

At conference of British Labour Party

# Corbyn and trade unions block deselection of right-wing MPs

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Monday saw delegates to the British Labour Party conference approve changes to leadership contest rules and the selection process for MPs that represented another capitulation to the right-wing by Jeremy Corbyn and his nominal backers.

The votes both secured a two-thirds majority largely thanks to trade union delegates voting in favour, after a vote earlier on the conference timetable Sunday was used to voice disagreements and ended up split down the middle between party and union delegates.

Party delegates had booed the trade unions and cried “shame” on Sunday, forcing Wendy Nichols, chair and member of the National Executive Committee (NEC), to appeal Monday for no more jeering.

Anger was generated by the rotten compromise stitched up by the NEC in a two-day meeting prior to the conference. This saw the trade unions spearhead a move to oppose mandatory reselection of MPs that would have seen dozens of right-wingers kicked out by Constituency Labour Parties.

In the past few weeks, Frank Field and John Woodcock quit the party whip amid demands for their expulsion, while Joan Ryan, Kate Hoey, Chris Leslie and Gavin Shuker all lost no-confidence votes moved by members who want them deselected.

The unions also championed proposed changes to the conditions for running as a leadership contender that leave untouched the semi-veto powers of MPs and even add new hurdles to clear.

Under Labour’s rules, any MP must get the backing of 10 percent of MPs to stand for leader, and the popular demand was to reduce this to 5 percent. The NEC proposals accepted Monday by conference keeps the 10-percent-of-MPs barrier and adds a requirement

to secure the backing of 5 percent of local parties or 5 percent of trade union affiliate members.

To deselect an MP has thus far required a vote by 50 percent of local branches and affiliated trade union branches within a constituency. The popular demand was for an automatic contest in every constituency, but the NEC instead proposed that active disaffection by one third of branches and affiliated trade unions is needed to provoke a contest against a sitting MP.

“Left” members of the NEC were reported to have spoken against the proposed changes, but this was for the record with the *Independent* reporting, “[I]t is understood the issue was not put to a vote and was therefore agreed unanimously.”

Delegates to Labour’s conference were given a straight choice between accepting or rejecting the NEC proposals and could not vote for open selection of MPs. However, reaction was furious with the proposals described as protecting “Many sitting MPs who have lost the respect and confidence of local parties.”

This sentiment was widespread. In response to articles by the pro-Corbyn web site Skwawkbox defending the NEC “compromise,” readers wrote:

“Terrible mistake—catastrophic from the point of view of the rank and file Labour Party members in need of accountability and a changed relationship with the arrogant, chicken-coup PLP”

“makes no sense except for Blairite neoliberalism to continue sinking its claws into Labour”

“this NEC has way too much power over the members they’re supposed to represent”

“This has gone on for years in the Labour Party, the executive taking the members for fools”

“Why should 2-300 people have the power to reject a

leadership candidate who may well be preferred by the other 500,000 or so members before even one vote is cast?”

Faced with this backlash, various trade union bureaucrats took to the floor to voice their outrage at any criticism of their betrayal. However, the most politically revealing response came from Unite General Secretary Len McCluskey at a fringe meeting, who insisted, “What comrades need to understand is that Jeremy Corbyn is asking us to accept this alternative.”

McCluskey is not lying. Corbyn joined Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell and the self-proclaimed “grassroots” pro-Corbyn Momentum group—run by Jon Lansman as his personal fiefdom—in urging acceptance of a stitch-up that leaves the right-wing only slightly less firmly in the saddle.

Corbyn has done everything possible to thwart demands for a reckoning with the right-wing. Before conference began, he described the no-confidence vote against Gavin Shaker as “not the start, or indeed the end, of any process” of deselection. Nor did it affect his role as an MP: “He works hard to represent the constituency and he’s obviously ever-present in Parliament, taking up issues there.”

McCluskey also told the fringe meeting, “There are certain MPs who are almost asking to be deselected.” But he went on to stress his concern over splits, calling for party members to stick together and support the NEC compromise because “The Tory media have come here desperate for divisions in our party.”

A spokesman for Momentum issued a weasel-worded apology for “a meagre set of reforms” by suggesting, “however, it could have been much worse.”

Lansman spent his time at a Jewish Labour Movement fringe meeting, speaking alongside MPs who have led the campaign slandering Corbyn, where he appealed for unity, saying, “As socialists it is difficult for all of us to have to accept that we have a problem with any form of hatred in the party.”

The media wasn’t waiting to see divisions in the party, but championing the right-wing protected from an angry membership by Corbyn, McDonnell, McCluskey, Lansman et al. The BBC noted how the conference revealed that “there are now far more delegates on the left of the party than in previous years, even after Jeremy Corbyn became leader. This is underlined by the fact that while the Momentum

leadership is now backing the de-selection compromise as a step forward, some of their own supporters see this as a sell out.”

The frothing anti-Communist Rod Liddle provided the most telling comment in the *Sunday Times*: “Gavin Shaker, the MP for Luton South, has been given a vote of no confidence by his local party—something that will lead, further down the line, to deselection—and told me that whereas he had originally been selected by the votes of a couple of hundred party members, 1,200 people have since joined up and they want him out.”

Labour “moderates,” he added, have “no allies, anywhere; nothing upon which to pin their hopes. ... The anti-Semitic stuff does not play with voters north of Watford Gap; it has no resonance,” because “there is also still a strong resentment about the ‘bankers’ we were forced to bail out 10 years ago who never got their comeuppance, allied to an even stronger resentment about social inequality. ...”

The Socialist Equality Party has lent critical support to the demand of Labour members to drive out the Blairites, insisting that these political criminals “must not be allowed free rein to carry out their anti-working-class agenda.” We also warned “those who take up such a fight will inevitably find themselves in conflict with Corbyn, whose pro-capitalist politics ensure that he and his clique will continue to appease, capitulate and otherwise sabotage the struggle against the right-wing.”

Many of those who look to Corbyn for political leadership will appreciate this warning in the aftermath of Labour’s conference.



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