

No Place For Antisemitism

Understanding Antisemitism to Defeat it

Antisemitism is a poison that must be challenged wherever it raises its head. Hatred towards Jewish people has no place in our society.

This short leaflet aims to provide Labour members and supporters with some basic tools to understand antisemitism so we can defeat it. To confront antisemitism in wider society, we must face up to the unsettling truth that a small number of Labour members hold antisemitic views and a much larger number don't recognise antisemitic stereotypes and conspiracy theories.

The evidence is clear enough. The worst cases of antisemitism in our party have included Holocaust denial, crude Jewish-banker stereotypes, conspiracy theories blaming Israel for 9/11 or every war on the Rothschild family, and even one member who appeared to believe that Hitler had been misunderstood.

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Antisemitism: a brief history

Antisemitism is an ancient and very particular form of racism. For most of their recorded history, Jewish people have been in the minority wherever they have lived and an easy target for scapegoating by the powerful.

The Middle Ages in Europe witnessed large-scale persecution of Jews including expulsions, forced conversions and killings. In the Crusades, hundreds of thousands of Jews were either killed in or expelled from Germany, England, France and Austria. All Jews were expelled from England in 1290.

In the 19th century, the scientific and industrial revolutions bred new manifestations of antisemitism resulting in pogroms and discrimination across Europe and the largest wave of Jewish migration to the UK.

Hatred of Jews reached its peak with the Nazi Holocaust. Between 1941 and 1945, through mass shootings by death squads, the starvation and squalor of concentration camps, and the gas chambers, the Nazis systematically murdered six million Jews, two-thirds of the Jewish population of Europe. The Holocaust's unique horror must never be minimised; Holocaust denial and revisionism are profoundly antisemitic.

Antisemitic conspiracy theories

There has been a rise in conspiracy theories which see capitalism and imperialism as the product of plots by a small shadowy elite rather than a political, economic, legal and social system. These views do no service to the struggle for a just society. They are just one step away from myths about Jewish bankers and a secret Jewish plot for world domination, which reproduce the anti-Jewish tropes that we have seen throughout history.

These anti-Jewish narratives are often based on the idea of powerful Jews controlling the world. The 1903 Protocols of the Elders of Zion, the entirely fabricated minutes of a fictitious meeting of a secret Jewish government planning world domination through control of the media and finance, helped spread murderous Jew-hate. Contemporary theories about George Soros' control of world affairs or a Jewish plot to facilitate "white genocide" helped fuel recent antisemitic attacks across the world.

Today, some conspiracy theories substitute Israel or Zionists for Jews, presenting Israel as controlling the world's media and finances. Others contain further antisemitic claims, such as Israeli responsibility for 9/11 or control of ISIS. These theories ascribe to Israel influence on world events far beyond any objective analysis. Likewise blaming Israel's faults on its Jewish identity, or holding all Jews in the UK and elsewhere responsible for what Israel does is antisemitic.

Antisemitic conspiracy theories don't just do harm to Jewish people, they also divert attention away from the real causes of war, poverty and injustice.

Zionism, anti-Zionism and antisemitism

In response to 19th Century European antisemitism, some Jews became advocates for Zionism, Jewish national self-determination in a Jewish state. Since the State of Israel was founded in 1948, following the horrors of the Holocaust, Zionism means maintaining that state. Jewish people have the same right to self-determination as any other people. Many Jewish Israelis are the descendants of refugees fleeing the Holocaust or from across the Middle East who faced discrimination after the founding of the State of Israel. Most British Jews feel connected to some extent to Israel and many have friends and family there.

There are many forms of Zionism both in Israel and around the world and for many Jews, Zionism represents national liberation. The concepts of Israel, Zion and Jerusalem run deeply in Jewish religion, identity and culture, and for many are symbolic of a homeland, refuge, or place of safety. The sensitivities around these concepts should be considered before using them.

That does not mean limiting legitimate criticism of the Israeli state or its policies or diluting support for the Palestinian people's struggle for justice, their own state, and the rights of refugees and their descendants. The impact that the creation of Israel had and still has on the Palestinian people means the struggle for justice for them and an end to their dispossession is a noble one; Labour supports Palestinian statehood and a two-state solution to the conflict.

But opposition to the Israeli government must never use antisemitic ideas, such as attributing its injustices to Jewish identity, demanding that Jews in Britain or elsewhere answer for its conduct, or comparing Israel to the Nazis. Many Jews view calls for Israel to cease to exist as calls for expulsion or genocide. Arguing for one state with rights for all Israelis and Palestinians is not antisemitic, but calling for the removal of Jews from the region is. Anti-Zionism is not in itself antisemitic and some Jews are not Zionists. Labour is a political home for Zionists and anti-Zionists. Neither Zionism nor anti-Zionism is in itself racism.

Learning about antisemitism to fight antisemitism

Labour exists to promote the social liberation of all people. That's why we are launching a programme to educate our members and empower them to confront oppression, wherever it arises. Our first materials will be on antisemitism, recognising that anti-Jewish bigotry has reared its head within our movement.

Please visit:

<https://labour.org.uk/no-place-for-antisemitism/>

to engage with this material and find links to other resources, so that together, we can stand in solidarity with our Jewish brothers and sisters and ensure there is no place for antisemitism in our society, with further materials to be produced on other forms of oppression.

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