

BRICUP Newsletter 101

BRICUP

British Committee for the
Universities of Palestine

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How Antisemitic are You?

Jonathan Rosenhead

OK, the title is mostly to get you reading. This article is really about how to read the Chakrabarti Report into antisemitism in the Labour Party (and

we will get there shortly). But the title does correspond to a potential issue. Before February almost no-one thought that antisemitism was one of the country's main problems. Between February and June it was everywhere, in the media at least. But if it is so rampant within the Labour Party, surely it must also be endemic in the country at large. How come I never noticed it? How come you never noticed it? I guess that we could mean we have been quite insensitive to this current, which would suggest that we tolerate a level of antisemitism within our own thought processes.

The only other explanation is that there is, actually, no UK antisemitism crisis, and this is all a confection dreamed up by people with axes to grind.

Despite having been Jewish all my life I have only experienced 2 antisemitic incidents – about 60 years ago in Liverpool and 40 years ago in Notting Hill. Neither had anything to do with the Labour Party. And I first joined the party in 1961! This is not a uniquely charmed life. The ex-Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sachs, interviewed on television, rather embarrassedly confessed that he had not himself experienced a single antisemitic incident. There can be no doubt that antisemitism, an ugly deformation in any society, has a continuing underground life in Britain as elsewhere, and that we should be alert to its existence and possible increase. But its public manifestations are currently so small that it is really impossible to say whether it is actually going up or down.

I therefore tend to the second explanation. To be more precise, it is that the friends of Israel and the enemies of Corbyn have made common cause, exploiting both their network of contacts in the media and the paid PR apparatus that boosts Israel

wrong or wrong. The cause is common because the Labour Party enemies of Corbyn resent his election and are determined to take ‘their’ party back, while Israel has every reason to reverse the innovation of a major UK party leader who is a committed supporter of the Palestinian cause.

This is a major moment for the BDS movement, so please excuse me if I explore its implications at some length.

Antisemitism and boycott

The moral panic about antisemitism is highly relevant to the Boycott Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement in general, and the academic boycott campaign in particular. In 2015 no less a person than Israel’s President Reuven Rivlin designated academic boycott (in particular) as a “[first rate strategic threat](#)”, on a par with a potentially nuclear armed Iran. And after the nuclear deal with Iran that leaves academic boycott in pole position.

Over the years BDS in general, including academic boycott, has benefitted from a repertoire of treatments from Israeli governments. They have ignored it, they have belittled it, they have derided it, they have tried to get legislation passed against it, they have demonised it. The demonization mostly consists of alleging that boycotters are motivated by antisemitism, for else why would they be ‘singling out’ Israel in this way? (See [Why Boycott Israeli Universities?](#) or the [Academic Commitment on Palestine website](#) FAQs for a deconstruction of this claim.) They somehow don’t see, don’t wish to notice, the quite disproportionate presence of Jews in the BDS movement (round the world, in the UK, in BRICUP too).

The Chakrabarti Inquiry

Although quite wonderful in many ways Jeremy Corbyn is perhaps not a natural leader for a party or a movement; nor is he fleet of foot in dodging enemy bullets or turning them back on their originators. Which makes the establishment of an inquiry into Antisemitism and Other Forms of Racism in the Labour Party almost the exception that proves the rule. It was an intervention which quelled the hubbub, in particular because the chair of the Inquiry, Shami Chakrabarti, has such an unshakeable reputation for probity, and indeed a strong public affection. Her assistants, David Feldman and Janet Royall provided the necessary backup in terms, respectively, of antisemitism and the workings of the Labour Party. But they did not write or have to approve the Report. It is hers.

The report lists 85 organisational submissions, and there was also an unknown number (but anecdotal evidence suggests it was large) of individual contributions. Judging by their names about 30 of the organisations are likely to have taken what I will for convenience call a ‘pro-Israeli’ line (stressing antisemitism as a crisis needing strong action); and some 20 came from explicitly pro-Palestinian organisations. Another 10 came from within the trade union and Labour movement, while 10 came from other religiously-identified groups, mostly Muslim. (Not all are easily classifiable in this way.) Their submissions are not centrally available, so this is guesswork. The submissions by the considerable group of Jewish organisations that mobilised against taking swingeing actions based on the moral panic are [collected together](#) at the Free Speech on Israel website. (For completeness, a collection of opposing [submissions](#) is also available.)

Given the copious leaks about suspensions from the Labour Party that could only have come from the Labour’s HQ bureaucracy (effectively working for dissident MPs rather than the elected leader of the party) unusual precautions were taken about the report launch. The aim was to avoid selective leaks with their accompanying negative spin. Only one copy of the text was produced and, so we are informed, that was passed directly from Chakrabarti to Corbyn. However....

The Report

The launch of the report, despite measured speeches by Chakrabarti and Corbyn, was effectively hijacked by a press corps which only wanted to ask the latter about his travails with disloyal MPs, and by media-oriented stunts about antisemitism of exactly the kind that provoked the inquiry in the first place. The result is that the content of this significant [report](#) has not had the attention that it deserves.

Any summary of the report is bound to be selective. The points I would pick out are

- There is no endemic crisis of antisemitism, Islamophobia or other racism in the Labour Party.
- The toxic nature of the debate has been in danger of closing down free speech in the party. Free speech is vital, and Labour Party members should be not only free but also positively encouraged to criticise injustice and abuse, including in the Middle East.

- Certain words ('Zio') and historical analogies (to the Nazi regime) are insensitive and incendiary and should not be used.
- Natural justice has not been observed in the recent rash of in effect arbitrary suspensions imposed on party members. Labour's disciplinary processes need sorting out, with full information to those accused, an end to automatic suspensions, a graduated range of possible responses where accusations are found to be justified, a time limit for making complaints, and no life time bans. All stages of these processes should have independent legal oversight, and control of discipline should be removed from the Party's General Secretary.
- The Macpherson principle (that the view of the victim is crucial) refers not to whether an incident is racist or not, but to whether it should be investigated as such.
- Compulsory anti-racist training programmes for Labour Party office-holders would be patronising, or even insulting. However it would be good to review the opportunities for the promotion of relevant skills and learning within the Party

How has the report been received?

How have the interested parties responded to the Report? A word of warning: we need to take such reactions with a health warning, because people and organisations don't always say what they actually think. These statements are for public consumption, and are, on all sides, edited with the aim of achieving a desired effect. If an organisation likes some part of the report, it has to decide whether to concentrate on the sections it is happy about, or those it wishes had been different. As a general rule those organisations that are quite pleased with the outcome tend to concentrate their reactions on those aspects they failed to secure, and so may appear to be critics of the report. Conversely those organisations which really lost most of what they were playing for are more likely to focus on what crumbs of comfort they can find – and so may appear to the uninitiated to be celebrating its appearance. Welcome to the weird world of spin.

Jeremy Newmark of the Jewish Labour Movement (more of him later) urges his readers to applaud as 'seminal ... the clarity around the unacceptability of using Zionism as a form of abuse'. But he acknowledges that 'many of our members are underwhelmed and disappointed that recommendations on process are not stronger'. Chief Rabbi Mirvis, and his predecessor Jonathan

Sachs, focussed on the claim that Jeremy Corbyn's speech at the press conference was itself antisemitic. But Mirvis also said that "there is much in the Chakrabarti Report that can herald an important step forward - in particular its acknowledgement that some within the Labour Party have peddled the prejudice of antisemitism, using language, innuendo and accusations that are deeply offensive and which should be universally condemned."

The [Zionist Federation](#) is lukewarm at best: "The report scarcely begins to shine a much needed light into this grey area. Instead it buries it under a mass of generic procedural recommendations for tackling racism as a whole, with very little attempt to clarify what constitutes specifically anti-Jewish racism." It thinks the report would be welcome if it proved to be a trigger for a further process of tackling antisemitism in the Labour Party, but 'as a conclusion it is wholly inadequate'. It suggests that this inadequacy may have resulted from the Inquiry having given equal weight to the submissions of the 'red/green alliance of anti-Zionist organisations' to those arguing that anti-Zionism is a major part of the problem. Shame on Chakrabarti for this even-handedness!

Looking for solid ground – comparing objectives with outcomes

One way of constructing a more objective scoreboard is to look at what those who stood to gain from the fomented sense of crisis hoped to gain from it. Two explicit proposals were promoted in April - by Progress, the Blairite ginger group which publishes the magazine Prospect; and by the Jewish Labour Movement (previously Poale Zion) which is affiliated to the Labour Party but also to the Israeli Labour Party and the World Zionist Organisation.

Progress assiduously promoted an '[8-point plan](#)' on antisemitism. One of its points is to urge people to join the Jewish Labour Movement. The others are

1. Training for the NEC in modern antisemitism and unconscious bias
2. A vice-chair of the NEC equalities committee for the Jewish community
3. New capacity for the compliance unit
4. Time to clarify the rules – anti-semitism must lead to a lifetime ban

5. Third party reporting or an independent ombudsperson
6. Self-organised groups for Jewish youth and student members
7. A modern understanding of anti-semitism – victims matter

My marking of the JLM scorecard is as follows:

Item 1 – explicitly negated by Chakrabarti

Item 2 – not even mentioned by Chakrabarti, and not part of her recommendations

Item 3 – not listed in the summary of recommendations, but in the body of the report is a suggestion that the establishment of a dedicated complaints handling officer or team might be considered

Item 4 – explicitly negated by Chakrabarti

Item 5 – unclear what this means. But not mentioned by Chakrabarti

Item 6 – unclear what this means, but not mentioned by Chakrabarti

Item 7 – very vague, but if this means either the ‘new antisemitism’ (where criticism of Israel is suspect as a proxy for antisemitism) or a strong reading of Macpherson (if a victim says it is antisemitic then it is) then Chakrabarti explicitly declines the invitation.

The other specific proposal for change came from the Jewish Labour Movement’s [proposal](#) to change the Labour Party rulebook. Currently this simply allows for action against those who “are considered to have acted in a way that is grossly detrimental to the Party”, without specifying particular types of misbehaviour. The aim of the proposed rule change is to install ‘stricter rules and sanctions to be placed upon members who have made racist, antisemitic or islamophobic statements’, and enable the Party to move ‘immediately’ against those who make such statements.

In support of this rule change the Jewish Labour Movement (JLM)

- (i) argued for a strong reading of the Macpherson principle as privileging the view of the complainant
- (ii) accepted that criticism of Israel can be legitimate, but tries to restrict the deployment of critiques of Zionism as a political project
- (iii) asserted that Zionism “is no single concept other than the basic expression of the national

identity of the Jewish people, a right to which all people are entitled”.

Of these points the first is explicitly recommended against by Chakrabarti, the second goes against her commitment to priority of free speech, while the third is an assertion they may make but which others are not obliged to honour.

A small digression on JLM and its chair Jeremy Newmark is in order. Newmark was formerly Chief Executive of the Jewish Leadership Council, which vied with the Board of Deputies and the Zionist Federation to ‘speak for’ the UK’s Jewish community. It was in that role that he gave evidence for Ronnie Fraser in the latter’s notorious law suit against his own union, the University and College Union (UCU) which alleged antisemitism in its conduct of debate on academic boycott. In Judge Snelson’s excoriating [judgement](#) on that doomed enterprise there were a range of criticisms of Newmark’s evidence for playing to the gallery, making preposterous claims, and making extraordinarily arrogant but also disturbing remarks. Crucially “we have rejected as untrue the evidence of {A N Other} and Mr Newmark [about an incident at the 2008 UCU Congress]”. It is striking that this is the man leading the charge to ‘reform’ the Labour Party’s handling of antisemitism.

The JLM rule change proposal is still active, and has been adopted by some constituency Labour Parties as motions to the impending Labour Party conference. It is wholly contradictory to the spirit of the Chakrabarti report. In September we will find out, in Lewis Carroll’s words, who is to be master.

End note

The Chakrabarti Report does not analyse the nature of settler colonialism, or the ideological roots of the Zionist project. It does not define racism in terms of power relations. It does not explore, let alone expose, the motives of those who conspired to foment the moral panic about antisemitism. It largely avoids historical analysis.

This is because the Report is not a political treatise, it is a political intervention. Its content and tone necessarily reflects that fact. Its function is to mobilise a new political consensus in place of the invective-filled hostilities around this topic over the past 5 months. It cannot do that by adjudicating that one side or the other is the winner. Rather such a report needs to enunciate irreproachable general principles from which certain consequent actions logically flow. If the

principles are well chosen and the logic clearly articulated then the previously competing sides will need to accept this new definition of the terrain, because to be seen to reject so reasonable a resolution has costs that are too great.

I believe that the Chakrabarti Report fulfills this function very well. Many of those who work for the achievement of justice for the Palestinians were concerned during the months of the fomented antisemitism crisis and the cavalcade of unjustified suspensions from the party, that the space for critique of Israel and Zionism would be drastically curtailed. If anything the reverse has happened. Free speech, including the freedom to criticise Israel and its policies, has been resoundingly reaffirmed. Improved procedures for investigating complaints of antisemitism, provided they are implemented, will prevent the demonstrative harassment and exclusion of those who advocate for the Palestinians. Rather than criticizing the report for not providing a swingeing critique of Israel's malfeasance we should be celebrating its good common sense and doing all we can to ensure that it is put into practice.

An update on our campaign to persuade the World Medical Association to act on the complicity of Israeli doctors in the torture of prisoners.

Derek A Summerfield and Chris Burns-Cox

A few months ago we reported in this Newsletter (March 2016, Issue 97) our renewed, evidence-based appeal to the newly appointed President of the World Medical Association, Sir Michael Marmot, regarding the institutionalised collusion with torture by Israeli doctors working in security units, and above all by the Israeli Medical Association - which is a WMA member organisation. Below is our letter of February 12th which we had posted on the website of the Brit Med Journal (bmj.com). In it we summarise what happened next - a transparent and instant example of unethical dereliction of duty, a moral corruption seemingly on the basis of identity politics. We asked the BMJ to elicit a response from President Marmot (who is a well-known UK medical academic). They have asked twice and to date have received nothing back. Perhaps this speaks for itself. We will continue to pursue this matter, which is a rebuff to the idea that there is effective and even-handed international regulation

of the ethical behaviour of doctors, notably in relation to any association with torture. This is why the WMA was created after World War 2!

The following is our letter to Sir Michael Marmot, President of the World Medical Association, concerning medical complicity with torture in Israel

February 12, 2016

It is 20 years since Amnesty International concluded that Israeli doctors working with the security services "form part of a system in which detainees are tortured, ill-treated and humiliated in ways that place prison medical practice in conflict with medical ethics". (1) In 2009, 725 physicians from 43 countries appealed to the World Medical Association (WMA), the official international watchdog for medical ethics, attaching a raft of more recent evidence from reputable human rights organisations which supported Amnesty's conclusions, and pointed to the studied refusal of the Israeli Medical Association (IMA) to take action. The IMA is a WMA member and at the time the WMA President was the IMA President Yoram Blachar. The WMA refused even to acknowledge the submission and it became clear that the WMA would not act against the IMA under any circumstances.(2)

We write as lead signatory (CB-C) and convenor (DS) of a fresh submission made in January this year by 71 UK doctors to the WMA, attaching a comprehensive report from the Israeli organisation Physicians for Human Rights (PHRI), with detailed case studies showing the complicity of Israeli doctors working in security units in which torture of Palestinian detainees was routine.(3) The BMJ has previously reported on this.(4) We also submitted a study published last November which showed that sexual torture too was endemic.(5) Why are the doctors posted to these units not protecting the detainees and protesting, and why has the IMA never acted on such reports, as required to do by the WMA Declaration of Tokyo? The new WMA President is the UK medical academic Sir Michael Marmot, and we looked to him to bring his international reputation to bear on a case that has been a standing reproach to the idea that global regulation of the ethical behaviour of doctors is even-handed and effective.

Signed by Derek A Summerfield, Kings College and Chris Burns-Cox, Institute of Psychiatry

Marmot sent us an acknowledgement of receipt on January 18th. Within days, alerted by various reports of an IMA victory, we were staggered to see on the website of the Simon Wiesenthal Centre (wiesenthal.com) a letter from the WMA President on WMA notepaper, dated January 25th. (6) Written to Dr Shimon Samuels, Director for International Relations at the Centre, Marmot said that our allegations had been sent to the IMA for comment but at the same time exonerated them in respect of our earlier unanswered complaints. He wrote that "investigations have revealed no wrong doing . . . by the Israeli Medical Association". We are not aware that any proper investigations have been carried out either by the WMA or, for that matter, the IMA. On the contrary, for many years the PHRI have tried to get the IMA to conduct such an investigation but found the IMA consistently unwilling. As they concluded in 'Doctoring the Evidence, Abandoning the Victim: the Involvement of Medical Professionals in Torture and Ill-treatment in Israel', "persistently repeated requests calling the IMA's attention to cases arousing suspicion of doctors' involvement in torture and cruel or degrading treatment, have not been dealt with substantively." PHRI noted that IMA ethical codes privileged a duty to assist the security services ahead of duty to the patient.(3)

Marmot added that the IMA "have repeatedly affirmed their commitment to the policies and positions taken by the WMA". This is to take verbal assurances at face value and the evidential record appears to say otherwise, and consistently so since Amnesty's 1996 verdict. In the era of evidence-based medicine, why does evidence from authoritative sources not count? The WMA has refused further comment.

Marmot has accorded the IMA once again the support and approval of the WMA, and of himself as President. He has done so without examination of the evidence, old and new, to which we (and PHRI) point. This is good news for the IMA, but bad news for Israeli doctors thrust into ethically compromised roles, and bad news for Palestinian detainees with little to protect them.

The WMA itself risks being morally complicit in this misconduct. The WMA website carries Marmot's inaugural speech in Moscow last September. In it he affirmed that "the WMA upholds the highest ethical standards of the practice of medicine". Involvement of doctors in torture is a matter of unsurpassed gravity for the reputation of the medical profession, the WMA, and now of Michael Marmot himself. We again

call on the WMA for a thorough and transparent examination of the evidence conducted by neutral parties.

Notes

- (1) Amnesty International. "Under constant medical supervision", torture, ill-treatment and the health professions in Israel and the Occupied Territories. London: Amnesty International, 1996.
- (2) Meyers A, Summerfield D. The campaign about doctors and torture in Israel two years on. *BMJ* 2011;343:d5223.
- (3) Public Committee Against Torture in Israel/ Physicians for Human Rights-Israel. Doctoring the Evidence, Abandoning the Victim: the Involvement of Medical Professionals in Torture and Ill-treatment in Israel. stoptorture.org.il 2011.
- (4) Gulland A. Doctors in Israeli detention facilities are complicit in torture, says report. *BMJ* 2011;343:d7200.
- (5) Weishut D. Sexual torture of Palestinian men by Israeli authorities. *Reproductive Health Matters* doi: 10.1016/j.rhm.2015.11.019.
- (6) <http://www.wiesenthal.com/atf/cf/%7B54d385e6-f1b9-4e9f-8e94-890c3e6dd277...>

Request for an international presence at the trial of the Palestinian astrophysicist Professor Imad Al- Barghouthi

BRICUP, AURDIP, BACBI

Readers of this Newsletter will be aware of the arrest and administrative detention of Prof Emad Al-Barghouthi in Dec 2014 – see the May 2016 Newsletter (#99). Messages of international support were instrumental in securing his release in Jan 2015. He was arrested again in April 2016 and remains in detention. The events surrounding his re-arrest, apparently related to entries on his facebook page, are particularly worrying and have led BRICUP and its European partners to write the following letter to EU officials, asking them to make sure there are observers at Imad Al-Barghouthi's trial. The message reads:-

To: Federica Mogherini, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Carlos Moedas, Commissioner for Research, Science and Innovation, European Commission.

We had occasion to [write to you on May 4th](#) about the detention without trial of the well-known Palestinian astrophysicist Professor Imad Al-Barghouthi, who was arrested on April 24th. This was his second detention – in 2014/5 he was held for 47 days without charge or trial. International pressure contributed to Dr. Barghouthi's release on that previous occasion.

There have been more recent developments in this case which we think call for action from the EU. In a rare victory in such cases, an Israeli military court on May 26th granted Al-Barghouthi's demand to be [released from administrative detention](#). However he was not released. Instead, on May 29th, it was announced that his expected release had been [cancelled after military prosecutors filed charges](#) over statements the Al-Quds University professor allegedly made on Facebook.

This whole process is clearly highly irregular. If there was evidence to support a serious charge, why was he kept imprisoned for over a month without charge? When the court ordered his release why did it not happen? Any evidence to support a criminal charge has been available all along to Israeli military and civil authorities, and to the military court which ordered him to be released. Since it did not support a criminal charge prior to May 26th, how are we to understand the sudden discovery that it could carry this weight after an adverse judicial decision?

The misuse of the legal system in so vindictive a way leads to great doubt as to whether his trial on these new charges will be in accordance with due legal process. The trial on these new charges is due to open on July 12th.

In all the circumstances there must be grave doubts that Dr Al-Barghouthi's human rights will be respected. We believe that an international presence in that court throughout his trial is a crucial safeguard if a continuation of the deeply prejudicial process which we have described above is to be avoided. We most earnestly request you to take all necessary steps to ensure that such an international presence is in fact in place. Time is short, and we must ask you to let us know as soon as possible what progress has been made towards achieving this international presence.

Jonathan Rosenhead, Chair, British Committee for Universities of Palestine ([BRICUP](#))

Ivar Ekeland, President, Association des Universitaires pour le Respect du Droit International en Palestine ([AURDIP](#))

Herman De Ley, Steering Committee, Belgian Campaign for an Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel ([BACBI](#))

Award of a prize to 'Breaking the Silence'

Material from Haaretz June 28th 2016

According to Haaretz, the Middle East Studies Department of Ben-Gurion University has awarded a prize annually for the past 25 years to recognize individuals and nonprofit organizations that faculty members judge to have contributed most to the advancement of understanding between Jews and Arabs. About a month ago the department chose to give the prize to Breaking the Silence. Department Chair Prof. Haggai Ram announced that "We believe that advancing Jewish-Arab relations requires confronting the public with the truth of the occupation – which may not be pleasant to hear, but constitutes a fundamental condition for reconciliation between the two peoples." However, subsequently the award was retracted in the name of 'consensus', a decision that Haaretz described as "a dangerous capitulation to the forces that seek to suppress civil society" The University, Haaretz declared, is learning a "lesson in spinelessness". Haaretz notes that. "in recent years, the Israeli government has waged a methodical campaign to undermine criticism of its policies, focused mainly against human rights and anti-occupation organizations. The mud-slinging against various individuals and organizations, which has judicial and public outgrowths, has become a given for large swaths of Israeli society".

The decision to cancel the award was made by the president of Ben-Gurion University. Prof. Rivka Carmi, after a vicious incitement campaign against the organization. Instead of reinforcing civil society the president joined with the forces that seek to suppress it. According to Carmi, the organization is "not within the national consensus,

and giving it the prize is liable to be interpreted as an appearance of political bias.” Harretz finds these reasons to be pitiful: “they lack even a suggestion of the argument that a university should be a safe and open space for different opinions, whose gates are closed to considerations of consensus and fear of political criticism. This is true especially when the consensus on whose behalf Carmi speaks endeavours not to advance understanding between Israelis and Palestinians, but rather to destroy it. Carmi’s decision, and the justifications she gave for them, send a message of reprimand and deterrence to faculty members at BGU and other academic institutions who seek to continue to voice their criticism. The faculty must stand up to this dangerous capitulation that bends even academia to the will of the ruling government”.

Source: Haaretz Editorial

Note: More detail is to be found at <http://www.haaretz.com/opinion/1.727487>

Notices

The Palestine Youth Orchestra

The first UK tour of the Palestine Youth Orchestra (PYO) will take place from July 18th to August 1st, with performances in Perth, Glasgow, Leeds, Birmingham, Cardiff and London. The programme will include Beethoven’s Leonore Overture no. 3, Arabic songs by Om Kolthoum and Fairuz, sung by Nai Barghouti, Graham Fitkin’s Metal, Arabic Improvisations and Mussorgsky’s Pictures at an Exhibition.

For detailed information consult the organisers Palmusic UK at

www.palmusic.org.uk,

see also [Facebook.com/PalmusicUK](https://www.facebook.com/PalmusicUK)

[Twitter.com/Palmusic_UK.org](https://twitter.com/Palmusic_UK.org)

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