

An attack on freedom of speech and dissent

The attempted with-hunt of critics of Israel mirrors the with-hunt in Israel against critics of the Israeli state

The article published simultaneously in the Jewish Chronicle, the Jewish Telegraph and Jewish News marks a stepping up of a political campaign which has a number of objectives. The first one is to support those Labour MPs who want the Parliamentary Party to endorse “the whole (IHRA) definition” on antisemitism. If they win this vote on September 5th then they can step up pressure on the Labour Party NEC to capitulate and abandon their own code of conduct. Should they refuse then Labour will be denounced 'definitively' as an antisemitic and racist party.

The coalition behind this campaign consists of supporters of Israel in the Board of Deputies, the Jewish Leadership Council, the Jewish Labour Movement, Labour Friends of Israel, opponents of Corbyn in the Parliamentary Labour Party and, of course, our friends in the mass media for whom no slander against Corbyn is beyond the pale. ***Anybody of good will, who thinks that the line of least resistance, by accepting the IHRA definition will put an end to attacks on Corbyn and the Labour Party is profoundly mistaken.*** Read the joint statement carefully and you can see why.

They say that those parts of the 'examples' which Labour has not accepted have been changed in order to stop antisemites being expelled from the Labour Party. The aim of supporters of this campaign is precisely that, to expel people for certain criticisms of Israel. The article says that if the “full-definition” was adopted then “hundreds, if not thousands, of Labour and Momentum members would need to be expelled.” Clearly that “need” is the aim of the campaign. But this is not because of doing things (for instance physically attacking Jews, or abusing them in meetings) but because of opinions they hold about Israel which supporters of the Israeli state disagree with. It wants the Labour Party to operate a kind of police regime which stops members expressing views which supporters of Israel consider to be beyond the pale.

“Racial antisemitism” and “political antisemitism”

Inadvertently the joint article admits that the dispute revolves around Israel since it differentiates between “racial antisemitism” and “political antisemitism”. It says that “Labour makes a distinction between racial antisemitism targeting Jews (unacceptable) and political antisemitism (acceptable).” So they admit that Labour is opposed to “racial antisemitism” but, apparently, it is guilty of 'political antisemitism'. What exactly is “political antisemitism”?

Antisemitism is prejudice and discrimination against Jews because they are Jews. It can take written form, verbal form and, as we know, can take the form of physical attacks against Jews. So for instance an attack against Jews per se because of what Israel does makes an antisemitic presumption that *all* Jews are responsible for what the Israeli government does, and all Jews agree with it, which is patent nonsense.

In attempting to label Corbyn and Labour as antisemitic it is necessary for Zionist and non-Zionist opponents of Labour to place an equals sign between calling Israel a racist state and antisemitism. Presumably this is what they mean by “political antisemitism”. We

must differentiate between [real and counterfeit antisemitism](http://martinwicks.org/2018/04/03/anti-semitism-real-and-counterfeit/).¹

The “threat” of Corbyn becoming Prime Minister, of course, connects with the very same view expressed by none other than our current Prime Minister.

“An existential threat”

The joint article takes hyperbole to a new level. It says that a Corbyn government would pose “an existential threat to Jewish life in this country”. What exactly does this mean? Jews will be driven out of the country? Jews will be physically attacked by Labour Party members? Their lives will be made intolerable? The lack of an explanation as to what means is convenient for whipping up hysteria. What it might mean can be seen from the outrageous article in the same edition of the Jewish Chronicle by Miriam Shaaviv which is a kind of fable about what would happen under a Corbyn government. Writing from the vantage point of 2020, she writes what might in other circumstances be a satirical article. But its slanderous intent is deadly serious. This is what happens under a Corbyn government.

- Labour's first act on coming to power was to declare that Britain no longer accepted the IHRA definition of antisemitism. It said it would use the NEC version “which allowed Jews to be accused of being more loyal to Israel than to their own country” and permitted claims that Israel is “a racist endeavour”.
- “This was swiftly followed by a Bill declaring that Zionism is racism, thus restricting political displays of support for the Jewish state. Thousands of Jews quit twitter in fear, after incessant abuse and death threats by antisemites – who now felt that the political wind was at their back. Many Jews feeling unsafe, deleted all traces of their presence online.
- A furious row erupts when a Labour MP accused Jewish schools of fostering support for the Jewish state. Ofsted was mandated to ask students, during inspections, whether they believed in a Jewish homeland, and inspected books in the libraries to ensure that all references to Israel were redacted. Several Jewish schools were put into special measures when it emerged that they had been “promoting racism” - otherwise known as celebrating Israeli Independence Day.”
- At universities across the country, Jewish professors were incensed to be called into meetings with their vice chancellors, where they were asked to disavow Israel before being allow back into the classroom. It was nothing personal, they were told, but the BDS campaign now considered any supporter of Israel a legitimate target in the UK, and universities did not want to attract that kind of attention.
- The crisis escalated after Corbyn hosted his first foreign leader – Hezbollah's Hassan Nasrullah. Tens of thousands of supporters of the terror group gathered in central London, waving Hezbollah flags, and burning the Israeli flag....a group of Jews was forced to hide out in a central London synagogue, which was surrounded by Hezbollah supporters screaming about “zionists”. They had to be smuggled out by police.
- In the wake of the sharp rise in threats to Jewish institutions the BOD asked for a meeting with Corbyn only to be denied.
- An emergency appeal by the CST to fund additional security for Jewish synagogues and schools is turned down by the government. The CST's annual fund raising

¹ <http://martinwicks.org/2018/04/03/anti-semitism-real-and-counterfeit/>

dinner is cancelled – anyone who could afford a ticket had escaped from London during the Great Capital Flight in the weeks following Corbyn's election. "Terrifies Jewish parents who could not afford to leave simply had to pray that the threats against their children never materialised."

So we have a picture of Corbyn as Prime Minister inviting as first foreign guest the head of Hezbollah, ignoring attacks on Jews and banning employees from supporting Israel. Interesting to see the economic analysis of the Great Capital Flight, a nice piece of propaganda designed to show why the country cannot afford a Labour government with Corbyn as Prime Minister. Labour must be stopped by any means necessary.

Do unto Brits as they do unto Israelis

What's important to note in relation to this campaign is that it is very similar to the campaign in Israel which seeks to outlaw expressions of opposition to the actions of the Israeli state. For instance, it has taken action against NGOs that receive financial support from abroad. It has banned organisations such as "breaking the silence" (Israeli soldiers whose experience in policing the occupation has led them to oppose it and speak out against it) from speaking in schools. This assault on democracy, on the democratic rights of people to dissent from received wisdom, is designed to stop people challenging government propaganda. The recent Nationality Law, as [I have written on previously](#),² formalises what has been the practice of the state for many years, instituting a kind of Jewish supremacy and constitutionally relegating Israeli Arabs to a second class status.

Supporters of the Israeli state in Britain, both those who self-identify as Zionists, and non-Zionists, including in the Parliamentary Labour Party, are attempting to do to the Labour Party membership what the Israeli state is doing to domestic critics and opponents. Just as Israel outlaws political participation to people who dissent from the mythical 'Jewish and democratic' nature of the state and outlaw discussion in the Knesset of the very idea of Israel becoming 'a state of all its citizens', supporters of this campaign in relation to the Labour Party want to outlaw political opinions about the Israeli state with which they disagree. You can agree or disagree with the opinion that Israel is a racist state, but there is nothing inherently antisemitic in such a view. Many Israelis share that opinion.

What is especially sickening about this attempt to label Corbyn and Labour as antisemitic is the fact that many of the people who support it are silent on the Nationality Law recently passed in Israel. Their attempt to label opposition to Israel as a Jewish state as antisemitic is in reality *an attack on the democratic right to dissent against received wisdom. It constitutes an attempt to witch-hunt people, not for what they have done but for opinions that they hold.*

The differentiation between 'racial antisemitism' and 'political antisemitism' shows that the nub of this dispute is about Israel. As somebody who is opposed to the ethno-religious state in Israel I have supported those Israeli Jews (as well as Arabs) who are fighting against the assault on democracy and against the promotion of Israeli racism against the minority population.

What is certain is that there can never been any resolution of the conflict without full equality for all its citizens, regardless of ethnicity, religion and so on. Israel cannot both be a Jewish state and a democratic one. Disagree with that view if you will but don't label it as

² <http://martinwicks.org/2018/07/25/defence-of-the-israeli-state-is-the-real-motive-for-the-campaign-against-labour-antisemitism/>

antisemitic. I support Israeli Jews, just ones with different politics than those supported by Zionists³.

Labour's prospects

One final comment on Labour's prospects in the light of this dispute. If the PLP votes to adopt the "full IHRA definition" in contradiction with the NEC's code of conduct this will set up a further round of internal strife. For some in the PLP this is exactly what they want because they haven't given up on driving Corbyn out. Stoked by the mas media there is a definite motivation to use this issue to either get rid of Corbyn or to prevent the election of a Labour government. For some in the PLP this is more important than a Labour government. Some of the Shadow Cabinet are calling for the NEC to cave in. Even John McDonnell expressed the view that Margaret Hodge's abuse of Corbyn was based on a misunderstanding of the code of conduct. *Nothing could be further from the truth*. It is a political campaign with a political motive, essentially to silence critics of Israel.

As we have seen earlier the witch-hunters see the "need" to expel "hundreds, if not thousands" of members. If Labour adopts all the "examples" and large scale expulsions do not follow then there will be a campaign for Labour to organise a purge. Any word out of place, every opinion which somebody expresses which somebody else would deem to be in contradiction with the IHRA will be the subject of a complaint and the demand for expulsion. It will create a with-hunting atmosphere and the witch-hunters will be on the look out for witches unless Labour defends the right of its members to express political views on Israel with which supporters of the Israeli state disagree.

Martin Wicks
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3 By the way this isn't a term of abuse but a designation of their politics. An organisation such as the Jewish Labour Movement is affiliated to the International Zionist Organisation, so they can hardly complain about being called Zionists. They call themselves Socialist Zionists.