

# Comrade Harpal on Lenin, opportunism and the Labour party



*What is the role of the Labour party in British politics in general and in the working-class movement in particular?*

Socialism aims to bring working people of all countries an era of peace, culture, fraternity and civilisation. Yet many people, some even respectable government ministers of imperialist governments, describe themselves as 'socialist', without bringing about anything of the sort. So how should we judge their sincerity, or lack of it? What does [real socialism](#) look like? Leaders of Britain's Labour party for over 100 years have been *opportunists*, meaning that they are prepared to sell out the *real long-term interests* of the workers for real or illusionary *short-term* gains; in essence, they work to defend the privileges of the small section of the working class (labelled by Lenin as the 'labour aristocracy') that does well out of British imperialism's continued existence. Ramsay MacDonald, Philip Snowdon, JR Clynes, Arthur Henderson, Sidney and Beatrice Webb, Clement Atlee, Tony Benn, Tony Blair, Peter Hain, Lord George Robertson, Gordon Brown, [Jeremy Corbyn](#) ... the list goes on and on. All of these illustrious 'socialist' Labour leaders have worked to defend the interests and existence of British imperialism. Despite this, all have been described by themselves, by supporters and by bourgeois academics as 'great leaders of labour' and as socialists. Moreover, many British revisionist communists and Trotskyists continue to this day to echo these specious claims, asserting even after a century of practice has proved the opposite, that voting for the Labour party is the 'realistic' way for workers to get socialism. Let us pass over for now the actual record of the Labour party in government and just deal with the party's core beliefs: what is socialism? Lenin defined these respectable 'labour' statesmen – even the once revolutionary Karl Kautsky, late 19th and early 20th-century leader of the German communist movement – not as socialists, but as opportunists; as social-chauvinists and social-imperialists (those who use socialist phrases in their *words*, but represent a chauvinist or imperialist policy with their *deeds*). Revolutionary [Marxism](#) teaches that only power in the hands of the working class itself will constitute socialism; and that the workers must use that power to take all wealth, and particularly productive wealth, and the real administration not just of government but also of industry, away from the exploiting class, putting the real wealth of

society at the disposal of the working people. This socialism (expressed in deeds, not just in words) will involve breaking the old *dictatorship of capital* (represented by Westminster, parliament and a thousand institutions of state) and replacing it with real working-class rule – councils of workers with legislative and executive power – the dictatorship of the proletariat (the workers) over the expropriated bourgeoisie (the former capitalists). Lenin insisted: "Only he who recognises the dictatorship of the proletariat [the rule of the working classes] is a socialist." At the time of [WW1](#), many cowardly so-called socialists caved in under pressure and [sided with their own ruling capitalist class](#) in the war. These opportunists refused to agitate against the massive slaughter of workers that was being carried out by the largest imperialist powers to defend the profits of the monopoly capitalists. They put their own comfortable careers and petty bribes above the lives of the millions of workers they claimed to represent. The opportunists betrayed the workers and the workers paid the price for that betrayal in blood. All of those [social-democratic](#) parties (which abandoned Marxism completely in 1914 but continued to claim to represent the working class), the British Labour party most prominent among them, betrayed their fellow workers and showed themselves instead to be servants of their rulers – servile lackeys of the exploiters; menial slaves, mentally chained to the concept of the greatness of their own slave-masters. Lenin was quite explicit when speaking at the [second congress of the Communist International](#): "Of course, most of the Labour Party's members are workingmen." However, whether or not a party is really a political party of the workers does not depend solely upon a membership of workers but also upon the men that lead it, and the content of its actions and its political tactics. Only this latter determines whether we really have before us a political party of the proletariat. "Regarded from this, the only correct, point of view, the Labour Party is a thoroughly bourgeois party, because, although made up of workers, it is led by reactionaries, and the worst kind of reactionaries at that, who act quite in the spirit of the bourgeoisie. It is an organisation of the bourgeoisie, which exists to systematically dupe the workers

with the aid of the British Noskes and Scheidemanns."

([Speech on Labour Party affiliation](#), 6 August 1920) Today we can say without reservation that Jeremy Corbyn offers only capitalism with a bearded face. We would welcome the election of Mr Corbyn as prime minister if only to give British workers the chance finally to learn that there is no way out of [poverty](#), [unemployment](#), [economic crisis](#) and [endless war](#) through the installation of a kinder face at the front of the monstrous system of capitalist imperialism – the system that has created all their miseries. Capitalism exists to make profits for the wealthy; it cannot be reformed to meet the needs of the masses. That being so, the fight for a decent life for workers is meaningless unless it is a fight for socialism, and the victory of socialism is impossible without a fight against Labour party opportunism – against the agents of the capitalists within the workers' movement.

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