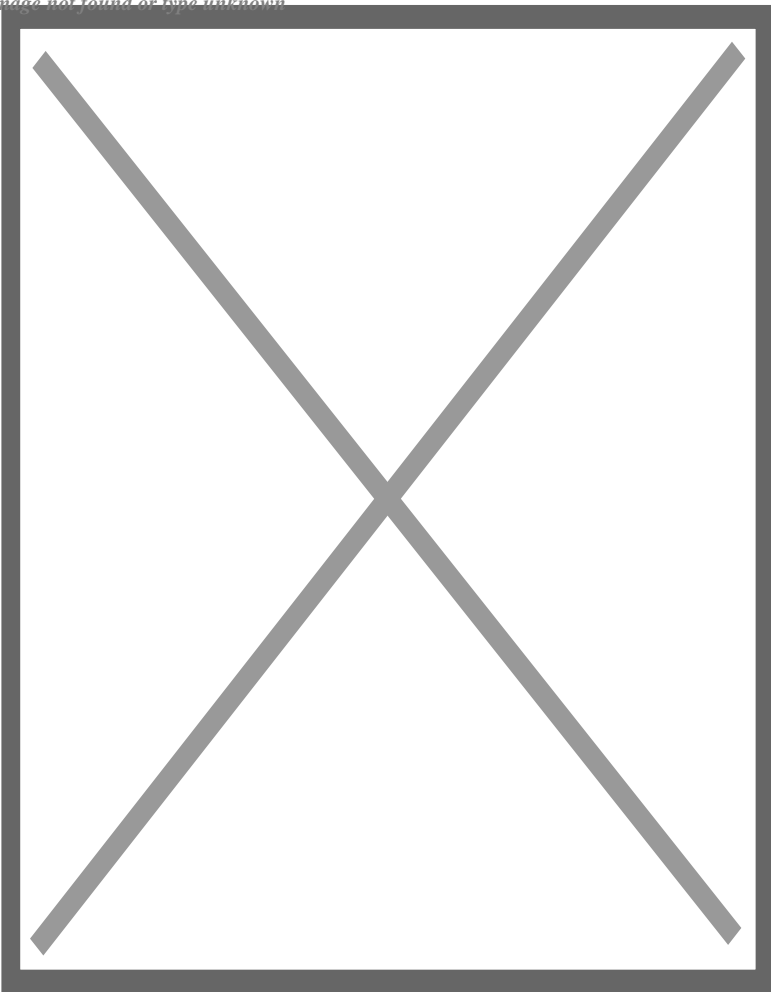


UK Conservatives' top donor Frank Hester spoke of hating all Black women

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London, March 12 (RHC)-- The biggest donor to Britain's governing Conservative Party has come under fire after he reportedly said looking at the country's longest serving Black lawmaker made him "want to hate all Black women" and she "should be shot".

Frank Hester has given 10 million pounds (\$12.8m) to Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's party in the past year, and the publication of his comments from 2019 prompted the opposition Labour Party to urge the Conservatives to return the donation.

The Guardian newspaper quoted Hester as referring to Diane Abbott, who became the first Black woman to be elected to the Parliament of the United Kingdom when she won a seat in 1987. "It's like trying not to be racist, but you see Diane Abbott on the TV, and you're just like, I hate, you just want to hate all Black women because she's there, and I don't hate all Black women at all, but I think she should be shot," he was quoted as saying.

Hester said in a statement that he "accepts that he was rude about Diane Abbott in a private meeting several years ago but his criticism had nothing to do with her gender nor colour of skin." He said he abhors racism and had tried to apologise to Abbott.

"Mr Hester has made clear that while he was rude, his criticism had nothing to do with her gender nor the colour of her skin. He has since apologised," a Conservative Party spokesperson said.

"The comments about Diane Abbott are just abhorrent," Labour leader Keir Starmer told ITV on Tuesday. "This apology this morning that is pretending that what was said wasn't racist or anything to do with the fact she's a woman, I don't buy that I'm afraid, and I think that it's time the Tory Party called it out and returned the money."

Abbott, 70, sits as an independent after being kicked out of the Labour Party caucus for comments that suggested Jewish and Irish people do not experience racism "all their lives." Abbott issued a statement Tuesday saying Hester's remarks were alarming for a public figure who is a visible presence in the community because she doesn't have a car and regularly walks or takes the bus.

"It is frightening," Abbott said. "I am a single woman, and that makes me vulnerable anyway. But to hear someone talking like this is worrying."

Hester's comments are likely to revive scrutiny of the Conservative Party and how it handles allegations of racism. Former party chairperson Lee Anderson was suspended after he refused to apologise for saying London's first Muslim mayor, Sadiq Khan, was under the control of "Islamists".

Senior Conservative lawmakers said Anderson's comments were wrong but declined to say why or whether they were Islamophobic. Graham Stuart, a minister in Sunak's government, was asked by reporters about Hester's comments on Tuesday morning. He said they were unacceptable but refused to call them racist, telling Times Radio he did not like to "sit in judgement".

He said the party noted that Hester had said the comments made "half a decade ago" were not racist, and he told Sky News the party could not "cancel" people based on previous remarks.

Anneliese Dodds, chairperson of the Labour Party, said it was vital that the party returns the donation.

"Rishi Sunak has claimed that 'words matter' and he must know that holding on to that money would suggest the Conservatives condone these disturbing comments," she said in a statement. "Sunak must return every penny."



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