

# Left-Horizons

## Editorial: "anti-Semitism" is pretext to undermine Corbyn

It is unfortunate to say the least that sections of the Labour left, like Momentum and NEC members, have buckled under the relentless campaign of the BBC and the Tory press over the trumped-up issue of "anti-Semitism". It is no surprise that the epithet "soft left" is often used to describe some of those on Labour's left.

The whole "anti-Semitism" row has been created as a pretext to undermine Corbyn and it has been engineered in such a way that whatever he appears to do is wrong. Thus, completely impossible 'Catch-22' demands have been put on Corbyn, so his detractors can then accuse him being "all words and no action". Labour MP Peter Kyle has demanded that Corbyn should have offensive websites and Facebook accounts "closed down" – as if the Labour leader had powers to do such a thing. The hyperbole about the of thousands and thousands of anti-Semitic posts and Tweets grows almost by the day and the only thing these claims have in common is a complete absence of concrete factual examples.

The Labour Party has 600,000 members and its activists post millions of comments on Facebook and Twitter every single week. It would not be a surprise if there were a few ill-judged comments here and there on such vast and largely open social media platforms. But the overwhelming majority of pro-Corbyn social media posts and tweets are perfectly reasonable by any definition of what is appropriate.

Anti-Semitism has been the excuse for the suspension of dozens of Labour Party members in the last few years. It may even be hundreds, because there is no transparency in the process at all. Apart from a few notable instances, where 'due process' has been accelerated by the publicity generated, in most cases the suspensions are shrouded in mystery, like something out of a Kafka novel. As often as not, there are no formal charges, no communication with the suspended member and no timetable given of any due-process. *Left-Horizons* knows of one case in the West Midlands, where a Party member of 50-years standing has been suspended *for two years*, without any formal notification of an allegation or a charge or a date for a hearing. What unifies the overwhelming majority of these

suspensions and expulsions, is that they are of members on the left of the Party; they are Corbyn-supporters.

Despite what we hear in the media, Labour members can be proud: racist, sexist and anti-Semitic behaviour is far *less common* in the Labour Party and particularly within its left wing, than in any other part of society, not least the Press and the Tory Party. Labour's 2016 Chakrabarti Inquiry into anti-Semitism within the Party only confirmed what most members knew instinctively, that racism, including anti-Semitism, was *not* endemic within Labour. It is the *left* of the Labour Party, including its leader Jeremy Corbyn, who has the most consistent and accomplished record of fighting against all form of discrimination, including racism and anti-Semitism, both in society at large and in the Party.

It is only necessary to look at the list of the 'usual suspects' of right-wing MPs to see the fake character of the "anti-Semitism" issue. The campaign has been centred on all those right-wing MPs who have been completely discredited by Corbyn's two crushing leadership elections and the general election result of last year. They cannot possibly face down Corbyn on his *policies* – because they are too popular in the Party and in society as a whole – so these MPs are have switched to a different tactic to undermine him, attempting to create a moral panic over alleged hatred of Jews as Jews, which is what anti-Semitism is.

### Attempt to silence criticism of Israel

These right-wing MPs have never been, *and are never likely to be*, reconciled to the idea of a Labour Party with a radical programme and an active mass membership. They will bide their time and they will attempt to stab Corbyn in the back at some point in the future. In the meantime, they will do what they can to discredit him. It is no accident that the current frenzy coincides with Labour's local election campaign. As was the case last year, Labour's right wing are trying to minimise the Party's election chances, so they can then blame Corbyn.

But apart from undermining Corbyn, the anti-Semitism campaign has another important purpose – to intimidate

or silence any Labour Party members who wish to criticise the disgraceful policies of the Israeli state in its oppression of the Palestinian people. Up to a point this has succeeded. How can it be interpreted otherwise, when the BBC can give far greater prominence in all its news outlets to the Labour Party controversy than it gives to the shooting dead of sixteen unarmed men in Gaza last week?

Israel has an active lobbying machine that works across the whole political spectrum, in the USA, Britain and elsewhere. A year ago, an undercover investigation by *Al Jazeera* revealed how the Israeli embassy in London funded political groups among students and in the Labour Party. The embassy has an extremely well-funded and effective lobbying apparatus that would have been very active in the current “anti-Semitism” controversy.

A quick look through the published register of MPs interests shows that many Labour MPs have had all-expenses-paid trips to Israel, courtesy of the Labour Friends of Israel which means, effectively, courtesy of the Israeli state. Sir Trevor Chinn, a well-known supporter of the policies of the state of Israel, has donated tens of thousands of pounds, not to the Labour Party *as such*, but to the private offices or campaigns of a number of Labour MPs, including Tony Blair, Liz Kendall, Tom Watson, John Mann, Stephen Kinnock and Dan Jarvis, all of whom have been vociferous in the current controversy.

### Faiths with unequal political rights

It is not the left of the Labour Party that conflates “anti-Semitism” with criticism of Israel. It is the state of Israel itself and its supporters who actively promote a linkage between the two, precisely in order to discourage criticism of Israel’s actions over Palestine. Even the intervention of the Board of Deputies of British Jews is suspect, to say the least. It is unclear by what democratic process its president, Jonathan Arkush, can claim to represent Jews in Britain, but leaving that to one side, he does not speak as a representative of those who follow the *Jewish faith*. He is making a *political* intervention. He told the *Times of Israel* last year that the British general election result was a “loss”; he described the Tory/DUP agreement as “good news”; he has supported the US decision to move its embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem; he has condemned critics of Israeli settlements on Palestinian land. Then he has the temerity to apply conditions before he will agree to meet with Jeremy Corbyn – he wants this member suspended and that member excluded, and so on. He acts, in other words, not as a leader of a *faith*, but as a *politician*.

In Israel itself, it is the *political right* – who currently dominate the government and the state – who deliberately conflate the state of Israel with Judaism. It is a fact that today a Jewish person living in London or New

York can migrate to Israel, no questions asked, while a Palestinian whose family roots are in Israel is not allowed to go there. Indeed, the slaughter in Gaza last week arose from a demonstration of Gaza residents demanding to be able to cross the border. Gaza is an open prison and when the inmates rebel and demand to be allowed to go free, the ‘warders’ shoot them.

In Israel today, members of the Jewish faith have better civil, economic and political rights than members of other faiths, notably Christians and Muslims. The Israeli political right has expressed its wish for the constitution of Israel to formally declare Israel to be a “Jewish” state. That is something socialist would oppose. Socialists are opposed to *any* theocratic state, whether it is “Islamic” or “Jewish” or anything else, and we should be opposed to any form of government that sets up one racial or religious group to the disadvantage of the others. This is not “anti-Semitism”. It is elementary democracy.

Socialists must accept the right for an Israeli state to exist. But that has to be on the basis of agreed borders and on the basis of complete equality in civil, economic and political rights for all of its citizens. The ‘security’ of the state of Israel cannot be at the expense of the suppression of the rights of half of its population. In any case, there is no security on that path, only endless wars and social upheavals.

What makes the weakness of Labour’s left on the fake “anti-Semitism” issue particularly unfortunate is the knowledge that the pressure we have seen from the press is not just a passing phase. The lies and slanders will be relentless, and they will run up to, during and after the next general election. The programme of Jeremy Corbyn – and the rising expectations that it has generated – pose a significant threat to the vested interests of the capitalist class who own and control the British state and the economy. The campaign against Corbyn and the “anti-Semitism” issue is part of a fight-back by the Establishment.

The tsunami of bile and smears directed at Corbyn in the last few weeks are as nothing. It will be *ten times worse* if there is the slightest danger of him winning an election and it will be a *hundred times worse* if and when he does win. If the soft left of the Labour Party buckle under pressure today, it does not augur well for the future. We already know that right-wing MPs are biding their time before they ‘jump ship’ and go off to establish the SDP Mark II, with the help of money from their business friends. Unfortunately, we know now that the soft left too will cave in to the pressure. That places even more importance on the role of real socialists in the Labour Party to stand firm in the fight for fundamental and permanent socialist change.

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