

FEBRUARY 1 2018, 5:00PM, THE TIMES

# Labour's antisemitism is worse than it looks

PHILIP COLLINS

The party's latest row over Zionism reveals much about the views of the governing body that surrounds Jeremy Corbyn



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**A**s Julian Treslove made his way alone through the dark London streets after dinner with two Jewish friends, he was assaulted by a woman. Reflecting afterwards on the surprise attack, Treslove convinced himself that his assailant had muttered the phrase “You Ju”, which, after some contorted reasoning, he took to mean “You, Jew”. This sparked on Treslove’s part an obsession with all matters Jewish which he called, in the title of Howard Jacobson’s novel from which this scene comes, *The Finkler Question*.

The political left in Britain has a serious problem with the Finkler question and it erupted again this week. A dispute has broken out which has the unlikely cast of the renowned cat-impersonator George Galloway, the comedian and writer David Baddiel and the founder of Momentum and member of the Labour Party governing body, Jon

Lansman. Mr Galloway started it by calling Baddiel “a vile Israel-fanatic” which accusation he later refined to suggest that Baddiel was prone to using the label of “antisemite” as a slander. Mr Lansman waded in to declare his solidarity with Baddiel who, as a “non-Zionist” is neither vile nor a fanatic.

Mr Galloway responded to Mr Lansman’s implication that he was antisemitic with a threat to sue for defamation. If this unseemly case ever wastes the time of British justice I will root without equivocation for Mr Lansman. That said, this brief exchange was by no means a contest between a knight and a knave and, if Mr Lansman is to become a power in the land, we need to understand the full implications of his position.

Mr Galloway signed off with a threat that revealed his confidence that his view is widely shared on the left. He suggested that he would call Jeremy Corbyn as a witness in his defence. Indeed, Mr Galloway is right to suppose that Mr Corbyn shares a less vehemently expressed version of his own confused certainty. Mr Galloway is never overtly antisemitic — he is far too canny for that. Instead, he alleges that Israel is a country born of colonial conquest which means that the Zionists are the racists. To this historical fiction, the Galloway leftists usually add a critique of acquisitive capitalism which elides neatly with the perennial tropes of antisemitism: the usurious, monied, wandering Jew. You can get a glimpse of a whole pathology without anyone ever actually spelling it out.

This is a familiar and dismal story yet perhaps it was Mr Lansman’s contribution that was the more intriguing, and not just because he is now a central figure in Labour’s command structure. Mr Lansman leapt to support Baddiel on the stated proviso that the latter was not a Zionist. The implied logic here is that, if Baddiel were vocal about the right of Israel to exist, then solidarity with him might be withdrawn. He merits support, in other words, not because calling someone a vile Israel-fanatic is diabolical but because he is on the right side of the imperial argument.

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Zionism, which in fact originated as a liberation movement and the search for a place of safety, is recast, by Mr Lansman’s implication, as an ideology of oppression rooted in an act of conquest in 1967. The two thousand years of migration, the sense of the return as a spiritual as well as a geographical exercise, are ignored. This looks like power politics pure and simple. Baddiel has shown himself not to be complicit and has

therefore proved his credentials as someone worthy of solidarity. Not as a Jew but as a “non-Zionist”. As Howard Jacobson has said, “those who say they are against Zionism but not Jews are speaking in riddles”. It seems to me that Mr Lansman reveals as much with his defence as Mr Galloway does with his attack.

This is a crucial step in the argument because it makes support conditional on a questionable judgment. It therefore opens up a defence to the left that people who think the wrong thing will get what is coming to them. Given that opening, there is no shortage of angry bigots who will pour through. The roster of recent examples shames the Labour Party. This is a party of which Ken Livingstone — the noted “Hitler was a Zionist” obsessive — remains a member. It is a party which has had to suspend 18 members for antisemitism. At a meeting of Labour Against The Witch-Hunt this week, the filmmaker Ken Loach said that Emily Thornberry, shadow foreign secretary, “didn’t distinguish herself” when she praised Israel as a beacon of freedom.

The Labour Party is led, indeed, by a man who only ever talked to one side, who called himself a friend of Hamas, a body which seeks the destruction of the Jewish state; a man who happily took money from Press TV, a channel owned and controlled by the Iranian government which denies the truth of the Holocaust. The home affairs select committee concluded that institutional antisemitism thrived in the Labour Party. Mr Corbyn did commission a report into the issue but it proved to be a lot better at getting Shami Chakrabarti into the Labour Party than getting antisemites out.

This is not the sort of prejudice that can be settled in court. Only the true cranks voice straightforwardly actionable statements of hatred. The left’s antisemitism is in the tone of voice, the severity, the passion, the elevation of an issue that should be one among many to a defining idea of political identity. It connects to a loathing of America and of capitalism and of alleged western interference in the Middle East. For the uncomplicated racist, hatred of the undesirable people is the starting point. For the complicated, confused leftist, the denigration of a people is their conclusion. The ingenious ones among them even sound as though they arrive at their argument with great reluctance. This is the mindset that might one day inform British foreign policy and, if that is a realistic prospect, then it is the errors hidden in Mr Lansman’s world view that will matter more than the errors evident in Mr Galloway’s.

The allegiance of once-immigrant communities is changing in British politics. British Hindus have switched from Labour to Conservative and, as prosperity spreads through

immigrant groups, the same may well happen to others. If that were the reason it would be no bad thing, either. British Jewry has been a reliable loyal friend to the Labour Party, relative prosperity or not, but that relationship will not survive a Corbyn government. Unless the left shifts its deeply held view of the configuration of world politics, unless it gains a wiser and wider historical perspective, the Labour Party is set to be, in Jacobson's brilliant but sad phrase, "for the many, not the Jew".

Politics



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“ What a complete and utter load of old tosh, based on a twisted interpretation of what Jon Lansman said and what he believes.

It is not for me to speak on Jon's behalf and, in any case, he's far more eloquent than I am. But I've known him for 38 years, am proud to call him a friend and would characterise him as one of the most decent and honest human beings it has ever been my honour to know.

Your claim that "the implied logic here is that, if Mr Baddiel were vocal about the right of Israel to exist" then Jon's support "might be withdrawn" is gutter journalism at its most despicable.

Jon is Jewish and of course he supports the right of Israel to exist - as does just about

every single person I've ever met in the Labour Party over the past 40 years.

In my experience when Labour supporters express their distaste for "Zionism", what they are referring to is not "the right of Israel to exist", which is unquestioned, but the fundamentalist school of thought that rejects the two state solution and holds that the entire territory was given to the Jewish people by Yahweh and they darned well don't see why they should share it with anybody else - particularly Palestinians.

What a thoroughly nasty, trouble-stirring and dangerous game you are playing, Mr Collins.

[Nigel Williamson](#) • 14 hours ago

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[Chel2000](#) 8 hours ago

I was wondering how long it would be before this sad little anti Labour propaganda story would be recycled.

6 ★ Recommend [← Reply](#)

[Serena Huda](#) 9 hours ago

The real surprise here is the choice of post for the 'featured comment'. But perhaps it should not have come as a surprise.

13 ★ Recommend [← Reply](#)

**T**

[Jack Millner](#) 9 hours ago

[@Serena Huda](#) We tend to feature comments that pose a counter-argument to the original column. More interesting that way. It's worth clicking the second link in Ann Yates' comment below to see what JL said on that second point. I hope this helps.

3 ★ Recommend [← Reply](#)

[de Selby](#) 9 hours ago

[@Jack Millner](#) [@Serena Huda](#)

You mean Steve Yates' comment.

1 ★ Recommend [← Reply](#)

**T**

[Jack Millner](#) 8 hours ago

[@de Selby](#) [@Jack Millner](#) [@Serena Huda](#) Sharp eye you have. Let's keep it on topic though.

2 ★ Recommend [← Reply](#)

[de Selby](#) 10 hours ago

I can't claim to be a friend of Jon Lansman. I've never met him.

This piece is a well constructed argument though and can't be shot down by a mixture of insult and anecdote. It is precisely because Baddiel has been "classified" as Jewish but not Zionist that he is classified as "OK".

From which it follows that he would otherwise be fair game. Collins puts his finger on the foulness.

31 ★ Recommend [← Reply](#)

[Nicole Segre](#) 10 hours ago

The "fundamentalist school of thought that rejects the two-state solution" represents only a small minority of the Israeli population, most of which favour the two-state solution. It is the Palestinians' who have rejected all offers since 1947. The truth is Arab leaders want one state, without any Jews in it - that's what "from the river to the sea" means.

40 ★ Recommend [← Reply](#)

[Paul Hendy](#) 10 hours ago

If Corbyn had dealt with the antisemitism properly Theresa May would not be Prime Minister. His racism cost his party enough seats to deny her any kind of majority however much she paid the DUP in bribes.

3 ★ Recommend [← Reply](#)

[Bob Borsley](#) 10 hours ago

Given Corbyn's history, it would be surprising if a party led by him did not have a problem with antisemitism. It is standardly said that he is not antisemite, but he has consistently been a good friend of antisemites, not just his 'friends' in Hamas and Hezbollah, but also Iran, for whose propaganda channel who worked not so long ago, and Raed Salah, Paul Eisen,

and Stephen Sizer.

<http://jewishnews.timesofisrael.com/salah-corbyn/>

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/05/20/jeremy-corbyns-10-year-association-group-denies-holocaust/>

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/religion/11399986/Vicar-who-blamed-Israel-for-911-attacks-is-banned-from-writing-about-the-Middle-East.html>

It is entirely unsurprising given this history that Labour is the party of choice for antisemites.

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27 ★ Recommend  Reply

**Ann Yates** 11 hours ago

This seems an inaccurate reading of Lansman's tweet, which I took to mean that since Baddiel is not a Zionist it would be absurd (or in fact anti-semitic) for Galloway to say he's an "Israel-fanatic". Not that he deserves support on the condition that he's not a Zionist.

The original is here

<https://twitter.com/jonlansman/status/958145587488190466>

And his reply to the editor of the JC, who read it the same way as Philip Collins, is here.

<https://twitter.com/jonlansman/status/958257089029296128>.

(Fwiw I'm not a supporter of Lansman or Momentum and I'm not out to downplay Labour's anti-semitism problem.)

Steve Yates

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4 ★ Recommend  Reply

**Stuart** 11 hours ago

An important piece. If Labour is to have a future then the endemic festering antisemitism, and weird antiwesternism need to be called out. And especially the oh-so-carefully calibrated and obscured antisemitism of the George Galloway variety, because it's so self justifying, and so insidious.

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20 ★ Recommend  Reply

**SARAH** 11 hours ago

Excellent article, especially the prophetic nature of the Finkler Question.

**Hian Kurtis** 11 hours ago

Islam Leftism, the de facto alliance between Islamists and leftists. Jewish people being the common thing they hate. In exchange of votes, Islamists have more room to develop their extremist views. Real issue that.

37 ★ Recommend ↩ Reply

**John B** 11 hours ago

It might help resolve these issues if we made sure Children are properly taught the history of the Balfour declaration etc... but the left has sadly destroyed history education in this country with their revisionism.

26 ★ Recommend ↩ Reply

**westheader** 12 hours ago

The three big hates of the left  
Israel is bad  
The USA is worse  
The UK is the worst  
All three must be smashed  
Just ask Corbyn, McDonnell and Abbott

48 ★ Recommend ↩ Reply

**IMHO** 9 hours ago

@westheader true Patriots

★ Recommend ↩ Reply

**neilnev** 9 hours ago

@westheader

Don't forget the 4th head of the hydra, the despicable Milne.

12 ★ Recommend ↩ Reply

**Barney Orr** 12 hours ago

Great piece Phil. Something tells me you'd struggle to vote for your beloved Labour Party in its current state; and I don't blame you

22 ★ Recommend ↩ Reply

**michael kerr** 12 hours ago



They're no longer interested in the Irish either. We voted remain. Still can't join the Labour party. Go figure.

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2 ★ Recommend [← Reply](#)

**pdre** 12 hours ago

You lost me here, Philip. Better luck next time.

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1 ★ Recommend [← Reply](#)

**Bob Borsley** 9 hours ago

*@pdre* I do like a carefully argued critique based on well-marshalled body of facts.

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15 ★ Recommend [← Reply](#)

**Plunket Greene** 12 hours ago

As - I hope - a semi-decent human being I genuinely and strongly feel that anti-semitism is vile and that the Jews should be left in peace wherever they live (including and especially in Israel). One can believe that, while having at the same time a rather more nuanced factual assessment of whether the way in which the state of Israel was established, and the way in which it has been forced to defend itself, has been positive or negative for regional stability and world peace. That is not speaking in riddles, but a sad reflection of complex and contentious reality.

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9 ★ Recommend [← Reply](#)

**Mary Walker** 12 hours ago

Doubtless why labour went after the youth vote on an abject lie about tuition fees.

I deplore a number of things but none more-so than anti-semitism.

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14 ★ Recommend [← Reply](#)

**Dominic** 12 hours ago

'British Hindus have switched from Conservative to Labour and, as prosperity spreads through immigrant groups, the same may well happen to others. ' surely the other way round?

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2 ★ Recommend [← Reply](#)

**OldManDJ** 12 hours ago

Why is it that those who criticise the Israeli actions Palestine are accused of racism and many other nasty things but those who criticise the activities of Arabs are not accused of racism or anything else?

**Jon G** 12 hours ago

Philip Collins shows that he doesn't grasp the fundamental facts of the dispute between Lansman and Galloway, let alone the distinction between antisemitism and legitimate criticism of Israel. There are plenty of Labour jews who support Corbyn and who believe their views are being ignored because for some reason Howard Jacobson is thought to be the true voice of British jews. Jacobson is a writer of fiction, a composer of witty aphorisms and a signer of letters of complaint, but he has a weak understanding of contemporary politics.

4 ★ Recommend ↩ Reply

**Londoner** 10 hours ago

@Jon G I think Jacobson is one of our sharpest commentators. Some Jewish people are Corbyn supporting Labour members. Vastly greater numbers of British Jews think he's a disgrace on all issues Jewish or Middle Eastern. (I would also add that Jezza seems to have a weak understanding of contemporary politics.)

15 ★ Recommend ↩ Reply

**Bob Borsley** 9 hours ago

@Jon G Not many British Jews support Corbyn's Labour Party:

<https://www.thejcs.com/news/uk-news/labour-support-just-13-per-cent-among-uk-jews-1.439325>

6 ★ Recommend ↩ Reply

**Robert Jones** 12 hours ago

This is merely a current expression of The Counter-Enlightenment.

Socialism, like phrenology, was born of The Counter-Enlightenment.

Its racism is usually better concealed than "National" Socialism's.

3 ★ Recommend ↩ Reply

**peter ellis** 13 hours ago

Anti semitism in the Labour Party is not worse than it seems. That is because it is so bad it can hardly get any worse.

What is incredible is that this is HM official opposition and the second largest Party at the

moment in parliament. What have we come to that we vote for these people and since June in increasing numbers.?

I do not want these people defeated after they have been in government after which it will be too late, they will have wrecked the Country, no ifs or buts. I want them soundly beaten electorally before they get into government after which time we do not know for sure what they have planned for our constitution but it makes one feel very uneasy to say the least.

One of their trump cards is having Theresa May leading the Conservatives. It is Labour with the policies right now, not the Conservatives. The Conservatives must really buck up their ideas or the unthinkable will happen.

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33 ★ Recommend [← Reply](#)

[neilnev](#) 13 hours ago

Absolutely spot on

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9 ★ Recommend [← Reply](#)

[Thinkaboutit](#) 13 hours ago

"This is the mindset that might one day inform British foreign policy". I'm afraid Mr Collins is a little late. British foreign policy has already been formed by this mindset. Otherwise a good article. Thank you, Mr Collins

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9 ★ Recommend [← Reply](#)

[neilnev](#) 9 hours ago

[@Thinkaboutit](#)

The foreign office has been pro-Arab from well before Israel was created in 1948. The pro-Arab leanings of the foreign office cost the lives of probably thousands of Jews by banning emigration from Germany to Palestine to escape the Nazi persecution at the "behest" of the Arabs. Not to mention the embargo on the survivors of Nazi persecution post-war until Israel was created.

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10 ★ Recommend [← Reply](#)

[polderntman](#) 13 hours ago

An excellent article which clearly highlights the true nature of the Corbyn led Labour party. Sadly I'm nit sure the majority of Labour supporters will be interested and I am very sure

that the Tory party is currently so useless that it will be unable to exploit this opportunity to showcase what Corbyn and his cronies really stand for.

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**Chris P Duck** 13 hours ago

Galloway, Lansman and Baddiel have an argument. This proves the Labour Party is anti-semitic.

But, I suspect this level of argument is enough for most of your readership.

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3 ★ Recommend [← Reply](#)

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**Bob Borsley** 10 hours ago

*@Chris P Duck* If the Party does not have a problem, why did Corbyn have to get Chakrabarti to investigate? No other major party has needed to do that.

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7 ★ Recommend [← Reply](#)

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**David Walton** 10 hours ago

*@Chris P Duck* Rejecting the Israeli government policies and actions over Palestine is not anti-semitic albeit those that defend the outrageous behaviour claim it is to detract from the Israeli government crimes.

Look at the behaviour and please don't highlight your ignorance by saying "what behaviour".

At least Corbyn et al have more courage than May.

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**Freespirit** 13 hours ago

Perhaps one way to rid any political party of antisemitism or racial partiality, is for all parties to have public funding and only public funding. If they do not adhere to this country's laws, then they cannot function as a political party.

Momentum are hardwired to have favourites and divide this country. It is time that Corbyn disowned momentum. I know there is fat chance of that happening, however, if he wants to become a statesmen, then he must show that he understands our democracy. Corbyn can no longer be an activist.

Weak people single out groups or a country to hang their hatred on. Momentum are immature, they wish to have a world made in their purest form. This will never happen in

this country. If Corbyn persists to befriend Galloway and Lansman chooses his form of Jewish friendship, then they should have them whip taken away from the by Parliament.

Time to make our politicians accountable for their actions.

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1 ★ Recommend  Reply

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**DMurdoch** 13 hours ago

It's not historical fiction that Israel is a country born of colonial conquest. Britain (a colonial power) decided to partition Palestine to establish a Jewish homeland which subsequently became Israel. It'd be like Egypt deciding that part of the UK should be partitioned for Muslims.

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4 ★ Recommend  Reply

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**Bob Borsley** 10 hours ago

*@DMurdoch* So do you think the Jews should all go back to where they come from? Enoch Powell's supporters used to say that about black people and they were rightly regarded as racists.

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6 ★ Recommend  Reply

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**AK** 10 hours ago

*@DMurdoch* Britain only had a temporary mandate over Palestine after the defeat of the Ottomans in WWI. It was never a British Colony. The Balfour declaration recommended a Jewish homeland but the partition plan which the Jews of Palestine (then, confusingly, the only ones called Palestinians) agreed to and the Arabs rejected was passed by the UN. The Arab countries then attacked the new State of Israel and were defeated.

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11 ★ Recommend  Reply

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**Hian Kurtis** 10 hours ago

Except there's hasn't been a Muslim presence for more than 2000+ years in Britain. On the other hand it is a historical fact Jews were there 2000 years ago. Anyway that conflict bores me.

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3 ★ Recommend  Reply

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**MK390** 9 hours ago

*@DMurdoch* You seem to have forgotten all about the Ottomans. Why is that?

---

4 ★ Recommend  Reply

**neilnev** 9 hours ago

[@DMurdoch](#)

And what's that got to do with antisemitism in the Labour party in the UK?

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**Richard Powell** 13 hours ago

"British Hindus have switched from Conservative to Labour"... given the context, shouldn't that be the other way round?

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**de Selby** 10 hours ago

[@Richard Powell](#)

It is. Maybe it was changed after your comment.

" British Hindus have switched from Labour to Conservative and, as prosperity spreads through immigrant groups, the same may well happen to others."

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**Jack Morly** 13 hours ago

A good and well argued piece. So worrying that a mainstream political party is now largely racist.

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**Robert Rosenberg** 13 hours ago

The funniest irony of all these Hard Left people who hate the Jews is that it was one particular Jew buried in Highgate who invented their whole purpose in life.

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49 ★ Recommend [← Reply](#)

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**pq17** 10 hours ago

[@Robert Rosenberg](#) plus many in USSR who implemented it.

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3 ★ Recommend [← Reply](#)

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**Bob Borsley** 10 hours ago

[@Robert Rosenberg](#) Marx himself could be antisemitic, as discussed here by a Jewish Marxist:

<http://normblog.typepad.com/normblog/2009/05/marx-and-antisemitism.html>

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