

<https://internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article6691>



Britain

If they come in the morning...

- IV Online magazine - 2020 - IV545 - June 2020 -

Publication date: Monday 29 June 2020

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The Labour Party's antisemitism witchhunt has just claimed its highest profile victim, with the sacking of Rebecca Long-Bailey from Starmer's shadow cabinet for the crime of tweeting a link to an interview with the actor Maxine Peake in the Independent. [1] This decision, taken just a few hours after a peremptory demand by the unrepresentative Board of Deputies of British Jews (BoD), makes a mockery of Starmer's claim that he intends to "reunify" the party. [2]

Peake made the mistake of claiming that Israel had trained the US cops who killed George Floyd in restraint techniques. This is probably incorrect – the US police were killing Black and Native Americans long before the Israeli state or the Zionist movement existed. But the bigger picture is correct: despite official denials, Israeli forces do use similar techniques, including kneeling on the necks of prisoners. And many US police forces have received Israeli police training, as Amnesty International USA has long been documenting. [3] This comment was just one sentence in a long interview, the gist of which is that people in the left should stay in the Labour Party to defeat the Tories and fight for social change. And it was in no way antisemitic, except for those who believe (as fascists and many Zionists do) that all Jews support Israel, and therefore should be held accountable for Israel's crimes.

Long-Bailey's tweet of the interview, with a comment that "Maxine Peake is a diamond", was enough to trigger the BoD's demand for a retraction and apology, to which Starmer responded by sacking Long-Bailey. This action has several apparent goals. Starmer clearly hopes to appease those who relentlessly attacked Corbyn, and may initially think that he has done so. His decision has been applauded by the renegades Mike Gapes, Joan Ryan, Louise Ellman and John Mann, as well as by Margaret Hodge (who for some unaccountable reason has still not been disciplined for bringing the party into disrepute by her foul-mouthed and libellous attack on Corbyn) and by the Jewish Labour Movement and the Campaign against Antisemitism, who are also calling for further scalps. [4] It would be naïve to believe that this will bring an end to the witchhunt. The BoD has already demanded that the party take disciplinary action against Dianne Abbott, Bell Ribeiro-Addy and Salma Yaqoob for taking part in an online meeting hosted by Jewish Voice for Labour, and Starmer's capitulation will only embolden them to redouble these attacks, and launch others.

With this action, Starmer has removed the only prominent supporter of Corbyn still in the shadow cabinet. And Long-Bailey is likely to be replaced as shadow Education Secretary by a career politician who will not follow her unwavering support for the NEU [teachers' union] in its opposition to the premature and unsafe reopening of schools.

All this comes on the eve of Israel's threatened formal annexation of large parts of the areas it occupied in 1967. It remains to be seen how Starmer will act when the Israeli coalition government – of which the Labour Party's sister party, the Israeli Labor Party, is a member – takes this step confirming that Israel has become, in law as well as in long-standing practice – an apartheid state. His dismissal of Long-Bailey suggests that he will be more likely to take action against those who denounce this than against Israel and its supporters in the Labour Party.

There are signs of resistance to this shameful action. MPs Richard Burdon, John McDonnell, Zarah Sultana, Ian Lavery, and Jon Trickett have already tweeted their solidarity with Rebecca Long-Bailey, as have Len McCluskey and Jon Lansman [5]. Petitions have been initiated by the Socialist Campaign Group of Labour MPs (who are meeting Starmer to discuss this) and Momentum. Reports from across the country suggest a groundswell of opposition.

Of course Starmer will resist all demands that Long-Bailey be reinstated, but we must make clear that we will not allow this scapegoating, which comes in the context of a renewed witch hunt including against 'dissident' Jews, to continue. Long-Bailey may have hoped that her agreement to the BoD's Ten Pledges, and her failure to support

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earlier targets of the witchhunt, would safeguard her position. In this she was mistaken. And if even she can become a victim of this vicious campaign, then clearly none of us are safe.

Solidarity with Rebecca Long-Bailey! Resist Israeli Apartheid!

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[1] *The Independent*, 25 June 2020 "[Maxine Peake: 'People who couldn't vote Labour because of Corbyn? They voted Tory as far as I'm concerned'](#)". Rebecca Long-Bailey was a rival to Starmer in the recent Labour leadership election where she was perceived as the flagbearer of the Corbynite left.

[2] Jewish Voice for Labour, 21 January 2020 "[Exposé: Who are the Board of Deputies of British Jews?](#)"

[3] Amnesty International, 25 August 2016 "[With Whom are Many U.S. Police Departments Training? With a Chronic Human Rights Violator – Israel](#)"

[4] Twitter [Jewish Labour Movement](#), Campaign Against Antisemitism "[Far-left Labour MPs and outriders defend Rebecca Long-Bailey after she is sacked for sharing antisemitic conspiracy theory even after Maxine Peake apologises for promoting it](#)".

[5] Len McCluskey is the General Secretary of UNITE, Britain's largest union, while Jon Lansman is best known for his senior role in Momentum. <https://twitter.com/LenMcCluskey/status/1276243410626715648>.