

Britain: Attempted coup against Jeremy Corbyn as leader of the Labour Party

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NO TO JEXIT! NO TO AUSTERITY! NO TO RACISM!

Those that have organised an attempted coup against Jeremy Corbyn as leader of the Labour Party are cynically using the referendum result as cover for something they have wanted to do ever since his election nine months ago.

These are the people who lost Labour the last two elections because of their austerity-lite politics and now they and now they want drag to Labour back to that old failed agenda. They are also the people who presided over an approach to immigration that was only marginally different to that of the Tories ("how do we keep immigration down") that helped make some Labour voters more vulnerable to the race card when it was played in this referendum.

They had hoped and expected that Labour would lose the Oldham by-election in the autumn or that the party's results in the local elections in May would be poor enough that they could move against him then. But that did not happen. Labour has done well in all the parliamentary by-elections since Corbyn was elected, like those in Oldham in December and in Tooting only two weeks ago, where the electoral swing would have been enough for Labour to win a general election victory. In the English local elections in May, opponents predicted a Labour meltdown with the loss of 150 council seats, whereas Labour did as well as 2012's high watermark when the Party was led by Ed Miliband. Labour won all the mayoral elections particularly in London, despite an extensive right wing media campaign against Corbyn and against Labour candidate Sadiq Khan, who was attacked by the Tories for nominating Corbyn for the leadership.

These results have been possible because Jeremy is not only the most popular leader Labour has ever had with the party membership, thousands of whom joined or re-joined to support him - leading to a doubling of Labour's membership, but he has also reached out to sections of the electorate abandoned by Labour under Blair and Brown.

Corbyn was not responsible for the UK-wide vote to Leave. It was the years of neglect under New Labour in particular compounded by the subsequent attacks by the Tories by which led some Labour voters to make a different choice than that which the party argued for. According to one of the opinion polls, 37% of Labour voters plumped for Leave while 63% - a significant majority - voted Remain. No Party leader delivered the votes of all their supporters in the referendum - not even UKIP on the Leave side, or the LibDems on the Remain side! The Scottish National Party had a similar Remain/Leave split among their voters, but SNP MPs and members are not organising against their leadership unlike the right in the Labour Party.

Corbyn has been a well-known and active local Labour MP in Islington for 33 years. In Islington, the Leave vote was among the lowest in the country at 25%, as the vast majority of working class Labour voters in the area swung behind Remain. Margaret Hodge has been Labour MP for Barking for 22 years, where the Leave vote was very high at 62% - yet it was Hodge who tabled a motion of 'no confidence' in Corbyn for losing Labour support during the referendum!

As we argued previously, Corbyn played a principled role during the referendum campaign – calling for a Remain vote to stay in, but with no illusions in the EU or its institutions. His interview on Sky TV News in the final week, for example, was filled with opposition to xenophobia, privatisation and austerity in front of a predominantly young and engaged audience with initial mixed views. This was a rare situation where the media covered the Labour campaign – the vast majority of coverage was either vitriolic xenophobia in the gutter press or a concentration on the ‘blue on blue’ between Conservative Party Leave and Remain positions, freezing out the Labour Party and progressive views.

And Corbyn’s decision – which should have been that of the whole Labour Party – not to appear on platforms with the Tories was not only principled but also more effective in delivering the votes of Labour supporters. As Matt Wrack of the FBU consistently argued we needed a Labour movement campaign for Remain.

Poison was spread during the referendum campaign that Corbyn was not committed to the position he was arguing – and since there have been even more despicable claims that he in fact voted to leave. Socialist Resistance has even sharper criticisms of the EU than Corbyn, but like him we were unequivocal in fighting for a Remain vote at this time and in these circumstances.

Jez we can - again!

The campaign by Labour MPs to remove Corbyn is a massive distraction when Labour needs to focus on fighting against austerity and racism – and will further weaken the chances of Labour being elected at a General Election – which could well be called in the autumn after the new Tory leader is elected rather than when it is scheduled in 2020.

Labour MPs could veto a general election timed to help the new Tory leader consolidate their position in the carnival of reaction that has descended. Under the Fixed Parliament Act, Prime Ministers no longer have the right to call a general election when it suits them – there must be a two thirds majority of MPs. However many Labour MPs who do not support Corbyn are scared of that the parliamentary boundary review in 2018 will mean selection contests before the general election – contests that many of them fear losing following the massive growth of Labour party membership by over 200,000 since Corbyn’s victory. They would rather risk destroying the Party’s electoral chances nationally than lose their own seats to democratic control by the members of the Party.

As the attempted coup within the Labour Party unfolded in the aftermath of the Cameron’s resignation following the referendum, Momentum, the organisation of Corbyn supporters within the Labour Party called an event in his support. After less than 24 hours a packed and vibrant rally of 10,000 (police estimate) packed into in Parliament Square. The protest took place during and immediately after a meeting of the Parliamentary Labour Party hidden just yards away in the Palace of Westminster. John McDonnell made clear to loud cheers that Jeremy Corbyn would not be resigning, while Diane Abbot stated that if there is a leadership contest, as seems now almost inevitable Jeremy would defend his leadership position in the election. The crowd, one of many across Britain, also heard from a number of trade union leaders including UNITE’s Jennie Formby who said: “I’m appalled at MPs choosing to create major rifts in Labour at a time when Tories have never been more divided”. Sam Fairburn from the Peoples Assembly told us that the PA and Stand Up to Racism have called an emergency demonstration against austerity and racism on July 16. Socialist Resistance fully supports this call.

Both speakers and participants at the rally included people who had campaigned on both sides in the referendum, although interestingly none of the Leave campaigners on the platform explained why they had taken that position while several Remain campaigners did.

Chants of “Corbyn in, Tories out” and “Jez we can!” –again echoed across the packed square particularly when it was announced that Corbyn would join us after the meeting – and even more excitedly when he did. The London event was one of several shows of support for Corbyn across the country and others are being planned by Momentum and allies. Trade unions like Unite, Unison and the Fire Brigades Union have been defending Corbyn. The FBU has recently reaffiliated to the Labour Party and FBU leader Matt Wrack has been both one of the strongest Remain campaigners and went on Radio to defend Corbyn strongly. Mark Serworka sent a strong message of support to Corbyn.

The statement from union leaders together with the mammoth petition with over 200,000 signatories in support of Corbyn are further important indications that the energy that saw his initial election is being reawakened in his defence now – but with more than a touch of anger that at a time when racist attacks are increasing and where the energy of the movement should be focused on defending communities against austerity and against racism and on taking the war to the Tories, energy is instead being wasted on such a battle. But given that the right in the Labour Party – given cover by some of the soft left who are going along with them – are trying to unseat Corbyn, Socialist Resistance stands full square with all those who are determined to prevent this happening.

There is a new wave of people rushing in their thousands to join the Labour Party to defend Corbyn, as Matt Wrack and others urged from the platform on Monday night. People active in campaigns to support migrants, to defend the environment, for council housing against zero hours contracts and so much more identify Jeremy Corbyn as the first Labour leader who has spoken for – and listened to – them. Despite the referendum results and the smears of the plotters in the PLP the dynamism that we saw last summer can be reactivated to defend what was won then – and deepen it. Left Unity will, as it did during Corbyn’s first election campaign work to be part of that movement, as well as to strengthen its own links with comrades across Europe as part of the European Left

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P.S.

* <http://socialistresistance.org/8564/no-to-jexit-no-to-austerity-no-to-racism>