

Karen Sudan

Hypothetical Response to Notice of Investigation concerning my alleged antisemitism

My first alleged transgression (Item 3 in the Notice of Investigation)

This was committed three years ago in June 2017 when I blocked 'Labour Against Antisemitism' from following me on *Twitter*.

My husband Mark and I received an alert - at exactly the same time - that we were being followed by 'Labour Against Antisemitism'. We had never heard of it, and we both thought it rather strange – organisations don't usually select who they follow; it is usually the other way about. We checked them out, as is our normal practice for would-be followers. Although we do not remember the detail of what we saw, and it is too long ago to go back to, we both remember disliking what we saw.

We both blocked 'Labour Against Antisemitism' and I commented in a tweet of my own:

“I oppose all kinds of racism, but having looked at their tweets and followers, I just blocked Labour Against Antisemitism.”

If the Labour Party believes it can arbitrarily decide to deny members the right to exercise freedom of preference over who we allow to follow us or not, or to inform our existing followers of those choices and the reasons for them, it is profoundly disturbing.

It is yet more disturbing in the light of what has been said about one of the two individuals who ran 'Labour Against Antisemitism'

“Individuals such as [REDACTED], LAAS spokesperson were rude in their tone, and had submitted a number of spurious complaints. The Labour Party received a number of complaints from 2017 onwards about their abusive conduct online, including allegations of 'dog piling' individuals on Twitter”

and

“In 2018-19 the Labour Party received a number of complaints alleging abusive behaviour by [REDACTED] including racism, Islamophobia, homophobia and antisemitism both online and in person.”

The Work of the Labour Party's Governance
and Legal Unit in Relation to antisemitism,
2014 – 2019 ('The Leaked Report')

Nevertheless, it was apparently wrong of me to block them and comment as I did. Not only this, it is apparently evidence of antisemitism.

I have looked at *Labour Against Antisemitism* again today. I do not regret blocking them and they remain blocked.

My second alleged transgression (Item 2 in the Notice of Investigation)

This was committed two years ago in August 2018

I retweeted a comment by someone whose friend had had 'No Blacs here' (sic) painted on her window. The comment read:

"My friend moved into a predominantly white area in Manchester over the weekend and look what they did to her window, I'm disgusted. Racism is so real and it's happening everywhere."

I commented:

"Where is the MSM outcry over this?! Oh yes, I forgot – too busy making up and/or exaggerating stories about antisemitism in the Labour Party!"

I believed then – and still believe now – that the media focus has been disproportionate when it comes to reporting and condemning antisemitism over other forms of racism.

There is evidence to support this view. For example, as presented by Greg Philo, in his book *Bad News for Labour: Antisemitism, the Party and Public Belief*.

Many people share the opinion that Labour's antisemitism problem has been exaggerated. **Indeed, this was the Labour Party's official position at the time.** Some may disagree of course, but it cannot be said to be antisemitic to hold the opinion that the media have exaggerated the phenomenon.

At the same time that there was an intense media focus on 'Labour's antisemitism problem', there has been, I believe, a failure to report or comment

on racist incidents generally, such as the one (above) reported on *Twitter* and others involving violent attacks. I represent people in Crawley who have suffered racist abuse and have been on the receiving end myself, as have members of my family. Racism of all kinds is a scourge on British society, and it has not been addressed as it should have.

I believe that, at best, the disproportionate media focus, both within and outside the Labour Party has done nothing to help the victims of racism. At worst, it has done the opposite. People I represent from Black and Minority Ethnic backgrounds once had trust in Labour as an anti-racist Party. Many feel that by – as they see it - over-stating an antisemitism problem within the Labour Party, while seeming to turn a blind eye to the racism they experience on a daily basis, Labour has betrayed that trust.

I have not encountered antisemitism within the local party, but have frequently come across other forms of racism:

For example, on coming home from a picnic with Party members, one of my granddaughters asked me to explain what a Party member had meant by the term ‘half caste’. The term was obviously part of the everyday language used by the woman who said it and went unremarked.

My (black) husband has been likened to a ‘warrior chief’ asserting his territory through ‘chest beating’. His (white) step-son has been referred to as ‘the Lone Ranger’ when he has supported my husband with the implication that my husband is ‘Tonto’. These racist tropes go unremarked and, if challenged, only provoke closing of ranks and further attacks.

These are my thoughts about racism, antisemitism, the MSM and the Labour Party. I do not regret the retweet or the comment I made.

Those of us who believe that there has been a disproportionate amount of attention paid to antisemitism may also believe that this needs explaining.

I believe that the explanation for this is that antisemitism has been weaponised to attack those who supported Jeremy Corbyn – who, it should be remembered was, for the period covered, the democratically elected leader of the Labour Party. Many of those people who supported Jeremy Corbyn’s leadership have also been vocal in their support for the Palestinian people in their struggle against continued oppression by the state of Israel. These people, who come from a range of backgrounds, and have Jewish people among them, have I believe, been the subject of a witch hunt by a section of the Party establishment.

Ironically, revisiting ‘Labour Against Antisemitism’ today (see above) and witnessing their celebration and joy at recent ‘success’ in purging the Party of committed and respected long-standing members – whose membership long predates Jeremy Corbyn, but whose antisemitic views only became a concern during the Corbyn years - only serves to endorse this view.

My third transgression (Item 1 in the Notice of Investigation)

This was a straightforward retweeting of a link to an article by Sai Englert, a well-respected Jewish academic, which argued that Labour should reject the ‘ten pledges’ because criticism of Israel was not necessarily - or even usually – related to antisemitism.

I have re-read the article today and I still agree with its main argument. The article did not suggest (as was implied) that the Jewish holocaust had been exaggerated and did not belittle it. The holocaust was a crime against humanity and there simply is no justification for it.

What the (state of) Israel is doing to the people of Palestine (themselves Semitic peoples) is also a crime against humanity. Many have said that they believe it to be worse than apartheid South Africa. Indeed, it has been condemned by some who actually lived under that regime including Nelson Mandela himself. Many have likened it to the way colonialists all but wiped out the Native Americans and Native Australians in past centuries. There can be no justification for the treatment of the Palestinian people by the state of Israel.

That was my position in January this year and it remains my position today. This is not an antisemitic viewpoint and I do not regret sharing the article. More than one Constituency Labour Party has posted links to this article on their website and I do not apologise for sharing it myself. Indeed, I would recommend a reading/re-reading of it in the light of events of recent weeks.

Finally, there has sometimes been an attempt to argue that the very act of speaking out – as I have - against atrocities committed by the state of Israel, is in itself antisemitic – as though somehow criticism of the actions of the state of Israel stems from an inherent ‘hatred of Jews’. Hatred of Jews has been included in far-right rhetoric against minorities for many years. It does not usually express itself in criticism of Israel or support for the Palestinian people. If anything, those on the far right usually express even more hatred for Arabs and Muslims than for they do for Jews.

For the record, I have been highly critical of Saudi Arabia’s decimating of Yemen – an area of the Middle East in which I spent some of my formative

years. I have also been vocal in my criticism of the Indian Government for its actions in Kashmir. I have not had racism imputed as my motive for these criticisms.

Throughout my life, I have – along with thousands of others on the Left – campaigned in support of oppressed people both abroad and here in the UK. It would be rather out of keeping with my record were I not to feel as passionately as I do in support of the Palestinian people. Many people feel as I do but have hesitated to speak out for fear of being attacked for it. I have felt that fear myself, but whenever I am tempted to give in to it, I think about a little girl I once knew:

She was seven, and I will call her Amalia. I knew her when I worked in a school in North East London. Part of my role was to monitor racist incidents, making sure that they were recorded and reported and dealt with appropriately.

One morning, I was called urgently to Year 3 to deal with a racist incident. When I got there, I found Amalia outside her classroom sobbing inconsolably. She had been sent from the lesson – an RE lesson in which the class had been learning about Judaism - because she was the perpetrator of the incident. A teaching assistant, Bruhriah (not her real name) was with her. Amalia kept repeating over and over through her sobs, that she was sorry and that she knew she ‘shouldn’t have said it’. I could see that she really was sorry, but it took me a long while to get her to tell me what it was she had said. ‘I said I hate Jews’ she told me once she could get the words out. Without prompting she told me ‘I know why I said it.’ I asked her why and she told me ‘Because of what happened in my country.’ She told me that she had seen her Grandma shot in the back, along with an uncle while they had been running away from soldiers. ‘Where is your country?’ I asked Amalia. ‘Palestine.’ She said. They had been running away from Israeli soldiers.

Amalia was right. It was wrong to say that she hated Jews. She understood that it was an antisemitic remark – not all Jews could be held responsible for killing members of her family. Many Jewish people – including Bruhriah - hate what the state of Israel is doing to the people of Palestine as much, and more than I do.

What the state of Israel is doing to Amalia’s people is wrong. I will never apologise for speaking out about it and I will continue to support the Palestinian people in their struggle against oppression in any way I can. I am not antisemitic. I am a socialist and that is what socialists do.

Karen Sudan, August 2020