

Election Watch

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A CAMPAIGN FOR PRESS AND BROADCASTING FREEDOM (NORTH) INITIATIVE



The Mail and The Sun went to ever-greater extremes in re-hashing anti-Corbyn diatribes



By Nicholas Jones

SHAMEFUL AND SHAMELESS – two words that best sum up the post-election reaction of political journalists to the relentless campaign that was pursued by most of the British press to demonise Jeremy Corbyn and John McDonnell.

Some of my former colleagues were aghast at the extent of the vilification printed by newspapers that did all they could before polling day to terrify their readers about the prospect of a Labour government.

By contrast most correspondents and columnists employed by pro-Conservative newspapers were entirely shameless. They just shrugged their shoulders; they were simply writing what their papers wanted; they had no alternative.

The effectiveness of tabloid propaganda was highlighted in countless vox pop interviews with voters in constituencies across the so-called Red Wall of seats that Labour lost to the Conservatives in the Midlands, Yorkshire, the north west and north east. Elderly passers-by in deprived working-class towns frequently repeated the words and smears they had been fed for months in headlines about the 'terrorists' friend' who could not be trusted, and who would turn Britain into a Marxist state.



TORY HACK PACK

How a new depth of viciousness marked last days of campaign

Just as had happened in the EU Referendum, there was sophisticated co-ordination between the attacks mounted by pro-Brexit Tory politicians and their media allies.

Instead of the torrent of scare stories about immigration that we saw in 2016 – backed up by the slogan of Take Back Control – there was endless press denigration of Corbyn which Boris Johnson constantly reinforced with his own personal savaging of the Labour leader.

I had not witnessed the same level of synchronisation since the height of the Thatcher era when her political messages integrated so well with the vicious press campaigns, as seen during sustained assault on the National Union of Mineworkers during the 1984-85 pit strike.

The Tory tabloids had played the same hand – supporting Brexit and delivering a Corbyn demolition job – during the 2017 general election.

Photographs of Corbyn and McDonnell dredged up from 30 years ago were regularly reprinted under alarmist headlines, but the then Prime Minister Theresa May failed lamentably

Continued on Page 3

'The biggest lie since the

By Tim Gopill

FOUR days before the poll the *Mail on Sunday* reported that the Simon Wiesenthal Centre had named Jeremy Corbyn as the 'worst anti-semitic on the planet'. The world's leading anti-Holocaust centre, based in Los Angeles, had placed him at the top of its annual list for 2019 and warned that Britain would become a 'pariah' if it elected him prime minister.

"No one has done more to mainstream antisemitism into the political and social life of a democracy than the Jeremy Corbyn-led Labour Party," said its dean and founder, Rabbi Marvin Hier. "We cannot sit back and watch this happen again."

Anyone who missed that none-too-subtle reference should listen to the catch-up recording on LBC Radio of *Sunday Telegraph* columnist Simon Heffer claiming last July that Jeremy Corbyn 'wants to reopen Auschwitz'. When challenged Heffer replied: "I'm sure, in 1933, they had similar conversations in Germany: 'the Fuehrer's never going to do that'."

Heffer is a notably deranged right-wing writer, but such insani-



Tory broadsheets and tabloids were unrelenting in their attacks on Labour and antisemitism

ties can only be expressed because the underlying premise has become so widely accepted, that the mild, egalitarian Labour leader is in fact a strutting Nazi, at the head of a party of anti-semites.

It has taken less than four years for official Jewish attitudes to Labour to move from historically



close to outright hostile. The process gives every appearance of a coordinated campaign.

According to the *Times of Israel*, the annual Simon Wiesenthal listing reported by the *Mail on Sunday* is 'normally published in late December or early January; the earlier release this year may have been timed to come out ahead of the upcoming UK vote.'

Bad News for Labour

The great anti-semitism scare has been running for nearly four years. There are now three critical books in publication. Verso have produced the ebook *Antisemitism and the Labour Party*, a collection of essays by Jewish writers edited by Jamie Stern-Weiner and Alan Maddison.

More media-oriented is *Bad News for Labour* from Pluto, another collection of chapters by leading left-wing media reformers. This picks up on the *Bad News ...* series of books published by the Glasgow University media group in the 1980s, edited by Greg Philo, who is lead contributor for the new collection. Notable is the dissection of the process that drove Labour to adopt the IHRA definition of anti-semitism by Justin

Schlosberg, who has last year co-wrote the first serious analysis of the media assault on Corbyn's Labour for the Media Reform Coalition.

And more newsy is *Is the BBC Anti-Labour?* edited by Paddy French. The title is a play on *Is Labour Anti-Semitic?*, the scandalously biased *Panorama* programme fronted by John Ware last June. As with the programme, the verdict is firmly in the affirmative, but with rather more convincing reasoning.



e Iraq war'

The article came on the same day as the Jewish Labour Movement (JLM), the pro-Israel anti-Corbyn grouping within Labour, announced it was no longer supporting the party in the election, despite being an affiliated society. A week earlier the JLM had 'leaked' its evidence to the Equality and Human Rights Commission's inquiry into Labour's handling of complaints of anti-semitism. This included lurid allegations of the contentious allegations of former Labour staff, but most of the evidence, as with all the complaints, derives from social media.

The week before that it was the Chief Rabbi, Ephraim Mirvis, a supporter of Boris Johnson, declaring that Corbyn was 'unfit for high office'.

Media Lens, an academically-based team of media analysts, commented on December 3 that the coverage accusing Corbyn and the Labour Party of institutional anti-semitism was the biggest lie since the Iraq war: "Not since 2003, when sanctions-stricken Iraq, willing to allow months of no-notice UN weapons inspections, was said to be a 'clear and present danger', has the truth been so completely and shamefully distorted."

There is no research data to confirm the prevalence of anti-semitism among Labour party members. But there is plenty on national racial and political attitudes, all of which show that Jew-hate is lowest on the left of the spectrum and rises as you move rightwards. Interestingly though, despite the horrifying rise of anti-semitism and proto-fascist politics elsewhere in Europe, there is research to show that anti-semitic

attitudes are generally declining.

Much of this data is accessible in *Antisemitism and the Labour Party*, a free-to-download ebook from Verso Press. This is a collection of essays by Jewish writers. The chapter *Smoke Without Fire: The Myth of a 'Labour Antisemitism Crisis'* by Jamie Stern-Weiner and Alan Maddison contains the research material.

Media Lens too have statistics: their database search reveals that in the national press there were 337 hits on 'Corbyn' and 'anti-semitism' in September, 222 in October and 1,620 in November.

Inevitably, there is a small amount of anti-semitic conduct in the party – but widespread, encouraged or even tolerated? Far from it. Corbyn himself has a long record of exposing and resisting anti-semitism and enjoys close relations with the sizeable Jewish community in his north London constituency. A number of prominent Jewish people have expressed public support for him, though this is little reported.

Among them is the irascible former Commons Speaker John Bercow, who said in an interview in *GQ* in October that he had been friendly with Corbyn in Parliament for 22 years and 'never detected so much as a whiff of anti-semitism.' Not one national newspaper picked up on that.

In the election itself canvassers reported that the issue rarely came up on the doorstep. But many former Labour voters planning to switch sides cited objection to Corbyn personally as a motive, and the relentless media assault on the baseless accusation of racism must have had an effect.

Would 10,292,354 people have voted Labour if they really believed the leader was a Jew-hater?

New depths of viciousness

From Front Page

to follow through the attack lines supplied by the press. Johnson would not repeat her mistake.

In the aftermath of the 2016 vote to Leave and the 2017 election, there was some rowing back by the tabloid press and an acknowledgement, at least by the *Daily Mail* and *Daily Express*, that their scare tactics on immigration needed to be scaled down.

Initially Geordie Greig, Paul Dacre's replacement as *Mail* editor, did shift towards a more balanced approach but that caution was cast aside after Johnson launched his Get Brexit Done campaign and triggered a December election.

As the *Mail* and *The Sun* went to ever-greater extremes in rehashing anti-Corbyn diatribes that had already been recycled several times before there was some limited internal resistance, but it was soon dissipated.

There was to be no letting up in the campaign to help Johnson secure the parliamentary majority he needed to deliver Brexit by the end of January 2020 and that meant the trashing of Corbyn – viler even than that meted out to Michael Foot or Neil Kinnock – would plumb new depths of viciousness.

ElectionWatch

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Not racist? Image of refugees on a Facebook post.

And they say they aren't racist

Leave.EU – founded by the millionaires Arron Banks and Richard Tice – pillories pro-EU politicians and the Labour Party. On its Facebook site it courts controversy, incites rage and drives debate. It has nearly a million Facebook likes. In one post – shared 7,000 times – the pro-Tory group reused an image of refugees from a notorious poster unveiled by Nigel Farage during the Brexit referendum, an image widely compared to Nazi propaganda.

Boris pockets phone and ducks question

IN THE last weekend before the election an image was being shared on Twitter showing Jack Williment, a four-year-old boy with suspected pneumonia who had to lie on the floor of an A&E department at Leeds Infirmary as there were no beds available.

The *Daily Mirror*, the only tabloid supporting Labour, used it on its front-page on Monday 9 December, with an interview with his mother, Sarah, a former Tory voter, who said she would vote Labour in the election, saying ‘I’m angry at the lack of funding that is failing our children.’

Confronted with the picture by Joe Pike, a political reporter for ITN



How the *Daily Mirror* reported on the hospital scandal.

News, Boris Johnson repeatedly refused to look at the picture when asked to, and then grabbed the journalist’s phone and pocketed it. Not one of his finest moments!

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