

UK Labour Party steps up purge of suspected Corbyn supporters

Chris Marsden
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Jeremy Corbyn is standing for Labour leader based upon the claim that the party can be won back from the right-wing course it has pursued since the mid-1980s.

The *World Socialist Web Site* has written in detail of the programme Corbyn advances here and here. His pledge to partially reverse Labour's support for austerity through a form of quantitative easing, combined with an "ethical foreign policy" that includes opposition to warmongering against Russia, quitting the NATO military alliance and ditching Britain's nuclear deterrent, was once the staple of the party's left wing—though this has now been reduced to a rump.

His leadership bid is backed by a number of pseudo-left groups, who urged people to sign up to Labour at a cost of £3 to vote for Corbyn, hailing it as a "defining moment" in the fight against austerity. The call has met with some response among workers and young people seeking a means to fight against the ongoing decimation of jobs, wages and conditions—with thousands signing up individually or through the trade unions.

However, the support for Corbyn has only proven the bankruptcy of such claims and underscored that the Labour Party will do whatever it takes to preserve itself as the political instrument of Britain's financial elite and the grasping petty bourgeois layer that directly benefits from the ongoing assault on the working class.

The entire full-time staff of the Labour Party, along with constituency party branches and university Labour Clubs, is now exclusively occupied in investigating those who have paid £3 to become Labour supporters to vote in the leadership contest. The declared purpose is to ensure that all who have signed up subscribe loyally to the aims of the party. The real aim is to exclude from membership as many as possible of those who intend to vote for Corbyn.

The depth to which Labour is prepared to go to this end is extraordinary. "This work is being done by 70 staff operating on a 24/7 basis in Newcastle, more than 30 staff in London and more than 30 in the Nations and Regions," a party statement explains. It goes on to detail who the checks are meant to weed out, including "People who have made public statements, usually on social media, which make it clear they do not share our aims and values," adding that, "MPs and CLPs [Constituency Labour Parties] have been sent the names of new participants and any information that they have responded with is acted upon."

A BBC "Newsnight" blog details how "cheats" or "an entrust who supports another party" will be "caught":

** Unusual name. This sounds odd but one of the main ways local Labour branches are checking you out is simply by "Googling" you. The odder your name the easier you are to find.*

** Email address linked to social media.*

** More than one social media profile. Some branches are trying to "triangulate" using as much open source data as possible. If you have open Twitter, Facebook, Google Plus accounts etc... branches will be more confident in reporting you to Labour HQ.*

** Labour door knockers. Do you remember ever talking to a Labour party campaigner during the General Election? Or getting a phone call from Labour's phone bank? If you responded saying you'd vote anything other than Labour, the party could be onto you. Some local branches are looking at their own internal campaign returns—a system called 'Contact Creator'. They won't report you for saying you'd vote for another party per se, but it will put a red flag by your name.*

The experiences of some of those who have been

rejected have been recounted on various websites.

Stephen Bush writes in the *New Statesman*, “The party has a large backlog of emails from local party chairs and individual members reporting what they believe to be voters and members who ought to be barred from the leadership” vote. He notes, “one member was reported for failing to attend the CLP barbecue...”

Politics.co.uk, for example, explains that Lambeth Councillor Alex Bigham, “sent a dossier to his party recommending that website editor Jason Cobb be excluded from voting due to ‘possible entryism’.” This was because he “accused some Labour councils of ‘social cleansing’ in London, as well as a link to a 2010 article he wrote for the Guardian in which he criticised Lambeth council.”

On *Open Democracy*, Michael Chessum writes of the exclusion of several students, such as Hattie Craig, “a relatively prominent activist in the National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts—the biggest organisation on the student left” who “has never been a member of any other electoral project—or indeed any other party at all.”

Easily the most egregious example of Labour’s witch-hunt comes from *Guardian* columnist Tim Dowling. He explains how his 17 year-old son received an email from the local Labour Party, which he joined six months ago, asking about the political loyalty of two boys in his year at school. He was questioned over whether one was a Conservative supporter, who would face expulsion “under clause 2.I.4.B of the Labour party rules”.

Dowling notes that his son “reckons the Labour party’s doubts are founded on an essay written by one of the boys before the election, explaining why he would vote Conservative if only he were old enough, which appears somewhere on the school’s website. According to my son—a witness—both the subject and the stance of this essay were assignments: no one in the classroom put their hand up when the pro-Tory line was offered.”

This trawling operation has seen a total of 3,500 people excluded out of the 200,000 plus who have registered individually or through their union. The party’s leaders expect more to follow. Of these, the vast majority, 1,900, are members or supporters of the Green Party, with an additional 400 members or supporters of the Conservatives. There is no breakdown

available of the remaining 1,000 or so to determine how many have been condemned for membership or association with various pseudo-left groups.

Labour’s caretaker leader, Harriet Harman, declared of the purge, “In undertaking these processes, we are completely impartial, the question is not which candidate you support, but do you support the aims and values of the Labour party.”

This will convince no one.

The stench of McCarthyism hangs over the Labour Party, which is underscored by the naming of the investigation of sign-ups as “Operation Icepick” in an obscene reference to the weapon used to assassinate Leon Trotsky.

Anyone among the millions who shifted support to the Greens, the pseudo-left groups, the Scottish National Party, the Liberal Democrats or others that advanced themselves as standing to Labour’s left—the very forces tempted to return to Labour by Corbyn—are viewed as infiltrators whose values are incompatible with party membership. It is only an initial indication of how ruthlessly the party leadership will respond to any threat to the pro-business, pro-austerity, pro-war course that is now part of its political DNA—proof that workers and young people must turn their attention to the building of a genuine socialist party rather than a futile effort to resuscitate Labour.



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