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## 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



# Labour's Leaked Report: Who Is to Blame for Antisemitism in Britain's Labour Party?

Dave Rich

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## Abstract

In April 2020, shortly after Keir Starmer replaced Jeremy Corbyn as leader of the UK Labour Party, an internal party report concerning the workings of Labour's internal disciplinary unit in relation to antisemitism was leaked to the media. This report was over 850 pages long and was intended to be submitted to the Equality and Human Rights Commission, which is conducting an inquiry into allegations of antisemitism in the Party. However, Labour's lawyers refused to allow it to be used, almost certainly because the content was so damaging to the Party's own defence. It confirmed many of the claims made by Jewish Party members and community organisations during Corbyn's leadership of the party, namely that the disciplinary system was not fit for purpose and cases of alleged antisemitism were ignored or delayed and punishments were too weak. When it was leaked the report caused a scandal because it claimed that Corbyn's efforts to deal with antisemitism were sabotaged by his own Party staff, who were mostly drawn from factions opposed to his left wing project. Furthermore, the report claimed that this was part of a broader conspiracy against Corbyn that even extended to Labour Party staff trying to prevent a Labour victory in the 2017 General Election. The leaked report is selective and inaccurate in many respects and ignores the role played by Corbyn and his close advisers in denying the problem of antisemitism existed. Nor does it address the reasons why people with antisemitic views were attracted to Labour under his leadership. It is most likely that it was written to allow Corbyn and his supporters to continue to claim that their project did not fail on its own merits, but was betrayed by internal saboteurs.

**Keywords** Labour Party, Antisemitism, Jeremy Corbyn, Left -Wing, UK Politics, EHRC, Keir Starmer, Chakrabarti Report.

One legacy of the Labour Party's troubles with antisemitism that will be welcomed by future researchers of this phenomenon is the sheer number of reports generated, written, published, quashed, and, on this occasion, leaked, by the various different actors in this saga. Each of these reports was conceived for a different purpose and met a different end, and their respective content, and the ways in which they were, or were not, published, all contribute to our understanding of how the Labour Party found itself sucked into the quicksand of antisemitism, and why it will

take Labour's new leadership a considerable time to drag the party back onto solid ground.

In February 2016, the party's official student body, Labour Students, investigated allegations of antisemitism within Oxford University Labour Club. Their report was never published; instead, the Labour peer Baroness Royall was asked by the Party's National Executive Committee (NEC) to investigate, and report on, the same allegations. It is not known why the NEC took the job of investigating antisemitism at a student Labour Club out of the hands

of Labour Students; but Baroness Royall got to work and in May 2016 delivered her fifteen-page report to Labour's NEC—who promptly decided not to publish that either. Instead, they released only the report's Executive Summary and its Recommendations, from which the most eye-catching and, for some, reassuring, conclusions were that “I do not believe that there is institutional antisemitism within OULC” and there had even been “at least one case of serious false allegations of antisemitism” at the Club. It was only when the full report was leaked to the *Jewish Chronicle* newspaper in August of that year that it emerged Baroness Royall had in fact made a significantly different finding in the body of the report, where she wrote that “There appears to be cultural [*sic*] problem in which behaviour and language that would once have been intolerable is now tolerated. Some Jewish members do not feel comfortable attending the meetings, let alone participating.” She added, “It is clear to me from the weight of witnessed allegations received that there have been some incidents of antisemitic behaviour and that it is appropriate for the disciplinary procedures of our Party to be invoked.”<sup>1</sup> Royall was unhappy at the way her report had been selectively published by the party's NEC; but by this stage it had been superseded anyway, as the Party had launched a third inquiry into antisemitism, with a much broader remit and led by the human rights lawyer Shami Chakrabarti—with Baroness Royall as one of her two vice chairs. This inquiry was a reaction to the escalating problem that antisemitism was causing Labour under the leadership of Jeremy Corbyn. Its terms of reference covered “anti-Semitism and other forms of racism” across the whole of the party; rule changes and improvements to Labour's disciplinary processes; questions of appropriate behaviour between party members; and education and training for officials, candidates and elected MPs.<sup>2</sup> Chakrabarti concluded that the Labour Party is “not overrun by antisemitism, Islamophobia, or other forms of racism,” warned against the use of “racial or religious tropes

and stereotypes about any group of people” and banned the antisemitic insult “Zio.” This inquiry concerned itself mostly with matters of process and party rules, and did not investigate to any depth the political ideas or culture that lay behind the antisemitism that had emerged in the party. It was nominally independent, but the swift ennoblement of Baroness Chakrabarti and her appointment to Corbyn's shadow cabinet soon after she completed her report left many feeling it was nothing of the sort.

At this point, critics of Jeremy Corbyn's leadership got in on the act. A selection of the submissions made to the Chakrabarti Inquiry, but largely ignored in its final report, was compiled and published in book form as part of a project that included a film: both titled *Whitewashed: Anti-Semitism in the Labour Party*.<sup>3</sup> Professor Alan Johnson, editor of the journal *Fathom*, wrote a 129-page report arguing that the Labour Party was institutionally antisemitic.<sup>4</sup> Perhaps the most consequential report so far the submission by the Jewish Labour Movement to the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) asking them to open a statutory inquiry into the Labour Party for breaches of the Equality Act—an invitation the EHRC accepted. The JLM's submission amounted to approximately 2,000 pages of legal argument, witness evidence, whistleblower testimony and media clippings.<sup>5</sup> It was exceeded, in size at least, by a submission from the Labour Against Antisemitism campaign group, who amassed a staggering 10,000 pages (or thereabouts) of screenshots and other evidence, mainly gleaned from social media, of antisemitism amongst Labour members, activists, and supporters. Still to come at the time of writing is the EHRC's own report, which is keenly awaited by those who hope it will be the final word on whether the Labour Party broke the law by discriminating against its Jewish members; and whether it did so in such a way that would justify describing Britain's foremost progressive party as institutionally antisemitic.

Except that even an unequivocal ruling from Britain's official equalities watchdog would not be the final word in this seemingly endless argument, because defenders of Corbyn's leadership are convinced, and are already claiming, that Corbyn was the victim of a plot by his factional opponents within the Labour Party machine. They argue that the conspirators deliberately failed to process complaints of antisemitism or to punish those guilty of it, while misleading Corbyn and his fellow naïfs in Labour's leadership office who had no idea that such sabotage was going on under their noses. This theory is set out in tortuous detail in perhaps the most remarkable report on this subject so far: an 851-page, 250,000-word document, written during the latter days of Corbyn's leadership with the formal purpose of being submitted to the EHRC, withheld on the orders of the Labour Party's lawyers, and then leaked anyway by actors as-yet unnamed. Despite its unglamorous title of *The Work of the Labour Party's Governance and Legal Unit in relation to anti-Semitism, 2014–2019*,<sup>6</sup> it amounts to a long and detailed allegation that a conspiracy of shocking cynicism at the heart of the party not only prevented Labour from ridding itself of antisemitism (until Corbyn's supporters wrested control of the party machine in 2018 and began the arduous work of cleansing the party), but also denied Britain a transformative socialist government. And even this will not be the end of the reporting production line, because the leaking of this report led the Party's NEC to establish yet another inquiry, led by an independent senior lawyer, to investigate the allegations made in the report and the way in which it was commissioned, written and leaked.<sup>7</sup>

The leaked report reveals a great deal about how the outgoing leadership team wants their record on antisemitism to be viewed. It is unambiguous in accepting that antisemitism has been a problem within Labour and rejects the notion "that it is all a 'smear' or a 'witch-hunt'," although it is confused about why this is the case.<sup>8</sup> "In 2016," it claims, "the problem

of antisemitism in the Labour Party could be attributed to a small number of individuals who had long held antisemitic views." Three years later this had become "more widespread" due to the emergence of "a specific discourse" about the issue of antisemitism in Labour, "which in itself has antisemitic undertones and has aggravated the problem."<sup>9</sup> In other words, by 2019 the existence, scale, and form of antisemitism in Labour was specific to the party. However, the report also claims that the party had become "more broadly reflective of the problems and prejudices of British society at large."<sup>10</sup> In other words, this wasn't a problem specific to Labour at all. Whatever the reason, "a small number of members [held] views which were unarguably hostile to Jewish people and in some cases frankly neo-Nazi in their nature"<sup>11</sup>—an arresting admission for a progressive, left-wing party to make. There are enough cases of antisemitism from Labour members quoted throughout this report to leave the reader in no doubt that this claim is no exaggeration, although the report does not address the issue of why such people would want to join Labour in the first place. The extensive citing of antisemitism cases in this report has created another problem for Labour. In the version that was widely leaked in April 2020, the names of all those accused of antisemitism, and of their accusers, were left unredacted. In one stroke those responsible for leaking the document potentially defamed dozens of people, while leaving dozens of others at risk of vengeful harassment or attack. This data breach is believed to be the subject of legal action and an investigation by the Information Commissioner that could cost the Labour Party, by one estimate, over £5 million in legal costs, fines, and compensation payments.<sup>12</sup>

This recognition that antisemitism in the Labour Party was, and is, a real problem, and not a smear invented by Zionists, Tories, or Blairites to undermine Corbyn's leadership, is welcome (if somewhat overdue). The report goes so far as to say that "denying that there is a problem of antisemitism within the Party contributes

to, and is part of, the problem,”<sup>13</sup> and that Labour suffers from “a culture of ‘denialism’”<sup>14</sup> amongst some members regarding antisemitism. It even credits Corbyn with recognizing the dangers of this denialism; but it omits to point out that Corbyn himself was guilty of exactly this when responding to a 2016 article about antisemitism in Labour by *Guardian* columnist Jonathan Freedland, which Corbyn described as “utterly disgusting, subliminal nastiness.”<sup>15</sup> Similar views were expressed on a regular basis by Corbyn’s closest political supporters. Here are four examples. Another *Guardian* columnist, Seumas Milne, wrote in August 2015 of “an attempt to smear [Corbyn] by association with antisemitism”<sup>16</sup> (Corbyn recruited Milne as Labour’s Executive Director of Strategy and Communications four months later). Len McCluskey, General Secretary of the Unite trades union that is Labour’s main financial backer, said the suggestion that Labour has a problem of antisemitism is “mood music that was created by people who were trying to undermine Jeremy Corbyn.”<sup>17</sup> Diane Abbott, speaking as shadow International Development Secretary in 2016, told the BBC: “It’s a smear to say that Labour has a problem with antisemitism. It is something like a smear against ordinary party members.”<sup>18</sup> Veteran left wing filmmaker Ken Loach, one of Corbyn’s best-known celebrity supporters, wrote that “exaggerated or false charges of anti-Semitism have coincided with the election of Jeremy Corbyn as leader.”<sup>19</sup> There is a long section in this report on the role of leadership in regard to antisemitism in Labour, which is composed of articles and statements made by Corbyn and others condemning antisemitism and promising to oppose it resolutely: examples of Labour’s previous leader and his closest supporters denying the scale or existence of the problem, or complaining that it was being used to damage their cause, were not included.

This report aims to explain why antisemitism became such a problem in Labour by highlighting what it claims is a combination of poor processes and factional intrigue. The argument

set out in this report is that Labour’s governance suffered from “bureaucratic drift and inertia”;<sup>20</sup> “mistakes, deficiencies, and missed opportunities to reform”;<sup>21</sup> “a lack of staff training and guidance”; and “a lack of rigorous systems and processes.”<sup>22</sup> The Governance and Legal Unit (GLU) that had responsibility for investigating and overseeing antisemitism cases “lacked systems, processes or guidance for managing complaints and disciplinary processes,”<sup>23</sup> and in 2015 and 2016 “had no systems for logging all disciplinary cases and tracking their progress.”<sup>24</sup> This was compounded by “inefficient processes, often poor judgements, and inconsistent decision-making.”<sup>25</sup> Consequently, this report claims, in ten months from April 2017 to February 2018, “there was not a single antisemitism case that went through GLU’s designed processes and received action,”<sup>26</sup> and only a small fraction of antisemitism complaints were acted on outside of that period until Jenny Formby—another Corbyn ally—became Labour’s General Secretary in April 2018. Even worse, the report claimed that the GLU allegedly provided “false and misleading information” to their superiors in Labour HQ and in Corbyn’s office, meaning there was a “hidden backlog of people” reported for antisemitism but never disciplined that the leadership was unaware of when they defended the party’s record in public.<sup>27</sup> The possibility that it was Corbyn and his staff in LOTO [the Leader Of The Opposition’s office] that prevented the GLU from acting on antisemitism cases is dismissed at several points in the report. “LOTO did not have authority over GLU, which routinely acted against LOTO’s interests and desires,”<sup>28</sup> it says; “Claims that the GLU were not able to take action on antisemitism cases because of pressure from LOTO or the NEC are simply not credible, and are directly contradicted and disproved by a vast array of documentary evidence.”<sup>29</sup>

Rather than Corbyn being to blame for these failures, the report proposes a different suspect: we are told that “the major blockage in this period appears to have been one individual, the Head of Disputes Sam Matthews.”<sup>30</sup>

By the time this report was written, Matthews was already a very public critic of the party's handling of antisemitism. He was one of eight former Labour staff members who were interviewed in an episode of the BBC current affairs show *Panorama* in July 2019, titled *Is Labour Anti-Semitic?*, that argued it was senior staff in Corbyn's leadership team that had obstructed the party's efforts to deal with antisemitism.<sup>31</sup> The interviews given by these former staffers turned whistle-blowers formed the heart of a powerful piece of political journalism that has been nominated for a BAFTA award for current affairs (full disclosure: this author was also interviewed on the program). Matthews was the most compelling of the interviewees, who not only described their first-hand experience of how antisemitism allegations were handled by Labour, but also bore witness to a working environment so toxic that it led Matthews to contemplate suicide. It can be assumed that Matthews and his former colleagues have made similar statements to the EHRC: the redacted summary of the JLM's submission to that inquiry repeatedly cites evidence given by party staff acting as whistleblowers. When the *Panorama* episode was broadcast, Labour's official media response was so condemnatory of the whistle-blowers that all but one of them sued the party for libel. In July 2020, the Labour Party withdrew their defamatory accusations, issued an unreserved apology to the whistle-blowers (and to John Ware, the BBC journalist who made the *Panorama* documentary), and paid them damages.<sup>32</sup> Corbyn objected publicly to the decision to settle this legal case and relied on the leaked report to do so. He criticized the decision to settle the libel action as "a political decision, not a legal one," warned that it "risks giving credibility to misleading and inaccurate allegations about action taken to tackle antisemitism in the Labour Party in recent years" and cited "the evidence in the leaked Labour report . . . about the role played by some of those who took part in the programme" as his justification.<sup>33</sup> The decision to settle the case was taken by Corbyn's successor

as leader, Keir Starmer, who has impeccable legal credentials as a QC and a former Director of Public Prosecutions.

All of which suggests that the outgoing party leadership would have an obvious motive to try to discredit Matthews's testimony. The leaked report claimed it was Matthews, as head of the GLU, who "fail[ed] to progress cases,"<sup>34</sup> provided "inaccurate and misleading reports"<sup>35</sup> to his superiors, "may have invented the numbers he reported"<sup>36</sup> and got away with it due to a "failure by his line managers."<sup>37</sup> The report even shares the extraordinary, and highly speculative, theory aired by unnamed "former LOTO staff" that Matthews and his colleagues in the GLU "deliberately failed to act on extreme cases of antisemitism in order to undermine the Labour Party as led by Jeremy Corbyn."<sup>38</sup> In other words, the defense put forward across 850 pages of this report, written with the intention of submitting it to the EHRC inquiry into alleged unlawful discrimination, is that the greatest hope of the left in a generation was the victim of sabotage at the hands of right-wing conspirators inside the Labour machine, who cynically manipulated the very serious and genuine issue of antisemitism in pursuit of their factional goals. Matthews strongly denies all these allegations (although he was not given the opportunity to do so within the leaked report) and his High Court vindication over his *Panorama* interview presumably leaves his remaining detractors in the weakest of positions. He—or rather, his lawyers—have described the report as a "defamatory dossier" that is "full of glaring omissions, factual inaccuracies, and innuendo."<sup>39</sup> Specifically, he says the claim that no antisemitism cases were processed by the GLU from April 2017 to February 2018 is false, and that the other statistics it contains relating to the work of the GLU are inaccurate. Having already won one legal case in relation to his *Panorama* appearance, he is taking further legal action against the Party as a result of this report.

The report does not accuse Matthews or anybody else at Labour HQ of sympathizing

with the antisemites that it claims they failed to discipline. It specifically says there is no evidence of “any antisemitic views on the part of party officials. . . . On the contrary, current and former staff members have expressed their disgust at examples of antisemitic attitudes within the party.”<sup>40</sup> What it does claim is that they were driven by factional motives. It is impossible to understand the behavior of the GLU during this period, the report claims, “without understanding the domineering role of factionalism within the Party.”<sup>41</sup> In an unwittingly comic demonstration of how domineering factionalism really is in Labour, the first 170 pages of this report—ostensibly about the work of the GLU “in relation to antisemitism”—are devoted to the subject of factional politics in the Party. Staff in the GLU, we are told, hated Jeremy Corbyn so much that they supported MPs who tried to unseat him as leader in 2016, wanted Labour to lose the General Election in 2017, and systematically used their powers to expel members who supported Corbyn and protect those who were from their own factions. In the lexicon of Labour factionalism, “trots” is a disparaging term used for people on the left of the party,<sup>42</sup> and the report quotes numerous examples of staff talking about “trot busting,” “bashing trots,” “trot spotting,” “trot hunting,” describing Corbyn himself as “that fucking trot” and one staffer claiming to be “trot smasher in chief.”<sup>43</sup> Nor was this the worst insult directed at Corbyn. “It was deeply inappropriate, offensive and against Labour’s code of conduct,” we are told, “for staff to share materials, using Party resources in office hours, likening the newly elected leader of the Labour Party to Adolf Hitler.”<sup>44</sup> If this sounds like the more puerile end of left wing student politics, the report has an answer for that too: “Many staff at Labour HQ had a background in ‘Labour Students’ . . . an organisation historically, and then, run by people from the ‘right’ of the party . . . [with] an internal culture of calling people to their left ‘Trots’.”<sup>45</sup> Nor was this limited to political insults. The language used in private messages between staff about some colleagues

and Labour MPs was “abusive or inappropriate”<sup>46</sup> and included “sexist and derogatory comments.”<sup>47</sup> This is a party so divided against itself that in one sentence it even speaks about itself in the third person twice over, as if the Labour Party and the Labour Party are two different entities: “The Labour Party believes that this was, unfortunately, indicative of the level of thought being put into Labour’s disciplinary procedures at the time.”<sup>48</sup>

The picture of a disciplinary system that was not fit for purpose will be familiar to members and campaigners who made complaints about antisemitism, only to find that their complaint would not be acknowledged, or would be acknowledged but not investigated, or would be investigated but would take years to resolve. A system designed to weed out the occasional unsuitable candidate for election was suddenly overwhelmed by hundreds of complaints about antisemitism. This was acknowledged by Chakrabarti in her 2016 report, which described “a lack of appropriate expertise, sufficient resources and clarity” and “the lack of any readily available complaints procedure.”<sup>49</sup> One of the recommendations of The Chakrabarti Report was to reduce the use of interim suspensions for members who were under investigation for antisemitism, which she felt were disproportionate. Chakrabarti wrote that “the presumption should be against interim suspension” and “if the principle of proportionality had been properly applied in recent times, I query whether so many people would ever have been suspended at all.”<sup>50</sup> The GLU was subsequently more reserved in its use of interim suspensions, but the leaked report criticizes Matthews for this.<sup>51</sup> Chakrabarti had qualified her remarks by noting that suspensions might still be appropriate, depending on “the gravity of the conduct complained about” and the “risk that the individual or group concerned might do lasting or irreparable damage to the Party even during the period of the investigation.”<sup>52</sup> According to the leaked report, “basic common sense”<sup>53</sup> indicated that antisemitism would be covered by these criteria, and

Matthews should have known this. Yet the terms of reference of the Chakrabarti Report specified that her recommendations regarding “clear and transparent compliance procedures” were “for dealing with allegations of racism and antisemitism”;<sup>54</sup> so it was not unreasonable for Matthews to interpret her recommendation to reduce the use of interim suspensions as applying to antisemitism cases and the report’s criticism of him for doing so seems obviously unfair. And there is yet another twist to this story that has not previously been disclosed. In its official Right Of Reply correspondence with the BBC prior to the July 2019 Panorama, the Labour Party explained Chakrabarti’s recommendations in an entirely different way:

The sheer number of individuals suspended and auto-excluded and the paucity of the justification for many of these decisions, fueled suspicions throughout the Party that the disciplinary process under those officials was being manipulated for political reasons, not least in an attempt improperly to influence the outcome of those elections. *It was this conduct during the 2015 leadership election that led to a number of Shami Chakrabarti’s findings and her recommendations for reform.* [emphasis added]<sup>55</sup>

There was nothing in the terms of reference of the Chakrabarti Inquiry that related to the suspension and exclusion of members during the 2015 leadership election; nor is there any discussion of this issue in her Report. The suggestion that this formed part of Chakrabarti’s motivation in drafting her recommendations makes no sense, unless, for some LOTO staff, her report was used as a Trojan horse to smuggle in measures that would make it harder for Labour HQ to suspend and expel Corbyn’s supporters, many of whom had spent years in small far left political parties and movements to the left of the Labour Party and only joined, or re-joined, when Corbyn stood for leader.

There are other details about some of the better-known episodes in Labour’s antisemitism crisis revealed in this report that are of interest.

It confirms that Corbyn’s office initially did not want to suspend Naz Shah MP for her antisemitic Facebook posts that emerged in April 2016, before reversing their position the following day. When a disciplinary panel failed to expel Ken Livingstone from the party in 2017 for various offensive comments he had made the previous year, including the claim that Hitler had “supported Zionism,”<sup>56</sup> one senior staffer in Corbyn’s office allegedly told Shadow Cabinet members that this outcome was the result of a plot by Labour’s Deputy Leader Tom Watson, working with allies in Labour HQ, who (they claimed) had encouraged Livingstone to make “provocative comments” and then rigged the disciplinary panel to give a weak verdict, “all in order to embarrass JC [Jeremy Corbyn] and create a crisis.”<sup>57</sup> Livingstone eventually resigned from the party the following year under the shadow of a further disciplinary investigation. Even then, we learn, his resignation was apparently arranged by Seumas Milne with the agreement of others in LOTO and in Labour HQ, as they were worried that if he avoided expulsion a second time it would generate “further controversy and media circus”; alternatively if he was expelled he “might take the party to court.”<sup>58</sup> Corbyn’s office put a significant effort into overturning the decisions to expel Moshe Machover and Glyn Secker, two well-known Jewish anti-Zionists on the Labour left. The report quotes internal discussions about the difficulties in handling cases that involve Jewish members allegedly using antisemitic language. We are told, “The Party’s disciplinary process recognises that individuals from protected characteristic groups can also be perpetrators of prejudice against said group, and has therefore suspended and investigated Jewish members for allegations of antisemitism”; but also “the fact that an individual is Jewish is important context in the disciplinary process in considering allegations of antisemitism.”<sup>59</sup> The work of grassroots activists in Labour Against Antisemitism (LAAS), and investigative blogger David Collier’s work exposing antisemitism in the Palestine Live Facebook

group and the Palestine Solidarity Campaign, are discussed at length. They generated a lot of casework for the GLU and their efforts were taken seriously, although the report says “LAAS’s claims were wildly inaccurate—the number of Labour members they had reported were about one hundred, rather than the hundreds or thousands they claimed.”<sup>60</sup> But then this report has its own problems with accuracy, as much by what it omits as what it includes. The report admits that “Jeremy Corbyn had technically been a member of the [Palestine Live] Facebook group,”<sup>61</sup> but does not mention that he was an active member who posted in the group and whose office had helped to organize a meeting in Parliament for one of the group’s administrators—who has since been expelled by the Party. It has a long section about Labour’s efforts to write its own antisemitism code rather than adopting the IHRA working definition of antisemitism, concluding with the NEC’s decision to adopt the IHRA definition in September 2018; but doesn’t mention that even at that meeting, Corbyn brought his own qualifying statement that he wanted the NEC to adopt. There is extensive discussion of the recommendations of the Chakrabarti Report, but no mention of the Report’s launch being disrupted by a supporter of Corbyn accusing a Jewish MP, Ruth Smeeth, of “working hand in hand” with a right-wing newspaper journalist against her party leader.<sup>62</sup> There are many more examples.<sup>63</sup> But ultimately, everything in this report points to one simple question: why was it actually written?

We know that the report was intended for the EHRC, as has already been explained. But it cannot have been written as a rebuttal of the formal charge that the party unlawfully discriminated against its Jewish members, nor against the broader allegation of institutional antisemitism, because on both counts this report is damning. Every claim made by campaigners and Jewish community activists over the five years of Corbyn’s leadership, much of which was repeatedly denied at the time, is validated by this report. Antisemitism cases were not investigated, or were

dropped, or people were let off with warnings, or the party claimed that members were not actually members. Antisemitism grew in the party as a result of the failure to tackle it, encouraged by a culture of denial that it was a problem at all. The disciplinary system was not fit for purpose and Jewish members suffered as a result. As the JLM argued in their submission to the EHRC:

The Party has singularly failed to implement appropriate complaints and disciplinary systems to protect Jewish members from antisemitism. Its procedures are characterized by: inadequate definitions of antisemitism; inherently politicised decision-making, lack of training for staff and committees dealing with antisemitism; a lack of transparency; political interference; action only being taken in response to public pressure; excessively lenient sanctions; unreasonable delay; blanket impunity for certain kinds of antisemitism; and the appointment of plainly inappropriate personnel within the system.<sup>64</sup>

It is no surprise that Labour’s lawyers refused permission to submit the leaked report to the EHRC: it confirms everything the party is accused of by the JLM. Instead, it appears that the report’s true purpose may not be to defend the Labour Party under its current leadership, but to absolve the previous leader and his followers from any blame. It provides a legend of hope betrayed by internal sabotage that allows the Corbyn project to retain its self-image of ideological and political purity. In this telling, Labour under Corbyn would have won the 2017 General Election if it were not for right-wing saboteurs at the heart of Labour’s own operation. Rather than Corbyn being the leader of an antisemitic movement, or even an antisemite himself, he is recast in this telling as the innocent victim of opponents who manipulated antisemitism to bring him down. It is a conspiracy theory of a kind with a long tradition on the part of the left represented by Corbyn and his inner circle.<sup>65</sup> There is little space in this version of history, or in this report, for the idea that antisemitism in the Labour Party reflected a certain strand of left

wing politics personified by Corbyn himself;<sup>66</sup> much less any consideration of why people with such antisemitic views were attracted to join Labour under his leadership. Instead, this report provides a 250,000-word alibi for the true believers of Corbynism. And if its legal and financial consequences leave Labour destitute, that will be, for some, an acceptable price to pay.

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# Conceptual Vandalism, Historical Distortion: The Labour Antisemitism Crisis and the Limits of Class Instrumentalism

Matthew Bolton

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## Abstract

This article analyses the British left's response to allegations of antisemitism within the UK Labour Party under Jeremy Corbyn's leadership. It uses as its foil a collection of essays on the topic written over the course of the Corbyn era for leading online outlets of the contemporary Anglo-American left, and given away as a free e-book by Verso, the world's biggest leftist publisher, during the 2019 British election campaign. On the basis of this collection, the article suggests that the Labour antisemitism crisis was the culmination of a long process of political and theoretical degeneration within the left. It argues that the tendency to reduce of the question of antisemitism to that of class "interests," with antisemitism understood primarily as an "instrument" used by the powerful to divide the "oppressed," leaves many leftists unable to comprehend the possibility of exterminatory antisemitism as an end-in-itself. The appeal of this approach lies in the apparent alibi against antisemitism it provides for those on the left, like Corbyn, whose interests supposedly coincide with those of "the oppressed," and means that *accusations* of antisemitism within the left can be similarly denounced as cover for the underlying 'interests' of those making the accusation. The article argues that the insistence that the State of Israel is "a racist endeavour," a claim which lay at the heart of the Labour antisemitism dispute, rests upon an arbitrary and ahistorical rejection of the notion of Jewish peoplehood. This critique itself draws upon a long history of right-nationalist and liberal-republican antisemitism in which Jews were viewed as an illegitimate "anti-nation," and in its partiality is radically distinct from a critique of the nation-state as such. The article suggests that this same partiality and ahistoricity reappears in the inability of a class instrumentalist perspective to apprehend the intrinsic, rather than extrinsic, relationship between Israel and antisemitism, and the genocidal antisemitism of the Holocaust in particular.

**Keywords** Jeremy Corbyn, antisemitism, Israel, antizionism, class, UK Labour Party, genocide, Holocaust, IHRA

## INTRODUCTION

In November 2019, as the UK General Election campaign approached its climatic—and, for Jeremy Corbyn's Labour Party, catastrophic—end, British publisher Verso released an "urgent" open access report entitled *Antisemitism and the Labour Party*.<sup>1</sup> Edited by Oxford PhD candidate Jamie Stern-Weiner, who has built a substantial online following through his trenchant

commentary on the topic, the report brings together key articles and essays on antisemitism within Labour published by leading websites, magazines and blogs of the contemporary Anglo-American left throughout the Corbyn era. These include the US quarterly magazine and website *Jacobin*, the British site *Open Democracy*, and the blog hosted by Verso itself.

The report is split into six sections: an “overview” featuring two wide-ranging essays from *Jacobin* features editor Daniel Finn; a section of “evidence” with contributions from Stern-Weiner and his regular collaborator Norman Finkelstein, and a guide to “challenging false accusations of antisemitism” by Jewish Voice for Labour, the anti-Zionist campaign group set up precisely for that purpose; a “reporting” section focusing on the media; three “case studies,” featuring two essays critiquing the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) “working definition” of antisemitism; a “politics” section, including an essay by cultural theorist Jeremy Gilbert setting out what shall be termed here an “instrumentalist” theory of antisemitism; and “processes and principles,” looking at the disciplinary structures of the Labour Party. The final section consists of twenty-one personal testimonies from “Labour members of Jewish heritage,” each affirming the central argument running through the report as a whole: that claims of “significant antisemitism” within the party “are ridiculous and owe more to the government of Israel’s concerns that a Labour government might support Palestine, to right-wing MPs seeing an opportunity to get rid of Corbyn, and to mainstream media fears of a left-wing Labour government.”<sup>2</sup>

To date, there has not been a more comprehensive account of the arguments put forward by leftist writers and activists to refute accusations of antisemitism during Corbyn’s leadership.<sup>3</sup> Despite the dust now settling on the Corbyn era, appraising the report in depth remains a useful exercise. This is not just for what it tells us about the past few years in British politics, but because it confirms that the crisis over antisemitism in Labour was not merely the result of one particular individual’s failings, or those of a “few bad apples,” but rather represented the culmination of a long process of political, ideological and theoretical corrosion when it comes to antisemitism that has disfigured parts of the left for decades. In this article I suggest that the effects of such corrosion are first felt at the level

of *conceptualisation*—the way that Jews, antisemitism, Zionism, Israel, the Holocaust are categorised *prior* to any consideration of a particular incident of alleged antisemitism—and how these concepts are integrated into a worldview that for much of the left is taken as axiomatic.

A close study of the Stern-Weiner report reveals how this outlook often derives from a reductive form of quasi-Marxist “materialism,” which seeks to reduce the multiplicity of modern capitalist society to a Manichean morality play in which every historical phenomenon can be understood by posing the same simple question of *cui bono*—who benefits?<sup>4</sup> When applied to antisemitism, this leads to a crude functionalism, whereby antisemitism is understood solely as an instrument consciously constructed by the powerful to protect their “real” political and economic interests and divide the oppressed. The validity of *claims* of antisemitism are in turn determined entirely by the supposed underlying “interests” of those making the claim, and those accused. In this way the concept of antisemitism is emptied of any determinate content of its own, dissolved into a generic notion of “oppression,” while leftists—those whose interests are assumed to necessarily coincide with those of the “oppressed”—are happily exonerated from any possibility of antisemitism from the start.

The imperious confidence provided by such a perspective goes some way to accounting for the lack of serious engagement with opposing arguments within these pages.<sup>5</sup> One searches in vain for any reference to more than a century’s worth of theoretical and historical literature on the anti-capitalist left’s relationship to Judaism, antisemitism, Zionism and Israel.<sup>6</sup> Instead each article is built upon a tight feedback loop of cross-references, with contributors rarely citing anyone except each other. The same self-certainty explains why so few authors feel the need to defend or even discuss the well-documented litany of Corbyn’s own actions during his career-long preoccupation with the Israel-Palestine conflict. Inviting a blood libeller for tea at the House of Commons? Donating money to a

charity run by a Holocaust denier?<sup>7</sup> Attending a talk by the architect of multiple Hamas suicide bombings, which he subsequently described as “fascinating and electrifying”?<sup>8</sup> None of this appears in the report. Why should it? Once Corbyn’s identity as—in Finkelstein’s words—a “saintly figure” whose “interests” are identical with those of the oppressed is taken as given, each question is answered before it is posed.<sup>9</sup>

Dissolving antisemitism into a prior question of supposed “interests” means the report can immediately shift its attention onto what, for its authors, is the far more pressing task of identifying those responsible for tricking people into believing that there is a problem at all. That this was the intended political function of the report is implied by the “urgency” of its free dissemination mid-election campaign, and is immediately affirmed by Stern-Weiner in his apoplectic introduction. The furore around antisemitism in Labour, he writes, “has no basis in fact, is *prima facie* absurd,” and is driven by “transparent[ly] . . . partisan motivations.”<sup>10</sup> In its “cynical calculation, bottomless irrationality, and self-perpetuating moral hysteria,” it can only be compared with the “Salem Witch Trials or the McCarthyite purges.”<sup>11</sup> Later on, he adds the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* and the Nazi fantasy of a “Judeo-Bolshevik conspiracy” to the list of similarly “fantastic antecedents.”<sup>12</sup> In response, the report seeks to provide a “sober examin[ation]” of “the strange events that have warped British politics since 2015,” with the immediate aim of helping Labour canvassers “challenge false accusations of antisemitism” on the doorstep.<sup>13</sup> But there are longer-term political imperatives too. For Stern-Weiner, “the ‘Labour antisemitism’ campaign set a template that is sure to be deployed against other popular movements of the left.” As such, “establish[ing] . . . the truth” about antisemitism under Corbyn is of critical importance, “not just for posterity, but to help kindred movements avoid repetition of Labour’s mistakes.”<sup>14</sup> In a post-election *Jacobin* article, Stern-Weiner emphasizes the foremost of these errors—attempting to “appease the

unappeasable” by acknowledging the existence of an “antisemitism crisis” in the first place.<sup>15</sup>

While the evasion of uncomfortable evidence, opposing arguments, and critical reflection on display throughout the report certainly makes the task of the authors easier—allowing Stern-Weiner to casually dismiss the controversy as little more than “a small number of questionable Facebook posts”—it leaves the central issues underlying the dispute untouched.<sup>16</sup> Without recognition, let alone resolution, these issues will retain their potency, even if the demise of Corbynism quells their immediate “urgency” in UK politics—and means that their return to the centre of political debate is indeed almost inevitable. To this extent, Stern-Weiner’s complaint that, “like a creature from a horror film, the ‘Labour antisemitism’ controversy just won’t die” has some merit, for all its graphic hyperbole.<sup>17</sup> In his view, this incessant return is evidence of the “collective madness” that engulfed British politics as part of a concerted attempt to prevent a left-wing leader coming to power.<sup>18</sup> But what this report reveals is that, in truth, such compulsive repetition is rather a symptom of the contemporary left’s refusal to engage in the painful process of “working through” the uncomfortable history of its relationship with Judaism, antisemitism, Zionism, the Holocaust, and Israel, or to reckon with the distorted worldview which has both produced and continues to reproduce that history.

Throughout the remainder of this article, each of the key conceptual understandings underlying the arguments put forward in the Stern-Weiner report is analysed in turn. The first part examines the definition of antisemitism itself. The second part examines the conceptual basis underlying the depiction of the state of Israel and Zionism as a “racist endeavour,” which was central to the explosive debate over Labour’s initial rejection of the IHRA definition. The final section explores how this depiction of Israel is related to the inadequate way instrumentalist theories of antisemitism grasp the Holocaust and genocide itself.

## CONCEPTUALISING ANTISEMITISM

At the root of the “crisis” lies the concept of antisemitism itself, and as such the question of its definition is a constant reference point here. In 2016, Jeremy Corbyn provided his own definition while giving evidence to the Home Affairs Select Committee. Confidently asserting it “was very obvious what antisemitism is,” he described it as “where you use epithets to criticise people for being Jewish; where you attack Jewish people for what they are.”<sup>19</sup> There are numerous echoes of Corbyn’s definition throughout the report. For Finn, antisemitism is “prejudice against Jewish people.”<sup>20</sup> Finkelstein gives Brian Klug’s definition—“a form of hostility to Jews as Jews, where Jews are perceived as something other than what they are”—his qualified approval.<sup>21</sup> Stern-Weiner and Alan Maddison truncate IHRA’s “working definition”—with knowing irony, given that its initial rejection by Labour in 2018 led to the most explosive flashpoint of the Corbyn era—so as to reduce the crucially ambivalent phrase “a certain perception of Jews, which *may* be expressed as hatred toward Jews” to the unequivocal “hatred of Jews.”<sup>22</sup>

Building on this definition, the report contends that there is no evidence of a rise in the number of Labour members or supporters showing “hostility,” “hatred,” or “prejudice” towards “Jews as Jews” under Corbyn’s leadership. The case for a Labour “antisemitism crisis” therefore collapses before it has even begun. To demonstrate this, multiple articles refer to Daniel Staetsky’s 2017 survey for the Institute for Jewish Policy Research, which sought to empirically measure the level of antisemitism within the United Kingdom.<sup>23</sup> Participants were asked their views on a set of negative stereotypes about Jews, ranging from “Jews think they are better than other people” and “get rich at the expense of others,” to “Jews exploit Holocaust victimhood for their own purposes” and full-on Holocaust denial. Staetsky found that while only around 5% of British people display “open dislike” or hold “developed negative ideas about

Jews,” 28% agreed with at least one anti-Jewish statement. It concluded that while there are few “hardcore” *antisemites* in the United Kingdom, there is a far greater “diffusion” of *antisemitic ideas*.<sup>24</sup> These results were then broken down along political lines. Staetsky found that around 30% of people who identify as “very” or “fairly left-wing” agreed with at least one antisemitic idea, a figure “indistinguishable from the general population and from the political centre.”<sup>25</sup> In comparison, the “very right-wing” were 20% more likely than the general population to agree with at least one anti-Jewish statement. Staetsky therefore suggested that, when it comes to attitudes towards “Jews as Jews,” “the very left-wing are . . . no more antisemitic than the general population, but neither are they less antisemitic.”<sup>26</sup>

This conclusion is the cornerstone of the Stern-Weiner report: yes, regrettably there may be some antisemitism in the Labour party, but it is merely a proportionate reflection of the level of antisemitism in British society in general. As Stern-Weiner puts it: “It has never been in dispute that anti-Jewish attitudes exist within the Labour Party. Such attitudes—along with ten thousand other varieties of bigotry and prejudice—exist in every political party, as they do in the society from which mass memberships are drawn.”<sup>27</sup> But Staetsky’s findings are said to confirm that the true home of antisemitism is the “very right-wing,” and therefore, to the extent that it seeps into Labour, this is assumed to be due to an unfortunate but unavoidable process of social osmosis affecting all large organisations. This leads to members making occasional mistakes, such as Corbyn’s notorious failure to recognise the “antisemitic undertones” of a mural depicting hook-nosed bankers—one of the few incidents involving Corbyn to get any serious attention.<sup>28</sup> But given there is no evidence of a *particular* problem within Labour, “the picture of a [Corbyn] movement infested with antisemitic attitudes simply cannot be sustained,” as Finn puts it.<sup>29</sup> The idea of a “crisis” beyond a few individual errors is for

Stern-Weiner thus a “baseless allegation,” which should be “dismiss[ed].”<sup>30</sup>

In the report’s final essay, Stern-Weiner and Maddison roll back from even this minimal “social osmosis” theory of antisemitism. Now rejecting Staetsky’s distinction between “antisemites” and “antisemitism,” they suggest merely expressing the belief that Jews control the media, or the banking sector, exploit the Holocaust, or enjoy disproportionate political influence should not be classed as antisemitic, unless explicitly accompanied by “hatred” of “Jews as Jews.”<sup>31</sup> Reducing antisemitism to explicit hatred provides the conceptual basis for Stern-Weiner’s *modus operandi*—splitting each incident of reported antisemitism into its component words or phrases, insisting that none, taken by themselves, “betray or necessarily reflect animus towards Jews,” and thus dismissing it as cooked-up. In so doing, the concept of antisemitism loses any objectivity, and is reduced to a search for irrefutable proof of subjective intent—something that even Norman Finkelstein recognizes is impossible to find.<sup>32</sup> The bar for antisemitism is thereby raised to such a height that all but the most brazen Neo-Nazis pass under it. The inevitable conclusion which follows such premises is that “the proportion of Labour Party members who harbour hatred toward Jews”—and thus the level of antisemitism in the party—“rapidly approaches zero.”<sup>33</sup>

As Sarah Brown has noted, this absolute separation between “hatred” and “negative stereotypes” is not routinely employed with regard to any other form of discrimination: “It doesn’t indicate *hatred*, precisely, to believe that blacks are inherently intellectually inferior to whites, or that women are only fitted to be mothers and homemakers. But most would have no difficulty acknowledging such views as racist and sexist.”<sup>34</sup> Nevertheless, this distinction is indeed the logical conclusion of a definition of antisemitism that limits itself to “hatred,” “hostility,” or “prejudice” towards “Jews as Jews.” Why, then, is such a distinction upheld when it comes to antisemitism? Perhaps the answer lies in an argu-

ment made by Finkelstein a few pages earlier, in which he suggests that the stereotypes measured in Staetsky’s survey are neither antisemitic, nor stereotypes—but rather statements of fact. For Finkelstein, Jewish people do indeed think they are better than others; they do exploit Holocaust victimhood; and they do hold “outsized . . . political power”—power that is in great part responsible for “British society . . . interminably chasing after [the] hobgoblin” that is the Labour antisemitism crisis. As such, holding such views is not antisemitic but “plain common sense.”<sup>35</sup>

It was no doubt an acknowledgement of the extremity of Finkelstein’s position—which would not be out of place on a far-right website—that led Stern-Weiner to sheepishly add a disclaimer assuring readers that “contributors should not be assumed to agree . . . with each other.”<sup>36</sup> The majority are, indeed, content to stick with the initial theory of generic “social osmosis,” and make at least a gesture of regret that antisemitism is not lower amongst members of an avowedly “anti-racist” party than the general public. For Jeremy Gilbert, “there is no more antisemitism in the Labour Party than in the rest of society but there should be much less.”<sup>37</sup> This is not so much because of the harm antisemitism does to Jews, but rather the role “antisemitic discourse” plays in “protect[ing] the interests of the powerful.”<sup>38</sup> In his view, “the fundamental purpose of antisemitism is always to cover up the truth of power relations, driving wedges between Jewish and non-Jewish communities who should be united in the assertion of their common collective interests.”<sup>39</sup> Those in power use Jews as scapegoats to deflect attention from their own misdeeds, and leftists who are fooled by such tales have fallen for the oldest trick in the capitalist playbook. The “best cure for antisemitism” is therefore “the positive raising of class consciousness,” for “the more [people] are enabled to realise the extent to which they share material interests with millions of others around the world—irrespective of ethnicity or religion—the less susceptible they will be to antisemitism.”<sup>40</sup>

This idea—that antisemitism is simply a cover for class oppression and will therefore vanish once a socialist society has been built—has been the dominant approach to antisemitism on the left for generations.<sup>41</sup> A functionalist theory of this kind provides antisemitism with a kernel of rationality by making it a disposable means for a higher end, an instrument to be wielded by the powerful when it is required and discarded when not, rather than an end in itself. While it is a truism that all forms of ideology can be utilised by different social groups, this says nothing about why a particular ideology is *available* for use in the first place—a question which requires a more concrete, determined explanation.<sup>42</sup> But by rendering antisemitism interchangeable with any other form of ideology aimed at “covering up the truth of power relations,” instrumentalist theory strips it of its particularity and instead subsumes it within an abstract concept of oppression-as-such.

Such an approach stands in contrast to the critical theories of antisemitism produced by a Frankfurt School-influenced left over the last century.<sup>43</sup> Theorists such as Max Horkheimer had, like the majority of leftist thinkers in the run-up to the Second World War, initially adopted instrumentalist theory to explain Nazi antisemitism. But they would later reject it once the limitations of depicting antisemitism as merely a means to another end, rather than an end-in-itself, became horribly apparent in the light of the Holocaust. As we shall explore further in the final section, the mass annihilation of European Jewry *for no other end than itself* cannot be grasped within a worldview that sees antisemitism as a secondary function of class oppression. If antisemitism is merely a consciously constructed yet ultimately superficial ‘narrative’ utilised by the powerful to pursue their “true” ends, the idea the powerful might seek to *totally eliminate* such convenient ideological cover is implausible. It was the belated recognition of this point which led Horkheimer and his colleague Theodor Adorno to abandon class instrumentalism. Instead they

began to theorise antisemitism as a complex, multivalent form of “unreason” with its own historic weight, dynamic and peculiar “anti-hegemonic” appeal, the “elements” of which are imbricated within modern or capitalist society *as a totality*—a totality that necessarily includes the standpoint and “interests” of that society’s critics.<sup>44</sup> The severity of this critique demands serious consideration of how even the most seemingly “radical” stance is entwined within the society against which it regards itself as opposed.

### CONCEPTUALISING ISRAEL

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But for those, like Gilbert, who continue to adhere to instrumentalist theory, it provides an infallible alibi against any possibility of their own antisemitism. If antisemitism is merely a strategy of class division propagated by the powerful, then as anti-capitalist leftists they cannot be antisemitic in any true sense, the occasional lapse aside, so long as they retain the requisite “class consciousness.” It is the confidence derived from this perspective which allows the Verso authors to completely disregard the second half of Staetsky’s report, despite relying heavily upon the findings of the first: an argumentative manoeuvre also employed by Philo et al.<sup>45</sup> The latter section focuses on level of “anti-Israel” sentiment in the United Kingdom, and possible connections between attitudes to Israel and anti-Jewish ideas in general. Participants were asked their views on nine negative statements about Israel, ranging from “Israel has too much control over global affairs” to “Israel is an apartheid state” and “exploits Holocaust victimhood for its own purposes.”<sup>46</sup> Previous research had shown most Jewish people considered these views as at least potentially antisemitic, in contrast to other criticisms of Israel that were not, and found a correlation between such attitudes and more traditional antisemitic attitudes. For these and other reasons, Daniel Allington and David Hirsh have argued that the two groups of attitudes should be recognised simply as differently

inflected forms of antisemitism: one, antizionist, and the other, Judeophobic.<sup>47</sup>

Staetsky found that “negativity towards Israel is significantly more common than negativity towards Jews” within the United Kingdom, with just over 30% holding “very” or “somewhat” unfavourable views.<sup>48</sup> When split by political affiliation, the “very left-wing”—those most likely to be Corbyn supporters—were 20% *more likely* to hold anti-Israel views than the general population, with “elevated levels” in the “fairly” and “slightly” left-wing groups, too. Moreover, 23% of the “very left-wing” agreed with six to nine negative statements about Israel, “in contrast to 9% in the general population.”<sup>49</sup> The JPR also found that ‘the stronger a person’s anti-Israel views, the more likely they are to hold antisemitic attitudes’ about “Jews as Jews.”<sup>50</sup> The most commonly held antisemitic attitude for those strongly anti-Israel was “Jews exploit Holocaust victimhood for their own purposes,” alongside “Jews think they are better than other people,” and “Jews have too much power in Britain.”<sup>51</sup> These attitudes, of course, are precisely those commended as “common sense” by Finkelstein.

Nowhere in the Stern-Weiner report is this aspect of Staetsky’s findings discussed. The reason is obvious: the authors do not accept there is any relationship between antisemitism and the disproportionately negative attitudes towards Israel amongst the left. The *possibility* of an “antizionist antisemitism” is regarded as a category error. Indeed, Daniel Finn argues that the entire Labour “crisis” derives from the “malicious” attempt to fabricate such a relationship through an illegitimate “redefin[ition of] the concept of antisemitism” so that it is no longer reserved for “prejudice against Jewish people” but encompasses “the view of Israel generally held in left-wing circles.”<sup>52</sup> The motivation for this conceptual vandalism is much the same as that which, according to instrumentalist theory, underlies antisemitism itself—to protect the interests of the powerful. Thus, in a post-election article Jeremy Gilbert describes *accusations*

of antisemitism in almost identical fashion to his earlier depiction of antisemitism—as a form of “discourse” intended “to alienate cosmopolitan and socially liberal voters” from the left, and weaken those struggling against power.<sup>53</sup>

The report’s authors are in general agreement about who has “weaponised” the charge of antisemitism in this way.<sup>54</sup> For Stern-Weiner, “Conservative, pro-Israel, and Labour rightist networks” are to blame.<sup>55</sup> For Finn, it is the defenders of “Atlanticist orthodoxy” in foreign policy, working alongside “several strands of pro-Israeli opinion whose combined weight is formidable.”<sup>56</sup> Gilbert presents it as the result of a historic compromise between the Blairite and Old Right wings of Labour, one ultimately dictated by the twin demands of “finance capital” and a “pro-Israel, pro-Atlanticist policy agenda,” and “calculated to attract the sympathy of the pro-Israel lobby, and the funding it has traditionally bestowed on politicians it likes.”<sup>57</sup> None of these groups truly believe in their accusations of antisemitism: in a separate essay not included here Gilbert writes that “Corbyn could convert to Judaism” or “apply for Israeli citizenship,” and still the “attacks on him would not relent for one second unless he agreed to give up control of the party; or at least to commit to a policy agenda approved by Merrill Lynch.”<sup>58</sup> David Edwards, the co-editor of the Chomskyite website Media Lens, argues that the absence of press articles associating Corbyn with antisemitism during his “first 32 years as an MP,” compared with the sudden avalanche of coverage following his elevation to the Labour leadership, proves the idea of a Labour antisemitism crisis is “a scam of the utmost cynicism and brutality” led by those desperate to prevent a challenge to “corporate power . . . by all necessary means.”<sup>59</sup>

Differences arise between contributors only in the relative weight attributed to each part of this reactionary coalition—whether pro-Israel or pro-capitalist forces are in the driving seat. In the latter part of the Corbyn era, this distinction became the first line of defence for many high-profile supporters. By drawing a line

between the so-called “cranks”—those focused primarily on Israel, epitomised by the figure of then-MP Chris Williamson—and Corbyn and the rest of the party, it was hoped antisemitism could be presented as a “virus” imported into the “true” left from outside.<sup>60</sup> This strategy drew increasing fury from grassroot supporters, who not only recognised, rightly, that Corbyn’s own obsession with the “hand of Israel” must place him among the “cranks,” but that most “cranks” merely expressed the view of Israel “generally held in left-wing circles” in an unabashed, if perhaps vulgar, manner.<sup>61</sup> To scapegoat “cranks” as antisemitic, while pledging full support to Corbyn, was seen as a hypocritical sacrifice of political principle in a futile attempt to “appease the unappeasable.” That the Verso authors share this analysis is indicated by Finn’s rejection of the label “crank,” both his and Edwards’s unfashionable defence of Williamson, and the inclusion of an article on the importance of “empirical sociology” co-written by Professor David Miller, a Syria chemical weapons-“truther,” who ran the campaign to reinstate Williamson after he was suspended from Labour for suggesting the party had “over-apologised” over antisemitism.<sup>62</sup> Miller has argued that transatlantic “Zionist” networks are not only to blame for false claims of antisemitism but also responsible for the global spread of Islamophobia.<sup>63</sup> The report’s generosity to those rejected as “cranks” by other parts of the movement is confirmed by the prominence of Norman Finkelstein, who, dispensing with “Zionist” niceties, pins the blame for the Labour antisemitism “scam” on “Jewish elites . . . a gang of moral blackmailers and extortionists” (45) who are “terrorising Corbyn to accept a purported definition of antisemitism that . . . has nearly nothing to do with antisemitism and nearly everything to do with shielding Israel from deserved condemnation” (128).

It is certainly true that some of the criticism aimed at Corbyn was disingenuous—particularly from those on the right of British politics otherwise happy to lend their support to Victor Orban’s wantonly antisemitic regime.<sup>64</sup> But

the idea that no-one had raised the question of antisemitism within Corbyn’s wing of the left before he won the leadership is belied by the Stern-Weiner report’s own inclusion of Richard Kuper’s 2011 critique of the IHRA “working definition”—precisely that “purported definition” castigated by Finkelstein above—written four years before Corbyn’s victory.<sup>65</sup> Kuper’s article was a response to a campaign by activists within the University and College Union (UCU) against efforts throughout the 2000s to enforce what they saw as an antisemitic boycott of Israeli universities and academics, a struggle in many ways prefiguring that which would take place within Corbyn’s Labour.<sup>66</sup> These same activists—many with impeccable leftist credentials—had for nearly two decades raised similar concerns about the demonisation of Israel and the unqualified support for Hamas and Hezbollah within the Stop the War Coalition, of which Corbyn and his close associates were founder members.<sup>67</sup> The reason why such concerns moved into mainstream political discourse at the point Corbyn became Labour leader was precisely because that faction of the left long accused of antisemitism had won control of the United Kingdom’s main left-wing party for the first time in its history. Thus far from antisemitism appearing in the party through an unavoidable random process of social osmosis, it was rather that specific *political* victory—preceded by a flood of new members from that particular wing of the left—which transformed what had hitherto been a relatively minor intra-left debate into one of national significance. That parts of the right were able to capitalise on the issue, cynically or not, was possible only because of the longstanding refusal of large parts of the left to even recognise the problem, let alone deal with it—a refusal which the Stern-Weiner report merely reproduces.

## CONCEPTUALISING THE NATION

As Kuper and Finkelstein’s comments above indicate, the question of the IHRA “working definition” of antisemitism is pivotal to this

debate. Throughout the report, the IHRA is presented as nothing less than the spearhead of a “concerted effort to stigmatise all robust, hard-hitting criticism of Israel as . . . tainted by anti-Jewish prejudice,” including as it does multiple examples related to the left’s “generally held” view of Israel.<sup>68</sup> The “most contentious” example is said to be “claiming . . . the existence of a State of Israel is a racist endeavour.”<sup>69</sup> It was indeed Labour’s initial rejection of this example when formulating an alternative code of conduct on antisemitism, which kickstarted the bitter dispute that followed. Posters declaring “Israel is a racist endeavour” were flyposted across London, while Labour activists (including David Miller) sought to make themselves martyrs of the IHRA by repeating the claim.<sup>70</sup> Corbyn himself was so committed to the description of the state of Israel—and, by extension, Zionism, the belief in a Jewish national identity manifest in a Jewish nation-state—as a “racist endeavour” that moments before the definition was finally to be adopted, he submitted a last-ditch amendment reiterating it is not “antisemitic to describe Israel, its policies or the circumstances around its foundation as racist because of their discriminatory impact, or to support another settlement of the Israel-Palestine conflict.”<sup>71</sup> The evident centrality of this particular argument means it merits sustained attention.

The claim that a “state of Israel is a racist endeavour” takes two distinct forms, conceptual and historical, although in practice they are often conflated. Both should be separated from the contention that any particular policy pursued by a particular Israeli government at any particular time is racist. What is at stake here is not the contingent activity of a temporary government, but the state’s inherent nature. Taken on its own, a *conceptual* argument that says a nationalist movement such as Zionism, and a nation-state which defines its citizenry in exclusive nationalistic terms such as Israel, is inherently racist is indeed not anti-Semitic—as long as that critique is applied equally to all forms of nationalism and national identity. The contradiction between

the abstract universality of “the state” and the concrete particularity of “the nation” (whether defined in territorial, racial, cultural, or ethnic terms) is by no means unique to Israel, but is inscribed in the very concept of the modern “nation-state.”<sup>72</sup> To be consistent those who wish to describe the Israeli nation-state as racist on a conceptual level must abandon the idea of a specific “anti-Zionism” and instead fold it into a general “anti-nationalism.” For on what grounds, aside from the fact that Zionism was in part a *response* to nationalistic racism, can a distinction between “Zionism” and “nationalism” be upheld—unless, for some unexplained reason, the *concept* of Jewish nationality is exceptionally malign?

This was, of course, how political antisemites responded to Zionism throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries: Jews did not constitute a proper national “people,” they had no organic connection to any land, and thus the claim to Jewish nationality was a contemptible parody, intended to fatally undermine the very concept of the nation. But the rejection of Jewish “peoplehood” also appears in the liberal republican mantra that Jews must be granted everything as individuals yet refused everything as a nation, while parts of the socialist left similarly regarded a particularistic insistence on Jewish identity as an obstacle to proletarian “unity.” From this perspective, anything that distracts from the struggle against the capitalist class—including a focus on Jewish, rather than class, interests—merely sustains capitalist power. This immediately places Zionism on the side of the oppressors, and explains, at least in part, why antipathy to a Jewish state existed within parts of the left long before Israel came into being.<sup>73</sup> The issue here is why such antipathy was, and is, not extended to all national movements. Applied consistently, a conceptual critique of a state of Israel would preclude support for Palestinian nationalism, as attempts to establish a “State of Palestine” must now be condemned as a “racist endeavour” undermining class solidarity.<sup>74</sup> Even those claiming to support a “bi-national”

Jewish-Arab federation in place of Israel would need to spend as much time calling for the abolition of every other extant nation-state as they do Israel.<sup>75</sup>

A *historical* critique of Israel as a “racist endeavour,” by contrast, acknowledges the theoretical possibility of a non-racist Israeli nation-state. However, if the historical reality of the state’s founding is understood as entailing what Finkelstein describes as the “ethnic cleansing” and “transfer” of “the indigenous population,” then the “realisation of the Jewish people’s right to self-determination must have been a racist endeavour.”<sup>76</sup> This argument is closely tied to that portraying Israel as an inherently “imperialist” state, representing the last gasp of a colonial era thankfully overthrown elsewhere. But again, to be consistent, those who view the formation of Israel as racist in practice if not in theory must spend as much time condemning, for example, India and Pakistan—both formed through partition, ethnic violence, and population transfer a year before Israel. Indeed, they would need to condemn with equal force the “Arab” or “Muslim” states surrounding Israel, from which 850,000 Jews were expelled during the tumultuous years of Israel’s formation.<sup>77</sup> There has been scant evidence of such even-handedness during the debate over the IHRA definition within Labour and the wider left. Indeed, much of that debate has been distinguished by an astonishing ignorance of the actual history of Israel’s formation—that it was founded in part through war *against* the imperial power, Britain; that Britain refused to vote for the creation of Israel in 1948; that from the moment of its birth Israel was attacked by neighbouring Arab states who rejected the UN-sanctioned partition, which would have created a Palestinian-Arab state; that thousands of both Arabs and Jews were forced from their homes in the following turmoil. But it is only through such ignorance, wilful or not, that it is possible to depict those fleeing Russian pogroms, Arab expulsion, and Nazi annihilation as imperialist conquerors.<sup>78</sup>

Perhaps the ongoing occupation and oppression of the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza qualifies Israel as a “racist endeavour”? When it comes to expansion of settlements in the West Bank, the descriptor “colonialism” might carry more weight. Nevertheless, to expand this claim so as to incorporate the state as a whole is to assume once again that occupation and oppression are inextricably woven into Israel in a way unlike any other state—a notion disproved by the longstanding existence of anti-occupation movements within Israel, however cowed today. Moreover, the conflict between Israel and Palestine is but one of any number involving other states today, many with far greater death tolls.<sup>79</sup> Acknowledging this entails justification why this particular conflict, out of all of those in the world, holds such a pivotal position within the left’s imaginary. This centrality is underlined by Daniel Finn, who argues that far from being “a marginal issue that can be ditched or downplayed,” the question of Israel represents a “Rubicon” for the left, which, if crossed, puts at risk its entire project.<sup>80</sup> Writing in 2018, he suggests that “Corbynism is at a fork in the road,” and while it might be tempting to “choose the path of capitulation over Palestinian rights . . . if we can’t hold the line in defence of Corbyn’s eminently moderate stance on Palestine we certainly won’t be in any condition to resist the pressure that is still to come.”<sup>81</sup> Leaving aside the suggestion that a “moderate stance” on “Palestinian rights” necessitates not only denouncing a Jewish state as a “racist endeavour” but acclaiming the reactionary fundamentalists Hamas as a force for “peace and social justice,” Finn’s depiction of the question of Israel as the lodestar at the centre of the left’s universe testifies to the extraordinary symbolic weight loaded onto the conflict, far beyond what it can bear.<sup>82</sup>

*Turning the question of Zionism into what Edward Said once called “the touchstone of contemporary political judgement”—the flipside of which is the inflation of “the idea of Palestine” into a signifier for universal emancipation-in-itself—has been standard practice within leftist*

movements over the past forty years.<sup>83</sup> Its main effect has been to distort the actual history of the region until it becomes almost unrecognizable, while making attitudes towards Israel a litmus test permitting entry into the left.<sup>84</sup> Much as republican assimilationists demanded Jews sever ties with their Jewish identity in order to enter the abstract realm of the citizen, so too are Jews today asked to renounce any affiliation with Israel, however critical, in order to gain access to parts of the left.<sup>85</sup> As a result, the overwhelming majority of Jewish people in the United Kingdom find themselves denied entry—for, as Staetsky notes, “most British Jews consider Israel to be a central part of their Jewish identity,” even if they oppose the government, occupation and settlements.<sup>86</sup> This is at least part of the meaning of descriptions of Corbyn’s party as a “cold house for Jews,” which Finn flippantly dismisses as “hysterical.”<sup>87</sup> The full symbolic force of the left’s disfigured image of Israel is pressed onto Jewish shoulders, and those who refuse to bear its weight must either leave the left voluntarily or find themselves cast out.

But the authors here reject the idea that singling Israel out as a “racist endeavour,” or forcing Jews to choose between the left and support for Israel’s existence, is antisemitic. Organisations such as Jewish Voice for Labour, and the testimonies gathered at the back of the Stern-Weiner report, demonstrate that some Jewish people do, in fact, pass the litmus test that Israel represents for the left. From this perspective, it is not the excess opprobrium directed at Israel that is antisemitic, but rather the assumption that Jewish people do not agree it is warranted. Making this assumption is to hold “Jewish people collectively responsible for what Israel does”—which is, indeed, one of the IHRA’s examples of antisemitism.<sup>88</sup> But the responsibility for such projection ultimately lies with those who, as Richard Kuper puts it, portray Israel as “*the* Jewish state, acting on behalf of *all* Jews” and therefore “conflate Jews collectively with Israel.”<sup>89</sup> Norman Finkelstein likewise argues that “by representing itself as the

Nation-State of the Jewish people, Israel itself collectively implicates Jews in its actions.”<sup>90</sup> In this view, if only Israel would abandon its “racist endeavour” of claiming a Jewish national identity, there would no longer be any risk of “spill-over” from righteous condemnation of Israel to Jewish people in general.

The same confusion of conceptual, historical, and contingent critiques of Israel that plagues the debate over the IHRA definition appears again here. The concept of Israel as a Jewish nation-state, representing a general idea of Jewish “peoplehood,” is distinct from the behaviour of any particular government or holder of that state’s offices. The claims of that state to represent Jews as a “people” in *institutional* perpetuity should not then be conflated with the claims of a particular government to have the *political* support of that “people” for its actions. The formal separation of the state as an institution, the government as office holders, and wider civil society is inherent in the concept of a democratic polity. It is undoubtedly true that the relationship between the state of Israel and the Jewish diaspora—or between a specifically *Israeli* national identity and a broader Jewish peoplehood—is uniquely complex, and that a minority of Jews do not consider that state *as a state* to have any connection with their Jewish identity. Nevertheless, the vast majority of Jews in the United Kingdom and around the world do, to a greater or less extent—while often severely disapproving of the actions of the government.<sup>91</sup> It is not then, *contra* Kuper and Finkelstein, antisemitic to recognize the claims of the Israeli state to *formally* represent a general (if not totalizing) notion of Jewish “peoplehood,” even if that notion—like all forms of nationalism—is neither uncontested nor incorporates all of what it means to be Jewish. Rather, antisemitism arises in the refusal to acknowledge the formal distinction (and often outright contradiction) between state, government and society when it comes to Israel, and Israel alone—to treat the actions of any particular Israeli government as expressing the inherent, essential character of a

Jewish state and society as such. This conflation of state, government and society underpins the conceptual critique of a Jewish national polity as uniquely malign—with the result that only the total rejection of the *concept* of Jewish nationality permits Jews entry into the left, a demand made of no other “people.”

## CONCEPTUALISING GENOCIDE

The only connection between antisemitism and Israel acknowledged within the report is thereby one which originates in the behaviour of the Israeli state and travels *from* Israel *to* Jewish people in general. Depicting antisemitism as an understandable if regrettable response to either Israel’s existence, its actions or the claims its leaders make to Jewish representation is to once again to provide antisemitism with an underlying rationale. Moreover, such a perspective can only grasp the relationship between Israel and antisemitism as an *extrinsic* and *possible* one, in which antisemitism appears as a contingent result of Israel’s prior activity. It is blind not only to the possibility, outlined above, that the left’s conceptualisation of a Jewish state and its activities might carry antisemitic resonances from the outset. It is also unable to apprehend that aspect of Israel’s existence which has an *intrinsic* and *necessary* relationship to antisemitism, namely, its status as a “life-raft” state formed in the wake of the near-total annihilation of European Jewry. This radical separation of Israel from the antisemitism which preceded its founding enables the relationship between Israel and antisemitism to be inverted, so that the formation of a Jewish nation-state is now *responsible* for antisemitism rather than a *response* to it.

Recognising that there is an essential, rather than accidental, connection between Israel’s existence as a Jewish nation-state and the long history of antisemitism that culminated in—but was not ended by—the Holocaust does not mean that that the *actions* of that state are somehow *justified* by that history alone. As Werner Bonefeld puts it, this would be to

“[accept] the barbarism of extermination as a legitimizing force of state action. There can be no such legitimization.”<sup>92</sup> It merely means that it is not enough to view antisemitism through the prism of Israel—rather the existence of Israel must first be viewed through the prism of antisemitism, and thus the Holocaust, itself. But this in turn entails recognizing the Nazi genocide for what it was: an attempt to root out and destroy every Jew in existence, not just within the German Reich but from every corner of the globe, with no exceptions, and for no “higher” purpose— not for territorial gain, nor for increased exploitation of labour, nor the pillage of natural resources—but rather as an end-in-itself. And yet, as noted above, it is precisely this form of recognition that is prevented by the instrumental theories of antisemitism which continue to prevail within leftist circles.

That Corbyn himself subscribes to such a theory, and shares its blindspots, is indicated by his co-sponsorship—alongside his former Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell—of a 2011 Early Day Motion (EDM) calling for the word “Holocaust” to be removed from the name of Holocaust Memorial Day. The EDM noted that

disabled people were the first victims of Nazi mass murder, that working class activists and trade unionists, many of whom were Jewish, were the first to be sent to concentration camps, and that Nazism targeted not only Jewish but also Roma, Jehovah’s Witnesses, lesbian, gay and bisexual people and others they deemed undesirables; and therefore supports the call for international awareness of all communities and countries who have suffered and resisted mass extermination by renaming Holocaust Memorial Day as “Genocide Memorial Day—Never Again For Anyone.”<sup>93</sup>

Taken by itself, this reads as a bald statement of fact, but the ideological basis of the motion is revealed by the interchange of the terms “mass murder” and “mass extermination.” While in terms of the impact on the victims there is

little to distinguish these categories, the Nazis' "mass murder" of non-Jews, however intense and unprecedented the persecution, was not, conceptually, motivated by the same desire for global annihilation that defined the "extermination" of world Jewry.<sup>94</sup> That the motion elides this crucial distinction—as well as the distinction separating the "concentration camp" from the "extermination camp"—is demonstrated by the single mention of Jews being as a mere predicate to the subject of "working class activist and trade unionist," implying that had these Jews only ceased working class activism they might have been spared—a point which utterly fails to comprehend the reality of antisemitism as an end-in-itself. But it was precisely this reality that necessitated the forging of the new concept of genocide following the Holocaust, alongside a legal framework capable of making similar crimes universally recognizable for the first time. The particularity of the Holocaust and the universality of the concept of genocide are thus inextricably tied together—the one illuminates the other, even if the Holocaust remains, as yet, unmatched in its extremity and global ambition.

By stripping exterminatory antisemitism of its privileged position within Nazi ideology in order to create a general category of "victims" in which Jews have no distinctive place, the class instrumentalism of Corbyn's EDM drains both the concept of genocide and the Holocaust itself of their determinate content, reducing them to the status of empty signifiers, abstract condemnations of violence-in-general. Demanding the word Holocaust be replaced by genocide on these grounds is thus little more than an expression of the mutilation of both terms. Moreover, while for Stern-Weiner and Maddison anything other than explicit hatred of "Jews as Jews" should be discounted as antisemitism, now it is precisely that hatred, in its most extreme genocidal form, which is erased by its dissolution into a generic concept of oppression. The concept of antisemitism thus stands on the verge of total disintegration.

But the gains from this conceptual sacrifice are threefold: the status of the Nazis as the universal symbol of oppression-in-general is secured against the special pleading of Jews; an otherwise problematic Holocaust is integrated into an instrumentalist theory of antisemitism through its reduction to "mass murder"; and, perhaps most importantly, the intrinsic connection between the "racist endeavour" that is the state of Israel and the Holocaust is severed. It follows that continued insistence on the Jewish particularity of the Holocaust blocks contemporary attempts to challenge the latest iterations of the generic "oppression" it now epitomizes: the most pertinent of which for the contemporary left is, of course, that embodied by the "racist endeavour" of the Israeli state. This is the main contention of Finkelstein's book *The Holocaust Industry*, published by Verso in 2000 and recapitulated in the Stern-Weiner report. The book transforms what would otherwise be an uncontroversial and unoriginal warning about crude usage of Holocaust memory into an extravagant conspiracy theory in which any insistence on the particularity of the Holocaust is now portrayed as little more than a cynical ploy to "justify criminal policies of the Israeli state," one ultimately driven by a "nauseating [Jewish] ethnic chauvinism."<sup>95</sup> The idea of the "unique suffering" of the Jews in the Holocaust "confers unique entitlement" upon Jews in general, acting as "Israel's prize alibi" to treat the Palestinians in whatever way they wish, and facilitating a lucrative "shake down" of credulous Gentiles.<sup>96</sup>

The widespread acceptance of this argument, predicated once again on reducing the reality of exterminatory antisemitism to a "narrative" constructed to cover up underlying "interests," is signalled by the strong connection Staetsky found between holding anti-Israel views and believing that both Israel and Jews in general "exploit Holocaust victimhood for their own purposes."<sup>97</sup> The task for those who do not subscribe to this doctrine of "Jewish uniqueness" is to prevent Jewish attempts to monopolise the concept of genocide as a means to distract

from Israel's oppression of the Palestinians. It was such an imperative that led Corbyn to host a Parliamentary meeting on Holocaust Memorial Day in 2010 entitled "Never Again for Anyone—Auschwitz to Gaza." The event was advertised with juxtaposed images of the Warsaw Ghetto and a Palestinian funeral, and featuring talks by Hajo Meyer, a survivor of Auschwitz—who would later blame Israel for 9/11—and Haidar Eid, a Gazan academic, who reportedly told the meeting that "Nazism has won because it has finally managed to Nazify the consciousness of its own victims."<sup>98</sup>

That same year, and following a similar logic, the Momentum activist Ewa Jasiewicz, together with Israeli BDS activist Yonatan Shapira, graffitied the slogans "Free Palestine and Gaza" and "Liberate all ghettos" on a wall within the remains of the Warsaw Ghetto. This story was revived in the wake of the IHRA debate when the *Sunday Times* reported Jasiewicz had been invited to speak at a Momentum event at the Labour Party conference.<sup>99</sup> In the light of the above analysis, it is worth examining this particular event in more detail, and, in particular, Jasiewicz's "apology" after she had been accused of antisemitism. Jaciewicz assumed that the main point of contention was whether her condemnation of Israel's treatment of Gaza extended to the Jews of the Warsaw Ghetto, or to Jews in general. This was, indeed, the critique from sympathetic left sources, such as the anarchist collective Jewdas, who warned her action "risks being interpreted as a suggestion that Jews, rather than Israel, are to blame for what's happening in Gaza."<sup>100</sup> This argument derives from the same idea of an *extrinsic* relation between Israel and antisemitism set out by Kuper and Finkelstein above. In response Jaciewicz categorically denied she was "holding all Jewish people or those who were murdered in and through the ghetto as responsible for the actions of the Israeli state." The connection her "creative expression" sought to make between the Warsaw Ghetto and Gaza did not arise from the *Jewish* aspect of the Ghetto and that of Israeli state—which, to her mind, absolves her of antisemitism. Rather, it

derives from the common experience of "ghettoisation and oppression" shared by the inhabitants of the Ghetto and Gaza, "which is why [she] chose to write Liberate All Ghettos."<sup>101</sup>

As we have seen, the idea that the situation in Gaza, however grim, is in any way comparable to the Warsaw Ghetto or Auschwitz, such that they can all be fitted alongside one another in a single concept of "ghettoisation and oppression," does not stand up to a moment's scrutiny.<sup>102</sup> The only way this can be done is, once again, by erasing the determinate role of exterminatory antisemitism in the Holocaust. The result is that the connection that *does* exist between the Warsaw Ghetto and Israel—consisting not of abstract "oppression" in general, but antisemitism in particular—is eradicated. Moreover, those who seek to reinstate that connection—not in defense of Israeli actions in Gaza but rather in defense of the concept of genocide itself—are now accused of merely "exploiting Holocaust victimhood for their own purposes." The justification of Jaciewicz's graffiti by prominent Corbyn-supporting commentator Ash Sarkar—that it was an act of "anti-racism" deserving "full solidarity" from the left, fallaciously depicted as antisemitic "as part of the informal silencing effects of [Labour's] IHRA adoption"—neatly demonstrates the connection between the conceptual critique of Israel as a racist endeavour, the erasure of genocidal antisemitism that reduces the Holocaust to an empty signifier, and the belief that Jewish particularity is merely a weapon cynically wielded in pursuit of selfish ends.<sup>103</sup>

For Stern-Weiner, of course, despite acknowledging comparisons between Israel and the Nazis are strategically "unhelpful" because they "[make] life easier for Israel's apologists," none of this can be considered antisemitic, unless explicitly accompanied by "animus" towards "Jews as Jews"—despite the fact that such comparisons are predicated precisely on the erasure of that "animus."<sup>104</sup> Thus he argues that neither "analogising Israel to Nazi Germany," nor asserting that "the Nazi regime and the Zionist movement possessed an element of ideological and practical common ground,"

nor calling for “free speech” for Holocaust deniers while denying “Zionists” a platform should be classed as antisemitic, as none express, in and of themselves, explicit hatred of Jews.<sup>105</sup> And he has no qualms in recycling Finkelstein’s suggestion that Corbyn’s critics are driven by a “‘Holocaust uniqueness’ agenda’ . . . mobilised for flatly political purposes: if Jews are ‘unique’ victims, then Israel cannot be held to normal standards.”<sup>106</sup> In this way, the Stern-Weiner report reduces issues as complex as the interplay of the universal and particular in Holocaust memorialisation, and the politics of historical consciousness, state power, and collective identity, to the same glib assertions of “interests” that underlie instrumentalist theory as a whole. Once again a whole literature of nuanced scholarship on these issues is ignored in favour of a cartoonish “materialism” that does little except give left activists permission to indulge in the kind of Jew-baiting long thought the preserve of the far-right.

## CONCLUSION

Throughout this collection of essays, first showcased in the leading websites and magazines of the contemporary left, and then lent the authoritative imprimatur of the world’s premier leftist publisher, the majority of British Jews—those unwilling to completely disavow either the concept or troubled reality of a Jewish state—stand accused of maliciously distorting concepts, “weaponising” that and manipulating history for their own purposes, stubbornly insisting on

a particularity which is presented as an obstacle to universal human emancipation. Yet, in truth, the evidence from the report suggest that the charges should be reversed. The desperation to defend Corbyn, and the movement behind him, from the charge of antisemitism has revealed the extent to which parts of the left, rather than Jews, are willing to abandon any commitment to historical truth, analytical consistency or intellectual integrity for the sake of political expediency. In the process the concepts and histories of antisemitism, of the Jewish nation-state, and the Holocaust itself have been wrenched out of shape, transformed into a crude artillery of anti-Jewish belligerence.

But such distortions are not merely a defensive response to immediate perceived attacks, but rather the legacy of a long history of political and intellectual struggle within the left itself—and for those leftists concerned with the rise of antisemitism, a history of defeat. Such a defeat was a precondition for a figure like Corbyn to not only win the leadership of the Labour Party in the first place, but be extolled as being on “the right side of history” throughout. It remains to be seen whether Corbyn’s own defeat at the hands of the electorate will lead to a reckoning with the long process of degeneration through which, in the words of Moishe Postone, “large parts of the left have lost their theoretical acumen, political analysis, and their moral compass.”<sup>107</sup> From what can be gleaned from the pages here at least, such a reckoning seems further away than ever.

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- 2 *Ibid.*, 201, 242. This article will primarily focus on the work of Stern-Weiner, Finn, Finkelstein, and Gilbert, as they provide the main theoretical thrust of the report. It will occasionally reference other contemporaneous works by these writers not featured here, including relevant essays written in the post-election period.
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  - 11 *Ibid.*, xi.
  - 12 *Ibid.*, 38.
  - 13 *Ibid.*, xii, 55.
  - 14 *Ibid.*, xii.
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  - 17 *Ibid.*, xi. Indeed, at the time of writing it had risen from the dead once more after Rebecca Long-Bailey, Corbyn's favoured candidate in the leadership election following his resignation, was sacked by new leader Keir Starmer. Long Bailey had approvingly retweeted an article speculatively asserting that Israeli "secret services" had trained US police in the restraint techniques leading to the death of George Floyd, thus shifting ultimate responsibility for American police brutality to Israel. John McDonnell, formerly Corbyn's Shadow Chancellor, defended the unsubstantiated theory as mere "criticism of the practices of the Israeli state" (see Eve Garrard, "What John McDonnell Still Does Not Understand," *Fathom*, July 2020, <https://fathomjournal.org/fathom-opinion-john-mcdonnell-man-of-principle>).
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- 40 *Ibid.*, 168.
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- 53 In characteristic fashion, Gilbert provides no evidence for this claim. Given the JPR found "elevated levels" of anti-Israel sentiment amongst the "fairly" left-wing, it is likely that "socially liberal voters" were *more*, not less, likely to agree claims of antisemitism against Corbyn based on his views on Israel were "smears" propagated by the powerful.
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- 106 "I find that ranking of suffering morally abhorrent. . . In fact, the 'Holocaust uniqueness' agenda has been mobilised for flatly political purposes: if Jews are 'unique' victims, then Israel cannot be held to normal standards." Jamie Stern-Weiner (@jsternweiner), Tweet, August 19, 2018, <https://twitter.com/jsternweiner/status/1031158429870641152>. By focusing on the subjective question of "suffering" rather than the objective distinctions between *projects* of genocidal violence and other forms of oppression, Stern-Weiner again deprives the concept of genocide of its determinate content.
- 107 Postone was critiquing that part of the left—epitomized by Corbynism—which fixates on Israel while ignoring the democratic revolution in Syria, if not outright supporting the Assadist counter-revolution in the name of "anti-imperialism." "Moishe Postone on the Left and Syria: 'You'd think that after the beginnings of a democratic uprising put down w/ incredible brutality by Assad, that that would ring a bell. Large parts of the Left have lost their theoretical acumen, political analysis, and their moral compass.'" Joey Ayoub (@joeyayoub), Tweet, March 22, 2018, <https://twitter.com/joeyayoub/status/976891551346552832>. For more on the "Western left's" failure on Syria, see Yassin Al Haj Saleh, "Syria and the Left," *New Politics*, Winter 2015, [https://newpol.org/issue\\_post/syria-and-left/](https://newpol.org/issue_post/syria-and-left/). On Corbynism and Syria in particular, see Bolton and Pitts, *Corbynism*, 109–114.

# Judeophobic Antisemitism among British Voters, 2016-2020

Daniel Allington

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## Abstract

Through secondary analysis of survey data collected by YouGov for Campaign Against Antisemitism, this research note provides a longitudinal account of changes in Judeophobic antisemitism (that is, antisemitism articulated in relation to Jews identified as Jews) in mainland Britain from 2016-2020. Because survey responses are aggregated by most recent general election vote, the dataset facilitates comparison between those who voted for each of Britain's three main parties in the 2015, 2017, and 2019 UK general elections. (Those who voted for other parties, as well as those who did not vote and those for whom voting data are missing, are aggregated as a fourth category.) Amongst those who voted for the centrist Liberal Democrat party, levels of Judeophobic antisemitism declined throughout the period. Amongst those who voted for the left-wing Labour Party, levels of Judeophobic antisemitism began at a low level, rose to a peak in 2018, and then declined, returning to something close to their 2016 level by 2020. Changes amongst other voter groups were less clear-cut, although all voter groups saw a decline in Judeophobic antisemitism from 2019 to 2020. Although it is beyond the scope of this article to analyze trends in antizionist antisemitism (that is, antisemitism articulated in relation to Israel and its supporters), comparative figures for that form of antisemitism are provided for the years 2019–2020.

**Keywords** Antisemitic attitudes, Britain, Labour Party, political parties, polling, public opinion, voters, survey

The study of antisemitism was given unexpected—and unlooked-for—political relevance by Jeremy Corbyn's tenure as leader of the UK Labour Party, which ran from September 2015 to April 2020. But while it has been able to furnish political scientists and commentators with extensive scholarship on the history and nature of the antizionist form of antisemitism most strongly associated with Corbyn's segment of the political left,<sup>1</sup> as well as with a host of studies of the empirical relationship between this and the Judeophobic form of antisemitism more strongly associated with the political right,<sup>2</sup> the discipline of antisemitism studies has had little to say about the key political topic within any functioning democracy: that is, voters.

The question of antisemitism among ordinary voters was first raised by two high-profile left-wing blogs, in articles both published on the same day in 2018. Both of these articles used comparisons of responses to arbitrarily selected pairs of questionnaire items in two surveys of antisemitic attitudes in order to argue that antisemitism among Labour voters had fallen under (and perhaps as a result of) the leadership of Jeremy Corbyn.<sup>3</sup> These claims went viral on social media, and appear to have motivated Channel 4 News to publish a fact-checking piece which warned that “[s]ome commentators in the Labour antisemitism row have cherry-picked data” from the surveys in question.<sup>4</sup> The allegation of

cherry-picking was well-founded: the statements used in the first survey were not the same as those in the second survey, which meant that the pairs of statements being compared were not the same and that like was not being compared with like. In fact, levels of agreement with the later versions of the statements were generally lower, and not only among Labour voters.<sup>5</sup>

This purpose of this article is to conduct a more systematic longitudinal analysis of data from the same source: that is, the Antisemitism Barometer surveys carried out by YouGov in 2016–2020 with funding from Campaign Against Antisemitism.<sup>6</sup> The first such survey, carried out in 2015, must be excluded because it used a different set of questions: a point that was glossed over by the authors of the blogs cited in the previous paragraph. These surveys were not originally intended as sources of comparative data on antisemitism among voters for political parties, but most recent general election vote is among the standard demographic variables which YouGov provides to its clients. Since 2019, the surveys have included questionnaire items designed to measure antizionist antisemitism,<sup>7</sup> but as those items were not used from the beginning, they are largely ignored here. Focusing on Judeophobic antisemitism alone will mean underestimation of levels of antisemitism on the political left,<sup>8</sup> but the purpose of this article is to reveal trends over time. Voters for small parties by overall vote share, such as the Green Party, Plaid Cymru, and the Scottish National Party, are necessarily aggregated together with non-voters, as are voters for UKIP (which ceased to be an effective electoral force from 2017) and the Brexit Party (which was founded only in 2019). Northern Irish voters were not polled.

For fieldwork dates and sample sizes, see Table 1, which also gives mean and standard deviation for participant age and percentages of female and male respondents. For mean numbers of Judeophobic antisemitic statements

agreed with, as well as for percentages agreeing with four or more Judeophobic antisemitic statements, see Table 2 and Figures 1 and 2. There were a total of seven Judeophobic antisemitic statements with which respondents could agree or disagree; thus, those who agreed with four were agreeing with more than half. Mean figures and percentages are weighted using demographic weights calculated by YouGov. 95% confidence intervals are provided both for the means and for the percentages.<sup>9</sup> For comparison, table 3 and figures 3–4 provide equivalent statistics for antizionist antisemitism. As there were only five statements used to measure this form of antisemitism, the maximum numbers are lower.

Levels of Judeophobic antisemitism generally appear higher among voters for the Conservative Party and among voters in the aggregate category for those who voted for other parties or none, or for whom voting data was unavailable. This is unsurprising: the form of antisemitism being measured is, as noted, more strongly associated with the political right than with the political left, and Britain's most successful minor parties (in terms of overall vote share) are of the political right. However, as noted above, the focus is here on trends, and among these two categories of voters, levels of antisemitism were essentially flat (with a possible slight downward trend among Conservative voters).

There appear to be quite clear trends with regard to those who voted for the Liberal Democrats—a centrist party, despite the probable implications of its name for American readers—and the left-wing Labour Party. Among Liberal Democrat voters, there was a steady fall in Judeophobic antisemitism throughout the period, with mean numbers of antisemitic statements agreed with falling well below that of all other voter categories and with the proportion agreeing with four or more such statements falling almost to zero in 2019 (the slight uptick in 2020 is well within the margin of error, and accompanies a fall in

mean number of statements agreed with). By contrast, mean numbers of antisemitic statements agreed with by Labour voters rise from 2016 to 2018, and then fall back to what is effectively their 2016 level by 2020. However, the percentage of Labour voters agreeing with four or more antisemitic statements does not quite return to its original level, climbing more dramatically than the mean number of statements and—despite its decline in 2019 and 2020—remaining higher in every year from 2017 to 2020 than it was in 2016. This suggests the presence of a small but notable minority of unusually antisemitic voters who either (a) did not vote for the party in 2015, but did vote for it in 2017 and 2019, or (b) acquired such views in 2017 and retained them into 2020. Peak agreement among Labour voters appears to occur in 2018, when levels of Judeophobic antisemitism were as high among Labour-voting members of the sample as among Conservative voters: an extraordinary achievement, given that the political left is (as already observed) more closely associated with a different form of antisemitism. Analysis of that form of antizionism, that is, antizionist antisemitism, is beyond the scope of this article, as data are not available for the period before 2019. However, it is noted that antizionist antisemitism did *not* appear to decline among voters for the Labour Party and the Liberal Democrats between 2019 and 2020, and indeed rose quite substantially among members of the sample who voted for either party (although from a lower starting point in the case of Liberal Democrat voters).

Besides sampling error, there are two primary mechanisms by which these year-to-year shifts might be explained: attitude change and vote-switching. That is, it may be that people who consistently vote for a party grow progressively more inclined to accept or reject statements. Or it may be that highly voters switch from voting for one party to voting for another, or that those who reject antisemitism most strongly make the reverse journey. Of course, it may well be that both processes play a role. Certainly, vote-

switching cannot explain changes taking place between 2017 and 2019, and nor can it explain the fact that mean numbers of Judeophobic statements agreed with fell for *all four* voter groups between 2019 and 2020 (percentage of respondents with four or more antisemitic views fell for every group except Liberal Democrat voters, where it was already very close to zero). On the other hand, it could potentially play a role in explaining the large drop in Judeophobic antisemitism among Liberal Democrat voters between 2016 and 2017: it may, for example, be that a group of people with strongly antisemitic views who voted Liberal Democrat in 2015 switched to voting Labour in 2017.

The apparent decline of Judeophobic antisemitism among Labour voters from 2018 to 2019, and among all voter categories from 2019 to 2020, requires a different explanation. Shifts in public opinion have multiple causes, and data such as these cannot provide evidence of causation, but it would be remiss not to attempt some form of interpretation here. Intensive public discussion of antisemitism arising from the Labour Party's antisemitism crisis and from the Pittsburgh synagogue shooting (which took place in October of that year) may well have played a role in discrediting antisemitic ideas, or in prompting members of the public to reflect on and potentially abandon certain prejudices. From March To August 2018, Jewish communal organisations called a series of demonstrations against antisemitism, which forced the issue onto national television. And in September 2018, the Labour Party adopted the IHRA definition of antisemitism, which may thenceforth have acted as a brake on the dissemination of antisemitic ideas (especially on social media).

Perhaps in retrospect, that will be seen as the point at which a tide was turned. It certainly provides hope for future progress.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

With thanks to Campaign Against Antisemitism for providing access to the data.

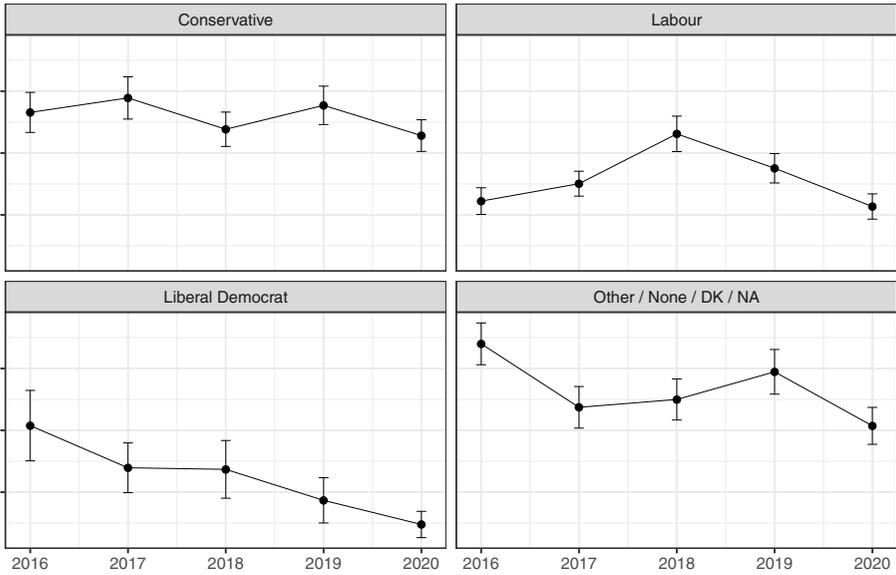


FIGURE 1. Mean number of Judeophobic antisemitic statements agreed with by most recent general election vote, 2016–2020

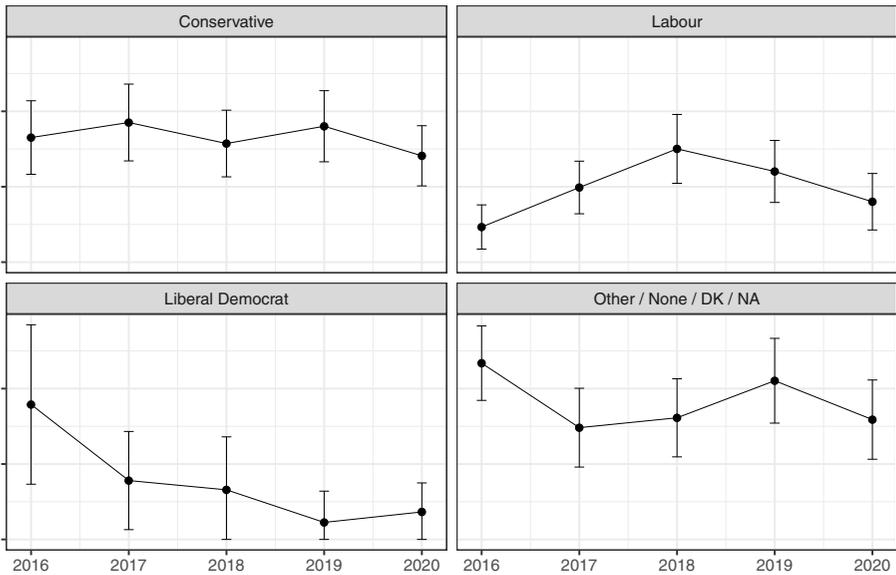
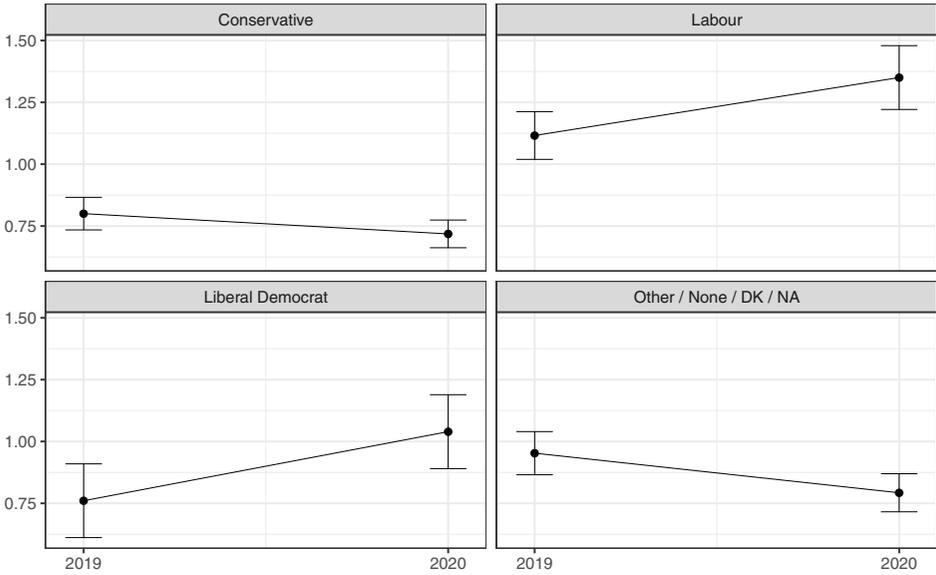
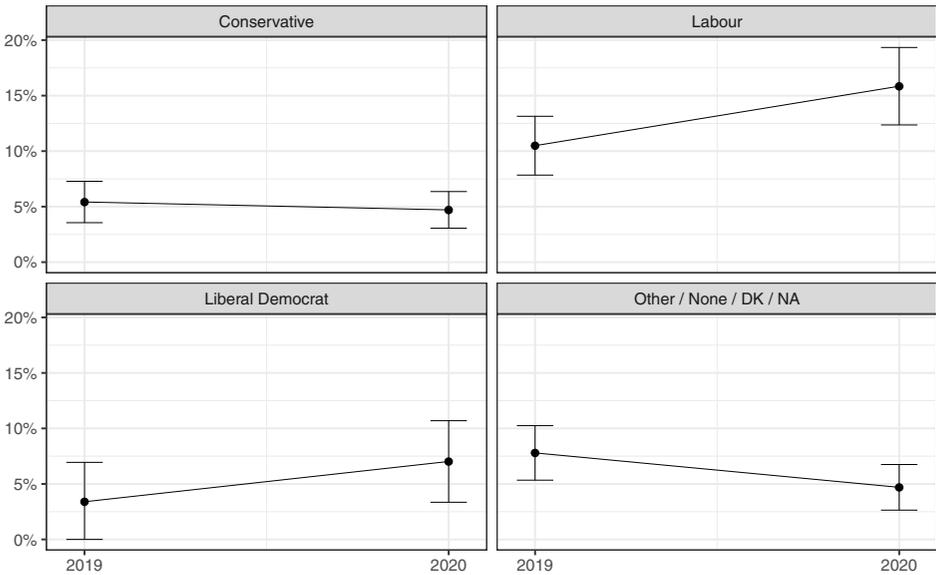


FIGURE 2. Percentage of respondents agreeing with four or more Judeophobic antisemitic statements by most recent general election vote, 2016–2020



**FIGURE 3.** Mean number of antizionist antisemitic statements agreed with by most recent general election vote, 2019–2020



**FIGURE 4.** Percentage of respondents agreeing with four or more antizionist antisemitic statements by most recent general election vote, 2019–2020

**TABLE 1. Fieldwork dates and descriptive statistics**

Year	Fieldwork dates	N	Age (M)	Age (SD)	Female (%)	Male (%)
2016	August 18–19	1660	48.7	16.7	55.4	44.6
2017	August 2–3	1614	48.2	16.5	55.9	44.1
2018	September 6–7	1606	48.4	16.8	56.2	43.8
2019	September 24–25	1639	50.1	16.9	57.4	42.6
2020	August 26–27	1646	51.6	16.7	57.4	42.6

**TABLE 2. Mean number of Judeophobic antisemitic statements agreed with and percentage agreeing with four or more Judeophobic antisemitic statements by most recent general election vote, 2016–2020**

Year	Last GE	Last GE vote	N	Mean statements				4+ statements (%)		
				Est.	SD	Low	High	Est.	Low	High
2016	2015	Conservative	490	0.9	1.4	0.8	1.0	8.3	5.8	10.7
2016	2015	Labour	407	0.6	1.1	0.5	0.6	2.3	0.9	3.8
2016	2015	Liberal Democrat	112	0.8	1.6	0.6	0.9	8.9	3.7	14.2
2016	2015	Other / None / DK / NA	651	1.1	1.7	1.0	1.2	11.7	9.2	14.2
2017	2017	Conservative	498	1.0	1.6	0.9	1.1	9.3	6.7	11.8
2017	2017	Labour	594	0.6	1.2	0.6	0.7	5.0	3.2	6.7
2017	2017	Liberal Democrat	136	0.6	1.2	0.5	0.7	3.9	0.6	7.2
2017	2017	Other / None / DK / NA	386	0.8	1.5	0.8	0.9	7.4	4.8	10.0
2018	2017	Conservative	570	0.8	1.5	0.8	0.9	7.9	5.7	10.1
2018	2017	Labour	512	0.8	1.5	0.8	0.9	7.5	5.2	9.8
2018	2017	Liberal Democrat	99	0.6	1.3	0.5	0.7	3.3	0.0	6.8
2018	2017	Other / None / DK / NA	425	0.9	1.5	0.8	1.0	8.1	5.5	10.7
2019	2017	Conservative	567	0.9	1.5	0.9	1.0	9.0	6.7	11.4
2019	2017	Labour	514	0.7	1.3	0.6	0.7	6.0	4.0	8.1
2019	2017	Liberal Democrat	100	0.5	1.0	0.4	0.6	1.1	0.0	3.2
2019	2017	Other / None / DK / NA	458	1.0	1.8	0.9	1.1	10.5	7.7	13.3
2020	2019	Conservative	632	0.8	1.4	0.8	0.9	7.1	5.1	9.0
2020	2019	Labour	421	0.5	1.1	0.5	0.6	4.0	2.1	5.9
2020	2019	Liberal Democrat	186	0.4	1.0	0.3	0.4	1.8	0.0	3.7
2020	2019	Other / None / DK / NA	407	0.8	1.4	0.7	0.8	7.9	5.3	10.6

**TABLE 2.** Mean number of antizionist antisemitic statements agreed with and percentage agreeing with four or more antizionist antisemitic statements by most recent general election vote, 2016–2020

Year	Last GE	Last GE vote	N	Mean statements				4+ statements (%)		
				Est.	SD	Low	High	Est.	Low	High
2019	2017	Conservative	567	0.8	1.2	0.7	0.9	5.4	3.6	7.3
2019	2017	Labour	514	1.1	1.5	1.0	1.2	10.5	7.8	13.1
2019	2017	Liberal Democrat	100	0.8	1.2	0.6	0.9	3.4	0.0	6.9
2019	2017	Other / None / DK / NA	458	1.0	1.4	0.9	1.0	7.8	5.3	10.2
2020	2019	Conservative	632	0.7	1.2	0.7	0.8	4.7	3.1	6.4
2020	2019	Labour	421	1.4	1.7	1.2	1.5	15.8	12.4	19.3
2020	2019	Liberal Democrat	186	1.0	1.4	0.9	1.2	7.0	3.4	10.7
2020	2019	Other / None / DK / NA	407	0.8	1.2	0.7	0.9	4.7	2.6	6.

**APPENDIX: ANTISEMITISM BAROMETER QUESTIONNAIRE (CAMPAIGN AGAINST ANTISEMITISM, 2016-2020)**

Here are a number of comments that different people have made about Jewish people in Britain these days. For each of the following statements, please indicate how true or untrue you think these statements are.

- British Jewish people chase money more than other British people.
- Having a connection to Israel makes Jewish people less loyal to Britain than other British people.
- Jewish people consider themselves to be better than other British people.
- Compared to other groups, Jewish people have too much power in the media.
- Jewish people talk about the Holocaust just to further their political agenda.
- Jewish people can be trusted just as much as other British people in business.\*

**Answer options:**

- definitely true;
- probably true;

- probably not true;
- definitely not true;
- don't know.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

- I am just as open to having Jewish friends as I am to having friends from other sections of British society.\*

**Answer options:**

- strongly agree;
- tend to agree;
- tend to disagree;
- strongly disagree;
- don't know.

**ADDITIONAL QUESTIONNAIRE ITEMS USED TO ASSESS ANTIZIONIST ANTISEMITISM, 2019–2020**

To what extent do you agree or disagree\* with the following statements?

- Israel and its supporters are a bad influence on our democracy.

- Israel can get away with anything because its supporters control the media.
- Israel treats the Palestinians like the Nazis treated the Jews.
- I am comfortable spending time with people who openly support Israel.\*
- Israel is right to defend itself against those who want to destroy it.\*

**Answer options:**

- strongly agree;
- tend to agree;
- tend to disagree;
- strongly disagree;
- don't know.

\* Reverse-coded

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- 9 Where confidence intervals do not overlap, differences are statistically significant at  $p < 0.05$ . However, overlapping confidence intervals may still represent significant differences, especially where there is a trend.