

UK: Labour Party's women MPs stage provocation to justify a purge of party members

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UK Labour Party General Secretary Iain McNichol announced Monday that the National Executive Committee (NEC), having “already taken the difficult decision to suspend most Party meetings while the Leadership election is ongoing,” will now take “further action” against alleged intimidation.

If “you are a member and you engage in abusive behaviour towards other members it will be investigated and you could be suspended while that investigation is carried out. If you are a registered supporter or affiliated supporter and you engage in abusive behaviour you will not get a vote in this Leadership election,” he continues.

McNichol issued his statement in response to a letter signed by 44 women Labour MPs, two-thirds of the total. The letter demanded that party leader Jeremy Corbyn take “swift and tangible action” against “escalating abuse and hostility” towards them. It is a filthy slander designed to stifle all opposition to the right-wing clique of which they are a part.

The entire affair is a McCarthyite smear campaign. Not a single claim of intimidation made has been substantiated, let alone directly or even indirectly attributed to Corbyn and his supporters. Instead there is a resort to the politics of amalgam and innuendo to blackguard party members as “bullies” while Blairite MPs are left free to insult, lie and bully whoever they choose.

The letter, drafted by Paula Sherriff, begins by linking those seeking to defend Corbyn with the fascist murderer of Labour MP Jo Cox during the referendum campaign on Britain's membership of the European Union.

Cox is described as “a staunch defender of all the

values we all hold so dear,” in order to equate accusations of abuse with a failure to “heed the lessons of this terrible event.” The claim is then made that it is “women and BAME (black, Asian, minority, ethnic) women who are disproportionately affected by these incidents,” which supposedly include “rape threats, death threats, smashed cars and bricks through windows...”

Responsibility is placed directly at Corbyn's feet, who is himself accused of intimidation on the basis that his “decision to vote against a secret ballot in the National Executive Committee meeting” was taken without reference to “the concerns of female representatives for their safety.”

Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell and others in Corbyn's leadership team are denounced for the supposed crime of addressing “rallies and events in which demonstrations outside MPs' offices and bullying at CLP meetings have been either actively encouraged *or quietly condoned* [emphasis added].”

Finally the demand is placed on Corbyn to subscribe to three pledges—to “make an unequivocal statement declaring his support for all MPs, particularly women, and clearly condemning campaigning outside MPs' offices, surgeries etc.”; to “actively challenge any behaviour which does not conform to Labour Party values”; and to hold “senior Labour figures” to account for “supporting events where such behaviour would appear to be encouraged,” including the mere act of “being present where posters, t shirts, etc. are abusive” and supposedly “encourage threatening behaviour.”

Corbyn must also “commit to regular meetings with the women's [Parliamentary Labour Party (PLP)] to update on progress.”

In the name of “shared Labour values” and on the basis that, as women, their political sensitivities are too fragile to withstand criticism, Labour Party members are to be prohibited from expressing opposition to MPs who have voted for the Conservative government’s austerity measures, for war in Libya, Iraq and Syria, and most recently for the renewal of the Trident nuclear weapons system.

Meanwhile, to uphold Labour’s “shared values,” the NEC bars 130,000 members, who have joined since January, from voting in the leadership contest, extorts £25 from anyone wanting to do so in contravention to the contract they signed, closes down Constituency Labour Parties (CLPs) for the duration of the leadership contest and suspends two CLPs for having the effrontery to vote against their MPs in defence of Corbyn.

As is made clear by the demand for an anonymous vote on the NEC over whether Corbyn should be excluded from the leadership contest, this is not about creating a “safe space” for women. As always such policies are utilised for reactionary ends. In this instance, it is a demand for a “safe space” for political scoundrels.

Naturally, not a word is said regarding the majority of members of the Labour Party, female and male, who support Corbyn and who are now accused of thuggery, violence, sexism, anti-Semitism and racism.

In reality, some hostile online posts will clearly involve disturbed individuals animated by the wall-to-wall media coverage of Labour’s infighting. Many more will be legitimate political comment that has now been unilaterally declared to be beyond the pale.

In addition, many posts will have been manufactured by provocateurs. Len McCluskey, the leader of Unite, has raised the possibility of MI5 involvement in a dirty-tricks operation. This cannot be excluded. But neither, it must be added, can the involvement of forces within and around the PLP.

As for concrete instances of intimidation, few examples are given, and these are often dubious. The most widely reported was the throwing of a brick through the window of Angela Eagle’s office—at that time a leadership challenger to Corbyn, before she was side-lined by “unity” candidate Owen Smith.

This was a curious incident to attribute to Corbyn’s supporters, given that members of Eagle’s Wallasey

constituency had already moved a motion of no-confidence against her. This week, right-wing *Daily Mail* columnist Peter Hitchens reported that he “asked Merseyside Police, and they told me that the window wasn’t that of Mrs Eagle’s office, which wasn’t broken. It was the window of a stairwell and hallway, in an office building which Wallasey Labour Party shares with several others.”

No other reporter noted this fact, as the incident was blazoned across the nation’s newspapers’ front pages, news bulletins and current affairs programmes.

The politics of those involved, and not their gender, is the litmus test in determining the veracity of claims of abuse and intimidation. The 44 MPs who signed the letter include the arch Blairite and roundly defeated 2015 leadership challenger Liz Kendall, and Margaret Hodge, the multi-millionaire MP who first submitted a letter to the PLP requesting a motion of no-confidence in Corbyn.

The letter’s author, Paula Sherriff, who declares, “I’m with Owen”, is just one of 14 signatories who resigned from the shadow cabinet to help precipitate the motion of no-confidence—and who now demand that Corbyn reports to them on his progress in carrying out their dictates.

As could be expected, none of these issues has been raised by the media, which has acted throughout in concert with the Blairite coup plotters. Rather the *Sun*, for example, gives its pages over to former Tory MP Louise Mensch to denounce McDonnell as a “vile sexist” and Corbyn as a “scumbag.”

Of greater significance than the complicity of the media is the acquiescence of Corbyn, and his and McDonnell’s constant appeals for unity with their political opponents. The truth is that they would rather see their supporters sacrificed than threaten the organisational integrity of the Labour Party apparatus, to which they are wedded.



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