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UK's new party in a party

Corbyn leadership re-election victory

After twenty years of right wing domination by warmonger Tony Blair and his heirs, the UK Labour Party now has a left anti-austerity leader - Jeremy Corbyn. His election caused shock waves in the British ruling class whose agents in Labour tried desperately to oust him forcing a second leadership election less than a year after he was elected to office. The Labour Party membership has trebled to more than 600 000 since Corbyn's election making it the biggest left wing party in Western Europe. Below is an edited version of a statement published by the Socialist Party (CWI in England & Wales) on 24 September 2016.



Jeremy Corbyn

Three months ago three quarters of Labour MPs launched a coup against Jeremy Corbyn forcing a new leadership election. They have been backed by all the forces of the capitalist establishment. Big business and the right-wing media have endlessly attacked Jeremy, while the Labour machine has prevented thousands of his supporters from voting in the contest. Despite this Jeremy was re-elected by a huge margin with 61.8% of the vote, even wider than in his initial victory. There was a very high turnout, with more than half a million people voting.

The issue of what needs to be done to consolidate Jeremy Corbyn's victory - by really transforming Labour into an anti-austerity, socialist, working class mass movement - is the critical question facing socialists in Britain today.

No compromise with the right

The course of recent events shows that Jeremy Corbyn's position is still tenuous. Only the protests of thousands of Labour members and trade unionists stopped what would have been a pre-emptory closing down of the opportunity to transform the Labour Party. All regular party meetings were cancelled, a number of constituency parties were suspended and the notorious 'compliance unit' conducted "a rigged purge of Jeremy Corbyn supporters". Ultimately, the structures and power relations that were developed under New Labour, which had destroyed the ability of the working class to contend for influence within the party, are still in place.

A first step for Jeremy Corbyn after his victory should be to declare that he will re-establish a central role within the Labour Party for the trade unions, commensurate with their importance as the collective voices of millions of workers.

Trade union representation within the Labour Party, when democratically exercised by union members, provides a potential means for the working class to control its political representatives. It was this characteristic above all that defined the Labour Party in the past - before New Labour - as a 'capitalist workers' party'. In other words, while the party had a leadership which invariably reflected the policy of the capitalist class, it had a structure through which workers could move to challenge the leadership and threaten the capitalists' interests. The unions' rights must be restored.

Other measures are also needed to democratise the structures of the Labour Party, sterilised by Blairism over years, with mandatory re-selection of MPs a key demand. The 172 MPs who triggered the coup with their 'no confidence' motion on 28 June should retain the Labour whip only if they agree to accept the renewed mandate for Corbyn and his anti-austerity, anti-war policies.

An ideological rearming is also necessary. In 1995, Tony Blair abolished Labour's historic commitment, in Clause Four, Part IV of the party's rules, to "the common ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange". The replacement clause committed the party instead to the dynamic "enterprise of the market", "the rigor of competition", and "a thriving private sector". Unfortunately, 'Corbynomics' - ultimately a form of Keynesianism - does not go far enough. There is no substitute for a clear programme of democratic public ownership of the banks, financial institutions and major companies, under workers' control and management, the essential basis for a new form of society, socialism, in opposition to the capitalist market system.

Reinstate the socialists

This necessary discussion and clarification of policies and ideas is the reason why another vital demand in the period ahead will be the right for all socialists, including those previously expelled or excluded, to participate in the Labour Party - and to be organised.

The leadership battle has revealed the morbid fear of the ruling class and their representatives within Labour precisely of 'organised socialists'. Above all for the right wing, exemplified in the attack on 'Trotskyist arm-twisters' by the deputy Labour leader Tom Watson, is the spectre of Militant, the predecessor of the Socialist Party. The capitalists have their 'tendencies' within Labour which they support both materially and ideologically, including through the weight of the establishment media. So why should those who oppose capitalism not be allowed to organise too? The best way to achieve this, undercutting the capitalist media's manufactured fixation on 'secret conspiracies', would be to allow socialist parties and organisations to openly affiliate to the Labour Party.

The transformation of the Labour Party into New Labour was not one act but a process consolidated over years. To reverse that transformation will also not be accomplished by one act but will require the organisation of a mass movement consciously aiming to overturn New Labour's legacy.



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