

LRC STATEMENT

AFTER CORBYN'S VICTORY

1. The election of Jeremy Corbyn constitutes a political earthquake in Britain. For many years first right wing New Labour, and now a Tory government, which aspires to destroy the welfare state and most of the gains achieved by the labour movement over a century, have dominated the political agenda. Over this time the LRC and the left generally have been in a defensive mode. Jeremy's election on a huge wave of democratic involvement and debate represents the beginning of a long-awaited radicalisation in British society. As Matt Wrack, General Secretary of the Fire Brigades Union has commented, this represents, "The chance of a lifetime." We must seize this opportunity to make permanent gains for the cause of socialism.

2. On the left there has been a historic division between those like the LRC who argued that the radicalisation of the working class was likely to be reflected within the Labour Party, the traditional political organisation of the working class, and others who asserted that an alternative to Labour must inevitably be built from outside. The LRC laid down in our statements at Conference after Conference that the radicalisation of working people will at some point attempt to create a mass left wing within Labour. Hence our long-term strategic orientation to the Labour Party. So we feel Jeremy's election as leader is a vindication of our perspective. But we are of course only at an early stage of what may well prove to be dramatic political developments.

3. Jeremy Corbyn's election has opened the way for a fight to change the nature of British politics fundamentally. Under all recent governments, neo-liberalism has ruled, unquestioned in the 'mainstream' of all major parties. But to carry forward the earthquake of Corbyn's election into lasting change will require a momentous struggle both within the labour movement's structures and a step-change in the industrial and social struggles outside. The fate of both is intrinsically linked, and the LRC needs to be encouraging, and a part of, both.

4. The continuous barrage of hostility faced by Corbyn (and McDonnell and some of their staffers) from the media and some in the PLP is an indication of the urgent need to change the Party. That some in the PLP have shown that they may even be willing to sacrifice their own careers in the drive to bring down Corbyn is one of many indications of the scale of the task. If the internal battle in the Labour Party is not resolved in the left's favour, then it is unlikely that the struggle outside could be sustained. A defeat for Jeremy in the Party would be a defeat for the left across the board.

5. While participating in, and encouraging, industrial and social struggles, at the present time the LRC has to emphasise the internal battles in the movement. The Labour Party has undergone a huge increase in membership and many of these have joined specifically to support the Corbyn leadership in the battles ahead. We must encourage these new members and supporters to get involved in the structures of the Party at every level, and provide the information and logistical support to enable them to do so. For Corbyn's election to have a lasting effect, transparent democratic structures need to be reintroduced into the party, such as the restoration of Party conference as the policy-making body, together with accountability of elected representatives at every level. Every effort to do so will

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get a hostile reaction, but backing off will only give heart to the right.

6. We need to be part of a campaign to win full membership rights for those disbarred or expelled during the campaign for the leadership and since, many of whom have been left in limbo – or worse – since. Without that the party machine will hold the upper hand in arbitrarily deciding who is a member.

7. The support of many unions for Corbyn in his election campaign was welcome and will have significantly contributed to his victory, but we need to be alert to the fact that some General Secretaries only gave their support under pressure and some have been working behind the scenes since his election for a watering down of his stance on several issues. Just as in the Labour Party, we need to work at every level in the unions to encourage participation, democracy and transparency, with policies which can defend workers against the on-going attacks of employers and government. We have to encourage union members and branches to join/affiliate to the Party and not simply leave support to national executives. We welcome the FBU decision to affiliate, and we have to press for other non-affiliated unions to also affiliate. Within the unions we need to argue for anti-austerity policies and for them to be given teeth through action. We need to insist that opposition to the Trade Union Bill and its draconian attempts to shackle workers, if it becomes law, is taken seriously and leaders are held to their verbal commitment to defy it.

8. For the LRC, the new situation poses new challenges and opportunities for activity. But it also requires a significant modification of our organisational forms if we are to take full advantage of these opportunities. If a mass movement of the left is in formation at present, then it is vital that the LRC is part of that movement. We have no organisational fetish. If the LRC is to be subsumed into a much larger movement that can strive to change society, then we have to be part of it, and would be glad to be so.

9. As agreed at the October NC, we support and will participate in the development of a united movement of the Labour left and beyond. This new movement seems to be crystallising around the banner of Momentum. Momentum is a somewhat amorphous network at present. This is not a criticism. It is an inevitable stage in the creation of a new movement. Momentum has enormous potential. We intend to be part of that movement and to work as hard as we can to make it a big success.

10. We want it to be democratic, with the membership determining its policies and electing its officers. We will build Momentum locally and take part in its national structures, as they are established, as a mass movement of the Labour left and beyond, uniting all those inside the Party and outside who wish to advance the Corbyn agenda and get a Corbyn-led government elected. However, we do not believe that those organisations which stand candidates against Labour should be in Momentum and we will push for this to become Momentum's national policy. It is not

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necessary for those standing against Labour to be inside Momentum for Momentum supporters to work with them in campaigns against austerity, war, racism etc..

11. One of the areas where the Tories are increasing their attacks is on local government, with the announcement of a further 50% cut in funding over the next few years. Over the years there has been little resistance to cuts in local government either from the national Labour Party or at a local level by Labour Councils, and often not by the unions whose members are affected by job losses, wage freezes and privatisation. We have to argue for such a campaign to include unions, service users as well as labour Parties and Councillors. At the same time, we continue to argue that real resistance means Labour Councils should refuse to carry through cuts, and will use the selection process to argue for representatives prepared to carry that out.

12. There is no contradiction between the LRC participating fully in the creation of a national network of local and internet-based Momentum groups and maintaining the existence of our own organisation – for the time being. But we must be alive to the prospects opening up before us. We are not sectarians. If the LRC has outlived its usefulness, we will be delighted to participate instead in a mass left wing movement aimed at transforming the Labour Party. Momentum has the possibility to become that movement, but that development is not inevitable. It is still finding its feet. There is at present no democratic structure to their organisation nationally. Some believe that is not necessary – that Momentum can maintain its existence as a network indefinitely. We believe it must develop a democratic structure. Secondly there is the question of the trade unions. Historically the unions gave birth to the Labour Party, and they remain its rock and foundation. Momentum must find a way to involve the trade union movement in its decisions and activities.

13. Momentum may still be in gestation and its practical forms of organisation under discussion. But what is no longer up for debate is the centrality of the Labour Party in the struggle to advance our socialist agenda. As other organisations are realising and the huge surge in Labour membership attests, the Labour Party is the key political place for socialist activists to be right now. And even if sections of the Labour right wing succeed in ousting Jeremy Corbyn as leader as some are currently plotting, it is absolutely impossible in these new conditions that the left will go back to being a marginal force in the Party.

14. Does that mean that Momentum should be purely oriented towards Labour? That would narrow the movement that came behind his campaign unnecessarily. Tens of thousands of people, particularly those involved in local campaigns and social movements, identified immediately with the Corbyn campaign but are not prepared at this stage to become actively involved in the Party. They are an important buttress of support. It would be a bad mistake to disregard these campaigners or impose conditions on their support. They must be involved in support of Corbyn and his objectives by all means possible. But we must also help turn their attention towards the battles that will take place within the Labour Party.

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15. This poses a new challenge for the LRC whose original objective, still valid, was to find a more democratic and participatory way of organising the left that was not tainted by bureaucratic and secretive practices. The challenge now is to recognise that the new situation in the Party allows us to move beyond the refinement of LRC policy at its AGMs to working with others, including affiliated unions, to advance the Corbyn agenda in the Party as a whole: making policy at the annual conference of the Party and securing new trade union and other affiliates to the real Labour Party.

16. The LRC therefore needs to change. It needs to transition into a new structure and potentially a new name, to be launched at an event in 2016. Its focus must be to organise a radical, democratic left within the Party and the unions to promote socialist policies and candidates and a democratisation of the party's structures. As once-affiliated unions that left in the New Labour years consider rejoining the Party, we will look to secure the active political commitment of these organisations.

17. Part of this process of reconstruction is the development of closer coordination with Red Labour, CLPD and other forces on the Labour left working in the same field for shared goals. Our long term aim must be a unified movement of the Labour left championing common goals, campaigns and slates.

18. Accordingly the constitution of the LRC will need to be significantly modified at the 2016 meeting, reshaping our organisation to the new tasks ahead. If – and only if - we do this, our organisation will be well placed to interact with and influence the thousands of potential supporters now joining the Party.