

The UK Equalities Commission's Labour Antisemitism Report Is the Real 'Political Interference'

By [Jonathan Cook](#)

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I recently published for the Middle East Eye website a detailed [analysis](#) of last week's report by the Equalities and Human Rights Commission into the question of whether the UK Labour party had an especial antisemitism problem. (You can read a slightly [fuller version](#) of that article on my website.) In the piece, I reached two main conclusions.

First, the commission's headline verdict – though you would never know it from reading the media's coverage – was that no case was found that Labour suffered from “institutional antisemitism”.

That, however, was precisely the claim that had been made by groups like the Jewish Labour Movement, the Campaign Against Antisemitism, the Board of Deputies and prominent rabbis such as [Ephraim Mirvis](#). Their claims were amplified by Jewish media outlets such as the Jewish Chronicle and individual journalists such as Jonathan Freedland of the Guardian. All are now shown to have been wrong, to have maligned the Labour party and to have irresponsibly inflamed the concerns of Britain's wider Jewish community.

My latest: In making an overtly partisan attack on Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn, Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis is actually likely to stoke very real antisemitism on the right <https://t.co/ia7CbpRTUc>

— Jonathan Cook (@Jonathan_K_Cook) [November 27, 2019](#)

Not that any of these organisations or individuals will have to apologise. The corporate media – from the Mail to the Guardian – are continuing to mislead and misdirect on this issue, as they have been doing for the best part of five years. Neither Jewish leadership groups such as the Board of Deputies nor the corporate media have an interest in highlighting the embarrassing fact that the commission's findings exposed their campaign against Corbyn as misinformation.

Breaches of procedure

What the report found instead were mainly breaches of party protocol and procedure: that complaints about antisemitism were not handled promptly and transparently.

But even here the issue was not really about antisemitism, as the report indicates, even if obliquely. Delays in resolving complaints were chiefly the responsibility not of Corbyn and

his staff but of a party bureaucracy that he inherited and was deeply and explicitly hostile to him.

Senior officials stalled antisemitism complaints not because they were especially antisemitic but because they knew the delays would embarrass Corbyn and weaken him inside the party, as the leaked report of an Labour internal inquiry revealed in the spring.

My latest: Labour's explosive leaked report, showing how party officials plotted to destroy Corbyn, including by weaponising antisemitism, is being quietly swept under the carpet by the media and Labour's new leader Keir Starmer <https://t.co/1m7WfRobhn>

— Jonathan Cook (@Jonathan_K_Cook) [April 16, 2020](#)

But again, neither the media nor Jewish leadership groups have any interest in exposing their own culpability in this false narrative. And the new Labour leadership, under Keir Starmer, has absolutely no incentive to challenge this narrative either, particularly as doing so would be certain to revive exactly the same kind of antisemitism smears, but this time directed against Starmer himself.

Too hasty and aggressive

The corporate media long ago styled Labour staff who delayed the complaints procedure to harm Corbyn as antisemitism “whistleblowers”. Many of them starred in last year’s BBC Panorama programme on Labour in which they claimed they had been hampered from carrying out their work.

My latest: With last night's Panorama programme on supposed 'institutional anti-semitism' in Labour, the BBC demonstrated that it has become a media attack dog in the hands of the ruling Conservative party <https://t.co/dSDaaLBY0S>

— Jonathan Cook (@Jonathan_K_Cook) [July 11, 2019](#)

The equalities commission’s report subtly contradicts their claims, conceding that progress on handling complaints improved after senior Labour staff hostile to Corbyn – the “whistleblowers” very much among them – were removed from their posts.

Indeed, the report suggests the very opposite of the established media narrative. Corbyn’s team, far from permitting or encouraging delays in resolving antisemitism complaints, too often tried to step in to speed up the process to placate the corporate media and Jewish organisations.

In an example of having your cake and eating it, the commission castigates Corbyn’s staff for doing this, labelling it “political interference” and terming these actions unfair and discriminatory. But the unfairness chiefly relates to those being complained against – those accused of antisemitism – not those doing the complaining.

If Labour had an identifiable problem in relation to antisemitism complaints, according to

the report, it seems to have occurred mostly in terms of the party being too hasty and aggressive in tackling allegations of antisemitism, in response to relentless criticism from the media and Jewish organisations, rather than being indulgent of it.

Again, no one in the media, Jewish leadership organisations, or the new Labour leadership wants this finding to be highlighted. So it is being ignored.

Flawed approach

The second conclusion, which I lacked the space to deal with properly in my Middle East Eye piece, relates more specifically to the commission's own flawed approach in compiling the report rather than the media's misrepresentation of the report.

As I explained in my earlier piece, the commission itself is very much an establishment body. Even had it wanted to, it was never going to stick its neck out and rubbish the narrative presented by the establishment media.

On procedural matters, such as how the party handled antisemitism complaints, the equalities commission kept the report as vague as possible, obfuscating who was responsible for those failings and who was supposed to benefit from Corbyn staff's interference. Both issues had the potential to fatally undermine the established media narrative.

Instead, the commission's imprecision has allowed the media and Jewish organisations to interpret the report in self-serving ways - ways convenient to their existing narrative about "institutional antisemitism" emerging in Labour under Corbyn's leadership.

Scouring social media

But the report misleads not only in its evasion and ambiguity. It does so more overtly in its seemingly desperate effort to find examples of Labour party "agents" who were responsible for the "problem" of antisemitism.

It is worth pondering what it would have looked like had the commission admitted it was unable to find *anyone* to hold to account for antisemitism in Labour. That would have risked blowing a very large hole in the established media narrative indeed.

So there must have been a great deal of pressure on the commission to find *some* examples. But extraordinarily - after five years of relentless claims of "institutional antisemitism" in Labour, and of organisations like the Campaign Against Antisemitism and the Jewish Labour Movement scouring through Labour members' social media accounts - the commission is able to muster sufficient evidence against only two individuals.

Two!

Both are found responsible for "unlawful harassment" of Jewish people.

In those circumstances, therefore, it is important to critically examine just what evidence exists that these two individuals exhibited antisemitic attitudes or harassed Jews. Presumably, this pair's behaviour was so egregious, their antisemitism so unmistakable, that the commission felt it had no choice but to single them out and hold the

party responsible for failing to punish them summarily (without, of course, exhibiting at the same time any “political interference”).

I won't test readers' patience by examining both examples. In any case, I have dealt with one of them, Ken Livingstone, London's former mayor, at length in previous blog posts. They can be read [here](#) and [here](#), for example.

Outward appearances

Let us focus instead on the other person named: a minor Labour party figure named Pam Bromley, who was then a local councillor for the borough of Rossendale, near Bolton.

First, we should note that the “harassment” she was deemed to have carried out seems to have been limited to online comments posted to social media. The commission does not suggest she expressed any hatred of Jews, made threats against any Jews individually or collectively, or physically attacked anyone Jewish.

I don't know anything about Bromley, apart from the handful of comments attributed to her in the report. I also don't know what was going on inside her head when she wrote those posts. If the commission knows more, it does not care to share that information with us. We can only judge the outward appearance of what she says.

One social media post, it is true, does suggest a simplistic political outlook that may have indicated an openness to anti-Jewish conspiracy theories - or what the commission terms a “trope”. Bromley herself says she was making “general criticisms about capitalism”. Determining antisemitic conduct on the basis of that one post - let alone allowing an entire party of 500,000 members to be labelled “institutionally antisemitic” for it - might seem more than a little excessive.

But notably the problematic post was made in April 2018 - shortly after Corbyn's staff wrestled back control of the complaints procedure from those hostile to his project. It was also the same month Bromley was suspended from the party. So if the post was indeed antisemitic, Corbyn's Labour lost no time in dealing with it.

Did Bromley otherwise demonstrate a pattern of posting antisemitic material on social media that makes it hard to dispute that she harboured antisemitic motives? Were her comments so obviously antisemitic that the Labour party bureaucracy should have sanctioned her much sooner (even if at the time Corbyn's staff had no control over the disciplinary process to do so)?

Let us examine the two comments highlighted by the commission in the main section of the report, which they deem to constitute the most clearcut examples of Bromley's antisemitism.

Raw emotions

The first was posted on Facebook, though strangely the commission appears not to know when:

“Had Jeremy Corbyn and the Labour Party pulled up the drawbridge and nipped the bogus AS [antisemitism] accusations in the bud in the first place we would not be where we are now and the fifth column in the LP [Labour Party] would

not have managed to get such a foothold ... the Lobby has miscalculated ... The witch hunt has created brand new fightback networks ... The Lobby will then melt back into its own cesspit.”

The strong language doubtless reflects the raw emotions the antisemitism claims against Corbyn’s supporters provoked. Many members understood only too well that the Labour party was riven by a civil war and that their socialist project was at stake. But where exactly is the antisemitism in Bromley’s tirade?

In the report, the commission says it considered the reference to a “fifth column” as code for Jews. But why? The equalities commission appears to have placed the worst possible interpretation on an ambiguous comment and then advanced it as an “antisemitic trope” – apparently a catch-all that needed no clarification.

But given what we now know – at least since the leaking of the internal Labour report in the spring – it seems far more likely Bromley, in referring to a “fifth column”, was talking about the party bureaucracy hostile to Corbyn. Most of those officials were not Jewish, but exploited the antisemitism claims because those claims were politically helpful.

Interpreted that way – and such an interpretation fits the facts presented in the leaked internal report – Bromley’s comment is better viewed as impolite, even hurtful, but probably not antisemitic.

Joan Ryan, an MP who was then head of Labour Friends of Israel – part of the lobby Bromley is presumably referring to – was not Jewish. But she was clearly very much part of the campaign to oust Corbyn using antisemitism as a stick to beat him and his supporters with, as an Al-Jazeera undercover documentary exposed in early 2017.

Ryan, we should remember, was instrumental in falsely accusing a Labour party member of an “antisemitic trope” – a deeply unfair characterisation of their exchange that was only exposed because it was secretly caught on film.

Internecine feud

Here is the second comment by Bromley highlighted by the commission. It was posted in late 2019, shortly after Labour had lost the general election:

“My major criticism of him [Corbyn] – his failure to repel the fake accusations of antisemitism in the LP [Labour Party] – may not be repeated as the accusations may probably now magically disappear, now capitalism has got what it wanted.”

Again, it seems clear that Bromley is referring to the party’s long-standing internecine feud, which would become public knowledge a few months later with the leaking of the internal report.

In this case, Bromley was suggesting that the media and anti-Corbyn wing of the party would ease up on the antisemitism allegations – as they indeed largely have done – because the threat of Corbyn’s socialist project had been ended by a dismal election result that saw the Tories gain a commanding parliamentary majority.

It could be argued that her assessment is wrong, but how is it antisemitic – unless the commission believes “capitalism” is also code for “Jews”?

But even if Bromley’s comments are treated as indisputably antisemitic, they are hardly evidence of Corbyn’s Labour party indulging antisemitism, or being “institutionally antisemitic”. As noted, she was suspended by the party in April 2018, almost as soon as Corbyn’s team managed to gain control of the party bureaucracy from the old guard. She was expelled last February, while Corbyn was still leader.

Boris Johnson’s racism

It is instructive to compare the certainty with which the commission treats Bromley’s ambiguous remarks as irrefutable proof of antisemitism with its complete disregard for unmistakably antisemitic comments from Boris Johnson, the man actually running the country. That lack of concern is shared, of course, by the establishment media and Jewish leadership organisations.

The commission has repeatedly [rejected](#) parallel demands from Muslim groups for an investigation into the ruling Conservative party for well-documented examples of Islamophobia. But no one seems to be calling for an investigation of Johnson’s party for antisemitism.

Johnson himself has a [long history](#) of making overtly racist remarks, from calling black people “piccanninies” with “watermelon smiles” to labelling Muslim women “letterboxes”.

Jews have not avoided being stigmatised either. In his novel 72 Virgins, Johnson uses his authorial voice to [suggest](#) that Jewish oligarchs run the media and are able to fix an election result.

In a [letter](#) to the Guardian, a group of Jewish Corbyn supporters noted Johnson’s main Jewish character in the novel, Sammy Katz, was described as having a “proud nose and curly hair”, and he was painted “as a malevolent, stingy, snake-like Jewish businessman who exploits immigrant workers for profit”.

Nothing in the equalities commission’s report on Labour comes even close to suggesting this level of antisemitism among the leadership. But then again, Johnson has never argued that antisemitism has been politically weaponised. And why would he? No one, from the corporate media to conservative Jewish leadership organisations, seems to be taking any serious interest in the overt racism demonstrated by either him or his party.

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This essay first appeared on Jonathan Cook’s blog: <https://www.jonathan-cook.net/blog/>

Jonathan Cook won the Martha Gellhorn Special Prize for Journalism. His books include “Israel and the Clash of Civilisations: Iraq, Iran and the Plan to Remake the Middle East” (Pluto Press) and “Disappearing Palestine: Israel’s Experiments in Human Despair” (Zed Books). His website is www.jonathan-cook.net. He is a frequent contributor to Global Research.

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