

Labour “anti-Semitism” witch-hunt dominates media in run-up to UK polls

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6 May 2016

The campaign by right-wing Blairites, the Conservatives and Zionist groups to supposedly “root out” anti-Semitism from the ranks of the Labour Party reached fever pitch in the run-up to yesterday’s elections for London Mayor, the Scottish Parliament, Welsh Assembly and some English local councils.

The media has obsessed on the question, with every alleged incident or accusation reported and amplified. Tanya Gold writes in the *Daily Telegraph* of how “Labour’s anti-Semitism problem should sicken any voter.” *Newsweek* wades in with “Britain’s Jewish Voters Desert Labour Party Amid Anti-Semitism Row.” “Anti-Semitism row is costing Labour,” states the *Guardian*.

This is occurring even as evidence mounts proving the entire affair to be a manufactured crisis, based overwhelmingly on attempts to portray hostility to Zionism and Israel’s suppression of the Palestinians as racism towards Jewish people.

A week ago, Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn authorised the suspension of his ally, former London Mayor Ken Livingstone, after he had defended Labour MP Naz Shah, who is accused of anti-Semitism. According to reports, 18 party members have now been suspended following allegations of racism and anti-Semitism since Corbyn became leader last September.

Since Corbyn’s election, Labour’s membership has more than doubled to around 500,000.

When Corbyn became leader, there were attempts to brand him an anti-Semite that failed miserably. This campaign has been resurrected and extended with the aim of damaging Corbyn and laying the ground for a leadership challenge against him. In March, the *Jewish Chronicle* editorialised regarding Labour: “There is now a cancer in their party and it is getting worse by the day. If Labour is not to lose the last residue of trust

from our community, it must recognise and deal with that cancer.”

In Parliament during Prime Minister’s Questions Wednesday, Conservative leader David Cameron reiterated the charge that Corbyn was a supporter of terrorism by again referencing a speech he made in 2009 in which he referred to representatives of Hamas and Hezbollah as “friends.”

Cameron said, “Are they your friends or are they not? Because those organisations in their constitutions believe in persecuting and killing Jews. They’re anti-Semitic organisations, they’re racist organisations. He must stand up and say they are not his friends.”

Corbyn said that he was speaking diplomatically at the time and that “Obviously anyone that commits racist acts or is anti-Semitic is not a friend of mine.”

The aim of this carefully choreographed campaign was made explicit by two articles in the *Daily Telegraph*.

The first is an interview with Britain’s chief rabbi, in which he states baldly that it is illegitimate to criticise Zionism, because Jewish self-determination has been at the centre of the faith for more than 3,000 years. “It is astonishing to see figures on the hard left of the British political spectrum presuming to define the relationship between Judaism and Zionism despite themselves being neither Jews nor Zionists,” he says.

John McTernan, Labour Prime Minister Tony Blair’s director of political operations from 2005 to 2007, wrote as the polling booths opened yesterday: “Each loss in today’s elections answers the question, ‘does Corbynmania translate into electoral support?’ It confirms what the polls say: that just as Jeremy is defiantly going nowhere, so is the party.... It may not be the beginning of the end, but it will be the end of the beginning.”

The Progress faction of the Labour Party has played a leading role in the witch-hunt. Last month, Progress director Richard Angell, a supporter of Liz Kendall, the most openly Blairite candidate defeated by Corbyn in last September's leadership election, said that by Labour's next conference, "serious sanctions should be in place for those considered to have been part of Jew hate and other forms of hatred."

He called for Labour's undemocratic "Compliance Unit", which has its origins in an anti-leftwing purge of the party carried out in the 1980s, to be allotted "extra resources" and be given "immediate and additional staff" as "they cannot be expected to work every hour the almighty sends to keep on top of this workload."

The workload he refers to is a vast trawl of social media accounts now underway to seek out examples of supposed anti-Semitism.

This week, in an interview on the Open Democracy web site, Professor Norman Finkelstein, a respected author and prominent critic of Zionism and Israeli policy, exposed the rotten edifice of the entire right-wing campaign.

Speaking about one of the postings for which Shah was suspended, an image depicting a map of the United States with Israel superimposed as one of its states, Finkelstein said he had posted the image on his own web site as far back as 2014. "Were it not for the current political context, nobody would have noticed Shah's reposting of it either," he said.

Livingstone was suspended for defending Shah and stating on BBC radio: "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."

Finkelstein said of these remarks, "Livingstone maybe wasn't precise enough, and lacked nuance. But he does know something about that dark chapter in history."

"Hitler wasn't wholly hostile to the Zionist project at the outset," he added. "The Nazis considered many 'resettlement' schemes—the Jews wouldn't have physically survived most of them in the long run—before they embarked on an outright exterminatory process. Livingstone is more or less accurate about this—or, as accurate as might be expected from a politician speaking off the cuff."

In his defence, Livingstone cited the work of Lenni Brenner, *Zionism in the Age of the Dictators* (1983) as source material. Finkelstein recalls, "[T]he fact of the matter is, when Brenner's book was published, it garnered positive reviews in the respectable British press. The *Times*, which is today leading the charge against Livingstone and the elected Labour leadership, back then published a review praising Brenner's book as 'crisp and carefully documented'. The reviewer, the eminent editorialist Edward Mortimer, observed that 'Brenner is able to cite numerous cases where Zionists collaborated with anti-Semitic regimes, including Hitler's'."

Regarding the accusations of anti-Semitism in the Labour Party, Finkelstein said: "These campaigns occur at regular intervals, correlating with Israel's periodic massacres and consequent political isolation... Let's not forget, just last year there was a hysteria in the UK over anti-Semitism. A couple of ridiculous polls purported to find that nearly half of Britons held an anti-Semitic belief and that most British Jews feared for their future in the UK... It was exposed as complete nonsense when, in April 2015, a reputable poll by Pew found that the level of anti-Semitism in the UK had remained stable, at an underwhelming seven percent."

This week, the House of Commons Home Affairs Committee confirmed it would call on Corbyn, Cameron and Livingstone to give evidence as part of its "inquiry into anti-Semitism." Shah had previously been a member of the committee.

This reactionary campaign could not have got any traction had it been resolutely opposed and exposed. Instead, both Corbyn and his main ally, Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell, agreed immediately to the suspension of Shah, Livingstone and numerous others both before and since. It is Corbyn's repeated capitulations that mean, despite having the backing of hundreds of thousands of members and supporters who want shut of the right-wing, it is the Blairites that still determine policy and who are Labour's real leaders.



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