

UK Labour leadership, bowing to right-wing campaign, suspends Ken Livingstone

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The British Labour Party's suspension of Ken Livingstone is undemocratic and the charge levelled against him of anti-Semitism is slanderous. Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn's capitulation to this witch-hunt is abject and disgraceful. It is, however, only the latest in an unbroken series of capitulations by Corbyn to the Blairite right wing of the Labour Party.

Livingstone was suspended in the immediate aftermath of a provocation organised by Labour MP John Mann and in response to a concerted campaign by MPs in the party's right wing. These figures are working in collusion with pro-Israel groups, the Conservative Party and the pro-Conservative media. Their aim is to engineer the downfall of Corbyn as party leader. Their method in the current witch-hunt is to brand all criticism of the Israeli state and its suppression of the Palestinians as a form of anti-Semitism.

Since his election as Labour leader on the basis of an appeal to anger and disgust with the reactionary policies of the dominant Blairite wing of the party, Corbyn has bowed to every demand of the right wing. In acquiescing to the suspension of Livingstone, Corbyn hypocritically declared, "If there is anti-Semitism, it has got to go." Livingstone's comments were "unacceptable," he added.

Last night, Corbyn announced an independent inquiry into anti-Semitism to be led by Shami Chakrabarti, the former head of Liberty. Labour is also to bring in new rules making it easier to discipline members for anti-Semitism. This, however, will do nothing to satisfy his opponents, who want his head on a plate.

Livingstone was suspended after he commented on Labour's suspension Wednesday of Naz Shah, the Labour MP for Bradford West. Shah became an MP at the May 2015 general election, just prior to Corbyn being elected as leader of the party last September. She was the darling of the party for defeating the incumbent, George Galloway, the Respect Party MP, who had been expelled

from Labour by Tony Blair in 2003 for his opposition to the Iraq war. On Corbyn's election, Shah was given the post of parliamentary private secretary to John McDonnell, Labour's shadow chancellor and Corbyn's closest ally.

On Tuesday morning, the right-wing political blogger Guido Fawkes (real name, Paul De Laire Staines) published a 20-month-old Facebook post Shah made in August 2014. Shah had reposted a graphic with Israel's outline superimposed on to a map of the US, with the text "Solution for Israel-Palestine conflict—Relocate Israel into United States."

Shah apologised several times, adding, "I made these posts at the height of the Gaza conflict in 2014, when emotions were running high around the Middle East conflict." Just hours later, the *Jewish Chronicle* published another Facebook post by Shah calling on her followers to vote in an online poll asking whether Israel had committed war crimes.

Despite Shah making another apology in the House of Commons, she was suspended from the Labour Party pending an investigation by its National Executive Committee.

On Thursday morning, Livingstone spoke to BBC Radio on Shah's expulsion. He said her "remarks were over the top," but that he didn't believe she was anti-Semitic. He continued, "Let's remember, when Hitler won his election in 1932 [sic] his policy then was that Jews should be moved to Israel. He was supporting Zionism. [He then] went mad and ending up killing 6 million Jews."

Livingstone concluded, "There has been an attempt to smear Jeremy Corbyn, and his associates, as anti-Semitic from the moment he became leader. But the simple fact is we have the right to criticise what is one of the most brutal regimes that's going in the way it treats its Palestinians."

Within two hours, more than 30 Labour MPs had demanded Livingstone's removal from the party in an orchestrated witch-hunt. The group included Andy Burnham, Yvette Cooper and Liz Kendall, the candidates Corbyn beat in the leadership election. Labour's London mayoral election candidate Sadiq Khan described Livingstone's comments as "appalling and inexcusable" and said, "There must be no place for this in our party."

Livingstone was about to do another interview with the BBC's "Daily Politics" and was walking towards the studio while conducting a separate interview on the Shah suspension, on his mobile phone, with the LBC radio station, when he was accosted by Mann, who shouted in his face that he was "a fucking disgrace," "a disgusting racist," a "lying racist" and, four times, "a Nazi apologist" who was "rewriting history."

The episode was conveniently filmed, giving Mann's outburst maximum publicity. Within two hours, Livingstone was suspended by the Labour leadership, pending an investigation, for "bringing the party into disrepute."

On Friday, an online petition to Corbyn was drawn up demanding Mann be disciplined for his "appallingly unprofessional and toxic behaviour." Within hours, it had already been signed by more than 11,600 people.

From 1981 to 1986, Livingstone was leader of the Greater London Council. He was a Labour MP from 1987 to 2001 and the first mayor of London from 2000 to 2008.

In 2000, Livingstone was expelled from Labour under Tony Blair when he sought to run as the party's candidate for London mayor against Frank Dobson, the leadership favourite. Having trounced Dobson in the 2000 election running as an independent, Livingstone was readmitted to the Labour Party in 2004, shortly before he won the mayoral contest for the second time. He stood unsuccessfully for mayor again in 2012.

Following Corbyn's election, Livingstone, a long-time ally of Corbyn, was appointed the co-convenor of the party's on-going review of its defence policy. This is to include an examination of Corbyn's stated preference of abandoning an intended upgrade of Britain's nuclear capabilities.

It is this position that has made him the target of the right wing. Pointing to relations between the Zionists in Germany and Hitler's Nazi Party is not anti-Semitic, but politically embarrassing to the Israeli regime and its apologists.

Given the rotten politics of the Labour Party, it has not been difficult to unearth a handful of genuinely anti-

Semitic statements made by party representatives. More often, hostility to Israel and defence of the Palestinians is portrayed as anti-Semitism. In any event, the campaign to "root out anti-Semitism" is in reality a campaign to purge all political dissent from within the Labour Party and put the party's right wing back in complete control.

Corbyn, elected leader on a massive mandate to oppose Labour's pro-big business Blairite leadership and policies, has lent his support to this reactionary operation.

During last year's Labour leadership campaign, the Socialist Equality Party wrote, opposing Corbyn's claim to articulate a socialist foreign policy:

"Corbyn and those supporting him, such as Ken Livingstone and Diane Abbot, made up a significant layer of the 'Labour left' in the 1980s. Their loyal support for the Labour Party, close work with the trade union bureaucracy, promotion of identity politics based on race, gender and sexual preference and insistence on a parliamentary perspective was routinely passed off as socialism. It played a considerable part in maintaining Labour's political grip over the working class.

"The promotion of bourgeois nationalist groups such as the IRA, the PLO and African National Congress was an important element in lending their political manoeuvres an internationalist colouration. But subsequent events have proved that these policies, and campaigns based on them, both anticipated and helped prepare for shifts in the official foreign policy of British imperialism."

In contrast, the SEP fights for a revolutionary socialist programme to unite Arab and Jewish workers in a common struggle against capitalism and for the building of a socialist society, which will tear down the artificial borders that divide the peoples and economies of the Middle East and end the constant wars and oppression that are fuelled by the profit drive of foreign capitalists and the native ruling classes.



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