



# Labour Party MARXISTS

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## RECRUIT WIN NEW AFFILIATES TRANSFORM

Jeremy Corbyn's election presents the left with a historic opportunity. **James Marshall** outlines a programme of immediate action and long-term strategic goals

**A**t the well publicised prompting of Peter Mandelson, Charles Clarke, David Blunkett and above all Tony Blair, the hard right has already launched what will be a protracted, bitter, no-holds-barred struggle to put an end to the leadership of Jeremy Corbyn. Blair's 'Alice in wonderland' opinion piece in *The Observer* had nothing to do with the former prime minister trying to swing votes in the closing two weeks of the leadership contest.<sup>1</sup> Comrade Corbyn had already won. No, its purpose was perfectly clear. Rally the Blairites and their corporate, state and international allies ... and declare war.

Given the punishing logic of the first-past-the-post election system, it is unlikely that the hard right will go for a breakaway. Minor parties tend to suffer "significant under-representation" at a national level.<sup>2</sup> Another Social Democratic Party is therefore an outside possibility. But, unlike the early 1980s, the political centre is not enjoying a sustained revival.<sup>3</sup> At the last general election the Liberal Democrats were decimated. They remain marginalised and loathed. It is probably true that "more than two" Labour MPs are considering defection, either to the Tories or the Lib Dems. Nonetheless, political suicide remains an unattractive proposition for most Blairites.<sup>4</sup> Their constituents would turf them out at the first opportunity. Instead of the glories of high office, it will be the musty corridors of the House of Lords. Knowing that, the right will therefore stay firmly put and fight hard ... until we send them packing.

The well-timed announcement by leading members of the right that they would refuse seats in Corbyn's



shadow cabinet needs to be understood as an act of civil war. Yvette Cooper, Chuka Umunna, Tristram Hunt, Emma Reynolds, Liz Kendall, Shabana Mahmood, Mary Creagh, Jamie Reid, Chris Leslie and Rachel Reeves have in effect constituted themselves a shadow-shadow cabinet. This parliamentary gang of 10 are still members of the Labour Party, but, obviously, they do not share the same values as the mass of Labour members.

In that context, Corbyn is absolutely right to maintain the leader's 'hire and fire' prerogative. After all, he faces not just 10 rebels. No, it is more like 110. We Marxists want the abolition of the Bonarpartist post of leader. But these are extraordinary times and require extraordinary measures. The idea of having the PLP elect the shadow cabinet was being touted by the right. Thankfully Corbyn's early pronouncements on this subject were rethought. He wisely opted to keep the *dictatorial* powers long favoured by past Labour leaders.

Appointing the shadow chancellor was always going to be a litmus test. The more timid members of Corbyn's inner circle were reportedly urging him to go for someone from the centre. Instead he chose John McDonnell. Excellent. So there is in effect a Corbyn-McDonnell leadership.

Offering shadow cabinet seats to the likes of Andy Burnham, Hilary Benn, Angela Eagle, Lucy Powell, Lord Falconer, Rosie Winterton and Chris Byrant was always going to happen. Corbyn is a natural conciliator. And the fact of the matter is that there are simply not enough leftwingers in parliament. Unless, that is, Corbyn went for a pocket-sized shadow cabinet and appointed talents from

outside parliament. That is what we LPMers advocated.

Nevertheless, equipped with his left-centre-right coalition, Corbyn can claim the moral high ground. He is reaching out to all sections of the party. Meanwhile, in terms of *internal* perceptions, it is the hard right that will be blamed for starting the civil war. That will play well with traditional Labour loyalists. They do not take kindly to anyone damaging Labour's chances at the polls. After all, for most Labour councillors and would-be councillors, most Labour MPs and would-be MPs, the be-all and end-all of politics is getting into office ... even if the manifesto promises nothing more than managing capitalism better than the Tories. A misplaced common sense that wide swathes of the Labour left, including Corbyn and McDonnell, have thoroughly internalised.

However, the hard right will have the full backing of the capitalist media, the City of London, the military-industrial complex, special branch, MI5 and their American cousins. Corbyn's much publicised admiration for Karl Marx, his campaigning against US-led imperialist wars, his opposition to Nato, Trident and nuclear weapons, his commitment to increase the tax take from transnational corporations, the banks and the mega rich, his republicanism - even his refusal to sing the national anthem at St Paul's - mark him out as completely unacceptable.

Of course, the distinct danger is that the Corbyn-McDonnell leadership will have their agenda set for them by the need to maintain PLP unity. Put another way, in what is a coalition cabinet, it will be the right that sets the limits and therefore determines the political programme. Why? Because they are quite prepared to walk. That is what Burnham has indicated over Nato and nuclear weapons. The decision by Corbyn to kneel before Elizabeth Windsor and accept a place on her privy council is therefore more than a symbolic gesture.

Watering down, abandoning, putting principles onto the backburner in an attempt to placate the right, if it continues to happen, will prove fatal. Such a course will demobilise, demoralise and drain away Corbyn's mass base in and out of the party.

Hence the Corbyn-McDonnell leadership faces both an enemy within the PLP and an enemy within their own reformist ideology. They seriously seem to believe that socialism can be brought about piecemeal, through a series of left and ever lefter Labour governments. In reality, though, a Labour government committed to the existing state and the existing constitutional order produces not decisive steps in the direction of socialism, but attacks on the working class ... and the return of a Tory government.

Tactically, Marxists will, for the moment, concentrate their fire on the hard right in the shadow cabinet. 'Blairites out' should be the common slogan of the left. The mass of Labour members trust the Corbyn-McDonnell leadership, but they have an instinctive distrust for those who support the Progress outfit, those allied with Lord David Sainsbury and the gang of ten, those who vote for welfare cuts, those who want British forces to join the bombing of Syria. Clearly the Blairites are closer in mind and spirit to the Tories than Labour's members, supporters and affiliates. An obvious target, therefore, is Tony Blair's old flatmate and co-thinker, Lord Charlie Falconer. He has already threatened to quit over the EU referendum.

## Immediate

The left in the Labour Party faces three immediate tasks.

Firstly, there must be a concerted drive to win registered supporters to become full individual members. There are now well over 100,000 of

them. If they want to bolster Corbyn's position, if they want to ensure that he stays true to his principles, if they want to transform the Labour Party, then the best thing they can do is to get themselves a vote when it comes to the national executive committee, the selection and reselection of MPs, MEPs, councillors, etc. Card-carrying members can also attend ward and constituency meetings and themselves stand for officer positions.

Secondly, within the affiliated trade unions we must fight to win many, many more to enrol. Just over 70,000 affiliated supporters voted in the leadership election. A tiny portion of what could be. There are 4,414,929 who pay the political levy.<sup>5</sup> Given that they can sign up to the Labour Party with no more than a click, we really ought to have a million affiliated supporters as a minimum target.

Thirdly, the constituency, branch (ward) and other such basic units must be revived and galvanised. Everything should be done to encourage new members, and returnees, to attend meetings and elect officers who oppose austerity and want to support the Corbyn-McDonnell leadership. Labour's constituency and branches can be made into vibrant centres of organisation, education and action. As such they would be well placed to hold wayward councillors and MPs to account. They could also spearhead a mass campaign to get local people onto the electoral register. The electoral commission reports that nationally "approximately 7.5 million individuals are not registered".<sup>6</sup> Most are "Labour-inclined".<sup>7</sup>

## Reorganise

As the hard right begins its civil war, the left must respond with a combination of intimidation, constitutional changes and reselection. Those proven to be in the pay of big business, those sabotaging our election campaigns, those who vote with the Tories on austerity, war, housing benefits, migration or so-called humanitarian interventions, must be hauled up before the NEC. If MPs refuse to abide by party discipline, they must be warned that they face expulsion. If that results in a smaller PLP in the short term, that is a price well worth paying.

Meanwhile, we should take full advantage of our current rules. The 'trigger' mechanism allows local party units, including both individual members and affiliated organisations, "to determine whether the constituency holds a full open selection contest for its next candidate, in which other potential candidates are nominated or reselects the sitting MP without such a contest."<sup>8</sup> Ironically, if it happens, David Cameron's proposed reduction in the number of MPs from 650 to 600, and the expected boundary changes, due to be announced in October 2018, could prove to be a golden opportunity. We should deselect hard-right MPs and democratically select tried and trusted leftwing replacements.

Obviously, the party must be reorganised from top to bottom. A special conference - eg, in spring 2016 - should be called by the NEC with a view to radically overhauling the constitution and rules and undertaking an across-the-board political reorientation. We need a new clause four, we need a sovereign conference, we need to be able to easily reselect MPs, MEPs and councillors. We also need to sweep away the undemocratic rules and structures put in place under Blair. The joint policy committee, the national policy forums - the whole horrible rigmarole - should be swept away at the earliest possible opportunity.

Clearly, it is going to take time to change the political make-up of the PLP and subordinate it to the wishes of the membership. But with force of numbers, tactical flexibility and

ruthless determination it can be done.

A particularly potent weapon here is the demand that all our elected representatives should take only the average wage of a skilled worker. A principle upheld by the Paris Commune and the Bolshevik revolution. From memory the Italian Communist Party under Enrico Berlinguer applied the partymax even in the 1970s. With the PCI's huge parliamentary fraction this proved to be a vital source of funds.

Our MPs are now on a basic £67,060 annual salary. On top of that they get around £12,000 in expenses and allowances, putting them on £79,060 (yet at present Labour MPs are only obliged to pay the £82 parliamentarian's subscription

rate). And, as leader of the official opposition, Jeremy Corbyn has just got himself a £6,000 pay rise.<sup>9</sup>

We in the LPM say, let them keep the average skilled workers' wage - say £40,000 (plus legitimate expenses). However, they should hand the balance over to the party. That would give a considerable boost to our finances. Even if we leave out our 20 MEPs from the calculation, it would amount to roughly £900,000 extra. Anyway, whatever our finances, there is a basic principle. Our representatives ought to live like ordinary workers, not pampered members of the upper middle class. So, yes, let us impose the partymax.

In the three days following Corbyn's

election, 30,000 joined the party.<sup>10</sup> Many more should be expected. But we need to reach out to *all* those who are disgusted by corrupt career politicians, *all* those who aspire for a better world, *all* those who have an objective interest in ending capitalism. To do that we need to establish our own mass media.

Much to the chagrin of the fourth estate, comrade Corbyn has shown his "contempt" for the capitalist press, radio and TV. Relying on their favours worked splendidly for Tony Blair and Alistair Campbell. But our newly elected leader will get nothing but mockery, hatchet jobs and implacable opposition. While there will doubtless be an attempt to court *The Guardian* and the Mirror group, Corbyn's turning to the social media is understandable and very much to be welcomed. However, as is obvious, tweeting and texting have severe limits. They are brilliant mediums for transmitting short, sharp, clear messages. But, when it comes to complex ideas, debating principles and charting political strategies, they are next to useless.

To set the agenda, however, we must shun those siren voices urging us to engage with the "unpersuaded" by relying on the existing "mainstream media".<sup>11</sup> As Gordon Brown and Ed Miliband found to their cost, to live by the mainstream media is to die by the mainstream media. No, we need our own full-spectrum alternative.

Once we had the *Daily Herald*. Now we have nothing. Well, apart from the dead-dull trade union house journals, the advertising sheets of the confessional sects and the *Morning Star* (which in reality is still under the grip of unreconstructed Stalinites). No, we should aim for an opinion-forming daily paper of the labour movement and seek out trade union, cooperative, crowd and other such sources of funding. And, to succeed, we have to be brave: iconoclastic viewpoints, difficult issues, two-way arguments, must be included as a matter of course. The possibility of distributing it free of charge should be considered and, naturally, everything should be put up on the web without page limits or paywalls. We should also seriously consider internet-based TV and radio stations. With the riches of dedication, passion and ideas that exist on the left, we can surely better the BBC, Al Jazeera, Russia Today and Sky.

Branding good people as 'infiltrators' because, mainly out of frustration, they supported the Greens, Tusc or Left Unity, at the last general election, does nothing to advance the socialist cause in the Labour Party. Such a jaundiced response smacks of cold-war bans and proscriptions. We should be proud of being a federal party. Therefore securing new affiliates ought to be at the top of our agenda. I am sure the FBU and RMT will soon be back. But what of PCS and NUT? Why can't we win them to affiliate? Surely we can ... if we fight for hearts and minds. Then there are the leftwing groups and parties. They too can be brought under our banner. Labour can become the common home of every socialist organisation, cooperative and trade union - the agreed goal of our founders.<sup>12</sup> In other words, we can become what Trotsky called a permanent united front of the working class.

Yet sadly, so far, in terms of those outside Labour, apart from the CPGB, there has been a distinct lack of imagination. Instead of a banging on the door, there is a cowardly disengagement. An approach designed to preserve sectarian interests and brittle reputations.

Showing his profundity, his prostration before Scottish nationalism, his unconscious English nationalism, the media darling, Tariq Ali, assesses Corbyn's victory as "England coming to life again".<sup>13</sup> In that same blinkered



## Alternative clause four proposed by LPM

### Objectives

1. Labour is the federal party of the working class. We strive to bring all trade unions, cooperatives, socialist societies and leftwing groups and parties under our banner. We believe that unity brings strength.

2. Labour is committed to replacing the rule of capital with the rule of the working class. Socialism introduces a democratically planned economy, ends the ecologically ruinous cycle of production for the sake of production and moves towards a stateless, classless, moneyless society that embodies the principle "from each according to their abilities, to each according to their needs". Alone such benign conditions create the possibility

of every individual fully realising their innate potentialities.

3. Towards that end Labour commits itself to achieving a democratic republic. The standing army, the monarchy, the House of Lords and the state sponsorship of the Church of England must go. We support a single chamber parliament, proportional representation and annual elections.

4. Labour seeks to win the active backing of the majority of people and forming a government on this basis.

5. We shall work with others, in particular in the European Union, in pursuit of the aim of replacing capitalism with working class rule and socialism ●



spirit he privileges protest politics as against parliamentary politics. Of course, comrade Ali is one of those freelance socialists, a typical dilettante. The idea of actively engaging in our civil war does not seem to occur to him nowadays.

The same goes for Charlie Kimber, national secretary of the Socialist Workers Party. Our Charlie *boasts* that he, and his much reduced band of followers, did not take up the opportunity of registering as Labour Party supporters. Why did they stand aloof? After all, a Corbyn vote cost a mere £3 ... and for levy-paying members of affiliated trade unions it was gratis. So why did the SWP refrain from giving Corbyn *voting* support? Comrade Kimber pathetically explains.

The right is set to begin a firestorm. The PLP is dominated by the right. Corbyn has the active support of no more than 20 MPs. Tom Watson is a Brownite. Lord Mandelson is advising protracted war. The trade unions are dominated by a self-serving bureaucracy. There will be internal struggles and attempts to introduce constitutional and programmatic changes.

What ought to be a challenge to join the fight becomes an excuse to stay clear.

Having been torn by splits and divisions in the 1970s and then again in the 2010s, the SWP apparatus wants nothing to do with anything that carries even the whiff of factional strife. So, as with Tariqi Ali, there is the call for marches, protests and strikes ... as counterposed to the Labour Party, PLP battles and taking sides in a *concentrated* form of the class war.<sup>14</sup> In other words, in rejecting any sort of active involvement in Labour's civil war, the SWP stays true to its modern-day version of Bakuninism.

Then we have the Socialist Party in England and Wales. Having categorically dismissed the Labour Party as an out-and-out capitalist party since the mid-1990s, it has been busily rowing ... backwards. The old *Militant* logo has now been cosmetically placed on the masthead of *The Socialist*. Nevertheless, while Peter Taaffe, SPEW's founder-leader, is a proven dunderhead, he at least has the good sense to borrow a vital element of the LPM programme. Hence we find him saying this:

Even today a few remnants of [Labour's original] federal constitution remain, with some MPs standing on behalf of the Cooperative Party under the Labour Party umbrella. Why couldn't that be extended to allow anti-austerity parties and campaigns to join with Jeremy Corbyn's Labour Party as affiliates, while maintaining their own independent identity, just as the ILP and John Maclean's British Socialist Party were able to do in the first 20 years of the party?

Leave aside the historical blunders. The BSP was never John Maclean's. A hero of the internationalist left during World War I, he ended up, however, as a sad, totally isolated figure, advocating left Scottish nationalism. True, the BSP did affiliate to the Labour Party ... in 1916. And, of course, the BSP was by far the largest component body which helped found the CPGB in August 1920 ... whose applications for Labour Party affiliation were consistently rejected. That despite very considerable grassroots support in the unions and CLPs. As for the Independent Labour Party, its special conference voted to disaffiliate from the Labour Party ... in 1932.<sup>15</sup> In other words, between ILP affiliation and disaffiliation there was not two, but three decades.

Despite such quibbles, comrade Taaffe's call for SPEW to affiliate to the Labour Party is very much to be welcomed. Nevertheless, showing his

political acumen, there is the promise that his ridiculous Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition will continue to stand against Labour candidates. A blundering approach supported by Nick Wrack's so-called Independent Socialist Network (along with the SWP, Tusc's only other political affiliate).

If Tusc candidates stood on something that resembled a Marxist programme, that would be tactically inadvisable under present circumstances. But what passes for Tusc's programme is barely distinguishable from Corbynism. Despite that, whereas the Corbyn Labour Party will get mass votes, even with many questionable candidates, Tusc will hardly register. Its votes are uniformly homeopathic.

Left Unity seems to me to be essentially no different. And, as with SPEW and the SWP, members are peeling away to join the Labour Party *as individuals*. I have been told of a 20% cancellation of standing orders. Left Unity is clearly doomed if it tries to continue as a halfway house project. Unless it votes for the motions of its Communist Platform at its November 21-22 conference, Left Unity will soon begin to fall apart.

We Labour Party Marxist unapologetically take our programmatic lead from the CPGB. Having been demanding the right to affiliate since 1920, today the CPGB ought to be accorded the same rights as the Cooperative Party, the Fabians, Christians on the Left, the Jewish Labour Movement, Scientists for Labour, etc.<sup>16</sup> However, we extend that demand to include the SWP, SPEW, Socialist Appeal, Left Unity and other such organisations.

Then there are the trade unions. Those who have disaffiliated or been expelled must be brought back into the fold. In other words the FBU and the RMT. They actively supported the Corbyn campaign ... from the outside. So, comrades, now do the same, much more effectively, from the inside. But what about those unions which have never had an organised relationship with us? Regrettably, Mark Serwotka, PSC general secretary, was one of those turned away in the Harriet Harman-organised purge. But, instead of impotently complaining about it on Twitter, he should turn the tables on the outgoing Blairite apparatus by bringing in his entire membership. Mark, fight to get PCS to affiliate.

I heard him interviewed on BBC Radio 4 on this. He enthusiastically supported Corbyn's September 15 speech at the TUC. However, he excused himself from getting the PCS to affiliate. Apparently it has been illegal for civil servant trade unions to affiliate to the Labour Party since 1927.

When we moved a motion to the effect that all trade unions should affiliate to the Labour Party at the February 2015 AGM of the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy, we met with exactly that sort of legalistic objection. However, as NEC member Christine Shawcroft, who was sitting next to me, said: "What does that matter?" Here comrade Shawcroft, a close ally of Corbyn, shows the exact right spirit of defiance. Comrade Serwotka and other leaders of non-affiliated trade unions should take her lead. Laws can be defied, laws can be changed. The key, however, is to win the PCS's membership to the idea of affiliation. It would be great if the 2016 PCS annual conference was addressed by Jeremy Corbyn and had a raft of branch motions calling for the union to affiliate to the Labour Party.

## Reclaiming

Real Marxists, not fake Marxists, have never talked of reclaiming Labour. It has never been ours in the sense of being a "political weapon for the workers' movement". No,

despite the electoral base and trade union affiliations, our party has been dominated throughout its entire history by career politicians and trade union bureaucrats. A distinct social stratum which in the last analysis serves not the interests of the working class, but the continuation of capitalist exploitation.

Speaking in the context of the need for the newly formed CPGB to affiliate to the Labour Party, Lenin said this:

[W]hether or not a party is really a political party of the workers does not depend solely upon a membership of workers, but also upon the men that lead it, and the content of its actions and its political tactics. Only this latter determines whether we really have before us a political party of the proletariat.

Regarded from this, the only correct, point of view, the Labour Party is a thoroughly bourgeois party, because, although made up of workers, it is led by reactionaries, and the worst kind of reactionaries at that, who act quite in the spirit of the bourgeoisie. It is an organisation of the bourgeoisie, which exists to systematically dupe the workers with the aid of the British Noskes and Scheidemanns.<sup>17</sup>

Despite all the subsequent changes, this assessment retains its essential purchase. Labour is still a "bourgeois workers' party". However, with Corbyn's election as leader, things have become more complex. Labour has become a chimera. Instead of a twofold contradiction, we have a threefold one. The left dominates both the top and the bottom of the party.

That gives us the possibility of attacking the rightwing domination of the middle - the councillors, the apparatus, the PLP - from below and above. No wonder the more astute minds of the bourgeois commentariat can be found expressing deep concern about what will happen to their neoliberal consensus ●

## Notes

1. *The Observer* August 30 2015.
2. A Blais (Ed) *To keep or to change first past the post?* Oxford 2008, p66.
3. From a 2.5% historic low point in 1951, the Liberal Party saw a revival in the 1970s, which saw it win 19.3% of the popular vote in the February 1974 general election.
4. [www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-34305994](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-34305994).
5. D Pryer *Trade union political funds and levy* House of Commons briefing paper No00593, August 8 2013, p8.
6. *The Guardian* February 24 2015.
7. *The Guardian* July 2 2015.
8. [www.grassrootslabour.net/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=200:how-labours-trigger-works&catid=43:forum&Itemid=60](http://www.grassrootslabour.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=200:how-labours-trigger-works&catid=43:forum&Itemid=60).
9. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Salaries\\_of\\_Members\\_of\\_the\\_United\\_Kingdom\\_Parliament](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Salaries_of_Members_of_the_United_Kingdom_Parliament).
10. *International Business Times* September 15 2015.
11. Eg, Owen Jones, *The Guardian* September 16 2015 and Roy Greenslade, *The Guardian* September 14 2015. Chris Boffly, online special advisor to the last Labour government, has also been bitterly complaining about Corbyn's supposed lack of a media strategy - see *The Drum* September 15 2015.
12. At the 1899 TUC, JH Holmes, a delegate of the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants, moved this resolution: "That this congress, having regard to its decisions in former years, and with a view to securing a better representation of the interests of labour in the House of Commons, hereby instructs the parliamentary committee to invite the cooperation of all cooperative, socialistic trade unions and other working class organisations to jointly cooperate on lines mutually agreed upon, in convening a special congress of representatives from such of the above named organisations as may be willing to take part, to devise ways and means for securing the return of an increased number of labour members to the next parliament" ([www.unionhistory.info/timeline/1880\\_14\\_Narr\\_Display.php?Where=NarTitle+contains+%27The+Labour+Party%27+AND+DesPurpose+contains+%27WebDisplay%27](http://www.unionhistory.info/timeline/1880_14_Narr_Display.php?Where=NarTitle+contains+%27The+Labour+Party%27+AND+DesPurpose+contains+%27WebDisplay%27)).
13. *The Independent* September 12 2015.
14. *Socialist Worker* September 8 2015.
15. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Independent\\_Labour\\_Party#The\\_ILP\\_and\\_Labour\\_Party\\_government\\_281922.E2.80.9331.29](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Independent_Labour_Party#The_ILP_and_Labour_Party_government_281922.E2.80.9331.29).
16. [www.labour.org.uk/pages/affiliated-organisations](http://www.labour.org.uk/pages/affiliated-organisations).
17. VI Lenin *CW* Vol 31 Moscow 1977, pp257-58.

# Our aims and principles

1. The central aim of Labour Party Marxists is to transform the Labour Party into an instrument for working class advance and international socialism. Towards that end we will join with others and seek the closest unity of the left inside and outside the party.

2. Capitalism is synonymous with war, pollution, waste and production for its own sake. Attempts to rescue the system through Keynesian remedies are diversionary and doomed to fail. The democratic and social gains of the working class must be tenaciously defended, but capitalism must be superseded by socialism.

3. The only viable alternative is organising the working class into powerful and thoroughly democratic trade unions, co-ops, and other schools for socialism, and crucially into a political party which aims to replace the rule of the capitalist class with the rule of the working class.

4. The fight for trade union freedom, anti-fascism, women's rights, sexual freedom, republican democracy and opposition to all imperialist wars are inextricably linked to working class political independence and the fight for socialism.

5. Ideas of reclaiming the Labour Party and the return of the old clause four are totally misplaced. From the beginning the party has been dominated by the labour bureaucracy and the ideas of reformism. The party must be refounded on the basis of a genuinely socialist programme as opposed to social democratic gradualism or bureaucratic statism.

6. The aim of the party should not be a Labour government for its own sake. History shows that Labour governments committed to managing the capitalist system and loyal to the existing constitutional order create disillusionment in the working class.

7. Labour should only consider forming a government when it has the active support of a clear majority of the population and has a realistic prospect of implementing a full socialist programme. This cannot be

achieved in Britain in isolation from Europe and the rest of the world.

8. Socialism is the rule of the working class over the global economy created by capitalism and as such is antithetical to all forms of British nationalism. Demands for a British road to socialism and a withdrawal from the European Union are therefore to be opposed.

9. Political principles and organisational forms go hand-in-hand. The Labour Party must become the umbrella organisation for all trade unions, socialist groups and pro-working class partisans. Hence all the undemocratic bans and proscriptions must be done away with.

10. The fight to democratise the Labour Party cannot be separated from the fight to democratise the trade unions. Trade union votes at Labour Party conferences should be cast not by general secretaries but proportionately according to the political balance in each delegation.

11. All trade unions should be encouraged to affiliate, all members of the trade unions encouraged to pay the political levy and join the Labour Party as individual members.

12. The party must be reorganised from top to bottom. Bring the Parliamentary Labour Party under democratic control. The position of Labour leader should be abolished along with the national policy forum. The NEC should be unambiguously responsible for drafting Labour Party manifestos.

13. The NEC should be elected and accountable to the annual conference, which must be the supreme body in the party. Instead of a tame rally there must be democratic debate and binding votes.

14. Our elected representatives must be recallable by the constituency or other body that selected them. That includes MPs, MEPs, MSPs, AMs, councillors, etc. Without exception elected representatives should take only the average wage of a skilled worker, the balance being donated to furthering the interests of the labour movement ●

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# Lies, smears and dictators

There were predictable reactions to the election of Jeremy Corbyn in the Middle Eastern media. Amir Parviz Pouyan reports

The pro-Saudi and Israeli press have been competing with each other in their scaremongering. The *Times of Israel*, under the headline, "Anti-Israel Jeremy Corbyn is new UK Labour leader", claimed that the "far-left MP has empathised with Hezbollah, Hamas" and that British Jews were "alarmed by his ties to 'holocaust deniers, terrorists and some outright anti-Semites'".<sup>1</sup>

All false accusations, as explained by Jewish supporters of Jeremy Corbyn. For example, Jews for Jeremy, which has almost 300 members and was launched in response to what its founders say were "unscrupulous" attacks from the media, comments:

Some members of the group live in Jeremy Corbyn's constituency, some have worked with him on various campaigns, and many know him from his reputation and his tireless work for the disadvantaged in society, including migrants and asylum-seekers .... Members applaud his efforts to bring together opposing parties to many conflicts in dialogue in a constructive way, and are dismayed that in some cases this has been held against him.<sup>2</sup>

The Jewish Leadership Council, which claims to represent more than 30 community groups, including Jewish charities, synagogues as well as the Board of Deputies of British Jews, has adopted a more cautious approach. It released the following press statement soon after the declaration of the votes:

The Jewish Leadership Council will, as we always have, find ways of working with her majesty's opposition on matters relevant to us. Over the course of the leadership campaign, we had a number of concerns regarding some of Mr Corbyn's past connections, and his stances on policy areas of great significance to the Jewish community. It is important that the legitimate concerns of the community are addressed.

We look forward to meeting with Mr Corbyn at the first available opportunity to discuss our concerns, but also ways in which the Labour

Party and the Jewish community can continue to work together in a spirit of cooperation and understanding. We hope that the labour movement remains a welcoming environment for members of the Jewish community, many of whom have lifelong commitments to it.<sup>3</sup>

For its part, the influential English-language daily, *Arab News*, which is published in London, relies on an article by veteran rightwing Iranian columnist Amir Taheri:

Corbyn admires Ali Khamenei because he is supposed to be 'standing against the Americans'. Corbyn could not have invited Mullah Omar or Saddam Hussein to dinner. If he sheds tears over their demise, it is because they fell victim to American 'imperialism'. For Corbyn, Israel is a hate object not because it is Jewish or even 'usurper of Palestinian land', but because it is supposed to be an ally of the US.<sup>4</sup>

Absolute nonsense. Jeremy Corbyn has no illusions about the Iranian clergy. In the 1980s he was the first and for many years the only British MP raising the issue of political prisoners in Iran and opposing the execution of leftwing activists in Iranian jails. He regularly met exiled activists and often raised the issue of repression in the Islamic Republic in parliament.

In the early 2000s he opposed war and sanctions against Iran, but he has no time for forces like Iran's royalists, who advocate 'regime change from above', courtesy of Saudi, US and Israeli funds.

And Corbyn's close ally John McDonnell has played a crucial role in supporting Iranian workers and political prisoners in his role as honorary president of Hands Off the People of Iran (Hopi).

In 2011 this is what he wrote in a joint call written with Yasmine Mather:

At this current time of enormous political and economic crisis, continued UN sanctions and war threats, Iranian workers are in a very difficult situation. This is why it is absolutely vital that the workers'

movement in this country organises material and ideological solidarity with workers', women's and students' struggles in Iran - they are our natural allies and a true beacon of hope for genuine democracy and freedom.<sup>5</sup>

This is what comrade McDonnell wrote in 2011 on the launch of a campaign to free all political prisoners in Iran:

We formed Hopi at a time when there was a real danger of imminent attack on Iran, right after the war on Iraq. While opposing any imperialist attacks, we positioned ourselves in clear, active solidarity with the people of Iran, who are fighting against their theocratic regime. That also led us to clearly oppose all sanctions on the country, because in our view that is just another form of imperialism attacking the people of Iran. I think we have successfully engaged others in that discussion ....

However, at the moment there is a certain quietude. Partially this has to do with other activities in their spheres of influence that the imperialists are anxious about, for example, in Afghanistan. And there is an acceptance that, as long as the Iranian regime is quiet, 'maybe we can turn a blind eye'. And that is why we have not had any major political leader in the west take on the question of Iranian political prisoners in a serious way ...

There is a certain acquiescence that the barbarity will go on and, as long as this barbarity in Iran does not affect the rest of the Middle East or the rest of the world, it is almost acceptable - very much in line with what goes on in other barbaric countries in that region. There is a real vacuum on the question of human rights in Iran, whereby those who look can easily discover the brutality of the executions, the hangings, the tortures, the arrests, the denials of human rights. But the media and mainstream politicians are not interested.

Just as Hopi had to stand up and put forward a principled position

against war and against the theocratic regime, we now have to stand up and fight for the freedom of all political prisoners. The responsibility falls on our shoulders, because nobody else is doing it.<sup>6</sup>

In fact, with the exception of one rightwing newspaper, where a reporter compared Corbyn's dress style with the refusal of former president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to wear fashionable clothes (!), the Iranian media have concentrated on Corbyn's anti-war position and his support for the Palestinians. As far as I can see, unlike Amir Taheri, no-one within the Islamic regime is claiming Corbyn is a supporter, let alone an 'admirer', of the Iranian supreme leader, ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

The pro-government news station, Press TV, reminds everyone of a short-term but well publicised association Jeremy Corbyn had with it in 2010, when he chaired one of its programmes. However, even Press TV cannot produce anything other than general comments about, say, the assassination of Osama bin Laden.

The *Middle East Eye* sums up the feelings of most progressive, secular forces in the region:

Here's the reality. Reality is four civil wars - four fires raging out of control, which are consuming Syria, Iraq, Yemen and Libya. Possibly five if security in Egypt deteriorates further. Reality is the strategic failure of every intervention since the first Gulf War. Reality is 432,761 refugees and migrants crossing the Mediterranean so far this year, already double last year's total. Reality is the loss of power and influence of the US, Britain and France, not least over their traditional allies - Saudi Arabia, Israel, Egypt - who are taking decisions on their own. What is it about this reality that is worth preserving? The fact that it could get a lot worse? It already is.

Credibility: the accolade is awarded to every leader who makes a 'brave and principled stand', but who subsequently does everything in his power to avoid accountability for his actions. David Cameron

wants to force a vote in parliament which would allow the RAF to bomb Islamic State (IS) in Syria, despite his defeat on a similar vote to bomb Bashar al-Assad after the chemical attack in Damascus. British pilots have already been caught using US planes, and now RAF drones have been involved ...

Credibility or consistency is not a word often applied to policy. British government policy on Syria has lurched one way and then another. It started by encouraging the rebels to believe that Assad's overthrow was imminent at both Geneva conferences. It has now morphed into one in which Assad could stay in a transitional government. Cameron's policy on Egypt is to engage the dictator in power, without having any traction over him or any hope of moderating his rule. Abdel Fatah al-Sisi is going to be Cameron's next guest in Downing Street.<sup>7</sup>

Note early day motion 279 protesting against the Sisi visit. Tabled on July 9 2015 it calls on the prime minister to: "rescind the invitation, to put pressure on the Egyptian government to take immediate steps to demonstrate its commitment to democratic freedoms and human rights, including the revocation of all death sentences, and to stop licensing equipment for export to the Egyptian military and security forces."<sup>8</sup> Its primary sponsor is Green MP Caroline Lucas and amongst its five other sponsors we find the signatures of Jeremy Corbyn and John McDonnell.

In other words, it is not comrades Corbyn and McDonnell who are on the side of dictators. It is David Cameron ●

## Notes

1. www.timesofisrael.com/jeremy-corbyn-claims-victory-in-labour-leadership-race.
2. http://jewsforjeremy.org.
3. www.thejlc.org/2015/09/labour-leadership-result-statement-from-the-jewish-leadership-council.
4. www.arabnews.com/columns/news/802576.
5. http://hopi.org/2011/07/from-john-mcdonnell-mp-support-hopi-vs-lrc-cricket-match.
6. http://hopi.org/2011/03/john-mcdonnell-mp-free-jafar-panahi-and-all-political-prisoners.
7. www.middleeasteye.net/columns/corbyns-ascension-no-accident-778799299#sthash.oO-1p72rN.dpuf.
8. www.parliament.uk/edm/2015-16/279.