

# Left- Horizons

## NEC ditching Chris Williamson is a disgrace

It is a disgrace that Chris Williamson was barred by Labour's NEC from standing as Labour candidate in Derby North, on the grounds that he was suspended. As we explained in an earlier comment, his first suspension was overturned after an investigation and the second *re-suspension* declared null and void by a court decision. The *third* suspension was little more than a pretext to keep him from standing for parliament.

There is an irony in the fact that the second, unlawful, suspension had been engineered on the grounds that one of the NEC members looking into Chris Williamson's case, Keith Vaz, claimed to have been unwell at the earlier hearing that had reinstated him. The High Court judge threw out this ludicrous excuse. But Vaz himself has now been suspended *from parliament* for six months, after a far more serious charge was laid against him than the flimsy charge put up against Chris. No decision was made by the NEC regarding Vaz, but Party members will be forgiven for wondering why being a socialist like Chris seems to be *verboten*, but buying Class A drugs for prostitutes and then lying to parliament about it might just be OK for the NEC.

The right wing of the Labour Party have always had double standards – they are prepared to tolerate any

transgression of Party rules if it suits them: likewise, any grubby attempt to undermine the leadership of Jeremy Corby is tolerated, no matter how much it brings the party into disrepute. Peter Mandelson has made it clear that he works 'every day' to undermine a leader elected twice by a huge majority of members. Yet no action is taken against him. The mis-named 'Jewish Labour Movement' has explicitly *refused* to endorse the Labour Party in this election, yet there are no moves to disaffiliate this hostile organisation. Nor is there any action against Margaret Hodge, who abused the party leader to his face, telling him that he was a f\*\*\*ing racist.

### **Policies and programme are more important than labels**

We have come to expect little else from all the *Chuka-Umunnas-who-haven't-left-yet*. When Labour is elected, these right wing MPs will act as a 'Fifth Column' and will do their best to sabotage the radical programme that Labour wants to introduce. But what is even more galling is the fact that a supposedly 'left' National Executive Committee has allowed the right wing to ride rough-shod over the views of members and has caved in to the pressure of the Tory media and Labour's right wing.

It demonstrates what we have argued many times – that it is not a matter of labels – like 'left wing' – but

*what policies and programme* are put forward. There are far too many masquerading as ‘lefts’ who are using Momentum and the NEC to establish a career for themselves, in the knowledge that the membership of the Labour Party is overwhelmingly on the left and will remain so for the foreseeable future.

But as disgraceful as this decision is, we do not think it is the right decision for Chris Williamson to stand as an independent candidate against Labour in Derby North. Nor do we think it right for Labour Party members to support him in that, or for members to tear up their party cards.

### **We are in the Labour Party for the long haul.**

The left should not isolate itself in a bubble of its own making. Many Labour members and even more supporters will simply not get the point if we ourselves showed the kind of disloyalty with which we charge the right wing, or if we were to pick and choose which part of the Labour Party we support in elections, especially a crucial election like the current one. Working class people take a straight-forward view of their organisations and those who are active in them. If you work to build the party (or the trade union) and you supports its struggles; if you show your loyalty at the most crucial moments, then and only then can you *earn the right* to be heard and to be critical of policy, of officials and even of elected representatives.

Even where we are critical of their views, (and we wouldn't hide it) ***Left Horizons supports the election of all Labour candidates*** in England, Scotland and Wales and we would support them in Northern Ireland too, if that choice was available. It is only by supporting candidates in elections that we earn the right to be critical of them in the policies they put forward.

### **Chris Williamson can be vindicated**

We are in the Labour Party for the long haul and the fight for genuine socialist ideas is a marathon, not a sprint. Chris Williamson could have been vindicated and reinstated into the Party. Of that we have no doubt. He could have supported the party as a rank and file member, or even as a suspended member.

He could have still advanced socialist ideas through his trade union, through other meetings and by a variety of means could have found access to Labour Party members. He could have increased support for what he stands for and he could have been reinstated with even more support than he had before. But a decision to stand against the Party will make his vindication far more difficult and therefore much less likely.

There will be howls of outrage among Labour Party members about the NEC decision, and it is justified anger. But we cannot build a movement on gut reactions. As the saying goes, “don't get mad; get even”. The tide of history is not moving with Labour's right wing and the right have nothing to offer ordinary working class people. That is why the relics of New Labour who still infest the party have to resort to organisational and administrative measures against the left. *They can work no other way*. They cannot debate policies in the open because they will fall flat on their faces. They have to scheme and manoeuvre in closed cabals, away from the scrutiny of party members.

The bigger tragedy is that so many on the ‘soft’ left are like putty in their hands and they bend to the pressure of the right and the Tory press. That is an issue that needs to be addressed in the future, especially next year, when the nine NEC places are elected in the CLP section.

What, then, is the task in the longer run? It is not a matter of the fate of one left MP, no matter how good he is. It is a matter of building a coherent socialist movement inside the party, based on the most open discussion of ideas and the promotion of the greatest possible democracy. We are primarily engaged in a struggle for *ideas*, and most likely a long-term struggle. It is a struggle that must take place for the foreseeable future inside the ranks of the Labour Party. Moreover, it is a struggle we are confident we will win. The disgraceful ditching of Chris Williamson as a Labour candidate will not deflect us from that goal, and we sincerely hope it does not deflect Chris Williamson either.

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