

Baroness Jan Royall

Allegations of anti-Semitism

Oxford University Labour Club

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## BARONESS ROYALL

I was honoured but daunted when asked by the NEC to undertake this inquiry. I was dismayed and ashamed that the ancient virus of antisemitism had infected our Party and wanted to do whatever I could to ensure that current problems were properly addressed and preventative action was taken to minimize the risk of reoccurrence.

My starting point was that antisemitism is abhorrent. Labour has a proud record of tolerance, antiracism and for standing up for minorities; and our leader, Jeremy Corbyn has been at the forefront of many of the struggles for the dignity of all peoples. Sadly however, there is now a feeling amongst part of the Jewish community that they do not feel welcome in our Party. There is too often a real, sometimes perceived, culture of intolerance where Jews are concerned and there are clear incidents of antisemitism.

For many years, Jews of all ages have strongly supported Labour – sharing our values and vision for society. The Jewish Labour Movement, the successor to Poale Zion, affiliated with the Party as a Socialist Society in 1920. The Union of Jewish Students say they have “an extremely positive relationship with Labour Students with many local clubs being strong supporters of Jewish students”. This makes the situation at the Oxford University Labour Club all the more troubling.

Some may suggest that allegations of antisemitism in discourse are a means of curbing free speech. They are wrong. Engaging in healthy, occasionally heated, debate is what we do because we feel passionately about issues. It is right to question and to criticize. Freedom of speech must flourish but just as it is unacceptable to be racist in debate, so it is unacceptable to be antisemitic in any discourse. The legal limits to free speech must be obeyed and freedom of speech held in equal measure with fundamental principles such as religious and racial tolerance.

Throughout the process of undertaking this inquiry, I have sought information about how antisemitism manifests itself in the modern world. I have also been guided by the principles of the London Declaration which was signed in 2009 after the Conference and Summit of the Inter-parliamentary Coalition for Combating Antisemitism:

“Parliamentarians shall expose, challenge, and isolate political actors who engage in hate against Jews.”

The first signatory was the then Labour Prime Minister, Rt Hon Gordon Brown MP, who said:

“So many of the principles it enshrines are already things we are doing here in Britain, and while I’m proud of the bold action Britain has taken to combat Antisemitism such as improved reporting, prosecutions for antisemitic Internet

hate and the funding of Holocaust education in schools, there is no room for complacency [...] I encourage other heads of government to become signatories to this historic agreement. Together our renewed efforts can rid the world of this ancient virus.”

These principles of the Declaration should stand today for our Party, just as they did then for our government.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

I was asked by the National Executive Committee of the Labour Party to examine the allegations of antisemitism that arose surrounding Oxford University Labour Club (OULC) after the resignation of a former co-Chair.

This was followed by a number of allegations of incidents of antisemitism against members of the Labour Party, including against one Member of Parliament and a member of the National Executive Committee.

I was also made aware that there was at least one case of serious false allegations of antisemitism which was reported to the police.

The context of the wider allegations means that I had to consider the matters of Oxford University Labour Club in that broader landscape. My recommendations will have a positive impact, not only on OULC, but on Labour clubs and the Labour Party more generally.

I do not believe that there is institutional antisemitism within OULC. Difficulties however, face OULC which must be addressed to ensure a safe space for all Labour students to debate and campaign around the great ideas of our movement.

It is not possible to simply make recommendations about the OULC without considering how our Party itself responds to these events. I am therefore, today making recommendations about how Labour tackles antisemitism to minimise the chance of any repetition of incidents such as those described at OULC. I am making eleven recommendations for immediate and sustained action. In addition, I am advising the second, wider inquiry led by Shami Chakrabarti of a further seven issues which she may wish to consider.

Many of my recommendations may be implemented such that they have a positive impact in other areas where Labour will want to demonstrate in a practical and sustained way that our Party ***“promotes a just society, which judges its strength by the condition of the weak as much as the strong, provides security against fear, and justice at work; which nurtures families, promotes equality of opportunity, and delivers people from the tyranny of poverty, prejudice and the abuse of power”***.

I trust that these will be accepted and implemented in full.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- OULC should consider procedures that allow for greater continuity of leadership than is provided by electing new leadership each term.

- The Executive of the OULC, and other Labour Clubs, should examine the culture of their Club and take action to ensure that all those who wish to participate in meetings feel that there is a safe space in order to discuss and debate without discrimination.
- Training should be organised by Labour Students together with the Jewish Labour Movement for officers of all Labour Clubs in dealing with antisemitism.
- The Executive of the OULC, and all Labour Clubs, should have a clear line of reporting for incidents of antisemitism and other forms of racism, discrimination and harassment. This should include the ability of individual students to report incidents directly to the Executive Director of Governance of the Labour Party.
- Where documented evidence of incidents which are alleged to show antisemitic behaviour has been presented in respect of members of OULC who are members of the Labour Party, I will be recommending to the General Secretary that these allegations are investigated in line with normal procedures.
- There should be no requirement for the Labour Party to determine its own investigation into antisemitic behaviour on the outcome of any criminal investigation or other third party inquiry.
- The Labour Party and the NEC should provide the leadership and training in equalities issues including antisemitism and ensure that post-holders throughout the Party have access to materials and guidance which will help them identify and deal appropriately with any incidents.
- That the national complaints procedure is properly resourced so that it may deal effectively with complaints of antisemitism.
- There should be no 'statute of limitation' on antisemitic behaviour. Any incident of antisemitism, even when not in Party membership, may be considered by Labour's disciplinary procedures in respect of current members.
- That there is a standing report to each meeting of the NEC Equalities Committee, and the NEC Disputes Panel, of any complaints and the action taken.
- It is not recommended that where a person is excluded from membership for antisemitism this should automatically be a life ban. I recognise that people may change their views and that where that is demonstrable a person may be allowed to seek NEC approval for any future application to join the Labour Party.

**Other issues submitted to the Chakrabarti Inquiry for consideration**

- The Labour Party should consider whether adopting the Macpherson Principle that an antisemitic incident that may require investigation is any incident that is perceived to be antisemitic by the victim or any other person is appropriate.
- The Review should consider whether it would be useful for the Labour Party to adopt a definition of antisemitic discourse.

- Labour should consider adopting rule changes that will allow swifter action to deal with antisemitism. This could include empowering the NEC, through an appointed, authoritative and independent panel, to exclude members where there is credible evidence of antisemitism with a right of appeal to the National Constitutional Committee (NCC). The panel must be able to both speak with authority on these issues and seek advice from experts in the field where necessary. No doubt such a procedure could be considered for wider use.
- That the membership procedures be adjusted such that, should evidence of antisemitic behaviour be discovered within the first year of membership, it should be treated as though it were discovered during the eight-week probationary period.
- That new procedures for the selection of local government and national candidates must include more rigorous vetting procedures. It is noted that volunteers manage many selections and the procedures must be appropriate for the task in hand.
- Consultations should take place with the Leader and Deputy Leader of the Party in respect principles of how we conduct on-line debate in a way which is both welcoming and productive.
- No form of antisemitism or racism is acceptable, including being used as a factional political tool.

## INTRODUCTION

On 15 February, Alex Chalmers posted a statement (Appendix One) on Facebook giving reasons for his resignation as Co-Chair of OULC.

This led to an immediate reaction in the wider community exemplified by various media reports such as:

“The Oxford University Labour Club (OULC) - the largest student Labour group in the country - has become embroiled in an anti-Semitism row following the resignation of one of its chairs after the club decided to endorse Israel Apartheid Week.” – The Independent 17 February

“Oxford University Labour club chairman QUILTS after accusing his comrades of anti-Semitism and having a ‘poisonous’ attitude to minorities.” – Daily Mail 16 February

“Oxford University's student Labour club, that was previously a platform for Ed Miliband and Michael Foot, has become embroiled in an anti-Semitism row. The club's chairman Alex Chalmers has resigned in protest after claiming that its members have ‘some kind of problem with Jews’ and sympathise with terrorist groups like Hamas.” – Telegraph 16 February

“A decision by the club to support Israeli Apartheid Week, which seeks to highlight Israel’s ‘ongoing settler-colonial project and apartheid policies over the Palestinian people’, has angered some Labour MPs, who have called for the party to dissociate itself from OULC.” – The Guardian 16 February

Labour Students, the affiliated organisation to which Labour Clubs themselves are affiliated, launched an internal investigation. Given the serious nature of the allegations and the impact they were having on the wider party, Labour’s General Secretary advised Labour Students of my appointment by the NEC to undertake an inquiry and that publication of their report might compromise my work. Labour Students, helpfully, agreed not to publish their own report. I have, however, had full access to that report.

I was asked to consider allegations of antisemitism in relation to individual members of our Party connected with Oxford University Labour Club. It is clear that any such allegations would have to be viewed within the wider landscape of claims of antisemitism in the Party, and I have therefore taken evidence from a wide range of people and organisations of standing.

I have received around 300 pages of evidence from over 40 members of OULC. I have interviewed eight members of OULC and offered interviews to a number of others which were not taken up. Throughout, I welcomed requests for meetings.

In drawing up my recommendations, I have taken account of the fact that the Leader of our Party has established a wider – and welcome – inquiry to look into antisemitism and racism. My report will form part of that inquiry, of which I will be a Vice Chair and so ensuring continuity. But I would not wish to delay my own recommendations in respect of antisemitism for fear that serious matters were being "swept under the carpet". Nor would it be appropriate to simply make recommendations in respect of student organisations and yet not make any for the NEC or the wider Party which may have an impact on the long-term change. I have therefore, referred a number of issues directly to the Chakrabarti Inquiry (as set out above).

I believe that no-one can argue that the symptoms I was asked to investigate can be treated in isolation. It would be a complete failure and abrogation of my responsibility not to make recommendations that will at least help address the causes that allow the virus of antisemitism the space to breathe, whether in a Labour Club or elsewhere.

I trust the Chakrabarti inquiry will build on these recommendations.



## WHAT IS ANTI-SEMITISM?

It sometimes seems that there may be as many definitions of antisemitism as there may be people willing to offer a definition. There are however, several things which should be clear for the Labour Party in considering its response to the allegations of antisemitic behaviour at OULC.

Antisemitism is an area where the behaviour is defined by the perpetrators rather than the victim. Even in recent weeks it has been questioned whether antisemitism is racism. Yes, it is.

As the Community Security Trust (CST) explains, antisemitism at its heart is hostility, phobia or bias against Judaism or individual Jews as a group.

“IN ESSENCE, antisemitism is discrimination, prejudice or hostility against Jews. The word ‘antisemitism’ came into use in the late nineteenth century to describe pseudoscientific racial discrimination against Jews, but is now used more generally to describe all forms of discrimination, prejudice or hostility towards Jews throughout history, and has been called ‘the Longest Hatred’.”

Antisemitic Discourse Report 2013

The same report quotes the Senior Research Fellow and Tutor in Philosophy at Oxford, Brian Klug who describes the importance of the imaginary ‘Jew’ (as distinct to the reality of Jews). He depicts the antisemitic caricature of this imaginary ‘Jew’ as:

“The Jew belongs to a sinister people set apart from all others, not merely by its customs but by a collective character: arrogant yet obsequious; legalistic yet corrupt; flamboyant yet secretive. Always looking to turn a profit, Jews are as ruthless as they are tricky. Loyal only to their own, wherever they go they form a state within a state, preying upon the societies in whose midst they dwell. Their hidden hand controls the banks, the markets and the media. And when revolutions occur or nations go to war, it is the Jews – cohesive, powerful, clever and stubborn – who invariably pull the strings and reap the rewards.”

Brian Klug – Antisemitic Discourse Report 2013 (CST)

Oppression of any sort, be it racism, sexism or any other form, is usually believed to be the strong oppressing the weak, the rich oppressing the poor, the owners oppressing the workers, the haves the have-nots.

A pervading discourse now is that Jews are neither weak, nor poor, neither workers, nor have-nots. In short, Jews cannot be victims and cannot be discriminated against.

Alongside this sits a view that criticism of the government of Israel is not antisemitic (it is not) and therefore being anti-Zionist cannot be antisemitic. Yes it can and, unfortunately, it is often used deliberately as a tool of antisemitism. (I make comment on this a little later.)

I have received evidence from students at Oxford and elsewhere that the various sides of this discourse are often conflated. This typically creates an environment in which Jews cannot debate, or feel safe to do so, unless their every remark is prefaced by a criticism of the Israeli government.

Antisemitism manifests itself frequently, and simply, as a failure to allow Jews to engage on a level playing field. No pre-conditions are placed on women debating sexism. It is not a prerequisite that Muslims condemn the atrocities of this or that government before they may enter debate on foreign policy.

Many students reported that should a Jewish student preface a remark “as a Jew...” they are likely to face ridicule and behaviour that would not be acceptable for someone saying “as a woman...” or “as an Afro-Caribbean...”. This behaviour is also reported within the wider community.

Legislative definitions of antisemitism are primarily intended for Police and Judicial use in identifying antisemitic incidents and crimes rather than defining discourse. Definitions however, can provide useful tools for helping consider what may, or may not, constitute antisemitic discourse, and the Chakrabarti Inquiry will need to consider this carefully.

In defining a racist incident, the government currently uses the Macpherson Principle, the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry definition of a racist incident, as an incident that is perceived to be racist by the victim or any other person. This naturally includes antisemitism. Such incidents must be investigated. It is clear that antisemitism must be judged according to the same standards as all other forms of racism and the Chakrabarti review may consider whether or not the Party should adopt the same approach.

The context in which certain words and phrases are used in discussion, debate and in writing is absolutely critical, for example Zionism and anti-Zionism.

There is a position put forward by some which says, “I am opposed to Zionism but am not antisemitic. Indeed, accusations of anti-Semitism are proffered simply to stop my legitimate opposition to Zionism.”

However, a counter-position is that antisemitism often simply hides behind the rhetoric of anti-Zionism.

Not all anti-Zionists are anti-Semites and anti-Zionism is not necessarily antisemitic. Once again the context is important in determining the meaning of the words or deeds.

The All-Party Parliamentary Group on antisemitism tackled this in its 2006 report.

“For example, criticism of Zionism is not in itself antisemitic. However, in some quarters an antisemitic discourse has developed that is in effect antisemitic because it views Zionism itself as a global force of unlimited power and malevolence throughout history. This definition of Zionism bears no relation to the understanding that most Jews have of the concept; that is, a movement of Jewish national liberation, born in the late nineteenth century, with a geographical focus limited to Israel. Having re-defined Zionism in this way, traditional antisemitic notions of Jewish conspiratorial power, manipulation and subversion are then transferred from Jews (a religious or racial group) on to Zionism (a political movement)..”

Report of the All-Party Parliamentary Inquiry into Antisemitism 2006

Shami Chakrabarti will certainly want explore these complex issues in detail and where to set the boundaries of antisemitic discourse. It is apparent however, that there are words like “Zio”, and tropes such as 'blood libel', which are antisemitic to all observers. When these are used, swift and decisive action should be taken.

There are occasions on which the context means that the boundaries between acceptable and antisemitic language and behaviour are blurred at the edges. Whilst taking action on those matters will help define the boundaries, it is clear that Labour Clubs and our Party more widely will need guidance, training and support to deal effectively with these issues.

For this reason, I am recommending that the NEC should show leadership in arranging such training. The NEC should also consider procedures which allow for the determination of whether this or that behaviour is antisemitic to be made by an independent authoritative panel. A similar approach could obviously be taken in respect of other behaviour where the NEC wishes to seek expert, independent advice. The NCC would, of course, remain the final arbiter in disputed disciplinary matters.

## OXFORD UNIVERSITY LABOUR CLUB

The Oxford University Labour Club comprises around 300 members of the Labour Party. In common with political (and non-political) societies in many universities, it is required to allow membership from anyone – including members of other political parties. Thanks to the recent adoption of a resolution, members of other political parties do not have voting rights.

The constitution of the Labour Club has to be approved by the university Proctors.

Two Co-Chairs provide leadership and organisation for the Club and these are elected to serve for a single academic term.

There are usually two general meetings in a term as well as social and other events.

I have received no evidence that the Club is itself institutionally antisemitic. The lack, however, of an effective complaints or disciplinary procedure and the rapid change in leadership mean that unacceptable behaviour – whether antisemitic or some other manifestation – may go unchallenged by either the victim or by those in authority. There appears to be cultural problem in which behaviour and language that would once have been intolerable is now tolerated. Some Jewish members do not feel comfortable attending the meetings, let alone participating. It has been reported to me that this is not a situation which is experienced by the Jewish community alone. This is not helped by the fact that Labour Club membership – albeit non-voting – is open to anyone, including those who do not share our Party's values.

Two comments which are typical of many received about the Labour Club itself are:

“With regards to the behaviour of the membership, I myself have not witnessed antisemitic behaviour, nor have I received any complaints or comments about it. I cannot, guarantee that antisemitic behaviour has not occurred, this is due to the large size of our membership, and an inability to police their behaviour consistently.”

“I do not believe there is a culture of secrecy, cover-up or subliminal/institutional anti-Semitism within OULC, but this does raise questions as to how such serious alleged incidences could have happened without any prior detection. I would suggest any such incidences would most likely have occurred outside official Club activities and events and been committed by peripheral members of the Club.”

Much of the evidence I have received about antisemitic behaviour by individuals relates to their actions outside of the Club activities. That may limit the scope of the Club to take action, but as far as our Party is concerned antisemitism should not be acceptable behaviour at any time in any circumstance – whether it is related to Labour Club activities or not. With regard to OULC meetings, it is understandable that when certain issues arise especially relating to Israel and Palestine, the debate is politically charged and robust, but certainly on at least one occasion the boundaries of acceptability were breached. Some responsibility must lie with the chair for the conduct of meetings.

I regret that the incidences of antisemitism were not reported to any authority, including the Labour Party, as soon as the allegations were made. In some cases this makes it very difficult to verify. The lack of a systematic reporting procedure is clearly a factor but also the fears of victims in coming forward. When my recommendations have been implemented I trust that there will be a clear system of which all members are aware and in which they have confidence. The cultural change is equally important because the

tensions that arise in relation to profound political disagreement and between factions within our Party should never give rise to intimidation or make any member feel insecure.

It also seems clear that some of these issues go wider than any Labour Club – to the university itself and other universities. This is something that I will want to raise with Universities UK in due course.

## ALLEGATIONS OF ANTI-SEMITISM IN RELATION TO INDIVIDUAL MEMBERS OF OXFORD UNIVERSITY LABOUR CLUB

I received a number of complaints of incidents of alleged antisemitic behaviour by individual members of OULC.

I have also received evidence that members of the Club, including past office holders of the Club, have not witnessed antisemitic behaviour by other members.

I am not part of Labour's disciplinary process, and where documented evidence of cases of antisemitism by individual members of our Party have been reported to me I have today passed that evidence to the General Secretary for action as appropriate.

It is clear to me from the weight of witnessed allegations received that there have been some incidents of antisemitic behaviour and that it is appropriate for the disciplinary procedures of our Party to be invoked.

However, it is not clear to me to what extent this behaviour constituted intentional or deliberate acts of antisemitism. This is particularly true of historic hearsay evidence. Whilst I want to see the Party deal with acts of antisemitism, I see no value in pursuing disciplinary cases against students who may be better advised as to their conduct and who would benefit from training on these issues.

There should be no doubt that any more complaints may lead to further disciplinary action.

## RULE CHANGES

Some of the recommendations I make may require rule changes over and above any changes to procedures. No doubt the NEC will wish to consider the findings of the second inquiry – as well as the proposals made by affiliates, including the Jewish Labour Movement, constituency parties and others – before making its own proposals to Conference.

## Appendix One: RESIGNATION STATEMENT OF ALEX CHALMERS

“It is with the greatest regret that I have decided to resign as Co-Chair of the Oxford University Labour Club. This comes in the light of OULC's decision at this evening's general meeting to endorse Israel Apartheid Week.

I originally ran for the position of Co-Chair back in Trinity, after our crushing defeat at the general election, because I was increasingly worried about the state of OULC. The club I had invested an extraordinary amount of time, energy, and emotion in during my first two terms at Oxford, which had given me a network of close friends, was becoming increasingly riven by factional splits, and despite its avowed commitment to liberation, the attitudes of certain members of the club towards certain disadvantaged groups was becoming poisonous.

Whether it be members of the Executive throwing around the term 'Zio' (a term for Jews usually confined to websites run by the Ku Klux Klan) with casual abandon, senior members of the club expressing their 'solidarity' with Hamas and explicitly defending their tactics of indiscriminately murdering civilians, or a former Co-Chair claiming that 'most accusations of antisemitism are just the Zionists crying wolf', a large proportion of both OULC and the student left in Oxford more generally have some kind of problem with Jews. The decision of the club to endorse a movement with a history of targeting and harassing Jewish students and inviting antisemitic speakers to campuses, despite the concerns of Jewish students, illustrates how uneven and insincere much of the active membership is when it comes to liberation.

I had hoped during my tenure as Co-Chair to move the club away from some of its more intolerant tendencies: sadly, it only continued to move away from me, to a place I could no longer hope to retrieve it from. I am now in a position where I can no longer in good conscience defend club policy, but I do not regret my time in OULC. I'm proud of the work I did, both as Secretary and Co-Chair, whether it be the hours spent campaigning or redrafting the club's constitution, or putting together a term card with a range of high profile speakers. I have also had the honour of working with some great people, whether they be my fellow Co-Chair Noni Csogor, or former Co-Chairs such as David Klemperer, Kate Welsh, Helena Dollimore, or David Cesar Heymann, and members of the Executive past and present such as Ella Taylor and Ben Scantlebury. I wish Noni the very best for the rest of term and I fully respect her decision to continue, even if it is not one I can take myself. “

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Labour members of Oxford University Labour Club

BAME Labour

The All-Party Parliamentary Group Against Antisemitism

The Board of Deputies of British Jews

Campaign Against Anti-Semitism

Community Security Trust

Institute for Jewish Policy Research

Jewish Human Rights Watch

Jewish Labour Movement

Jewish Leadership Council

Labour Students

Union of Jewish Students

And members of both Houses of Parliament and individuals who shared their views