

The right-wing politics of the British “Labour anti-Semitism” smear campaign

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The British and international media is filled with uncritical reports of Jewish protests against Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn, centred on the March 26 demonstration by some 200 people outside parliament demanding that Corbyn purge the party of supposedly rampant anti-Semitism.

Little has been said about the forces behind the protests or their political objectives. However, an examination of the tendencies and prominent leaders involved makes clear that strident accusations of anti-Semitism are aimed at shifting the domestic and foreign policy not just of Labour, but of the entire British political establishment sharply to the right.

Especially critical is the effort to silence any criticism of the right-wing government of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and its brutal subjugation of the Palestinians in Gaza, the West Bank, East Jerusalem and within Israel itself, as well as its plans to draw the US into a direct military confrontation with Iran and Iran’s regional allies.

To this end, right-wing Zionists are carrying out a smear campaign against Corbyn and his supporters, with the aim whipping the Labour leader firmly into line, or, if possible, replacing him altogether.

The demonstrations and accusations are portrayed in the media as representing the “voice” of the “mainstream Jewish community.” This is a lie—and not only because it treats Jewish people as a single, monolithic bloc.

The organisations leading the attack are the Board of Deputies of British Jews (BoD) and the Jewish Leadership Council (JLC). The 250-year-old BoD is elected by the synagogues and Jewish charity organisations. But given its admission that about half of all Jewish households in Britain do not belong to a synagogue, that synagogue attendance has been in decline over the last 20 years, and that around a quarter of marriages are with a non-Jewish spouse (while more than

60 percent of those in a partnership have a non-Jewish partner), it can hardly be said to be representative of the Jewish population.

The BoD’s claims to combat anti-Semitism are belied by its record in the 1930s, when it spent more time criticising Jewish anti-fascists than combating Oswald Mosley’s British Union of Fascists—not unlike its stance today.

A socially conservative organisation dominated by Conservative Party supporters and right-wing Labourites, the BoD functions as a lobby group for Israel. According to its web site, it seeks to “counter the de-legitimization of Israel” and “express our community’s bond with the State of Israel.”

Crucially, it adds, “We are also the foremost point of contact for London’s diplomatic community, and the UK affiliate of the European Jewish Congress and World Jewish Congress.”

The latter organisation was set up in the 1930s during the Nazi persecution of the Jews, with the aim of “setting up a national homeland for the Jews in Palestine.”

The BoD’s president, Jonathan Arkush, rushed to congratulate Donald Trump, whom he views as Israel’s best friend, on winning the US presidential election in November 2016, sparking an angry response on social media from many Jews.

The BoD’s sister organisation, the Jewish Leader Council, is similarly made up of synagogues and Jewish charities, but also includes the Zionist Federation of Great Britain and Ireland and the UJIA (Our Israel Our Future), which claims to “have spent the last ten years investing in programmes that make Judaism and Israel inspiring.”

Mick Davis, a previous JLC chairperson, is now chief executive of the Conservative Party. Current JLC Chairperson Jonathan Goldstein is CEO of the real estate investment company Cain International. Speaking on the BBC Radio 4’s “Today” program ahead of last month’s

demonstration, he pointed to the political agenda behind the Labour anti-Semitism accusations when he said, “Jeremy Corbyn is now the figurehead for an anti-Semitic political culture, based upon obsessive hatred of Israel, conspiracy theories and fake news.” His claim is part of a broader amalgam that equates any anti-imperialist criticism of Israel’s suppression of the Palestinians with anti-Semitism.

In the space of a few days these organisations cobbled together a motley crew from across the right-wing political spectrum.

Conservative Party members involved in the protest outside parliament include: Lord Norman Tebbit, one of Margaret Thatcher’s closest political associates, who famously called for a “cricket test” for immigrants to show how patriotic they were; Zac Goldsmith, who ran a filthy Islamophobic campaign for mayor of London against Sadiq Kahn in 2016; and Sajid Javid, former managing director of Deutsche Bank, secretary of state for communities in Theresa May’s Conservative government, and member of Conservative Friends of Israel.

The BoD and JLC even turned to Nigel Dodds, Sammy Wilson and Ian Paisley, Jr., members of the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), which is indelibly associated with religious bigotry and intolerance. These three combine a hatred of Muslims with a loathing of the Labour Party.

Within the Labour Party, they drew succour from MPs Louise Ellman and Luciana Berger, the former and current parliamentary chairpersons of the Jewish Labour Movement (JLM).

The JLM is affiliated to the Labour Party, the Board of Deputies of British Jews and the Zionist Federation of the UK. It works via the World Zionist Organisation with its sister party in Israel, the Israeli Labour Party, which is now part of the Zionist Union coalition. Its current chair and a Labour councillor, Jeremy Newmark, was previously chief executive of the Jewish Leadership Council.

Members of JLM were implicated in the undercover plot by Israeli embassy staffer Shai Masot, revealed by *Al-Jazeera*’s “The Lobby,” to discredit figures associated with the pro-Palestinian camp and “take down” senior government minister Alan Duncan, perceived as hostile to Israel. The programme revealed that Masot worked with pro-Israel Labour MPs, who exaggerated and concocted fake examples of anti-Semitism in the party. They sought thereby to portray the party as “institutionally anti-Semitic,” while they organised plots and coup attempts against Corbyn, a long-time Palestinian supporter who has

in the past called for an arms embargo on Israel.

Last October, Ofcom, the UK’s broadcasting regulator, rejected Israel lobby complaints about the Al Jazeera investigation, ruling that it was factually accurate, had correctly observed rules on fairness, impartiality and privacy, and was not anti-Semitic.

Other Labour MPs to join the protest included Ian Austin, Chuka Umunna, Ruth Smeeth, Joan Ryan, Margaret Hodge, Liz Kendall and Stephen Kinnock, Wes Streeting and John Mann—all of whom have worked for several years to remove Corbyn.

Mann was involved in a provocative punch-up in April 2016 in front of the TV cameras with Corbyn ally Ken Livingstone. This was over comments Livingstone made claiming that Hitler “was supporting Zionism before he went mad and ended up killing six million Jews.” Mann accused Livingstone of being a “Nazi apologist” and a “f***** disgrace.”

Also involved in this frenzied attack is Labour right-winger Claire Kober, who announced earlier this year that she would stand down in May as leader of Labour-run Haringey Council in London. She had been responsible for pushing through plans to turn over £2 billion worth of council housing, schools, clinics and commercial buildings to the Haringey Development Vehicle (HDV), a 50:50 partnership with the global private developer Lendlease.

Popular opposition to the turnover of facilities to HDV, which would have resulted in the demolition of 1,400 social housing units and huge profits for Lendlease, led to the deselection of many Labour councillors supporting the privatisation by their party branches. When these same councillors tried to push ahead with their plans, Labour’s National Executive Committee called on Kober and her Blairite clique to reconsider their policy. The Haringey leader announced her own resignation and used the pages of the *Financial Times* to vent her spleen on the Labour left and the “threats, bullying, sexism and intimidation” she was supposedly made to endure.



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