

# How Top Labour Officials Plotted to Bring Down Jeremy Corbyn

Leaked report shows that staff worked relentlessly to damage the party's leader, including by exploiting antisemitism

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*The findings of a leaked, 860-page report compiled by the British Labour Party on its handling of antisemitism complaints is both deeply shocking and entirely predictable all at once.*

For the first time, extensive internal correspondence between senior party officials has been revealed, proving a years-long plot to destroy Jeremy Corbyn, the Labour leader who recently stepped down.

The report confirms long-held suspicions that suspected cases of antisemitism were exploited by head office staff to try to undermine Corbyn. Anyone who was paying close attention to events in the party over the past five years already had a sense of that.

But the depth of hostility from party managers towards Corbyn – to the extent that they actively sought to engineer his defeat in the 2017 general election – comes as a bombshell even to most veteran Labour watchers.

## Hankering for Blair

As the report reveals, party managers and a substantial section of the Labour parliamentary party barely hid their contempt for Corbyn after he won the leadership election in 2015. They claimed he was incapable of winning power.

These officials and MPs hankered for a return to a supposed golden era of Labour 20 years earlier, when Tony Blair had reinvented the party as New Labour – embracing Thatcherite economics, but presented with a more caring face. At the time, it proved a winning formula, earning Blair three terms in office.

Many of the officials and MPs most hostile to Corbyn had been selected or prospered under Blair. Because Corbyn sought to reverse the concessions made by New Labour to the political right, his democratic socialism was reviled by the Blairites.

In 2017, one of the architects of New Labour, Peter Mandelson, unabashedly [declared](#):

“I work every single day in some small way to bring forward the end of his [Corbyn’s] tenure in office. Something, however small it may be – an email, a phone call or a meeting I convene – every day I try to do something to save the Labour Party from his leadership.”

That sentiment, the report makes clear, was widely shared at the highest levels of the party bureaucracy. Senior officials actively sought to sabotage Corbyn as leader at every turn.

### Bid to rig leadership contest

The Blairites found a plethora of self-serving reasons – aggressively shared by the media – for arguing that Corbyn was unfit for office. Those ranged from his unkempt appearance to his opposition to Britain’s recent wars of aggression, resource grabs repackaged as “humanitarian interventions” that had been a staple of the Blair years.

Corbyn was falsely presented as having a treasonous past as a [Soviet spy](#), and of being at the very least indulgent of antisemitism.

While members of Corbyn’s inner circle were busy putting out these endless fires, the leaked report shows that Labour officials were dedicating their time and energy to unseating him. Within a year, they had foisted upon him a rerun leadership election.

Corbyn won again with the overwhelming backing of members, even after party officials tried to rig the contest, as the report notes, by expelling thousands of members they feared would vote for him.

Even this second victory failed to disarm the Blairites. They argued that what members found appealing in Corbyn would alienate the wider electorate. And so, the covert campaign against the Labour leader intensified from within, as the extensive correspondence between party officials cited in the report makes clear.

### Blue Labour



In fact, senior officials frantically tried to engineer a third leadership challenge, in early 2017, on the back of what they expected to be a poor showing in two spring byelections. The plan was to install one of their own, Tom Watson (image on the right), Corbyn’s hostile deputy, as interim leader.

To their horror, Labour did well in the byelections. Soon afterwards, a general election was called. It is in the sections dealing with the June 2017 election that the report’s most shocking revelations emerge.

Again assuming Labour would perform badly, senior staff drew up plans to stage yet another leadership challenge immediately after the election. Hoping to improve their odds, they proposed that an electoral college replace the one-member, one-vote system to ensure no leftwing candidates could win.

These same staff had boasted of “political fixing” and interfering in constituency parties to ensure Blairites were selected as parliamentary candidates, rather than those sympathetic to Corbyn.

It was already well known that Labour was beset by factionalism at head office. At the time, some observers even referred to “Blue Labour” and “Red Labour” – with the implication that the “blue” faction were really closet Tories. Few probably understood how close to the truth such remarks were.

#### ‘Sick’ over positive polls

The dossier reveals that the Blairites in charge of the party machine continued undermining Corbyn, even as it became clear they were wrong and that he could win the 2017 election.

According to the report, correspondence between senior staff – including Labour’s then-general secretary, Iain McNicol – show there was no let-up in efforts to subvert Corbyn’s campaign, even as the electoral tide turned in his favour.

Rather than celebrating the fact that the electorate appeared to be warming to Corbyn when he finally had a chance to get his message out – during the short period when the broadcast media were forced to provide more balance – Labour officials frantically sent messages to each other hoping he would still lose.

When a poll showed the party surging, one official commented to a colleague: “I actually felt quite sick when I saw that YouGov poll last night.” The colleague replied that “with a bit of luck” there would soon be “a clear polling decline”.

Excitedly, senior staff cited any outlier poll that suggested support for Corbyn was dropping. And they derided party figures, including shadow cabinet ministers such as Emily Thornberry, who offered anything more than formulaic support to Corbyn during the campaign.

#### ‘Doing nothing’ during election

But this was not just sniping from the sidelines. Top staff actively worked to sabotage the campaign.

Party bosses set up a secret operation – the “key seats team” – in one of Labour’s offices, from which, according to the report, “a parallel general election campaign was run to support MPs associated with the right wing of the party”. A senior official pointed to the “need to throw cash” at the seat of Watson, Corbyn’s deputy and major opponent.

Corbyn’s inner team found they were refused key information they needed to direct the campaign effectively. They were denied contact details for candidates. And many staff in HQ boasted that they spent the campaign “doing nothing” or pretending to “tap tap busily” at their computers while they plotted against Corbyn online.

Writing this week, two left-wing Labour MPs, John Trickett and Ian Lavery, [confirmed](#) that efforts to undermine the 2017 election campaign were palpable at the time.

Party officials, they said, denied both of them information and feedback they needed from doorstep activists to decide where resources would be best allocated and what messaging to use. It was, they wrote, suggested “that we pour resources into seats with large Labour majorities which were never under threat”.

The report, and Trickett and Lavery’s own description, make clear that party managers wanted to ensure the party’s defeat, while also shoring up the majorities of Labour’s right-wing candidates to suggest that voters had preferred them.

The aim of party managers was to ensure a Blairite takeover of the party immediately after the election was lost.

‘Stunned and reeling’

It is therefore hardly surprising that, when Corbyn overturned the Conservative majority and came within a hair’s breadth of forming a government himself, there was an outpouring of anger and grief from senior staff.

The message from one official cited in the report called the election result the “opposite to what I had been working towards for the last couple of years”. She added that she and her colleagues were “silent and grey-faced” and in “need of counselling”.

Others said that they were “stunned and reeling”, and that they needed “a safe space”. They lamented that they would have to pretend to smile in front of the cameras. One observed: “We will have to suck this up. The people have spoken. Bastards.”

Another tried to look on the bright side: “At least we have loads of money now” – a reference to the dues from hundreds of thousands of new members Corbyn had attracted to the party as leader.

Investigated for antisemitism

In short, Labour’s own party bosses not only secretly preferred a Conservative government, but actually worked hard to bring one about.

The efforts to destroy Corbyn from 2015 through 2018 are the context for understanding the evolution of a widely accepted narrative about Labour becoming “institutionally antisemitic” under Corbyn’s leadership.

The chief purpose of the report is to survey this period and its relation to the antisemitism claims. As far as is known, the report was an effort to assess allegations that Labour had an identifiable “antisemitism problem” under Corbyn, currently the subject of an investigation by the Equality and Human Rights Commission.

In a highly unusual move, the commission [launched](#) an investigation of Labour last year. The only other political party ever to be investigated is the neo-Nazi [British National Party](#) a decade ago.

The Labour report shows that party officials who helped the Tories to victory in 2017 were

also the same people making sure antisemitism became a dark stain on Corbyn for most of his leadership.

No antisemitic intent

Confusingly, the report's authors hedge their bets on the antisemitism claims.

On the one hand, they argue that antisemitism complaints were handled no differently from other complaints in Labour, and could find no evidence that current or former staff were "motivated by antisemitic intent".

But at the same time, the report accepts that Labour had an antisemitism problem beyond the presence of a few "bad apples", despite the known statistical evidence [refuting](#) this.

A Home Affairs Select Committee – a forum that was entirely unsympathetic to Corbyn – [found](#) in late 2016 that there was "no reliable, empirical evidence to support the notion that there is a higher prevalence of antisemitic attitudes within the Labour Party than any other political party".

Even that assessment was unfair to Labour. Various surveys have [suggested](#) that Labour and the left have [less of a problem](#) with all forms of racism than the ruling Conservative Party.

For those reasons alone, it was highly improper for the equalities commission to agree to investigate Labour. It smacks of the organisation's politicisation.

Nonetheless, the decision of the report's authors to work within the parameters of the equalities watchdog's investigation is perhaps understandable. One of the successes of Corbyn's opponents has been to label any effort to challenge the claim that Labour has an antisemitism problem as "denialism" – and then cite this purported denialism as proof of antisemitism.

Such self-rationalising proofs are highly effective, and a technique familiar from witch-hunts and the McCarthy trials of the 1950s in the United States.

'Litany of mistakes'

The report highlights correspondence between senior staff showing that, insofar as Labour had an "antisemitism problem", it actually came from the Blairites in head office, not Corbyn or his team. It was party officials deeply hostile to Corbyn, after all, who were responsible for handling antisemitism complaints.

These officials, the report notes, oversaw "a litany of errors" and delays in the handling of complaints – not because they were antisemitic, but because they knew this was an effective way to further damage Corbyn.

They intentionally expanded the scope of antisemitism investigations to catch out not only real antisemites in the party, but also members, including Jews, who shared Corbyn's support for Palestinian rights and were harshly critical of Israel.

Later, this approach would be formalised with the party's adoption of a new definition of antisemitism, proposed by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA), that

shifted the [focus](#) from hatred of Jews to criticism of Israel.

The complaints system was quickly overwhelmed, and delays worsened as officials hostile to Corbyn cynically dragged their heels to avoid resolving outstanding cases. Or, as the report stiffly describes it, there was “abundant evidence of a hyper-factional atmosphere prevailing in Party HQ” against Corbyn that “affected the expeditious and resolute handling of disciplinary complaints”.

The report accuses McNicol of intentionally misleading Corbyn about the number of cases so that “the scale of the problem was not appreciated” by his team – though the scale of the problem had, in fact, also been inflated by party officials.

The report concludes that Sam Matthews, who oversaw the complaints procedure under McNicol, “rarely replied or took any action, and the vast majority of times where action did occur, it was prompted by other Labour staff directly chasing this themselves”.

Amplified by the media

Both McNicol and Matthews have [denied](#) the claims to Sky News. McNicol called it a “petty attempt to divert attention away from the real issue”. Matthews said the report was “a highly selective, retrospective review of the party’s poor record” and that a “proper examination of the full evidence will show that as Head of Disputes and Acting Director, I did my level best to tackle the poison of anti-Jewish racism which was growing under Jeremy Corbyn’s leadership.”

But there is too much detail in the report to be so easily dismissed and there remain very serious questions to be answered. For example, once Matthews and McNicol had departed, Labour rapidly increased the resolution of antisemitism cases, dramatically stepping up the suspension and expulsion of accused party members.

The earlier delays appear to have had one purpose only: to embarrass Corbyn, creating an impression the party – and by implication, Corbyn himself – was not taking the issue of antisemitism seriously. Anyone who tried to point out what was really going on – such as, for example, MP Chris Williamson – was [denounced](#) as an antisemitism “denier” and suspended or expelled.

The media happily amplified whatever messages party officials disseminated against Corbyn. That included even the media’s liberal elements, such as the Guardian, whose political sympathies lay firmly with the Blairite faction.

That was all too evident during a special hour-length edition of Panorama, the BBC’s flagship news investigations programme, on Labour and antisemitism last year. It gave an uncritical platform to ex-staff turned supposed “whistleblowers” who [claimed](#) that Corbyn and his team had stymied efforts to root out antisemitism.

But as the report shows, it was actually these very “whistleblowers” who were the culpable ones.

‘Set up left, right and centre’

The media’s drumbeat against Corbyn progressively frightened wider sections of the Jewish community, who assumed there could be no smoke without fire.



It was a perfect, manufactured, moral panic. And once it was unleashed, it could survive the clear-out in 2018 of the Blairite ringleaders of the campaign against Corbyn.

Ever since, the antisemitism furore has continued to be regularly stoked into life by the media, by conservative Jewish organisations such as the Board of Deputies, and by Israel partisans inside the Labour Party.

“We were being sabotaged and set up left, right and centre by McNicol’s team, and we didn’t even know. It’s so important that the truth comes out,” one party source [told](#) Sky News.

### Stench of cover-up

The question now for Labour’s new leader, Keir Starmer, is what is he going to do with these revelations? Will he use them to clean out Labour’s stables, or quietly sweep the ordure under the carpet?

The signs so far are not encouraging.

The intention of current party managers was to bury the revelations – until someone foiled them by leaking the report. Predictably, most of the media have so far shown very little interest in giving these explosive findings anything more than the most perfunctory coverage.

Unconvincingly, Starmer has claimed he knew nothing about the report until the leak, and that he now intends to [conduct](#) an “urgent independent investigation” into the findings of the earlier inquiry.

Such an investigation, he says, will re-examine “the contents and wider culture and practices referred to in the report”. That implies that Starmer refuses to accept the report’s findings. A reasonable concern is that he will seek to whitewash them with a second investigation.

He has also promised to investigate “the circumstances in which the report was put into the public domain”. That sounds ominously like an attempt to hound those who have tried to bring to light the party’s betrayal of its previous leader.

The stench of cover-up is already in the air.

### Fear of reviving smears

More likely, Starmer is desperate to put the antisemitism episode behind him and the party. Recent history is his warning.

Just as Williamson found himself reviled as an antisemite for questioning whether Labour actually had an antisemitism problem, Starmer knows that any effort by the party to defend Corbyn’s record will simply revive the campaign of smears. And this time, he will be the target.

Starmer has hurriedly sought to placate Israel lobbyists within and without his own party, distancing himself as much as possible from Corbyn. That has included [declaring](#) himself a staunch Zionist and promising a purge of antisemites under the IHRA rules that include

harsh critics of Israel.

Starmer has also made himself and his party [hostage](#) to the conservative Board of Deputies and Labour's Israel partisans by signing up to their 10 pledges, a document that effectively takes meaningful criticism of Israel off the table.

There is very little reason to believe that Labour's new leadership is ready to confront the antisemitism smears that did so much to damage the party under Corbyn and will continue harming it for the foreseeable future.

The biggest casualties will be truth and transparency. Labour needs to come clean and admit that its most senior officials defrauded hundreds of thousands of party members, and millions more supporters, who voted for a fairer, kinder Britain.

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