

Statement by the Right Honourable Nick Brown MP

I am today announcing that I will not be standing again at the next general election.

This is a decision which I had been pondering for some time. I am 73 years old and have had the honour of serving my constituents in Newcastle Upon Tyne East for more than 40 years, during which time I have had the privilege of being the Labour Chief Whip (under four Party leaders) as well as in four ministerial posts.

My constituency border is now being redrawn following the national constituency boundary changes and I think it is a sensible time for me to retire – given that I would otherwise be nearly 80 by the end of my next term.

However, it is also important to make clear that my decision to stand down is made against the backdrop of a long-running internal Labour Party disciplinary process against me – a process which I consider (and am advised) is so fundamentally, and inexcusably, flawed that I can no longer engage with it. As such it is with an extremely heavy heart that, as well as announcing that I will not be standing for re-election, I have also today made the difficult decision to resign from my membership of the Party which I love, and of which I have been a proud member for over 50 years.

I wish to say something about the circumstances that have prompted me to take this step. I do so in part so that my own position is made clear (as I have not been able to say anything to date, resulting in speculation and gossip filling the vacuum). Also, I do so because the so-called “investigation” and then the disciplinary procedure to which I have been subjected is so grotesquely unfit for purpose, and open to flagrant abuse (by malicious complainants and political opponents alike), that they risk causing a serious erosion of the confidence that the Party’s members should be able to place in it.

By way of background:

I have been suspended from the Labour Party since July 2022.

My suspension followed a complaint against me by a political rival within the Party. It concerned an allegation about events said to have taken place more than 25 years ago.

To be clear; the accusations against me were, and remain, entirely false, without even the faintest germ of any truth to them. Not only had they never previously been made in the ensuing 25 years, they had never been so much as hinted at, whether by that individual or anyone else. They came entirely out of the blue, and as a complete bombshell to me.

The person who made the accusations was a long-standing political opponent of mine (who at the time of the complaint clearly had political ambitions of their own) and I can only conclude that their decision to fabricate these allegations – hiding

behind the safe cloak of a confidential process – was made with those ambitions in mind. It is striking, for example, that they declined to go to the proper authorities, which is what they should have done if there had been so much as a scintilla of truth in what they accused me of.

There was, and is, no proper corroborative evidence to support the allegations. Indeed, I have been advised by Leading Counsel that much of the so-called “evidence” would be inadmissible in any disciplinary or legal process worthy of the name.

When the complaint was first filed, I was determined to trust the Labour Party’s investigation and disciplinary system. After all, as someone who had been a member of the Party for so many years and had devoted much of my life to it, I wanted to trust the system. Furthermore, while I considered them to be plainly ludicrous, the allegations were very serious and it was important that they were looked at properly (and with full rigour). Indeed, given the gravity of the allegations, I expected the Party to approach the matter with the seriousness and legal rigour that the situation clearly demanded. This would include the procedural and evidential safeguards which such a situation required – for all involved.

However, the opposite happened. Over the ensuing 17 months it became clear to me, and to my legal team, that I can simply have no faith whatsoever in the ability (or, I fear, the desire) of the Labour Party to investigate and then adjudicate on this allegation fairly and even-handedly.

On the contrary, the process has been structured, and conducted, in such a manner as to lack even the most basic of procedural fairness and evidential safeguards. Time and again, my lawyers and I have implored the Party to properly adhere to those basic legal (and common sense) standards. Yet time and again they have refused, on the most flawed of grounds.

Such are the blatant unfairness and procedural concerns – which the Party has brazenly dismissed – that the procedure has frequently, and increasingly, felt entirely skewed against me, to the extent of being pre-judged. Even if my concerns as to pre-judgment are misplaced and those involved with administering the process were acting in good faith and to the best of their abilities, the shortcomings are inexplicable, and inexcusable.

The litany of failings is too long to set out in this statement, but by way merely of illustration:

- Despite this being an extremely serious case, in which the demeanour and credibility of the complainant and I would be crucial, the Party has refused my repeated requests that the proposed disciplinary hearing take place in person. Instead it has insisted that the hearing takes place by video conference primarily, it seems, for the convenience of those presiding over it.
- Equally extraordinarily, the Party has refused even to permit the witnesses (including the complainant and I) to be questioned directly by the lawyers,

instead restricting any questioning to be made through a panel of adjudicators, as they see appropriate.

- Aside from a wholly fabricated statement by the complainant made for the first time almost 25 years after the (fabricated) events are said to have taken place, the “case” against me relies largely on so-called “evidence” consisting of statements by a small number of individuals (friendly to the complainant) who admit that they knew nothing whatsoever of the allegation until the complainant chose to mention it to them more than twenty years later. Despite this, some within the Party have effectively taken on the role of “prosecutor”, inviting the adjudicators to make findings of wrongdoing against me on the basis of this utterly flawed so-called evidence.

I have repeatedly and clearly expressed my concerns about this procedure over many months reasonably and at great length. However, they have fallen on completely deaf ears to a degree which is simply terrifying for a major political party.

As a consequence, and despite my hopes that good sense, legal propriety and basic natural justice might prevail, it has become increasingly clear to me not only that I cannot possibly expect a fair hearing, but that this process is a complete farce. It is for others to judge whether some within the Party considered these flimsy allegations against me to be a convenient pretext for suspending me and then hounding me from the Party. It has certainly felt that way, and even if that were not the intention, it is the appearance and effect.

My own legal team – which include a leading KC and a leading public law barrister – have told me that, in light of the Party’s refusal to comply with even the most basic of safeguards, evidential and procedural measures to be expected of any quasi-judicial process, they are unable to advise me that I could expect a fair hearing.

Things have reached a very sorry pass when the likely next party of government conducts cases of this gravity in a manner more akin to those of a mismanaged golf club.

I wish to thank the colleagues, friends and constituents who have stood by me throughout this process. It remains my hope that the country will soon be led by a strong Labour government, and one that properly adheres to the principles of fairness, accountability and due process.