

UPDATE:

Late this afternoon I was issued with a formal warning by the Labour Party NEC, as some here had indicated might happen. They claim that I am in violation of Labour Party rules because I, and the people who have kindly donated, are buying memberships for those unwilling to do so themselves. They have demanded that I shut down the page, and return all monies to the original donors by 12 noon on Monday, 18 July. If I fail to comply, they advise that the case will be passed to the NCC and I face possible expulsion from the Labour Party.

I dispute utterly the claim of the NEC on the basis that firstly, I and those who have donated, are not buying memberships, but rather endeavouring to provide financial support to those who have been disenfranchised by the party itself: people who are *already members*, have now been told that they have to pay a further £25 if they wish to vote in the leadership election, and do not have the financial resources to do so. Furthermore this group of people can hardly be categorised as unwilling, as they have already purchased memberships, and from the personal emails I have received, many have also put up additional funds to pay for union memberships as they try to exercise their right to vote. I have been clear throughout that who people voted for was not important; rather what mattered was that people had the opportunity to cast the vote that they thought they had already obtained, via membership.

Nonetheless, this warning puts me in an extraordinarily difficult position. To go ahead and continue, openly defying their demands, is an option but the potential implications could be significant. It appears that there may be a risk that I am not only putting my membership at risk but also putting the memberships of all those that receive any help, and who have donated at risk, and by extension, denying them any chance of a vote. However small this risk may be, it is not one that I feel is mine to take. The timing of this warning (3.40 on Friday afternoon) is such that it makes it impossible for me to seek proper advice, especially given the already accelerated timetable that is in place for people to register as supporters.

The last thing that I want to happen is that the people that this campaign set out to help are actually harmed by it. As such, it is with extreme regret that I am complying with the NEC's demand. I had already asked Just Giving to close the page in order that I could begin the process of distributing the funds in the coming days, but I will now ask them to return the funds to all those who have donated them. I hope that those who have kindly donated consider donating the funds to another campaign they support.

I do not yet have a timeline for when the funds will be returned to donors but will post updates when I hear further from Just Giving in this regard. I understand that owing to the workings of Just Giving pages, that I will have limited opportunities to post updates in the way that I have done so far. However, I will continue to post in the comments with links to updates such as this, as required.

It is with great regret that I have decided to take this step. However, I have been truly touched by the kindness and generosity that I have witnessed here, and at the stories that people who have emailed me personally have shared. The immense and rapid growth of this campaign demonstrated how much good there is in the world, and I thank each of you from the bottom of my heart for your contributions.