

# Corbyn's Shadow Chancellor says Labour MPs will boycott RT

By Laura Tiernan  
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Even before UK Prime Minister Theresa May said that Russia was highly likely to have been responsible for the supposed nerve poison attack on the former double agent Sergei Skripal in Salisbury, Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell had declared that Labour MPs should boycott RT, Russia's state broadcaster.

Amid a climate of state-sponsored anti-Russia hysteria, McDonnell used his appearance on Sunday's Andrew Marr Show on the BBC to urge sweeping anti-Russia measures.

The statements of McDonnell—party leader Jeremy Corbyn's top ally—sought to position Labour to the right of the Conservatives on Russia-baiting, signalling the embrace of the “fake news” and “Russian interference” narratives being used to crack down on free speech and prepare for war against Russia.

Marr pointed to “suggestions” in Sunday's press that the Magnitsky Act (adopted by the US in 2012, and more recently by Canada and Estonia) imposing sanctions and asset seizures on Russians deemed guilty of corruption and human rights abuses, should be applied in Britain. He asked McDonnell, “Do you agree with that?”

McDonnell replied, “The Labour Party moved amendments to the current money laundering bill only a week ago to introduce the Magnitsky clause. At that stage the Conservative Party opposed our amendments. We hope now that they'll enable us to bring those amendments back at report stage of the bill so that we can have effective action.”

While acknowledging there was “not yet” proof of Russian state involvement in last week's attack on Skripal and his daughter, Yulia, Marr rushed to declare, “One very clear thing you could do is stop appearing on Russia Today [RT], which has been described by one of your own ministers as a Kremlin propaganda

vehicle.”

“I think that's right now, and that's what I'll be doing,” McDonnell replied. While he had, “appeared on [RT] in the past ... what we're seeing from Russia Today at times goes beyond objective journalism.”

“So, this is a change in direction,” asked Marr. “Peter O'Dowd, your deputy, was on Russia Today only yesterday. You're going to be encouraging the rest of your colleagues to follow your lead?”

“Yes, I am, because I've been looking overnight at what's happening in terms of changes in coverage on Russian television in particular, and I think that we have to step back now. I can understand why people have (appeared on RT) up until now because we have treated it like every other television station.” There had “been examples” of RT aligning itself to Vladimir Putin's regime, McDonnell said.

The *Financial Times* described McDonnell's statements as a “sign of growing hawkishness on Russia.”

Once again, the Corbynites have adopted policy positions associated with the pro-war majority that dominates the Parliamentary Labour Party. In October, Labour's Deputy Leader Tom Watson, one of the chief coup-plotters against Corbyn, called on Ofcom to investigate RT for breaching “the principles of impartiality and editorial independence that are set out in Ofcom's broadcasting code.”

Watson's letter to Ofcom followed a series of RT-sponsored billboard advertisements lampooning the ongoing campaign over “Russian hacking” and “interference” in domestic politics: “Missed the train? Lost a vote? Blame it on us!” Another billboard read: “Watch RT and find out who we are planning to hack next.”

RT's billboard campaign, straplined, “Question

More,” was pitched to significant sections of the public who regard the witch-hunt against the Russian broadcaster with scepticism and ridicule. They don’t need to be told, by John McDonnell or anyone else, that RT represents the interests of the Russian state. But large numbers have tuned in to RT as a means of circumventing the raw pro-war propaganda of the BBC and other news outlets in the UK and United States, and to hear anti-establishment commentators who have been censored.

McDonnell’s denunciations of RT are a warning to the working class: behind all the rhetoric about governing “for the many, not the few,” a Corbyn Labour government is lining up with the preparations for war against Russia and would implement a regime of state censorship against RT and any other news sites deemed a “threat” to the interests of British imperialism.

In November, the US branded RT a “foreign agent” under the Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA), a measure which the *World Socialist Web Site* explained was “aimed at delegitimizing RT as a news source, intimidating its journalists and guests, and setting the precedent for taking similar actions against other news outlets.”

The campaign against RT and “fake news” has been used as the pretext to enforce a reign of censorship against left-wing, socialist and anti-war websites. Following the introduction of new search algorithms last April, whose stated aim was the boosting of “trusted news sources”, traffic to the *World Socialist Web Site* via Google’s search engine fell by 74 percent.

While McDonnell denounces RT for breaching standards of “objective journalism,” he is more than happy to support the BBC’s lurid and wholly unsubstantiated accusations against Moscow. His attack on RT is rank hypocrisy. The BBC, CNN and Murdoch’s Sky News have all promoted blanket lies to justify regime change and brutal wars of aggression that have claimed more than one million lives in Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, Libya and Yemen.

On the Daily Politics show, which followed Marr’s own programme, presenter Sarah Smith described the attack on Skripal as “a sinister plot that has shocked the country ... with the finger of suspicion pointing firmly at Russia,” adding that “there’s even been a suggestion this could come up at the next NATO summit in

Brussels—because an attack on one member of NATO is an attack on all, and we could be looking at some kind of co-ordinated response from our international allies.”

McDonnell’s call for a boycott against RT underscores the bogus claims made by the myriad of pseudo-left outfits that Labour under Corbyn and McDonnell could be refashioned into a vehicle that defended the interests of working people.

As the Socialist Equality Party warned in December 2015:

“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 fight against the growing danger of a third world war means the development of an anti-war movement in the working class on a socialist and internationalist programme, independent of and in direct opposition to the pro-war programme of the Labour Party and its pseudo-left backers.

To contact the WSWP and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

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