

Corbyn offers olive branch to right wing as purge of British Labour Party escalates

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The McCarthyite purge of the Labour Party's membership by its Blairite wing is reaching a crescendo, just three weeks ahead of the vote for the party's leader. But in response, incumbent Jeremy Corbyn has again signalled his desire for an accommodation with the right wing.

Elected a year ago by a massive majority, Corbyn is being challenged by Owen Smith after more than 60 MPs walked out of the Shadow Cabinet and 172 MPs out of 230 supported a vote of no confidence in the Labour leader.

However, the Blairites have little support within the party. A YouGov poll last week showed Corbyn is expected to win the leadership of all three of Labour's membership categories: full members, registered supporters and trade union affiliates.

This comes after Labour's National Executive Committee (NEC) barred 130,000 members from voting, using an arbitrary membership duration cut-off point that was upheld by the Court of Appeal in an anti-democratic ruling.

The escalating purge of the membership is aimed at ensuring that as many as possible of the more than 300,000 people who have largely joined Labour to support Corbyn are denied a vote.

Last year Labour's Compliance Unit, which has its origins in the expulsion of left-wingers carried out in the 1980s by then leader, and supporter of the current coup, Neil Kinnock, suspended and expelled thousands of Corbyn's supporters ahead of his leadership victory in a witch-hunt they informally dubbed "Operation Ice Pick"—a sinister reference to the assassination of Leon Trotsky. This time around, according to the *Financial Times*, "Labour officials have suspended about 50,000 'registered supporters' during the leadership contest for a variety of reasons," listing "multiple applications,

failure to pay the fee and previous support for a rival party."

The social media accounts of hundreds of thousands of people are being trawled in order to concoct often spurious grounds on which to deny them membership. The *Daily Mirror* reported, "It's been suggested that supporters' social media accounts are being examined for words including 'traitor', 'scab' and even 'Blairite', though Labour would not confirm this."

One Corbyn supporter received a letter signed by General Secretary Iain McNicol informing her that she was being refused full membership as she had "shared inappropriate content on Facebook." On checking her postings for that day in question, Catherine Starr found she shared a clip of the Foo Fighters rock band with the comment, "I f***** love the Foo Fighters."

A woman aged 82, who had voted Labour for 50 years, received a letter from the Compliance Unit stating they had "supporting evidence that you have declared support for the Green party on social media on 5 November 2015." She was expelled from the party for five years. On checking, the woman had simply retweeted a Green Party post calling for the BBC to allow its leaders to take part in TV debates.

Chris Devismes said he was accused of posting "inappropriate content on Twitter on 27 July," but he said that the only material posted on that date was a statement that he wasn't a supporter of Owen Smith.

Last week the media reported that ballot papers had still not been sent out to 100,000 members, out of a total of 647,000 people who are eligible to vote online or by post. Many enquiring about their missing ballot papers are reportedly being told by Labour's HQ that it is due to an "administrative error." One member was told their ballot paper must have been "lost in the Internet."

By September 24, through such methods, it is highly likely that well over 200,000 people will have been barred from voting for Corbyn.

In contrast, the right wing remains free to unleash whatever attacks and use whatever inflammatory language it wants against Corbyn's supporters. Last month for example, Michael Foster, a businessman and Labour member who has donated £400,000 to the party penned an article in the right-wing *Daily Mail*, "Why I despise Jeremy Corbyn and his Nazi Stormtroopers."

Naturally, no action was taken against him by the Compliance Unit. Indeed there is not a single incident yet reported of the suspension of anyone for denouncing Corbyn or using inappropriate language against his supporters by a politically stacked eight-strong committee. A pro-Corbyn source told the *Guardian* that only two committee members were "consistent" supporters of the leader.

As the name "Operation Ice Pick" indicates, the aim of the Labour Party apparatus is to suppress the left-wing and oppositional sentiment that Corbyn's election represented due to his stated opposition to austerity and war. However, there is barely a trace of opposition to this grotesque witch-hunt of his supporters by Corbyn and his leadership team—who are determined to prevent a thoroughgoing struggle against the right wing at all costs.

Last week, John McDonnell, Corbyn's Shadow Chancellor and closest ally, went on record declaring that "Labour party members will not accept what appears to be a rigged purge of Jeremy Corbyn supporters," before adding he would do no more than write a complaint to McNicol.

In his own letter to McNicol, Corbyn said the purge was "raising concerns about whether members are being treated in a consistent and proportionate manner," before making the pathetic statement, "This in turn is damaging the reputation of the Labour Party."

Yesterday the *Guardian*, which is spearheading the anti-Corbyn propaganda campaign, cited a "wide ranging" interview with the Labour leader reporting that "he is investigating allegations that Labour's leadership contest is being rigged against him."

Corbyn reportedly said that "he hoped party officials were not working against him but could not rule out the possibility" and that he was "surprised at the numbers of people who've been denied a vote" and "the lack of

reason that's been given to people" in what the *Guardian* described without irony as "his strongest intervention on the subject so far."

He also declared himself to be "unhappy" about the situation, but not "obsessed."

While making such mealy-mouthed statements, Corbyn is busy making efforts aimed at restoring party unity with the Blairites once the leadership contest is concluded.

The *Financial Times* reported last Friday, "Jeremy Corbyn's team is in talks with some dissident Labour MPs about their potential return to the front bench if, as expected, he wins the leadership contest at the end of the month."

The FT added, "Len McCluskey, general secretary of the union Unite, said that private conversations had taken place between the leadership and MPs," with Corbyn "optimistic that some would reverse their resignations if Mr Corbyn emerged as the winner on September 24."

That Corbyn offers an olive branch to such forces is an object lesson regarding his own pro-capitalist perspective. He has repeatedly insisted that he will not engage in "personalised" politics, while presenting the frenzied denunciations of the right wing and its witch-hunt as an unfortunate diversion from the "real issues."

In reality, the witch-hunt and its intensity is the major lesson that must be drawn from the events of the past weeks. It demonstrates just how far the bureaucracy and its supporters will go in order to preserve the Labour Party as a trusted instrument of imperialist rule—and gives the lie to Corbyn's claim that an influx of members and the advocacy of a few reforms can transform it into a means of defending the interests of the working class.



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