

Defend freedom of speech on Israeli

Labour should reject the McCarthyite 10 Pledges

In a video of the Campaign Against Anti-Semitism, an ecstatic Joe Glassman, drunk on his 'victory' in the General Election, declared that “the beast is dead”; the beast being Corbyn. In a somewhat chilling video he declared that England's “green and pleasant land” had been “saved” by Labour's defeat in the general election, that is by the Tory victory. Yes, Johnson, who could write about “picanninies with watermelon smiles”, had got back into Downing street and, apparently this was a victory for British Jews. Mr Glassman compared himself and his comrades with the Macabees who won back Jerusalem and re-dedicated the temple in 164 years BC. Their “spies and intel” had helped them win. According to him “they were coming to kill us” but “we won”. Who exactly was coming to “kill us”? Corbyn?

This outrageous hyperbole mirrored the joint statement of three Jewish publications which had said that a Labour government with Corbyn as leader would be “an existential threat to Jewish life in Britain”. Many Jews were outraged at such exaggeration which could legitimately be described as hysterical nonsense. At a time when there is a global rise of anti-Semitism promoted by the far-right, conservative forces in Jewish communities (some of them big C-Conservatives) were declaring that socialists were threatening the existence of Jews.

If anybody imagined that the killing of the “beast” in the General Election would bring an end to the campaign of those who wanted to keep Corbyn out of Downing Street they were wrong. These very same organisations have stepped up their campaign and directed it at the candidates for Leader and Deputy Leader. They have demanded that all of them agree to support the Board of Deputies “[Ten Pledges](#)”. With the exception of Richard Burgon (as of the time of writing) and Dawn Butler they all appear to have agreed to this ultimatum from the BOD. In executing this political capitulation they have now boxed themselves into a corner. Moreover this is a decision for the membership. Have they all renounced democracy?

What are the 10 Pledges that these would-be Leaders appear to have agreed on?

- 1. All cases must be brought to a conclusion with a “fixed timescale”.** Justice must be done and seen to be done. Anybody who might suffer being expelled from the Labour Party should be given the opportunity to defend themselves. Whilst cases should not be left hanging around for a long time, justice cannot be rushed. Accusations have to be proven or disproved. Nobody should be cavalierly expelled on the basis of some arbitrary timetable without due process and 'natural justice'.
- 2. Make the party's disciplinary process independent.** An “independent provider” is suggested in order to “eradicate any risk of partisanship and factionalism”. As an independent political party Labour should control its own procedures. It is not for the BOD or any other outside body to decide how it functions. It should be determined by the membership of the Party. It is particularly egregious that the BOD which has played a central role in the campaign against the Labour Party should have any say on how the party is run. It has certainly proved its 'partisanship' against Labour.
- 3. Ensure transparency.** The idea that “Jewish representative bodies” should be given the right to detailed updates “on the basis of confidentiality” is unacceptable for the simple reason that the BOD and some other organisations, for example the CAAS, cannot for one moment be trusted to stick to confidentiality, as their activity over a number of years has

shown. There *should* be transparency so that the members are able to examine the record in detail enabling them to judge the actions of the Party apparatus. During the period when Iain McNichol was General Secretary some Jewish members were falsely accused by other Jewish members of anti-Semitism. For instance Glen Secker, Secretary of the Jewish Socialist Group was suspended, found with nothing to answer, yet no action was taken against the malicious complainant. No apology was forthcoming. It was under McNichol, hostile to Corbyn, and one of the key people involved in the coup attempt against him, that the backlog of cases built up. As became clear from the statistics released by Jennie Formby nearly 40% of the complaints sent into the Labour Party were against people who were not Labour Party members. Margaret Hodge alone sent in nearly 20% of the complaints; 200 which related to 111 people of whom 91 were not party members.

4. Prominent offenders (like Ken Livingstone and Jackie Walker) should never be readmitted. It is completely unacceptable for any outside organisation to determine who can or cannot be a member of an independent political party, to institute a lifetime ban. This is an issue for Party members. No outside body should be able to determine the rules of a political party, and decide who should or should not be a member.

5. “No platform for bigotry”, or guilty until proven innocent. The BOD's suggestion that anybody who “support, campaign or provide a platform for people who have been suspended or expelled in the wake of anti-Semitism incidents should themselves be suspended from membership”. There is an assumption here that somebody is suspended as a result of “an anti-Semitic incident” is guilty. An accusation may be proved or disproved. It is an extraordinary proposal that somebody who “supports” an individual who is suspended because of a claim of anti-Semitism should themselves be suspended. Under this McCarthyite logic anybody who supports a campaign against an accusation, which they consider to be unjust, has their freedom of expression nullified. Clearly the person accused is guilty until proven innocent according to the BOD.

6. Adopt the international definition of anti-Semitism without qualification. This would then “provide the basis for any anti-Semitism disciplinary action”. This is nothing other than an attempt to silence people who have a different political view of the Israeli state than the BOD and other organisations. Its purpose would be to define as *automatically* anti-Semitic the international BDS campaign and any criticism of the Israeli state which rejects, as many Jews do, both inside and outside Israel, the ethnic-religious basis of the state; its “Jewish character”. The IHRA definition itself is unexceptional, the problem is with the examples, which **as the author of the IHRA himself has said, are being used to silence debate on the Israeli state.**

One “example” of supposed anti-Semitism in the IHRA includes this point:

“Denying the Jewish people their right to self-determination, e.g, by claiming that the existence of a State of Israel is a racist endeavour.”

Hence, anybody who believes that the Israeli state was founded on the dispossession of Palestinian/Arab people, is “anti-Semitic”, even though it is an historical fact, facilitated by the exodus of 700,000 Arabs. Israel is an ethnic-religious state which privileges Israeli Jews and renders Arabs as second class citizens. How can a state which allows Jews only towns be anything other than racist? Some Jewish Israelis consider Israel to be a racist state. Some of them are opposed to Israel being a “state of the Jews” and want it to be “a state of its citizens”. They are opposed to Jewish supremacy and fight for equal rights for Arab Israelis. These are not anti-Semites they are socialists and democrats. I must

confess I have always found it strange that any socialist could support an ethnic-religious state, which must inevitably be racist/discriminatory since it is defined as the state of a particular ethnicity/religion rather than of all its citizens.

7) Deliver an anti-racism programme that has the buy-in of the Jewish community.

This calls for the Jewish Labour Movement to be re-engaged to “lead” on training about anti-Semitism. If anybody doubts that this campaign of the BOD is politically motivated rather than about anti-Semitism per se, then this particular ultimatum proves it. If education on anti-Semitism was to be objective then it would include discussion of the different views on Israel, Zionist, non-Zionist and anti-Zionist. But the JLM has a political agenda which informs its view on anti-Semitism. **It accuses other Jews who do not support the Israeli state of being anti-Semitic.** The Jewish nature of the state is a red line against which everything else is measured. This mirrors the limits of Israeli democracy, because although Arabs have a vote, both Jews and Arabs are prevented from standing in elections if they proclaim that they want Israel to be “a state of all its citizens” and hence to cease to be a “Jewish state”.

“According to the Basic Law: The Knesset, the Central Elections Committee may prevent a candidates' list from participating in elections if its objectives or actions, expressly or by implication, include one of the following:

1. negation of the existence of the State of Israel as the state of the Jewish people;
2. negation of the democratic character of the State;
3. incitement to racism.”

Note that caveat, expressly *or by implication*.

The Jewish people here does not refer just to Jewish citizens of Israel but Jewish citizens of all and any states on a global scale, who have “the right of return” even if they have never been there and have no connection with it. “The “democratic character” of the state involves oppression and discrimination against the Arab population which constitutes 20% of the population.

From the point of view of Labour Party rules *the Jewish Labour Movement should clearly have been disaffiliated* because of its refusal to support all Labour candidates in the general election and their opposition to the election of a Labour government. In practice, given the fact that the only governmental alternative to Labour was a Tory government then **the JLM was effectively supporting the election of a Tory government.** As far as I am aware it is unprecedented for a Labour Party affiliate to *campaign against the election of a Labour government and to be allowed to remain in the Party.* When the union, RMT, supported Scottish Socialist Party candidates, it was deemed to have excluded itself. The idea that an affiliate which has effectively supported the election of a Conservative government is subsequently allowed to “lead” education of its very tendentious view of anti-Semitism is scandalous.

8. Engagement with the Jewish community to be made via its main representative groups.

The Labour Party, says this outside body, must only speak to Jews who are members of its “main representative groups” rather than “fringe groups”. This is another McCarthyite prescription which says you must only speak to some Jews and we, the BOD and other “main representative groups” will determine which Jews you should speak to and which ones you should boycott. In other words the BOD is calling on Labour to even refuse to talk with organisations such as Jewish Voice for Labour, Jewish Socialist Group or Jewdas. **The McCarthyite BOD determines who are the 'good Jews' and the 'bad Jews'.**

9. **Communicate with resolve.** The BOD instructs this independent Party that it must avoid “generic statements” and issue “condemnation of specific behaviours – and where appropriate condemnation of specific individuals.” On the basis of Pledge 6 this should no doubt involve condemnation of members who support BDS or say that Israel is a racist state and so on. In other words *political views that the BOD disagrees with should be outlawed by Labour.*

10. **Show leadership and take responsibility.** The leader must personally take on the responsibility of “ending Labour's anti-Semitism crisis”. Quite what they want here other than a Leader who does everything that the BOD demands is difficult to say. But certainly Labour democracy does not seem to be a consideration. They appear to want a dictator.

There is no single “Jewish community”

So there you have the 10 Pledges as an ultimatum. There is no room for discussion. They have to be adhered to if Labour wants to “begin healing its relationship with our community”. The arrogance of the BOD knows no bounds because it speaks seemingly for “the Jewish community”, all of it! *In reality there is no single Jewish community.* The BOD operates a form of **communalism** which is based on the idea that all Jews have the same interests and those interests, of course, are determined by the BOD. Hence, they could declare that the election of a government headed by Corbyn was against the interests of *all* Jews. In the real world meanwhile, the Jewish community is divided by class and political differences. There are many Jewish communities, and many different views on Israel.

What we have here is a clear political agenda, with the Israeli state at its heart. The BOD has long been an apologist for the Israeli state, even if it makes the occasional muted criticism of this or that Israeli government. It is attempting to impose its view on a political party by use of the label of anti-Semitism to demonise and silence people who simply have a different political view to them.

Anti-Semitism, real and counterfeit.

The joint statement of the three Jewish publications which announced that the election of a Labour government would be an “existential threat”, inadvertently admitted that anti-Jewish racism was not prevalent in the Labour Party. It said

“Labour makes a distinction between racial anti-Semitism targeting Jews (unacceptable) and political anti-Semitism (acceptable).”

So Labour thinks that racial anti-Semitism is unacceptable? What then is this creature “political anti-Semitism” which isn't racial? It's a nonsense. As the unexceptional definition of the IHRA says

“Anti-Semitism is a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of anti-Semitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities.”

Hatred or abuse of Jews as a whole is anti-Semitic. If somebody is in favour of “driving the Jews into the sea” this is anti-Semitic. In contrast if you are in favour of Israel being “a state of all its citizens” this is a democratic demand, though obviously one which the BOD cannot countenance since it accepts the second class status of Israeli Arabs.

As I have written elsewhere in relation to [anti-semitism, real and counterfeit](#), the attempt

to label opposition to Zionism as anti-Semitic has a political purpose, that is to outlaw criticism of the Israeli state which questions its “Jewish” nature or believes it to be an “Apartheid state”. Analogies, of course, have their limits. In South Africa blacks were an oppressed majority, in Israel Arabs are an oppressed minority. You might argue on the accuracy of the analogy, but Jews only towns, Jews only roads, are clearly racist, as is the new Law which says that in Israel “self-determination” is only for Jews.

The Israeli state was founded on the dispossession of Arabs. The state has recently introduced a new Basic Law which enshrines settlement, that is seizure of land in the West Bank as “a national value” “and will labour to encourage and promote its establishment and development”. This gives more dispossession new legal sanction. They are seizing land which the UN has always said they are occupying illegally. Now it will formally become part of Israel.

Oppose the witch-hunt

The fact that Labour leadership candidates have so readily said that they will accept the 10 point ultimatum delivered by the BOD is a bad sign. That they appear frightened to even argue with any of the 10 Pledges is an indication of a witch-hunt atmosphere that has been created. People who might have commented on the issue have been silenced for fear of being accused of being anti-Semitic. Labour members who are opposed to this are fearful of being expelled.

The 10 Pledges, as I have highlighted above, are a McCarthyite weapon with a political purpose. If the Labour Party accepts the conditions which the BOD is demanding then it will be the prelude to a witch-hunt against members, *Jews included*, who are not anti-Semitic, but oppose Zionism as a political philosophy and do not support an ethnic-religious state in Israel. *This is an anti-democratic attack on freedom of expression and the right to dissent.* Holocaust deniers and people who express anti-Jewish sentiments have no place in the Labour Party. But a political discussion on what the Israeli state is, what it does, should be free from disciplinary threats. Political differences can only be clarified or resolved by political discussion free of threats.

The 10 Pledges, if accepted, are likely to lead to **a Star Chamber in permanent session**, as a wave of politically motivated complaints are sent in. As Joe Glassman indicated in his video countless hours were spent trawling through Facebook posts years old. The CAAS and others will do the same again. Supporters of the Israeli state will not stop until they are satisfied by *a widespread purge*.

What is sickening about this campaign to decry as anti-Semitic people who are not, is that there is a growing trend of anti-Semitism internationally which is rooted in the far-right. The killings in Pittsburgh were the latest example. Yet the Israeli government is quite happy to have friendly relations with anti-Semites like Orbán in Hungary, whose government has organised an assault on democracy. In parallel the witch-hunt which the BOD promotes undermines democracy insofar as it attempts to take away (in this case in a political party) the democratic right of members to express their political views about the Israeli state. The narrative of the BOD is one where they split up Jews as good and bad, depending on their views on Israel.

Racism cannot be defeated by disciplinary action. There is a difference between somebody who may use an anti-Semitic 'trope' and somebody who has a racist attitude towards Jews. Challenging racism requires education and discussion free from threats. *It is impossible to deal with anti-Semitism without a discussion on the Israeli state.* This is something that the Labour leadership failed to do. Their failure gave the initiative to those who use anti-Semitism precisely to avoid that discussion. The very differences as to what does and does not constitute anti-Semitism relate directly to political views on Israel. The purpose of the BOD and some Jewish publications is to defend the Israeli state, as it is, to

demonise other Jews who have a different view and for Labour to make them persona non-grata. **Opposing the McCarthyite 10 Pledges is a necessary defence of freedom of speech on Israel** and the right of Labour members to support those forces in Israel, both Jews and Arabs, that are involved in **a democratic struggle to make Jews and Arabs equals and to end Jewish supremacy and privilege**. Ultimately there can be no solution to the dispute without Jews and Arabs living together as equals. This is what the BOD and other self-professed Zionist organisations are opposed to since for them the “Jewish state” is sacrosanct.

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