SOPHIE RAWORTH:
Now could Labour’s relationship with the trade unions be at a crossroads? That’s the speculation following claims that the powerful Unite union tried to rig the selection of Labour’s candidate to fight the Falkirk seat at the next General Election. Ed Miliband’s accused of being “slow to grip the problem” because Unite is such a big donor to the Labour Party and supported him for the leadership, but now a war of words has broken out between him and Unite’s Leader Len McCluskey. Well I’m joined now by Labour’s Deputy Leader, Harriet Harman. Good morning.

HARRIET HARMAN:
Good morning.

SOPHIE RAWORTH:
What actually has happened in Falkirk? What are the allegations because we simply don’t know.

HARRIET HARMAN:
Well what’s happened is that some members of the party have been suspended; the selection of Labour’s candidate in the General Election for Falkirk has been suspended, that process; the scheme, which proved to be vulnerable to abuse, has been ended. And, therefore, what Ed Miliband has done is stepped in and put the situation back on track.

**SOPHIE RAWORTH:**

But what has actually happened? What are the allegations? Are we talking about fraud? I mean this has been handed to the police. You clearly think something criminal has taken place.

**HARRIET HARMAN:**

Yeah, there was an investigation after complaints that the membership system was being abused in order to favour a candidate to get selected in Falkirk. That was investigated. The party then suspended two people as a result of that. But then, on it being reviewed by the party solicitor, it was considered that this should be investigated by the police as to the question of criminal actions. And you know we all want to see … Those of us who are in the Labour Party, we all want to see the voice of ordinary working people heard in the corridors of power. That is absolutely fundamental. But the way to do that is not to have abuse of the membership system or indeed to have a membership system which leaves itself open to abuse. That’s why the scheme has been ended.

**SOPHIE RAWORTH:**

But, as you well know and Len McCluskey has been very, very vocal in saying, I mean he says today in the papers that they were working completely within the rules to get a working class candidate selected, and he has dismissed your internal investigation and he’s accused that of being “shoddy fraud”. I mean let’s just be very clear. You are adamant that there is possibly some criminal activity that has taken place here?

**HARRIET HARMAN:**

Well I think he’s absolutely wrong to say that the investigation did not turn up allegations without foundation. That is absolutely wrong. And actually just as if there
was a breach of the rules within his union, his members would expect him to ensure that the rules were obeyed and the integrity of the union upheld, so if there’s allegations of membership breach in the Labour Party, the duty of the leader absolutely - and this is what Ed Miliband is doing - is upholding those rules. And you know Len McCluskey should be supporting Ed to support the integrity of the rules of the party, not simply saying “oh well these allegations, I’m going to sweep them aside”. You know these investigations have been done by party staff on behalf of the party and that’s you know what’s going to happen. So there’s not … you know there’s not a war of words on this. What there is, is determined action by Ed Miliband to change the system and to deal with the abuses of the system.

**SOPHIE RAWORTH:**
The case of Falkirk for you, are you sure this is an isolated case or could this be more widespread? Are you looking into other constituencies?

**HARRIET HARMAN:**
Well actually if you look at the figures, which we have done, that Falkirk is definitely the first time that there’d been attempt at mass recruitment of membership and irregularities. So actually most …

**SOPHIE RAWORTH:**
And you’re sure about that?

**HARRIET HARMAN:**
Yes. Most of the … Absolutely. Most of the Union Join, membership joins were just like one per constituency. So it’s where there’s been a group. This is the one where there’s a problem. The scheme was open to abuse, it was abused in Falkirk. That’s why members have been suspended, that’s why the police have been called in. But we do …

**SOPHIE RAWORTH:**
But what about other constituencies because I mean there was this leaked document from Unite’s political director saying Unite has plans in place for another forty constituencies. Are you now looking into those?
**HARRIET HARMAN:**
Well the scheme, the Union Join scheme, you know has been ended because it was obviously … Falkirk showed it was vulnerable to abuse. So it wasn’t in use before …

**SOPHIE RAWORTH:**
*(over)* But will you look into the other constituencies? Are you …

**HARRIET HARMAN:**
*(over)* The ones they’ve already had selections, we’re not concerned that the scheme was abused because you only have to look at the numbers to be clear that’s the case. Falkirk, there was abuse. You know action has been taken on that. But if I can just explain because I think you know obviously there is no doubt that we want to have proper processes for selection of the candidates. There’s no doubt about that, and not abuse of a membership system, but I think a lot of people don’t understand that actually the relationship between the trade unions and the Labour Party, it is important that actually we hear the voice of people at work in our public policymaking. And I’ll just give you one example. Yesterday I was in Leicester at the East Midlands conference and there was a woman there from USDAW, the shopworkers’ union. She was talking to me about these things called “small hours contracts” where people are on contracts of 3 hours a week …

**SOPHIE RAWORTH:**
Okay …

**HARRIET HARMAN:**
… in a twilight world between employment and unemployment.

**SOPHIE RAWORTH:**
But look, I just …

**HARRIET HARMAN:**
It’s the unions, the voice of people at work that brings those issues into the public domain.
SOPHIE RAWORTH:
(over) Fine. I want to talk about your relationship with the unions in a moment …

HARRIET HARMAN:
Yeah.

SOPHIE RAWORTH:
… but I just want to be absolutely specific. With the other constituencies, these forty other constituencies, have you taken central control of any other of those?

HARRIET HARMAN:
Well there are a number of constituencies where for different reasons issues are being looked into. But, as far as the Union Join …

SOPHIE RAWORTH:
(over) Since last week?

HARRIET HARMAN:
Oh no, since previous, since previous to that. But this is the Union Join problem and this has been dealt with. But also Ed Miliband is saying …

SOPHIE RAWORTH:
(over) And what kind of issues are you looking … What are these issues? Are they …

HARRIET HARMAN:
(over) Well Ed Miliband is actually saying that we need to have further reform in the selection process. For example, we need to have a cap on expenditure in selection processes because we want to have a situation where an ordinary person can actually get selected to stand for Parliament or to stand for a position in the party without having to have financial backing either because they’re independently wealthy or because they’re backed by a trade union. And, therefore, the question of capping spending in elections whether or not it’s for MP or whether it’s for Leader or Deputy Leader … See I actually was not backed by unions to be Deputy Leader of the Labour
Party, but I had to get a second mortgage. Now most people are not in a position where they can actually do that and that’s unfair. So we need to open the system up, so you don’t have to have financial backing either from the unions or to be able to use your own resources in order to be able to stand for selection in the Labour Party.

SOPHIE RAWORTH:
What about the political levy? What about making that opt-in rather than an opt-out system? That presumably would weaken, dilute the power of the union bosses?

HARRIET HARMAN:
Well actually if you think of selection, selections are one member one vote anyway for parliamentary selections, and, therefore, the question of affiliation is not the issue in parliamentary selections.

SOPHIE RAWORTH:
Yes, but I mean the political levy - that is very important, isn’t it? That could be a step where you actually … Because the crux of this now is you’ve got this great public spat between your leader and the unions, and it’s a battle for power.

HARRIET HARMAN:
No it’s not a great public spat between the leader …

SOPHIE RAWORTH:
*(over)* Well of course. There’s a huge public spat.

HARRIET HARMAN:
*(over)* No the leader and the unions. There is a public argument about Unite and Ed Miliband is … Unite and Falkirk, and Ed Miliband is absolutely right that he’s upholding the rules on that. There isn’t going to be any argument. The rules are going to be upheld. But actually the relationship between the unions and the Labour Party is important for reasons, as I’ve said - the voice of people at work having their voice heard in the corridors of power - but we also have to modernise the system and that’s why I think Ed will be bringing forward proposals, including a cap on spending, so that actually it’s opened up to ordinary people, you don’t have to have financial
backing. But you know we think that the relationship between people at work in ordinary workplaces who are having a really hard time at the moment and the Labour Party, it keeps us in touch and that’s why we are on people’s side locally, but we are totally opposed to abuse of the rules. And that is what actually happened …

**SOPHIE RAWORTH:**
Okay, but he’s …

**HARRIET HARMAN:**
… and nobody should be backing that.

**SOPHIE RAWORTH:**
… I mean Ed Miliband is going to have to do a bit more than just cap spending, isn’t he? He’s going to have to do something a bit more dramatic in order to convince people that he is in charge and that he’s not being pushed about by the unions. He’s going to talk about this, I understand, this week. Anything more? I mean what kind of options is he looking at?

**HARRIET HARMAN:**
Well he’s basically looking at the rules and working out how best they should be. And you know this is not about posturing. This is basically about ensuring … I mean this issue in Falkirk was not sought out by Ed, so that he could do posturing on it. *(Raworth tries to interject)* This was wrongdoing and he stepped in. And he’s also saying …

**SOPHIE RAWORTH:**
*(over)* I mean let’s be clear, he’s been bounced into this by the Conservatives really, hasn’t he?

**HARRIET HARMAN:**
No, that is … no that is not true because …

**SOPHIE RAWORTH:**
*(over)* This came out of nowhere on Wednesday …
HARRIET HARMAN:

(over) No, no …

SOPHIE RAWORTH:

(over) In PM Qs …

HARRIET HARMAN:

(over) … no, no.

SOPHIE RAWORTH:

… they were talking about education and all of a sudden it’s all about Len McCluskey and the unions.

HARRIET HARMAN:

No. No because you see what had happened is already the process had been selection … the process had been suspended of selection long before David Cameron raised it. Also an investigation had been set up long before David Cameron raised it. So Ed Miliband and the party had already stepped in. So David Cameron might decide to give himself the credit, but no that process was already underway. The review was underway, the selection process had been suspended. So that is not right.

SOPHIE RAWORTH:

Ed Miliband’s leadership though - it is at a crossroads, isn’t it? I don’t think you can deny that. There is a crisis going on at the moment. At the end of this, are we going to see a significant change in Labour’s relations with the trade unions?

HARRIET HARMAN:

Yes, I think things like a cap on spending will be a significant change for the right reasons. But I don’t think this is …

SOPHIE RAWORTH:

(over) That’s not going to be enough, is it?
HARRIET HARMAN:
Well I think it’s very important that actually nobody is able to be ruled out of a contest because they can’t get financial backing from a union or have their own independent funds. I think that is a major step …

SOPHIE RAWORTH:
(over) But you can’t have your leader being pushed about in the papers, as he is today, and you know there’s the war of words that’s going on, because you’re just going to leave yourselves open to this Tory jibe that we heard a lot of last week that your leader is weak.

HARRIET HARMAN:
Well he’s not because he’s actually stepped in and taken the action that’s necessary. And he’s going to take further action to make sure that we keep that link with people at work and make sure that we’re in touch with ordinary peoples’ lives, but we also have clear rules to make sure that those rules are not abused.

SOPHIE RAWORTH:
Harriet Harman, thank you very much.

INTERVIEW ENDS