

UK Labour's governing body says Jeremy Corbyn will be on leadership ballot

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Current leader Jeremy Corbyn will be on the ballot in the forthcoming Labour leadership contest after the party's National Executive Committee (NEC) voted 18-14 that his name would go forward automatically.

The move by the majority of the Parliamentary Labour Party (PLP), led by its Blairite wing and backed by large sections of the media, to insist that Corbyn must secure the backing of 20 percent of MPs (51) in order to exclude him, was rejected.

This was due in the main to the warnings of the trade union bureaucracy, and their 12 NEC votes, that to do so would lead to the immediate disintegration of the party. They had taken a sounding of the mood in the working class, as exemplified by the tens of thousands of new sign-ups to the party in the main in order to support Corbyn and the 60 percent vote he won to become leader last September.

Len McCluskey, the leader of the Unite union, insisted that the 20 percent threshold should apply only to challengers, not a sitting leader. For Corbyn to be excluded would, he said, be viewed by millions of workers as a "squalid coup."

After the no-confidence motion in Corbyn by 172 MPs (80 percent), McCluskey feared that such a decision would demonstrate the unbridgeable gulf separating the PLP from the party membership and threaten a permanent split. This week he declared that he was attempting "to try and hold our party together, as the trade unions have done so many times in the past when politicians have let us down."

A "senior source" told the *Guardian* "the unions' support was 'on lockdown... Unite are flying [delegate] Michael Mayer in by plane. The TSSA [Transport Salaried Staffs' Association] delegate has cancelled her holiday'."

Jim Kennedy, a Unite official on the NEC, got

lawyers to write to Iain McNicol, Labour's general secretary, threatening "injunctive action" if Corbyn was excluded. The letter from Martin Howe threatened "legal action for breach of contract."

Throughout the day leading up to the NEC meeting, a slander campaign was mounted to portray Corbyn and his backers as "thugs." The convenient smashing of a single window in the Wallasey Constituency Labour Party (CLP) headquarters of Corbyn's challenger, Angela Eagle, was seized on as a supposed example of a campaign of intimidation—coupled with allegations that Eagle had been threatened with death and being raped on Twitter and Facebook. Labour MP Ben Bradshaw declared on BBC News that the supposed intimidation was being orchestrated by the pro-Corbyn Momentum group, stating, "The people around him control them." Momentum has threatened legal action against "a divisive & vile smear."

Eagle too claimed that attacks on MPs "are being done in his name and he needs to get control of the people who are supporting him..." No one in the media saw fit to point out that Eagle's CLP is an unlikely target of pro-Corbyn wrath, given that it is moving a motion of no confidence against her for standing against Corbyn—or that anonymous social media posts can be made by anyone. Nor did Corbyn pointing out that he has received death threats get any coverage.

The NEC met at 2:00pm to discuss the legal advice obtained by Corbyn's opponents that he needed the backing of 51 MPs.

A secret ballot was agreed by a vote of 17-14 on the pretext, one journalist reported, that "two female members [were] particularly distressed about the threat of intimidation." In reality, the hope was that anonymity would secure a vote against Corbyn by one of the representatives of the trade unions. Much was

made of the fact that one of the 33 NEC members, Mary Turner of the GMB union, did not attend due to illness, with reports that the GMB's public support for Corbyn would not survive a secret ballot. Corbyn himself was asked to leave the room, with right-wing media hack Michael Crick claiming that he had at first refused to do so, which was later described as a "total fabrication."

After more than six hours, and with many news sources declaring that the "game was up" for Corbyn, the result in his favour was finally announced.

Eagle, who had spent days insisting that Corbyn must not be on the ballot, put on a brave face, stating, "I am glad the NEC has come to a decision. I welcome the contest ahead and I am determined to win it." Her pose was deeply unconvincing. Her only merit as far as the Blairites are concerned was to create the conditions for Corbyn to be excluded. Now there is discussion that not only Owen Smith, the former shadow Welsh secretary, but others will also stand.

There is no reason, however, for anyone to believe that the NEC's decision puts an end to the ongoing coup attempt. Speaking after the NEC, Corbyn made one of his routine and politically bankrupt appeals for party unity with his thwarted political assassins, telling reporters, "I am reaching out to everyone in our party so that all the talents can be used and I say to anyone who has any disagreements to come and speak about it... I am sure that Labour MPs will understand that the party has to come together."

Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell tweeted that "Democracy prevails" and that the leadership election would be used "to sign up even more members and prepare ground for General Election."

In reality, the stage is set for a bitter contest lasting throughout the summer, before a new leader is announced on September 24—one that will still almost inevitably tear the party in two.

The Blairites leading the coup plot have no intention of either waging a fair contest for leadership, or of abiding by any popular vote to re-elect Corbyn. Indeed, after the defeat over Corbyn's ballot status, Robert Peston, the political editor of ITV News, Tweeted, "At the end of the meeting, after a couple of pro-Corbyn members had left, and Corbyn himself had left, a vote was taken on a motion not on the agenda, to exclude from the leadership vote anyone who joined the party in

the past six months—including the 130,000 who signed up since Brexit."

The BBC's chief political correspondent, Vicki Young, reported, "It looks like anyone who joined after then will have to pay an extra £25 to become a 'registered supporter'—and will get a two-day window in which to sign up."

If excluding hundreds of thousands of members and supporters from the ballot fails, then the next course of action would likely be a formal split to form a new right-wing political vehicle. John McTernan, Tony Blair's former top strategist, laid out the rationale that will be employed. Corbyn "has destroyed the Labour Party," he told the BBC after the NEC vote. "This is the end of the Labour Party. The vandals, the unions on the NEC, have destroyed the Labour Party."



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