

Left- Horizons

Disgraceful Party treatment of Chris Williamson MP

The Party's treatment of Labour MP Chris Williamson has been nothing short of disgraceful and it throws into question the fairness and transparency of the Party's so-called Compliance Unit and its whole disciplinary process.

Although the outcome was widely misreported in the mass media last week – and deliberately so – Chris Williamson won a victory in the High Court against his *second* suspension by the Party, the court agreeing that “there was no proper reason” for it. As the High Court judge said, “it is not ... difficult to infer that the true reason for the decision in this case was that [NEC] members ... were influenced by the ferocity of the outcry following the June decision.”

Ferocious outcry from Labour's right wing

Williamson had been originally charged and suspended on the grounds of anti-Semitism; his case had been investigated and he had been reinstated. It was only after the “ferocious outcry” from right-wing Labour MPs and peers that the party reversed that decision and *re*-suspended Chris. Party members and CLPs are apparently banned from public comment on active disciplinary cases, but that rule does not apply to Labour's right-wing who have the enthusiastic backing of the media, when any left-bashing is in order. It was over that second suspension that Chris Williamson took his case to court...and won.

However, the Labour Party, anticipating that it was going to lose the High Court case, found yet another pretext to suspend Chris, so that whereas his second suspension was deemed unlawful, the High Court could do nothing about his *third*. It did not matter that Chris was able to answer all the charges this time around. He therefore remains suspended.

Labour Party members will be forgiven for seeing this process as no more than an attempt to find some pretext to bar Chris Williamson from being a Labour MP. Since he cannot be a candidate as long as he is suspended, the exact pretext for suspension doesn't matter, so long as it is in effect just prior to a snap election, when candidates are selected. Party members will also ask whether it is a good use of membership subscriptions to employ staff to trawl through social media accounts and ferret around *ad infinitum* to target, exclusively, *left-wing* members and MPs.

What is particularly disappointing is the fact that there is not a single 'left' MP who has had the courage to stand up in support of Chris Williamson. The two rallies at Labour Party conference organised by the *Tribune* newspaper and the Campaign group of MPs were both packed. One left MP after another enthusiastically endorsed the radical resolutions passed and the radicalism of the expected Labour election manifesto. But to a man and woman they seem to be running scared of the right-wing on the question of anti-Semitism, with which Chris Williamson's suspension is entangled.

Whatever appeasement to the right, it is never enough

Even within the top leadership of the party, there are some who have urged Chris Williamson to 'apologise' (yet again) to the Jewish community, including bodies like the *Jewish Chronicle* and the mis-named Jewish Labour Movement. The idea that Chris should apologise to these organisations, especially if it comes from senior members of the Shadow Cabinet is an outrage.

The *Jewish Chronicle* and the Jewish Labour Movement are not 'community' organisations that represent ordinary Jewish people going about their business. They are *political* entities which are irreconcilably opposed to the leftward shift of the Labour Party, to any left Labour MPs and to Jeremy Corbyn personally. It does not matter how many 'apologies' are made by Chris Williamson, or anyone else on the left for that matter. *It will never be enough.* And it will never be enough, until

Corbyn is gone, the radical party membership is brought in check and criticism of the state of Israel is restricted.

There has never been the remotest piece of evidence that Chris Williamson has in any way expressed hostility, insults or abuse towards Jewish people. The Labour Party's own leaflet on fighting anti-Semitism expressly states that such a fight "does not mean limiting legitimate criticism of the Israeli state or its policies or diluting support for the Palestinian people's struggle for justice." Yet *in practice*, what the fight against anti-Semitism has come to mean is that Labour Party members criticise Israel at their peril.

Too many NEC members are Left In Name Only

The treatment of this good Labour MP brings into question the whole disciplinary process within the Party. The Labour Party membership is overwhelmingly on the left, but within the party's apparatus remnants of the old unreconstructed Blairite right-wing still remain and, unfortunately, most of the so-called lefts on the NEC are incapable or unwilling to seriously challenge the right.

What has it come to, we might ask, when right wing members of the Labour Party can flout the party rules with apparent impunity – such as suspending a member (as we have reported) *for three and a half years without specified charges or due process?* Meanwhile, those on the left are *micro-monitored* for any 'deviation' from rule or for any uttered or written form of words that can be used as a pretext for suspension. To make matters worse, like something out of a Kafka novel or a Stalinist Party hand-book, those who *defend* suspended members and speak up in their support are *themselves* suspect on account of it.

Cravenly cowering before the media and right-wing

What we also have to consider is that the treatment of Chris Williamson has led some good party members to question the whole Corbynism project and to address that we have to look at the bigger picture. 'Corbynism' is something of a misnomer because it means different things: it reflects a *contradictory and dynamic process* with many different strands.

In so far as it refers to the *tops* of the Labour Party, NEC and 'left' MPs, then the Corbyn project is definitely beginning to unravel. Too many NEC members are 'lino' – *Left In Name Only*. They are being exposed as weak, short of ideas and cravenly cowering before the media and the party right-wing. Momentum is fast evolving into a career-path for all sorts of carpet-baggers who will gladly label themselves as 'lefts'.

We are not entirely surprised at this turn of events. It is not a *personal* issue, it is *political*. The dire crisis faced by British and world capitalism offers only one solution: the socialist expropriation, by a mass movement of the working class, of the main levers of production, distribution and exchange. It is

a *revolutionary* concept, but an urgent crisis demands an urgent response.

Those who cling onto the illusion that capitalism has the capacity to reform itself will inevitably come into conflict with socialist ideas and will find reasons to compromise with the right wing. That is why so many Labour 'lefts' cower in front of the press and the right-wing.

On the side we need to consider what Corbynism means to the Labour Party rank and file, and for Marxists, *this is its most important aspect and meaning*.

The Labour Party has more than half a million members, overwhelmingly on the left and that is a massive change from the days of Ed Miliband just four years ago. Even if that membership is less active, unwilling (at the moment) to attend meetings regularly and is semi-dormant, the vibrancy and vitality of that membership will become manifest whenever there is an election.

A reflection of the awakening consciousness of millions

With its half a million members rooted in every community, the party, as seen at conference, really does reflect the growing radicalisation of millions of working people. That is the reason why the manifesto is arguably the most radical since 1945 and in some respects is *more* radical. It is no accident or historical freak: it is a reflection, in terms of the changed consciousness of the working class, of the crisis of capitalism.

Jeremy Corbyn is the *personal embodiment* of a massive wave of hopes and aspirations, but as we said in our last editorial, if it wasn't through Corbyn, then that shift in the consciousness of the class "would find an outlet with some other leader or leaders". That is why the old Blairite wing of the party is reduced to organisational and constitutional manoeuvres and plotting behind closed doors. In the full light of day they have nothing to offer the working class. Corbynism, *as a reflection of the awaking consciousness of millions of workers*, is here to stay for the foreseeable future.

What has happened to Chris Williamson is a disgrace and Labour Party members up and down the country should put resolutions through their CLPs to object to the charade. But we always have to bear in mind the bigger picture and have a wider perspective. Despite his treatment and any short-term victory for the right-wing, we have no reason to be pessimistic. On the contrary, the present political situation presents a great opportunity for debate and discussion in the movement. We can be confident that the ideas of Marxism will get a wider echo than ever before, and we are sure that *Left Horizons* will play a significant part in that process.

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