



On offensive offenses

The slow motion train wreck which was the complaints procedure during the leadership contest seems to be finally grinding to a halt – or perhaps it’s hitting the buffers. Whichever it is, the recent Disputes sub-committee of the NEC showed that NEC members and staff have become absolutely sick to death of it. The suspended and expelled members, of course, were already sick of it.

What seems to have happened is this. The Procedures Committee was set up by the NEC to deal with verifying supporter applications for the leadership contest. Many concerns were aired at the time by some NEC members that the Procedures Committee was accountable to no one. It seems to have started out just looking at supporter applications, but when complaints about existing members started to trickle in, it was decided to admit them to that process too. Everyone concerned seems then to have become victims of the Law of Unintended Consequences.

Once members began to get suspended (or even expelled) as a result of complaints sent in to the Party by other members with an axe to grind, the trickle of complaints became a flood. Eventually over 11,000 complaints were logged as well-resourced right wing hit squads scented a golden opportunity and began trawling through known Corbynistas’ FaceBook and Twitter accounts.

Conspiracy theorists should take note that over half (52%) of complaints resulted in no action being taken, which suggests to me that there was no concerted attempt by supposedly right wing party staff deliberately to rescind people’s membership. Party staff have a variety of personal political affiliations, ranging from die hard Progress supporters to optimistic Corbynistas, but in any case lack the time, resources or inclination to embark on internet trawls.

I did point out that alarm bells should have rung in HQ when all these complaints started pouring in. Someone, somewhere could have wondered why it

Christine Shawcroft looks at the ongoing ramifications of membership disputes triggered during the leadership campaign. Has the attack from the right hit home?

was that all these members had been potting along happily, for several years in some cases, with the support of their CLPs, only to have huge numbers of complaints swamp the department for a ten week period which just happened to coincide with a leadership contest.

At the Disputes committee meeting, I also said that “support for another Party” should only mean standing as a candidate or signing nomination papers (although there have been cases of people innocently doing this as a favour for their next door neighbour the Lib-Dem candidate), not sharing or liking things on FaceBook or Twitter. Furthermore, it should only apply to people who were members at the time, not to previous political affiliations.

After the fiasco of someone’s membership reapplication having been refused last year because they supposedly stood as a Socialist Unity candidate in 1976, it has been clarified that it only applies to people who stood in the last two years. Of course, this has caught people who stood as Green or TUSC candidates in May 2015 – many of them ex-Labour Party members who had despaired of the Party, but who swiftly saw the error of their ways when Jeremy was elected and joined up. Having been accepted by their CLPs, it seems rather harsh for them to be expelled again a year later and told they are barred for five years, especially when sitting Lib-Dem, Green, UKIP and even Tory councillors are admitted into membership every day.

Lots of people were suspended under the rules about abusive language. No matter how annoyed they may be that their “private” social media posts have been combed through, I’m afraid we all have to accept that these things aren’t private, posts are there forever and we shouldn’t say things on social media

that we wouldn’t say to people’s faces (or in front of our mums).

I have had lots of people complain to me that they’ve been suspended “just for one tweet”. When I’ve asked to see the evidence, it turns out that there are several posts, and many take the form of “why don’t you Bl***ite w***kers just f*** off” and “These Red Tory b***t**ds should all be deselected”, etc. Um, are you surprised you were suspended? However, don’t despair: it seems that many of these suspensions are being lifted, with a warning letter about future conduct.

Although suspensions are now being lifted, and many more will be sent to the relevant CLPs (which is where they should have been dealt with in the first place), some people will be having hearings arranged in their regions. Expulsions are a trickier matter. In either case, victims need to appeal and gather as much support in their CLPs as possible. I’m already taking up several of these cases so, wish us all luck.



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