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UK: Starmer threatens to expel Corbyn and any Labour MPs not backing NATO's war on Russia

Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer told the *Times* May 3 that he would expel any Labour MP who did not declare “unshakeable support for Nato”.

Starmer, who has repeatedly declared Labour to be the “party of NATO” during its proxy war with Russia in Ukraine, said he was “very clear” that support for the military alliance was at “the root of the Labour Party”.



Jeremy Corbyn (left) and Sir Keir Starmer at an event during the 2019 General Election when Corbyn was party leader (Credit: AP Photo/Matt Dunham, File)

Times Radio had reported earlier that Starmer's allies wanted him to force hard-left MPs out of his party before the next general election. When asked by the *Times* about the

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report, Starmer replied, “We’ve been very clear about the expectations of our members of parliament when it comes to issues like antisemitism, when it comes to the false equivalence that some argue between Russian aggression and the acts of Nato. I’ve been very, very clear about that. And I’ll be very clear and firm on those issues.”

Asked to clarify whether he would act against his own MPs, Starmer replied, “Yes, these are principles that are absolutely the root of the Labour Party, the centre of the Labour Party...”

Starmer has indeed made clear not only that the de facto expulsion of former leader Jeremy Corbyn will be made permanent, but that it will be followed by similar treatment meted out to any of Corbyn’s allies not prepared to issue a grovelling pledge to support NATO’s war.

The only thing possibly preventing expulsions, given that hundreds of thousands of the socialist-minded members who joined Labour under Corbyn have since left the party, is the utter lack of political principle that characterises the Corbynite left.

On February 24, 11 Labour MPs, the rump of the Corbynite Socialist Campaign Group (SCG), collapsed in the face of a threat from Starmer to withdraw the party whip if they did not remove their signature from a Stop the War Coalition (STWC) statement calling for a halt to NATO’s eastward expansion and a negotiated settlement with Russia. All did so within an hour, including Corbyn’s closest allies, former Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell, former Shadow Home Secretary Diane Abbott, and SCG leader Richard Burgon.

Another 11 SCG MPs had on January 21 announced a new group that would try to “pressure” and “steer” Starmer “rather than resist or remove him.”

One day later, February 25, Starmer suspended the Twitter account of the party’s youth wing, Young Labour, and scrapped its annual conference for criticising Labour for “backing Nato aggression.”

McDonnell made his amends by addressing a pro-Ukraine demonstration in London alongside the warmonger Paul Mason, while Abbott said in a TV interview, “Nobody

wants to attack NATO... I am a loyal supporter of Keir Starmer". Both subsequently withdrew from the platform of an STWC rally.



Britain's Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell, left, embraces Jeremy Corbyn, the then leader of Britain's main opposition Labour Party during his speech on stage during the Labour Party Conference at the Brighton Centre in Brighton, England, Monday, Sept. 23, 2019. (AP Photo/Kirsty Wigglesworth)

The only MPs now backing the eviscerated remnants of the STWC are Corbyn and Claudia Webbe, both having already had the Labour whip removed. Despite this, demands persist for McDonnell and Abbott to be removed along with "as many Corbynites as possible," according to Blairite sources.

The *Times* cites one source saying, "Keir should have booted them out then... Forcing them to back down wasn't enough. He still has to share a party with them." Another said Starmer would not necessarily need a pretext like the STWC letter, because "when you control the NEC [national executive committee] there is always going to be a way."

The collective spinelessness of the Corbynite "left" is nauseating. Both McDonnell and Abbott will be septuagenarians by the time of the next general election, with fat pensions awaiting them on retirement. But they would rather end their days in the Labour Party covered head to foot in political filth than take a stand on the supposed principles on which they have built their reputations over decades.

However, this is not a betrayal of “JC” by his disciples, as some of Corbyn’s despairing supporters maintain. He leads these political scoundrels and set the tone for their response to the Blairite threats with his own constant retreats during his five-year term as party leader and following his replacement by Starmer. Not for nothing did McDonnell most recently reply to Starmer’s attacks on Corbyn for criticising NATO by tweeting, “A commitment to Nato has been Labour policy democratically determined by party conference and accepted by every Labour leader for inclusion in every Labour manifesto, including by Jeremy Corbyn, since NATO’s inception.”

It was already obvious that there was no pathway back to being a Labour MP for Corbyn. On October 29, 2020, the Equality and Human Rights Commission issued a report that was the product of the witch-hunt organised by the Blairite and Zionist groups, denouncing critics of Israel’s suppression of the Palestinians as anti-Semites. Corbyn never opposed the expulsion of even his closest supporters on such trumped-up charges. But six months after being replaced by Starmer, he commented that “the scale of the problem” of anti-Semitism within Labour was “dramatically overstated for political reasons by our opponents inside and outside the party, as well as by much of the media”.

Corbyn was suspended from the party that same day. He was readmitted by the NEC on November 17, but Starmer refused to restore the party whip—forcing him to sit as an Independent in parliament. Corbyn was told he must “unequivocally, unambiguously and without reservation apologise” for his comments before readmission would be considered. Last November Starmer said Corbyn might not be allowed to stand as a Labour candidate in Islington North in the next general election unless he did so.

For months Corbyn’s only political response to his expulsion was to set up the Peace and Justice Project. This one-man vanity operation gives him a platform from which to pontificate on the official “left” and “peace movements” around the world, while he speaks “in a personal capacity” at innumerable small demonstrations and small events mounted by Constituency Labour Party branches and local trade unions—carefully avoiding any conflict with the party that has driven him into this political wilderness.

On April 20, Corbyn gave two media interviews that underscored the miserable character of his opposition to Starmer et al. On Times Radio, Corbyn asked rhetorically, “Do

military alliances bring peace?” He added, “I would want to see a world where we start to ultimately disband all military alliances.”

After issuing these political bromides about a future without militarism, Corbyn stressed, “I don’t blame NATO for the fact that Russia has invaded Ukraine” and reassured his right-wing audience that if he was Labour leader, he would be “supporting Ukraine’s right to defend itself.”

An interview with the *Standard* that same day was an extended appeal for Starmer to let bygones be bygones. Stressing that he wanted to stand for Labour at the next general election, when he will be 73, Corbyn noted that he had not spoken to Starmer for two years. If he had the chance to do so, “I’d say I think Keir we need to move on... and I should be reinstated into the PLP [Parliamentary Labour Party]...” It was “irritating the way I’ve been treated. And I have not indulged in any kind of personal attacks of vendettas and don’t intend to as far as I’m concerned...”

He told his Islington North London constituents, “I’m proud to be your member of parliament, and I hope to be your member of Parliament in the future as a Labour MP.”

Asked if he would stand as an independent if he is not readmitted to the Labour Party, he replied evasively, “let’s deal with that bridge when we get to it”.

Four days later, Starmer predictably reiterated to the BBC’s *Sunday Morning*, “It is very difficult to see how” Corbyn could ever be readmitted to the party following his mealy-mouthed comments on NATO.

Corbyn’s prostration before the right-wing continues to exact a toll on his political allies. Even as the vicious offensive against even the most partial expression of popular anti-war sentiment escalates, the anti-Semitism witch-hunt rumbles on. With both Corbyn and McDonnell scheduled to speak at the Socialist Workers Party’s (SWP) Marxism 2022 event, the *Jewish Chronicle* denounced him for mounting a platform with “anti-Semites”. After slandering well-known rapper Lowkey and Palestinian academic Shahd Abusalama of Sheffield Hallam University, the newspaper reported that the Union of Jewish Students was demanding that Queen Mary University in London cancel the upcoming event.

However, the conditions have emerged for overcoming the damage Corbyn did to the political development of the working class.

Corbyn became Labour leader in 2015, and defeated a move by the Blairites to unseat him in 2016, because broad layers of workers and young people were looking for a way to oppose the destruction of their living standards and democratic rights—and because of Corbyn’s long record of opposing war and imperialist oppression. His downfall was not because he held these views, as the big-business media asserts, but because he betrayed those who believed he would fight for them.

Today there is nothing left of the claim, trumpeted by pseudo-left groups such as the Socialist Party and SWP, that Corbyn was leading a socialist transformation of the Labour Party. Labour’s policies are further to the right today than when Corbyn first became leader. Most fundamentally, Starmer is competing with the Conservative government to be the premier representative of imperialist warmongering against Russia.

As for Corbyn himself, he has rejected all pathetic appeals for him to head up a new “left” party. Instead he has made it known that his “pacifism” does not extend to opposing NATO’s plans to wage a war for regime change in Russia, even when this raises the threat of nuclear annihilation. His express aim is for Starmer to grant him an audience where they can discuss his reintegration into a party of austerity, militarism and war, led by McCarthyite witch-hunters.

These spent forces are in no position to capture a working class radicalised by price rises, pushing for a renewed wave of industrial action and repelled by the insane war propaganda of all the official parties and the media. That movement will find a political way forward in the Socialist Equality Party’s record of opposition to Corbynism over the past seven years. Defending the working class at home and opposing the drive to war means joining the SEP.

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