

Corbyn speech to UK Labour conference criticises austerity but offers no viable alternative

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In its “snap judgement” of Jeremy Corbyn’s first conference speech as Labour Party leader, the *Guardian* wrote:

“Other left/idealist types fed up with the status quo may be enticed by the Corbyn offer as well. But Corbyn had little or nothing to say to people outside the ‘insurgency bubble’ (to coin a phrase), people not stirred by quotes from Keir Hardie, people who may even have voted Conservative (all 11m of them).”

This is a refrain that will be heard ad nauseam throughout the media in the next days.

In his speech at Brighton, Corbyn spoke of the more than 160,000 who have joined Labour, more than 50,000 of them since his election; declaring that the two thirds of votes registered for him in the party leadership contest were a “huge mandate” for political change. “Let me be clear, under my leadership Labour will be challenging austerity,” he said.

Later he denounced the Conservatives, asking, “How dare these people talk about security for families and people in Britain? Where is the security for families who cannot own a home, and who have to move frequently in the private rented sector? Or for carers struggling to look after older people? Or for young people locked out of careers?”

This was “Tory economic failure... An economy that works for the few, not for the many.”

He added, “And the shocks in the world markets this summer have shown what a dangerous and fragile state the world economy is in. And how ill prepared the Tories have left us to face another crisis.

“It hasn’t been growing exports and a stronger manufacturing sector that have underpinned the feeble economic recovery. It’s house price inflation, asset inflation, more private debt. Unbalanced. Unsustainable.

Dangerous.”

He was proud to have spoken at the “refugees welcome” demonstration hours after being elected as Labour leader. “These refugees are victims of war. And the response from the government isn’t enough. Let’s reach out the hand of humanity and friendship to these people,” he said.

Across the official political spectrum, from the nominally liberal *Guardian* to the *Daily Telegraph*—and especially the constant stream of Blairite policy wonks appearing on TV—there is a chorus denying that Corbyn’s victory means anything other than a “left” knee-jerk by the party faithful that bears no relationship to the “real mood” in the country.

This is yet another example of the political disconnect of these immensely privileged, wealthy layers from the thoughts and sentiments of huge numbers of working people, who will see these parts of Corbyn’s speech as a breath of fresh air and, more importantly, something worth fighting for. For in truth the working class is far to the left of anything being offered by Corbyn.

The *World Socialist Web Site* wrote on September 14 that his election was “an indication of enormous social anger and disgust with the rotten state of British society.”

But this was followed by a political warning that “there are principled considerations that must govern political analysis. And while Corbyn is the initial beneficiary of a significant shift in the political climate, he and the party he now leads cannot escape responsibility for the present state of affairs, much less provide the means for changing it.”

Everything he has done since taking office has confirmed the correctness of that verdict, including the substance of his speech to the conference.

Corbyn offered no real answer to austerity because his

pledge to end it is not made from the standpoint of opposing capitalism. He claims only that “There is an investment crisis” and that there needs to be a national investment bank and a “Green New Deal.”

The reality is that trillions of pounds, dollars and euros have been pumped into the world’s markets in the aftermath of the 2008 crash, but capitalism has not recovered. Rather it is in every bit as “dangerous and fragile” a state as Corbyn himself stated.

Moreover, to complain that the problem is that “quantitative easing” has only gone to the banks and not to stimulate the real economy answers nothing.

Corbyn has stated repeatedly that austerity is a “political choice.” But the same argument could be made regarding pumping endless billions into the coffers of the banks and investment houses throughout the world.

That process only illustrates the dictatorship exercised by a financial oligarchy over all aspects of economic, political and social life. To challenge that dictatorship also requires making a political decision—not to engage in minor economic tinkering, but to mobilise the entire working class against big business in a struggle for socialism.

This is far removed from anything being offered by Corbyn.

One of the most significant elements of his speech is how, after first ridiculing some of the more hysterical press attacks on him, he moved immediately to offer an olive branch to all those in the Labour Party who are bitter opponents of any and all measures that would impinge on the power of the super-rich layer they all serve.

There was no mention whatsoever of the pro-austerity, pro-business policies pursued by Labour under Tony Blair, Gordon Brown and Ed Miliband that saw the party crash and burn in the general election in June.

On the contrary, he took pains to praise all his rivals in the leadership contest that followed, including the arch Blairite Liz Kendall for her “passion, independence and friendship.”

“I am not imposing leadership lines,” he added. “We all have ideas and a vision of how things can be better.”

“I will listen to everyone,” he said.

The “commentariat” do not understand the “new politics,” he added later. “They report disagreements as splits, and agreement and compromise as concessions and capitulation,” whereas, “This is just grown-up politics.”

Corbyn maintains that his refusal to engage in “personal attacks” honours the mandate that he has been given for political change.

It is a betrayal of that mandate, one that subordinates the working class to a rotten right-wing cabal that still heads the Labour Party. He was elected with the political support of only 15 Labour MPs. Large numbers of the rest are just biding their time before moving against him—which they will do with the full backing of the ruling class and its media.

Much of Corbyn’s speech was given over to his pledge to transform the Labour Party into a “voice for engagement and for international law.”

He denounced the Conservatives for supporting repressive regimes such as Saudi Arabia, for their intention to repeal the Human Rights Act and the Trade Union Bill, which is a “fundamental attack on human rights.”

But he then praised US President Barack Obama for reaching a deal with Iran and showing how other conflicts, including in Syria, could be resolved through the mechanism of the United Nations.

To sow such illusions in the peaceful intent of Obama is to disarm the working class as to the growing danger of war in the Middle East and throughout the world, which stems above all from the predatory actions of the US, Britain and other imperialist powers that have already cost the lives of millions.

Underlining the falsity of his pose of opposition was Corbyn’s decision to junk his promised apology for the Iraq War, or to make any mention at all of Labour’s record of criminal warmongering under Blair and Brown.

He did, however, find time to make his pledge of loyalty to the armed forces. Britain needs a “strong military, to keep us safe,” he said.



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