

In Right-wing Putsch, UK Labour MPs Deliver Overwhelming Anti-Corbyn Vote

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Fully 81 percent of the parliamentary Labour Party (PLP) supported Tuesday's motion of no-confidence in leader Jeremy Corbyn. Just 40 Labour MPs voted against the motion, with 172 in favour. Thirteen did not vote at all and there were four spoilt ballots.

The extraordinary scale of the right-wing coup, which had already seen Corbyn lose most of his shadow cabinet in a series of timed resignations, was intended to force the Labour leader to resign. But in a statement put out moments after the result, Corbyn said that he had been elected "by 60 percent of Labour members and supporters" only last September, and "I will not betray them by resigning."

The no-confidence motion, he said, has "no constitutional legitimacy."

Corbyn is correct in that the motion is non-binding and there are no constitutional provisions in Labour's rulebook for a leader to stand down in the event of such a vote. But his opponents are not merely indifferent, but viciously opposed to party democracy. They aim to overturn the result of last September's election, which saw Corbyn decisively win the leadership on a ticket of opposing austerity and war.

These events shatter Corbyn's claim that the party can be "reclaimed" for working people. They make clear that Labour is a right-wing party of the state, deeply hostile to the working class and even to its own membership.

The seismic shock of last Thursday's referendum vote in favour of Britain quitting its membership of the European Union has provided the trigger for these moves. With the contest for the Conservative Party leadership opening today and a snap general election possible in the autumn, the PLP clique that controls the Labour Party is acting in concert with the highest levels of the state.

Their motivation is not their professed concern that Corbyn could not win a general election, but their fear that he very well might. Under conditions of the gravest crisis for Britain's ruling elite since the Second World War, the bourgeoisie will not tolerate a potential prime minister professing an anti-austerity, anti-militarist agenda. They want to ensure that Labour—the main political obstacle to socialism in Britain for more than a century—is completely reliable in carrying through the onslaught against the working class now being prepared.

On June 13, 10 days before the EU referendum, the *Telegraph's* political correspondent, Ben Riley-Smith, set out precisely the scenario that has now unfolded. "Labour rebels," he wrote, were preparing to topple Corbyn after the referendum in a 24-hour media "blitz."

“By fanning the flames with front bench resignations and public criticism, they think the signatures needed to trigger a leadership race can be gathered within a day,” he said.

Within hours of the referendum result, by midday Friday, Dame Margaret Hodge and Ann Coffey MP had submitted the no-confidence motion against Corbyn. This was followed early Sunday morning by Shadow Foreign Secretary Hilary Benn informing Corbyn that he had no confidence in his leadership, leading to his sacking.

Beginning Monday morning, the wave of resignations by shadow cabinet MPs was underway. Charging that Corbyn had not done enough to ensure a Remain vote in the referendum—despite 64 percent of Labour supporters backing staying in the EU—more than 50 resigned their posts in less than 48 hours. Such was the febrile atmosphere in the PLP that there were wild and false allegations that Corbyn had personally voted to leave the EU.

Late Monday, the *Financial Times* demanded that the party “now act to remove Jeremy Corbyn.” Regardless of party rules and members’ desires, the PLP must “press ahead” and “spell out to the whole Labour movement the consequence of the false path the party has embarked upon.”

On Tuesday morning, the pro-Labour *Daily Mirror* led its front page with a call for Corbyn to “step down for the good of the party and the country.”

Corbyn was left to frantically seek replacements for the resigned shadow cabinet ministers, but he could not command sufficient support to fill the vacancies. Two members of his newly reshuffled shadow cabinet, Rachael Maskell and Rob Marris, abstained in the no-confidence motion.

Ian Murray, former shadow Scottish secretary, is among those who quit the front benches. He is Labour’s sole Scottish MP after the party was all but wiped out in last year’s general election. Scottish Labour leader Kezia Dugdale joined the calls for Corbyn to quit, and Lord Foulkes, chairman of the Scottish PLP, said no Scottish politician would be prepared to sit in a Corbyn-led shadow cabinet.

These moves are deeply unpopular. More than 224,000 people have so far signed an online petition defending Corbyn. On Monday night, 10,000 protested in Parliament Square in support of the Labour leader. But right-wing Blairites have lined up to insist that this support—which they deride as consisting of “Trotskyites” and “Stalinists”—is illegitimate.

Alistair Campbell, Tony Blair’s former spin doctor, said that Labour had become a Corbynite “sect” and a “cult,” made up of supporters of hard-left parties. Campbell called on those wanting to oust Corbyn to sign up as Labour supporters in preparation for a leadership challenge. A campaign, #SavingLabour, has been set up to recruit new members on this basis.

Former shadow business secretary Angela Eagle is today expected to announce her challenge to Corbyn’s leadership if he does not resign. Her candidacy, some on the right hope, would rally the majority of the PLP and effectively block Corbyn from even running in a leadership contest, as he does not have the support of the 50 MPs required for placement on the ballot. Corbyn’s supporters say that this is also unconstitutional, because, as serving leader, he automatically has the right to be on the ballot.

So far, Corbyn seems to retain the backing of the major trade unions, which are Labour’s

main financial base. Len McCluskey, leader of the Unite union, the single largest donor, said that the behaviour of the PLP was “extraordinary” and that “if anyone wants to change the Labour leadership, they must do it openly and democratically through an election, not through resignations and pointless posturing.”

But such statements are lukewarm. And even if these blatantly anti-democratic moves fail and Corbyn is able to run, the PLP has made clear they will not serve under him if he wins again.

Hence the open calls for a split by the right. Former Home Secretary David Blunkett said Corbyn’s supporters should leave Labour and “set up their own party with Momentum,” the “grassroots” organisation set up to support Corbyn after his leadership victory.

Behind such demands, preparations are being made for a “national unity” government. Writing in the *Telegraph*, John McTernan indicated what is being discussed behind the scenes. The issue of EU membership had split the country and all the parties, he wrote, requiring a “government capable of rising to the challenges the country faces.” The solution was a “grand coalition” along German lines.

The ideal would be to take the “ultra-left rump of the Labour Party” around Corbyn and “demerge them into a separate party.”

The Conservative party could then be split into “pro- and anti-Brexit camps.” This would see “Tory modernisers” join with the majority of Labour MPs in a “progressive party of the radical centre” that could incorporate the remaining Liberal Democrats into an “opposition of national unity.”

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