been the obstructive role played by the bulk of the organised left in Labour. In the lead-up to today's action, these political forces:

- Sharply criticised those who welcomed the opportunity to get shot of Watson that Momentum leader Jon Lansman created when he tabled a motion to scrap the position of deputy leader altogether. What was needed instead was an entirely *imaginary* "mass socialist movement from below" to do the job for us. This would be our preference, of course, but in the meantime ...
- Have energetically used social media to talk the protest down, to issue dire warnings of reprisals and ambushes from the party's apparatus and generally spread as much downbeat passivity and demoralisation as they could muster.
- Gravely intoned that we should restrict ourselves only to activities explicitly initiated and endorsed by the party leadership - preferably by Jeremy himself. So, as our dear leader "hasn't told us to do it", it shouldn't happen.

In our view, in this unstable and fluid period, taking an Eeyore stance on the political opportunities that sometimes present themselves is *not* what socialists should be doing.

In stark contrast, Labour Party Marxists congratulates comrades who have organised this protest action and have shown Tom Watson exactly what the militant rank and file think of him and his treacherous campaign of sabotage.

**Today's issue: Tuesday September 24 2019**

- Jeremy Corbyn attacks a banner as "anti-Semitic" - but is it really?
- Why calling for a general election now is not a good idea

# Alice in Brexitland

At Brighton the party's contortions over Brexit have become even more extreme. Jeremy Corbyn has been widely mocked for advocating a 'neutral' stance in any post-election referendum - or 'creative ambiguity', as it used to be called.

To that end, on Sunday night the NEC backed by 16 votes to 10 a motion tabled by Corbyn saying a Labour government would negotiate a "sensible" 'leave' deal with the European Union and within six months would put it before the people in a referendum alongside the option to remain. But, according to the statement, Labour would "only decide" how to campaign in such a referendum at a one-day special conference. This would be held at the end of a three month period during which Labour would try to negotiate its own Brexit deal - with Corbyn himself, it seems, playing the honest broker carrying out whatever the people decide.

As is always the case with Brexit, for some this statement does not go anywhere near far enough. Labour should be the party of 'remain' pure and simple like the Liberal Democrats, who are now committed to revoking article 50 if they win the general election. That, of course, is not going to happen, which means it is the same old 'remain' position.

For others, however, the leadership/NEC line is an insult to the 17.4 million who voted to leave the EU, offering them a non-choice between 'remain' and Brino ('Brexit in name only'), as in reality this "sensible" option entails remaining part of the customs union and keeping a "close" relationship with the single market - not to mention contributing to the EU budget, accepting the continuation of free movement, and so on. As many Brexiteers point out - with a certain logic - what then is the point of leaving the EU? We might as well stay in - at least you get a vote.

After the usual bureaucratic haggling into the early hours, two motions were presented to conference, along with the NEC statement. Composite 13 said Labour "must reflect the overwhelming view of its members and voters" who want to stay in the EU - therefore the party will "campaign energetically" for 'remain' in that referendum, while "recognising the rights of those members who want to argue another view". Alternatively, composite 14 endorsed the leadership's approach, although it did not *explicitly* say the party's referendum stance should not be decided until after the special conference - a slight

fudge. Rather, the motion declared, Jeremy Corbyn has made the way forward "abundantly clear" by backing a public vote between a "credible" Brexit

and 'remain' - at the same time seeking "maximum consensus" around policies "for the many, not the few". Again doing his Jesus act, Corbyn said he would "go along with whatever decision the party comes to".

Before the conference debate on Brexit, the press was full of stories attacking Jeremy Corbyn because he "relies" on the union block vote to "crush members" who support 'remain'. But it was not so straightforward. Unison voted for the 'back remain now' motion, whilst Momentum's National Coordinating Group came in behind the Labour leadership's 'delay' position. But

curiously, it transpired that Momentum's owner did not approve of the NEC statement and called upon delegates to "feel free to vote with their conscience". Proving that irony is not dead, Jon Lansman described the NEC statement as a "travesty", because there had not been any "discussion" or "consultation" with the membership. If there were a prize for hypocrisy, Lansman would win it hands down, given his dictatorial running of Momentum and participation in the witch-hunt. Welcome to the politics of Alice in Brexitland.

In the end, for all the hoopla about a Unison revolt against the Labour leadership, both the NEC statement and composite 14 were passed - Corbyn loyalism won out. Supporters of composite 13 staged a little protest, demanding a card vote. But the chair overruled them, saying the show of hands clearly indicated that the motion had been defeated - which seemed correct to observers in the hall.

Emphasising the absurdity of it all, the conference vote might not even determine Labour's position anyway, as party officials sheepishly admit. The decision on what goes into the manifesto will be taken nearer the time at a 'clause five' meeting, where the NEC, shadow cabinet and union leaders will agree the text of the document. You might even think it was a waste of time going to conference.

For Marxists neither the NEC statement nor the motions were worthy of support, as they remain trapped in the bourgeois politics of 'remain'/'leave' - which would only be reinforced by another referendum. The reformist politics of 'remain' and the nationalist slogans of 'leave' have split the working class right down the middle. Instead, Labour should be fighting for internationalism and genuine working class politics to challenge capitalism.

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# General election now? Not such a good idea!

Most of the Labour left supports the call for an immediate general election - it seems such common sense: Jeremy Corbyn will sweep into power, establish a socialist government and create a country "for the many, not the few". But this scenario ignores a few inconvenient truths - chiefly the fact that the vast majority of the Parliamentary Labour Party remain deeply hostile to Corbyn and will do everything to get rid of him when the time is right.

A year ago conference decided to prioritise the call for an immediate general election. This was, of course, very much linked to the question of Brexit and today the two questions are still regarded as closely intertwined - especially by the Labour right.

That is because for the right, along with the capitalist class, the immediate priority is to put a stop to the very real possibility of Britain leaving the European Union on October 31 without a deal. If that aim is accomplished, then the next priority will be to stop Brexit altogether.

So how can that be done? Well, by replacing Boris Johnson as prime minister as quickly as possible. This is why for the moment the Labour right has toned down its opposition to the Corbyn leadership. If a general election is called, they hope that Johnson's dreams of winning a clear majority for the Tories will be thwarted.

The calculation is that, just as in 2017, Labour will gain substantial ground thanks to another Corbyn surge and there will be a clear, self-declared *anti-Brexit* majority in parliament. Not necessarily a *Labour* majority, you understand - just like last time around, the right hopes that the surge will perhaps be insufficient for Labour to win the election outright.

So much the better! In the medium term the right still hopes to depose Corbyn and return Labour into the safe hands of the pro-establishment Blairites. But right now their aim is to stop Brexit by any means, and that can only mean unseating Johnson very quickly. Yes, they know that the prime minister himself has been calling for a general election, but they hope that he has miscalculated and the opinion polls are wrong!

Let us imagine for the moment that their wishes come true and that there is indeed another hung parliament. If that is the case, will Johnson be able to hold on to the premiership? At the very least it would be a severe blow to his hopes. In such a situation it is entirely possible that the queen will be advised that someone other than the leader of the Conservative Party should be summoned to Buckingham Palace to be charged with forming a government. There has, of course, been an anti-Brexit majority among MPs all along - the referendum changed nothing in that regard.

But now, assuming such a setback to Johnson's hopes actually occurs, there would be a real possibility that the 'remainers' would insist on forming a government themselves. We are talking about - yes - a 'na-

tional government', consisting of Tory anti-Brexiteers, the Labour right, the Liberal Democrats and the Scottish and Welsh nationalists. In other words, a government *not* headed by Jeremy Corbyn.

That is why Corbyn's own proposal for a temporary national government, headed by himself, was so foolish: He legitimised the idea of a cross-class coalition - however short-term and limited in its aims - and the Labour right has been only too pleased to take up the idea and use it for their own ends.

Now imagine Labour wins an overall majority. Unfortunately, that does not automatically mean there will be a Corbyn-led government - in fact the odds would be against it. The Labour right is still aiming to depose him, if he was appointed prime minister that would represent a major setback for them. So, once again, the possibility of a national government would rear its head.

For the right - and the entire ruling class - a 'government of national unity' would be the best of both worlds, with two major aims achieved simultaneously: stopping Brexit and seeing off the threat of a Corbyn premiership.

In these circumstances it is very foolish indeed for the Labour left to call for an early general election. Leaving aside the fact that this is what Johnson wants too, there are bigger issues at stake.

Let us not forget that there remains a job to be done within our party. It is not just Tom Watson who wants to stymie hopes of a genuinely leftwing Labour Party - one where the entire organisation from top to bottom is controlled by the membership in the interests of the working class. There is also the important question of the Parliamentary Labour Party. The PLP remains dominated by the anti-Corbyn, pro-capitalist right and requires urgent attention if we want to transform Labour into the party we need.

And that brings us to another decision of last year's conference - the reform of the trigger ballot system, enabling CLPs to begin the process of replacing MPs with candidates who better reflect the current make-up of the Labour Party. Unfortunately for most of last year the NEC sat on its hands and it was only in June that it gave the go-ahead to start the whole thing off in September.

As far as we know, Diana Johnson of Kingston upon Hull North is the only MP who has been 'triggered' - meaning that she will have to go through a selection process, if there is sufficient time before a snap election is called. Otherwise she will be automatically installed as the Labour candidate. A snap general election will mean that the PLP will remain totally dominated by the anti-Corbyn right - possibly for another five years!

In other words, comrades, let's get our priorities right and concentrate on the fight to transform the Labour Party.

# Is this really anti-Semitic?

On September 22, pro-Zionists outside the Labour Party conference attacked a banner displayed near the entrance. They tore it down three times in the course of a few hours, claiming it was anti-Semitic, then slashed it in half with a knife.

We have important political differences with its owner, Peter Gregson, and have parted ways with him following his expulsion from Labour Against the Witchhunt.

However, the banner is obviously not anti-Semitic. It merely points the finger at those who are driving the 'Anti-Zionism equals anti-Semitism' smear campaign in the Labour Party and to what purpose – to get rid of Jeremy Corbyn. The Israeli government - in a coalition with the right wing in and outside the Labour Party - have indeed employed 'weapons of mass defamation' against the twice elected leader of the Labour Party. Next to the picture of Corbyn, the banner states: "IHRA: Tell the NEC how you feel."

Disgracefully, we read in the mainstream press that a Labour press officer asked the police to remove the banner, describing it as "grossly offensive and racist" and raving that a "hate crime" had been committed. The police swiftly confiscated it as evidence in what they dubbed a "possible public order offence" ... committed by *Peter!* This was despite the fact that the police had deemed it "acceptable" when it was first went up.



But even more disturbing was the fact that this outrageous infringement of free speech was actually endorsed by Jeremy Corbyn. He intervened personally in the confrontation ... on the side of censorship and to strengthen the perverse idea that the image was somehow "anti-Semitic poison". He will have to explain that one to us.

Corbyn still seems to believe that he can appease his critics - but all he does is step into the traps they lay, time and time again. This will only further embolden his enemies and strengthen their campaign to get rid of him. We unequivocally condemn this physical assault on free speech. Indeed, Labour Party Marxists comrades confronted some of the attackers and sent them packing.

## Labour Against the Witchhunt fringe event Tuesday September 24, 7pm: with Jackie Walker, Chris Williamson MP, Ken Livingstone, Asa Winstanley and others

Comrades are meeting from 6.30pm outside Ben & Jerry's (next to Brighton Centre). Please note that the organisers reserve the right to refuse entry. Call 07817 379 568 if you are running late.



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