

3rd September 2018

Dear Members of Camberwell and Peckham Labour Party,

I'm writing in response to a number of emails from members about my views on the anti-semitism row in the party and ahead of your branch meetings this week.

The speech Gordon Brown made at the Jewish Labour Movement conference yesterday expresses my views completely. So I have included it below.

For those reasons I want the NEC to adopt the IHRA definition of anti-Semitism and I believe our CLP should support our longstanding affiliate, the Jewish Labour Movement.

Best wishes,

Harriet Harman

Speaking at a Hope Not Hate event at the annual conference of the Jewish Labour Movement in Finchley, North London, on Sunday, September 2, Mr Brown said:

The Labour Party has a long, proud and indeed noble history of standing up to injustice.

Fighting against bigotry. Opposing discrimination. Battling prejudice. Combating racism

From our earliest days striving to right the wrongs inflicted by the extremes of imperialism.

Standing up to fascism in the 30s. Fighting Nazism.

Working in the post war years for the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the European Convention of Human Rights

Standing four-square against Powellism in the 60s. Opposing apartheid in the 70s and 80s.

Campaigning for 'the responsibility to protect' minorities when oppressed by states. And most recently fighting Islamophobia in the UK.

I remember 1964 and Harold Wilson declaring that the racist MP from Smethwick would be a parliamentary leper and remember him too for sacking a front bench MP for antisemitic comments

I remember Tony Benn and Jim Callaghan who disagreed about a lot and Denis Healey and Michael Foot who also disagreed about a lot all coming together as one to argue for the first Race Relations Act of 1965, its reinforcement in 1968 and then again, its further reinforcement in 1976 ...and I remember their total and shared revulsion against hate-filled talk of 'rivers of blood'.

I remember in 2000 when after the tragedy of the Stephen Lawrence murder and the Macpherson report we legislated yet again to ensure that the police and government departments could be found guilty of racism when they were guilty.

And I recall 2010 when under Harriet Harman's direction we passed the new Equality Act — to do more than avoid discrimination, to positively promote equality and thus strengthen action against all forms of racial and religious discrimination.

I remember most recently Labour wholly united – Jeremy Corbyn and Diane Abbott; and from the backbenches Yvette Cooper and David Lammy against the racism inflicted on the Windrush generation.

And I remember too and am proud of the support we gave at the start of the Holocaust Education Trust making it possible for hundreds now thousands of schoolchildren to see for themselves in visits to Poland, the horrors of the Holocaust.

It is a history of which we should rightly be proud.... and it's more than a record of action: it arises from and reflects a shared conviction that we have held throughout our history that we take on bigotry, discrimination, intolerance, prejudice and racism whenever, wherever, by whomever and for whatever reason it exists in our world.

A consistent determination that we stand up against –

Any and every discrimination. Any and every prejudice.

Any and every bigotry. Any and every bullying. Any and every instance there is violence against any ethnic minority.

No ifs, no buts, no caveats, no qualifications.

And we mean 'any and every' because we cannot ever allow discrimination to begin to take root against any section of our society.

It's our belief that if you violate the rights of any one of us you diminish the freedom of us all;

It's a belief that if you allow one kind of prejudice to fester, you open the door to all kinds of prejudice;

It's a belief that discrimination that starts with one minority does not end with one minority.

And that is what we mean when we say an injury to one is indeed an injury to everyone and that an injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.

It means that we must never tolerate intolerance; we must never accept the unacceptable; and we must never equivocate on what is unequivocally wrong

And that belief reflects two great enduring principles that are at the heart of our party's beliefs – a commitment to the principle of equality, that everyone enjoys the dignity of being treated equally, and to the principle and power of solidarity, that we support each other even when it is not in our direct interests to do so but because it is in the interest of justice.

And that informs the promises we have made to the Jewish community.

In the wake of the unspeakable horrors of the Holocaust and the depths of depravity unprecedented in human history – a deliberate and diabolical plan to exterminate an entire people, from the oldest and the frailest to the youngest infant—and let us remember that the Holocaust is no distant memory but has happened in the life and times of many people alive today – we made a specific promise to the Jewish community.

Our promise to the Jewish community was that they would never walk alone and that we would never walk by on the other side.

I say directly to the Jewish community: it is a promise that whenever prejudice and intolerance arises, we are not going to desert you, or neglect you or forget you

A promise if ever your voices are silenced, or for whatever reason are not being heard, we will lend you ours.

It is a promise based on our understanding that while your freedom as Jewish community depends on all of us, the quality of our freedom depends on yours.

That's the historic promise of the Labour Party – so often because of our commitment the last line of defence for those suffering discrimination.

It would break my heart if we were to ever become, because of our lack of commitment, the first point of attack.

The last line of defence must never become the front line of the problem.

And this is why adopting the IHRA – the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance definition of antisemitism is so important and why it must be embraced immediately and unequivocally by the Labour Party.

It is too easy to forget the extent of the international unanimity around the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance which was first formed as a task force 20 years ago in 1998 out of Sweden.

What is now the internationally-agreed definition of antisemitism was negotiated at length and in detail –driven forward by input from many of the world's foremost experts on antisemitism, a momentous exercise in international cooperation, approved in 2016 by governments including the UK and now signed by 31 countries within the alliance with many more now indicating support.

Endorsed in our own country and other countries by a multitude of local councils and cities, it is born out of a specific and important objective to which we can all subscribe – educating a new generation about the horrors of the Holocaust.

Its aim is stated quite simply – 'to strengthen, advance and promote Holocaust education and remembrance worldwide.

It is not a foreign policy document nor is it a detailed diplomatic plan for the Middle East. It is what it says: it is about 'Holocaust remembrance and it is this that inspires and motivates and shapes its existence

And it states clearly in its opening statement so that there is no doubt, that 'criticism of Israel similar to that levelled against any other country cannot be regarded as antisemitic.' So, opposition of the IHRA Declaration cannot be justified on the grounds it asks for blind loyalty to, no criticism of, or exoneration for any wrongs of the Israeli government.

We can criticise specific policies of Israel; we can support the cause of a Palestinian state; and we can still believe that all racism practiced against Jewish communities is wrong.

The Declaration is about this and this only: to condemn and root out, as they state antisemitism,' a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews.'

And this Declaration is needed now – urgently. Not as some sort of abstract document of philosophy: needed now to deal with practical threats to confront gathering dangers and on the ground realities.

It is indeed the very real week-by-week threats to Jewish communities in our country that now demand an unequivocal response and the unqualified resolve called for by the declaration of International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance

Attacks on and near Jewish synagogues which have more than doubled in the last four years from 57 to 120.

Antisemitic attacks which threaten to treble rising from 583 to 1382 last year and rising again.

Attacks on Jewish schools -and children on the way to school -which have quadrupled.

Attacks over the internet by trolls-internet intolerance, internet intimidation, internet insults – often dark, sinister, hidden, anonymous attacks that can't be traced — which have multiplied by a factor of 2,000 times.

And so, I come here as someone who is not Jewish to say unequivocally that no member of the human race should ever be treated in this way.

And I abhor this rising antisemitism not just because I appreciate the history, the sacrifice and the suffering of the Jewish people and not just because it against the law of the land; I abhor what is happening because having a country free of antisemitism is the only right way for us as a community to live our lives.

And where are we the Labour Party in this hour of need of the Jewish community? Where are we at this time of challenge and at this moment of truth?

Did we not promise that whenever someone, anyone, is humiliated or made to feel unworthy because of race or religion, we will show up, speak up and stand up and be counted?

Did we not affirm that whenever whole groups of people, no matter how much of a minority, appear to be treated with contempt and denied equal access to respect we will be there at their side by their side and on their side?

When we say we are committed to the principle of equality, that every single life is valuable, every individual human being of equal worth, did we ever say that that we meant equality of treatment for some but not equality of treatment for all? No: the principle of equal treatment is indivisible.

And when we say we are committed to the principle and power of solidarity, did we ever say our solidarity is reserved for some suffering injustice but not offered to others? No: It must be solidarity for all who suffer from injustice.

I say if we cannot stand up against this racism, this discrimination, this prejudice being perpetrated against the Jewish community of Britain....stand up against the social media trolls and bullying.....if we cannot show solidarity with people who need deserve and should have our support.....then we are at risk of not living up to the very principles of the Labour Party we love.

I am here because this is about changing a policy – the Labour Party's position on the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance.

But what we say and do on antisemitism raises something that is more profound than a point of policy or procedure.

It goes to the heart of what we are for. It is about what makes us tick. It is what at its deepest and truest sense makes us socialists. It is about why we are progressives.

It's about the moral soul of our party

I've always thought of us as the party of conscience. And a party of conscience must show that everyone sees that it does not just stand up for some of the rights some of the time of some of the people who are facing discrimination: we must stand up and be counted defending all of the rights all of the time of all of the people all of the time facing discrimination.

And so, it is time to show that the problem we have as a Labour Party can and will be solved within the Labour Party.

And it cannot be seen as a hesitant, grudging, half-hearted and ultimately dismissed as negative response. It is not enough to say 'move on': we must move forward in a way that is true to our traditions, our lasting values, our belief in the principles of equality and solidarity.

It is time for the Labour Party to immediately and unequivocally adopt the internationally-agreed definition of antisemitism and agree to discipline where there are breaches.

Recognise there is a problem of antisemitism not just on the fascist right but on the left too – and because learning is the key to preventing prejudice step up our programme of education within our own movement.

And once we have made this progress, consider creating in government as President Obama did an office with an envoy with wider responsibilities than the post Holocaust Envoy to monitor and combat antisemitism nationally and globally.

And following the proposal of the Equalities and Human Rights Commission which the current Government has yet to take up fully, develop and then implement in government a comprehensive strategy against antisemitism and racism in all its forms.

And so, I have no other agenda than to show there is a wrong that can and must be righted, an injustice redressed, a wound repaired, a scar healed, a moral stain erased, and the hurt and the harm that have been done, undone. And undone now

Before misunderstanding descends further into distrust and the damage becomes difficult to repair.

And let me answer those who still have doubts about what we propose.

To those who says 'it's a distraction and a diversion from the direction in which we have to go – like the focus we must have on social and economic injustices- I answer with this: standing up against racism in all its forms and wherever it appears is not in competition with our values.

I say the opposite:

Opposing prejudice and discrimination which motivates it is the very the foundation of our values

Standing up to racism is not a barrier to our claim of equality for all, it's not an obstacle to the realisation of a society that stands for dignity for every single individual, but one of the most important ways to make that ideal real.

And to those who say we should amend the document, I ask you: should we not listen to those who have suffered oppression, and give some priority to their views, their conviction that we should adopt it in full – no ifs no buts, no caveats, no qualifications.

Can you imagine a document on sexism and sexual violence with men defining what is discrimination against women and detailing the remedies and not fully listening to the voice of women?

Can you imagine a document with the white population defining anti-black racism and detailing the remedies and not fully listening to the voice of the black community as if saying we know better than the black community what their needs are?

Can you imagine a document defining homophobia and the remedies – and not fully listening to the LGBT community and their fears and anxieties as if we know their interests and needs better than they do?

And can you imagine a document defining discrimination against the disabled and not listening to the voice of the disabled who know the injustices they face every day and what they need more than anyone?

We must never allow the accusation to be made that the definition of what constitutes an injustice has been written by the oppressor overruling the views of the oppressed.

But we should not amend this declaration for another reason: We have 31 countries and fortunately one agreed definition.

There is not a Jewish definition and then a competing non-Jewish definition

There is not a western definition and a competing eastern definition

There is not a left definition and a competing right definition: there is one unified definition that gains its strength from us all coming round behind it

I say that the document's unanimity is its greatest strength and if we amend it and then others amend it and add new qualifications, with new ifs and new buts, and new caveats, we will end up with a world where we are seen to be divided; where no common action against antisemitism is possible and where the antisemitic camp simply divides and rules.

And then some say the International Declaration prevents us from supporting the Palestinian cause.

Let us be clear. Yes, I support the creation of Israel. For hundreds of years the Jewish people were a people who had a history but not a home...for hundreds of years the Jewish people had to wander the world with no piece of land to call their own; for hundreds of years the Jewish people faced pogroms and persecution with no home for safety and security. But as I said to the Knesset when I became the first Prime Minister to address the parliament of Israel, I support a two state solution, an economically-viable Palestinian state side by side with a secure Israel ; I support Jerusalem as a capital for the three religions ; I support the withdrawal of Israel from the settlements; I support action to repair the damage caused to millions of refugees; I support in my work only yesterday the need to finance the education of 500,000 Palestinian refugees denied a proper future by the withdrawal of aid by President Trump after nearly 70 years of American support.

And I see no incompatibility between my support for a Palestinian state and my insistence that we will always support the right of the Jewish community to live their lives free of discrimination.

And for many of you here, it is a calumny visited on the Jewish Labour movement to suggest that by supporting the antisemitism definition, you have somehow signed a self-denying ordinance that requires you to be un-critical of the actions of the Israeli government.

Instead you are bravely standing up for what you believe and often being criticised for it.

But some of our opponents go further and say the whole purpose of the IHRA is to close down debate – to prevent free speech and thus prevent fair criticism.

Look at those strong supporters of Palestine....people such as Sadiq Khan who know what Islamophobia is about and know the importance of free speech to oppose it , who do not see the definition as preventing him speaking out in favour of Palestine.

Look at Peter Tatchell who has disagreed with me on other issues but who knows what homophobia is about and knows the importance of free speech to call it out. He does not see the definition preventing him speaking out in support of Palestine and what he believes.

Look at Dave Prentis of Unison, Paddy Lillis of USDAW, and Tim Roache of GMB all of whom know what discrimination against working people can mean and also know the importance of the right to speak out; each of them supporters of a Palestinian state, each of them speaking out for what they believe. And not seeing the definition blocking their ability to say what they believe.

And yes, but some say the International Declaration is in a long line of documents supposedly promoting justice but a cover for a Jewish elite controlling finance or the economy or the media. Indeed preparing for this event I've had to look at internet postings bathed in darkness coming from the sewers of history but they makes us understand, as I have said, that antisemitism does not just come in its Nazi and fascist form but from a few on the far left who somehow have been convinced that rich, capitalist Jewish elites are the secret masters of the

universe pulling the strings and behind the greed and unfairness which defines the economic system we have today – a wicked lie born of far-fetched conspiracy theories that has to be refuted at every turn by the evidence that is before us.

I come to a final criticism of the definition this time not of its wording but of its significance: one we have to consider very seriously and answer directly from those who say fighting antisemitism is, of course, a cause but someone else's cause, and it cannot be their priority.

They say, and I understand them, 'I'm concerned about world poverty, 'climate change is my issue', 'inequality is what hurts everyone'

Brexit is the issue defining Britain's future 'a each in their different way saying' I cannot devote my time to every campaign'.

And I hear people say, and I understand them too, 'I run a food bank,' I give to Save the Children' 'I volunteer for Mencap' ...'I'm helping people facing spending cuts'. 'I cannot do any more, this cannot be my priority'.

I ask you to consider how a low priority, given a concern, can descend into indifference and how one person's indifference when it is racism can sadly become the cover for another person's intolerance.

Let's remind ourselves of the dangers if we simply stand aside and say it is someone else's fight and do little. I will never forget hearing about that meeting on Lake Geneva 80 years ago in the summer of 1938; 32 nations congregating at the Lake Geneva hotel professedly to act on the refugee crisis triggered by German antisemitism and Hitler's demand for the removal of Jews out of German-controlled territories.

In June 1938, the US turned back 51 Austrian Jewish refugees. 100,000 Austrians were affected but because nobody agreed to accept significant numbers of refugees, the Jews were denied the support they needed that could have saved so many from the horror of the Holocaust. Let us not forget that evil happens not just through sins of commission but also through sins of omission.

Bad things could happen because good intentioned people did nothing. 1938 reminds us that wrong doing is not the exclusive property of what the High Commissioner for Human Rights has called 'moral monsters' – the Hitlers. Evil can flourish by doing nothing by being bystanders, by being watchers on the shore. But if we then allow antisemitism to flourish, then Islamophobia, xenophobia, anti-migrant feelings and other forms of racism rise.

It reminds us: no matter how many Acts of Parliament we pass, and no matter how many declarations and covenants we sign, respect for human rights can never be assumed or taken for granted: that respect for human rights has to be fought for every single day and in every single generation.

And so, the racism that we are confronting cannot be the fight of the Jewish community alone. It is the world's fight -the fight of all of us -against an ever more isolated few and that's why we need solidarity. By solidarity I mean not what others can do for me in the interests of me but what I can do for others in the interests of justice. Solidarity means that even if I'm not disabled I help those who are disabled. Solidarity means that even if I'm not poor I help those who are poor. Solidarity means that even if I am not a Jew I help those who are Jews. Solidarity means that even if I am not subject to racist attacks I help those who are attacked.

In 1932 two great Jewish thinkers of their generation Freud and Einstein had engaged in a correspondence about what can stop people from being intolerant, aggressive, hateful and warlike.

In the absence of something superhuman, they agreed we needed an alliance of the imperfectly human – fair laws, yes that prevented aggression to each other but to hold together we needed to build common bonds and ties based on shared sentiment and the cultivation of fellow feeling. Another way of saying we need solidarity and yes: solidarity means none of us can feel secure when millions are insecure, none of us can be at ease when millions are ill at ease, none of us can be comfortable when millions lack comfort but it's more than that: solidarity is more than compassion or caring, or thinking well of people. It is at its best when making common cause with people who may have different traditions, different customs, different ways of worshiping, different faiths. For if we

cannot show up for people who have different needs who require our help then we don't understand what we mean by the word 'solidarity' at all.

But there is solidarity around us not least from people of different faiths supporting action against antisemitism.

I have statements here that testify to this:

Let me read them to you.

From the Anglican Communion: 'The Archbishop of Canterbury has always been committed to combatting antisemitism wherever it exists'

From the Catholic bishops from all parts of the United Kingdom: The same revulsion against antisemitism and the call for action to root it out.

From the Methodist Conference: 'Noting the recent rise in antisemitism in the UK and around the world, the memorial called on the Methodist Church to reaffirm its abhorrence for antisemitism.'

From The Muslim Council of Britain: 'There can be no excuse for racism, violence, or other forms of intimidation, when expressing views in the media, on the streets, outside shops or online. We condemn any expression of Islamophobia, antisemitism or any form of racism. We call for Muslim and Jewish communities to redouble efforts to work together and get to know one another.'

And from Muslims Against antisemitism: "To our Jewish sisters and brothers, we say the struggle against one of history's oldest and most virulent hatreds is not your fight alone but ours collectively. For far too long, antisemitism has gone unchecked. The time has come to speak out." They add a pledge to call out antisemitism when they see it. "We must be ever vigilant against those who cynically use international issues to vilify Jews or promote antisemitic tropes."

From the Buddhist Society of Britain, Mariano Marcigaglia: "Out of sincere and compassionate concern for all involved, we need to speak out and stand by the most vulnerable, the ones who are subject to abuse, appealing to our shared humanity. Only unconditional love can conquer hate'

Jagtar Singh Gill, Secretary General of Sikh Council UK: "A fundamental tenet of the Sikh faith is the equality of all people in the eyes of Waheguru, the creator. This is a key trait that we are required to practice in our lives at all times. Any discrimination of any kind including racism and antisemitism is to be condemned and has no place in Sikhism or in a decent society."

And so, I say to all Labour members who are not Jewish: Ask yourself if you can be at ease if you do not show up speak up and stand up to combat antisemitism and racism

And I say to Jewish members: You are not alone. I stand with you and and so long as a few of us have the strength to speak you will never be on your own. But the few are already the not so few and becoming the many.

Hundreds, indeed thousands, of Labour members stand with you right now, a grass roots petition is circulating 'Solidarity Against antisemitism', men and women coming together growing by the hour – coming to link arms with you – a petition which says you are not alone and you never will be on your own.

This is also a time of hope. This summer I read Nelson Mandela's prison letters and what comes through them is one thing – never to lose hope.

Never even in the most difficult and often seemingly hopeless situations, never lose hope.

Hope for an individual is the bridge between what we are and what we have it in ourselves to become. Hope for a society is the bridge between what is and what can be.

Hope is the indispensable virtue. It gives us purpose and direction. It gives us energy and enthusiasm.

All great causes are inspired by idealism and hope.

They are driven forward by what Martin Luther King called the fierce urgency of now.

And there is new hope today because of rising support across the faiths outside the party.

New hope because of rising support inside the party. And hope always, because whatever the setbacks, the cause is just and it will in the end prevail

Yes, we have a decision to make as a party to combat antisemitism.

But we can show by our actions that we are what we always should be: the party of progress, optimism and hope. To be true to ourselves we can do no other.