



LABOUR PARTY MARXISTS

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Defend Corbyn

But have no illusions

Join, get new affiliates, attend face-to-face meetings, caucus, subject MPs to mandatory reselection, transform the Labour Party from top to bottom. **James Marshall** outlines the Marxist programme of immediate action and long-term strategic goals

Operation Get Corbyn started even before the results of the Labour leadership election were announced. At the well publicised prompting of Peter Mandelson, Charles Clarke, David Blunkett and above all Tony Blair, the right launched a no-holds-barred struggle. 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.¹ Corbyn had already won and everyone who had an ounce of common sense knew it. No, the purpose of Blair's article

was perfectly clear. Rally the Labour right and their corporate, state and international allies ... and put the wheels of Operation Get into motion.

A direct assault was immediately discounted. Corbyn's margin of victory made that impossible. So there had to be a campaign of slander, sabotage and spin. Corbyn was to be slowly, inexorably, pitilessly, ground down.

Operation Get Jeremy Corbyn is, undoubtedly, well financed and carefully choreographed. Alastair Campbell, the Fabian Society, Portland Communications - all have been implicated.² Using the capitalist media, every action, every statement, every gesture ... even Corbyn's choice of clothes, is to be savaged. As the relentless psychological pressure built up and up, the calculation was that he would eventually buckle - throw in the towel and resign.

By-elections, local elections, the London and other mayoral elections have been fought with constant sniping from the right and predictions of disaster. Another strand of Operation Get Corbyn is, of course, the utterly cynical 'anti-Zionism equals anti-Semitism' smearing. Dozens of loyal Labour Party members fell victim to the Compliance Unit's witch-hunt. However, with the EU referendum result the right believed at last it could deliver the *coup de grâce*. Corbyn simultaneously got the blame for the narrow failure of the Remain campaign and

for not pandering to the anti-immigrant sentiments of exiters. The bitter sense of disappointment felt by many, especially the young, could thereby be directed against Corbyn. To modify Abraham Lincoln's famous adage, "You can fool some of the people, some of the time ..."

Operation Get Jeremy Corbyn entered its final phase. In a late-night phone call on June 26, Hilary Benn informed Corbyn he had "lost confidence" in his leadership. Following Benn's inevitable sacking, two thirds of the shadow cabinet subsequently resigned, along with dozens of junior shadow ministers and numerous aides and advisors. One after the other they deserted their posts and lined up to appear on eagerly awaiting TV and radio stations. Steve Bassam - Baron Bassam of Brighton, leader of the Labour Party in the House of Lords - formally broke off links with Corbyn's office. Then there was the joint letter of 57 prospective parliamentary candidates, the 600 councillors, Alan Johnson, Kezia Dugdale, Ed Miliband, Neil Kinnock, Tom Watson, etc. All played their role in Operation Get Jeremy Corbyn. Crucially, there was, of course, the Parliamentary Labour Party and the 172-40 no confidence vote.

Rules

Given this predictable outcome, it is clear that Jeremy

Corbyn has been badly advised. From the beginning he had the majority of the PLP profoundly, implacably, irreconcilably set against him. He should have been told so in no uncertain terms. Instead, he had Seumas Milne's widely over-optimistic spreadsheet. It showed just 85 MPs who could be considered "core group negatives" or "hostile". Milne was providing misinformation. He put 19 MPs in Corbyn's "core group", while 56 were classified as "core group plus" and 71 as "neutral but not hostile".³ Obviously, the 172-strong right were never reconciled to Corbyn's stunning leadership victory.

Yet Corbyn still remains hugely popular at a rank-and-file level. Opinion polls show that in no uncertain terms. And in the week following the EU referendum result 60,000 signed up to join the Labour Party. Corbyn has also received the backing of Unite, GMB, Unison and other unions. Nevertheless, Tom Watson, Labour's deputy leader, promises a bruising contest. Here, at least, he is being honest. Expect, therefore, an unremitting anti-Corbyn media barrage. More 'anti-Zionism equals anti-Semitism' smears. More suspensions. More exclusions. More accusations of intimidation. More so-called revelations about the left.

But will there be a fair contest? Will Corbyn be allowed to stand? Everyone knows our rules are ambiguous. Here is the relevant section of the 2016

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Labour rule book, chapter 4, clause II:

2. Election of leader and deputy leader.

A. The leader and deputy leader shall be elected separately in accordance with rule C below, unless rule E below applies.

B. Nomination

i. In the case of a vacancy for leader or deputy leader, each nomination must be supported by 15% of the combined Commons members of the PLP and members of the ELP. Nominations not attaining this threshold shall be null and void.

ii. Where there is no vacancy, nominations may be sought by potential challengers each year prior to the annual session of party conference. In this case any nomination must be supported by 20% of the combined Commons members of the PLP and members of the ELP. Nominations not attaining this threshold shall be null and void.

iii. Affiliated organisations, the ALC [Association of Labour Councillors - JM], Young Labour, and CLPs and Labour MEPs may also nominate for each of the offices of leader and deputy leader. All nominees must be Commons members of the PLP.

Understandably, that is why the left has concentrated efforts on ensuring a rule change at this year's Liverpool conference.

Till then, however, doubt remains. Does a sitting leader automatically appear on the ballot paper? Do they have to pass the 20% nomination threshold of MPs?

The National Executive Committee may well decide that Jeremy Corbyn, being the incumbent, should automatically be allowed to stand, if he so wishes. Then the chances are that the right's 'unity' candidate will be soundly beaten. To prevent such a totally unacceptable outcome expect the right - maybe in the form of general secretary Iain McNicol - to take matters to the courts. Needless to say, the judicial system is no friend of the working class. Remember the Taff Vale judgement (1901), the Osborne judgement (1909), the Viking, Laval, Rüffert and Luxembourg judgements (2007, 2008).

Huffington Post UK reports legal advice from Doughty Street Chambers. It concludes that B (ii) only applies to a "potential challenger". The right, however, has "two rival legal opinions, suggesting that, because the current rules are 'silent' on the explicit need for nominations, he [Corbyn - JM] would indeed need nominations from MPs".⁴ The precedent of Neil Kinnock securing the symbolic backing of numerous Labour MPs when faced with Tony Benn's leadership bid back in 1988 is frequently cited (Benn was trounced, picking up 11.4% to Kinnock's 88.6%).

Hence, we can certainly imagine a leadership contest where the right's 'unity' candidate is soundly thrashed by Corbyn. What would the PLP majority do after that? On the other hand, it is quite conceivable that Corbyn fails to secure enough nominations and, thanks to a court judgement, there is only one runner - the 'unity' candidate of

the right. What would the party's affiliates, members and supporters do in the event that, instead of a right vs left election contest, we get the crowning of the right's candidate?

A historic split is clearly on the cards.

Our best-case scenario is that Corbyn beats the right's 'unity' candidate. Maybe then, all the 172 rebel MPs will do us a favour and go for another Social Democratic Party. Admittedly an outside possibility - but political suicide is an unattractive prospect for most of the PLP. They remain acutely aware of the sorry fate of the SDP. Moreover, unlike the early 1980s, the political centre is not enjoying a sustained revival.⁵ At the last general election the Lib Dems were decimated. They remain marginalised and widely despised.

Given the punishing logic of the first-past-the-post election system, it is therefore unlikely that the PLP majority will do us that favour. No, probably the right will rely on the rule-based fact that as sitting MPs they are set to be official Labour candidates in a November 2016 or February 2017 general election.

Also, well before that, expect the PLP right to elect its own, unconstitutional, leader (maybe their leadership candidate). The result: in effect two rival parties. A rightwing Labour Party with by far the biggest parliamentary presence. Then, on the other hand, a leftwing Labour Party with trade union support, but a much smaller number of MPs.

However, there is an obvious problem for the right. The Liverpool conference, or a special conference before that, can be expected to change the rules. Not only B (ii). New rules must be introduced subjecting all elected representatives, crucially MPs, to mandatory reselection. A welcome threat now coming from Len McCluskey and Unite, which we have every interest in getting into the rule book.

So, on balance, I would guess the right is probably banking on excluding Corbyn from the ballot. It therefore expects the courts to oblige. With its 'unity' candidate elected by default, the right would then do everything within its power to ensure that the trade unions, the left, the majority of members and supporters are driven away. Obviously a high-risk strategy. But that shows just how desperate the right actually is.

Ruins

The well-timed series of resignations by members of the shadow cabinet need to be understood not, as claimed, as a heavy-hearted response to Corbyn's "weak role" in the EU referendum, lack of "leadership skills", "poor response" to the Shami Chakrabarti report, etc. The right wants to split the Labour Party and establish an out-and-out bourgeois party on its ruins.

What should the left be doing under these unprecedented circumstances? As the right goes in for the kill, we must respond using all our energy and all the weapons at our disposal. Obviously Corbyn must be unconditionally, but critically, defended. Certainly this is no time to faint-heartedly opt out of "Labour's internecine strife" (Owen Jones).⁶ Unite's Len McCluskey has warned the right that a leadership election without Corbyn on the ballot paper will set the Labour Party "on course for a split".⁷ However, that split should not come from the left. Instead, we should use our conference majority to change the rules and if necessary rerun the leadership election ... with Corbyn on the ballot paper. If the right refuses to accept conference decisions the NEC should swiftly counter with some well chosen expulsions.

Hence the Labour left has five immediate tasks.

Firstly, we should support demands for a special conference. Change the rules on the leadership election, lower the threshold, confirm that the incumbent is automatically on the ballot paper. Put in place rules stipulating that all elected representatives are subject to mandatory reselection. Abolish the compliance unit. Restore full membership rights to those cynically charged with anti-Semitism. Welcome in those good socialists who have been barred from membership because, mainly out of frustration, they

supported the Greens, Left Unity or the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition at the last general election.

Meanwhile, 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".⁸

Secondly, Momentum must be transformed. The inertia that paralyses us today must be replaced with ... well, momentum. That can only come about through democracy, open debate and the election of and right to recall all Momentum officials. Membership lists must certainly be handed over to local branches as a matter of urgency. Without that our ability to fully mobilise our forces will be severely diminished.

Thirdly, there must be an education campaign to overcome the illusion that Facebook, Twitter, etc, are the future of politics. They are, in fact, echo chambers. We must persuade Corbyn's Facebook, Twitter, etc, supporters that they have to become full individual Labour Party members ... and then regularly attend face-to-face meetings. If you want to defend Corbyn, if you want to ensure that he stays true to his principles, if you want to transform the Labour Party, then you must use your vote to swing the NEC to the left, select and reselect MPs, MEPs, councillors, etc. Only card-carrying members can attend ward and constituency meetings and stand for officer positions. But caucus beforehand with your Momentum, Campaign for Labour Party Democracy, LPM, etc, comrades. That is what the right does with Progress, Labour First, etc. We must do the same ... only better.

Fourthly, within the affiliated trade unions we must fight to win many, many more to enrol. Just over 70,000 affiliated supporters voted in the 2015 leadership election. A tiny portion of what could be. Over four million pay the political levy.⁹ Given that they can sign up to the Labour Party with no more than an online click, we really ought to have a million affiliated supporters as a minimum target figure.

Fifthly, every constituency, branch (ward) and other such basic units must be seized, revived and galvanised by the left. The right has done everything to make them cold, uninviting, bureaucratic and lifeless. The left must convince the sea of young new members, and the elder returnees, to drive out the right. Elect officers who defend the Corbyn leadership. Our constituencies and branches can then be made into vibrant centres of organisation, education and action. Only then can we hold wayward councillors and MPs to account.

Long term

Whatever the particular scenario, the Labour Party must be reorganised from top to bottom. That should be our overriding aim - as opposed to trying to win the next general election by concocting some rotten compromise with the right.

Organisationally and politically radical change must be put on the agenda. We need a sovereign conference. We need to subordinate MPs to the NEC. 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 must go at the earliest possible opportunity. Politically we need a Marxist - not a Lassallian, not a Blairite - clause four and a programmatic commitment to working class rule and international socialism.

In terms of our history we are rightly proud of being a federal party. Trade unions, the Co-op, socialist societies, etc. Therefore securing new affiliates ought to be a priority. The Fire Brigades Union has reaffiliated. Excellent. But what about Rail, Maritime and Transport union? Let us win RMT activists to drop their misplaced support for Tusc. Instead affiliate to the Labour Party. And what about the National Union of Teachers? Why can't we win them to affiliate? Surely we can ... if we fight for hearts and minds.

LONDON COMMUNIST FORUM

Sundays, 5pm: Weekly political meetings and study group organised jointly by Labour Party Marxists and CPGB. Details in *Weekly Worker*.

VENUE:

The Calthorpe Arms,
252 Grays Inn Road,
London WC1X 8JR

SUNDAY JULY 10, 5PM:

THE CHAKRABARTI REPORT AND LABOUR'S ANTI-SEMITISM SMEARS

Tony Greenstein, veteran socialist, anti-fascist and anti-Zionist, and victim of the recent witch-hunt, will address this report and its dubious claims about anti-Semitism and Zionism.

What about the Public and Commercial Services union? Thankfully, Mark Serwotka, its leftwing general secretary, has at last come round to the idea. The main block to affiliation now comes in the form of opposition from the Socialist Workers Party and the Socialist Party in England and Wales. True, PCS affiliation will run up against the Trades Disputes and Trade Union Act (1927). A piece of vicious class legislation introduced in the aftermath of the 1926 General Strike. Civil service unions were barred from affiliating to the Labour Party and the Trades Union Congress. However, the Civil and Public Services Association - predecessor of PCS - reaffiliated to the TUC in 1946. Now, surely, it is time for the PCS to reaffiliate to the Labour Party.

When we in LPM moved a motion at the February 2015 AGM of the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy calling for all trade unions to be encouraged to affiliate, we were met with the objection that for the PCS it would be illegal. 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. Force another change in the law.

Then there are the leftwing groups. 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.¹⁰ In other words, the Labour Party can become what Leon Trotsky called a permanent united front of the working class.

We in Labour Party Marxists unapologetically take our programmatic lead from the CPGB. Since the CPGB has been demanding the right to affiliate since its foundation in 1920, we simply extend that so as to include the SWP, SPEW, Left Unity and other such organisations.

Yet, sadly, there has been a distinct lack of imagination here. Instead of a vigorous banging on the door, there has been cowardly disengagement. An approach undoubtedly designed to preserve sectarian interests and brittle reputations.

Take the SWP. An official statement admitted that SWP members "did not sign up to vote in the [Labour leadership] election". Why did the comrades refuse to register as Labour Party supporters? After all, to have voted for Corbyn cost a mere £3 ... and for levy-paying members of affiliated trade unions it was free. As the statement pathetically explains, Corbyn faces "a firestorm of opposition" from the right. There are no more than 20 MPs "who really support Corbyn". Etc, etc.¹¹

What ought to be a challenge to throw oneself into a pivotal battle becomes an excuse to stand aloof. Beset by splits and divisions in the 1970s and then again in the 2010s, the SWP apparatus wants nothing to



MODEL MOTIONS PROMOTED BY LPM

SUPPORT CORBYN

1. This [Branch/CLP] expresses its support for, and solidarity with, the elected leader of the Labour Party, Jeremy Corbyn. We regret the June 27 vote of 'no confidence' in him by a majority of Labour MPs.

2. We urge Labour MPs to respect the democratic mandate given to Jeremy Corbyn by the Labour Party.

3. We demand that Jeremy Corbyn must have an automatic place on the ballot paper, if a leadership challenge is made.

MANDATORY RESELECTION

1. Momentum [your local group] urges Momentum nationally to campaign for the introduction by the Labour Party, at the earliest opportunity, of mandatory reselection of Labour MPs, MEPs, councillors and all Labour Party representatives before each election.

2. Trigger ballots should be abolished.

3. No incumbent should have the right to represent the Party without facing the scrutiny, challenge and competition of a democratic selection process.

do with anything that carries even the whiff of factional strife. So there is the routine call for marches, protests and strikes ... as counterposed to the Labour Party, the PLP, CLPs and participating in a *concentrated* form of the class war. However, in rejecting any sort of front-line involvement in the Labour Party, the SWP stays true to its modern-day version of Bakuninism.

Under these circumstances we urge SWP members to organise factionally and openly revolt. At the very least, however, become a Labour Party supporter or register as a voting trade union affiliate. Many already have. A silent rebellion is better than no rebellion at all.

Then we have SPEW. 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 was cosmetically placed on the masthead of *The Socialist*. Despite that, Peter Taaffe, SPEW's founder-leader, refuses to actively engage in the Labour Party. Instead he clings to Tusc and for show calls for a labour movement conference to defend Corbyn ... crucially one that is open to SPEW. A classic case of Mohammed and the mountain. Except, of course, that, whereas the Labour Party, with its affiliates and mass base, are undoubtedly a mountain, Taaffe is no Mohammed. Time and again he has proved himself a buffoon. Eg, failure to predict the collapse of the Soviet Union, failure to predict the period of reaction that followed, failure to predict the revival of the Labour left, etc. If his Tusc stood on something that resembled a Marxist programme, Taaffe would still be guilty of another blundering strategic error. Suffice to say, Tusc is committed to nothing but left reformism and will continue to be politically, organisationally and electorally irrelevant.

Left Unity is essentially no different. As with SPEW and the SWP, members peeled away to join the Labour Party *as individuals*. Undaunted, LU's beleaguered leadership is determined to carry on as a halfway house project that merely comments on developments in the Labour Party. A detached form of politics utterly alien to the spirit and practice of Marxism.

Partymax

Our PLP rebels are out-and-out traitors. They are also out-and-out careerists. Once and for all we must put an end to such types exploiting the Labour Party for their own narrow purposes. Being an MP ought to be an honour, not a way to secure a lucrative living.

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. Even the Italian Communist Party under Enrico Berlinguer applied the 'partymax' in the 1970s. With the PCI's huge parliamentary fraction this proved to be a vital source of funds.

Our MPs are 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 annual £82 parliamentarian's subscription fee to the party). Moreover, as leader of the official opposition, Jeremy Corbyn not only gets his MP's salary: he is entitled to an additional £73,617.¹²

We in LPM say, let them live on the average skilled worker's wage - say £40,000 (plus legitimate expenses). Then, however, they must hand the balance over to the party. Jeremy Corbyn, John McDonnell and Diane Abbott should take the lead.

The partymax would give a considerable boost to our finances. Even if we leave out Labour's 20 MEPs from the calculation, with 229 MPs it would amount to roughly £900,000 extra. Anyway, whatever our finances, there is the basic principle. Our representatives ought to live like ordinary workers, not pampered members of the middle class.

Given the Labour Party's mass membership, affiliated trade unions and the huge electoral challenges before us, we urgently need to reach out to *all* those who

are disgusted by corrupt career politicians, *all* those who aspire to a better world, *all* those who have an objective interest in ending capitalism. Towards that end we must establish our own press, radio and TV. To state the obvious, tweeting and texting have severe limits. Brilliant mediums for transmitting short, sharp, clear messages. However, when it comes to setting the agenda, educating members, debating principles and charting political strategies, they are worse than useless.

Relying on the favours of the capitalist press, radio and TV is a fool's game. True, it worked splendidly for Tony Blair and Alistair Campbell. But, 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. The established media can be used, of course. But, as shown with the anti-Corbyn coup, when things really matter, we get hardly a look in. Indeed the capitalist press, radio and TV are central to the anti-Corbyn coup. There were, of course, idiot voices to the contrary - those who wanted to court *The Guardian*, the *Mirror*, the BBC, etc.¹³ But, frankly, we should have anticipated the bile, the mockery, the relentless stream of lies.

Once we had the *Daily Herald*. Now we have nothing. Well, apart from the deadly-dull trade union house journals, the advertising sheets of the confessional sects and the *Morning Star* (which is still under the control of unreconstructed Stalinites).

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 such a paper free of charge should be considered and, naturally, everything should be put up on the web without pay walls or subscription charges. We should also launch a range of internet-based TV and radio stations. The left in South Africa, Iran and the US do it ... so should we. With the abundant riches of dedication, passion and ideas that exist on the left here in Britain and far beyond, the BBC, Al Jazeera, Russia Today and Sky can be bettered.

Leader

Of course, in the medium to long term, we Marxists want the abolition of the Bonapartist post of leader. But these are extraordinary times and require extraordinary measures. Ed Miliband abolished the fleeting practice of having the PLP elect the shadow cabinet and, understandably with the election of Corbyn, the right touted the idea of a restoration. That would have left Corbyn without John McDonnell and Diane Abbott and utterly isolated in the shadow cabinet. Thankfully Corbyn's early pronouncements favouring such an outcome were quickly 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 opt for someone from the centre. Instead he chose John McDonnell. Hence the Corbyn-McDonnell leadership. Offering shadow cabinet seats to the likes of Hilary Benn, Angela Eagle, Lucy Powell, Lord Falconer, Chris Bryant, Owen Smith and Lisa Nandy was always going to happen. Corbyn is a natural conciliator. And the fact of the matter is that Seumas Milne's "core group" of 19 loyalist MPs was too small if all posts were to be filled. Unless, that is, Corbyn went for a pocket-sized shadow cabinet and even drew upon talents from outside parliament (as seen during World War II under Winston Churchill with Ernest Bevin - he was appointed minister of labour in 1940 despite not being an MP). That is what we LPMers advocated.

Nevertheless, equipped with his left-centre-right coalition, Corbyn could claim the moral high ground. He was reaching out to all sections of the party. Now, in terms of *internal* perceptions, it is the "hostile" and "core negative

group" of MPs who, hopefully, will be squarely blamed for undertaking a completely cynical coup attempt against Corbyn that, whatever the outcome, will surely badly damage Labour's chances in a widely expected *early* general election. That might play well with traditional Labour activists. Normally, they do not take kindly to anyone damaging Labour's chances at the polls. After all, for most of them, the be-all and end-all of politics is getting elected and re-elected ... even if the manifesto promises little 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 "hostile" and "core negative group" of Labour MPs 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 Israel's settlement of the West Bank, opposition to US-led imperialist wars, call to junk Trident and nuclear weapons, his commitment to increase the tax taken from transnational corporations, the banks and the mega-rich, his platonic republicanism, even his unwillingness to enthusiastically sing the royal anthem mark him out as completely unacceptable.

Of course, there is still the danger that the Corbyn-McDonnell leadership will have their agenda set for them by their futile attempt to restore PLP unity. Put another way, in what is still a coalition cabinet, the right sets the limits and therefore determines the political programme. Why? Because they were always prepared to walk. That is what Andy Burnham could still do over so-called anti-Semitism, EU negotiations, nuclear weapons, the monarchy, etc. The decision by Corbyn to kiss the hand of Elizabeth Windsor, though not to kneel, in order to gain access to the privy council was therefore highly problematic.

Staying silent, abandoning principles or putting them on the backburner in an attempt to placate the right was never a good strategy. We saw that with John McDonnell's pusillanimous statements on Ireland, Jeremy Corbyn's refusal to defend the victims of the 'anti-Zionism equals anti-Semitism' witch-hunt, lauding the Jewish Labour Movement, etc. Now there is the call from the Corbyn-McDonnell leadership to have a "sensible" discussion on immigration.

Following the EU referendum McDonnell says we are no longer obliged to defend the principle of the right of people to free movement (he was disgracefully backed by Unite's general secretary, Len McCluskey). Such a course may court the working class EU exiters. But it demobilises, demoralises and drains away Corbyn's mass base.

Reclaim

So, 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 then the election of a Tory government.

Tactically, today, Marxists are right to concentrate our fire on the 172 "core negative group" of "hostile" MPs. 'Blairites out' should be the common slogan on the left. Yet the majority of Labour affiliates, members and supporters still trust the Corbyn-McDonnell leadership. Despite that, they have to be presented with a programme that decisively breaks with their conciliations, compromises and concessions. Everyone on the left will have an instinctive loathing of those seeking to oust Jeremy Corbyn, who support US imperialist wars, who follow the lead of Progress, Labour First, etc. Therefore our call is to turn the tables. Purge the right and transform the Labour Party.

Naturally, real Marxists, not fake Marxists, never talk of 'reclaiming' the

Labour Party. 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 had this to say:

[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 [the executioners of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht].¹⁴

An assessment which retains its essential purchase. But the PLP is now two parties. One is a 172-strong bourgeois party. The other is a 40-strong potential workers' party. However, the potential workers' party has every chance of keeping the loyalty of the affiliated trade unions, the leftwing mass membership and, albeit after a fierce fight, the working class electoral base. With Corbyn's election in September came the chance to transform the Labour Party by attacking the right both from below and above. It was never going to be easy and not easy it has proved. But that chance still remains before us. Hence, we must ensure that Corbyn is re-elected and the right is humiliatingly defeated. Then we can regrow the PLP, not as the master, but as the servant of the labour movement. That prospect genuinely sends shivers of fear throughout the bourgeois establishment. No wonder Angela Eagle, Owen Smith, the PLP right, the *Mirror*, the *Sun* and David Cameron have been united in calling upon Jeremy Corbyn to resign ●

Notes

1. *The Observer* August 30 2015.
2. <http://www.thecanary.co/2016/06/28/truth-behind-labour-coup-really-began-manufactured-exclusive/>.
3. *The Guardian* March 23 2016.
4. www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/jeremy-corbyn-legal-advice-automatically-on-ballot-leadership-challenge_uk_577003cfe4b0d2571149d42a.
5. From a 2.5% historic low point 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.
6. <https://medium.com/@OwenJones84/my-thoughts-on-the-plight-of-labour-38413229f88#.13swc959x>.
7. *The Guardian* June 26 2016.
8. www.grassrootslabour.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=200:how-labours-trigger-works&catid=43:forum&Itemid=60.
9. D Pryer *Trade union political funds and levy* House of Commons briefing paper No00593, August 8 2013, p8.
10. 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).
11. *Socialist Worker* September 8 2015.
12. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leader_of_the_Opposition_\(United_Kingdom\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leader_of_the_Opposition_(United_Kingdom)).
13. Eg, Owen Jones *The Guardian* September 16 2015.
14. VI Lenin *CW* Vol 31, Moscow 1977, pp257-58.

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 ●

Clause four

Three clause fours

We not only need to subject MPs to mandatory reselection. We need new political principles

Understandably, clause four - agreed in 1918 and then rewritten under Tony Blair in 1995 - has totemic status for partisans both of Labour's right and left. But should the left seek to raise the 1918 Lazarus? Or should we audaciously reach out for another future?

True, the 1918 clause four (part four) committed us:

To secure for the workers by hand or by brain the full fruits of their industry and the most equitable distribution thereof that may be possible upon the basis of the common ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange, and the best obtainable system of popular administration and control of each industry or service.

Mistakenly, this is often fondly remembered as a defining socialist moment. But when it was first drafted - amidst the slaughter of inter-imperialist war - the calculated aim of Sidney Webb, its Fabian author, was threefold.

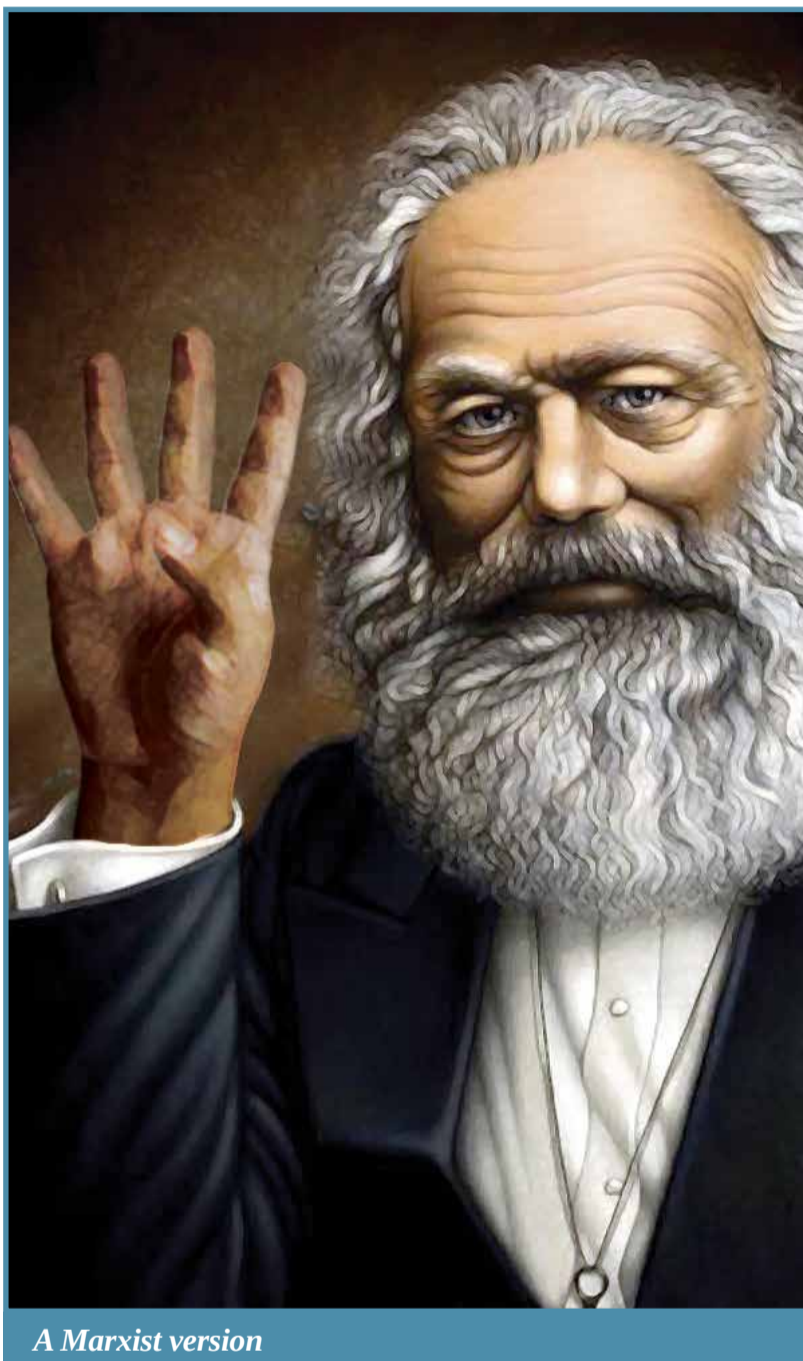
Firstly, clause four socialism must be implicitly anti-Marxist. Webb well knew the history of the workers' movement in Germany. Karl Marx famously mocked various passages in the *Gotha programme* (1875), not least those which declared that every worker should receive a "fair distribution of the proceeds of labour" and that "the proceeds of labour belong undiminished with equal right to all members of society".¹ Contradictory and vacuous, concluded Marx. What is fair? What about replacement means of production? What about the expansion of production? What about those unable to work? More than that, Marx explained these and other such woolly formulations as unneeded concessions to the followers of Ferdinand Lassalle. His *Workers' programme* (1862) called for "an equal right to the undiminished proceeds of labour." Obviously Webb wanted to give clause four a distinct Lassalian coloration - not out of admiration for Lassalle, but because he wanted to distance the Labour Party from Marxism.

Secondly, by adopting clause four socialism, the Labour Party could both distinguish itself from the exhausted, divided and rapidly declining Liberal Party and please the trade union bureaucracy. Since the 1890s the TUC had been drawing up various wish lists of what ought to be nationalised; eg, rails, mines, electricity, liquor and land. Clause four socialism also usefully went along with the grain of Britain's wartime experience. There was steadily expanding state intervention in the economy. Nationalisation was, as a result, widely identified with efficiency, modernisation and beating foreign rivals. It therefore appealed to technocratically minded elements amongst the middle classes.

Thirdly, clause four socialism could be used to divert the considerable rank-and-file sympathy that existed for the Russian Revolution into safe, peaceful and exclusively constitutional channels. That did not stop prime minister David Lloyd George from declaring, in his closing speech of the 1918 general election campaign, that the "Labour Party is being run by the extreme pacifist Bolshevik group".²

Socialism

Almost needless to say, clause four was mainly for show. A red ribbon around what was the standing programme of social liberalism. Yet, even if it had been put into effect, clause four socialism remains stateist, elitist and antithetical to working



A Marxist version

class self-liberation. Capitalism without capitalists does not count amongst our goals. Railways, mines, land, electricity, etc, would pass into the hands of the British empire state.³ Capitalist owners are bought out. Eased into a comfortable retirement. But, as they vacate the field of production, a new class of state-appointed managers enters the fray. In terms of the division of labour they substitute for the capitalists. The mass of the population, meanwhile, remain exploited wage-slaves. They would be subject to the same hierarchical chain of command, the same lack of control, the same mind-numbing routine.

Marxism, by contrast, is based on an altogether different perspective. If it is to win its freedom, the working class must overthrow the existing state. But - and this is crucial - in so doing the proletariat "abolishes itself as a proletariat, abolishes all class distinctions and antagonisms, abolishes also the state as state".⁴ Capitalist relations of production and the whole bureaucratic state apparatus are swept away. Every sphere of social life sees control exercised from below. All positions of command are elected or chosen by lot and are regularly rotated. Hierarchy is flattened. Alienation is overcome. What is produced and how it is produced radically alters too. Need, not exchange, is the ruling principle. And alone such an association of producers creates the benign conditions which allow for the full

development of each and every individual.

Admittedly, the old clause four resulted from a far-reaching cultural shift. The Russian Revolution has already been mentioned. But there is also the 1867 Reform Act and the extension of the franchise, the considerable popularity of socialist propaganda, the growth of trade unions, the formation of the Labour Party and the horrors of World War I. Because of all this, and more, capitalism was widely considered abhorrent, outmoded and doomed. As a concomitant socialism became the common sense of the organised working class.

Of course, what the Fabians meant by socialism was a self-proclaimed extension of social liberalism. The Fabians would gradually expand social welfare provision and harness the commanding heights of the economy with a view to promoting the national interest.

In other words, the Fabians *consciously* sought to ameliorate the mounting contradictions between labour and capital and thus put off socialism. As Friedrich Engels damningly noted, "fear of revolution is their guiding principle".⁵ And, needless to say, the years 1918-20 witnessed army mutinies, colonial uprisings, a massive strike wave and brutal Black and Tan oppression meted out in Ireland.

Interestingly, before 1918 attempts to commit the party to socialism met

with mixed success. The 1900 founding conference rejected the "class war" ultimatum tabled by the Social Democratic Federation.⁶ Despite that, conference voted to support the "socialisation of the means of production, distribution and exchange". The next year a socialistic motion moved by Bruce Glasier was defeated. In 1903 another socialistic motion fell; this time without debate. Two years later, conference passed a motion with the exact same wording. In 1907 the previous endorsement of socialism was overturned at the prompting of... Bruce Glasier. Despite that the same conference agreed to set the goal of "socialising the means of production, distribution and exchange".⁷

The explanation for the seesawing doubtless lies with electoral expediency. While most in the party leadership considered themselves socialists of a kind, they were mortally afraid of losing out in the polls. What appeared acceptable to likely voters set their limits. So, instead of fearlessly presenting a bold socialist vision and building support on that basis, Sidney Webb, Arthur Henderson, Ramsay MacDonald and co chased the capricious vagaries of popularity. With the radicalisation of 1918-20, socialist declarations were considered a sure way of adding to Labour's ranks in parliament.⁸ Forming a government was both a means and an end.

Blair

Nevertheless, the Blairising of clause four in 1995 was hugely symbolic. The ground had been laid by the Eurocommunists and their *Marxism Today* journal. Socialism was declared dead and buried, the working class a shrinking minority. Only if Labour accepted capitalism and reached out to the middle classes would it have a future. Neil Kinnock, John Smith and finally Tony Blair dragged the party ever further to the right. Out went the commitment to unilateral disarmament, out went the commitment to comprehensive education, out went the commitment to full employment, out went the commitment to repeal the Tories' anti-trade union laws, out went the commitment to "the common ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange".

By sacrificing the old clause four in the full glare of publicity Blair and his New Labour clique sought to appease the establishment, the City, the Murdoch empire, the global plutocracy. Capitalism would be *absolutely* safe in their hands. A New Labour government could be relied upon not even to pay lip service to a British version of state capitalism. Leftwingers such as Tony Benn, Dennis Skinner, Diane Abbott and Ken Livingstone protested, trade union leaders grumbled, but the April 1995 special conference voted by 65% in favour of Blair's clause four.

Needless to say, his version is stuffed full of managerial guff and classless nonsense. Just what one would expect from the architect of New Labour. After all, one of Blair's big ideas was to replace 'socialism' with 'social-ism'. Another was communitarianism. But, of course, the media glowed with admiration. Crucially, Rupert Murdoch agreed to unleash his attack dogs. Within a few months John Major was almost universally derided as a total incompetent heading a sleaze-mired government.

Riding high in the opinion polls, Blair inaugurated a series of internal 'reforms'. Conference was gutted. No longer could it debate issues, vote on policy or embarrass the leadership in front of the media. Instead the whole thing became a rubberstamping exercise. Then there were the tightly controlled policy forums, focus groups

and the staffing of the party machine with eager young careerists (most on temporary contracts). Blair thereby asserted himself over the National Executive Committee... considerably reducing its effectiveness in the process.

Class lines

Demands for a return of the old clause four are perfectly understandable. But why go back to a Fabian past? Instead we surely need to persuade members and affiliates to take up the LPM's pithy, implicitly Marxist alternative:

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 to form 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 ●

Notes

1. K Marx and F Engels *CW* Vol 24, London 1989, p83.
2. Quoted in R Miliband *Parliamentary socialism* London 1973, p64n.
3. The Fabians supported a *civilising* British empire. In their own words, the white dominions should be given self-government. However, "for the lower breeds" there should be a "benevolent bureaucracy" of British civil servants and military officials guiding them to "adulthood" (G Foote *The Labour Party's political thought* London 1985, pp29-30).
4. K Marx and F Engels *CW* Vol 25, London 1987, p267.
5. K Marx and F Engels *CW* Vol 50, New York 2004, p83.
6. Though it had two guaranteed seats on the LRC's leading body, the SDF disaffiliated in August 1901.
7. See RT McKenzie *British political parties* London 1963, pp465-71.
8. Labour gained 15 seats in the December 1918 general election, making it the fourth largest party in parliament after the Bonar Law Tories, Lloyd George's Coalition Liberals and Sinn Fein. It had a total of 57 MPs.

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