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Labour Party Leadership Contest: Critical Support for Jeremy Corbyn!

By Laurence Humphries, RCIT Britain, 17. August 2015

The Labour Party leadership contest – which became necessary after Ed Miliband's resignation following the ignominious defeat of the Labour Party at the last General Election – has four declared candidates. These four candidates are:

* Yvette Cooper: wife of Ed Balls, a former cabinet minister in the Gordon Brown Government

* Andy Burnham: another former cabinet minister in the Gordon Brown Government

* Liz Kendall: a Shadow Minister and the favoured Blairite candidate

* Jeremy Corbyn MP for Islington North and the socialist candidate from the left of the party.

The Labour party, supported by Tony Blair, changed the rules for party members voting in a leadership election. Instead of the block votes of the trade unions they introduced one vote per member. And under Ed Miliband's leadership, they introduced two other criteria for membership 1) *Members* 2) *Registered supporters* 3) *Affiliated Supporters*. For just £3 a registered supporter can vote in this leadership election. The election will be from the 14th August -10th September with a special conference on the 12th September to announce the result.

There has been a howl of protest from right-wingers suggesting that members of various centrist groups like the SWP, the SPEW and Socialist Appeal could sign up as registered supporters and vote in the Election. It appears that the right wing in the party 'have all been hung by their own petard'.

"The frontrunner in the Labour leadership election, Jeremy Corbyn, has said he only wants the support of "genuine Labour supporters" as he sought to dismiss calls for the party to shelve the contest over fears of an "infiltration" by hard-left activists. John Mann, the Labour MP for Bassetlaw, has written to the party's interim leader, Harriet Harman, to call for the election to be suspended until proper checks can be carried out on the tens of thousands of new members who have joined Labour since its election defeat in May. Mann told Harman: "[The election] should be halted. It is becoming a farce with longstanding members ... in danger of getting trumped by people who have opposed the Labour party and want to break it up – some of it is the Militant Tendency-types coming back in." (1)

Jeremy Corbyn is a noted left-winger, active in the Socialist Campaign group of MP's as well as being a leader in the *Labour Representation Committee*, another left wing organisation. Corbyn has caught the imagination of workers and youth who see in Corbyn an expression of change of politics in the Labour Party. He is chair of *Stop the War campaign* and has repeatedly voted in parliament against the Iraq war and the bombing of Syria. He was the only leadership contender who attended the recent anti-austerity march organised by the *People's Assembly*. He is known to be campaigning in the election as an anti-austerity candidate. He was one of 48 MP's who recently voted against the Conservative governments *Welfare Reform Proposals*. All the other candidates abstained against this ferocious attack on workers living standards which include cuts in tax credits (the amount that government adds on to help with workers with low wages); Housing benefit is to be cut to workers and their families with some exceptions. Universal credit, another Welfare reform, is paid to people of working age but failure to attend interviews or contact the job centre can lead to benefit sanctions which are being rigidly adhered to. The latest report is that over 1 million claimants have been sanctioned. The three other candidates – Cooper, Burnham and Kendall – all espouse right-wing views in the party and have grown closer and closer to the capitalist state. Blair has been rolled out to defend their cosy relationship with capitalism.

Jeremy Corbyn's campaign promises include opposition to imperialist wars including wars in Iraq and Syria, opposition to the *Anti-Union Laws*, the return of *Clause 4* to the Labour Party and nationalisation of major utilities like the Railways. Jeremy Corbyn has risked provoking a damaging row at the heart of the Blairite Labour Party by pledging to restore Clause Four if he is elected leader next month. Unsurprisingly, Corbyn has provoked a storm of protest by right wing Blairites in the Labour Party.

"Jeremy Corbyn has risked provoking a damaging row at the heart of the Labour Party by pledging to restore Clause Four if he is elected leader next month. In an interview with The Independent on Sunday, the man who has set alight the leadership race says the party needs to reinstate a clear commitment to public ownership of industry in a move which would reverse one of

the defining moments in Labour's history. (...) Mr Corbyn said: "I think we should talk about what the objectives of the party are, whether that's restoring Clause Four as it was originally written or it's a different one. But we shouldn't shy away from public participation, public investment in industry and public control of the railways."

Tony Blair described it as the "defining moment in the history of my party" when he successfully scrapped Clause Four in 1995, marking an end to nearly a century of Labour's commitment to socialism. The old Clause Four stated that the party was committed to "common ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange", but it was more than just a line of text. Mr Blair, who had been leader for less than a year, wanted to free Labour to embrace the market, and took on his party and the unions. At a special conference in April 1995, Mr Blair successfully won the party's agreement to sign up to a new Clause Four, which replaced the old wording with a commitment to a "dynamic economy, serving the public interest" with "a thriving private sector and high quality public services". (2)

Corbyn in many ways reflects the hopes of the progressive sector of the working class and wants to fundamentally steer the Labour party in a leftward direction. He has been attracting huge numbers of workers and youth to his campaign meetings. His meetings are overcrowded with enthusiastic workers and youth who want to see an end to austerity.

Many of the centrist groups have embraced his campaign. *The Socialist*, the paper of the Socialist Party, writes:

"Jeremy Corbyn's nomination for Labour leadership has transformed the contest. In contrast to the three varieties of Blairite 'austerity lite' on offer, he has captured a mood. Large numbers of people young and old, many from outside the party, have been inspired by the anti-austerity message. This parallels the anti-austerity mood that developed around the Scottish independence referendum and the surge for the Scottish National Party, as well as the million people who voted Green in the general election".(3) .

Workers Power emphasises the mass character of the campaign and its progressive potential. It recommends that revolutionaries should join the Labour party as registered members.

"Every left winger, every socialist individual or group, should throw themselves into the Corbyn campaign and prepare to fight the Tories in the streets and their stooges in the Labour Party." (4)

Naturally, revolutionaries must not stand aside of the Corbyn campaign but intervene and participate in it. Only sectarians can ignore the fact that this movement represents an important step in the politicisation of tens of thousands of young activists. It is important to build rank and file committees which organize new layers of activists and which will remain active beyond the electoral campaign in order to participate actively in the class struggle.

However, at the same time revolutionaries have to point out the left reformist character of Corbyn and his campaign. Corbyn has no perspective beyond becoming leader, transforming Labour into a left-reformist party without splitting with the right-wing and hopefully winning the 2020 General election.

It is important to explain that while Corbyn stands for partial nationalisation (Rail and Electricity), his economic programme which he proposes is nothing more than a Neo-Keynesian document which attempts to tinker with

capitalism in a reformist way.

In his document "The Economy in 2020" it is plain that like all reformists he favours a mixed economy with trade union bureaucrats working together with the capitalists. "Labour must create a balanced economy that ensures workers and government share fairly in the wealth creation process". (5) In another statement of his document he proposes the equality of taxation. "So to deliver rising living standards and decent jobs for the majority - which has got to be the focus of any Labour programme - we need a strategy for faster, more sustainable growth, as well as policies - including on taxation - to make sure that growth is more fairly distributed." (6)

This is the tenet of Corbyn's economic policy which is a total reformist document. The RCIT Britain rejects this formula as unattainable and a pipe dream. Capitalism is a system driven by crises and anarchic production. As Marxists we reject the idea that capitalism can be in anyway reformed or be made social just. As we have shown elsewhere, it has become increasingly unequal in the past decades around the world. (7) It can not be otherwise since in a period of decline of the capitalist system, the capitalists can increase their profits only at the costs of wages and welfare benefits. Hence capitalism has to be overthrown and replaced with a planned socialist economy.

Likewise, Corbyn wants to avoid a split with the party bureaucracy. Authentic socialists have to warn the new generation of activists that Corbyn will do whatever he can to avoid such a split. But it is in the interest of the working class to drive out the Blairite right-wing and the bureaucracy from the Labour Party. Revolutionaries have to warn that Corbyn will be prepared to make concessions to the bureaucracy in order to avoid such a split.

Many of the centrists believe that the Labour party can be reformed or changed. However, the right wing and the bureaucracy in the Labour party will ensure that it remains a bourgeois workers party (i.e. a party which is based upon the working class but controlled by a bureaucratic caste inextricably linked with the capitalist state). They will do everything in their tracks to stop Corbyn either through a split in the party or encouraging members to leave as the Social Democratic party did in the early 1980s (they are now part of the Liberal democrats).

Corbyn's weakness is that he has nothing to offer at the moment, all his policies are geared towards a Labour victory in 2020. Leaving aside that such victory is not a certainty, it also means that workers and youth have to face another 5 years of austerity without a perspective to fight back NOW.

It is the task of socialists to fight side by side with the tens of thousands of young activists in the Corbyn campaign. The RCIT Britain support this campaign and calls for a critical vote for Corbyn. However, at the same time we warn that Corbyn's program is not only left-reformist but that also his strategy lacks a realistic perspective to fight back against austerity now. It is not orientated towards the organization of mass mobilizations, mass strikes and occupations in order to bring down the Tory government. Corbyn's strategy is rather orientated to symbolic one-time protests now and winning the election in five years. Finally, Corbyn is not prepared to break with the right wing in Labour (while the right wing itself is likely to break with Corbyn).

For all these reasons revolutionaries have to warn that

Corbyn will betray the movement and their hopes of his supporters. This must not lead to any sectarian abstention from the campaign. Revolutionaries have to apply the united front tactic and give critical support to it. We call for the formation of committees of action out of the tens of thousands of supporters of the Corbyn campaign in order to put pressure on Corbyn to implement his promises. Such committees could also continue the struggle independently if Corbyn retreats.

The RCIT calls for:

** Critically support Jeremy Corbyn in the Labour Party Leadership campaign!*

** Formation of committees of action out of the supporters of the Corbyn campaign!*

** Stop the Tory's racist immigration policies! For equality of black, Asian and migrant peoples! For all migrants' full citizenship rights, for the right to use their native tongue, and the right to all their cultural rights including the right of dress!*

** For the nationalization of rail and electrify under workers control! Nationalise all banks and corporations under workers' control without paying compensation! Reinstatement of all public utilities that have privatised by both Labour and Tory led Governments!*

** Cancel all household debts! Occupy empty housing and oppose evictions if carried out by local authorities!*

** Repeal the Anti-Trade Union Laws! Legalise the right to strike and withdraw your labour!*

** Oppose all imperialist wars! British army and air force – out of Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and Northern Ireland! Support the resistance!*

** For a general strike to bring down this hated Tory government!*

** For a workers' government based upon councils of action and for an armed workers militia!*

** For a workers republic in Britain! For a United States of Europe!*

In order to enhance the struggle for such a perspective it is crucial to build a revolutionary party in Britain as part of revolutionary workers international. The RCIT Britain is dedicated to this task. If you agree with our perspective, join us!

Footnotes

(1) Patrick Wintour: Jeremy Corbyn: I only want genuine Labour supporters to vote for me, The Guardian, 26 July 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2015/jul/26/jeremy-corbyn-genuine-labour-supporters-leadership-election>

(2) Jane Merrick: Jeremy Corbyn to 'bring back Clause IV': Contender pledges to bury New Labour with commitment to public ownership of industry, The Independent, 09 August 2015, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/jeremy-corbyn-to-bring-back-clause-four-contender-pledges-to-bury-new-labour-with-commitment-to-public-ownership-of-industry-10446982.html>

(3) Steve Score: Jeremy Corbyn – thousands rally to anti-austerity appeal, 05.08.2015, Socialist Party, <http://www.socialistworld.net/mob/doc/7293>

(4) KD Tait: Class consciousness, class struggle and Jeremy Corbyn, Workers Power, 29 July, 2015, <http://www.workerspower.co.uk/2015/07/jeremy-corbyn-class-consciousness-class-struggle-and-jeremy-corbyn>

(5) Jeremy Corbyn: The Economy in 2020, p. 2

(6) Jeremy Corbyn: The Economy in 2020, p. 4

(7) See e.g. Michael Pröbsting: The Great Robbery of the South, Vienna 2013, chapter 5, <http://www.great-robbery-of-the-south.net/great-robbery-of-south-online/download-chapters-1/chapter5/>

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South Africa: Free the Boikelotong 4!

SPECIAL APPEAL launched by the South African *Workers International Vanguard Party*

The following appeal has been launched by the Workers International Vanguard Party (WIVP). The RCIT, irrespective of its political differences with the comrades from the WIVP, is in full solidarity with their appeal for the release of the four political prisoners. We also urge our readers to send donations to the fund to help pay for the costs of the appeal process (see below).

* * * * *

The activists **Dinah Makheta, Siphon Mangane, Dan Molefe and Pulane Mahlangu** are political prisoners of the capitalist state. We demand their immediate release. We call for all working class organizations to take up this call to campaign for the over-turning of their sentences, for an end to the criminalisation of protest and for the arrest of the bosses of Anglo American, Lonmin and other mining giants that have stolen hundreds of billions over the years that could have been used for decent housing for all, jobs for all, free, quality health care for all, free, quality education for all and all the needs of the entire masses. More than 63% of deaths of children are caused by hunger. Hundreds of thousands of people are dying from diseases of poverty. Millions are crowded into small dwellings and shacks. More than half the youth that start school drop out before matric because of poverty conditions. Our pensioners are starving; this year they received only a 4% 'increase', which is a cut in real terms. Meanwhile Anglo American and other mining giants not only take hundreds of billions of Rands of profits out of the country and the region, they also do not pay the taxes that they should. The government turns a blind eye to this theft while targeting activists who lead the struggles of the masses. Cde Dinah has a 12 year-old boy and a 83 year old granny

who is blind. Cde Siphon has 1 child; cde Dan has 3 children; Cde Pulane cannot care for her family as she is regarded as a prisoner-on-the-run.

Free Dinah Makheta, Siphon Mangane, Dan Molefe, Pulane Mahlangu and other political prisoners! Workers should mobilise committees, at all mines and other workplaces. Forward to workers' control over the means of production! Arrest the mining bosses and the corrupt police and political leaders responsible for the Marikana and other massacres! The police are the executive arm of the big bosses. They are not there to protect the masses. They protect thieving big bosses.

A legal fund has been set up to help pay for the costs of the appeal process. Please contribute to

Name of account: Eastes Inc Trust fund

Absa bank

Northcliff branch (Johannesburg)

Account number: 2840184350

Branch code: 334705

Please use the reference: appealvdbp

Please also email or sms us how much you are depositing so that we can keep track of funds.

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