

OPEN LETTER TO A CORBYN SUPPORTER

Charlie Kimber, editor of Socialist Worker, argues that no peace is possible with the vicious Labour right—and that vital battles outside the party risk being neglected.

The re-election of Jeremy Corbyn as Labour leader is a reason to celebrate—and a time for important choices. Jeremy has overcome the hostility of the media and the slurs from top bosses such as Virgin's Richard Branson. He has defied the plotting of the 172 Labour MPs who voted "no confidence" in him, and the hatred of much of the party bureaucracy.

He has won despite Labour's national executive committee blocking 130,000 people from voting and then the "compliance unit" weeding out thousands of others. He has shown that socialist ideas can be popular and that the crisis of mainstream politics can be resolved to the left.

What happens now?

There will be great pressure to compromise and to seek peace with at least some of those who have spent months attacking the left.

But most of the right have made it plain that they will continue trying to destroy Jeremy. Do you think people like Jess Phillips MP, who told shadow health secretary Diane Abbott to "fuck off", are now going to meekly accept Jeremy's policies and leadership?

How about John Woodcock MP who called Corbyn a "fucking disaster" or Tristram Hunt MP who described Labour as "in the shit"? Or deputy leader Tom Watson, who smeared Labour left group Momentum as a "rabble"?

Last week's *Socialist Worker* revealed how the right are scheming to keep fighting Corbyn—and laughing at the thought of him losing his seat when constituency boundaries are redrawn.

Such people will be unmoved by the members' rejection of their arguments. Instead, they will demand the party acts as if the right had won.

Confront the right wing

The Labour right must be confronted. If they threaten to go, good riddance. But if they stay, there's a great danger that you could be drawn into endless internal battles. I'm for deselection of Corbyn's enemies. But you might end up directing most of your energy to the long slog, through tortuous processes and endless meetings, to (perhaps) get rid of a right winger. This is not the crucial arena.

The best way for Jeremy to beat back the right and win the next election is to head up a fight against austerity in the workplaces and the streets.

Workers are more open to radical ideas and less prone to scapegoating when there are lots of strikes and protests.

Resistance is crucial anyway. It's well over 1,300 days until the scheduled general election. Can you imagine the damage the Tories will cause by then? We need a fightback now. That means defining targets and getting active outside parliament.

We should take confidence in everything from the recent strike by 150 million people in India to the support for Bernie Sanders in the US to the Black Lives Matter movement.

But in truth there has been an alarming lack of real resistance from the trade unions and labour movement in Britain over the last year. That's not because people wouldn't support it—as the widespread backing for the junior doctors has shown. Now the left inside and outside Labour need to discuss and cooperate to shift this.

Mobilise against austerity, racism and war

There are hundreds of thousands of new left wing Labour members and tens of thousands more who come to Jeremy's rallies. It would be great to get them mobilised—even if it means upsetting some of the union leaders who have no confidence in the possibility of success. We already work together against war and racism. That work can be strengthened.



Photo: Manos Simoniades



Lecturers strike in defence of education
Photo: Michael Bradley

The election campaign has seen Jeremy put more flesh on the bones of his calls for a country that works for “the millions, not the millionaires”. But he could set out a programme for a left wing Brexit – and call meetings and demonstrations to battle for it. He could choose a small number of popular policies and campaign hard for them. For example, a £10 an hour minimum wage, guaranteed full rights for EU nationals, or stopping grammar schools and educational segregation.

For a start let's be together in Birmingham on 2 October demonstrating outside the Tory conference, and in London on 8 October at the Stand Up to Racism conference.

Struggle in the workplace

I'm very excited by developments in Labour, but I'm not joining the party. It is still centred on elections, and the union leaders have a huge say in what happens. For the moment most of them support Jeremy. But it comes at a price. A poll in August showed that 53 percent of Labour members and supporters said Britain should get rid of its nuclear missiles. Just 25 percent were in favour of them. But that won't go through Labour's conference because the Unite and GMB union leaders and most MPs support Trident.

Most Labour members back the junior doctors' strikes, and so does Jeremy. But there's no push to get Labour members on to picket lines or to organise support.

Jeremy is right to oppose the cuts being dictated by the Tories in councils—such as the wage cut that teaching assistants are fighting in Durham. But in Durham, as in many other towns, it's a Labour council imposing the cuts. I'm sure many on the left regret that, but there's no consistent criticism, let alone an attempt to stop councils doing it.

Labour remains a parliamentary party. Its structures and politics restrict the capacity for it to become a social movement, let alone an instrument for socialist transformation.

I hope Labour led by Jeremy wins the next general election. But if that happens, the bankers, the bosses and most of the media will react with horror. Their profits and their privileges might be threatened!

They will undoubtedly use methods such as manipulation of currency markets and deliberately shrinking the economy. Look what happened in Greece. The Syriza government was elected with an anti-austerity mandate then capitulated to pressure from bankers, bosses and the EU. It failed to mobilise and organise the masses of Greece against the unelected elite.

Despite pledges to halt privatisation, the port of Piraeus, the national railway carrier and 15 airports have been sold off. Thousands of refugees are herded into detention centres and threatened with deportation. There was and is resistance—but now it's against the leaders of Syriza, not alongside them.

Brutality of the ruling class

Jeremy wouldn't be like that, I hear you say. Of course he wouldn't want to end up implementing the bosses' plans. But neither did Syriza prime minister Alexis Tsipras. He simply had no answer when capital moved to crush him.

In such situations, if the financial squeeze fails, the ruling class can become more brutal. In the 1970s sections of the bosses and the politicians were terrified by the scale of workers' struggle in Britain.

A top Tory called Ian Gilmour, then the shadow defence secretary, wrote “Majority rule is a device... Democracy is a means to an end, not an end in itself. If it is leading to an end that is undesirable, then there is a theoretical case for ending it.” No such measures proved necessary. But the threat has not gone away.

A “senior serving general” told the *Sunday Times* newspaper that if Corbyn became prime minister, there would be “the very real prospect” of “a mutiny”. Elements in the military would use “whatever means possible, fair or foul,” he said. This doesn't mean I think the struggle is hopeless. Far from it. But in the end power doesn't lie in parliament. It lies in the economic ownership and control by the bosses and the unelected army, the police and the state.

What is the alternative?

The only way we can combat economic sabotage from the multinationals or the reaction of the state would be mobilisation of workers on a vast scale.

It would need strikes and occupations and monster demonstrations. It would require politics dragged from the parliamentary chambers into the streets. That's why I think we need independent revolutionary organisation.

We want to fight for a society where people's needs come before profit, where ordinary people control the wealth and resources of the world. We want an end to exploitation and all forms of oppression.

Let's unite in the many struggles where we have so much in common. I will always be on Jeremy's side against his right wing critics. But we also have to keep discussing how best to open the road to socialist transformation.

Join the Socialist Workers Party

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