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# UK: 'The Big Lie film: Glastonbury should not screen Corbyn conspiracy theories'

Saturday 24 June 2023, by [MASON Paul](#) (Date first published: 19 June 2023).

**The documentary Oh Jeremy Corbyn: The Big Lie has been drawing sizeable crowds to ticket-only showings and is now [slated to be shown at Glastonbury](#). I hope the festival thinks again.**

The film presents a full-blown conspiracy theory about Corbyn's opponents, conflating Zionists, Jews and Israel as part of a force that "orchestrated" his overthrow.

That, to me, appears to match at least two examples of anti-Semitism in the [International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance definition](#), and should raise legal and ethical questions for any venue considering screening it.

The film claims to tell the story of what caused the Corbyn project to fail, employing a familiar cast of characters: Chris Williamson, Jackie Walker, Tony Greenstein, Graham Bash and Ken Loach, all of whom have been expelled from or suspended by Labour, together with David Miller, the former Bristol University academic sacked after complaints from Jewish students.

## **Film includes 'Jewish orchestration' conspiracy theory**

Seventeen minutes in, after presenting evidence of an "orchestrated campaign" against Corbyn, the narrator, Alexei Sayle asks: "But if it was an orchestrated campaign, who was in the orchestra?" There follows a silent montage showing the Jewish Board of Deputies, the Jewish Labour Movement, Labour Friends of Israel, and the Israel Advocacy Movement.

As a professional film-maker I recognise this wordless presentation of a controversial idea not as an accident but as a technique: using captions and pictures to state what, if spoken aloud, could be accused of anti-Semitism.

But the "Jewish orchestration" theory is just one conspiracy the film showcases. There are three others, each of which has become central to far-left paranoia about today's Labour Party.

## **Film asks if Starmer is an 'establishment spycop'**

First, the film implies that a majority of Labour MPs were actively trying to lose the 2017 general election, which is purportedly evidenced by the shock shown by some at the unexpected success.

Second it asserts that Labour was doomed "from the moment Keir Starmer became shadow Brexit minister" – ie from October 2016 – because Keir was on a mission to destroy Labour using Brexit as the dividing issue.

Thirdly, it suggests that the Labour leader is a state agent planted either by the CIA or the British

security service.

Over a picture of Starmer and Corbyn together, Sayle asserts “In the end it was not the paid officials who brought Corbyn down, but an MP who said he was on his side”.

This leads into a segment entitled “Starmer – Establishment Spycop?” and Sayle elaborates: “Was the colourless Starmer really an undercover saboteur, a sort of establishment spycop who infiltrated the Corbyn project just to bring it down?”. At no point does the film answer in the negative.

Expelled member Rebecca Massey comments: “He’d worked quite closely with the CIA, hadn’t he?” Andrew Murray, Corbyn’s former adviser and a key commentator in the film, says: “I think Starmer will simply be seen as someone who did the establishment’s bidding, which is really what he’s been doing all his life. He is above all a servant of the state.”

### **Conspiracy theories are being used to mobilise a movement**

If support for such ideas existed only purely at the extremes, the film would hardly be worth bothering about. But the screenings are being used to mobilise a movement, and the narrative – like all conspiracy theories – is powerful.

I supported Jeremy Corbyn in the 2016 leadership campaign, and collaborated with John McDonnell in the run up to the 2017 manifesto. Like several current members of the Shadow Cabinet, I sought to make the best of the project. So I can say from this vantage point of a semi-insider that the film is a totally misleading account.

I have no doubt that the Israeli government was opposed to our position on Palestine. Nor do I underestimate the damaging role Brexit played for Labour’s electoral chances – above all the confused position Corbyn himself foisted on us at the September 2019 conference.

### **There was no conspiracy - Corbynism destroyed itself**

But there is no evidence Corbynism failed because of state conspiracy, either by Israel or the British government. On the contrary – and the film completely ignores this – Corbynism destroyed itself. As for the idea that Keir Starmer was a spycop planted by “the state” to sabotage the project, it deserves derision.

But with conspiracy theorists, derision is sometimes not enough. The sociologist Karl Mannheim, studying the rush to political extremism in the Weimar Republic, described the crucial role played by conspiracy theories, both on the far left and far right.

If an ideology that used to explain the world is shattered by events, he said, the reaction of some people is to construct a “Utopia” – an alternative reality, which is completely internally logical but bears no relationship to the facts. It’s a soothing narrative, and avoids having to look objectively at why the project failed.

That’s what’s happening in this film. You could easily come away from a screening believing that all that stood between Labour and electoral victory were the PLP, the British state, Israel, Jewish community organisations and the “spycop” Keir Starmer.

Not every interviewee may hold such views, and many of their arguments are based on legitimate (if wrong) political convictions, but the overall argument created by the film risks leaving this impression.

## **Screening the film risks making it the default history**

The film is being screened at a critical moment for Corbyn himself. He is criticised in the film for the apologies made over anti-Semitism. So is Momentum. The main commentators – Williamson, Walker, Greenstein and Bash – are unrepentant over the behaviour that got them expelled or suspended. So the film is an attempt to shape the future direction of Corbynism outside the Labour Party.

I wish I could tell readers of LabourList “go and see the film for yourself” – but in any real life showing of this film I would have walked out within 20 minutes of the start, and not quietly. Sadly, you don’t need to attend a screening to hear its basic message: it is available on social media, and on the websites of some proscribed organisations.

But here is the risk: many people newly engaged with politics have no personal experience of the events described in this film. The teenagers leaving school this summer were just ten years old when Jeremy first won the leadership.

The film’s aim is to become the default version of events. And therein lies its danger. If you pay money to watch it, or organise a screening, that’s the effort you are aiding.

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**P.S.**

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