

Corbynites moot new party

Chris Marsden
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A report leaked to the *Guardian* has been widely understood as the first public indication that former Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn is amenable to the formation of a new “left” party.

Just over two months ago Corbyn told the *Guardian* that he would focus his own efforts as an Independent MP on building community-based initiatives in his Islington constituency and insisted that “to create a new, centralised party, based around the personality of one person, is to put the cart before the horse.”

But on September 15, the *Observer* Sunday sister paper of the *Guardian* reported his attendance at a secretive meeting aimed at starting “a party named Collective.”

The newspaper reported that “Key figures in the group said they hoped the party would act as an incubator for future leaders who could replace Corbyn as a figurehead of the left, and aim to contest seats at the next general election.”

It wrote that Corbyn “gave the opening speech” and that “founders said they would begin drawing up democratic structures for a new party to launch.” But this was followed by a source “close to Corbyn” stating that “his attendance was not an official endorsement and that he had attended the meeting to ‘listen to and share a variety of views about the way forward for the left’.”

It also noted that others in attendance such as the former North of Tyne mayor Jamie Driscoll, Lutfur Rahman, the mayor of Tower Hamlets, and Andrew Feinstein, the anti-apartheid activist who stood against Keir Starmer in Holborn and St Pancras constituency and who is a leading light in the group Collective leading the initiative, as well as the “four independent candidates who won seats at the last general election on a pro-Palestinian platform and who have subsequently formed a parliamentary alliance with Corbyn” are all opposed to such a move.

Subsequent comment from some of those invited, above all the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC), the electoral front dominated by the Socialist Party, made clear that such sentiments are widespread. This partially accounts for the secrecy surrounding the event, Corbyn still maintaining his distance/deniability and the extraordinary absence of political discussion on just what the new party will stand for.

The only political comment cited publicly was from Pamela Fitzpatrick, the relatively unknown director of Corbyn’s Peace and Justice project and spokesperson for Collective, who insisted that “now is the time” to become an established party... We have seen the rise of the far right and already people are feeling politically homeless because they were so desperate for change but support for Labour is dropping so quickly. We need a real movement that can fill that gap.” Even she said the movement would take time to launch as a political party because “We don’t want to make the same mistakes as the past.”

What Collective is and what it proposes

Feinstein was the second most prominent general election candidate

after Corbyn to be backed by Collective. The group was set up late 2023 by supporters urging Corbyn to come to the head of a new party. It was publicly launched in May 2024 after he declared he would be standing against Labour in Islington North.

But Feinstein has since urged Corbyn to concentrate on local “grassroots” organising of his “People’s Forum” in Islington North, which held its first meeting last weekend, and is himself involved in a similar venture in Holborn and St Pancras.

The day before the secret Collective meeting, the Peace and Justice Project, launched in December 2020 by Corbyn, had held a one-day conference in London at which no mention of a new party had been made.

Those invited to take part in the Collective discussion, including Fiona Lali of the Revolutionary Communist Party, had all agreed not to talk publicly about the strategy document issued August 12, *Beyond GE24: Rebuilding A Mass Socialist Movement As A Foundation For A New Left Political Party*, because, according to TUSC, “it could become the subject of a ‘public debate over details’ at this early stage.”

A report by the TUSC steering committee is therefore the most comprehensive presentation publicly available of this document, which TUSC representatives Dave Nellist and Clive Heemskirk of the Socialist Party had access to.

The summary drawn up September 4 and published in *The Socialist* September 11 reads like an Initial Public Offering designed to reassure potential political partners that investing in the new venture will pay dividends.

The “objective of a new party” states only that “there is a need for a new class based and mass membership political party of the left in the UK”, requiring “a new organised mass movement... capable of mobilising the disaffected and disenfranchised millions...”

The “required components” of such a party are: “a strong grassroots community organising model; unity within the left; an inspirational leadership team; a national democratic structure; and a solid relationship with organised labour”—for which read the trade unions.

The party’s “ultimate object” is “to gain representation at national parliamentary, regional and local government levels that will properly serve the aims and demands of the labour movement and the millions left disaffected and disenfranchised by Oligarch Britain”.

For the new party to be “the credible, sustainable and pre-eminent party of the left,” the “go-to choice for members and affiliates, left candidates and voters” requires “a growing base of party elected representatives across the UK, beginning with the 2025 local elections”.

The plan proposed is to “register 100,000 members by 2025”, to “establish a policy programme clearly differentiated from Labour, Greens and [George Galloway’s] the Workers Party”, to “identify and stand candidates in all UK elections” and to “have a minimum of 150 elected councillors in 2025 and a dozen MPs from the 2029 general election”.

This wish-list-cum-promissory note is followed by a section, “Founding Principles”, centred on a repetition of Labour’s old claim to have a “‘broad church’ philosophy”, democratic structures and a “governance constitution with an emphasis on tolerance, inclusivity and solidarity”.

The principles also include a commitment to support “electoral

alliances” with other “alternative left parties or groupings that share our core values” so as to “not compete or split the vote”.

The timeframe for establishment was laid down as registering a party with the Electoral Commission in early 2025, a “public launch early in 2025” with “the ability of individuals to join the party” and its “principles and/or brief policy commitments” both “to be in place and visible on the day of the launch”, preparing a “local elections strategy” for candidates to be announced by mid-March and a founding and annual conference “in late 2025”, by the end of which “the party should have its policies, party structure, constitution, internal democracy and disciplinary and governance all democratically decided upon.”

The Socialist Party for one was not convinced, insisting that a new party must have the support of trade unions, which Collective does not, and complaining that Corbyn, who must play “the catalyst role” in the formation of a new party, had not attended Collective meetings, “nor given any other indication of his commitment to the strategy and timeframe proposed.”

The SP then lists other failed projects for a new party in the UK before concluding that TUSC’s proposal was that “Beyond GE24 should be presented as a discussion document to be taken into the movement to see what the response is, rather than as definitive proposals—particularly the timeframe action-points—to set up a new party in the next few months.”

Placating such concerns indicates why Corbyn chose to attend his first Collective meeting on September 15, but also why he has still not nailed his colours to a new party project.

Yvonne Ridley, a member of Galloway’s populist and anti-migration Workers Party, who was also in attendance, wrote in the *Middle East Monitor* that “Describing the private gathering of The Collective and calling it the launch of a new political party was probably a little premature of the uninvited *Guardian* newspaper. Corbyn and his supporters were testing the water and had invited probably no more than 60 people, ‘comrades’ from around the UK who are appalled by Labour’s current trajectory.

“Significantly, Corbyn himself sat in the front row of the audience and not on the platform, making it clear that this was not his conference, but a gathering of like-minded people who are desperate for the emergence of a new political movement...”

If the Collective meeting is seen in future as the initial launchpad for a new party, which is entirely possible, then this only confirms the politically rotten character of such a formation.

It will be an unprincipled amalgam of various bankrupt Labourite and pseudo-left groups, which only weeks ago were all campaigning for a Labour victory and based on a minimal programme of reforms that has yet to be agreed. And it will be led by someone so wedded to the Labour Party that he still hesitates to completely break from it after being witch-hunted for years as an antisemite, then expelled from its ranks.

Corbynism and the crisis of working-class leadership

What are Corbyn’s qualifications for leading a new party for working people? He was handed leadership of the Labour Party with a massive mandate to drive out the Blairite right and fight for socialist and anti-war policies. His victory was proclaimed by Britain’s pseudo-left as the basis for Labour to become a “new workers’ party” (Socialist Party) and the “rebirth of social democracy” (Socialist Workers Party).

Corbyn himself declared that his mission was to oppose the “Pasokification” of Labour, the collapse in support suffered by the Greek and other European Social Democrats, pledging himself to maintaining a “broad church” with the right wing. His constant capitulations handed

them a victory in less than five years, while his own supporters were slandered and driven out, or left in disgust. From being in charge of the party with the largest membership in Europe, he presided over the biggest rout in British political history and is now one of just five Independent MPs who agree on nothing outside of opposing the ethnic cleansing and mass murder of the Palestinians.

The working class has, moreover, already had bitter experiences with the type of supposedly alternative “broad left” party Corbyn’s pseudo-left supporters advocate: not the failed projects they cite in the UK such as Respect and Left Unity, but formations that succeeded in forming governments—Syriza in Greece and Podemos in Spain. Championed by the same social forces and built by Stalinist and pseudo-left tendencies, their betrayals in imposing austerity on the working class and waging war on behalf of NATO imperialism ended in disaster and collapse.

The timid manoeuvres of the Corbynite take place under conditions where Labour under Keir Starmer has formed a right-wing government proud to be “the most business friendly” in British history, which is intent on imposing austerity on the working class and whipping up anti-migrant sentiment, is openly Zionist and supports the genocide of the Palestinians, and which is in the front rank of those urging that the proxy NATO war in Ukraine is escalated to the direct use of cruise missiles against Russia.

This makes the formation of a new workers party the most urgent question. But the right-wing evolution of Labour into a such a naked party of big business and imperialist war was not reversed by Corbyn’s leadership and cannot be answered by the formation of what would essentially be a Labour Party Mark II.

The essential motivation of those involved in the “new party” discussions is to police the inevitable confrontation developing between the Starmer government and the working class, to prevent a social explosion and confine workers to a parliamentary struggle for the election of a few candidates of protest—“positioned”, as they declare, between the Greens and the Workers Party and drawn when possible from the Labour and trade union bureaucracy.

During the general election, in a June 28 polemic against Feinstein and Collective, the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) explained that the fundamental reason for the failure of the Corbyn project was not ultimately the milquetoast character of his leadership, but fundamental shifts in the very organisation of world capitalism.

The development of transnational production and the global integration of finance and manufacturing has dramatically undermined the viability of the old trade unions and Stalinist and social democratic parties that were embedded in the nation-state system, to which they all responded by junking their former reformist programmes.

The Labour “left” shares the right-wing’s nationalist and pro-capitalist programme, differing only in their advocacy of a few of the reforms the Blairites have abandoned.

Today, only a socialist and internationalist programme offers a way forward for the working class.

This appraisal holds equally true for the trade unions which the pseudo-left groups hail as the essential organisations of the working class and the bedrock of any new party venture. They are dominated by a bureaucracy whose nationalist programme of support for British capitalism and collusion with the corporations and the state in policing and betraying the struggles of their members finds finished expression in their corporatist alliance with Starmer’s Labour Party.

The building of a socialist and internationalist party is what now confronts the working class in Britain and all over the world.

Only in an alliance with their class brothers and sisters in a globally organised struggle can workers combat the drive of transnational corporations and banks and their parties and governments for austerity, the rise of the far right that feeds off the despair produced by capitalism and the vile nationalism of the official parties, including Labour, and the escalation of war and all its horrors in Europe, the Middle East and throughout the world.

The SEP urges the formation of rank-and-file committees in every workplace to lead a fight against the employers and in a rebellion against the union bureaucracy. We call on young people and workers to join the International Youth and Students for Social Equality and to become members of our party to take forward the necessary fight for the socialist political reorientation of the working class.

The SEP is the British section of the International Committee of the Fourth International, the world party of socialist revolution founded by Leon Trotsky in 1938. Its entire existence is one of political struggle against Stalinism, reformism and imperialism and all those tendencies that tried to confine the working class to the leadership of bureaucracies that betrayed again and again to devastating effect, and which have now suffered political collapse.

The most advanced workers and youth assimilating the lessons these decades of struggle is the necessary political foundation for resolving the crisis of working-class leadership.



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