

# Roger Cohen of the New York Times declares that anti-Zionism is anti-Semitism

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On October 18, Roger Cohen published a column in the *New York Times* titled “Anti-Semitic Anti-Zionism.”

The column targets UK Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn and compares him negatively to Donald Trump. Its broader purpose, however, is made clear in the very first line: “The hard left meeting the hard right is an old political story, as Hitler understood in calling his party the National Socialists.”

Cohen’s “old political story” is an old political lie. Nazism was developed not primarily as an anti-Semitic, but as an anti-communist movement. Anti-Marxism and opposition to the international unification of the working class was Hitler’s driving obsession, to which he counterposed ethnic German nationalism. His hatred of the Jews was based upon their association with the socialist movement.

He stated in *Mein Kampf* that his aim was to destroy “Jewish Bolshevism.” He wrote of his “conviction” that “the question of the future of the German nation is the question of the destruction of Marxism... In Russian Bolshevism we must see the attempt undertaken by the Jews in the twentieth century to achieve world domination.”

The service provided to German imperialism by “National Socialism,” i.e., fascism, was to mobilise the ruined petty-bourgeoisie and the declassed lumpen-proletariat as a shock force against the organised workers’ movement. Its essential political aim was to eradicate Marxian socialism and destroy the labour movement as a precondition for the unleashing of militarism and war, which were necessary to secure the markets and territory required by German imperialism, as expressed in Hitler’s goal of “Lebensraum.”

Cohen regurgitates the old anti-communist slander—identifying the “hard” left with the “hard” right—to underscore his assertion that the “leftist supporters of Britain’s Labour Party,” described by him as an alliance of “young dreamers and old guard Leninists,” are aligned with Trump. Corbyn’s supporters, he declares, “like Vladimir Putin’s Russia even as he flattens Aleppo... oppose or are skeptical of NATO, the cornerstone of the Western alliance,” and “see a conspiracy of what Trump has called ‘global financial powers.’”

In regard to the supposed espousal of anti-Semitism by the “Corbynistas,” the main theme of his confused rambling, Cohen declares them to be even worse than Trump! The Republican presidential candidate is only opportunistically using “tropes with a distinctly anti-Semitic undertow about the banks and financiers plotting the ‘destruction of US sovereignty,’” but “these are words, not a program.”

“He’s a New Yorker after all,” Cohen adds shamelessly.

In contrast, “Corbyn and his extreme left backers” are the advocates of what “the British political theorist Alan Johnson has called ‘anti-Semitic anti-Zionism.’” As proof, Cohen cites a cross-party parliamentary committee that concluded Corbyn had created a “safe space” for “those with vile attitudes towards Jewish people,” and declared that Labour’s “passivity before anti-Semitic incidents” risked “lending force to allegations that elements of the Labour movement are institutionally anti-

Semitic.”

This is the second foray by Cohen on the issue, following a March 7 column titled “An Anti-Semitism of the Left.” But his slanders are reinforced by a number of other *Times* articles, including one by Dave Rich titled “Anti-Semitism and the British Left” and another by Kenan Malik of the libertarian Institute of Ideas, publishers of *Spiked Online*, which bears the headline “The British Left’s ‘Jewish Problem.’”

## A concerted slander campaign

All such claims are a calumny against hundreds of thousands of progressive and anti-racist working people and students who have rallied behind Corbyn. In this, the *New York Times* has taken its place in an alliance of the Conservative Party, right-wing sections of the Labour Party and numerous Zionist groups. These forces are collaborating in a political campaign that has two aims: to discredit Corbyn in order to place the Labour Party under the firm control of its pro-NATO, pro-business right wing, and, of equal significance, to outlaw all criticism of the state of Israel and Zionism as a form of anti-Semitism. As the Socialist Equality Party warned in April:

“A political amalgam has been established that equates any criticism of Israel with anti-Semitism, with the aim of charging the entire ‘left’ with this crime—on the basis that all Jews identify with the state of Israel. Any criticism of the historical actions of the Zionist movement, and, above all, any equation of Israel’s brutal treatment of Palestinians with that suffered by Jews under fascism, is outlawed.”

The “discovery” of Labour’s supposed anti-Semitism was made only after Corbyn was first elected as party leader in September 2015. Fearing the underlying oppositional sentiment expressed in the support for Corbyn, the party’s right wing and the media went on a political offensive—including accusing Corbyn himself of being an anti-Semite due to his opposition to Israel’s brutal treatment of the Palestinians and his advocacy of a negotiated settlement in the Middle East involving Hamas and Hezbollah.

For the most part, this pattern has been repeated ever since. On April 27, for example, Naz Shah, Labour MP for Bradford West, was suspended from the party for the “crime” of retweeting a map of Israel superimposed on a map of the US so as to depict Israel as one of the US states. This image had been republished from the web site of leading historian Professor Norman Finkelstein.

One day later, Ken Livingstone, the former London mayor, who has been active in left-wing and radical causes for more than 40 years, was suspended from the Labour Party 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.”

As the *World Socialist Web Site* explained, “[T]he worst that can be said about Livingstone’s comments is that he spoke with insufficient care. The statement that Hitler supported Zionism, without further qualification, is imprecise and challengeable on factual grounds. Hitler was a virulent anti-Semite, and whatever support he and his regime gave to Zionism was steeped in the most cynical political calculations and always subordinate to the Nazi leader’s unwavering and pathological hatred of Jews. However, it is a matter of historical record that after Hitler came to power in 1933, significant sections of the Zionist movement in Germany sought an accommodation with the regime.”

Other Labour suspensions followed, almost all related to posts made during Israel’s 2014 war on Gaza, during which Israel’s indiscriminate bombing led to the deaths of 1,462 civilians, including 551 children, out of a total death toll of 2,251 Palestinians. No mention of these crimes was made in the media outrage that followed, much of it based upon sometimes falsified material dredged up by the Conservative Party blogger Guido Fawkes.

During the latest leadership contest, which Corbyn again won, Labour’s sinister Compliance Unit trawled through the accounts of tens of thousands of party members. But all of this has led only to between 20 and 40 suspensions out of a party membership of half a million. The majority of these suspensions were related to criticisms of Israeli policy towards the Palestinians and statements opposing Zionism.

### **The anti-communist pedigree of Alan Johnson**

Cohen cites approvingly Alan Johnson’s term “Anti-Semitic Anti-Zionism.” What he does not explain is that Johnson writes in his capacity as senior research fellow at the Britain Israel Communications and Research Centre (BICOM), run by Poju Zabłudowicz, a billionaire who also funds Conservative Friends of Israel.

BICOM is one of a number of Zionist organisations which, working with the Tories and the Blairite wing of the Labour Party, have been central to the campaign to portray Labour as a bedrock of “left anti-Semitism.” Cohen’s earlier March 7 article, for example, relates to the resignation of the co-chair of the Oxford University Labour Club, Alex Chalmers, who claimed his fellow members were anti-Semitic. Chalmers is a former intern with BICOM and resigned over the decision of the Labour Club to support Oxford’s Israel Apartheid Week.

Another key organisation is the equally well-funded Community Security Trust (CST), in which Dave Rich is a key figure. Rich is the author of the book *The Left’s Jewish Problem: Jeremy Corbyn, Israel and Antisemitism*. The book is published by Biteback, part-owned by Political Holdings Ltd, which is run by billionaire former Tory Party Deputy Chairman Michael Ashcroft.

Johnson’s pro-Zionist sympathies were incubated during his years as a member of the anti-Trotskyist Alliance for Workers Liberty. He went on to become a leading advocate of imperialist military intervention as co-author of the 2006 Euston Manifesto. The manifesto argued in favour of the Iraq war and occupation on the basis that socialists should align themselves with the “democratic” mission of the Western powers in combating Islamic fundamentalism and not espouse “a blanket and simplistic ‘anti-imperialism.’” It urged opposition to concealed “prejudice against the Jewish people behind the formula of anti-Zionism.” Johnson praises the “social democratic anti-totalitarianism” of Tony Blair, as well as the “democracy-promotion” of the US neo-cons.

In an article for the BICOM-linked journal *Fathom*, “The Left and the Jews: Time for a Rethink,” Johnson denounces a “strand of distinctively

*left-wing* hostility to Jews” that “takes the form of a wild, demented, unhinged form of anti-Zionism.” He proclaims the guilty to be all those who claim that Zionism is racist and/or engage in what he terms “Holocaust inversion,” i.e., any comparison between Israel and Nazi Germany—“even in the language of intellectuals.” His list of intellectuals “unhinged” by their anti-Zionism includes the historian Ilan Pappé, Professor Noam Chomsky, the poet Yitzhak Laor and sociologist Yehuda Shenhav.

Johnson decries the idea that the Jews could ever assimilate into European society and targets Lenin in particular for having set up “the ‘Good Jew/Bad Jew’ dichotomy” as part of his advocacy of assimilation. “The Left hoped to dissolve Jewish peoplehood in the solvent of progressive universalism,” he charges. But Nazism and the Holocaust left such ideals “in tatters,” so that today, anti-Zionism can mean only “a programme of comprehensive hostility to all but a sliver of world Jewry, a programme for the eradication of actually existing Jewish self-determination.”

This insistence that Zionism is the legitimate and unchallengeable voice of the Jewish people is the broader political agenda behind the slanders directed against Corbyn and his supporters in the Labour Party. It means that any and all criticism or opposition to the state of Israel—“actually existing Jewish self-determination”—can be denounced as an example of disguised anti-Semitism.

### **The House of Commons Select Committee redefines anti-Semitism**

Cohen dismisses as a “whitewash” the report commissioned by Corbyn and authored by Shami Chakrabarti, the former head of human rights group Liberty, which rejects claims of rampant anti-Semitism in the Labour Party.

Without citation of evidence or any independent examination, he instead declares his solidarity with an October 15 House of Commons Home Affairs Committee report into anti-Semitism, which is a hatchet job produced exclusively for factional purposes by Corbyn’s opponents. The report was published by a committee consisting of five Conservative MPs, one member of the Scottish National Party and two leading Labour opponents of Corbyn, Chuka Umunna and David Winnick.

In a perfunctory introduction, the report admits that the vast majority of hate crimes are directed against Muslims, the incidence of which rose by 326 percent last year. Anti-Semitic crimes that year totalled 1.4 percent of all hate crimes, of which 41 were violent incidents—a 13 percent fall. Most crimes are on social media and the report acknowledges that “CST figures suggest that around three-quarters of all politically motivated anti-Semitic incidents come from far-right sources.”

Having made these points, the committee gets down to its real agenda of targeting the Labour “left”—faithfully reproducing every slander against Corbyn’s supporters and always with the intention of conflating anti-Zionism with anti-Semitism.

The main criticism made of the Chakrabarti inquiry is that it “declined to provide a definition of anti-Semitism.” The committee proposes to remedy this error by adopting the “working definition” of anti-Semitism adopted in June by the intergovernmental body, International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA).

This, it asserts, was drawn from an earlier “working definition” used by the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC), an agency of the European Union that has been replaced by the Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA). However, Blanca Tapia of the FRA has said the document published for a period on the EUMC web site was never regarded as a valid definition and it has been pulled offline “together with

other non-official documents.”

The IHRA definition is significant for including as examples of anti-Semitism:

- \* Denying the Jewish people their right to self-determination, e.g., by claiming that the existence of a state of Israel is a racist endeavour.

- \* Applying double standards by requiring of it behaviour not expected or demanded of any other democratic nation.

- \* Drawing comparisons of contemporary Israeli policy to that of the Nazis.

These same criteria should now be adopted by the UK government, according to the Home Affairs Select Committee.

The definition also declares, in giving examples of anti-Semitism: “Manifestations might include the targeting of the state of Israel, conceived as a Jewish collectivity,” and “Accusing Jewish citizens of being more loyal to Israel, or to the alleged priorities of Jews worldwide, than to the interests of their own nations.” Yet the formula now being advanced—that Zionism is integral to the Jewish faith, which is inseparable from the state of Israel—plays directly into racist tropes, long the staple of fascist propaganda.

The implications of the proposed definition are so nakedly reactionary that the committee is forced to add two caveats that are supposed “to ensure that freedom of speech is maintained in the context of discourse about Israel and Palestine:”

- \* It is not anti-Semitic to criticise the government of Israel, without additional evidence to suggest anti-Semitic intent.

- \* It is not anti-Semitic to hold the Israeli government to the same standards as other liberal democracies, or to take a particular interest in the Israeli government’s policies or actions, without additional evidence to suggest anti-Semitic intent.

This is purely for the record. The caveats are there only because the definition to be adopted is inherently an attack on free speech. Indeed, the Community Security Trust is effusive in its praise for the report. In the BICOM-linked *Jewish News*, Dave Rich declares it to be “the new template for the fight against anti-Semitism,” because it not only justifies the ongoing purge within the Labour Party, but also potentially criminalises—as hate speech—criticism of the Israeli government. This is also what recommends the report to Cohen.



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