

The anti-Semitism accusations against Corbyn: A witch-hunt in the service of imperialism

Jean Shaoul
13 December 2019

In the final days of the election campaign, Labour's right-wing ramped up its fraudulent anti-Semitism campaign against party leader Jeremy Corbyn.

The aim of this political destabilization operation has been to prevent an election victory that would take him to Number 10 and to then engineer his subsequent removal. It followed a relentless campaign that started as soon as Corbyn became leader in 2015, when the Blairites—acting with the Conservative Party, the media, the military and intelligence establishment and the Israel lobby—denounced not only Corbyn's but all left-wing opposition to Israel's brutal suppression of the Palestinians as anti-Semitic.

The witch-hunt centres on a concerted attempt to equate opposition to Zionism and the colonial policies of the Israeli state with hatred of the Jewish people in general and the infamous and reactionary anti-Semitism of the Nazis in particular.

The Netanyahu government does not represent the Jewish people who live in Israel, let alone the Jewish people all over the world. It is the political voice of a section of Israel's financial elite and a proxy of the Trump administration in the US. Similarly, the Jewish organisations that back the anti-Corbyn frenzy have no claim to represent Jewish opinion in Britain.

The campaign is spearheaded by Labour's Blairites, the Jewish Labour Movement (JLM), Labour Friends of Israel (LFI), the Community Security Trust (CST), funded by the Conservative government to the tune of £65.2 million since 2015, the pro-Tory *Jewish Chronicle* and their allies.

Last week, the JLM, a pro-Israel affiliate of the Labour Party, leaked its own 53-page submission to the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC), accusing Labour of the "corrosive disease" of institutional racism and being "a welcoming refuge for anti-Semites." It alleged that the Corbyn-led Labour Party was "no longer a safe space for Jewish people or for those who stand up against anti-Semitism" and that 47 percent of British Jews would consider leaving the country if Corbyn was elected.

Backed up by a corporate media aided and abetted by the BBC, the JLM has for four years mounted a ferocious campaign over an alleged "Labour anti-Semitism crisis" to the extent that, as academics Greg Philo and Mike Berry noted in a survey they undertook for their book *Bad News for Labour*, on average respondents estimated that 34 percent of Labour members had been accused of anti-Semitism, more than 300 times larger than the true figure.

According to Labour Party records, there were few accusations of anti-Semitism among its 500,000 members—just 0.08 percent of the

membership. Anti-Semitic views, held by four percent of Britons, are far more likely to be found in right-wing than in left wing circles, a recent *Economist* survey noted.

The campaign escalated after the pro-Israel lobby forced the Labour Party to adopt a highly controversial—and non-legally binding—definition drafted by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA), whose examples of anti-Semitism included criticism of Israel.

Last August, the EHRC opened an investigation into whether the Labour Party had broken the law in relation to anti-Semitism, the degree to which the party had implemented the recommendations made in the reports on anti-Semitism by Baroness Royall, the Home Affairs Select Committee and in the Chakrabarti Report, its processes for handling discrimination and the appropriateness of its responses to complaints of unlawful acts. The EHRC is not expected to report until the beginning of next year.

The pro-Tory *Daily Telegraph* obligingly gave over five pages to the JLM's allegations conflating opposition to Israeli policies towards the Palestinians with anti-Semitism.

The JLM repeated numerous anti-Semitic remarks and accusations whose authenticity and origins have never been substantiated. It asserted that anti-Semitic abuse had become a common experience for Jews attending local party meetings, citing an unbelievable claim by one person of experiencing 22 separate instances of abuse at constituency meetings, including being called "a Tory Jew," a "child killer," "Zio scum" and being told that "Hitler was right." In another equally unbelievable incident, said to have occurred at last year's Labour Party conference, a Jewish member reported sharing a breakfast table with two other delegates who both agreed Jews were "subhuman" and should "be grateful we don't make them eat bacon for breakfast every day."

Targeting Corbyn, it reported that a former Labour Party staffer, who left before Labour established its procedures for investigating anti-Semitism, had stated that the party's complaints unit had failed to act independently of the leaders' office and alleged that his advisors had leaned on the unit to "take a lenient approach to anti-Semitism."

None of this constitutes "evidence" but hearsay that any court of law would dismiss out of hand. The phrases used are not common parlance anywhere other than in the lexicon of Britain's far right, certainly not in the Labour Party.

Crucially, the JLM said, this was because the Labour leader and his coterie "were guilty of similar behaviour." While previously Labour's right-wingers had claimed that Corbyn, a lifetime anti-racism

campaigner, had tolerated anti-Semitism, now they are openly slandering him and his immediate circle as anti-Semites—citing 11 instances that relate to his pro-Palestinian stance.

The JLM has refused to campaign for Labour as long as Corbyn remains leader. This should come as no surprise. The JLM functions as a lobby group for Israel that works with the other pro-Zionist organisations such as the Labour Friends of Israel, the Community Security Trust, the Board of Deputies of British Jews and the Zionist Federation of the UK. Its members were implicated in the undercover plot by Israeli embassy staffer Shai Masot, revealed by *Al-Jazeera*'s "The Lobby," to discredit figures associated with the pro-Palestinian camp, to "take down" senior Conservative government minister Alan Duncan—perceived as hostile to Israel—and use allegations of anti-Semitism to blacken opponents of Israel's brutal suppression of the Palestinians.

Last week, Israel's Foreign Minister Yisrael Katz, told Israel's Army Radio, "I personally hope that [Corbyn] won't be elected, with this whole wave of anti-Semitism... I hope the other side wins." Israeli officials have frequently attacked Corbyn's positions on Israel, the Palestinians and the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) campaign. The Ministry of Strategic Affairs has held discussions on whether to allow him into the country if he is elected, in line with Israel's law banning entry to proponents of BDS.

Boris Johnson's Conservative Party is much more acceptable to Israel. It was Johnson who, when foreign secretary, helped Israel cover up the plot by its embassy staffer Shai Masot, declaring the matter closed after an apology by the Israeli embassy. His action is in sharp contrast to his supposed outrage over unsubstantiated accusations of Russia's attempts to interfere in Britain's elections and plant fake stories in the media.

Johnson's Home Secretary Priti Patel is a former vice-chairperson of Conservative Friends of Israel (CFI). In 2017, she was forced to resign as a Secretary of State for International Development after reports emerged of 12 secret meetings she held with Israeli officials while supposedly on a family holiday. The meetings, arranged and attended by Stuart Polak who for 25 years headed the CFI, were a state mission that could not be publicly acknowledged.

Patel visited the Syrian Golan Heights, illegally occupied by Israel since its capture in the 1967 War and lobbied to divert part of Britain's international aid budget to the Israel Defense Forces' operations in the Golan.

In a further unprecedented development, in an editorial, the *New Statesman*, the house journal of the Fabian right, adopted the same stance as the JLM, stating that Corbyn's "reluctance to apologise for the anti-Semitism in Labour and to take a stance on Brexit, the biggest issue facing the country, make him unfit to be prime minister."

The *Jewish Chronicle* has backed the anti-Semitism witch-hunt to the hilt, giving prominence to attacks on Corbyn by Johnson and former Labour MP and former JLM parliamentary chairperson Luciana Berger. Berger quit the Labour Party in February over Corbyn's supposed support for anti-Semitism, to co-found the Independent Group, which she then left to join the Liberal Democrats. This week's *Jewish Chronicle* included a lengthy interview with Johnson in which he declares that the "threat" from Corbyn is "very real" along with a full-page advert in which Johnson calls for a vote for the Tories.

In addition, 15 former Labour MPs—more Blairite defectors who now form the Mainstream campaign group, published a full-page advert in regional newspapers across the north of England

Wednesday, targeting marginal constituencies where Labour could lose seats. They urged voters to reject Corbyn, calling him a threat to national security and saying, "Despite what Jeremy Corbyn says about anti-Semitism, we need to accept that most Jewish people have well-founded fears about what Labour has become."

A few weeks ago, the Murdoch-owned *Times* published the accusation by Britain's chief rabbi, Ephraim Mirvis, a Johnson supporter, that Corbyn was "unfit for high office"—the first time a serving chief rabbi has ever publicly voiced his opinion about the contenders in a general election. He warned that the election result would serve as a measure of Britain's "moral compass." Justin Welby, the archbishop of Canterbury and leader of the Church of England, entered the fray, tweeting about the "deep sense of insecurity and fear felt by many British Jews."

This McCarthy campaign is orchestrated directly by the Trump administration in the US. Last June, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo warned that Washington would not allow a Corbyn-led Labour government to take office and would "push back" to prevent it. He was caught on tape saying at a conference of American Jewish organisations, in response to a question about whether, if Corbyn was elected, he would be willing "to work with us to take on actions if life becomes very difficult for Jews in the UK?"

Pompeo replied, "It could be that Mr. Corbyn manages to run the gauntlet and get elected. It's possible. You should know, we won't wait for him to do those things to begin to push back. We will do our level best... It's too risky and too important and too hard once it's already happened."

This anti-Corbyn campaign is "push-back" in action.

None of this would have been possible without Corbyn's craven submission to Labour's right-wing in the name of preserving party unity. Despite hundreds of thousands of people joining or rejoining the party in the belief that he would bring about a change in Labour's policies, he has refused to mobilise workers and youth behind any of the causes he formerly supported and given in on every occasion to the right-wing's demands, without even the semblance of a fight.

Never once did he defend his own supporters, including Ken Livingstone, Marc Wadsworth, Jackie Walker and Chris Williamson, who were expelled or forced to resign from the party over false accusations of anti-Semitism. Instead, he has now apologized repeatedly for a supposed failure to deal rigorously and speedily with anti-Semitism.

This must be a wakeup call for the working class and youth to intervene directly—not to save the Labour Party, which is beyond saving, but to wage ideological war against the right-wing political conspirators and their attempt to portray opposition to Israeli repression and war crimes as anti-Semitism.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact