

Britain: Resisting the right - Moving forward

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As the Labour Party conference starts, Socialist Resistance looks at the challenges for the left in the coming months.

Resisting the right has been a theme over recent months on three interrelated fronts – the offensive against the possibility of a Corbyn government, against the increased likelihood of a hard Brexit and against the growth of the far right in the shape of Tommy Robinson and his supporters.

The Right against Corbyn

Ever since Jeremy Corbyn entered the contest for leader of the Labour Party powerful forces have tried to stop or remove him. A continuous stream of right-wing slander and abuse has been directed against him and his supporters from the Tories, the overwhelming majority of the media and from the right inside the Labour Party. The most persistent focus of the attack on Corbyn has been the false accusation that Labour is riddled with antisemitism.

This summer saw that hate campaign plumb new depths. Three mainstream Jewish newspapers took the unprecedented step of publishing a common front page about the “existential threat to Jewish life in this country that would be posed by a Jeremy Corbyn-led government”. Labour MP Margaret Hodge not only denounced Corbyn to his face as a “fucking antisemite and racist”, but, hearing that she was to be disciplined for this, claimed she “felt the same fear her father would have felt when he was fleeing Nazi Germany”. This utterly trivialises the Holocaust, and was angrily condemned by many Jews who had lost relatives to Nazi barbarity.

This and much more took place in the context of pressurizing Labour’s NEC to adopt the IHRA definition, including all 11 examples of what ‘might’ be antisemitism, in the context that the NEC back in July had adopted a draft code of conduct which is more than sufficient to identify and deal with real cases of antisemitism.

There was a vigorous fightback from many Palestinian groups, from many Jews who asserted that the so-called community leaders did not speak for them and from many thousands of Corbyn supporters. Unfortunately the NEC caved in to the pressure and adopted the full IHRA package.

But despite everything thrown at Corbyn, he and his supporters remain on the offensive. All the vitriol aimed at him has had little impact on the opinion polls. The left swept the board in the NEC elections and won the great majority of seats for the National Policy Forum. Labour is debating measures to further democratize the party.

In this context, the Labour right are on the back foot. Blair says he doesn’t know what they should do – though the media are still giving him endless airtime to say so. Progress’s Luke Akehurst says they must stay and fight. The media focus has shifted from antisemitism to opposing “Open Selection” – which Momentum has come behind late and could be agreed.

Resisting Tory Brexit

The 'leave' vote in the referendum led to a carnival of reaction shown in the spike in racist attacks, rampant Islamophobia and a strengthening of the right wing of the Tory party, led by the likes of Jacob Rees-Mogg. Brexit will do major economic damage and, as usual, the working class and the poor will suffer most.

The Conservative right wing is openly discussing overthrowing Theresa May and imposing their own leader, possibly Boris Johnson. Such a government would lurch sharply to the right, imposing the harshest of Brexits, and targeting the rights of immigrants and workers. The Tory ultra-Brexiteers have strong support in the diminishing and ageing Tory rank and file.

This is taking place in the context that the TUC passed a statement from the General Council which leaves open the possibility that it will campaign for a referendum on the deal if the Tories don't deliver one that will protect workers' rights.

Labour needs to follow suit, also making clear that defending the rights of workers can only be achieved by fighting for the rights of migrants. Further Labour should fight for the extension of the franchise to EU nationals and to 16-18 year olds – those who would be the most affected by a Tory Brexit.

Resisting the far right

The left needs to wake up to the threat posed the new growth of the neo-fascist right, exemplified by the like of Tommy Robinson and the 'Democratic' Football Lads Alliance. The 'free Tommy Robinson' demonstration in June mobilised perhaps 15,000 with only a terrifyingly small counter-protest. And Gerard Batten, UKIP's new leader, is tilting his party towards trying to recruit from the fascist street fighters. The whole hard right spectrum is getting a major political boost from the rise of racism and xenophobia in the United States and Italy, while finance and international co-ordination is being organised by Trump outrider Steve Bannon.

The second counter-mobilisation against the fascists saw a better turn out by the left including some on the Labour left and trade union activists taking to the street. Labour and the trade unions need to take initiatives in local communities to mobilise against this poison – by challenging racism itself and by putting forward radical policies to tackle unemployment, poverty and social exclusion which are the grounds on which such reactionary views can breed. That's where a Corbyn-led Labour party, with its manifesto For the Many – Not the Few, is so important in giving hope for a progressive left alternative.

In this context initiatives like the National unity demonstration against Racism on November 17 in London should be a priority for the whole left and Labour movement.

Moving forward

Labour and all the left have to stand up to the right, stand up to the witch-hunt, and champion free speech on Palestine.

We must organise to resist a Tory Brexit, defend the rights of immigrants and demand a new referendum if a hard Tory Brexit solution is put to parliament.

The Labour movement and the left must mobilise at home and abroad against the new fascists to oppose them on the streets. The protests against Trump show that the forces are there to build such a movement.

These three tasks link together. The building of a massive movement against racism and fascism will

create the best situation to fight back against the witch-hunt, defeat a Tory hard Brexit, get Jeremy Corbyn into Number 10 and produce the conditions to defend him and his policies.

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P.S.

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