



UK: The Plot against the Labour Party membership

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The attempt by Labour MPs to oust Party Leader Jeremy Corbyn has suffered yet another setback. Unless there are interventions by the courts, Jeremy Corbyn will now be on the ballot in a new leadership election thanks to an 18-14 vote on the National Executive Committee. As usual in this saga, however, there is sting in the tail and it is a nasty one.

More than a hundred thousand Party members, all those who have joined since January 12, have had their right to vote in the leadership election taken away by the NEC. Moreover, Party branches and constituency organisations have been banned from holding any meetings until after the election, which means not until October. The only exceptions will be meetings to discuss nominations or local election work. Even then, members or supporters who joined after January 12 will not be allowed to attend, no motions will be taken and there will be no other debate allowed.

The NEC procedures committee justifies this by saying there have been reports of intimidation at party meetings. Rather than investigate such reports, they have chosen to remove the elementary democratic rights of the whole membership! The real reason is not difficult to see; Corbyn's opponents, headed by Ian McNichol and Tom Watson, who control the party bureaucracy, want to give the MPs free rein whilst the membership is kept fragmented and isolated.

They want to be free to slander Jeremy and his supporters, spreading invented stories and reports of his 'declining support amongst the membership' via the media. They will have plentiful resources for this. On June 26, Watson received a £200,000 donation 'for running his office' from the billionaire, former Formula One boss, Max Mosley, friend and fund raiser for Tony Blair.

The purpose of the clampdown on Party activity is to stop members and supporters expressing their justified anger at the plotters, to con them into believing that nothing can be done against an all-powerful Labour Establishment, which has behind it the media, big business and security Establishments.

Defiance

This combined gerrymandering of the electorate and shutting down of party democracy must be fought tooth and nail. The order for party bodies not to meet must simply be defied wherever the left has a majority. Elsewhere, 'unofficial' meetings of the pro-Corbyn majority must meet regularly throughout the campaign. Momentum should continue to urge those who support Jeremy to join the Party but also to join and register with Momentum.

This can lay the basis for establishing new branch committees and GCs at the general meetings in the autumn. At those meetings, the officials who supported the coup plotters should be cleared out and Unite's call for mandatory selection of MPs should be supported and put into practice.

Rank and file members and supporters in affiliated unions must mobilise on a scale even greater than last year to ensure Corbyn is re-elected and all the dirty tricks deployed by the Party bureaucracy, the PLP and the Tory media, are exposed and thwarted.

Of course, the new leadership election is, in itself, an unnecessary diversion from what the Party should be doing now; attacking the new Tory Leader, Theresa May, and all attempts to make working people pay for the reactionary

consequences of exiting the European Union. The whole Party should be out on the streets over the summer combatting the wave of anti-European chauvinism and anti-migrant racism that has gushed out of the political sewers since the Brexit vote.

But that is not the priority for the right wing majority of Labour MPs. Far from attacking May and resisting racism, they are busy using every crooked and undemocratic method to overthrow their own leader and the progressive policies on which he was elected. Moreover, they are floating the idea of more restrictive immigration laws, abandoning free movement of labour, supporting rearmament, and calling for 'realistic' economic policies, meaning cutting services and balancing budgets.

The Left

Nevertheless, the election is on and we must use it to strengthen the left. Over the last year, the left in the Party has not done enough to mobilise and organise supporters to ensure democratic control over all party bodies from local to national level or to challenge the disloyal behaviour of the majority of MPs. It is now plain for all to see that the strategy of appeasement and compromise has proved a failure. Many of the plotters lack elementary decency, let alone democratic principles, and will not compromise on the most important issues of policy or party organisation. So be it.

Our first task is to combat the gerrymander and demand the NEC reverses its decision to exclude members from voting and charging supporters £25 instead of £3. John McDonnell was totally wrong to 'accept' this and the movement to elect Jeremy should not follow his suggestion. During the election, throughout the summer, the drive to recruit new members and supporters should go ahead on an increased scale. With or without the right to vote, the surge in membership is an enormous boost for Jeremy Corbyn and the rank and file. The arrogant Westminster élite can still be humbled and faced with the demand to obey the membership's decision. For the sake of the entire labour movement, political and trade union, no effort must be spared to do this.

One major question, however, must be faced squarely. In various anonymous press briefings, the plotters are threatening that the PLP majority will not submit to the result if Corbyn wins. Some will continue to demand he adopts their policies and promotes them to key positions, otherwise they will continue their effective strike and back stabbing. Luke Akehurst one of their frankest ideologues advocates this course.

'None of this (the list of poisonous objections to Corbyn's leadership-ed) will be changed if Corbyn is re-elected, however wide the margin. MPs are not going to go crawling back to him saying they made a mistake. They will challenge him again and again as his failings and the untenability of his position become more and more apparent, until eventually he is defeated.'

In the immediate future, this is a more serious threat than all talk of the PLP declaring independence or organising a separate whip as the first step to a new party. As long as they retain absolute control over the PLP and the party apparatus, the plotters have no need to split. Rather, they intend to coerce the membership into silence, hoping that many will leave the Party in disgust or demoralisation. Against this, the Left must organise to use all democratic means to channel discontent into constructive opposition to the right wing MPs.

Control

What the NEC decision has made clearer than ever is the reality that the Labour Party is a highly centralised organisation, bureaucratically controlled by officials, MPs and councillors. It will be impossible to establish democratic control by the members if we accept the rules they are making up as they go along. That will mean not only continuing to recruit new members but organising meetings in support of Corbyn's campaign and to rebut the lies and slander that we have already seen.

Last but not least, after the result, there must be a huge demonstration at the Annual Conference in Liverpool to demand the delegates overthrow all the accumulated violations of democracy, force the removal from office of those who perpetrated them and throw open the doors of the Party, setting the goal of a million members. Together with the

trade unions such a party will be mighty weapon for smashing the Tory offensive and opening the perspective of a working class government imposing socialist measures.

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