

Oppose the witch-hunt of Ken Livingstone!

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The suspension of former London Mayor Ken Livingstone from the Labour Party in Britain on the spurious grounds of anti-Semitism is an outrageous violation of democratic rights and yet another shameless capitulation by the Jeremy Corbyn leadership to reactionary political forces.

The Socialist Equality Party in Britain has longstanding and fundamental political differences with Livingstone. But it rejects the accusation that he is an anti-Semite as a politically motivated lie. Livingstone has been active in left-wing and radical causes for more than 40 years. To accuse him of anti-Semitism is not only a personal slander. The unjustified misuse of the term—reducing anti-Semitism to the level of an epithet—has the effect of trivialising a politically sinister and dangerous form of racism. Such misuse of the charge of anti-Semitism has become the stock-in-trade of Zionists and other right-wing forces seeking to discredit all political opposition to Israel's oppression of the Palestinian people.

The political forces behind the attack on Livingstone involve an unholy alliance of the Conservative Party, Zionist groups and right-wing sections of the Labour Party itself. The support lent to it by Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn is yet another demonstration of his political cowardice and lack of principles.

The suspension arises out of statements Livingstone made last week while opposing a similar action carried out against another Labour Party MP, Naz Shah. After defending Shah against charges of anti-Semitism, Livingstone went on to say, "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."

Within hours, dozens of reactionary Labour Party MPs—including all three of the individuals Corbyn defeated in the party leadership contest last September—demanded action against Livingstone.

Corbyn suspended him that same day, declaring that his comments were "unacceptable" and that he would have to face an investigation. "We are not tolerating anti-Semitism in any form whatsoever in our party," Corbyn said.

As to the substance of the controversy, the worst that can be said about Livingstone's comments is that he spoke with insufficient care. The statement that Hitler supported Zionism, without further qualification, is imprecise and challengeable on factual grounds. Hitler was a virulent anti-Semite, and whatever support he and his regime gave to Zionism was steeped in the most cynical political calculations and always subordinate to the Nazi leader's unwavering and pathological hatred of Jews. However, it is a matter of historical record that after Hitler came to power in 1933, significant sections of the Zionist movement in Germany sought an accommodation with the regime.

Dealing with this subject in his book *Nazi Germany and the Jews*, the respected historian Saul Friedländer has written:

Not only did the [Nazi] regime encourage Zionist activities on the territory of the Reich, but concrete economic measures were taken to ease the departure of Jews for Palestine. The so-called Haavarah (Hebrew: Transfer) Agreement, concluded on August 27, 1933, between the German Ministry of the Economy and Zionist representatives from Germany and Palestine, allowed Jewish emigrants indirect transfer of part of their assets and facilitated exports of goods from Nazi Germany to Palestine.

Friedländer also cites a memorandum from leaders of the Zionist Federation of Germany sent on June 22, 1933, which, according to historian Francis Nicosia

(author of *Zionism and Anti-Semitism in Germany*), “seemed to profess a degree of sympathy for the völkish principles of the Hitler regime and argued that Zionism was compatible with these principles.” The memorandum states:

Zionism believes that the rebirth of the national life of a people, which is now occurring in Germany through the emphasis on its Christian and national character, must also come about among the Jewish people. For the Jewish people, too, national origin, religion, common destiny and a sense of its uniqueness must be of decisive importance to its existence. This demands the elimination of the egotistical individualism of the liberal era, and its replacement with a sense of community and collective responsibility.

While the topic of Zionist relations with the Nazi regime is subject to varying interpretations, Livingstone’s statements have a factual foundation. That he has been suspended from the Labour Party for expressing his views on the matter is a violation of the most elementary democratic norms.

An article that appeared in the *Observer* on Sunday, written by Nick Cohen, exposes the underlying political motivation of the campaign against Livingstone. Denouncing Livingstone and Corbyn in equal measure, Cohen libels Marxism as the political source of the Labour “left’s” supposed hostility to Jews. The Labour Party is led, according to Cohen, by “dirty *old* men, with roots in the contaminated soil of Marxist totalitarianism. If it is to change, its leaders will either have to change their minds or be thrown out of office.” [Emphasis in original]

Cohen is a right-wing hack and venal warmonger, who defends the actions of an Israeli state run by political gangsters and war criminals. His lies are part of a concerted attempt to silence dissent and shift British politics sharply to the right.

The provocation against Livingstone occurred just days before elections to the Scottish and Welsh Assemblies, to some English local authorities and for mayor of London. It was timed to inflict maximum damage on Jeremy Corbyn in the first national

elections contested under his leadership.

Rather than forthrightly defending Livingstone, Corbyn immediately prostrated himself before the right wing. His response to the anti-Livingstone campaign is that of a political coward. It demonstrates once again that Corbyn’s political role is to stifle and suppress the oppositional sentiment of the hundreds of thousands of workers and youth who elected him to the leadership of the Labour Party. Indeed, his tenure as the party’s leader has not changed Labour’s policy one iota—so much so that today the party’s right wing feels able to plan his ouster.

Corbyn’s behavior exemplifies the lack of political principle characteristic of the entire Labour Party and its leadership. His main ally in the party, Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell, is already positioning himself as a possible replacement in the event of a leadership challenge. After committing any future Labour government to continued austerity measures, McDonnell attacked Corbyn for taking too long to suspend Livingstone.

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