

Labour Party revokes *Electronic Intifada* journalist's press pass in bid to suppress left-wing criticism

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Without any explanation, last month the Labour Party revoked *Electronic Intifada* journalist and deputy editor Asa Winstanley's press pass to cover Labour's annual conference in Brighton to be held September 21-25. It gave no explanation, despite having previously approved it on July 22.

The *World Socialist Web Site* condemns this blatant attack on media freedom and demands that the Labour Party rescinds its decision to ban Winstanley from its annual conference.

Labour's censorship constitutes a threat not just to Winstanley and the *Electronic Intifada* but to other journalists. It is aimed at ensuring they toe the line or face a loss of access or even blacklisting. It is bound up with the Labour right's efforts to silence critics of its slanderous witch-hunt of party leader Jeremy Corbyn's left-wing supporters.

Ever since Corbyn became leader in 2015, the Blairites—acting in cahoots with the Conservative Party, the media, the military and intelligence establishment and the Israel lobby—have denounced as anti-Semitic not only Corbyn but all left-wing opposition to Israel's brutal suppression of the Palestinians in an attempt to conflate anti-Zionism with anti-Semitism.

Their aim is not only to prevent the possibility of a Corbyn-led government, which they fear will embolden millions of workers and youth in their opposition to austerity and war, but to justify a clamp down against the left—especially socialists.

Winstanley is banned because he and the *Electronic Intifada*—founded in 2001—have reported on and opposed Israel's inhumane and illegal actions against the Palestinians, both in the occupied territories and in Israel itself. But above all, the *Electronic Intifada* is targeted for its prominent role in what the mainstream media opposes root and branch—the exposure of the real purpose of the anti-Semitism witch-hunt against supporters of Palestinian rights.

Winstanley, an investigative journalist, has reported on the Labour conference every year since 2015, and from inside the conference itself in 2016 and 2018.

It was no coincidence that the withdrawal of his pass came just days after the government-funded Community Security Trust (CST) reported that the *Electronic Intifada* is “the single

most popular website” for reporting on Labour's anti-Semitic witch-hunt against supporters of Palestinian rights.

The CST, a charity initially established to protect “British Jews from anti-Semitism and related threats,” published in August “Engine of Hate: the online networks behind the Labour Party's antisemitism crisis.”

The report said, “The single most popular website for article shares about the subject of antisemitism, the Labour Party and Israel/Palestine was *Electronic Intifada*, a radical anti-Zionist website which has consistently promoted the idea that allegations of antisemitism in the Labour Party are false and are part of a smear campaign against Jeremy Corbyn that is orchestrated by the Israeli government.”

It observed that *Electronic Intifada* “generated nearly four times the online engagement than the Guardian did” in its reporting on the issue.

The CST devoted a whole section to Winstanley, listing his articles, which were some of the most widely read pieces, accusing him of trading in an anti-Semitic “trope” because of his reporting on the pernicious role of Israel lobby groups within the Labour Party.

It was Winstanley who explained how the Jewish Labour Movement was re-founded to oust Corbyn. He exposed how Ella Rose, who had once been the Jewish Labour Movement's executive director, had previously worked at the Israeli embassy. She had worked closely with the Israeli embassy spy Shai Masot, who was expelled from the UK after his activities were exposed.

Winstanley cited *Al Jazeera*'s documentary “The Lobby,” which exposed how the Israeli embassy, working with Israel lobby operatives in Britain, tried to create a fake grassroots organization called Young Labour Friends of Israel. It also exposed how then Labour MP Joan Ryan, when she chaired Labour Friends of Israel, fabricated an allegation of anti-Semitism against a party member. Earlier this year, Ryan defected from Labour to join the right-wing Independent Group of MPs.

While the CST attacked Winstanley for claiming that “the Israeli government is behind an alleged campaign to smear

Corbyn as anti-Semitic,” it could not point to any factual inaccuracies in his articles.

Nevertheless, Labour got the message and revoked Winstanley’s press pass. It eventually sought to justify its decision by citing the suspension of his party membership in March. But this was clearly an excuse because it had already approved his application. In any case, attending/reporting on the conference is not in any way dependent upon Labour Party membership. The party will welcome all the mainstream corporate media to the conference, however hostile they are to Labour.

There is no question that Labour’s banning of Winstanley and the *Electronic Intifada* is part of a broader attack by the right on Palestinian supporters and an escalation of the filthy campaign to criminalise left-wing opposition to the crimes—including war crimes—carried out by the Israeli regime.

Winstanley spoke to the *World Socialist Web Site* about the rescinding of his press credentials. He explained that having rejected Tony Blair’s New Labour as a party of war, he had joined the party in 2016, albeit reluctantly, after Corbyn’s election as leader in 2015. Along with hundreds of thousands of others who joined, he saw it as a historic opportunity to change the party for the better. “I expected it to be a struggle and suspected I would be targeted.” He added, “The party was technocratic, neo-liberal. It did not want a mass movement.”

“But the membership has dropped because of the anti-Semitism campaign and the Brexit crisis, because people are sick of being labelled as anti-Semitic and sitting in interminable, desiccated meetings, aimed at stopping a popular, democratic leader becoming prime minister.”

When the Labour Party suspended his membership in March, pending a disciplinary investigation into several of his tweets critical of Israel and its official ideology, Zionism, it leaked the information and personal details—which should have remained confidential—to the *Jewish Chronicle*, before telling Winstanley himself. This right-wing, pro-Israel publication has played a major role in the anti-Semitism smear campaign. The move against Winstanley coincided with an increase in suspensions after Labour’s general secretary Jennie Formby reinstated automatic suspensions.

He lodged a formal complaint about the violations of his rights under the UK’s Data Protection Act, prompting the Information Commissioner’s Office to conduct an investigation into the leaking of his data as a potentially criminal act. But, said Winstanley, “Given the massive backlog of complaints against the Labour Party, there is unlikely to be a decision any time soon. At the same time, the party’s own investigations drag on for months,” adding, “So, it’s a wearing down process.”

The *World Socialist Web Site* asked Winstanley about Corbyn’s role in refusing to defend any of the senior left-wing Labour figures, including some of the party leaders closest supporters—Ken Livingstone, Jackie Walker, Marc Wadsworth

and Chris Williamson—who have been falsely accused of anti-Semitism and driven out.

Winstanley said, “Corbyn’s failure to defend Livingstone was a mistake, and that while Livingstone’s words were not well chosen, what he said was essentially correct and was news to a lot of people.” This was a reference to when Livingstone, defending another Labour MP against charges of anti-Semitism, said, “Let’s remember, when Hitler won his election in 1932 [sic] his policy then was that Jews should be moved to Israel. He was supporting Zionism. [He then] went mad and ended up killing 6 million Jews.”

He added, “Momentum, [the movement of Corbyn supporters led by his supposed ally Jon Lansman] threw Livingstone under a bus. This set the dynamic of the poisonous witch-hunt in motion. Suspending, marginalizing and expelling people. Facts don’t matter. The expulsion of Wadsworth was the most egregious example.

“Corbyn,” he said, “has been stymied by the Labour Party at all levels. He has definitely been boxed in. But he has capitulated too much and is digging his own grave.”

Adamant that the Labour Party should not be allowed to get away with it, Winstanley said he would be speaking at a Labour against the Witch Hunt’s meeting during the conference. More than 3,000 people have signed a petition for his pass to be reinstated, among them prominent journalists and activists such as John Pilger, Tim Llewellyn and Noam Chomsky.

By refusing to speak out in defence of Winstanley and the *Electronic Intifada*—which have done so much to expose the McCarthyite witch hunt against his own supporters—Corbyn has reached a new low in his abasement before his right-wing opponents. It demonstrates the degree to which he is embedded with the Blairites in the broader interests of British imperialism. It is a stark confirmation of what the Socialist Equality Party (UK) warned in its 2018 congress resolution, “Corbyn and his coterie would rather see their own supporters expelled, than break with the Blairites.”



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