

McCarthyite witch-hunt over alleged anti-Semitism explodes in British Labour Party

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Sir Keir Starmer has launched a witch-hunt against the left, in the Labour Party and beyond, of unprecedented scope.

He leads an alliance of Blairite Labour MPs, Zionist groups, the Conservative Party, and the mainstream media, intent on driving out what remains of the official Labour “left,” expelling hundreds, if not thousands, of members, setting up former party leader Jeremy Corbyn and others for legal prosecution, bankruptcy and worse, and is planning the same for various left-leaning websites.

In the process, political opposition to the criminal suppression of the Palestinians by Israel will be officially recast as a form of anti-Semitism, slandering, and virtually outlawing, a vast swathe of left-wing opinion. The only disagreement within this unprincipled cabal, given that it extends into Tory central office and has the support of Benjamin Netanyahu’s far-right government, is whether the entire Labour Party should be bankrupted in the process.

On Wednesday, July 22, Labour apologised in the High Court to seven former staffers from Labour’s governance and legal unit, involved in investigating accusations of anti-Semitism, who became whistleblowers in a July 2019 BBC Panorama documentary, *Is Labour Anti-Semitic?* A letter of apology was sent to BBC journalist and Panorama presenter John Ware. Undisclosed financial compensation was made to the whistleblowers and to Ware, reported to be worth around £500,000.

Under Corbyn, the party had issued a press release immediately after the Panorama programme aired, that Labour now accepted, contained “defamatory and false” allegations about the seven whistleblowers. “We unreservedly withdraw all allegations of bad faith, malice and lying. We would like to apologise unreservedly for the distress, embarrassment and hurt caused by their publication.”

Corbyn and the former party leadership had rejected the accusations made in the Panorama programme that they had shown a “lack of commitment” to investigating charges of anti-Semitism levelled against Labour members. A party spokesman had called the whistleblowers “disaffected former officials,” who had “worked actively to undermine” Corbyn and had “both personal and political axes to grind.”

They described the Panorama programme as “a seriously inaccurate, politically one-sided polemic, which breached basic journalistic standards, invented quotes and edited emails to change their meaning.”

Labour has been investigated by the Equalities and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) into its handling of anti-Semitism allegations under Corbyn. A report was commissioned by Labour’s former General Secretary Jennie Formby to be submitted as evidence to the EHRC, but which was blocked by the party’s lawyers. This internal report was leaked in April. It accused the Panorama whistleblowers of bad faith in their charges made against Corbyn’s leadership and insisted that all accusations of anti-Semitism had been pursued once Corbyn’s team had control of the party’s governance and legal unit. The report referred to a “hyper factional atmosphere” of hostility towards Corbyn in Labour’s head office.

With Starmer having accepted all the allegations made against Labour, Corbyn—as his opponents would have anticipated—was forced to respond, insisting in a Facebook post, “The Party’s decision to apologise today and make substantial payments to former staff who sued the party in relation to last year’s Panorama programme is a political decision, not a legal one.

“Our legal advice was that the party had a strong defence, and the evidence in the leaked Labour report that is now the subject of an NEC [National Executive Committee] inquiry led by Martin Forde QC strengthened concerns about the role played by some of those who took part in the programme.”

Others, including Len McCluskey, general secretary of the Unite trade union, voiced criticisms. McCluskey tweeted, “Today’s settlement is a misuse of Labour Party funds to settle a case it was advised we would win in court.”

A fresh round of legal action was swiftly announced, instigated by Ware, the seven whistleblowers, and by some of those named in the leaked internal Labour Party report commissioned by Formby. Mark Lewis of Patron Law, representing Ware and the whistleblowers, said, “I can confirm that I have been instructed to pursue cases.” Wednesday’s settlement, he said, was “the first battle of many battles.” The leaked Formby report had seriously harmed a “whole list of people” and would now also “have to be challenged in the court.”

The findings of the EHRC are due to be published in September, after which many of those named in the leaked report and other Jewish members would be entitled to bring discrimination cases against Labour, citing personal injury. Each of these claims can be for an upper limit of £47,000. The *Jewish Chronicle* has reported that the pro-Zionist Jewish Labour Movement is considering bringing a class action against Labour, on behalf of its members, if the EHRC report finds they have been discriminated against.

The internal party inquiry into the leaked report, led by Martin Forde QC, will also no doubt become an occasion for condemning its authors.

For Patron Law, Lewis revealed that former Labour General Secretary Iain McNicol is already suing the party over the leaked report, adding, “There are many other people who are named in the report, they come under different categories: people who work for the party, people who were in the party in political positions.”

Claims covering the Data Protection Act, invasion of privacy, and libel have already been submitted. Estimates of the potential costs of various cases, encompassing more than 50 individuals, range from £5.5 million to £8 million.

Corbyn is being personally targeted. The *Mail on Sunday* reported that some of the ex-party staff would drop their legal action against Labour if Corbyn were to be expelled. A source said, “Labour says they have zero tolerance to anti-Semitism. Zero tolerance means no Corbyn and no Corbynistas. It’s Keir’s choice, zero tolerance, or zero money.”

Campaign Against Anti-Semitism chief executive Gideon Falter has also called for Corbyn’s suspension or expulsion for “gaslighting the

whistleblowers he bullied for standing up to Jew-hatred.”

Corbyn already faces a legal case based on allegations of anti-Semitism. On July 10, blogger Richard Millett won the first stage of a libel case against Corbyn for claiming that Zionists in the audience at a 2013 meeting featuring Palestinian ambassador to the UK, Manuel Hassassian, lacked “English irony” and were “disruptive and abusive.”

Mr Justice Saini ruled that Corbyn was making “factual” allegations “as to Mr Millett’s behaviour.” By then, Millett had been publicly identified as one of the “two individuals” referred to by Corbyn on BBC1’s Andrew Marr Show in September 2018 while defending his 2013 comments from claims of anti-Semitism. Millett, too, is represented by Lewis, of Patron Law.

Starmer had already begun purging the few remaining Corbynites from the party leadership before making his apology to the Panorama whistleblowers. He dismissed Rebecca Long-Bailey as Shadow Education Secretary for retweeting comments by actress Maxine Peake that were critical of Israel. Peake had pointed out that Israeli security forces trained US police in the restraint techniques that led to the May 25 death of George Floyd.

Lloyd Russell-Moyle, a shadow environment minister, did not even need to be expelled. He quit after the Jewish Labour Movement demanded his resignation for an old Facebook message describing Zionism as a “dangerous nationalist idea.”

This is nothing compared with what is to come. The legal and political witch-hunt will extend far beyond Corbyn and his immediate periphery and prepare the machinery for a more ferocious onslaught on any socialist movement of workers and young people. Lewis for Patron Law warned, “This is just the start. Actions are being taken against those who repeat the libels and will be taken against those who choose to do so in future. An honest opinion has to be based upon facts.”

On July 23, John Ware wrote in the *Jewish Chronicle*, in which he has a commercial interest, of a “year-long fusillade of falsehoods from a stream of Left wing bloggers, media ‘activists’, Labour’s ‘people powered’ Momentum faction, and alt-Left outlets—all of whom share a conviction that the mainstream media is fundamentally dishonest.”

Acknowledging “an unwritten code that says we journalists should never sue because however offensive or defamatory criticism of our journalism may be, we hold free speech sacrosanct,” he continued, “It was a rule with which for decades I agreed. I no longer do. That is why my proceedings against Labour are only the first of several I have begun against alternative media outlets and individuals.”

Ware cited the “then Chair of Momentum Jon Lansman,” “pro-Corbyn alt-Left outlets, notably *Skwawkbox* and the *Canary*,” and “more mainstream journalists who should have known better—such as Owen Jones, the *Guardian* columnist.”

Lansman has already issued a public apology effectively blaming Corbyn for statements he (Lansman) made, because they were “based on the party’s advice and assurances.”

This orgy of McCarthyite slanders must be opposed by all workers and young people. This includes defending Corbyn and others facing legal censure—a crowdfunding appeal for Corbyn has already raised over £300,000.

But opposing this right-wing offensive cannot be left under the leadership of Corbyn and his allies. The working class has already paid a bitter price for the glorification of the Corbynites as a supposedly socialist alternative by pseudo-left groups such as the Socialist Party and Socialist Workers Party.

Even as the Blairite right and their Zionist and Tory allies prepare for all out war, Corbyn, McDonnell, Long-Bailey, et al. remain tight-lipped in the faint hope of a compromise on the right’s terms—including allowing ordinary Labour members to be expelled or driven out of the party.

Corbyn is absolutely opposed to any political struggle by workers and

young people against the Labour and trade union bureaucracy. He stands for a policy of death by a thousand compromises. That he now faces a personal attack of such magnitude is because he spent his four and a half years as party leader demobilising opposition to the Blairites and bowing to their every dictate—including granting free votes on war against Syria and the renewal of the Trident nuclear weapons programme, dropping opposition to NATO, and instructing Labour councils to impose Tory austerity cuts. In the process he delivered an electoral victory to Boris Johnson, before meekly handing back control of the party to the representative of the right wing, Starmer.

Corbyn’s refusal to oppose the Zionist and Blairite right’s anti-Semitism witch-hunt epitomises his political cowardice and lack of principle. He allowed some of his closest allies to be driven from the party—including Ken Livingstone, Jackie Walker, Marc Wadsworth, and Chris Williamson—on trumped up charges, along with hundreds of other members. Moreover, his endorsement of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA)’s designation of legitimate political criticism of Israel as a form of anti-Semitism, and its inclusion in Labour’s new code of practice, has fashioned the noose his opponents intend to hang him with.

Even now, the message of unity with the right wing remains the same. Responding to the sacking of Long-Bailey, for example, McCluskey complained, “Unity is too important to be risked like this.” Unite Assistant General Secretary Steve Turner tweeted, “Sacking her is wrong and undermines unity in our Party.”

The working class must respond to the witch-hunt by striking out on a new political road.

Corbyn’s abject betrayal of his popular mandate to end the Blairite era of austerity and imperialist militarism and take the fight to the Tories and the ruling class was predicted by the Socialist Equality Party. Basing itself on Trotsky’s writings from the 1920s onwards, the SEP explained that the role of the Labour and trade union “lefts” has always been to ensure the domination of the right wing.

Today, moreover, no change of leader, or influx of left-leaning members, could reverse Labour’s transformation into a naked party of big business. Labour’s abandonment of reforms and embrace of Thatcherite neoliberalism was not the product of the scheming of Tony Blair and Gordon Brown. Rather, fundamental changes within world capitalism associated with globalisation have objectively undermined all organisations embedded in the nation state and seeking limited reforms through an accommodation with their own bourgeoisie.

The conflict between rival imperialist powers for control of global markets and resources demands trade war and militarism abroad and austerity, authoritarianism, and class war at home. Combatting the agents of this capitalist perspective such as Starmer and his allies, therefore, demands far more than trench warfare to maintain a “left” rump within the Labour Party. It means building a new leadership, the SEP, to take forward a revolutionary struggle against capitalism and for socialism.



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