

No to the witch-hunt of Chris Williamson!

Oppose the Blairites' bogus claims of "left anti-Semitism"!

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The Socialist Equality Party opposes the suspension of Derby North MP Chris Williamson from the Labour Party. His suspension is the product of a reactionary campaign by the Blairite right wing of the Labour Party and media to slander the "left" as anti-Semitic, and must be opposed by all workers and youth.

The capitulation of Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn and his key supporters before this McCarthyite witch-hunt is a betrayal of monstrous proportions—signifying a political and moral collapse from which the Labour "left" will never recover.

On February 27, Corbyn accepted without comment the National Executive Committee's decision to suspend Williamson, whose sole crime was to reject the accusation that the Labour Party is awash with anti-Semitism. Speaking to a meeting in Sheffield of the pro-Corbyn Momentum group that was published by the *Yorkshire Post* and released February 26, Williamson told his audience, to applause, that Labour was being "demonised as a racist, bigoted party... I have got to say I think our party's response has been partly responsible for that because in my opinion... we have backed off too much, we have given too much ground, we have been too apologetic."

Williamson was immediately accused of condoning anti-Semitism. Wednesday saw 38 MPs from the centre-left Tribune group write an open letter to Labour's General Secretary demanding that Williamson be suspended. Threats of frontbench resignations and a "totally unprecedented" decision by the Parliamentary Labour Party (PLP) to ask Williamson to stop attending its meetings followed. Finally, Theresa May demanded action against Williamson at Prime Minister's Questions. Williamson was gone within a few hours.

The Kafkaesque character of the accusations against

Williamson were underscored by this week's attacks on him by leading Blairites for allowing Jewish Voice for Labour to screen in parliament *The Witch Hunt*. Produced by Jon Pullman, the documentary is an expose of the 2016 suspension for anti-Semitism of black Jewish Labour member Jackie Walker. Jewish Voice for Labour, which has hundreds of members, defends Corbyn and has been denounced for doing so by Zionist groups and the Labour right.

Corbyn has not defended any of the left-wing Labour members falsely accused of anti-Semitism, including Walker, Ken Livingstone, Marc Wadsworth and now Williamson. The contrast between his silence and the vicious campaign mounted by the right wing is stark. Over the past week every news bulletin featured one Blairite or another railing against Williamson, Corbyn and the "left" for their supposed "anti-Semitism." The aim here is not simply to delegitimise opposition to the brutal suppression of the Palestinians by Israel, but to criminalise socialism by associating it with a fascistic hatred of the Jews.

Labour's right wing want nothing less than to purge Labour of the influx of left-leaning members attracted to the party by Corbyn's 2015 leadership victory. As far as the Blairites are concerned, Labour must be restored to its function as a ruthless defender of big business, insulated from even the semblance of pressure from workers and young people who are opposed to austerity, militarism and war.

Labour's Deputy Leader and resident Torquemada, Tom Watson, last month demanded that the Liverpool Wavertree Constituency Labour Party be suspended for moving a motion of no-confidence in Luciana Berger for her attacks on the party. This was only days before Berger quit Labour, joining a small coterie of Blairites and

Conservatives in “The Independent Group” whose declared mission is ensuring that Labour under Corbyn is never allowed to form a government. Watson called Berger’s critics “racist thugs” and her leaving “the worst day of shame in the party’s 120-year history.”

The most striking development in this sordid political affair is the rout triggered among many of the most prominent Corbynites, who have lined-up to support Williamson’s suspension. *Guardian* columnist Owen Jones called Williamson’s suspension “the right decision” that “should be part of a healing process with Britain’s Jewish community...” He then retrospectively edited an article “Delegitimising the British left,” he wrote last April, excising Williamson’s name from a list of “left-wing politicians... subjected to relentless online pile-ons from both Tory and Labour MPs and hostile commentators.”

His fellow columnist Ellie Mae O’Hagan tweeted arrogantly, “Good afternoon. Suspend the whip from Chris Williamson. That is all.”

Skwawkbox, run by Corbynite Steve Walker, was too cowardly to mention Williamson by name. Instead, it ran an opinion piece titled, “It’s time for Labour supporters to wise up, step up and think strategically.”

Labour was “a government in waiting,” *Skwawkbox* explained, but there was a problem with its members—their commitment to “solidarity.” Such beliefs allowed the right wing to “press the buttons that will generate a reaction they can exploit... Not every wrong can be immediately righted. Sometimes we have to understand when less is more. Sometimes we have to play the long game.”

On Monday, Momentum’s founder Jon Lansman told BBC Radio Four that Labour had a large number of members with “hardcore anti-Semitic opinions” due to it having “trebled in size.” Momentum also supported a letter organised by a Twitter group, #Socialists4Change, signed by 1,000 pro-Corbyn Labour Party members who recognised Labour was “too tolerant of the existence of antisemitic views within our ranks, too defensive and too eager to downplay it.”

The SEP holds no brief for the British Labour Party, which has been the chief political prop for British imperialism for more than a century. But the claim that its membership is rife with anti-Semitism is a political libel. The appeasement by Corbyn et al. in the face of this unprecedented campaign has the most serious consequences. It is enabling a right-wing offensive whose ultimate target is the working class.

This witch-hunt will not stop at Williamson and a few high-profile figures. A lynch-mob has been unleashed that will inevitably target thousands of Labour members. There is massive opposition to the Blairites and their filthy witch-hunt. Sheffield Hallam, Hackney North, Stoke Newington, Park & Arbourthorn ward, Sheffield Heeley Constituency Labour Parties and other groups have already passed motions in Williamson’s defence. Jewish Voice for Labour warned against the danger of exaggerating anti-Semitism in the Labour Party: “Crying wolf is dangerous when there are real wolves around the corner.”

However, as the SEP has consistently warned, any genuine struggle against Labour’s right wing inevitably brings party members into conflict with Corbyn and his Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell, whose sole concern is to preserve the unity of the party and to offer their services as defenders of “the national interest.”

Corbynism has ceded the initiative to the right wing on every fundamental issue, from support for Trident, NATO, the war in Syria and insisting that local councils enforce “legal budgets.” He has opposed all attempts to drive the right wing out of the party, joining with the unions at last year’s party conference to veto mandatory reselection of Labour MPs. Today, instead of the right wing being booted out it is they who dictate which heads must roll.

Corbyn’s role has been to stem rising social anger and demands for change by holding out the possibility of reforms under a Labour government. But that claim now lies in ruins. The deepest global crisis of capitalism since the 1930s means there is no basis for the type of reformist Labour Party promised by Corbyn and his cheerleaders in pseudo-left groups such as the Socialist Party and Socialist Workers Party. Workers and young people must break with the bankrupt Labour party and build the Socialist Equality Party to advance a revolutionary struggle against capitalism and its political defenders.



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