

## **Submission to the Chakrabati Inquiry**

### **Personal/ /experience /relevant to the inquiry**

I am a long standing member of the Labour Party (I joined in the early 1980s and was for a time in the 1990s a Leeds city councillor for Headingley)

My CLP is Leeds North East which has a sizable Jewish membership and an MP Fabian Hamilton who is also Jewish.

I am a retired academic from the Department of Peace Studies, the University of Bradford where I taught and researched amongst other things human rights and International Humanitarian Law and taught MA courses on the Israel/Palestinian conflict, human rights and IHL. In the course of so doing I have critically examined the concept of Zionism, its history, meanings and influence and the debates amongst both Jews and gentiles on Zionism both in the past and today.

I have visited both Israel, the West Bank and East Jerusalem and met with many Israelis, with politicians, with Jewish activists against the Israel occupation and Israel Arabs as well many Palestinian groups. I also visited Yad Vashem, the Jewish Holocaust museum when I was in Jerusalem.

In 2013 I visited the West Bank with Labour Friends of Palestine where amongst other activities I observed an Israeli military court that dealt with Palestinian children arrested by the Israel military (primarily for throwing stones) and which breached IHL and the Convention on the Rights of the Child to which Israel is a signatory.

### **Racism and Anti-Semitism in the Labour Party**

There is clearly no place in the Labour Party for racism of any kind. However in my long membership of the party I have never witnessed any actual anti Semitism in the party itself.

At the same time however I have found it difficult to discuss the Israeli /Palestinian conflict within the party and in my CLP. I have had many very constructive and useful one to one conversations with Fabian Hamilton MP over many years and particularly after my visit to Israel and Palestine in 2013 but when I attempted to discuss what I actually witnessed on that visit in my CLP there was a real reluctance to engage with the serious issues I raised. Unlike other instances of global injustice I had the strong feeling that members and particularly Jewish members who strongly support Israel did not really want to reflect at all on what I said. I think because of my long standing membership of the party and the respect people have for me and my work I was never actually accused of anti Semitism but I was aware and still am that raising criticisms of Israel or support for the Palestinian rights to self determination or raising critical questions regarding Zionism is extremely difficult in the Labour Party. Of course discussing the Israel/Palestine conflict is an emotive subject and one needs to be careful with the terminology one uses but it is my view that the Labour Party does not always provide a safe space within which to debate these issues without some groups raising the accusation of anti Semitism. I am clear that being critical of Israel and its government, its human rights record or being critical of Zionism as an idea is not in any sense being anti semitic.

Therefore I think attention needs to be paid to rules of debate, listening and respecting differences of opinion but which also safeguards the right of people to say things without them being accused of racism/anti Semitism by those who disagree. Education and conflict resolution practices could usefully be employed. When I was in the Department of Peace Studies , Bradford University we set up a 'Peaceful Cities' project after the Bradford riots which brought together ethnically diverse community and religious groups to discuss conflict,

racism and religious and social division and how to discuss difficult issues and move towards better understanding and conflict resolution. Although difficult and not always succeeding this was a worthwhile project and demonstrates that it is possible to debate emotive and fractious issues without accusing those one disagrees with of hatred and bigotry!

As said above I have never witnessed any clear anti-Semitism in the Labour but at the same time I have several Jewish friends both in the labour party and supporters who are critical of Israel who have suffered from virulent attacks from supporters of Israel calling them not 'real Jews', self-hating Jews etc which I think is abhorrent and should, just like real substantiated racism, have no place in the Labour Party. I hope some of the members of, for example, 'Jews for Justice for Palestine' describe the hate mail they regularly receive.

I could document a number of instances when I have witnessed serious intimidation of individuals and groups raising issues of Israel's occupation of Palestine by groups of extreme right wing supporters of Israel which it seems to me are not really acknowledged by the press or in political discussion of racism and anti-Semitism.

Finally in my view the allegation of widespread anti-Semitism in the labour Party has been grossly exaggerated. It has been politically driven by those who will do anything to undermine Jeremy Corbyn as leader of the labour Party and those Jewish organisations who wish to stifle any serious political debate on Israeli policy towards the Palestinians.

I am happy to discuss any of my submission with the panel at any time.

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