

Witch hunting socialists, including Jewish ones

“Because it’s very much part of their politics, of hard left politics, to be against capitalists and to see Jewish people as the financiers of capital. Ergo you are anti-Jewish people”. Humphrys followed up: “In other words, to be anti-capitalist you have to be anti-Semitic?” “Yes,” the Labour MP said. “Not everybody, but there is a certain... there’s a certain strand of it. These people are not Labour, have never been Labour, but we now find them in our party.” MP, Siobhan McDonagh

The comments of Siobhan McDonagh on the Today programme are typical of the methods of those who are creating a witch hunt atmosphere in the Labour Party. Of course, she rowed back a bit, it's only a “strand” (how large we aren't told) not everybody. Obviously McDonagh thinks “these people” need to be thrown out of the party. Who are these unidentified people who apparently believe that Jews are the “financiers of capital”? They are straw men. Of course, you can find all manner of bizarre and disgusting material on the internet and social media is renowned for the prevalence of abuse. Somehow the instantaneous nature of the medium sees people who could probably have a rational discussion face to face flying off the handle and partaking in an exchange of abuse with people whom they disagree with, on-line. We must also take account of the fact there are agents provocateurs attempting to stir the pot. This is not a conspiracy theory. It was recently discovered that four people who were presenting themselves as Labour members and posting comments, including about “killing Jews”, had in fact stolen photographs for these bogus Facebook accounts. We have previous seen evidence of Tories masquerading as Corbyn supporters.

When Tom Watson tells us that Luciana Berger has been driven out of the Party by “anti-Semitic thugs”, this is such a serious allegation it is incumbent upon him to *provide some evidence or withdraw the comment*. How many members of Wavertree CLP have been disciplined or expelled for abuse of the MP, anti-Semitic or otherwise? How many Party members nationally have been disciplined or expelled for abusing/threatening her? We should be told.

It's certainly true that Luciana Berger and other MPs have received appalling abuse and threats. There are people in prison for threatening her though none of them are Party members. If Watson accuses members of being thugs, that is violent people, let him provide the evidence or apologise, otherwise people will draw the conclusion that he is slandering his party and its members.

Differences between Jewish members

One of the features of the current situation is that the sharpest differences are between Jewish members of the Party, those who support the Israeli state and those who do not. When Luciana Berger and people with similar views to hers demonstrated against anti-Semitism in the Labour Party, they were happy to do so together with Tory Ministers current and old (our old friend Norman Tebbit joined in). Jewish non or anti-Zionists organised a counter-demonstration because they were angry about their party being labelled as anti-Semitic. They were denounced by Zionists (that's what they call themselves) as 'kapos'¹ or 'self-hating Jews' because they have different views on the Israeli state. To denounce these Jews as anti-Semitic is both ludicrous and slanderous.

Tom Watson talks of Jeremy Corbyn “winning back the trust” of “the Jewish community”.

¹ Kapos were prisoners in concentration camps, some of whom were Jewish, who were put in charge of work gangs. Their job was to force prisoners to work despite being sick and/or starving. There could hardly be a worse insult by one Jew to another.

In reality there is no single, homogenous, Jewish community. What he means is supporters of the Israeli state. He himself says he is “a proud defender of Israel”. Of course, Corbyn never had the confidence of the Jewish organisations or Jewish press that Watson likes to identify as “the Jewish community”. When a joint statement by three Jewish publications suggested that the election of a Corbyn government was an “[existential threat to Jewish life in this country](#)”, Watson, the Labour Friends of Israel and the Jewish Labour Movement could not bring themselves to disagree with this *hysterical exaggeration*. There was an accompanying article in the Jewish Chronicle which told the story of what happens when a Corbyn government takes power. Naturally enough his first foreign visitor is the head of Hezbollah, and his government bans books that support Israel from Libraries. Any calumny will do. The Board of Deputies by the way - Watson wants Corbyn to “win back their confidence” - is now such a right wing organisation that it cannot bring itself to criticise Netanyahu for his alliance with Israeli fascists to try and stay in power. Even the American AIPAC has done so, but the BOD remains silent.

The IHRA “examples”

This witch hunt aims to outlaw views with which LFI and the JLM disagree. The IHRA definition and all its examples were used to try to paint up political differences over Israel as anti-Semitism. In July of last year I wrote that

“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.”

Sure enough the demands for more expulsions have continued. The joint statement by the three Jewish publications said that if all the “examples” relating to Israel had been adopted by Labour then “hundreds, if not thousands, of Labour and Momentum members would need to be expelled.” When it was adopted in September of last year then these organisations expected mass expulsions to follow. The joint statement had insisted that unless Labour adopted “the full definition” then it “would be seen by all decent people as an institutionally racist, anti-Semitic party”.

Jewish Labour Movement – judge and jury

The JLM last year wrote to Jenny Formby with various demands of the Party. Their 19 demands included:

- a guarantee that they would be the only Jewish Labour affiliate.
- “appropriate resourcing” of the JLM to deliver Labour’s anti-Semitism training.
- JLM anti-Semitism training to be made mandatory for all CLPs.
- Acceptance of the IHRA definition to be mandatory for all Labour candidates.
- All Labour Groups must adopt the IHRA definition.

There is a *political agenda* here which seeks to bar people from expressing disagreements with the IHRA “examples”. The JLM will decide what is anti-Semitic and what isn’t. If it is the only possible Jewish affiliate to Labour, then since it is a Zionist organisation (affiliated to the International Zionist Organisation) Jewish members who do not support the Israeli state cannot be members. Jewish members who do not support Israel being a “Jewish state” and support Israeli Jews who want their country to be “a state of all its

citizens” are traduced as being anti-Semitic.²

The JLM demanded not only the exclusive right to carry out all training, with its particular slant, but funding from Labour to do it on a grand scale. Of course, genuine training rather than propaganda would need to facilitate discussion of different views rather than *imposing a highly contested view as the only 'correct' view on anti-Semitism and Israel*. The JLM wants to be judge and jury.

It is difficult to understand how anybody who considers themselves to be a socialist can support an ethno-religious state in which one ethnicity has special privileges and dominates other ethnicities. This is what JLM supports. Ultimately, these are political differences which can only be dealt with by political discussion. But the JLM and LFI, as well as some Labour MPs want to silence critics of the Israeli state, including Jewish ones.

The furore over the question of anti-Semitism, real or imagined, has silenced some Labour Party members who are frightened of being accused of anti-Semitism. The atmosphere is such that whatever you write in relation to this issue it's safest to check it six times, because any imprecise formulation will be picked up and used against you. There is literally *a hunt for witches* taking place with people trawling through Facebook looking for something written, how ever many years ago, which can be used as evidence to 'convict' them. There are genuine complaints but there are certainly malicious ones as well. From the statistics published by Jenny Formby we know that nearly 20% of the complaints were from Margaret Hodge alone. She put in 200 in relation to 111 people and only 19 were related to Labour Party members! Overall, 40% of the claims were in relation to people who were not even Labour Party members. We could usefully have more information, without disclosing who the individuals were, such as what exactly were people expelled for, what were people warned for (146 were given a 'first warning'), and what were the type of complaints in relation to those people who were found to have 'no case to answer'. Despite the fact that a third of the complaints against members were dismissed out of hand, to my knowledge not a single person who has put in a malicious complaint has had any action taken against them as yet.

“institutional anti-Semitism” - a compulsory view?

Just recently Hackney North CLP passed a resolution which expressed the view that the labelling of the Party as “institutionally anti-Semitic” was a slander. Stella Creasey, MP, immediately called for an investigation into the Party. Are they not allowed to express a point of view? This was apparently insensitive to the feeling of Jewish members, except that some Jewish members supported the resolution. Is Stella Creasey saying that it is now obligatory for CLP's to accept that their party is “institutionally anti-Semitic”?

The irony of all this is that it takes place against the backdrop of a real rise in anti-Semitism across Europe. We need to challenge genuine anti-Semitism which sets up Jews as scapegoats for economic and social problems which are in reality the product of the global capitalist crisis. To do that, of course, it is necessary, amongst other things, to condemn the Netanyahu government's collaboration with anti-Semites in Hungary and other countries. A recent statement by a Likud Member of the Knesset infamously announced “they may be anti-Semites but they support us”. In an article in the American Jewish publication “Forward”, reproduced in the Guardian, the writer Peter Beinart, examines the complexities of the issue. He discusses the phenomenon of the anti-Semitic supporters of Israel. You can find such people in Britain as well, such as 'Tommy Robinson'. To some extent this is because these people see “Islam” as the greatest threat. Beinart's article debunks the myth that [anti-zionism is antisemitism](#). He reflects the haemorrhaging of support for the Israeli state amongst US Jews in response to the

² The main author of the IHRA opposed it being a legal definition because he was concerned that it would be used to silence people over political differences.

increasingly rightward trajectory of the government and its laws.

Anti-Semitism is not complicated. It is hatred of Jews because they are Jews, discrimination against Jews because they are Jews. It can be verbal, literary or take violent form. *There is no place for such people in the Labour movement.* But the attempt of supporters of Israel to paint Corbyn as an anti-Semite and the Party as “institutionally anti-Semitic” has a political purpose. It is both a means of undermining the leadership and witch hunting people who cannot support a “Jewish state”.

Factional struggle

Tom Watson's behaviour since he posted his video shows that he is organising a factional struggle for control of the Labour Party. He is going to “drive the scourge of anti-Semitism out of the party”. Apparently, not enough people have been expelled. Of course, if Watson could provide convincing evidence that there were “racist thugs” in the Party *then we could all agree on expelling them*. But none has been offered thus far.

I don't think that anti-Semitism is just a convenient excuse to use against Corbyn. Watson and some sections of the CLP really do want to silence critics of Israel as a 'good' in itself. Of course, a certain amount of criticism is acceptable, provided that it does not cross a line which self-professed Zionists want to determine. They think that nobody should be allowed to say that Israel is a racist state, even though that is the opinion of some Israeli Jews. Nobody should be allowed to call for an end to the “Jewish state” and for the country to be “a state of all its citizens” even if Israeli Jews also hold such an opinion. This mirrors the situation in Israel where opponents of Zionism are being silenced. The Knesset was not even allowed to discuss a Bill to make Israel “a state of all its citizens”. It was blocked from reaching the floor of the house. The method of the thought police is necessary to outlaw such opinions in whatever country. It is wrong in principle and it has the added consequence here that it threatens to destroy the electoral chances of the Labour Party.

The JLM decides to stay... and do as much damage as it can

The Jewish Labour Movement has decided not to disaffiliate from the Labour Party. However, they made it clear that they will work to remove Corbyn as Leader. They said that the issue of anti-Semitism cannot be resolved so long as he remains Leader. Last November the JLM sent in a complaint to the Equality and Human Rights Commission calling on it to investigate Labour for being “institutionally anti-Semitic”. It is difficult to imagine that you could both work for the election of a Labour government and work to have your Party declared to be “institutionally anti-Semitic”. Why would you want to stay in such a party? Whilst the complaint predates the formation of the 'Independent Group' does anybody imagine that they are not in discussion with Luciana Berger and Joan Ryan; that they are not continuing to work together with them?

So far as the Labour Friends of Israel is concerned, they have stated that Joan Ryan will continue to be their Parliamentary Chair even though she is the member of a Parliamentary group which has denounced Labour as “as bad as the Tories” and whose central aim is to prevent the election of a Labour government. Perhaps they should change their name to Friends of Israel.

Self-discipline

Those who oppose these witch hunting methods have a responsibility to give no ammunition to the witch hunters. Whilst people are inevitably angry, self-discipline is necessary. **All those who post abuse online (“Zionist scum” and such like) are doing**

a disservice to efforts to defeat the witch hunt. Make your arguments political and measured. The purpose of discussion is not to make yourself feel better or to vent your anger but to argue your case and to use a scalpel to dissect the case of those who are traducing Jews who do not support an ethno-religious state.

One final point. In my view this situation has been badly handled by the leadership. That doesn't mean just Corbyn. The backlog of cases built up under McNichol, the man who attempted to keep Corbyn off of the second leadership ballot. **What is needed is complete transparency.** The publication of the figures by Jenny Formby is a start in providing the necessary information to make an objective assessment of the extent of anti-Semitism within the party. Those who a priori are in favour of expelling “hundreds if not thousands” cannot give any lessons in democracy. It is no small thing to accuse people of anti-Semitism, especially Jewish members.

There should be no place for genuine anti-Semites in the Labour Party. Likewise those who denounce innocent people as anti-Semites on the grounds of *political differences* should face serious consequences for slander and malicious complaints.

Martin Wicks

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Postscript

In today's Guardian Margaret Hodge makes the most extraordinary demand. She says that CLPs which “minimise the problem” should be closed down. In other words CLPs where the members have a different opinion to her as to whether or not their party is “anti-Semitic” should be closed down by her thought police; closed down not because of anti-Semitism but because they have a different opinion of the scale of anti-Semitism in the Party. The witch finder general has spoken.