

Dear Shami Chakrabarti and David Feldman,

I will address the questions in the form on the inquiry website, but first I would like to explain why I believe it essential for this important inquiry to take a firm stand in defence of freedom of speech within the Labour Party (as elsewhere) on the subject of Israel and Palestine.

This has to include the freedom to oppose the ideology of Zionism and to question the nature of the Israeli state, even if this upsets people who identify closely with this ideology and feel strong loyalty to the state. They must, of course, have the freedom to argue for their views, but not the right to eliminate opposition by branding it racist.

I am the daughter of East End Jews whose parents fled pogroms in Russia, Ukraine, Poland and Germany in the late 19th and very early 20th centuries. It was a time of rising national awareness across Europe and also a time of developing political radicalism. Large numbers of Jews chose to fight their oppression alongside fellow workers in the progressive, socialist currents of the time. A much smaller number chose to adopt a Zionist ideology and, in so doing, accepted the basic premises of antisemitism - that Jews were eternal outcasts, victims of never-ending hatred by non-Jews - and that the only solution was to abandon the diverse societies in which they lived to set up an independent Jewish homeland. Some did so inspired by an idealistic vision of Jews sharing the biblical land of Israel with the indigenous people. But the reality was that in order to succeed, Zionists had to enter into an alliance with the dominant imperialist power which had the land of Palestine in its gift after WW1. The British state allowed Jews into Palestine as Western colonisers, displacing the Arab Palestinians who had lived there for hundreds of years.

My forbears had no interest in the latter idea - hence their integration into British society. Many family members have been lifelong left-wing activists. Like many brought up with a universalist Jewish ethic of care for common humanity, they were inspired by feelings of solidarity with victims of injustice regardless of ethnicity or faith. This may be why Jews have been disproportionately represented in anti-racist and anti-fascist struggles; the American civil rights movement; the anti-apartheid movement; and anti-war campaigns from Vietnam to Iraq and Syria. It should surprise no one that many Jews are also active supporters of Palestine solidarity including the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement. These movements are gaining support within the Labour Party and the labour movement at large. Any attempt to delegitimise them will inevitably catch committed Jewish activists in their coils - as has indeed already occurred in a number of cases during the current witch-hunt.

I have spent the past five decades patiently explaining that being a Jew does not pre-determine my attitude to the Israel-Palestine conflict; that is not about religion; that there are Jews who are not religious and Jews who have no loyalty to Israel; that most Palestinians - Christian, Muslim and secular - understand the distinction between Zionist and Jew; that there are many Christians, especially in the UK and US, who call themselves Zionist, either for religious or political reasons; and that there are far-right racists who support Israel because their hatred of Muslims trumps their loathing of Jews.

We are now witnessing attempts by supporters of Israel, combining forces with Labour right-wingers and Conservatives, to deny all that. They are claiming that adherence to Zionism is a form of Jewish self-determination which is intrinsic to Jewish identity. This is the fall-back position of supporters of a state which is racist, militarised, nuclear-armed. A state which executes Palestinians on the streets and celebrates their murderers, denying the non-Jewish population under its sway all civil and human rights. As Israel's claims to be a democratic state, morally superior to its Arab neighbours, in an existential struggle with a monstrous terrorist foe, become less and less credible, its supporters try to ban opposition to Israel on the pretext that it has no other motive than hatred of Jews. This is

unacceptable on the international stage. Within a democratic, historically socialist British political party, it is unforgivable, wrong, and deeply dangerous.

Without any justification, Israel's supporters in the party seek to privilege antisemitism as an exceptional form of racism unlike any other. Worse, by setting Jews up as arbiters of what may or may not be said about Israel-Palestine, and by tying Jewish identity inextricably to Zionism and the state of Israel, they are stoking more hostility against Jews. Cynics may suggest that this is the intention of the pro-Israel lobby. The more evidence they can find of hostility to Jews, the more fear they generate in the Jewish community and the more they can persuade Jews that Israel is essential to their identity, persuading some to make Aliyah, that is, to migrate to Israel.

What is or has been your connection with or interest in the Labour Party?

I have been active in left-wing politics since my teens and was a Labour Party member in Kilburn for a short period in the 1970s, before my work took me abroad for almost a decade. I was disillusioned by the party's turn away from its founding principles and only reluctantly supported the Blair leadership in its 1997 return to power. I remained politically active but outside the parliamentary mainstream, joining the movement against war in Iraq in 2003, then Jews for Justice for Palestinians, then becoming more intensely involved with Palestine solidarity. At the same time I was an active trade unionist (NUJ and then NUT). I am now the International Solidarity Officer for Waltham Forest NUT. Jeremy Corbyn's election as Labour leader last summer revived my enthusiasm for the Labour Party because I was aware of his consistent support for progressive causes, including justice for Palestine. I joined my local CLP - Chingford and Woodford Green - at the first opportunity. I have been welcomed by existing and other new members and have been elected a delegate from my branch to the constituency GC.

Please describe any form of antisemitism, islamophobia or other racism that you have experienced or observed within the Party?

I don't deny that there may be instances of racism in the Labour Party, but I have never experienced or witnessed any and I am confident that - as an anti-racist party - its members are far less likely to be guilty of prejudiced thinking than most other sections of society. Every day I see evidence of extreme anti-Muslim sentiment and prejudice against east Europeans and other migrants, but this comes from media and politicians, not from within the Labour Party. Suggestions that the Labour Party "has a problem with Jews" are, in my view, entirely false.

I can honestly say that I have been very fortunate in never experiencing anti-Jewish discrimination during my life. That is not to say that I have not seen and heard unpleasant, prejudiced, stereotyping of Jews in the media and coming from the mouths of politicians and pundits and from far-right extremists.

I have, along with other Jews and non-Jews in the Palestine solidarity movement, occasionally had to take a firm stand against misplaced expressions of hostility to Israel, couched in antisemitic language. This usually comes from people who, misled by Israel's claims to represent all Jews around the world, believe that every Jew shares responsibility for Israel's actions against Palestinians. This is a form of antisemitic stereotyping of Jews which is deliberately fostered by Israel's supporters. Since neither our government nor any other authority in the West holds Israel to account, the idea takes root in some people's minds that Jews who support Israel are in control of media and other institutions. This is regrettable and needs correcting, but it is not Jew hatred in any meaningful sense.

Ironically the only form of Jew-hatred I have encountered personally has been in the form of attacks from supporters of Israel condemning me as a self-hating Jew, not a real Jew, a traitor who deserves to see her child slaughtered by terrorists.

What is your understanding of the Party's ethics, rules and procedures for dealing with any form of inappropriate language or conduct?

Have you any positive suggestions for the future, including training, codes of conduct, rules and discipline for members, candidates and representatives of the party?

I understand and expect that abusive, discriminatory, prejudiced language and behaviour directed against anyone because of their race, religion, gender, disability or sexual orientation would be judged unacceptable in the Party; that someone suspected of such conduct would be called to account and investigated under a transparent and just process; that their conduct would be judged against objective criteria and that disciplinary procedures would be applied in an even-handed manner, treating all forms of prejudice in the same way. This should apply to all members, candidates and representatives.

Recently we have seen many cases of malicious, false allegations made against anti-racist activists on the Left of the party. They have been accused of antisemitism on the basis of critical comments they have made about Israel, usually in the form of remarks dredged from old social media exchanges at times when Israel's treatment of Palestinians has been particularly outrageous. These false allegations have brought the Party into disrepute and given its opponents and hostile media ammunition to discredit it.

I hope and expect that, as a result of your inquiry, members responsible for such allegations will be called to account and subjected to disciplinary procedures applied as rigorously as in the case of members accused of racism.

I see no evidence that the Party has any need of special training with regard to antisemitism, any more than any other form of racism.

In this context I must comment on the Royall report into allegations of antisemitism in the Oxford University Labour Club. Janet Royall found no evidence of institutional antisemitism but did find evidence of at least one case of a serious false allegation of antisemitism. One of the main drivers of such false allegations has been the Jewish Labour Movement - an organisation which is seeking to amend Party membership rules to allow Zionists to have other party members disciplined if they express views upsetting to supporters of Israel. They are engaged in a concerted campaign to foist onto the party a distortion of the Macpherson guidance on police responses to racist incidents.

The Macpherson report said that a victim's perception must be taken into account in a case of hate crime; it was not intended to empower an alleged victim "or anyone else" to determine, without reference to any other criteria, when a hate crime was being committed, as in the JLM's proposed rule change. To do so would allow pro-Palestine, pro-Boycott or anti-Israel statements to be labelled antisemitic without contest, thus shutting down debate on Israel.

And yet Janet Royall, who has discredited herself by writing [an approving blog](#) on the JLM website, recommends that the JLM should be made responsible for training party officials on the nature of antisemitism.

If this were to happen I would seriously have to consider my position as a party member.

According to the [JLM's own website](#):

The Jewish Labour Movement (UK), founded in 2004, is the successor organisation to Poale Zion (founded in 1905). The Jewish Labour Movement affiliated with the Labour Party in the UK as a Socialist society in 1920. It is also affiliated with the World Labour Zionist Movement, a faction within the World Zionist Organization. We view Zionism as the national liberation movement of the Jewish people. Its aim is to promote "a secure, progressive, just and successful State of Israel" and believe in a two state solution.

This organisation is complicit in the colonisation of Palestine and the ongoing illegal expansion of settlements on Palestinian land. It is not a fit body to be charged with training about antisemitism.

I would go further. It is not a fit body to have affiliate status in the Labour Party because it does not represent Jews as it claims. It represents only those who share its particular political stance towards the Israel-Palestine conflict. There is no evidence of its having any role other than to lobby on behalf of the state of Israel. Its website is devoid of any sign of progressive, anti-racist, or indeed any political activity, beyond campaigning to vilify the pro-Palestinian Left since Jeremy Corbyn was elected leader.

I support the proposal in another submission, with multiple Jewish signatures (including mine), for the formation of an inclusive Jewish section in the Party which would be genuinely representative of Jews regardless of their attitude to Israel. Such an organisation would be qualified to advise the party on tackling antisemitism, if your inquiry concluded that there was a need for it.

There is one final comment I would like to make. It concerns the so-called “EUMC definition” of antisemitism which is frequently held up by pro-Israel lobbyists as proof that criticising Israel is equivalent to criticising Jews as Jews, and therefore antisemitic. It’s a lengthy, confused document, devised by American Zionists without reference to any dissenting authorities on the matter, that deliberately mixes together obvious examples of true Jew hatred with attitudes to Israel that “could” be antisemitic. The implication being that if it could, then it is. It is discussed in some detail here.

<http://freespeechonisrael.org.uk/eumc-not-produce-adopt-working-definition-antisemitism/>

Its proponents assert that it was “adopted” by the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC), that it is the gold standard in defining antisemitism and that an organisation that declines to adopt it is by definition guilty of antisemitism. As I’m sure you know, it never was “adopted” by the EUMC and its successor organisation, the European Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), has dropped it from its website. Unfortunately, its advocates have had some success in pushing it in some organisations. I hope your inquiry will recommend forcefully that no Labour Party organisation should adopt this discredited draft definition.