

The Labour Party

Jeremy Corbyn MP
Leader of the Labour Party

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Jonathan Goldstein,
Chair of the Jewish Leadership Council

Jonathan Arkush,
President of Board of Deputies of British Jews

26 March 2018

Dear Jonathan and Jonathan,

Thank you for your letter to the Labour Party concerning antisemitism issued as a press statement last night.

First of all, let me acknowledge the anger and upset that provoked it, and repeat my offer of an urgent meeting to discuss the issues you have raised as soon as possible.

I stated yesterday, and repeat today, that I will not tolerate any form of antisemitism that exists in or around our party and movement. I am committed to eliminating antisemitism wherever it exists.

As I told the Labour Party conference in 2016, antisemitism is an evil that led to the worst crimes of the 20th century. Prejudice and hatred of Jewish people has no place whatsoever in the Labour Party, and every one of us has a responsibility to ensure it is never allowed to fester in our society again.

I recognise that antisemitism has surfaced within the Labour Party, and has too often been dismissed as simply a matter of a few bad apples. This has caused pain and hurt to Jewish members of our Party and to the wider Jewish community in Britain. I am sincerely sorry for the pain which has been caused, and pledge to redouble my efforts to bring this anxiety to an end.

While the forms of antisemitism expressed on the far Right of politics are easily detectable, such as Holocaust denial, there needs to be a deeper understanding of what constitutes antisemitism in the labour movement. Sometimes this evil takes familiar forms – the east London mural which has caused such understandable controversy is an example. The idea of Jewish bankers and capitalists exploiting the workers of the world is an old antisemitic conspiracy theory. This was long ago, and rightly, described as “the

socialism of fools." I am sorry for not having studied the content of the mural more closely before wrongly questioning its removal in 2012.

Newer forms of antisemitism have been woven into criticism of Israeli governments. Criticism of Israel, particularly in relation to the continuing dispossession of the Palestinian people, cannot be avoided. Nevertheless, comparing Israel or the actions of Israeli governments to the Nazis, attributing criticisms of Israel to Jewish characteristics or to Jewish people in general and using abusive phraseology about supporters of Israel such as "Zio" all constitute aspects of contemporary antisemitism. And Jewish people must not be held responsible or accountable for the actions of the Israeli government.

The Labour Party has always opposed antisemitism, old and new, and always will. We are proud of our deep historical links with Jewish communities, and to have fought alongside generations of Jewish men and women against fascism, prejudice and discrimination. This is a part of our common heritage from which we will never be separated. But I acknowledge that antisemitic attitudes have surfaced more often in our ranks in recent years, and that the Party has been too slow in processing some of the cases that have emerged. Early action has nevertheless been taken, and we will work to speed up procedures, to deal with cases of antisemitic abuse or attitudes.

I am committed to making our Party a welcoming and secure place for Jewish people. Zero tolerance for antisemites means what it says, and the Party will proceed in that spirit. That demands among other things the overdue full implementation of the recommendations of the Chakrabarti report, including a programme of political education to increase awareness and understanding of all forms of antisemitism.

The battle against antisemitism should never become a party political issue. It must unite all of us if we are both to honour the memory of the victims of the bestial crimes of the twentieth century and build a future of equality and justice for all.

In that spirit, I must make it clear that I will never be anything other than a militant opponent of antisemitism. In this fight, I am your ally and always will be.

Best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jeremy Corbyn', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Jeremy Corbyn MP
Leader of the Labour Party