

Antisemitism in the UK Labour Party Editorial

I am pleased to publish an open-access online preprint of two articles and a research note that will appear in the forthcoming issue of the *Journal of Contemporary Antisemitism* 3, no. 2 (Fall 2020). This preprint is a new and exciting development for the *Journal*. It has been made possible by the generous donations of sponsors, including BICOM's co-chairman, David Cohen, whose support for the work of the *Journal* allows for timely scholarly analysis to be put into the public sphere.

Our first preprint is of a themed section, "Antisemitism in the UK Labour Party." Although Jeremy Corbyn's replacement as Labour Party leader, Sir Keir Starmer, has promised to draw a line under the issue of antisemitism in the Party following his inaugural vow to "tear out this poison by its roots," the Corbyn-era controversies continue to drag on as one antisemitism row after another hits the headlines.

In April 2020, shortly after Keir Starmer took over from Jeremy Corbyn, an internal party report written by the old Corbyn regime was leaked to the media. The report claimed that Corbyn's efforts to tackle antisemitism in the Labour Party were sabotaged by internal factional opponents. The contents of the report caused a scandal and are now the subject of an internal Labour Party inquiry. In "Labour's Leaked Report: Who is to Blame for Antisemitism in Britain's Labour Party?," Dave Rich assesses the report's claims, set against the wider context of Labour's internal divisions and the Equality and Human Rights Commission's (EHRC) ongoing inquiry into antisemitism in the Party. He concludes that the report was written not with the purpose of defending the Party from the EHRC's inquiry, but to provide a

myth of betrayal that allows the Corbyn project to retain its self-image of ideological and political purity. Dr Dave Rich is the director of policy at the Community Security Trust and an associate research fellow at the Pears Institute for the Study of Antisemitism, Birkbeck, University of London. Dr Rich's latest volume, *The Left's Jewish Problem: Jeremy Corbyn, Israel and Antisemitism*, was published by Biteback in 2016, with a second edition released in 2018.

In "Conceptual Vandalism, Historical Distortion: the Labour Antisemitism Crisis and the Limits of Class Instrumentalism," Matthew Bolton examines the arguments put forward by left academics and activists who seek to refute the charge of antisemitism against Jeremy Corbyn's Labour Party. Focusing on a set of essays written over the course of the Corbyn era and published by Verso as a free e-book during the 2019 election, Dr Bolton argues that the roots of the crisis can be traced to a tendency within the contemporary left's tendency to reduce the question of antisemitism to that of "class interests," with antisemitism depicted as an "instrument" used by the powerful to divide the "oppressed." Dr Bolton suggests that while such a reductive approach assures the left of its own innocence by making left antisemitism a contradiction in terms, dissolving the particularity of antisemitism into a general concept of "oppression" leaves the left unable to comprehend the possibility of exterminatory antisemitism as an end-in-itself, and leads to a worldview in which the modern histories of antisemitism, the Jewish people, the Holocaust, and the State of Israel, are radically distorted. Dr Matthew Bolton is an associate lecturer in Politics and Philosophy at the University of Chichester. His latest edited volume (with Frederick Harry Pitts),

Corbynism: A Critical Approach, was published in 2018 by Emerald.

In “Judeophobic Antisemitism among British Voters, 2016–2020,” Daniel Allington examines survey data collected for Campaign Against Antisemitism throughout the Corbyn years. Those years saw Britain’s famously stable political system go through an extraordinary level of upheaval, with two parliaments dissolved after only two years in power. They were also extraordinary in that they saw one of the country’s two main political parties taken over by a movement that faced repeated and credible accusations of antisemitism. Because the same survey questions were asked year after year, direct comparisons can be made. Allington finds that levels of Judeophobic antisemitism stayed roughly constant among Conservative voters,

yet fell consistently among Liberal Democrat voters—while among Labour voters, they rose to a peak in 2018 before declining back to something close to their original 2016 level in 2020. As he observes, this may reflect vote-switching, changes in attitudes, or a combination of the two. Statistics for antizionist antisemitism are provided for the years 2019 and 2020, but are unavailable for 2016–2018. Dr Daniel Allington is a senior lecturer in Social and Cultural Intelligence at King’s College, London. Together with Matthias Becker, he is carrying out a major study of online antisemitism with funding from the Landecker Foundation.

My team of dedicated editors and I hope that you will find this timely collection of articles, “Antisemitism in the UK Labour Party,” to be of interest.

Lesley Klaff
Editor in chief