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Antisemitism in the UK Contents

Conclusions and recommendations

Defining antisemitism

1. The Macpherson definition that, for recording purposes, a racist incident is one "perceived to be racist by the victim or any other person" is a good working definition, which provides a strong basis for investigation. As such, the perceptions of Jewish people—both collectively and individually, as an alleged victim—should be the starting point of any investigation into antisemitism. However, for an incident to be found to be antisemitic, or for a perpetrator to be prosecuted for a criminal offence that was motivated or aggravated by antisemitism, requires more than just the victim's perception that it was antisemitic. It also requires evidence, and it requires that someone other than the victim makes an objective interpretation of that evidence. The difficulty of making such a determination in the face of conflicting interpretations underlines the importance of establishing an agreed definition of antisemitism. (Paragraph 22)
2. It is clear that where criticism of the Israeli Government is concerned, context is vital. Israel is an ally of the UK Government and is generally regarded as a liberal democracy, in which the actions of the Government are openly debated and critiqued by its citizens. Campaigners for Palestinian rights have informed us that they would expect similar standards of conduct from the Israeli Government as they would demand from the UK Government. It is important that non-Israelis with knowledge and understanding of the region should not be excluded from criticising the Israeli Government, in common with the many citizens of Israel who are amongst its strongest critics, including human rights organisations in that country. (Paragraph 23)
3. We broadly accept the IHRA definition, but propose two additional clarifications to ensure that freedom of speech is maintained in the context of discourse about Israel and Palestine, without allowing antisemitism to permeate any debate. The definition should include the following statements:
 - It is not antisemitic to criticise the Government of Israel, without additional evidence to suggest antisemitic intent.
 - It is not antisemitic to hold the Israeli Government to the same standards as other liberal democracies, or to take a particular interest in the Israeli Government's policies or actions, without additional evidence to suggest antisemitic intent. (Paragraph 24)
4. We recommend that the IHRA definition, with our additional caveats, should be formally adopted by the UK Government, law enforcement agencies and all political parties, to assist them in determining whether or not an incident or discourse can be regarded as antisemitic. (Paragraph 25)
5. 'Zionism' as a concept remains a valid topic for academic and political debate, both within and outside Israel. The word 'Zionist' (or worse, 'Zio') as a term of abuse, however, has no place in a civilised society. It has been tarnished by its repeated use in antisemitic and aggressive contexts. Antisemites frequently use the word 'Zionist' when they are in fact referring to Jews, whether in Israel or elsewhere. Those claiming to be "anti-Zionist, not antisemitic", should do so in the knowledge that 59% of British Jewish people consider themselves to be Zionists. If these individuals genuinely mean only to criticise the policies of the Government of Israel, and have no intention to offend British Jewish people, they should criticise "the Israeli Government", and not "Zionists". For the purposes of criminal or disciplinary investigations, use of the words 'Zionist' or 'Zio' in an accusatory or abusive context should be considered inflammatory and potentially antisemitic. This should be communicated by the Government and political parties to those responsible for determining whether or not an incident should be regarded as antisemitic. (Paragraph 32)

The rise of antisemitism

6. Police-recorded antisemitic crime is almost non-existent in some parts of England, as illustrated by the data provided as an Annex to this report. We question why some police forces, operating in counties in which thousands of Jewish people live, have recorded few or no antisemitic crimes. The NPCC should investigate the causes of this apparent under-reporting and provide extra support, where needed, to police forces with less experience of investigating antisemitic incidents. (Paragraph 41)
7. Although the UK remains one of the least antisemitic countries in Europe, it is alarming that recent surveys show that as many as one in 20 adults in the UK could be characterised as "clearly antisemitic". The stark increase in potentially antisemitic views between 2014 and 2015 is a trend that will concern many. There is a real risk that the UK is moving in the wrong direction on antisemitism, in contrast to many other countries in Western Europe. The fact that it seems to have entered political discourse is a particular concern. This should be a real wake up call for those who value the UK's proud, multi-cultural democracy. The Government, police and prosecuting authorities must monitor this situation carefully and pursue a robust, zero tolerance approach to this problem. (Paragraph 47)
8. We were shocked by the viscerally antisemitic nature and volume of tweets directed specifically at Members of Parliament, as well as those received in response to our own tweets about this inquiry. It is particularly ironic that, at the point at which we considered this report, Twitter had made no effort to remove antisemitic responses to tweets sent from the Committee's account two days earlier. More alarmingly, some of the abusive messages sent to Luciana Berger MP in 2014 (using the hashtag "filthyjewbitch") are still available. This experience is no doubt common to many Jewish people outside Parliament, too. It is disgraceful that any individual should have to tolerate such appalling levels of antisemitic abuse in order to use Twitter—a social media platform now regarded as a requirement for any public figure. Twitter trolls attempt to use vile attacks to silence the voices that they find unacceptable. (We have also looked at the illicit use of the internet to promote hate, in our report into countering extremism). (Paragraph 57)
9. In the context of global revenue of \$2.2 billion, it is deplorable that Twitter continues to act as an inert host for vast swathes of antisemitic hate speech and abuse. The company has the necessary resources and technical capability, and must do more to address this pernicious problem, which appears to be growing exponentially. The onus should not be on the victim to monitor their account for ongoing abuse and report it to the company. Twitter has approximately 3,800 employees around the world. Even if a third of them work in the company's security and enforcement team, that would equate to around one employee for every 82,000 active users, or one employee for every 130,000 tweets per day. It must devote more resources and employ more staff to enable it to identify hateful and abusive users in a proactive manner, and it must introduce more rigorous tools for detecting and filtering abuse. (Paragraph 58)
10. Twitter has introduced new tools to improve the ability of victims to report abuse. While we welcome these changes, the scale of abuse on Twitter is a problem of such magnitude that it cannot be solved through quick fixes alone. Instead, we recommend that the company should:
 - Significantly expand its enforcement remit to include proactive identification of abusive users, by searching for keywords associated with abuse and suspending or removing the accounts of perpetrators;
 - Devote considerably more resources to identifying abusive users proactively, and employ a large number of staff dedicated to enforcing these new powers; and
 - Allow users to choose abusive terms that they wish to block from tweets or messages, so that they do not reach their intended victim and do not appear in any related conversations, to deny the abusive trolls the attention that they so desire. (Paragraph 59)

The response of Government and justice system

11. The majority of the evidence we have received suggests that the police and criminal justice system's response to antisemitism in the UK has been, for the most part, excellent. We nevertheless welcome the decision by the Crown Prosecution Service to issue detailed guidance on prosecuting cases involving communications sent via social media, as well as its recently-launched consultation on racially and religiously aggravated hate crime. We hope that Jewish community groups will engage fully in this process, to ensure that the final CPS guidance take appropriate account of the specific impact of antisemitism. We also reiterate our concerns about the potential under-reporting of antisemitic crime in some parts of England, as outlined in Chapter 3. (Paragraph 67)
12. To address the particular problem of hate crime committed online, we recommend that individuals reporting antisemitism and other hate crime should have a single point of contact within their local police force for the duration of the investigation and any subsequent prosecution, ideally in the form of a dedicated hate crime officer. This will ensure that an ongoing flow of communication is sustained when the case is referred to another force. Where police forces are too small to have a dedicated member of staff, they should nevertheless have an officer with specific responsibility for hate crime cases. The victim should be able to contact this individual directly for information about the status of their case. We have announced a separate inquiry into hate crime, which will examine this and other related issues in greater detail. (Paragraph 68)
13. It is concerning that the Crime Survey of England and Wales (CSEW) is not able to provide reliable baseline figures on the prevalence of self-reported experiences of antisemitic crime. The majority of British Jewish people live in Greater London, so a national sample would have to be prohibitively large in order to obtain reliable data on antisemitism. CST figures, while valuable, may reflect trends in reporting as well as overall prevalence. The Home Office and the Office for National Statistics should commission enhanced samples in Greater London and other areas with large Jewish populations, to ensure that the CSEW can collect reliable data on the prevalence of antisemitism. (Paragraph 69)
14. The evidence we have received on the current and previous Governments' responses to antisemitism has been positive, particularly on their engagement with Jewish community organisations, interfaith work, and ongoing funding of security provision for Jewish schools and synagogues. The former Prime Minister David Cameron was particularly commended for his support for Holocaust education and commemoration. The Cross-Government Working Group on Antisemitism appears to be an effective forum for relationship-building, sharing of information and collaborative work aimed at addressing antisemitism in all communities, and is held up as an international model of best practice. (Paragraph 74)
15. We express our gratitude to Community Security Trust for the impressive and professional work that they do to keep British people safe. It is appalling that such stringent measures are necessary to ensure the safety of British Jewish people, and it is right that funding for that security should come predominantly from the Government: the safety of any British community should never be reliant on the generosity of individuals within that community. We recommend that this funding stream continues on an annual basis, rather than being dependent on a Government Minister making an announcement at CST's annual dinner. The Government should also be responsive to any requests for increased resources arising from any ongoing increase in antisemitism. (Paragraph 76)

Campus antisemitism

16. The current President of the National Union of Students, Malia Bouattia, does not appear to take sufficiently seriously the issue of antisemitism on campus, and has responded to Jewish students' concerns about her previous language with defensiveness and an apparent unwillingness to listen to their concerns. There is of course no reason why an individual who has campaigned for the rights of Palestinian people—a cause widely supported on university campuses—should not serve as President of the NUS. But Ms Bouattia's choice of language (and ongoing defence of that language) suggests a worrying disregard for her duty to represent all sections of the student population and promote balanced and respectful debate. Referring to Birmingham University as a "Zionist outpost" (and similar comments) smacks of outright racism, which is unacceptable, and even more so from a public figure such as the President of the NUS. (Paragraph 87)
17. The unique nature of antisemitism requires a unique response, which may not be effectively addressed by the steps that the NUS is currently taking. For the sake of their own credibility and to ensure Jewish students across the UK are treated appropriately, the NUS and the Union of Jewish Students (UJS) should work to mend their broken relationship. The Jewish member of the Anti-Racism, Anti-Fascist (ARAF) Taskforce should be elected by the UJS, and should not require the approval of the President of the NUS. If, after a one year 'grace period', the UJS does not believe that the ARAF Taskforce is up to the challenge of tackling antisemitism on campus, an Antisemitism Taskforce should be established at the Executive level of the NUS, aimed at ensuring that British universities are a safe space for students of all faiths or none. (Paragraph 88)
18. We welcome the fact that Holocaust teaching in schools is compulsory. However, public understanding both of centuries of European anti-Jewish hatred, which culminated in the Holocaust, and of post-Second World War Jewish history, is still lacking. Many students encounter campaigning and debates about Israel and Palestine for the first time at university. The tensions surrounding Israel Apartheid Week and pro-Israel activities on campus illustrate how polarised this debate tends to be, with some students drawing on a simplistic formulation of the conflict. There is evidence that this has resulted in unwitting antisemitism emerging in some student populations, and within left-leaning student political organisations in particular. (Paragraph 93)
19. Free speech must be maintained, and it is perfectly legitimate for students to campaign against the actions of the Israeli Government. But resources should be provided to ensure that students are well-informed about both sides of the argument, both Israeli and Palestinian, and to support them in developing a sensitive, nuanced understanding of Middle Eastern politics in general. Universities UK should work with appropriate student groups to produce a resource for students, lecturers and student societies on how to deal sensitively with the Israel/Palestine conflict, and how to ensure that pro-Palestinian campaigns avoid drawing on antisemitic rhetoric. This should be distributed widely via student unions, university staff and social media. (Paragraph 94)

Political discourse and leadership

20. While the Labour Leader has a proud record of campaigning against many types of racism, based on the evidence we have received, we are not persuaded that he fully appreciates the distinct nature of post-Second World War antisemitism. Unlike other forms of racism, antisemitic abuse often paints the victim as a malign and controlling force rather than as an inferior object of derision, making it perfectly possible for an 'anti-racist campaigner' to express antisemitic views. Jewish Labour MPs have been subject to appalling levels of abuse, including antisemitic death threats from individuals purporting to be supporters of Mr Corbyn. Clearly, the Labour Leader is not directly responsible for abuse committed in his name, but we believe that his lack of consistent leadership on this issue, and his reluctance to separate antisemitism from other forms of racism, has created what some have referred to as a 'safe space' for those with vile attitudes towards Jewish people. This situation has been further exacerbated by the Party's demonstrable incompetence at dealing with members accused of antisemitism, as illustrated by the saga involving the suspension, re-admittance and re-suspension of Jackie Walker. The ongoing membership of Ken Livingstone, following his outbursts about Hitler and Zionism, should also have been dealt with more effectively. The result is that the Labour Party, with its proud history of fighting racism and promoting equal rights, is seen by some as an unwelcoming place for Jewish members and activists. (Paragraph 113)
21. The decision by the Leader of the Labour Party to commission an independent inquiry into antisemitism was a welcome one, notwithstanding subsequent criticisms. The Chakrabarti report makes recommendations about creating a more robust disciplinary process within the Labour Party, but it is clearly lacking in many areas; particularly in its failure to differentiate explicitly between racism and antisemitism. The fact that the report describes occurrences of antisemitism merely as "unhappy incidents" also suggests that it fails to appreciate the full gravity of the comments that prompted the inquiry in the first place. These shortfalls, combined with Ms Chakrabarti's decision to join the Labour Party in April and accept a peerage as a nominee of the Leader of that Party, and her subsequent appointment as Shadow Attorney General, have thrown into question her claims (and those of Mr Corbyn) that her inquiry was truly independent. Ms Chakrabarti has not been sufficiently open with the Committee about when she was offered her peerage, despite several attempts to clarify this issue with her. It is disappointing that she did not foresee that the timing of her elevation to the House of Lords, alongside a report absolving the Labour Leader of any responsibility for allegations of increased antisemitism within his Party, would completely undermine her efforts to address this issue. It is equally concerning that Mr Corbyn did not consider the damaging impression likely to be created by this sequence of events. (Paragraph 114)
22. The recommendations of the Chakrabarti report are further impaired by the fact that they are not accompanied by a clear definition of antisemitism, as we have recommended should be adopted by all political parties. We remain unconvinced of the robustness of the Labour Party's code of conduct (and whether it will be effectively enforced), and the report does nothing to address a severe lack of transparency within the Party's disciplinary process. There are examples of Labour members who have been accused of antisemitism, investigated by their Party, and then reinstated with no explanation of why their behaviour was not deemed to be antisemitic. The Labour Party, and all other political parties in the same circumstances, should publish a clear public statement alongside every reinstatement or expulsion of a member after any investigation into suspected antisemitism. (Paragraph 115)
23. We see no good reason for the Chakrabarti report's proposed statute of limitations on antisemitic misdemeanours. Antisemitism is not a new concept: an abusive, antisemitic tweet sent in 2013 is no more defensible than one sent in 2016. If the Labour Party or any other organisation is to demonstrate that it is serious about antisemitism, it should investigate all allegations with equal seriousness, regardless of when the behaviour is alleged to have taken place. (Paragraph 116)
24. In its determination to be inclusive of all forms of racism, some sections of the Chakrabarti report do not acknowledge Jewish concerns, including its recommendations on training, which make no mention of antisemitism. This has generated criticism among some observers that antisemitism may be excluded from future training programmes. The Labour Party and all political parties should ensure that their training on racism and inclusivity features substantial sections on antisemitism. This must be formulated in consultation with Jewish community representatives, and must acknowledge the unique nature of antisemitism. If antisemitism is subsumed into a generic approach to racism, its distinctive and dangerous characteristics will be overlooked. In addition, the Labour Party's disciplinary process must acknowledge the fact that an individual's demonstrated opposition to other forms of racism does not negate the possibility that they hold antisemitic beliefs; nor does it neutralise any expression of these beliefs. (Paragraph 117)
25. The Chakrabarti Report is ultimately compromised by its failure to deliver a comprehensive set of recommendations, to provide a definition of antisemitism, or to suggest effective ways of dealing with antisemitism. The failure of the Labour Party to deal consistently and effectively with antisemitic incidents in recent years risks lending force to allegations that elements of the Labour movement are institutionally antisemitic. (Paragraph 118)
26. The historical inaccuracy of Ken Livingstone's remarks regarding Hitler and Zionism have been analysed elsewhere, and it is not the job of this Committee to deliver lessons in Nazi history, except to point out that Mr Livingstone has since admitted that it was "rubbish" to refer to Hitler as a Zionist. Regardless of academic rigour, his decision to invoke Hitler in a debate about antisemitism and Zionism—in defence of a Facebook post comparing Israel with the Nazis—was unwise, offensive and provocative. In light of previous incidents in which he has made comments that have been interpreted as antisemitic, or especially offensive to Jewish people, we believe it likely that he knew that his comments would cause similar offence. The fact that he continues to defend his position casts serious doubt on whether he has sufficient understanding of the nature of contemporary antisemitism. In the words of Mr Corbyn, who described himself as his friend, we hope that Mr Livingstone will "mend his ways" without delay. (Paragraph 119)
27. No party is immune to 'bad apples', and it would be naïve to assume that tackling antisemitism in the Labour Party would eliminate it from political discourse altogether. Antisemitism is a problem of such gravity that no party can afford to be complacent. It is an issue that should transcend party loyalties and inter-party conflict. (Paragraph 128)
28. Other political parties must not assume that antisemitic political discourse is an issue affecting the Labour Party alone. The Liberal Democrats in particular should pay heed to the need to act swiftly and decisively to deal with antisemitism within their ranks. We were disappointed by the manner in which their Leader, Tim Farron, referred to disciplinary processes rather than explicitly condemning antisemitic remarks made by members of his Party, and we were surprised to learn that Cllr David Ward remains an elected representative of the Liberal Democrats, despite his repeated antisemitic comments. All of the main political parties should examine whether the reforms recommended in this report could be applied to their own processes for training and disciplining their members and activists. Political leaders should also make themselves responsible for taking swift investigatory or disciplinary action when a party member is identified by Twitter as being a perpetrator of abuse. (Paragraph 129)
29. The acts of governments abroad are no excuse for violence or abuse against people in the United Kingdom. We live in a democracy where people are free to criticise the British Government and foreign governments. But the actions of the Israeli Government provide no justification for abusing British Jews; just as the actions of the Saudi Arabian or Iranian governments provide no justification for abusing British Muslims. (Paragraph 130)
30. History shows that antisemitism is a virus that is too easily spread, through subtly pernicious discourse, ignorance and collusion. Political leaders must lead by example, oppose racism and religious hate in all its forms, and promote an atmosphere of tolerance, inclusion and understanding, as befits the UK's status as a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multi-religious society. (Paragraph 131)

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