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Keir Starmer and Jeremy Corbyn on 6 December 2019 [Flickr]
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Labour's anti-Semitism crises fuelled by right-wing faction to undermine Corbyn says new report

Shocking details of a conspiracy at the heart of the British Labour Party aimed to sabotage Jeremy Corbyn's chance of winning an election was leaked in an 851-page report yesterday.

Seen by MEMO, the report titled: “*The work of the Labour Party's Governance and Legal Unit in relation to antisemitism, 2014 – 2019*”, provides details into the way in which the anti-Semitism row within the party was exploited by right-wing factions known as Blairites, to discredit and undermine Corbyn during his five-year reign.

Created by party staff, the report pulls together evidence from 10,000 emails, thousands of messages exchanged on work accounts and the contents of two WhatsApp group chats created by senior management in Labour headquarters. However, it will not be submitted to the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) that is currently investigating anti-Semitism within the party, even though it offers a thorough context that would prove vital to any inquiry into the anti-Semitism row which struck a devastating blow to Labour's chance of winning the 2017 general election.

Party lawyers reportedly decided that it is not within the scope of the external EHRC probe. This explanation however has been questioned given the thoroughness of the report. Doubting the official explanation some have asked if a person would not have

checked to see, before embarking on an 851-page odyssey involving 10,000 emails, whether it was going to be within the scope of the external probe.

New Labour leader Keir Starmer has quickly stepped in. In what seems to be an attempt to contain the damage and halt a mass exodus of members who feel they have been badly let down by the party apparatus for having sabotaged their chance of winning an election, Starmer launched an “urgent investigation.” Having spent the first week of his leadership prioritising the mending of ties with pro-Israeli sections of the British Jewish community while the rest of UK was in lockdown due to the global coronavirus pandemic, the last thing the new Labour leader would have wanted was to be saddled by a row that had seen Labour torn apart under his predecessor.

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Announcing the investigation yesterday, Starmer said that the probe would focus on why the report was commissioned, its findings and also how the document was released into the public domain. “In the meantime, we ask everyone concerned to refrain from drawing conclusions before the investigation is complete,” added Starmer in a joint statement with his deputy, Angela Rayner.

Starmer has every reason to be worried. **Details of the report are as shocking as they are damaging to his effort to unite the party and mount a challenge against the Tories. The report not only exposes the most shameful of hostility amongst Blairites within Labour headquarters, conspiring and delighting in the party’s defeat only to see Corbyn lose, it also uncovers shocking levels of racist, Islamophobic and misogynistic language normalised by the right-wing faction of the party.**

The report found that from 2015-18 Labour Party machinery was openly opposed to Corbyn, a long-standing supporter of the Palestinian cause and a vocal critic of Israel. Blairites worked to directly undermine the elected leadership of the party. Their priority during that period was to further the aims of a narrow faction aligned to Labour’s right rather than fulfilling the organisation’s objectives of winning elections.

In the same period allegations of anti-Semitism became weaponised to undermine Corbyn. Though the report acknowledges that anti-Jewish racism was becoming a problem within

small sections of the party, it also seems to have presented an opportunity for Corbyn's opponents in Labour headquarters. The plan it seems, was to tarnish Corbyn's image in the eye of the British electorate by failing to build a functioning complaints and disciplinary process capable of dealing with allegations of racism. The decision not to develop a system for the swift processing of complaints not only made Corbyn appear incompetent in dealing with what later became a crises, it also undermined his entire leadership.

Labour's Governance and Legal Unit (GLU) managing complaints and disciplinary within the party was "ill-equipped to deal with the impending caseload", the report found, adding that "the disciplinary processes did not adequately deal with even the far fewer number of cases the Party was managing before 2015" prior to Corbyn becoming leader. A system that was not fit for purpose was swamped even further when membership of the party grew from 200,000 to 600,000 in the same period.

A popular myth spread by the mainstream media during the height of the row was that Corbyn and his team were reluctant to deal with alleged cases of anti-Semitism; undermining the disciplinary process; and interfering in the impartial decision making of the GLU by insisting on it to follow an "unwritten guidance" on anti-Semitism. The report blows this away by showing that Blairite officials in Labour headquarters, including in GLU motivated by hostility to Corbyn's left-wing politics, made a concerted effort to scupper the handling of complaints.

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It further exonerates Corbyn of the allegations that he had failed to take anti-Semitism seriously. Instead, the report shows that hostile senior officials, including many that appeared on a controversial BBC "Panorama" programme, operated in a highly factional manner to turn the issue of anti-Semitism into a crisis for the party. Many of the same individuals are also thought to have drip fed the media in their attempt to demonize the Labour leader.

Unresolved complaints created a bottleneck which was not cleared until spring 2018 when right-wing senior staff in Labour Party headquarters, led by Iain McNicol, who appeared in the "Panorama" documentary, was replaced as general secretary by Jennie Formby. Following the appointment of the new general secretary, the backlog of anti-Semitic

complaints were cleared up. It seems Corbyn's opponents were sitting on 673 complaints which were cleared up following Formby's appointment. Some 96 members were immediately suspended from the party for their conduct and 12 were expelled. With 600,000 members that is less than 0.1 per cent of complaints of which 0.016 were expelled.

As for the actual cases, the report found that half of all anti-Semitism complaints and a third of all anti-Semitism cases, came from one individual in 2019. Complaints from this one individual are "typically poorly evidenced and submitted in a format that hinders investigation," the report said. This individual has a habit of repeatedly emailing about the same cases cluttering the complaints inbox and taking staff time. A large proportion of the people this individual complains about are either not members of the Labour Party or are already in the disciplinary process. The quality of his complaints is also said to be very poor, lacking an explanation for why sharing a certain article about Jews or Israel is anti-Semitic.

Many watched the anti-Semitism crises within the Labour Party unfold with horror. Even though the suspicion of foul play was on the lips of nearly everybody, few would have expected their colleagues to behave in such shameful disregard for the interest of the party. The new leader not only has the mammoth task of ensuring that disgruntled members who worked tirelessly for years trying to defeat the Tories do not abandon the cause, he needs to find a way to prove that Labour is still a vehicle for the kind of progressive politics that galvanised the left during Corbyn's early days, before it was swamped by a crisis manufactured within the heart of Labour itself.

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