

UK Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn joins right-wing campaign against Ken Livingstone

Robert Stevens
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Ken Livingstone was suspended from Labour Party membership for two years on Tuesday. He was dragged before the National Constitutional Committee (NCC), based on the spurious charge that he made anti-Semitic statements that “brought the party into disrepute.”

Livingstone has been suspended since April 2016, after he opposed the suspension of Labour MP Naz Shah based on similarly bogus charges of anti-Semitism.

During an interview last April, Livingstone told reporters, “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 ended up killing 6 million Jews.”

The NCC suspended Livingstone for two years, upholding three charges against him of breaching party rules. In addition to the suspension he has just served, he will be unable to stand for office or represent the party at any level until April 2018. But he remains a party member, as the panel decided against expelling him.

Livingstone is the former leader of the now-defunct Greater London Council, the MP for the London constituency of Brent East from 1987 to 2001 and Labour mayor of London for eight years, from 2000 to 2008. The latest action against him, as with his original suspension, is an outrageous violation of democratic rights. Moreover, accusations that he is anti-Semitic are slanderous given that he is a long-standing opponent of all forms of racism.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* has previously stated, Livingstone’s remarks were made with insufficient care, “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.”

Following the NCC hearing, Livingstone described the allegations against him as “nonsense” and said it was “like sitting through a court in North Korea.” He added, “I expected them to expel me, so I have now got to consider whether I challenge this legally.”

In a statement issued by Livingstone shortly after, he said he would campaign to overturn the NCC’s decision. The suspension had been extended “because of my political views, not because I have done anything to harm the Labour Party.” The “disciplinary process was not in accord with natural justice in a number of ways. For example, the panel hearing was not held in public, despite the fact that it could have been under Labour’s rules. I was suspended for more than 11 months before the hearing was held.”

Dozens of right-wing Labour MPs immediately denounced the NCC’s failure to expel Livingstone from the party. The vicious line-up was led by the chief coup plotters who have sought to remove Jeremy Corbyn as party leader ever since his landslide election in September 2015.

Those calling for Livingstone’s expulsion include Deputy Leader Tom Watson, former Labour leader Ed Miliband, Blairites Yvette Cooper, Liz Kendall and Andy Burnham (who unsuccessfully challenged Corbyn in the 2015 leadership ballot) and Labour Mayor of London Sadiq Khan.

Michael Dugher, vice chairman of the pro-Zionist Labour Friends of Israel group, said, “Ken Livingstone should be kicked out for good.”

Simon Johnson, the chief executive of the Jewish Leadership Council (JLC), said, “Livingstone’s inaccurate and antagonistic comments, including over the past 40 years, have had a huge impact on the Jewish community.”

The Jewish Labour Movement had provided a 178-page dossier to the hearing.

Richard Angell, the director of the main Blairite think tank, Progress, called on Corbyn to take further action, saying, “It isn’t good enough for Jeremy Corbyn to hide behind the process here.”

By Wednesday afternoon, 42 Labour MPs (nearly 20 percent of the parliamentary party) had called for further action against Livingstone.

Though he has been in a political alliance with Livingstone for decades as part of Labour’s “left,” the NCC verdict was the signal for Corbyn to prostrate himself once again. He announced that he had called a meeting of the National Executive Committee to open a further investigation into Livingstone, focussing on comments he had made in his defence since the panel’s decision.

Responding to Livingstone’s refusal to accept the politically motivated decision against him, Corbyn stated, “It is deeply disappointing that, despite his long record of standing up to racism, Ken has failed to acknowledge or apologise for the hurt he has caused. Many people are understandably upset that he has continued to make offensive remarks which could open him to further disciplinary action.”

Corbyn knows that convening the NEC—led by a right-wing cabal—and his support for “further disciplinary action” opens the way for Livingstone’s expulsion. But this is of a piece with his kowtowing to the right wing throughout this entire filthy witch-hunt.

From the outset, Corbyn immediately agreed to the suspension of Shah, Livingstone and others. Then, in response to the Labour right’s manufactured scandal claiming the party was rife with anti-Semitism—allegedly due to Corbyn’s leadership and support for the Palestinians—he set up an inquiry into racism in the Labour Party headed by prominent human rights lawyer Shami Chakrabarti.

Chakrabarti completed her report and concluded, to the chagrin of the right, that the party “is not overrun by anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, or other forms of racism.” Since then, Chakrabarti has been made a

baroness, was appointed shadow attorney general, and then elevated at Corbyn’s recommendation to the House of Lords. Ignoring her earlier findings, she endorsed Livingstone’s suspension by the NCC, claiming it proves that Labour has the “ability to look at itself fairly and carefully in the mirror in more difficult times, however painful this might be.”

According to the *Guardian*, “Livingstone is believed to have told the panel that the case against him was motivated by a plot to undermine the Labour leader, Jeremy Corbyn, and his supporters in the party.”

Yet Corbyn’s prostration before his opponents is so complete that he thinks nothing of offering to lead a political witch-hunt launched by the Blairites and their supporters—as part of the plot to remove him!

Livingstone’s persecution is an attack on the freedom of speech of all Labour members. It proceeds despite five Jewish members of the party presenting evidence in his defence at the hearing. Among the five was 93-year-old Walter Wolfgang, a former member of Labour’s NEC, who was born in Germany and whose family was persecuted by the Nazis.

The five Jewish members have since issued a statement condemning Livingstone’s continued suspension and pointing to its anti-democratic character: “The case brought against Ken was not that he was antisemitic. Instead it was claimed that he upset a significant part of the UK’s Jewish population. This upset had been caused by his (accurate) statement that some Zionists and Hitler had wanted to get Jews out of Germany, and that prior to the War they reached a temporary agreement to help bring this about. The Zionist motivation was to increase the numbers of Jews going to Palestine.

“If a political party adopts the principle that it suspends every member that upsets some part of the population where would it all end? Labour should respect freedom of expression.”



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