



What is the Jewish Labour Movement?

In early 2016, an intense media offensive was launched claiming that the Labour Party was rife with antisemitism. Since then, after a wave of summary suspensions, costly investigations and many successful appeals, it is clear that the vast majority of the members disciplined were on the Left of the Party and were opponents of Israel's violations of Palestinian human rights who had no hostility to Jews as Jews.

Even after Corbyn's transformatory 2017 general election campaign the offensive, led by the Jewish Labour Movement (JLM), Labour Friends of Israel and other pro-Israel lobby groups has not abated. Some of the groups receive direct finance from Israel, as revealed in the Al Jazeera investigation *The Lobby*, televised in January 2017. It made clear the hostility of Labour's pro-Israel Right to the left-wing leadership of Jeremy Corbyn, a known supporter of Palestinian rights.

Why JLM is a problem

JLM is a new incarnation of the organisation Poale Zion which first affiliated to the Labour Party in 1920. In 2004 it changed its name to the Jewish Labour Movement but remained almost entirely inactive. In February 2016, its website sprang into life with attacks on the newly invigorated Labour left. This coincided with the appointment of committed pro-Israel lobbyist Jeremy Newmark as its National Chair.

Being Jewish is not a requirement of membership but members must share JLM's stated purpose, to "maintain and promote Labour or Socialist Zionism as the movement for self-determination of the Jewish people within the state of Israel," and its belief in "the centrality of Israel in Jewish life". Membership is not an option for anyone, Jews included, with a different view of Zionism or Israel. Yet JLM claims quite illegitimately to speak for all Jews in the Labour Party.

The World Zionist Organisation

JLM says it organises within the World Zionist Organisation (WZO), whose goals include establishing Eretz Yisrael as a greater Israel from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean, including the whole of Jerusalem. WZO's Settlement Division actively supports settlements in the Occupied West Bank, although both the Occupation and the settlements are illegal under international law. JLM claims to work for a "two-state solution" under which Palestinians would have their own state with its capital in East Jerusalem. This is Labour Party policy. But the JLM's involvement with WZO, and also with the Israeli Labor Party which has backed the building of illegal settlements on Palestinian land for decades, puts it in conflict with this policy. There is nothing on its website indicating any opposition to, or even disapproval of, Israel's oppressive policies.



JLM Chair Jeremy Newmark (centre) flanked by Israeli Ambassador Mark Regev (right) and discredited Embassy staffer Shai Masot at Labour Party conference in 2016.

Picture: Al-Jazeera

JLM Staff

JLM Chair, Jeremy Newmark, was previously official spokesman and head of communications for the Chief Rabbi, and then Chief Executive of the Jewish Leadership Council. It was while acting in that role that he was said by an employment tribunal judge in March 2013 to have been "false, preposterous, disturbing and arrogant" in his evidence in a case against the university lecturers' union UCU. The Tribunal dismissed the case brought by pro-Israel lobbyists accusing the union of antisemitism.

The current JLM Director is Ella Rose, who moved to the post straight from a position in the Israeli Embassy. The Al-Jazeera programme *The Lobby* recorded her threatening another Jewish Labour Party member, Jackie Walker, calling her a "fucking antisemite" and saying that she could "take" Walker with her Krav Maga unarmed combat skills. (No disciplinary action was taken against Rose.)

Antisemitism training JLM-style

The JLM has persuaded the Labour Party to ignore recommendations in the Chakrabarti Report and award it the role of educating party members about antisemitism. There has been no consultation in the party on how to deliver anti-racist education or training on antisemitism. How is it that the JLM has apparently been granted the position of trainer, although its partisan views about Israel are rejected by many Jews in the Labour Party? Why has it acquired a uniquely privileged status to advise the party, while other Jews (let alone other minorities) have been ignored?

The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) Working Definition of Antisemitism.

JLM training is based on the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) Working Definition of Antisemitism. It is true that the Labour Party has adopted the 40-word definition at the start of the IHRA document. We think this fails to do what any definition ought to do: help people distinguish between what is and is not antisemitic.

The rest of the document, which has thankfully *not* been adopted by the Labour Party, muddies the waters further by giving 11 examples of what it says might be antisemitic, seven of which refer not to Jews but to Israel. It is these examples that JLM focuses upon in its training. They lend weight to the conflation of criticism of Israel with antisemitism which is being widely used by pro-Israel advocates to delegitimise opposition to Israel's abuses of Palestinian human rights.

A Legal Opinion

The legal Opinion on the IHRA document by senior barrister Hugh Tomlinson QC, published in March 2017, concludes that criticisms of Israel based on opposition to its human rights abuses of Palestinians are not antisemitic *unless* they also contain material expressions of hatred of Jews. (The Opinion can be found at www.freespeechonisrael.org.uk/ihra-opinion)

Describing Israel as a racist, apartheid, colonial settler state, or advocating boycott of Israel or its institutions, may be upsetting to Israel's supporters. However, the Opinion is clear that unless there is evidence that they are motivated by hatred of Jewish people, such actions are not antisemitic. Banning or obstructing such criticism of Israel would breach legal obligations of free expression under Article 10 of the Human Rights Act, and, in an educational setting, the Education Act 1986, section 43.

JLM training sessions on antisemitism are helping to create an atmosphere in which people who make legitimate criticism of Israel or Zionism can be branded as antisemitic – a poisonous and intimidating label within the progressive labour movement.

JLM and Labour Party rules

Since early 2016, the JLM has been attempting to have its censorious goals enshrined in Labour Party rules. They have been pushing a proposal which would make it easier to discipline members solely on the basis of any complainant's belief that an act or statement was motivated by hostility or prejudice. An Orwellian touch is that even beliefs expressed privately could be regarded as sufficient evidence of hate crime - a violation of both due process and natural justice, and contradicting the specific recommendations of the Chakrabarti report to the Labour Party on antisemitism. At the time of writing it is unclear how this proposal will be resolved.

Opposing racism, supporting free speech

As a Jewish-led campaign group with many members in the Labour Party, Free Speech on Israel abhors all forms of racism, including antisemitism as it is normally understood – that is, as hostility to, or prejudice or discrimination against, Jews as Jews.

Antisemitism in the UK clearly exists and must be opposed. But seventy-five percent of political antisemitism (according to a Home Affairs Select Committee report in 2016) comes from the far right of the spectrum. Wherever it occurs, including within the Labour Party, it must be dealt with robustly, like any form of racism.

But the notion that there is a crisis, a wave of hostility to Jews in the Labour Party, is fanciful verging on farcical. Through its evidence-free insistence that there is, the JLM is attempting to instil the idea that any criticism of Israel is *prima facie* likely to be antisemitic. The effect is to shut down free expression and democratic discussion within the Labour Party on the issue of Israel and Palestine.

Promoting genuine debate

If a JLM speaker is coming to your area, ask for a balancing Labour Jewish voice to be invited. Since July 19, 2017, there is a new organisation for Labour Party members – Jewish Voice for Labour - eminently qualified to engage in well-informed, wide-ranging discussion about antisemitism and related issues. Contact them on info@jvl.org.uk.

Free Speech on Israel, Jews for Justice for Palestinians, Independent Jewish Voices, Jewish Socialists' Group and the International Jewish Anti-Zionist Network also have active Labour Party members who can present an alternative view and promote genuine debate.

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