

UK: Momentum's Jon Lansman takes his place alongside anti-Corbyn witch-hunters

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20 August 2018

Momentum leader Jon Lansman will be a keynote speaker at the Jewish Labour Movement's (JLM) one-day conference next month. The announcement underscores the key role played by the supposedly "grassroots" organisation in the trumped-up anti-Semitism campaign against Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn.

Lansman's appearance takes place amid the unremitting offensive by the Labour Party's right wing, which is allied with the Conservative Party and the media in trawling through Corbyn's political history to manufacture "proof" of his anti-Semitism. The pro-Zionist JLM has played a central role in this manufactured campaign whereby Corbyn's historic criticism of Palestinian oppression by Israel is denounced as evidence of his blind hatred of Israel and support for terrorism.

Speaking alongside Lansman are Labour MPs who have been the most vociferous proponents of the anti-Corbyn campaign. They include current JLM chair Luciana Berger and Ruth Smeeth (former director Britain Israel Communications and Research Centre). Both took part in the attempted 2016 anti-Corbyn putsch by the Parliamentary Labour Party (PLP). Wes Streeting—another key anti-Corbyn figure—is also on the platform, as is Dame Margaret Hodge.

Described as "iconic" by JLM, it was Hodge who staged a provocation against Corbyn in Parliament, smearing him as a "fucking anti-Semite and racist." Despite the party dropping disciplinary action against her, while throwing out others accused of far lesser charges, many of which were false, Hodge has not let up.

Earlier this week, she earned deserved contempt—especially among those of the Jewish faith she presumes to speak for—when she likened the potential disciplinary proceedings against her to the terror felt by those who had to flee Nazi Germany in the 1930s. Norman Finkelstein, an American Jewish scholar known for his trenchant criticism of Israeli policy, was one among many expressing outrage at her remarks, stating acidly that if the campaign against the trivialising of the Holocaust had any real content Hodge should be the first to be thrown out of the party.

The JLM announcement underscores earlier reports by *Jewish News* that "Lansman has for weeks been lobbying Labour's leadership to adopt the international definition [sic] of anti-Semitism with all its examples."

Labour is the only political party to have adopted the controversial International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) "working definition" of anti-Semitism, along with most of its examples of behaviour and statements to be proscribed. But it has balked at the example stating that to define Israel as "a racist endeavour" is anti-Semitic.

Lansman's appearance comes after months in which the Momentum leadership did nothing to oppose right-wing moves against long-standing Labour members Jackie Wilson, Tony Goldstein, Marc Wadsworth and Ken Livingstone on fraudulent anti-Semitism charges, but rather endorsed them in some instances.

Last month it went still further, withdrawing its backing of Peter Willsman from its nine-person slate for elections to the National Executive Committee after he became the latest target. Its action was denounced by Jewish Voice for Labour, which has opposed the anti-Semitism campaign.

An Open Letter from Momentum members in Camden, published by Skwawkbox, attacked the move as "cowardly" and a "craven betrayal." Calling on Momentum to "start seriously pushing back" against the right-wing alliance, it criticised as "mistaken" the belief that "Labour's so-called 'broad church' will mean that your political enemies on the right will give you an easy ride if only you find the right kind of compromise."

The appeal was to no avail.

Lansman's decision to join the JLM platform goes beyond mere conciliation. He is solidarising himself and the organisation he heads with the most reactionary elements of the PLP and their political backers in the ruling elite.

Their aim is not only to silence criticism of Israel's murderous onslaught against the Palestinians and its adoption of the apartheid-style "nation state" law. It is part of a broader offensive aimed at intimidating and outlawing socialist opposition to capitalism and imperialism.

In the Tory-controlled London borough of Barnet, for example, the council has agreed, subject to legal verification, that it can refuse to allow organisations and individuals that support the Boycott Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement—protesting illegal Israeli settlements—from hiring premises. Using IHRA, Barnet is defending its antidemocratic

move on the basis that BDS is anti-Semitic because it targets Israel.

Lansman's actions demonstrate that the right's McCarthyite smear campaign could not have any traction were it not for the leadership of Momentum.

Founded as "a people-powered, grassroots movement working to transform Britain in the interests of the many, not the few," following Corbyn's surprise 2015 leadership bid, it attracted tens of thousands of new members to Labour. This support was key in defeating a right-wing leadership challenge against Corbyn just one year later.

Behind the trappings of "mass participatory democracy," Momentum perpetuated the fiction that Labour could be transformed into a political instrument of working class opposition to austerity and war. But whatever the progressive sentiments of those who signed up to the project, the Momentum network was from the very start aimed at controlling and ultimately sabotaging any genuine challenge to the right.

Founded by Lansman, a life-long Labour "left" apparatchik and millionaire, its political core is made up of professional anti-Trotskyists such as Owen Jones and Paul Mason. The loyalty of this pseudo-left layer is not to socialism, much less the working class, but to the goal of shoring up Labour as the principal political prop of capitalist rule.

As David North explained in *The Frankfurt School, Postmodernism and the Politics of the Pseudo-left*, the term pseudo-left denotes "political parties, organizations and theoretical/ideological tendencies which utilize populist slogans and democratic phrases to promote the socioeconomic interests of privileged and affluent strata of the middle class."

Hostile to the class struggle, the pseudo-left promotes instead identity politics, "fixating on issues relating to nationality, ethnicity, race, gender and sexuality in order to acquire greater influence in corporations, the colleges and universities, the higher-paying professions, the trade unions and in government and state institutions, to effect a more favourable distribution of wealth among the richest 10 percent of the population."

The Syriza government in Greece, which has implemented vicious austerity policies and anti-migrant measures, is the archetypal representative of this social layer. But Syriza shares the same political DNA as Die Linke in Germany, Jean-Luc Melenchon's La France Insoumise and the pro-Bernie Sanders Democratic Socialists of America.

Syriza was the model for what Corbyn described as his attempt to prevent the "Pasokification" of British Labour (i.e., the electoral rout of Greece's social democratic PASOK). In founding Momentum after Corbyn's 2015 victory, the aim of Lansman et al was to strangle the rank-and-file rebellion against the right wing in its crib.

Momentum's 2016 conference was cancelled at the last moment, and an undemocratic constitution and structure imposed aimed at barring from membership anyone who was or

remained a supporter of another political organisation, or who had registered political opinions deemed to be at odds with those of the Labour Party. The youth movement was also liquidated. Its national conference in July heard no motions and took no elections.

In a secret recording made by the *Observer*, Lansman explained that Corbyn and Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell had "personally asked him to exclude members of the Socialist Party [the successor to the Militant Tendency] from Momentum owing to the embarrassment they were causing."

Momentum is now playing the lead role in efforts to overturn opposition to a second referendum on British withdrawal from the European Union, in line with the interests of powerful sections of the corporate elite and the military/intelligence apparatus. A Momentum-backed petition is being circulated to force a vote at Labour's upcoming conference on shifting the party decisively in favour of a "People's Vote" on Brexit.

Among Lansman's vocal supporters are none other than representatives of Open Labour, which was also formed in 2015, but to oppose Corbyn's leadership on behalf of the "soft-left." In 2016, one of its lead proponents, Jade Azim from Women in Political Data, was scathing in her denunciations of Corbyn. A supporter of Andy Burnham's failed attempt to be selected as a leadership challenger that year, she wrote longingly of how—just months after Corbyn's second win—she "had watched a few Shadow Cabinet members shine, and secretly wished they would replace Jeremy."

Open Labour is part of the debate at the JLM on "The Labour Party—A Church Too Broad?" which also features the Blairite think tank Progress alongside Momentum.

Azim now writes as a defender of Momentum in the "real battle for Labour's soul." On Labourlist she defends Lansman, attacks his opponents within Momentum as "cranks" and insists that "Beyond these elections ... the real question is what the nature of the Corbynite left will be."

The "Lansmanite left will have to stay vigilant, organise as best they can, pick candidates without histories of bigotry, and not let the cranks define what it means to be left-wing in the Labour Party and at its grassroots," she writes.



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