

Left-Horizons

SDP Mark II is born

So after months of huffing and puffing, a small band of right-wing, 'Labour' MPs have left the party to form an independent group in the House of Commons. No doubt the big majority of Labour Party members will be citing the old proverb about the mountain that laboured and brought forth a mouse. We have argued on this website since our foundation that there is no "if" about the right-wing splitting away from the Party, but only a "when". The only question now is how many other right-wing MPs will follow these seven. We expect the likes of Margaret Hodge, John Mann and Stephen Kinnock to follow in their own good time.

Secret sources of funding

It is no surprise at all that the "seven dwarves" as they have been dubbed, have had praised heaped upon their heads by all the most strident anti-Labour newspapers. These are "decent" MPs, in the eyes of the *Daily Mail*. Their resignations have been endorsed by Katie Hopkins, one of the most vile, anti-immigrant and right-wing commentators, so much beloved by the likes of Fox and Sky-News. These endorsements alone would give most Labour members cause for concern. It has also been reported that this little band of malcontents has set up a private company to hide their sources of funds. There is not the slightest doubt that secretive right-wing foundations and anti-Labour business people will be throwing a few million pounds at this breakaway.

As we have argued, this split has nothing to do with Brexit or the allegations of anti-Semitism in the Labour Party. The idea that Labour is a party of "institutionalised racism" would be laughable, were it not for the serious insult it represents to hundreds of thousands of Party members. When the right wing call for Corbyn to "do something about anti-Semitism", what they really mean is that they want a new Inquisition in the Party, to dish out hundreds of suspensions and expulsions, to all those members who are critical of Israel or who criticise the political philosophy of Zionism as embodied by that state. It is an admission of the impossibility of their aim that they have left the Party. It is likewise an admission that there will be no turning back of the Labour Party towards the milk-and-water policies of Tony Blair and New Labour, which, in effect, meant years of 'Tory-lite' policies.

First as a tragedy, then as a farce

These MPs cannot reconcile themselves to the fact that the Party now has a mass, radical membership. They can no longer be guaranteed life-long, cosy careers, protected by a small and deferential constituency party membership. Their political outlook is such that they are out of touch, not only with Labour Party members, but with the big majority of working class people, who have suffered from years of austerity, cuts and slashing services, while Tory MPs and right-wing Labour MPs lead comfortable lives. The not-so-magnificent seven had nothing to say in their resignation statements about poverty, homelessness, low pay, or the insecurity and uncertainly facing working class people. Because they have nothing to say on these issues.

In January 1981, four right-wing Labour MPs split away for much the same reasons – the Party, as they saw it, was moving too far to the left. Within years, these four were joined by nearly thirty more, forming the SDP, the Social Democratic Party. Just as dozens more MPs jumped ship after 1981, we fully expect more right-wing MPs to follow these seven who have resigned. The SDP, unfortunately, drew many voters away from the Labour Party in the two general elections following their split, gaining over 20 per cent of the votes each time.

Had it not been for the support of the mainstream media and the confusion created in the minds of many natural Labour supporters by this split, Margaret Thatcher's government would have only lasted four years. The fact is that the founders of the SDP – exactly like the new splitters from the Party – would rather see a Tory government in office than support a Labour government committed to radical policies. No doubt other right-wingers will now split away over the coming months and years, perhaps a few at a time, to inflict the maximum damage on the Party.

Labour Party members must trigger selection ballots

But this is a case of history repeating itself, first as a tragedy and then as a farce. The seven MPs much beloved of the *Daily Mail* and Katie Hopkins will cut no ice with the big majority of Party members. Even with the addition a few dozen (or more) right-wing renegades, this new 'centre-ground' formation will not succeed as the SDP did to some degree in the past. There is no room in politics today for the so-called 'centre'. One opinion poll after another has shown that Labour's radical policies, so much abhorred by the right-wing, are extremely popular within the electorate as a whole. Ten years of austerity have ground away at the political 'centre', until there is little of it remaining. For Labour's right wing, therefore, it is a case of 'rule or ruin'. If they can no longer run 'their' party – and they can't – then they will set out to ruin it, if they can.

What Labour Party members must do now is to hold their MPs to account. **We do not want "unity" with**

'Labour' MPs who do not support Labour's leadership or policies. In many Constituencies sitting Labour MPs have expressed their support for the Labour leadership and its policies, so there is no problem. But where there are 'Labour' MPs who are in any way equivocal about supporting the Labour leadership – elected twice, let us recall, by an overwhelming majority of members – then members should put into effect trigger ballots and move towards reselection.

Workers need a Labour government after nine years of austerity

Although we would have preferred the Party conference last year to have agreed a rule change to bring in 'open selection', the rule change that was agreed was still an improvement on the previous rule. Labour Party rules now make it explicit that *"If either one third or more of Party branches, or one third or more of affiliated branches, indicate that they wish a selection to take place, a selection shall proceed."* That rule should be put into action in all those areas where MPs are sitting on the fence.

Working class people need a Labour government. The policies of the Labour Party manifesto – For the Many, not the Few – articulates the *minimum* needed to resolve the problems faced by workers. Capitalism has failed and is failing. We need policies that do away with the whole rotten system: to use the wealth, resources and know-how of the British economy in the interests of the big majority of the population and not just the millionaire class at the top.

Labour Party members must demand that we have MPs and candidates who support a Labour government and the implementation of socialist policies. We should not be distracted or in any way disheartened by the defection of a handful of right-wing careerists. We should be even more determined than ever to build a mass Labour Party with socialist policies and a socialist manifesto for the next election.

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