

Retreat by Corbynites on anti-Semitism definition emboldens UK right wing

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Labour's National Executive Committee (NEC) has agreed to adopt all the examples set out in the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's (IHRA's) "working definition" of what it claims constitutes anti-Semitism.

Jeremy Corbyn had already accepted the party adopting the IHRA definition and most of its examples of behaviour and statements to be proscribed in 2016. However, his balking at the example stating that to define Israel as "a racist endeavour" is anti-Semitic became the excuse for an endless outpouring of manufactured outrage by the party's Blairite right wing, Zionist groups, the Conservatives and Britain's media, who all denounced Corbyn as an anti-Semite and demanded his removal as party leader.

Once again, Corbyn and his immediate coterie have capitulated in the hope of appeasing their critics and maintaining party unity. Once again, the result has been to cede political territory to the right wing, from where they will proceed to launch the next offensive.

Those Labour and affiliated trade union bureaucrats attending the NEC meeting were greeted by a pro-Corbyn demonstration of around a hundred party members, including a substantial number of Jews, holding placards reading, "Oppose IHRA—Freedom of speech on Palestine" and "Anti-Zionism does not equal anti-Semitism." But all media attention focused on a small group of pro-Israel fanatics, some of whom called out, "Drive Labour fascists off the streets!"

This turns reality on its head. Those protesting the imposition of the IHRA's definition of anti-Semitism are animated by genuine and legitimate outrage at attempts to outlaw criticism of Israel's brutal subjugation of the Palestinians.

The Zionist protest was a celebration of anti-Palestinian violence and included known British

fascists who are aligned with the Israeli state on the basis of anti-Muslim sentiment. They included Paul Besser, formerly the "intelligence officer" of the paramilitary fascist outfit, Britain First, who stood shoulder to shoulder with Gemma Sheridan of the Jewish Defence League, founded by racist fanatic Meir Kahane and notorious for plotting and committing terrorist attacks in the United States.

Yet, over the next four hours it was the demands of the far-right, Blairites and Zionists that held sway over the sentiments of Labour members.

The day before the NEC, the slate of nine candidates for the leadership body organised by the pro-Corbyn Momentum group won a clean sweep against the right wing. Testifying to the depth of opposition to the right, in contrast to the capitulationism of Corbyn's inner clique, this included long-standing NEC member Pete Willsman, who was made the subject of a hysterical campaign accusing him of anti-Semitism. Momentum, which advances itself as representing popular left-leaning sentiment, had called on Labour members not to vote for Willsman.

Various sources reported that Momentum leader Jon Lansman and outgoing NEC Momentum member Rhea Wolfson were also instrumental in persuading Corbyn to abandon a statement he drew up to serve as a caveat to the examples being adopted and for it not to go to a vote.

Corbyn's statement read, "[It should not be] regarded as anti-Semitic to describe Israel, its policies or the circumstances around its foundation as racist because of their discriminatory impact, or to support another settlement of the Israel-Palestine conflict."

Momentum joined with various trade union leaders in formulating and getting adopted a still weaker and "even-handed" caveat to the IHRA code, allowing

members “freedom of expression on Israel or the rights of Palestinians.” Corbyn folded without a murmur.

The response of the right wing was predictable. The Zionist front group, Labour Against Anti-Semitism, described the “compromise” as a “get out of jail” card “protecting the freedom of racists to present vile views.”

The Board of Deputies of British Jews demanded that Corbyn now apologise for what it claimed was his past anti-Semitism.

The Labour Friends of Israel denounced Corbyn, with its director, Jennifer Gerber, formerly director of Blairite think-tank Progress and a special advisor in the Blair government, stating, “It is contemptible but utterly unsurprising that Jeremy Corbyn prioritised and fought for the right of anti-Semites to describe the world’s only Jewish state as racist in a meeting supposedly about combating anti-Semitism. It is now even more clear that Jeremy Corbyn is part of the problem not the solution.”

Richard Angell, current director of Progress, described the caveat as “a ‘right to be racist’ protection when debating the Middle East. ...”

The Jewish Leadership Council revealed more than they perhaps intended when its chief executive, Simon Johnson, said that Corbyn had “attempted shamefully to undermine the entire IHRA definition.”

The free speech caveat “drives a coach and horses” through the IHRA definition, he added. This at least is true. The definition Corbyn signed up to is intended to criminalise left-wing political opposition to Israel, by forces who happily rub shoulders with fascists.

Corbyn’s retreat not only strengthens the right wing politically. It opens Labour members and others up to criminal prosecution for “hate speech.”

It was revealed Tuesday that the Metropolitan Police have received a leaked dossier detailing 45 cases of alleged anti-Semitism within Labour, which they are examining with a remit of seeing if any of them constitute a “hate crime.” Whatever the character of the 45 comments, a precedent is being set that has a truly chilling character.

The constant denunciations of Corbyn, despite his political cowardice and endless series of retreats, point to the fact that the real target of the anti-Semitism campaign is the working class and the emergence of popular anti-capitalist and socialist sentiment. None

other than the old war-criminal Tony Blair told *Euronews*, “Antisemitism is one aspect of what is a deeper problem with the politics of Jeremy Corbyn and the people around him which is sort of a visceral anti-Western position. ...

“If you look at where they make their attacks, where they don’t make their attacks: they will attack people who support the West and they will basically defend people who are anti-West.”

Blair’s position was echoed by the voice of British capital, the *Financial Times*, which reiterated its demand that Corbyn must not be allowed to become prime minister. In an editorial Tuesday, the *FT* warned, “Last year’s election pointed to a mood for change in the UK. His [Corbyn’s] radical policy programme spoke to that.”

This popular mood is to be opposed by the constant evoking of the same political slander: Corbyn cannot be trusted because he had “marinated on the leftward fringes of British politics for over four decades. He was steeped in a world view that flirts with anti-Semitism, where criticism of international capitalism and Israel easily spills over into anti-Jewish rhetoric.”

The *FT* concluded, “[T]his row casts doubt on whether he is a suitable leader for the country. Judged on his response to the anti-Semitism crisis, the conclusion must be that he is not.”

The message to workers everywhere is that their views, their political aspirations, their desire for an end to austerity, militarism and war count for nothing. They can elect a leader (twice) on a massive majority, they can join the Labour Party in such numbers that its membership trebles. They can vote the right wing off the NEC and demand their de-selection as MPs. But these same MPs, backed by well-heeled trade union bureaucrats, are instead hailed by the big business media as secular saints fighting a bunch of racists. They continue determining Labour Party politics thanks to the self-proclaimed Labour “lefts,” who refuse to expel them and still have the gall to promise to form a government “of the many, not the few.”



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