

HOW TO DEFEND CORBYN & DEFEAT AUSTERITY



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Jeremy Corbyn continues to face savage and relentless attacks from the capitalist establishment and also from within Labour. Nothing sums this up more than the outrageous attack on him by the chief of the defence staff of the armed forces, which was then supported by the shadow defence secretary, Maria Eagle. This, along with the suspension of Jeremy's head of policy Andrew Fisher, marks a clear escalation by the right wing of the civil war in the Labour Party. The charge against Andrew Fisher is that he tweeted support for non-Labour candidates in the general election. Yet while he has been suspended right-wingers like Frank Field face no disciplinary action, despite calling for de-selected Labour MPs to resign and trigger by-elections, standing in them against Labour as independents.

It would be a major mistake to imagine it is possible to pacify the Labour right, trying to 'peacefully co-exist' with the Blairites while they conduct an all-out war, with the full backing of the capitalist class. To defeat the right requires building on the 'Corbyn surge' to create a mass movement against austerity. Only a movement of this kind will be able to launch a serious fight to transform Labour so that it not only has an anti-austerity leader, but is an anti-austerity party. This will not be possible on the basis of accepting the current, highly-undemocratic, Labour Party structures. To say, as Jeremy did, for example, that he was making it 'crystal-clear' he opposed mandatory reselection of MPs was a mistake which emboldened the right and can potentially disarm the hundreds of thousands of workers and young people who would like to deselect pro-war, pro-austerity Blairite MPs.

Instead of making political and organisational retreats it is essential to stand firm on the anti-austerity programme which delivered a landslide victory in the election and attempt to organise all anti-austerity forces in defence of Jeremy Corbyn. A council of war involving all anti-austerity forces – including the non-affiliated unions, the Socialist Party and others is urgently needed.

Momentum has the potential to provide the political and organisational framework for building the anti-austerity movement; particularly as it initially recognised the need to organise both 'inside and outside of Labour'. However, to succeed it will need to stand firm against the attacks of the right wing; both on its anti-austerity programme and the involvement of all anti-austerity forces, inside and outside the Labour Party.

In our view one vital demand should be for all political forces that have been fighting against austerity to be welcomed into Labour. This means removing all bans and proscriptions against socialists but also extending the existing list of acceptable affiliated organisations to include the Socialist Party, the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition, anti-austerity forces within the Green Party, and others. This, in practise,



would re-create the vibrant coalition structure of the Labour Party when it was founded, involving trade unions, the co-op movement, social movements like the WPSU and different socialist parties. It would be a struggle for a force that could take up and defeat the capitalist establishment who are gathering their forces – including within the Labour Party – to defeat the Corbyn movement.

Another essential strand of the battle against austerity is to fight for Labour councils to refuse to implement austerity locally. Local authorities have already suffered 39% budget cuts over the last five years, with more to come. Up until now Labour councils have dutifully implemented the cuts demanded by the Tory government. An important element in Jeremy Corbyn's victory in the Labour leadership contest was his urging "Labour councils to stand together against the cuts". This can only mean: don't implement these cuts, which will only add to the already unbearable suffering of working class people.

The combined reserves of Labour councils with elections next May amount to a considerable £4.4 billion, for all 100 plus Labour-controlled councils it is much higher. What is to stop Labour councils coming together and – via pooling their reserves and using prudential borrowing powers – collectively refusing to implement a single further cut? Such a stand would create the conditions to build a mass movement which could potentially stop Tory austerity in its tracks. Clearly, many Labour councillors are on the right of the party and would not be prepared to refuse to implement austerity, but if Jeremy Corbyn were to make a clear call for action of this kind it would encourage more Labour councillors to act and

would also enormously increase his standing among the many council workers and service users who are facing cuts. Conversely, if the new 'anti-austerity' Labour Party was seen to uncritically back Labour councils implementing cuts it would undermine Jeremy Corbyn's anti-austerity stance and inevitably disillusion his potential supporters.

The Socialist Party has a record of standing anti-austerity candidates in elections as part of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition, along with the RMT (transport workers' union) and others. Of course pro-austerity right-wingers have criticised us for this, but how else could trade unionists, community campaigners and socialists have had a political voice against unrelenting austerity from councils of all political stripes? We do not wish to stand against Labour candidates in the future; but to prevent this being necessary requires a strategy to develop anti-austerity Labour councils who are prepared to oppose the cuts in both words and deeds.

Jeremy Corbyn's victory has lifted the confidence of all those who oppose austerity and has already dealt a blow to the establishment. However if the right succeed in containing and undermining him the danger is that those drawn around Corbyn's campaign will become disillusioned. This would represent the loss of another favourable opportunity to strengthen the workers' movement in the battle against capitalism and its political representatives, the Tories and other forces that base themselves on outmoded capitalism. There is an urgent need for all those who oppose austerity to discuss how we can defend Jeremy Corbyn's leadership of the Labour Party by building a mass movement against austerity.