Twitter Thread by Daniel Finn

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Some familiar figures are pushing the absurd and defamatory claim that Ken Loach supports Holocaust denial. The story of this bogus talking-point, which relies upon multiple layers of falsehood and guilt-by-association, makes for a revealing case-study. 1/

It dates back to the 2017 Labour conference. In a NYT op-ed, Howard Jacobson claimed that “a motion to question the truth of the Holocaust was proposed” from the conference floor—a crude fabrication, which the NYT sanctioned in its pages. 2/

> At the Labour Conference just concluded there was no sign, as the fringe moved ever closer to the center, that even Ms. Chakrabarti’s modest advice as to Hitler and the Nazis had been heeded. There were calls for some Jewish groups to be excluded from the party. A paper was handed out supporting the claim by Ken Livingstone, the former mayor of London, of collusion between German Jews and Nazis. A motion to question the truth of the Holocaust was proposed.

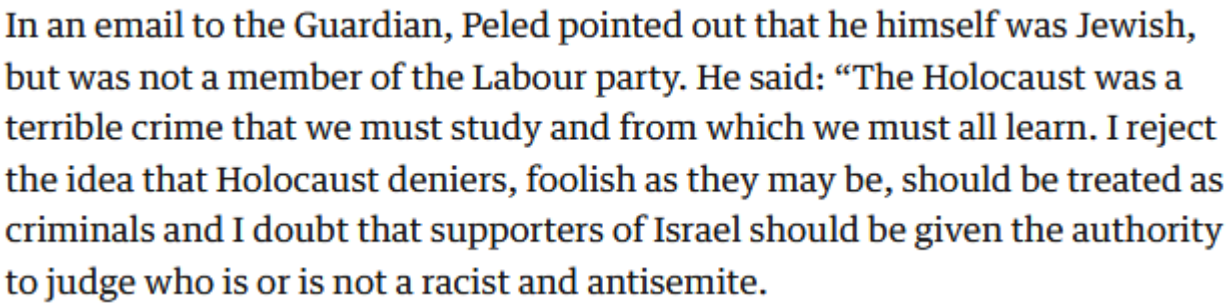
If you follow the link supplied by Jacobson or his editors, you’ll see that he was wrong on 3 counts: it wasn’t a motion, it wasn’t at the conference, and it wasn’t in favour of Holocaust denial. Quite the hat-trick! 3/

At a fringe meeting, granted no official status by Labour, an Israeli-Jewish speaker, Miko Peled, had said that he didn’t think Holocaust denial should be a criminal offense (which it is in some European countries). 4/

This is a perfectly reasonable position to hold—that opinions, no matter how wrong-headed or morally objectionable, should not be a matter for the criminal law—and of course it does not mean that Peled himself questions the truth of the Holocaust. 5/

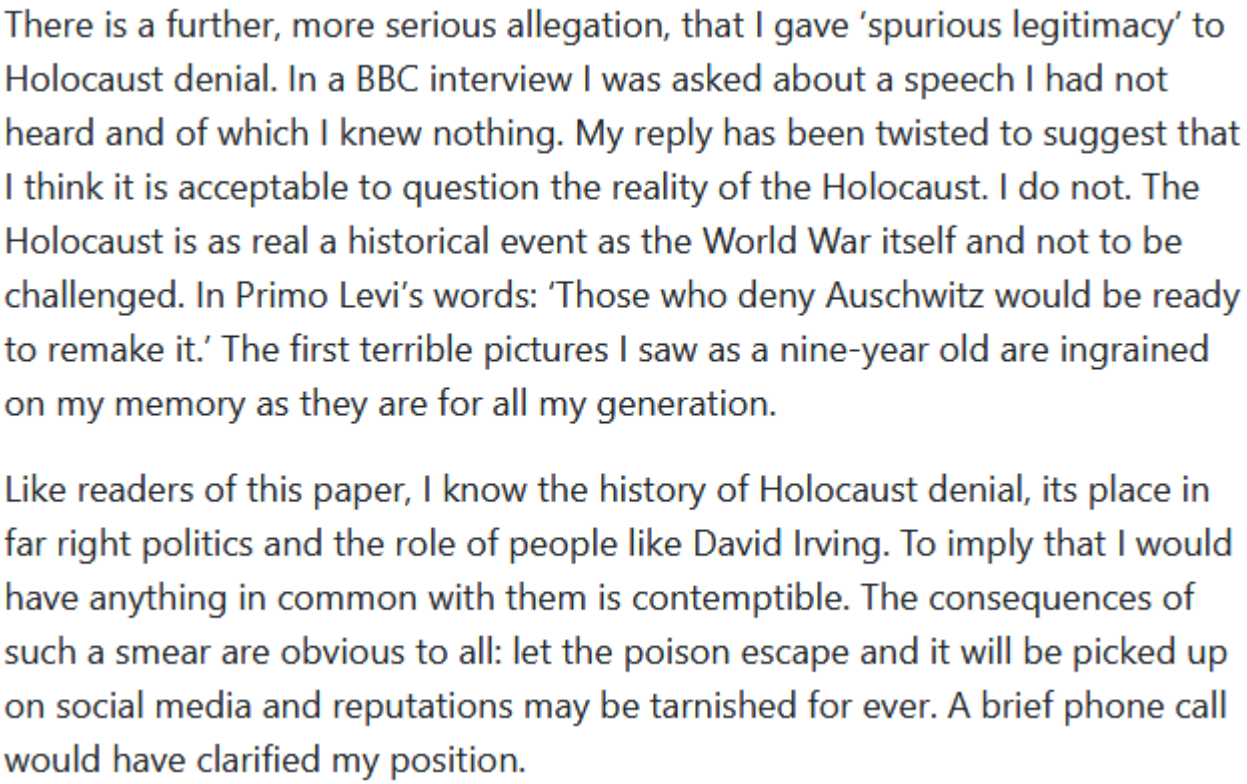
If there was any doubt about Peled's position, he made it clear in the very article cited in support of Jacobson's fictitious claim. 6/

https://t.co/8nERBHLLYt


In an email to the Guardian, Peled pointed out that he himself was Jewish, but was not a member of the Labour party. He said: "The Holocaust was a terrible crime that we must study and from which we must all learn. I reject the idea that Holocaust deniers, foolish as they may be, should be treated as criminals and I doubt that supporters of Israel should be given the authority to judge who is or is not a racist and antisemite.

This is where Ken Loach comes in. A BBC presenter demanded that he condemn a non-existent speech in favour of Holocaust denial. Loach declined to comment on a speech he had not heard and expressed scepticism about whether the reports of its content were accurate. 7/

Loach's scepticism was entirely justified, of course. His position was then cynically misrepresented by Jonathan Freedland, a prolific fabulist. The Guardian published a truncated version of Loach's reply to Freedland: this comes from the full text. 8/


There is a further, more serious allegation, that I gave 'spurious legitimacy' to Holocaust denial. In a BBC interview I was asked about a speech I had not heard and of which I knew nothing. My reply has been twisted to suggest that I think it is acceptable to question the reality of the Holocaust. I do not. The Holocaust is as real a historical event as the World War itself and not to be challenged. In Primo Levi's words: 'Those who deny Auschwitz would be ready to remake it.' The first terrible pictures I saw as a nine-year old are ingrained on my memory as they are for all my generation.

Like readers of this paper, I know the history of Holocaust denial, its place in far right politics and the role of people like David Irving. To imply that I would have anything in common with them is contemptible. The consequences of such a smear are obvious to all: let the poison escape and it will be picked up on social media and reputations may be tarnished for ever. A brief phone call would have clarified my position.

@jsternweiner discusses the whole episode in detail here, along with several other fables from the 2017 Labour conference:

https://t.co/orXU8ee72O 9/

“Ken Loach declined to condemn a Jewish man for saying he doesn’t think Holocaust deniers should be put in prison, however repugnant their views may be” doesn’t sound as good as “Ken Loach supports Holocaust denial”, but that’s what actually happened. 10/