

Israel's Smear Campaign Will Not Stop Until Jeremy Corbyn Fights Back

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I am one of very few journalists on the left to have covered the Labour Party's supposed "anti-Semitism crisis" from its beginning three years ago, if not the the only one. I am also one of a handful of people who have even questioned the dominant media narrative of a "crisis".

In my extensive reporting for *The Electronic intifada*, and in some of my *MEMO* columns, I have shown how the story is almost entirely a media fabrication. What we are witnessing from the British press right now is a form of collective hysteria; a McCarthyite witch hunt, in which black is white and up is down. This represents a sustained attempt to gaslight the entire left into believing that the Labour leader – a life-long opponent of racism in all its ugly forms, with a strong track record of combatting anti-Semitism — is actually some sort of closet racist.

As I have stated repeatedly, neither the left nor Labour are immune from the reality of anti-Semitism. However, all available statistical evidence shows that the level of anti-Semitism in the Labour Party is far less than such racism on the right. Anti-Jewish hatred extends across society, but is most prevalent amongst right-wingers, and especially so on the far-right.

Why, then, has there been nearly daily headlines over the summer about an "anti-Semitism crisis" in the Labour Party and nowhere else? The answer is clear for anyone who has eyes to see: this is an attempt to assassinate Jeremy Corbyn politically and break up the popular political movement that is close to taking him through that famous door in Downing Street.

Moreover — and let's be clear about this — the state of Israel is at the forefront of this smear campaign. Corbyn is a lifelong supporter of the Palestinian struggle for freedom, and so a concerted effort is on to smear him and the popular movements that he represents.

One of the pro-Israel Lobby's most important bodies was quite frank about that fact this week. In a long, boring and arrogant letter to Labour's General Secretary Jennie Formby (another strong supporter of Palestinian rights), the Jewish Leadership Council stated quite openly that it will continue with its campaign to smear Labour as "anti-Semitic" until the party commits to a "deep cultural change" towards "Zionism and Israel". That is the reality of the situation.

This is what it is all about and what it has been about all along: protecting Israel and its war crimes from any loss of political support in the West. The prospect of a veteran Palestine

solidarity campaigner entering Number 10 as Prime Minister represents the pro-Israel Lobby's worst nightmare. It would confirm the thinking of the Israeli Ministry of Strategic Affairs that "Europe is lost" and that there is no hope of regaining its support.

The people are increasingly against Israel, so all that remains is to translate that loss of popular support into a loss of top-level political support. Jeremy Corbyn represents hope for that to happen.

The "Labour anti-Semitism" story started in earnest in February 2016 as a complete and total fabrication invented out of thin air by Alex Chalmers, a former intern with the pro-Israel Lobby group BICOM (Britain Israel Communications and Research Centre). He claimed that almost the entire student Labour left in Oxford University was anti-Semitic. There was no real evidence for this, but the mainstream media ran with the story anyway.

Aside from some unspecific slurs (which tellingly named no culprits), Chalmers' only "evidence" was the fact that the student Labour Society had endorsed Israeli Apartheid Week. This is an annual global initiative by pro-Palestinian activists to educate and inform about the realities of Israel's racist apartheid regime in Palestine.

Chalmers, in fact, was part of Progress, the Blairite desiccated corporate faction of Labour. He and his co-conspirator exited the Labour Party soon after quitting the club, and joined the Liberal Democrats, but the damage was done in the minds of the hysterical and deluded mainstream media; Corbyn's Labour has been "anti-Semitic" ever since.

The sad reality, though, is that Corbyn and his team have indeed made mistakes, in that they have indulged this media fantasy far too much. Instead of hitting back strongly and calling out his accusers as the bad-faith smear merchants that they are, Corbyn has instead apologised, backed down and pandered to them, even when he has absolutely nothing to apologise for.

One of the worst mistakes in this regard was to apologise for appearing on a platform with Hajo Meyer, a survivor of the Nazi Holocaust. Meyer had compared the situation of Palestinians trapped under Israeli occupation and bombardment with Jews caged by the Nazis in places like the infamous Warsaw ghetto.

Perhaps it was not a comparison that everybody would feel able to make, but Meyer lived under the brutal reality of the genocidal anti-Semitism of the Nazis. He was perfectly within his rights to make it, and those smearing him as anti-Semitic should be ashamed of themselves, but I doubt that they ever will.

Thankfully, in more recent weeks, Corbyn's office has shown some tentative signs of fighting back, and getting up off their knees. When Benjamin Netanyahu intervened directly via Twitter two weeks ago, for example, Corbyn hit back by insisting that the Israeli Prime Minister's claims were false, and slammed him for his army's killing of more than 160 unarmed protesters in the Gaza Strip since the end of March.

This week, Corbyn's spokespeople put out a good response to the media after former Chief Rabbi of the United Synagogue in Britain, Lord Jonathan Sacks, made a disgusting claim that the Labour leader is a racist. They stated that his "comparison with the race-baiting Enoch Powell is absurd and offensive."

The more Corbyn sticks up for himself, the more his supporters will rally around him. The

more he concedes to the pro-Israel Lobby, the more his critics will sense weakness, and will continue the smears, character assassinations and even open incitement to murder him.

Appeasement is a doomed strategy, as the last three years have proven decisively. The Labour “anti-Semitism crisis” smear campaign will only end in one of two ways: either it will have Corbyn deposed, or it will be defeated. The latter is only possible if Corbyn fights back strongly enough.

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