

UK: Labour Students leadership and Zionists extend witch-hunt of Chris Williamson MP

Thomas Scripps
7 December 2018

A right-wing campaign by an alliance of Blairites and Zionists to no-platform Labour MP Chris Williamson has been extended to several major universities.

Williamson is being targeted because he is the most prominent supporter of Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn to have denounced the smearing of party members as anti-Semites for opposing Israeli repression of the Palestinians. He has described this as “proxy wars and bullshit” and “the weaponisation of anti-Semitism for political ends.” He has also been vocal in his support for mandatory reselection of MPs that the Blairites fear might provide a focus for widespread support for them being deselected.

The campaign against Williamson on campus began early last month when the executive of the Sheffield Labour Students (SLS) society “indefinitely postponed” a meeting at the university on the war in Yemen at which he was to speak. This was in response to a complaint from the Sheffield Jewish Society (JSoc), which accused Williamson of “encouraging a culture of anti-Semitism”—largely due to his defence of others accused by the Blairites and sacrificed by Corbyn, such as Marc Wadsworth and Ken Livingstone. JSoc used the pretext of an announcement by the London Metropolitan Police of an investigation into 42 allegations of anti-Semitism in the Labour Party.

The cancellation of the Sheffield meeting became a launch pad for a nationwide offensive wherever the Blairites and Zionists have influence within student groups. Late November, a meeting was held by Westminster Constituency Labour Party featuring a “Chris Williamson MP presentation followed by Q&A.” University College London’s Labour Students Society attacked the Westminster CLP and declared that they would not campaign for its parliamentary candidate, Steven Saxby, a prominent Corbyn supporter, until Williamson was barred and an apology issued. The

demand was taken up immediately by Labour Students societies at Birkbeck, the London School of Economics and King’s College London. Royal Holloway University, Imperial College London, and Edinburgh University’s Labour societies followed shortly afterwards. A joint letter was issued by the London groups condemning Williamson “for his anti-semitic apologism.”

Because it was so nakedly against Labour’s constitution, the threat not to campaign for Saxby was rescinded and attributed to an individual. But this was of a piece with a campaign conducted by a small and unaccountable clique using their positions in groups without active participation to issue statements claiming to represent the collective views of the “Jewish community” and of the “Student population.” The joint letter by London groups, for example, was issued after a meeting “between reps,” i.e., without discussion or a vote by members.

The actions taken at local level are part of a carefully planned national offensive that includes Labour Students, which is dominated by the Blairites, and the pro-Zionist Jewish Labour Movement. But the successes registered have been made possible only by the refusal of Corbyn and his allies to mount any real opposition. In response to every attack mounted by the right-wing, the default position of the Labour “left” is to retreat, appease and then abandon their own stated policy and adopt that demanded by their opponents. As well as sacrificing Wadsworth, Livingstone and others, Corbyn also agreed to adopt the International Holocaust Remembrance Society (IHRA) definition of anti-Semitism which effectively criminalises opposition to Zionism.

This collusion was epitomized by Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell welcoming the Met Police investigation even as it was being used as an excuse for witch-hunting Williamson. Predictably Corbyn et al have maintained absolute silence on the campaign against Williamson. To

do otherwise would involve a conflict with the party's right-wing, which is anathema to the supposed "left." Instead, it is Williamson himself who is now under threat.

Throughout the summer, Williamson enjoyed a high profile among the Labour "left" for running a series of meetings under the banner of The Democracy Roadshow. He urged Labour members to support mandatory reselection as a means of strengthening the Corbyn wing of the party, which he entertained ambitions to eventually lead.

Instead this put him into an unintended conflict with Corbyn as the party leader and his trade union backers retreated on mandatory reselection immediately prior to Labour's annual conference in September. To deselect an MP previously required a vote by 50 percent of local branches and affiliated trade union branches within a constituency. The popular demand of members was for an automatic contest in every constituency, but the NEC agreed instead to the active disaffection of one third of branches and affiliated trade unions before any contest against a sitting MP.

Williamson criticized the GMB and Unite unions for abandoning their previous position supporting mandatory reselection—without criticizing Corbyn for doing the same. Unite General Secretary Len McCluskey responded by attacking Williamson for "undermining the wishes" of Corbyn for a compromise as expressed in Corbyn's closing speech to conference appealing to the Blairites for unity in the party's "broad church." The next month it was leaked to the *Huffington Post* that Williamson might become the first MP to be deselected under the new rules, by his Derby North CLP, in a move initiated by the trade unions. "He is his own worst enemy. He doesn't know when to stop," one source said.

With the possibility that he will be the latest Corbyn supporter to be thrown to the wolves, Williamson has been reduced to complaining as an individual of "a hateful smear campaign" while citing "the importance of the old Labour movement maxim that unity is strength." Meanwhile the Sheffield Labour Students society has seen a rout involving the resignation of half its committee in the aftermath of the cancelling of the Williamson meeting—which was only opposed by three people.

The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) and International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) warned that, left unopposed, the de-facto ban on Williamson would have a chilling impact on free speech. The *World Socialist Web Site* wrote November 12:

"By its actions, the SLS has become an accomplice in

the politically motivated anti-Semitism witch-hunt led by the Blairites, the Zionist lobby, establishment media and intelligence agencies against Corbyn." The WSWS warned, "While Corbyn and Williamson are the immediate targets, the witch-hunt against them has a broader political purpose—aimed at suppressing the growing anti-war sentiment among students, young people and the entire working class, including to Israel's brutal subjugation of the Palestinians."

This warning has been vindicated. Shortly after the attack on Westminster CLP, the Cardiff University students' union was also denounced by the Union of Jewish Students (UJS), Cardiff Jewish Society (JSoc), and the *Jewish Chronicle* for an "appalling" motion titled, "Protecting our Palestinian and Jewish students." The motion called for the union to "endorse a zero-tolerance policy to antisemitism," but was still accused of deploying "a skin-deep mention of combating antisemitism in an attempt to 'kosher' BDS [the boycott campaign against Israel]" and attacked for opposing Israel's repression of the Palestinians in the Occupied Territories as a "system of occupation and colonialism."

Cardiff student union's support for a definition of anti-Semitism that did not follow the IHRA in proscribing reference to the State of Israel as a "racist endeavor" was described as an implicit threat to the safety of Jewish students.

The SEP and the IYSSE call on all students who are members of the Labour Party to reject the no-platforming of Williamson and take up the fight to drive the right-wing out of the Labour Party and from the student movement. We call on all students to wage a counter-offensive against the witch-hunters, in defence of democratic rights and free speech as part of an independent struggle for socialism. The IYSSE offers the only genuine political home for those students seeking a way forward out of the dead-end into which Corbyn and the Labour "left" are trying to lead them.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact