

Bad News

Bad News for Labour: Antisemitism, the Party and Public Belief

Greg Philo, Mike Berry, Justin Schlosberg, Antony Lerman and David Miller

London: Pluto Press, 2019, p/b £14.99, h/b £75.00¹

John Booth

Perhaps it was inevitable that the September launch of this book on Labour Party strife during its annual conference in Brighton should itself become embroiled in controversy. Hoping to hear and question the academic authors when they appeared in the city's Waterstones store, I purchased my ticket, only to learn the following day that the bookstore's London HQ had ordered the event's cancellation.

At the hastily arranged alternative gathering the audience, one including several Brighton Waterstones employees, we were told that threats and cancellation of venues had become a regular feature of Brighton political life, especially if events focused on Labour and anti-semitism² or if the scheduled speaker was the then Derby North MP Chris Williamson.³

There was little media coverage of the cancellation and it will be interesting to see how much review attention is paid to the book itself. The five authors deserve it given the public prominence of 'Labour anti-semitism' since Jeremy Corbyn became leader in September 2015. But as their research indicates, fair, full and balanced attention to the subject has been little in evidence these past four years, so I'm not holding my breath.

The authors preface their work by describing how they commissioned a national poll and focus groups to measure public perceptions of Labour. 'The results showed that on average people believed that a third of Labour

¹ ISBN 978 0 7453 4065 4 Hardback; ISBN 978 0 7453 4066 1 Paperback; ISBN 978 1 7868 0571 3 PDF eBook; ISBN 978 1 7868 0573 7 Kindle eBook; ISBN 978 1 7868 0572 0 EPUB eBook

² For consistency in the text I have spelled the word 'anti-semitism' using lower case with a hyphen except when quoting headlines and other sources who, like the authors in the book title, have adopted different styles.

In some cases it may be necessary to copy and paste web links into your search engine.

³ Chris Williamson was suspended from Labour membership and thus could not stand for re-election as a Party representative in his native Derby.

Party members had been reported for anti-semitism,' they say. In March 2019 the actual figures published by the Labour Party of cases it investigated related to 0.1 per cent of the membership.

Greg Philo and Mike Berry examine how that grossly distorted public perception of the actual situation came about. Justin Schlosberg looks into media coverage of Labour and the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) working definition and Antony Lerman describes its history and evaluates the accusation that the party is 'institutionally anti-semitic'. David Miller briefly describes the political repercussions of speaking about the IHRA definition in a personal case study.

The appendix details chronologically the major controversies affecting Labour from the beginning of the party leadership election in 2015 until its referral to the Equalities and Human Rights Commission in May 2019 following submissions made by the Campaign Against Antisemitism and the Jewish Labour Movement.

Philo and Berry write:

'A search of eight national newspapers shows that from 15 June 2015 to 31 March 2019, there had been 5497 stories on the subject of Corbyn, anti-semitism and the Labour Party. The issue was also extensively featured on television and in new and social media. These headlines give a sense of the accusations that were being made:

"Labour Party is Anti-Semitic and Racist" (LBC, 18 February 2019)

"Jeremy Corbyn, the anti-racist who turned Labour into the party of anti-Semitism" (*Sun*, 18 July 2018)

"Chuka Umunna condemns 'nasty, bullying and racist' Labour Party" (*Evening Standard*, 19 March 2019)".

They say that in both their national poll conducted by Survation and in focus groups in different parts of the United Kingdom the public perception of this highly exaggerated proportion of 'anti-semitic' Labour members was due to the 'volume of coverage and the persistence of the theme in reporting'.

Why didn't Labour effectively counter the allegation that it wasn't acting against anti-semitism? Because, say Philo and Berry, the standard public relation response to such a situation was not possible as many of the allegations were coming from within its own party: too many of its leading lights were busily scoring own goals.

In addition to the party's then deputy leader Tom Watson, these

included regular Corbyn-critical MPs Margaret Hodge, Ruth Smeeth, Louise Ellman, Chuka Umunna, Luciana Berger, Mike Gapes, Wes Streeting, Frank Field, Joan Ryan, Stella Creasy and John Mann; former Labour Party General Secretary Lord Triesman; New Labour figures including Tony Blair, Gordon Brown and their respective funding organisers, Lords Levy and Mendelsohn; as well as fellow peers Mandelson, Hain, Reid, Blunkett, Hughes, Cunningham and Winston.

In July 2019 these were among 64 Labour Lords who placed a *Guardian* advertisement attacking Corbyn over alleged anti-semitism. Included in their number was Lord McNicol, the man who until the previous year had been Labour General Secretary.⁴

Labour also suffered from stories bearing headlines like this one in the *Evening Standard* on February 25 2019:

‘Momentum founder and Corbyn ally Jon Lansman: Labour has “major problem” with anti-Semitism’.

So when those said to be supporters of Corbyn’s leadership joined his many critics, then no refutation effort was likely to be successful.

Schlosberg has important insights into the ways media outlets covered the protracted process by which Labour adopted the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) working definition of anti-semitism and its controversial examples. He says:

‘The [consequence] was not just that the coverage leaned in favour of a particular point of view, but that the ascendant narrative was based on a fundamentally false premise.’

He adds:

‘The IHRA definition did not have consensual support by any measure. Prevailing academic and legal opinion had been strongly critical of the definition since its earliest formulation.’

In March 2018 the IHRA itself confirmed that just eight countries had adopted its definition. But this did not prevent Sky News anchors describing the IHRA definition as ‘widely accepted’ while Jonathan Freedland, in his *Guardian* column, referred to the ‘nearly universally accepted’ definition of anti-semitism.

⁴ <<https://tinyurl.com/t8zxlbv>> or <<https://www.thejc.com/news/uk-news/labour-peers-advert-guardian-jeremy-corbyn-failed-test-leadership-antisemitism-crisis-1.486555>> <<https://tinyurl.com/yy8h4tdh>> or <<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/labour-antisemitism-corbyn-peers-advert-guardian-house-lords-a9007986.html>>

Schlosberg concludes:

'But it was BBC television which performed the worst in this respect, its anchors and presenters repeatedly asserting the universal quality of the definition.'

Lerman's chapter on the history and formulation of the IHRA and his forensic response to the accusation of Labour 'institutional anti-semitism' is worth the price of the book in itself. The former director of the Institute for Jewish Policy Research says the politicisation of anti-semitism is now new.

'I first started writing about the use and abuse of anti-semitism in Jewish communal politics back in 1985 and was, to say the least, not thanked by official communal bodies for doing so. But even after almost 40 years engagement in studying contemporary anti-semitism, it was clear to me that this level of politicisation, going well beyond the organised Jewish community, was unprecedented in its reach and ferocity.'

He cites Umunna as one example among many of those seeking to gain political advantage by this means. He was a Labour member of the cross-party Commons Home Affairs Committee that found in October 2016 'no reliable, empirical evidence to support of the notion that there is a higher prevalence of anti-semitic attitudes within the Labour Party than any other political party'. The same month Umunna told the online site *Labour List*:

'Some have suggested that there is institutional anti-semitism across the whole of the Labour Party, this is not a view I share, not least because I have not seen one incident of anti-semitism in almost 20 years of activism within my local Labour party in Lambeth.'

Yet in February 2019 the then South London MP tells Sky News:

'I've been very clear, the Labour Party is institutionally anti-semitic, and you either put your head in the sand and you ignore it or you actually do something about it.'

Over those 28 months Umunna switched from Labour to found Change UK and, at the time of writing, is a LibDem front-bench foreign affairs spokesman seeking election in the Cities and Westminster constituency.

In his demolition of the Labour 'institutionally anti-semitic' charge Lerman asks whether Jewish Labour Party members experience and suffer discrimination. Clearly not at the top of the party, he says, as in 2010 the two front-runners to succeed Brown as leader were 'Ed and David Miliband,

both self-identifying Jews’.

Is there then discrimination in parliamentary representation? Lerman answers:

‘Eleven of the party’s 261 MPs elected in 2017 were Jewish. The UK Jewish population makes up approximately 0.5 per cent of the total population (Board of Deputies, 2014), which means Jewish MPs were overrepresented in the Parliamentary Labour Party by a factor of 4.’

In his concluding remarks Lerman says that

‘. . . very much at the heart of the anti-semitism controversies in the party is a Jew-on-Jew war; a battle between members who identify themselves as Zionists and those who do not. Some of the most controversial cases of alleged anti-semitism involve Jews. Some of the most vociferous opponents of Corbyn’s leadership are Jews; some of his most loyal and ardent supporters are Jews.’

He adds:

‘It’s no secret that the bitter arguments about Jewish factions in the party are, at root, about the rights and wrongs of the Israel-Palestine conflict.’

I don’t think that’s quite the whole story as I shall explain, but coming from someone with Lerman’s expertise it’s a significant statement, one rarely mentioned, even less examined, in the mainstream media.

Likewise little attention is paid to events such as the one described by Miller after he addressed a small London meeting of Palestinian students in late 2018. The repercussions, he writes, included denunciation by the *Jewish Chronicle (JC)* for anti-semitic statements; anonymous emails sent to colleagues at the University of Bristol denouncing him as an anti-semite; being subject to a complaint to the Labour Party for breaching IHRA guidelines by describing the foundation of Israel as a ‘racist endeavour’ and for being ‘part of the reason that the *JC* denounced the Corbyn-led Labour Party for failing to tackle anti-semitism because I was not expelled from the party’.

Anyone paying even limited attention to the ‘Labour anti-semitism’ issue since Corbyn became leader will recognize this pattern of abuse usefully detailed in this book’s appendix in timeline form.

Bad News for Labour provokes some wider observations than the academic authors themselves allow. One is to go beyond Lerman’s thorough dissection of the IHRA furore to see it as one of the key elements

in the propaganda initiatives of Israel and its supporters in this 'war on terror' century.

As I touched upon in *Lobster 74*⁵ there is a large network of Israel support in the media, both in its ownership and its personnel. This includes Rupert Murdoch with his News Corp operation, the Barclay brothers with the Telegraph Group and *The Spectator*, the DMG Media (formerly Associated Newspapers), the Express titles, now owned by Trinity Mirror – all with their influential online outlets.

To Lerman's recognition of the disproportionately high ratio of Labour MPs who are Jewish to the population at large we can add a similar picture when it comes to journalists prominent in the coverage of 'Labour anti-semitism'. At the BBC we have presenters Nick Robinson, Emily Maitlis, Jo Coburn and Emma Barnett plus the regular slots given to Jonathan Freedland, Melanie Phillips and David Aaronovitch.

The last occupied a senior editorial position at the corporation when he moved with John Birt and others, including current director of editorial policy and standards David Jordan, from London Weekend Television in the mid-1980s. Their LWT colleague Peter Mandelson became a BBC consultant on resigning as Labour's director of communications after being selected as parliamentary candidate in Hartlepool. His subsequent New Labour Cabinet colleague James Purnell, a former chair of Labour Friends of Israel when a New Labour MP, is now the BBC director of radio and education. Former BBC political editor Robert Peston now occupies the same senior position at ITN.

In addition to *The Guardian/Observer's* long list of staff and freelance columnists critical of Corbyn for his alleged anti-semitism, is former *Jewish Chronicle* reporter Jessica Elgot, now the paper's chief political correspondent.

Jerusalem-born former *Evening Standard* journalist Mira Bar-Hillel says her UK-based Jewish colleagues are reluctant to speak out against Israel 'for fear of retribution'.⁶

To what she says about Jewish journalists can be added what former *Guardian* reporter Nick Davies writes of the wider profession in *Flat Earth*

⁵ <<https://tinyurl.com/wrwqyr5>> or <<https://www.lobster-magazine.co.uk/free/lobster74/lob74-labour-corbyn-anti-semitism.pdf>>

⁶ <<https://tinyurl.com/stw8wyk>> or <<https://www.pressgazette.co.uk/mira-bar-hillel-says-fellow-uk-based-jewish-journalists-wont-speak-out-against-israel-fear/>>

News.⁷

'Journalists who write stories which offend the politics of the Israel lobby are subjected to a campaign of formal complaints and pressure on their editors; most of all, they are inundated with letters and emails which can be extravagant in their hostility,' he writes.

'Robert Fisk of *The Independent* has been told that his mother was Adolf Eichmann's daughter, that he belongs in hell with Osama bin Laden, that he is a "hate peddler", "a leading anti-semitic and proto-fascist Islamophile propagandist" and a paedophile.'

Beyond media ownership and the practices and views of individual journalists lie the organisational structures of the media from those who become editors such as James Harding both with the BBC and Murdoch⁸ to those who handle the copy and material seen by readers and viewers.

Here, for example, is what can happen to Fisk's copy before it reaches his audience. This is an extract from a 1998 'Memo to all subs' from a senior executive at *The Independent* to those sub-editing the Middle East correspondent's copy:

'Fisk wins awards on an annual basis for stories that stand as he has written them, not for stories that are changed in an uninformed way. Can you please check with the desk if you have a query about something he has written.

A slightly different point: he recently lost a paragraph in the Alois Bruner [sic] story that said: "Israel has taken no steps to punish the plain-clothes Israeli agents who systematically murdered captured Egyptian soldiers, shooting them in the head after forcing them to dig their own graves during the 1956 Suez war."

The fact that this par was removed raised suspicions of ideological rather than journalistic subbing. Fisk was making a point about murderous agents who have escaped retribution. He gave lots of examples from many countries. It was hard to see why this par was singled out for cutting.

Similarly, Israeli assassins were referred to as 'heroes' in a recent headline.'

⁷ <<https://www.flatearthnews.net>>

⁸ James Harding moved from the editorship of *The Times* in 2012 to become the BBC's director of news and current affairs.

Fisk had left *The Times* for *The Independent* 10 years earlier in part because of the way his copy was changed by executives to suit the wishes of Murdoch over coverage of Israel and the United States.⁹

An example of the way editors can be pressured was shown to the *New Statesman* in the heyday of New Labour in January 2002. It published a cover showing the Star of David standing on a Union Jack with the questioning phrase: 'A kosher conspiracy?' It introduced articles by Dennis Sewell and John Pilger on Britain's pro-Israeli lobby. In a subsequent apology for the cover, editor Peter Wilby described not only receiving highly critical letters from, among others, Labour Party General Secretary Triesman but also experienced the following:

'On 30 January, as we were going to press for last week's issue, four people claiming to represent a group called Action Against Antisemitism (of which I had not previously heard) arrived unannounced at our offices demanding that we print a comprehensive apology.'¹⁰

Wilby ended his apology: 'Readers should be assured that we shall not censor ourselves; but we shall try to present our views with greater sensitivity.'

It was an earlier *New Statesman* editor, John Lloyd, who gave us an insight into the wider, historical context of the 'Labour anti-semitism' controversy that has dogged the Corbyn leadership of the party. Soon after Tony Blair became Prime Minister, Lloyd penned 'Labour falls for the Big Gift' for the weekly magazine.¹¹ He opened his article this way:

'Very rich men are now the key element in the finances – and thus arguably the policies – of both major British political parties. The historic division in party funding, in which the unions supported Labour and big business the Conservatives, has given way to a more mobile universe wherein both parties vie for the favours of entrepreneurs – sometimes the same entrepreneurs.'¹²

⁹ <<https://tinyurl.com/v5lrfns>> or <<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/media/press/robert-fisk-why-i-had-to-leave-the-times-2311569.html>>

¹⁰ <<https://www.newstatesman.com/node/194341>>

¹¹ 'Labour falls for the Big Gift', *New Statesman*, 27 February 1998.

¹² In the Democracy for Sale chapter of his 2008 *Who Runs Britain?*, Robert Peston made the same point 10 years later. See <<https://tinyurl.com/wrwqyr5>> or <<https://www.lobster-magazine.co.uk/free/lobster74/lob74-labour-corbyn-anti-semitism.pdf>>.

Lloyd identifies Michael (later Lord) Levy as the key fundraiser for Blair and New Labour after the two were introduced to each other by Gideon Meir, a senior diplomat at the London Israeli embassy in 1994, the year Blair later became leader on the death of John Smith.¹³

'Levy brought the world of North London Jewish business into the Labour party – the same world that had been very supportive of Margaret Thatcher.' He adds: 'None were natural Labour supporters.'

Lloyd says that the funds Levy produced – £12m before 1997 is the figure most often mentioned – gave 'Blair the kind of operational independence enjoyed by none of his predecessors. Levy's pitch was aimed not at getting support for the Labour Party but for the Labour leader'.

That money allowed Blair in opposition to hire Jonathan Powell and Alastair Campbell, both becoming key figures in his government after being elected prime minister. Levy himself became Middle East special envoy with a desk in the Foreign Office and a seat in the House of Lords.

When Blair left No 10, Levy's fundraising function on behalf of his successor Brown was taken over by his friend and colleague Jon (later Lord) Mendelsohn.

Another source of finance that reached Labour by unusual means from strong Israel supporter David Abrahams was revealed in 2007.¹⁴ Property developer Abrahams, a former vice-chairman of the Jewish Labour Movement, became a vice-president of the Royal United Services Institute in 2010.¹⁵ In 2018 he resigned his party membership blaming Corbyn for his alleged failure to deal with 'Labour anti-semitism'.¹⁶

Levy and Mendelsohn have in recent years joined Abrahams in the same attack on Corbyn. Two of those encouraged by Levy to fund New Labour, Sir Trevor Chinn and Sir David Garrard, continued to fund Corbyn's critical deputy, Watson, until his unexpected resignation as MP in 2019.¹⁷

This financial dimension to Labour politics is one that is not explored in

13 <<https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2006/mar/19/constitution.partyfunding>>

14 <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/7111838.stm>
<<https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2007/nov/30/labour.partyfunding>>

15 <<https://rusi.org/rusi-news/new-rusi-council>>

16 <<https://tinyurl.com/sfc4qgh>> or <<https://www.thejc.com/news/uk-news/major-jewish-labour-donor-explains-why-he-has-quit-the-party-1.461586?highlight=david+abrahams>>

17 <https://www.theyworkforyou.com/mp/11309/tom_watson/west_bromwich_east>

Bad News for Labour as it exceeds the remit the authors have set themselves. But it is one important to our understanding of the context in which the 'Labour anti-semitism' campaign has been conducted: a party with the much larger and more active membership than New Labour has less need of the deep pockets on which Blair depended, pockets, according to Peston (op cit), that swelled following the 2003 Iraq invasion.

One aspect the authors do touch on but is worth adding to is the way celebrities – often the main feature of news reporting, especially in the tabloid press – have been involved in attacking Corbyn. These have ranged from Sir Tony Robinson, a member of Labour's National Executive Committee in the Blair years,¹⁸ to Rachel Riley, a TV show personality with no previous history of political activity but one happy to share her anti-Corbyn views in an interview with fellow critic Alastair Campbell.¹⁹ Alongside them in the same attacks are those well known to TV and radio audiences such as Sir Simon Schama, Howard Jacobson, Simon Sebag-Montefiore, Tracey Ann Oberman and Dame Julia Neuberger.²⁰

The last time Rabbi Neuberger intervened so directly in British politics was when she helped found the Social Democratic Party (SDP) in 1981 and stood as a London parliamentary candidate for it in the general election two years later.

Robert Philpot's²¹ recollection of those events sparked by the breakaway of senior Labour figures to launch the new party bears quite strong resemblance to the way the current Labour party has been undermined since Corbyn became leader.²²

While the SDP project didn't focus on 'Labour anti-semitism' in the same way, it did play on fears of a radical change of political direction under then party leader Michael Foot.

¹⁸ <<https://tinyurl.com/y2fk5jlv>> or <<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/tony-robinson-quit-labour-corbyn-a8898306.html>>

¹⁹ <<https://tinyurl.com/t28448v>> or <<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-6881361/Countdown-star-Rachel-Riley-accuses-Jeremy-Corbyn-condoning-anti-Semitism-Labour-party.html>>

²⁰ <<https://tinyurl.com/y6z2rh4f>> or <<https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2019/jul/14/jewish-intellectuals-express-outrage-over-labours-handling-of-antisemitism-crisis>>

²¹ <<http://www.robertphilpot.com>> Philpot worked for the Policy Network 'think tank' Mandelson set up in 2000. He is also a former executive director of Progress, the Blair-supporting lobby funded for many years by Lord Sainsbury.

²² 'How the SDP failed the Jews', <<https://www.thejc.com/news/news-features/how-the-sdp-failed-the-jews-1.434008>>.

So intent were some of Neuberger's future SDP colleagues to damage Labour and allow Margaret Thatcher to greatly increase her parliamentary majority in 1983, they did all they could before leaving the party to sabotage it. The story was told by *Sunday Telegraph* reporter Kate Ironside in 1996 under the headline 'How we tried to wreck Labour, by SDP rebels'.²³

Neville Sandelson, the former Labour MP for Hayes and Harlington, told her that in the 1980 party leadership contest between Denis Healey and Foot 'myself and my colleagues who voted for Foot were leaving the Labour party and setting up a new party under the leadership of the Gang of Four, and it was important that we finished off the job. It was very important that the Labour party as it had become was destroyed.'

Ironside then writes:

'Lord Healey last night deplored their decision and accused them of condemning the country to almost an extra decade of Thatcherism. He said: "I always knew they had done this, and they bear the responsibility of giving Thatcher two election victories which she would not have otherwise won, and condemned the country to the misery of her government."'

In the 1983 general election Sandelson stood in his West London seat for the SDP and took enough votes from Labour to allow the Conservative candidate Terry Dicks to win.

Am I alone in thinking that some of the well-publicised events surrounding the splitting of the Labour Party in 1981 bear some current resemblance when, again to media acclaim, Labour MPs attack their leader,²⁴ some of them then set up a new party, in a few cases using that as a stepping stone to joining another one in time for a general election?²⁵

As in 1981 the effect of internal Labour attacks and recrimination followed by defections and party re-alignment can only benefit the governing party especially when all these things receive huge publicity. As

²³ 'How we tried to wreck Labour, by SDP rebels' Kate Ironside, *The Sunday Telegraph* 14 January 1996.

²⁴ <<https://tinyurl.com/sfwsbw4>> or <<https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2019/oct/31/jewish-group-removes-campaigning-support-for-labour-in-election>>

²⁵ <<https://tinyurl.com/w8tmgkn>> or <<https://www.standard.co.uk/news/politics/chuka-umunna-and-heidi-allen-among-string-of-mps-to-quit-change-uk-a4159321.html>> <<https://tinyurl.com/tgl4lbg>> or <<https://www.itv.com/news/2019-11-14/liberal-democrats-attack-corbyn-and-labour-s-stance-on-anti-semitism/>>

Bad News for Labour shows, this coverage warps democracy by giving a false picture to voters.

This distortion is not just as described by the authors but it also fails by omission to provide a fuller picture of what the campaign against 'Labour anti-semitism' actually includes. A short list of events and stories not reaching voters as a result of minimal or non-coverage by the mainstream media includes:

When venues for events organised to contest the 'Labour anti-semitism' allegations are threatened by scares, including ones about bombs,²⁶ or when party initiatives like the launch of the Chakrabarti report are undermined.²⁷

When cross-party loyalties to Israel with a negative impact on Labour are not reported.²⁸

When little coverage is given to the Al Jazeera investigation series *The Lobby* confirming Israeli intervention in UK politics, especially in the Corbyn-led Labour party.²⁹

When interests and connections between politicians and journalists are not made transparent.³⁰

When attempts by Jewish supporters of Corbyn to respond to 'Labour

²⁶ <<https://tinyurl.com/yb7lxcss>> or <<https://www.liverpoolecho.co.uk/news/liverpool-news/film-screening-hosted-jewish-voices-15200721>>

²⁷ <<https://www.jewishvoiceforlabour.org.uk/article/3317-2/>>

²⁸ One example is that of leading Corbyn critic Jeremy Newmark who was chairing the Jewish Labour Movement when he was a parliamentary candidate supported by Yvette Cooper in 2017. <<https://tinyurl.com/uhp3mh4>> or <<https://jewishnews.timesofisrael.com/yvette-cooper-anti-semitism-fight-would-be-boosted-by-election-of-jlm-leaders/>>

He was chief executive of the Jewish Leadership Council under the chairmanship of Sir Mick Davis who Theresa May later appointed to be CEO of the Conservative party. <<https://tinyurl.com/yxxbf77d>> or <<https://www.thejc.com/news/uk-news/sir-mick-davis-named-by-theresa-may-as-conservative-party-chief-executive-1.440595>>

Newmark had previously been head of communications for Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, a regular BBC broadcaster for many years. Sacks criticised Corbyn for 'Labour anti-semitism', likening his influence to that of Enoch Powell. <<https://tinyurl.com/yb52dohf>> or <<https://www.thejc.com/news/news-features/jeremy-newmark-a-man-of-power-and-ambition-1.458366>> and <<https://tinyurl.com/rfufkoj>> or <<https://jewishnews.timesofisrael.com/lord-sacks-renews-attack-on-jeremy-corbyn/>>

²⁹ <<https://www.aljazeera.com/investigations/thelobby/>>

³⁰ <<https://tinyurl.com/veg3sz8>> or <<https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20180823-bbc-under-fire-over-conflict-of-interest-in-corbyn-anti-semitism-row/>>

anti-semitism' charges are denied access to the public prints.³¹

The picture the authors paint – offences of commission and omission against freedom of expression, fairness and balance as well as personal allegations against those unable to contest them – is a disturbing one.

Since Corbyn became leader, the campaign against 'Labour anti-semitism' has claimed many victims. Some are professional politicians like Chris Williamson. But most are unpaid citizens who commit their voluntary time and energy to the democratic process and who have become collateral damage in what Lerman calls a 'Jew-on-Jew war'. Many have been subject to well-publicised smears resulting from detailed trawling of their social media output going back many years, investigations that suggest organized, time-consuming effort.

The result since 2015 has been the incubation of an intimidatory environment in which open questioning and discussion of politics have been actively discouraged by those with the power and influence to have ready media access. The decent, trusting goodwill of many in the Labour Party who would not dream of saying or doing anything anti-semitic has been cynically abused as our democracy has been deliberately disfigured.

In strongly recommending *Bad News for Labour* and wishing it a wide readership, I conclude with two thoughts from abroad.

One is from American scholar and author Norman Finkelstein who sees the 'Labour anti-semitism' campaign as a means to bring down Corbyn for advocating a much bigger agenda than the future of Israel and the fate of the Palestinians. He says:

'The British elites could not have gotten away with calling Corbyn an anti-semite unless they had the support, the visible support, of all the leading Jewish organisations. . . They are the enablers of this concerted conspiracy by the whole of British elite society to destroy Jeremy Corbyn.'³²

The other is fellow Jew Avraham Burg, the former speaker of the Knesset and ex-chairman of both the Jewish Agency and the World Zionist Organisation. He writes in *The Holocaust is Over; We Must Rise from its*

³¹ <<https://tinyurl.com/y6t6s7r7>> or <<https://www.haaretz.com/world-news/europe/the-guardian-retracts-pro-corbyn-letter-defending-labour-of-anti-semitism-charges-1.7487275>>

³² <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JEX5OGmXLz4>>

*Ashes*³³ about the United States but with implications for the United Kingdom well worth pondering:

'Jews hold stunningly powerful positions and clout in the United States. The combination of the American state's power and the Jewish power in the areas of legislation, administration, media, law, culture, and entertainment have made Jews a defining factor of contemporary America. Because Israel is inseparable from the identity of American Jews, Israel is inseparable from the American experience.'

He continues:

'Too many of my Jewish American brothers and sisters have become the beating heart of neoconservatism. They are part of the white, right-wing, nationalist, and powerful establishment, part of an administration and culture that withdraw [sic] from the global responsibility that defined America's spirit during World War II.'

One does not have to agree with all that Burg says about the United States to draw from it at least concerned inquiry about the state of the United Kingdom as it goes to the polls under the long, dark shadow of alleged 'Labour anti-semitism'.

John Booth is a freelance journalist and writer

³³ Avraham Burg, *The Holocaust is Over; We Must Rise from its Ashes* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008)