

# Britain: Labour expels Ken Loach - a left response

Sunday 29 August 2021, by [KELLAWAY Dave](#) (Date first published: 23 August 2021).

**[Dave Kellaway](#) provides a left response to the expulsion of film director and political activist Ken Loach from the Labour Party.**

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Bureaucrats and witch hunters often fail to see the irony of their actions. Labour under Starmer has been involved in countless discussions, reports and focus groups about how to win back the traditional or industrial working class, particularly in the so-called 'red wall' seats of the Midlands and North. Ken Loach in his TV and film work has probably examined and expressed the lived experience of working class people better than anyone else.

## *The film poster for 'Kes'*

Labour has recently highlighted how the exam results have exposed huge social inequality. Loach's film '[Kes](#)' memorably shows how schools fail working class students. Zero hour contracts and the gig economy need regulating say Labour, Loach exposed their reality in 'Sorry we missed you'. Labour has said the welfare system needs reform, Loach attacks its vicious daily war against working people in '[I Daniel Blake](#)'. Labour argues for more social housing Loach created the definitive TV film on homelessness with '[Cathy Come Home](#)' which led to the founding of Shelter, the housing charity and campaign.

Ken Loach also freely contributed some effective election broadcasts under Corbyn's leadership. He has a well earned national and international reputation.

You would have thought that the current Labour leadership might just consider him as a great asset to the movement. On the contrary he has fallen victim to the ongoing witchhunt of left activists:

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Ken Loach & Sixteen Films

@KenLoachSixteen

'Labour HQ finally decided I'm not fit to be a member of their party, as I will not disown those already expelled. Well...' KL

11:40 AM · Aug 14, 2021

21.9K

2.1K

[Copy link to Tweet](#)

Ken Loach & Sixteen Films

@KenLoachSixteen

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Aug 14, 2021

'Labour HQ finally decided I'm not fit to be a member of their party, as I will not disown those already expelled. Well...' KL

Ken Loach & Sixteen Films

@KenLoachSixteen

'I am proud to stand with the good friends and comrades victimised by the purge. There is indeed a witch hunt....' KL

11:40 AM · Aug 14, 2021

10.2K

134

[Copy link to Tweet](#)

Ken Loach & Sixteen Films

@KenLoachSixteen

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Aug 14, 2021

Replying to @KenLoachSixteen

'I am proud to stand with the good friends and comrades victimised by the purge. There is indeed a witch hunt....' KL

Ken Loach & Sixteen Films

@KenLoachSixteen

'Starmer and his clique will never lead a party of the people. We are many, they are few. Solidarity.'

KL

11:40 AM · Aug 14, 2021

14.5K

496

[Copy link to Tweet](#)

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Loach previously left the Labour party in the 1990s, reportedly in disgust at Tony Blair, after three decades as a member. He has also been active in political parties such as Respect and Left Unity that have presented themselves as a radical alternative to Labour. He rejoined the party following Corbyn's election to the leadership.

The former shadow chancellor John McDonnell tweeted:

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John McDonnell MP

@johnmcdonnellMP

To expel such a fine socialist who has done so much to further the cause of socialism is a disgrace. Ken's films have exposed the inequalities in our society, have given us hope for change & inspired us to fight back. I send my solidarity to my friend and comrade @KenLoachSixteen

Ken Loach & Sixteen Films

@KenLoachSixteen

'Labour HQ finally decided I'm not fit to be a member of their party, as I will not disown those already expelled. Well...' KL

12:13 PM · Aug 14, 2021

8.7K

835

[Copy link to Tweet](#)

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Twenty MPs and some Labour peers from the Socialist Campaign Group [have taken a stand](#), calling for Ken Loach to be immediately reinstated into the Labour.

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Socialist Campaign Group

@socialistcam

Reinstate Ken Loach.

Image

11:22 AM · Aug 16, 2021

1.4K

314

[Copy link to Tweet](#)

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"Ken is an outstanding socialist and a fierce opponent of discrimination in all its forms, whose work has done more than any other living British filmmaker to shine a light on injustice and oppression,"

"The values embedded in his films — solidarity, compassion, equality — should be the values proudly championed by our party.

"That Ken is expelled while Islamophobes are welcomed is shameful and suggests the party leadership is drifting yet further away from these values."

***Socialist campaign group***

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It is positive that the Socialist Campaign group is standing up for Ken Loach but as Pete Firmin,

another leading left activist who is being expelled, has commented on the Jewish Voice for Labour website, the whole witchhunt needs to be opposed:

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*I welcome the statement from the MPs, but it shouldn't just be about Ken Loach. He is being expelled for his association with one of the newly proscribed organisations. I want the MPs to come out clearly against those proscriptions and the auto exclusions.*

**Pete Firmin** 17 august 2021 ([Jewish voice for labour](#))

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When asked for a comment Labour HQ said it did not comment on individual cases. This is of course being very economical with the truth since there have been a number of comments directly referring to Jeremy Corbyns suspension from the PLP.

### **Why we should make a fuss about Ken Loach's expulsion**

A good comrade said to me why make such noise about another expulsion from labour. Don't we all need to move on outside labour. I do not agree.

**Firstly**, Ken is very well known so kicking up a fuss about him could help the defence of all those expelled. His case has been widely reported in the British press. His international status has been reflected in articles I have seen in the mainstream press in the Spanish State, Italy and France.

**Secondly**, there is a general principle involved here. Whatever position you take on whether as a socialist you work inside Labour we defend democracy inside the unions and the labour movement generally. It is part and parcel of our vision of both how to get to a socialist alternative and one of the guiding principles of any socialist society. There is no evidence at all that Ken Loach is antisemitic. He is being expelled because of guilt by association with a group like Labour Against the Witchhunt that the labour apparatus and Starmer bureaucracy have defined as antisemitic. No statements or actions have been provided to Ken proving his antisemitism apart from his solidarity with such groups. When does signing an appeal make you a member of the group putting out the appeal? Indeed this is all retrospective and against natural justice since Ken showed his support for such campaigns before they were proscribed.

**Thirdly**, the game is not over inside Labour. The left has been severely weakened, thousands of activists have left but the left is still a strong force. Recent votes for the Conference Arrangements Committee and for some national youth posts show Momentum-supported candidates winning all but one position. Momentum itself is a lot bigger than the left groups outside Labour and is opening itself out to campaigning with non-Labour members. Not all the gains of the Corbynism project have been destroyed -not yet anyway.

**Finally**, there is a broader argument about how such undemocratic behaviour by Labour severely

damages perceptions that any future government it leads will be particularly inclusive. Since the choice for Socialists is still likely to be either a Tory or Labour government this remains an important consideration. Leah Levane – another activist being expelled – makes this point:

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*One question I have for the Labour Party leadership is why would you expect people in this country to trust with government a Party that treats its own hard working, committed, volunteer members with such disdain?*

**Leah Levane**

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### **Not the right sort of Jews**

Another irony in the present situation is that although the focus is mostly on using antisemitism accusations as the basis for expelling people, some of the key activists the leadership are expelling are in fact Jewish comrades who have always fought against all times of racism, including antisemitism. In other words comrades like Leah Levane, Roger Silverman and Graham Bash are considered the wrong sort of Jew by the Labour Leadership who appear to be largely guided by the Jewish Board of Deputies on the matter of definitions.

However if you attack asylum seekers you can stay unperturbed in the party, as Pete Firmin says in his response to the expulsion letter:

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*Socialists are being removed from the party at the same time as the leader of the Labour Group in Ashford remains in post after calling for a Home Guard to repel asylum seekers.*

**Pete firmin**

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## **Why is Starmer expelling so many socialist activists?**

Like Blair he knows he does not need a party of half a million members, particularly if the majority are left leaning, to win elections. It is a dangerous argument for left militants inside Labour to suggest that expelling the left will mean Labour cannot win an election. It maybe is comforting for left people committed to working in Labour but it is not true that Labour can only win with lots of leftists canvassing. Starmer thinks that Labour can win again if it provides a perception that Labour can manage the economy without challenging the rule of capital. All the positions expressed on the fall of Kabul also reassure the establishment that Labour is not going to threaten in any way Britain's imperialist role. Labour defends the failure of twenty years of intervention in Afghanistan and supports the supposedly benign logic of nation-building and support for women's rights from the barrel of a gun. Today Corbyn and his supporters have been proved 100% right about the decision to intervene beside the US in Afghanistan.

## **Is this an opportunity to launch an appeal for a new broad left party?**

A few people on the left have said why doesn't Ken get together with Jeremy Corbyn and make a call for a new party outside Labour? It seems attractive on paper. Such a call would be much more than just getting all the left groups together (even if this were possible which is doubtful). Clearly building any new party to the left of Labour requires broad left forces in Labour and the unions to break with Labour. It is particularly hard in a country with an undemocratic, first past the post system of elections. But this would not necessarily be a fundamental obstacle. We have seen significant success for political forces starting outside the mainstream parties in recent years - such as the SNP, the Greens or even UKIP.

The big problem is that Jeremy Corbyn is a bit like Blackpool rock. The Labour Party is written large from head to toes in body and soul. Except if he is expelled. This is possible if he wants to stand again in Islington North and has not been re-admitted to the Parliamentary Labour Party. Then he would be de facto excluded. Even then it is not clear that he would willingly split the party locally or nationally. Who from the Socialist Campaign group would follow him in any case, there are signs that this group is differentiating between a hard and soft wing.

Nevertheless it is important to work out ways of keeping all those socialists who have left and all who remain together in regular joint work and campaigning. A number of currents and some unions have released a statement calling for building such a network and have announced a meeting at the Labour Party Conference. At this stage it does not include Momentum or other significant currents. The stronger such a network is the bigger and better basis there would be for a new party were there ever to be significant splits from the PLP or within the unions. Closer work between revolutionary currents who share a non-sectarian open approach to both people inside and outside labour would help this process. The ACR is committed to that project.

In one of Ken Loach's best films, [Land and Freedom](#) about the Spanish Civil War in the late 1930s, there is [a brilliant scene](#), filmed in one take showing the discussion among the Republican, anti-fascist fighters.

*[Video not available here.]*

It all turns around how to keep the struggle going forward, whether to radicalise, distribute the big landowners land straightaway and take other progressive measures or to consolidate, making the army more hierarchical and professional and to maintain the alliance at all costs with more

moderate sectors. The fighters allied with the Spanish Communist Party, who followed the Moscow line, argued for the latter and the POUMistas (a more left wing group) argued the radical line.

In a way all this stuff about antisemitism and Ken Loach is really a cover for the real debate about which way forward for people in Labour – be moderate and ditch all vestiges of Corbyn’s project or re-engage with it through a real fight for the many not the few.

**Dave Kellaway**

## **2 comments**

Richard Purdie  
23.08.2021 at 5:36 pm

I find David Kellaway’s conclusion faulty, even though as a revolutionary socialist I share many of his concerns. The real debate, for me, is emphatically not about ‘the way forward for people in Labour’. That is simply parochial.

For socialists of every stripe, the correct question has to be about ‘the way forward’ for the working class in its ineluctable struggle with capital. In other words, David must remove and set aside his party spectacles in order to see, and assess, the balance of forces in the class struggle today, not only domestically but internationally/ globally also.

The latter dimension, tellingly, is entirely missing from David’s account.

**Pete Firmin**

29.08.2021 at 10:34 am

A factual error, you write “A number of currents and some unions have released a statement calling for building such a network and have announced a meeting at the Labour Party Conference. At this stage it does not include Momentum or other significant currents.” If you mean the meeting backed by FBU, BFAWU as well as currents such as CLPD and LRC, it is a week before Labour Party conference, not “at” LP conference. Momentum has chosen not to be involved, the invitation to them is still open

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## **P.S.**

- Anti\*Capitalist Resistance. 23 Aug 2021:

<https://anticapitalistresistance.org/labour-expels-ken-loach-a-left-response/>

- Dave Kellaway is on the Editorial Board of Anti\*Capitalist Resistance, a member of Socialist Resistance, and Hackney and Stoke Newington Labour Party, a contributor to International Viewpoint and Europe Solidaire Sans Frontieres.