

## Corbyn, British Labour and Anti-Semitism

By [Dr. Binoy Kampmark](#)

Global Research, July 01, 2016

Region: [Europe](#)

Theme: [Law and Justice](#)

*In another attempt to kick the leader of the British Labour down and out, a campaign has been hatched with a now commonplace virulence. A report into anti-Semitism within Labour party circles authored by Shami Chakrabarti was to be released with little fanfare, filled with the pieties that come at a time when language is a matter of moral policing rather than concerted expression.[1]*

The report had been set up to investigate the circumstances behind the suspension of MP Naz Shah and former London mayor Ken Livingstone. Chakrabarti makes the important point that the Labour Party “is not overrun by anti-Semitism, Islamophobia or other forms of racism. Further, it is the party that initiated every single United Kingdom race equality law.”

Suggestions for reforming disciplinary procedures, be it the insertion of legally qualified personnel, attention to guidance and training and a range of recommendations, are also made in the report.

Criticism of foreign powers, including Israel, was legitimate “without resorting (by accident or design) to inflammatory (rather than persuasive) language.” As a cautionary note, Labour members “should resist the use of Hitler, Nazi and Holocaust metaphors, distortions and comparisons in debates about Israel-Palestine.”

In public debate, notably in countries where one can be punished for the utterance of words, attention is not paid to how they are used, contexts and meanings. The crime lies in saying the unmentionable. Never, for example, equate the Zionist project to an exterminating one; never suggest that Israel’s policies resemble those of apartheid, or dispossession. And never, of course, deny the Holocaust in various European countries, because that just might book you a room in a cell. Free speech, however misused, is a mutable possession indeed.

That sets the scene for what happened regarding the latest round of criticisms. Corbyn’s remarks at the release of the report were hardly shocking in their conceptual distinctions: “Our Jewish friends are no more responsible for the actions of Israel or the Netanyahu government than our Muslim friends are for those of various self-styled Islamic states or organisations.”[2]

Corbyn was making an obvious, if at times contested point: governments and institutions should not be confused with the broader population, be it intention or acts. Individuals express disagreement with governments that supposedly represent their interests. Many would wish such governments did not.

Such sharp points of distinction did not trouble Britain’s chief rabbi Ephraim Mirvis. The Labour Party had done the unpardonable by making comparisons between peoples he should have avoided. The singular, exceptional *chosen* ones were above such comparisons.

Former Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks suggested that Corbyn had apparently compared the state of Israel to Islamic State, calling it “demonisation of the highest order, an outrage and unacceptable.”

Corbyn had done nothing the sort. As he explained in remarks, “The point is that you shouldn’t say to someone that just because they’re Jewish you must have an opinion on Israel, any more that you say to anyone who’s a Muslim you must have an opinion on the vile actions being taken by people misquoting the good name of Islam in what they do.”

Rabbi Sacks was far more interested in the sniff of equivalence, as were such figures as Jonathan Arkush, president of the Board of Deputies of British Jews. Having never mentioned the specific regime in question, the good Rabbi assumed that Corbyn had gone through the list of extreme comparisons and drawn the most reprehensible one out of the hat.

The Islamic State, he explained in his statement, is “a terrorist entity whose barbarities have been condemned by all those who value our common humanity. In the current political climate, when hate crimes are rising and political rhetoric is increasingly divisive, this is all the more shocking.”[3]

This is an age old debate about complicity that has raged for centuries – at least since the state became a manifestation of the general will. To what extent can you attribute a German citizen’s blame for the concentration camps of the Second World War has been an ethicist’s and lawyer’s feast. Complicity does, and can travel far, but it would be foolish to suggest that all were somehow directly responsible.

Another aspect has also been the Israeli government’s desire to speak for all Jews, an appropriating catch-all evocation that eliminates free will and independent thought and always assumes a “my country right or wrong” approach. This effectively conflates entities: to question the Israeli government and its policies is to question the high representative of the Jewish people, which becomes, ipso facto, anti-Semitic.

This has been particularly problematic in debates between Jewish communities in the aftermath of the establishment of Israel in 1948, be there those in the United States, or the secular remnants in Europe that miraculously survived the Holocaust.

Such dogmatic thinking has become the means to silence and shout down disagreement about Israeli policies, however severe or savage they might be to Palestinians or neighbouring states. That fact, rather than the barrage on Corbyn, should have been brought to the fore.

**Dr. Binoy Kampmark** was a Commonwealth Scholar at Selwyn College, Cambridge. He lectures at RMIT University, Melbourne. Email: [bkampmark@gmail.com](mailto:bkampmark@gmail.com)

## Notes

[1] <http://www.labour.org.uk/page/-/party-documents/ChakrabartiInquiry.pdf>

[2] <http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/jun/30/jeremy-corbyn-appears-compare--israeli-government-islamic-state-labour-antisemitism-review>

[3] <http://www.rabbisacks.org/rabbi-sacks-responds-jeremy-corbyn-comments-israel-isis/>

[Comment on Global Research Articles on our Facebook page](#)

[Become a Member of Global Research](#)

Articles by: [Dr. Binoy  
Kampmark](#)

**Disclaimer:** The contents of this article are of sole responsibility of the author(s). The Centre for Research on Globalization will not be responsible for any inaccurate or incorrect statement in this article. The Centre of Research on Globalization grants permission to cross-post Global Research articles on community internet sites as long the source and copyright are acknowledged together with a hyperlink to the original Global Research article. For publication of Global Research articles in print or other forms including commercial internet sites, contact: [publications@globalresearch.ca](mailto:publications@globalresearch.ca)  
[www.globalresearch.ca](http://www.globalresearch.ca) contains copyrighted material the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. We are making such material available to our readers under the provisions of "fair use" in an effort to advance a better understanding of political, economic and social issues. The material on this site is distributed without profit to those who have expressed a prior interest in receiving it for research and educational purposes. If you wish to use copyrighted material for purposes other than "fair use" you must request permission from the copyright owner.

For media inquiries: [publications@globalresearch.ca](mailto:publications@globalresearch.ca)