

# Left-Horizons

## Watson's resignation shows depth of change in Labour Party

The *Financial Times* is a newspaper for business people and the rich. Its Saturday supplement is even called, *How to Spend It*, with adverts for watches that cost five-figure sums and features on luxury yachts. The newspaper has the most comprehensive tables in any newspaper of stock and commodity prices and currency movements and it has the UK's two main share indices, the FTSE100 and the FTSE250, named after it. It regularly features a pull-out section on "Fund Management", which is aimed at those who have so much money that they cannot look after it themselves and therefore need a specialist to do it for them.

But nevertheless, in contrast to rags like the *Daily Mail*, the *Daily Express* and the *Sun*, aimed at the great unwashed, the *Financial Times* is a serious newspaper for those, as the old saying goes, who really "own" the country. For this reason, it cannot afford to fill its columns with made-up propaganda, lies and dross. It weighs up political and economic developments soberly and carefully, all the better to inform the strategists of capitalism about what is really happening, so they can plan the best way forward for their class. Because we are a serious political website, therefore, *Left Horizons* takes due note of analysis and comment coming out of the *Financial Times*.

Bearing that in mind, it was an interesting article that appeared in that newspaper last Friday (November 8<sup>th</sup>), on the resignation of Tom Watson as deputy Labour leader. According to Jim Pickard,

chief political correspondent of the *Financial Times*, Watson's resignation, "...looked little short of the final surrender of centrist MPs who have resisted Jeremy Corbyn's leadership from day one..." Paul Richards, one of the co-founders of the mis-named right-wing entryist group called *Progress* – whose members still infest the Parliamentary Labour Party – is quoted as referring to Watson's departure as an important turning point. "I think it does represent a decisive shift to the left within Labour," he says, "It maroons the Labour moderates further. He was the leader of the resistance."

### 100 Labour MPs disagree profoundly with Corbyn

Leaving aside the annoying habit in the press and media of referring to Labour *right-wingers* as 'centrists' and 'moderates' this is an important admission. It acknowledges that fundamental shifts have taken place in the party in the last four years and it marks the impact it is having even on the parliamentary party. It should be taken as some encouragement for every left-wing member of the Labour Party.

It is not that we should underestimate the ongoing influence of the old right wing. "There are still over 100 MPs," the article goes on, "who disagree profoundly with their leader on many issues, especially national security and international affairs. Liz Kendall, who stood for the leadership four years ago on a Blairite platform [and got less than 5 per cent of the votes], said she would "continue to fight" for progressive, social-democratic values from within the Labour Party."

But the tide of change has decisively shifted in the last few years. *“Should Mr Corbyn be forced out,”* the FT chief political correspondent goes on, *“there is still a high probability that the mantle would pass to another ‘hard-left’ candidate blessed by the current leader...”* So deep have been the changes in the Party that Paul Richards was quite pessimistic about the chances of Labour’s right winning ground back... *“I think the soft left is now as impotent as the Labour right. I don’t think they will have a chance in the leadership contest, it will be a battle between which Corbynista can be a true carrier of the flame.”*

As an aside, the resignation of Watson shows the utter stupidity of some supporters of the ‘Labour Left Alliance’ at Labour Party conference last September. The formation of the LLA offered some promise of a realignment of genuine Labour lefts opposed to the relentless political retreats and the lack of democracy coming out of Momentum, but the approach of some LLA members to Tom Watson’s scheduled speech at conference was completely ultra-left and it does not bode well for the LLA.

Although in the end his speech was cancelled, the LLA put out a leaflet in the morning, suggesting that delegates might walk out or sing ‘Oh Jeremy Corbyn’ during his speech. Others on social media suggested “slow-handclapping”. Any stunt of that kind would have completely back-fired and would have ended up *strengthening* Watson’s position rather than the opposite. The view of those delegates who argued on social media for a silent, folded-arms, protest has been vindicated, because his resignation has shown how weak Watson’s position really was.

### **Thirty right-wingers have jumped ship**

The fight for the soul of the Labour Party, for the development of a broad-based socialist movement, was never going to be smooth. There will be victories on the way and there will be setbacks. But no-one should under-estimate the changes that have taken place in only four years. We can now compile a list of *thirty* right-wing Labour MPs who have jumped ship and most left party members, if offered such a list four years ago, would have bitten your hand off.

This is the full list, in alphabetical order:

Heidi Alexander, Ian Austin, Kevin Barron, Luciana Berger, Tom Blenkinsop, Ann Coffey, Simon Danczuk, Gloria del Piero, Jim Dowd, Michael Dugher, Louise Ellman, Frank Field, Jim Fitzpatrick, Mike Gapes, Kate Hoey, Tristram Hunt, Alan Johnson, Chris Leslie, Ivan Lewis, John Mann, Jamie Reed, Joan Ryan, Gavin Shuker, Angela Smith, Gisela Stuart, Stephen Twigg, Chuka Umunna, Keith Vaz, Tom Watson, John Woodcock.

The loss of these MPs is a great boost for the Labour Party. But, as the *Financial Times* journalist points out, there are still over 100 Labour MPs opposed to Corbyn. Even that may be an underestimate. There is a long way to go before the election.

Much can change in a few weeks. But Labour Party members must prepare themselves whatever the result. They must be prepared for yet another revolt of right-wing MPs, like the vote of no-confidence that led to Corbyn’s second leadership contest. Whether Jeremy Corbyn stands down voluntarily or is pushed from his position, the Party membership must fight in any new contest for a leadership and policies that reflect the needs and aspirations of ordinary working people and not the careers of a few dozen parliamentarians.

Labour Party membership must prepare, secondly, for reopening the debate on *Open Selection* for all candidates for all elections. There can be no more meal tickets for life and no more obstacles like ‘trigger ballots’ put in the way of democratic change. In the long run, the Labour Party membership deserve to have leaders that represent their interests. The changes of the past four years are considerable, and even the right wing acknowledge them. But we still have a long way to go to build support for genuine socialist ideas and for full democracy in the Party.

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