

Antisemitism? - Defend Corbyn against the Alliance for Workers Liberty

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Just as the latest round of witch hunting antisemitism allegations against Jeremy Corbyn has reached its crescendo something particularly vile has emerged from the woodwork - a 2400-word open letter to Corbyn from Sean Matgamna of the AWL (Alliance for Workers Liberty) [1], an organisation claiming to be on the radical left, arguing that Corbyn is guilty as charged.

The AWL has a proud thirty-year record of supporting Zionism and attacking anti-Zionist Jews. An article last year concluded that “AWL is a Zionist organisation, though it does not describe itself as such. Its commitment to Zionism cancels out its commitment to socialism and internationalism whenever the two conflict.” [2]

Matgamna’s letter is a torrent of pro-Israeli, anti-Palestinian, bile. Despite recognising the weaponisation of antisemitism against Corbyn, he argues that this is fully justified and should be supported. He argues that the MPs who left the Labour party last week to form the Independent Group were “driven out of the party” by “possible future anti-Jewish pogromists” inspired by “five decades of political and moral ferment on the ostensibly ‘Trotskyist’ left in which absolute hostility to Israel, to ‘any’ Israel, has slowly built up in the political atmosphere like poisonous smog.”

He explains: “The ‘Corbyn surge’ that recreated a mass membership almost overnight pulled into the new, new Labour Party a lot of people educated on the Middle East question in the kitsch left. With them they brought their political baggage, and a trolling and bullying culture. On a certain level, the Corbyn surge was also an antisemitic purge.”

With Matgamna you can skip to the chase. The much-debated definitions of antisemitism –that antisemitism is hatred of or discrimination against Jewish people and not opposition the Israeli Government or indeed Zionism – have little relevance. For him the main crime is exactly that – opposing the state of Israel or conversely supporting the Palestinians.

The biggest crime in his distorted world is to call for a single democratic secular state based on equal rights as an alternative to the current occupation and suppression of the Palestinian people by Israel and to support the right of return of the Palestinian refugees driven out in 1947-8. Such people he says are “absolute anti-Zionists” and in the end they are racists who bring a “lethal poison” into the Labour Movement: They are “adamantly for a one-state solution, for an Arab and Islamic state incorporating the population of 1948-67 Israel, or those of the population whom it does not kill or drive out in conquering them.”

He goes on: “This ‘right of return’ implies, and is meant to imply, the displacement of the Jews of Israel. By what standards do the descendants of the people who lived in that territory decades ago have the right to do that?”

He accuses Corbyn of playing lip service to a two-state solution while tolerating “absolute anti-Zionists” in the party. He calls for the witch hunt to be stepped up and the party to be re-educated. He calls for advocacy of the right of return and opposition to Zionism to be proscribed:

“As well as an educational drive in the party on this question - which includes a candid discussion of the politics of the leadership - the party should declare advocacy of the destruction of Israel, by Arab or Islamic states or whomever, incompatible with membership of the Labour Party. Encoded versions of that policy - via ‘right of return’ for example - should not be tolerated in the labour movement. Advocacy of measures that are code for driving Israel out of existence - ‘right of return’, ‘from the river to the sea’, etc. - should not be tolerated in a healthy labour movement...”

And this comes from a man who told a public meeting in the 1990s that Palestinians could not exercise their right of return because “No nation should be expected to absorb an immigration greater in size than the host community”. This racist nonsense is what should really not be tolerated in the labour movement.

No doubt this kind of vile divisive stuff works well for the AWL in hardening up a sect around outrageous positions that are rejected by the bulk of the left and building its organisation. But its wider effect is to support a campaign by the right that poses a real and direct threat to the whole Corbynite project, which is the most important development in Britain and indeed beyond for a very long time.

The response to the witch hunt has been the emergence of Jewish Voice for Labour [3], which does a very important job, it should fully supported by the whole of the left in the Labour party that rejects the AWL line and seeks to build a healthy left inside the Labour Party to back up and defend the Corbyn leadership.

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P.S.

- Socialist Resistance. Posted on March 1, 2019:
<http://socialistresistance.org/defend-corbyn-against-the-awl/16389>

Footnotes

[1] <https://www.workersliberty.org/story/2019-02-27/labours-antisemitism-crisis-open-letter-jeremy-corbyn>

[2] <https://abovetheparapet409167924.wordpress.com>

[3] <https://www.jewishvoiceforlabour.org.uk/blog/reinstate-paul-jonson/>