

# UK Labour MPs and media demand expulsion of Ken Livingstone

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The campaign to ensure the expulsion from the Labour Party of Ken Livingstone is being stepped up through the organised lobbying by right-wing and Zionist Labourites and their media backers.

Livingstone, the party's London Mayor until as recently as 2008, was suspended from membership for two years on Tuesday by Labour's National Constitutional Committee (NCC), based on allegations that he made anti-Semitic statements that "brought the party into disrepute." Livingstone had already been suspended for a year, since making his original comments last April.

This has not satisfied Britain's political and media establishment, who have issued a chorus of demands that Livingstone is expelled from the party.

Last April, while defending Labour MP Naz Shah against bogus charges of anti-Semitism, Livingstone said, "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."

Livingstone spoke with insufficient care--and can be legitimately challenged on both factual grounds and on his interpretation. But it is a matter of historical record that the Nazis, with Hitler's support, entered an agreement with significant sections of the Zionist movement meant to facilitate Jewish emigration to British Mandate Palestine.

Over the last days, a flood of op-eds and editorials have appeared in the national media demanding Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn expel Livingstone, his long-time ally. In the five days to Friday, more than 50 articles have appeared in the UK national media, with a significant number demanding Livingstone's head.

This offensive is being led by the *Guardian*, whose front page Thursday was dominated by the headline,

"100 Labour MPs condemn decision not to expel veteran over Hitler remarks."

It was referring to the letter signed Wednesday by 107 MPs, nearly half of the parliamentary party and including eight members of Corbyn's shadow cabinet, along with 47 Labour peers. The letter reads, "We stand united in making it clear that we will not allow our party to be a home for antisemitism and Holocaust revisionism. We stand with the Jewish community and British society against this insidious racism."

On Wednesday, the *Guardian* editorialised that the NCC decision was "wrong" and sent a "terrible message." Livingstone's comments were a "grotesque misreading of history" and "Most Jews think it [Livingstone's language] was hurtful. But a Labour committee has decided not to mind their pain."

The *Guardian* proclaimed of the NCC decision, "An ugly conclusion is inevitable: Labour values Mr Livingstone's membership over the fight against antisemitism."

*Guardian* columnists Suzanne Moore, Jonn Elledge and Anne Perkins all weighed in with vitriolic denunciations of Livingstone.

The campaign for his removal on grounds of "bringing the party into disrepute" will have a destructive impact on the democratic rights of rank and file Labour members, including many of its Jewish members and a chilling effect more broadly on criticism of the state of Israel and its ongoing war against the Palestinians.

Five Jewish members of the party--including 93-year-old Walter Wolfgang, whose family was persecuted by the Nazis--submitted evidence to the NCC in Livingstone's defence. "We are appalled by the decision to continue the suspension of Ken Livingstone," it stated. "It is an attempt to protect Israel

from criticism, while simultaneously weakening the position of Jeremy Corbyn, a principled supporter of Palestinian rights.”

That letter was preceded by one sent by 30 Jewish members and supporters of the Labour Party in support of Livingstone. These included Marion Kozak, of the Holborn and St Pancras Constituency Labour Party, who is the mother of former party leader Ed Miliband. Another signatory is the actress Miriam Margolyes, a member of Lambeth CLP.

The letter stated that the origins of the attack on Livingstone date back to February last year, with a “skilfully delivered campaign to present the Left of the Labour Party as riddled with antisemitism, a charge which we can refute based on many years of accumulated experience.”

Regarding Livingstone’s statements, the letter continues, “To be specific, we do not find Ken Livingstone’s remarks about the Zionist leadership’s involvement in negotiating the ‘Ha’avarah’ (Transfer) agreement with the Nazis in the 1930s in any way antisemitic. This agreement is a historical fact, and it gave vital support to Hitler at a time when his regime was under severe international pressure.”

The 30 members state that Livingstone’s comments “fall well within the spectrum of reasonable comment on a contentious political issue.” They declared, “As Jews, we are appalled that such a serious issue as antisemitism is being used in this cynical and manipulative way. It is harmful to Jewish people that false charges of antisemitism are so casually thrown around.”

On the *Guardian*’s letter’s pages Labour member Dr Ian Saville wrote, “It may have been politically inept to bring up the question of Nazi support for Zionism in the way Ken Livingstone did... However, while it is possible to argue about the extent or motivation of Nazi-Zionist support and collaboration, the transfer agreement and other Nazi endorsements of some aspects of Zionism really did happen. It is chilling to insist that a member of a democratic party believing in free speech should resile from what is indisputable historical fact.”

Saville concluded, “So as a Jewish member of the Labour party, I feel I must, therefore, support Ken Livingstone, and oppose the punishment imposed on him. If that means I will be expelled from the party, so

be it.”

Another letter by Steven Rose, emeritus professor of biology and neurobiology at the Open University and Gresham College, London, stated, “Ken Livingstone may be tactless and self-indulgent, but the facts of collaboration between the Zionist leadership and the Nazis are well established, uncomfortable though they may well be.”

The censorship being imposed goes way beyond banning criticism of Israel. What is taking place is a process in which any political position that runs counter to that sanctioned by the Labour right-wing is forbidden.

The charge of “bringing the party into disrepute” is almost always employed by the right-wing against its opponents. Prior to Livingstone, the Blairites in 2003 engineered the expulsion of another high profile party figure, George Galloway, who was targeted due to his being the most prominent opponent within the party of the Iraq War.

The working class must draw crucial lessons as to the character of Labour as a party entirely beholden to the interests of the capitalist class. The Labour MPs demanding action against Livingstone have repeatedly demonstrated their support for austerity, war and the evisceration of democratic rights. In their pursuance of such policies--antithetical to the interests of the working class--this right-wing cabal cannot abide any dissent.

Jeremy Corbyn--who was elected on a mandate of opposing the Blairites--has instead only reinforced their grip on the party. Following the NCC’s decision not to expel his long-time ally, Corbyn has convened meetings of the ruling National Executive Committee to consider “further disciplinary action” against Livingstone.



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