

Jeremy Corbyn calls for unity with Labour's right-wing and the "business world"

By Robert Stevens
29 September 2018

The Labour Party's conference finished with a speech from Jeremy Corbyn that was a pitch for a "mainstream" government, a precondition of which was unity with the Blairite right of the party.

Corbyn delivered his address after an avalanche of bogus allegations by the Blairites, in alliance with the Tory government, military/intelligence complex and corporate media that he is an anti-Semite, supporter of terrorism and a threat to national security.

Such is the hostility to the right that Labour's National Executive Committee (NEC)—led by the trade unions and with the support of Corbyn himself, spiked demands for mandatory reselection of MPs that would have seen dozens expelled. After authoring this sabotage, Corbyn delivered a speech peppered with pledges to implement a minimal programme of reforms to rebuild "our divided country" and offer "an alternative to the politics of austerity, of social division and of international conflict," while insisting, "Our movement has achieved nothing when divided."

Labour stood for "democracy and social justice against poverty, inequality and discrimination," but "If we are to get the chance to put those values into practice in government we are going to need unity to do it."

Leading right-wingers including Tom Watson and Sir Kier Starmer were name-checked by Corbyn as being integral to his shadow cabinet and who would play a vital role in government.

Addressing those who have spent years slandering him and his supporters, including Chuka Umunna, who recently referred to Labour members as "dogs," and Margaret Hodge, who screamed in Corbyn's face that he was a "f***ing anti-Semite and a racist," the Labour leader pleaded that it was necessary "to focus on what unites us. We are on a journey together and can only

complete it together."

Labour had to "speak for the overwhelming majority in our country. Labour is a broad church and can be broader still. I lead in that spirit," Corbyn stressed.

Corby's pledges to end austerity came after conference whose actual business was dominated by one concession after another to the Blairites. The NEC motion reiterated that if Theresa May's Conservative government failed to secure a Brexit deal with the European Union (EU) guaranteeing access to the Single Market, it demanded a general election. But then declared that all options were on the table including a "People's vote." After some chivvyng by Starmer, Corbyn's key ally and Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell, acknowledged that a second referendum would include an option to remain in the EU.

With the Tories split and seemingly incapable of delivering even a "soft-Brexit"—maintaining tariff-free access to Europe's markets—Corbyn offered Labour's services as guarantor of the national interest. This went beyond even his overtures to the Blairite Remainers. To prove his reliability and responsibility, he pledged support to May if she secured an acceptable agreement but was opposed by the anti-EU faction of the Tories.

"Brexit is about the future of our country and our vital interests," Corbyn intoned. "It is not about leadership squabbles or parliamentary posturing... If you deliver a deal that includes a customs union and no hard border in Ireland, if you protect jobs, people's rights at work and environmental and consumer standards—then we will support that sensible deal. A deal that would be backed by most of the business world and trade unions too."

The political purpose of Corbyn's appeal was underscored by one of his chief advisors, Paul Mason, during the conference at a Momentum fringe meeting.

If the Tory government moves towards a “hard Brexit”, he said, “the way is open for us, Labour, to make a... hegemonic offer;” one that “allows us lefties, troublemakers, pains in the arse to capitalism... to make an offer to capitalism. We will save your bacon.” This would involve not only being “close to the single market, close in a customs union,” but would guarantee “joint security and defence... We’ll do all that.”

Corbyn made his own broader foreign policy pitch. His pledge to “progressive values,” “international solidarity and “no more reckless wars of intervention, like Iraq or Libya” was flatly contradicted by his naming of Emily Thornberry, Kate Osamor and Nia Griffith as its guarantors. Griffith, Corbyn’s Shadow Defence Secretary, is a fervent supporter of NATO’s military encirclement of Russia. In 2017, she strenuously objected to Corbyn’s statement that he would not authorise the use of nuclear weapons, declaring, “We are prepared to use it, and I’m certainly prepared to use it.”

Most pointedly, after being repeatedly attacked by the Blairites and the media as a stooge of the Kremlin, Corbyn fell into line yet again stating, “We are entering a new fast-changing and more dangerous world including the reckless attacks in Salisbury which the evidence painstakingly assembled by the police now points clearly to the Russian state.”

Applause for Corbyn from delegates was loudest when he outlined various measures he pledged would “rebuild the public realm and create a genuinely mixed economy for the 21st century.”

However, stripped of conference euphoria, his actual proposals were a very thin gruel. Nowhere in the speech was there even a single reference to the nationalisation of the utilities such as rail and water, to which he is formally committed. Instead he focused on measures that appeal to sections of the party and trade union bureaucracy and other upper middle-class layers who want to dabble in business with a guarantee of state support—speaking of “creative local initiatives such as those taken by Labour councils like Preston.” As with every other Labour council, Preston has abided by the instructions of Corbyn and McDonnell in imposing the austerity measures demanded by the Tories. Its “initiative” consists of buying in services from private providers located within the Preston area.

As for wealth redistribution, nothing was said about

big business and the banks, only a “levy on those with second homes” as “a solidarity fund for those with two homes to help those without any home at all.”

However, resources would be made available for law and order, Corbyn stressed: “Labour is listening. We’ll put another 10,000 police officers back on our streets...”

Corbyn was fully justified in his promise that there was “nothing for businesses to be afraid of” in his policies. Indeed, so tame were his proposals that Stephen Daisley in the *Spectator* wrote that he could not “think of any policy espoused by Corbyn that [Neil] Kinnock would have disagreed with in his time as Labour leader. If anything, Corbyn is more conservative.”

He asks, “If this is Corbynism—if it’s really just a harder edge on the soft-left—why go to all the trouble of electing a life-long far-leftist to push bog-standard social democracy?”

Daisley’s piece was nevertheless titled, “Why we should fear Corbyn’s socialism.”

His answer was that the real fear is of the working class responding in an uncontrolled way to Corbyn’s anti-austerity, anti-militarist and socialist rhetoric. “Public opinion has lurched to the left and the left’s figurehead ambles sluggishly after it,” he states. However, “Rhetoric matters and in rhetorical terms Corbyn is at odds with the last three decades of bland managerialism” with his “Talk of ‘a broken economic system’, ‘the political and corporate establishment’...”

For Daisley and his ilk, this poses the question that makes their blood run cold: What if workers and youth tire of Corbyn’s platitudes and decide to do something fundamental about this broken system and its political and corporate elite?

To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>