

Pro-Corbyn Momentum group seeks affiliation to Labour Party

By Richard Tyler
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Immediately prior to its first national conference, announced for next month, the pro-Jeremy Corbyn Momentum campaign liquidated its “democratic structures” last week at the click of a mouse button. This followed an email “vote” by members of the Momentum “Steering Group” on the evening of January 10.

A new “constitution” was imposed, aimed at purging those pseudo-left groups opposed to the plans of the group’s founder, Jon Lansman, to seek “affiliation to the Labour Party”.

According to one Steering Group member, “There was no prior notice to find out who might be available to take part in this email vote, there was no discussion about the significant content of Jon’s email or the 4 attached documents, one of which is a constitution for the organisation and surely worthy of much discussion.”

The whole process “took less than an hour—6 votes for and 4 votes against,” after which “dissolution of all structures was announced along with a new constitution.”

From now on, people will only be allowed to join Momentum if they are “a member of the Labour Party and no other political party.” Existing members who do not meet this criterion have been given until July 1, 2017 to join the Labour Party, or be “deemed to have resigned” their membership of Momentum.

For months, those in the Lansman faction have denounced what they described as a “Trotskyist” and “sectarian,” minority faction “destructive to our movement” and intent on halting democracy. The forces they are describing are pseudo-left groups bitterly opposed to Trotskyism, who have no intention of breaking with either Corbyn or the Labour Party. But they are viewed as a political embarrassment and

an obstacle to Corbyn’s ongoing efforts to secure a permanent accommodation with the right wing of the party. To this end Momentum’s claim to be engaged in a “new kind of politics”, based on “participatory democracy” and “grassroots power,” has been summarily junked.

Corbyn, and those close to him, including Seumas Milne, Andrew Murray and Momentum spokesman James Schneider (on Corbyn’s strategic communications team) were all intimately involved. An email from Lansman to the Steering Group said that the constitution had been drawn up following “consultation with a number of others in Momentum, the [Labour Party] leader’s office and trade unions that have supported Jeremy Corbyn.”

The email continued, “We must put behind us the paralysis that has for months bedevilled all our national structures.” This is an oblique reference to the faction fight that erupted inside Momentum last December between a bureaucratic cabal at the core of Corbyn’s leadership team—many of whom are Stalinists—and representatives of various pseudo-left groups. Summing this up, the *World Socialist Web Site* wrote, “Lansman’s overarching political concern regarding Momentum is shared by Corbyn and his inner circle—to ensure that it remains as a useful adjunct of the Labour Party. In order to get Corbyn elected and re-elected as leader, Momentum assumed all the rhetoric associated with mass participatory democracy and successfully appealed to widespread hostility to the Labour right and the Parliamentary Labour Party (PLP) as a whole. But having succeeded in this task, it must now be made safe for the PLP and Corbyn’s stated aim of preventing the PLP’s collapse, or ‘Pasokification’ (a reference to the meltdown of the Greek social democrats.)”

The Lansman faction has carried out a purge of the

pseudo-left more ruthless than that of the Labour right during its moves against Corbyn's supporters through the party's Orwellian Compliance Unit—such that steering group member Jill Mountford, a member of the Alliance for Workers Liberty, declared, “This coup is astounding and not what any of us expected.”

Despite the grovelling of Lansman and Co, figures on Labour's right continue to oppose Momentum's affiliation to the Labour Party due to its backing of Corbyn. Richard Angell, director of the Blairite think-tank Progress, gleefully described Lansman as acting “like a monarch, granting a committee, granting a conference and taking them away again.”

Labour MP Tom Blenkinsop—one of the MPs demanding Corbyn's resignation as leader last year—tweeted, “I will be opposing this with every fibre of my body,” and has written to party general secretary, Iain McNicol, querying the basis on which Momentum could affiliate.

The *Guardian* cited Labour sources saying the process for Momentum to affiliate would be “long and difficult... Organisations must have three years of accounts before they can apply to affiliate, with Momentum in existence for only just over a year.”

Another Labour source quoted said, “Momentum would have to substantially change what they do in order to be an affiliate. Anything that emulates structures of the Labour party, like constituency groups, won't be allowed. It's inherently a faction, not an affiliate.”

Labour's constitution does not allow affiliated bodies to support one or another faction or leader of the party. On this basis, all affiliates must accept Labour party policy in its totality.

The inclusion of Momentum's aspiration to affiliate in the new constitution and the requirement that its members belong exclusively to the Labour Party is clearly aimed at excluding those like Mountford from its ranks. But this did not stop her from appealing to “activists to resist demoralisation and walking away from Momentum.”

Instead of alerting “activists” to the true character of Corbyn, Mountford reiterated her group's insistence that “Our aim is to transform the Labour Party and to replace the Tories with a Labour Party that fights for the working class”.

Every one of the pseudo-left groups has worked with

Corbyn and his clique to reinforce illusions that his victory as party leader would offer the opportunity for such a transformation. To this end they have boosted Corbyn's paper-thin left credentials, apologised for every accommodation and retreat he has made before the right-wing and now continue to claim that a Corbyn-led government is the way forward, even as he boots them out of his supporters' club.

Following Corbyn's election as leader in September 2015, the Socialist Equality Party (UK) wrote, “No one can seriously propose that this party—which, in its politics and organisation and the social composition of its apparatus, is Tory in all but name—can be transformed into an instrument of working class struggle. The British Labour Party did not begin with Blair. It is a bourgeois party of more than a century's standing and a tried and tested instrument of British imperialism and its state machine. Whether led by Clement Attlee, James Callaghan or Jeremy Corbyn, its essence remains unaltered.”

The events in Momentum have a clear precedent in what took place in the pseudo-left Syriza formation before it took office in January 2015 and continued enforcing brutal austerity against the Greek population.

In 2013, Syriza agreed to end its previous incarnation as an alliance of various pseudo-left and ecological groups, reflected in its official name—the Coalition of the Radical Left. Instead, it became a unitary party, firmly under the control of its leader and now Greek Prime Minister, Alexis Tsipras, and his faction. The ditching of its previous radical pretences was central to Syriza's grooming by the ruling elite as a party of the bourgeois state, tasked with the imposition of savage austerity.

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