

UK: “Left antisemitism” campaign downplays far-right danger to promote crackdown on anti-Zionism

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John Mann, the former Labour MP and now Lord Mann of Holbeck Moor has published a report calling for the International Holocaust Remembrance Association (IHRA) definition of anti-semitism to be enforced in schools, universities and all public bodies.

The IHRA definition is an ahistorical and anti-democratic construction designed to paint political anti-Zionism and opposition to the Israeli state’s persecution of the Palestinians as anti-Jewish hatred by establishing a deeply harmful equivalence between Israel and all people of Jewish heritage. It is the central plank of a campaign to use accusations of “left anti-semitism” to intimidate growing socialist sentiment in the working class and among young people.

Mann has played a leading role in these efforts from the start, spearheading the slandering of former leader of the Labour Party Jeremy Corbyn and his supporters as anti-semites. He fired the starting gun on the campaign with an altercation with Ken Livingstone in 2016, calling him a “Nazi apologist”, which eventually saw the leading Corbyn supporter thrown out of the Labour Party.

At a right-wing rally outside parliament in 2018, Mann and other Blairites demanded Corbyn “must go” to chants of “Jeremy Corbyn is a racist”.

In 2019, he was awarded a peerage by Conservative Prime Minister Theresa May, then made the government’s “Antisemitism Tsar” by her successor Boris Johnson.

He has supported current Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer’s witch-hunting of left-wingers out of the party, encouraging him to “embrace the reality that most British Jews define themselves as Zionists. It is their identity, who they are... He must make Zionism a term of endearment not a term of abuse and banish from his party those who defile the right of Jewish people to determine for themselves their own identity.”

Suppressing anti-Zionism under the guise of combatting antisemitism

Mann’s new report, “Anti-Jewish Hatred: Tackling Antisemitism in the UK 2023—Renewing the Commitment”, is authored in his capacity as HM Government’s Independent Adviser on Antisemitism. It pushes forward the most developed front of the “left antisemitism” campaign outside of the Labour Party, in the universities.

Mann writes approvingly that “200 universities, colleges and other higher education providers had signed up” to the IHRA definition in November 2021, with more to follow, but adds “there is still more to be done”.

This means an even tighter crackdown on opposition to Israel, its

apartheid regime and violations of international law. “Among students and academics,” Mann argues, “the growth in antisemitism has largely occurred under the guise of anti-Zionism or criticism of the Israeli Government. The atmosphere can become particularly toxic when conflict in the Middle East arises.”

Tightening the identification of all Jews with Israeli nationalism, Mann states baldly, “The Union of Jewish Students [UJS] and their Jewish Societies are the representative voice for Jewish students in universities.”

The UJS works closely with the Israeli embassy in the UK and its constitution lists as one of its objects, “inspiring Jewish students to make an enduring commitment to their Jewish identity, Israel, and the community.” It played a leading role in the recent witch-hunts of National Union of Students (NUS) President Shaima Dallali and University of Bristol Professor David Miller.

The persecution of Miller is cited by Mann to whip the University and College Union representing university staff into line. He writes threateningly, “There is a perception among Jewish organisations that the University and College Union (UCU) has been far from supportive on matters such as adopting the IHRA working definition and the David Miller case.”

As well as universities, Mann argues, “all public bodies... should use the IHRA working definition of antisemitism”.

He notes as a positive step that the Crown Prosecution Service has “recommended the IHRA definition of antisemitism in a newsletter in 2017 to all CPS Area Hate Crime Coordinators”. The CPS and Community Securities Trust (CST, of which Mann is a board member) “have worked together to develop guidance for prosecutors” and the government “wrote to all local authority leaders recommending it [the IHRA’s] adoption by them.”

Mann crows that “the definition is now used by the UK Government, Scottish Government, Welsh Government, over 250 local authorities and other employers in civic society.”

Referring to the Labour Party Mayor of Greater Manchester Andy Burnham, the report “agrees with the Mayor’s recommendation that work should be undertaken nationally to encourage other public bodies to do the same,” worrying that “some local authorities and public bodies only pay lip-service to the definition”.

In a new and sinister step, Mann raises the prospect of extending this dictate into pre-18 education.

His report cites figures from a survey of secondary schools this July which found that “antisemitic incidents in schools have almost trebled over the past five years.”

It quotes the UK’s Special Envoy on Post Holocaust Issues Lord Eric Pickles’ “submission to this Office” that “the adoption of the IHRA definition of antisemitism is a good place to start” in addressing this issue,

“because we can use the definition to assist teachers and others to understand that antisemitism can take many forms”.

Pickles is a chairman of the Conservative Friends of Israel lobby group.

Mann, acting on behalf of the Tory government and Labour opposition, has outlined the framework for the criminalisation and suppression of anti-Zionism throughout society, outlawing a political position held by millions. Teachers and local government workers would be policed for any expression of these views, and in the case of teachers required to carry out the same role among their students as has already begun on university campuses.

Falsifications in the service of a witch-hunt

How monstrous this falsification is was inadvertently highlighted by Mann’s own cited research. The July 2022 school survey was conducted by the right-wing thinktank the Henry Jackson Society (HJS), a fervent advocate of the IHRA. Its findings and conclusions make clear that the HJS went fishing for proof of an explosion of “left-wing antisemitism”, failed to find it, then contrived the pre-prepared conclusion anyway.

According to the HJS, it sent 3,335 Freedom of Information requests to secondary schools around the country, receiving 1,314 responses. These identified 1,077 anti-semitic incidents over the five-year period 2017-18 to 2021-22.

Some schools provided a year for each incident, others provided aggregate figures. Based on the cases with a year indicated, the HJS list 60 in 2017-18, 79 in 2018-19, 59 in 2019-20, 127 in 2020-1 and 164 in 2021-2, concluding that there has been a 173.33 percent rise over the period, though this is weakened by the fact that most cases, 588, were not dated.

Significantly, the report notes, “Some schools voluntarily shared case details. These case descriptions were then categorized into incidents that referred to Nazism and/or the Holocaust, Israel and Palestine, Jewish conspiracy theories, and not identifiable. An overwhelming 58 per cent were Holocaust or Nazi related; 1.5 per cent were Israel/Palestine Related; and 1.5 per cent referred to Jewish conspiracy theories.”

Clearly embarrassed by the small minority of Israel/Palestine cases versus the evidently right-wing “Holocaust or Nazi related” incidents, the HJS theorises “a potential lack of accurate recording, possibly owing to a lack of a clear understanding amongst teachers as to how antisemitism can manifest itself. This requires further research.”

That research, it proposes, should be carried out under conditions in which criticism of the Israeli state and its ethnic nationalist politics has been redefined as an anti-Jewish hate crime. “Embedding the IHRA definition of antisemitism within school policy and improving awareness training and awareness assessment of schools deemed at high risk will help improve the accuracy of incident reporting.”

The HJS attempts to back this up with reference to a “spike in incidences reported in 2020-2021” which it connects with “escalations in the conflict between Israel and Palestine.” This refers to an 11-day assault by Israel on Gaza which led to 256 Palestinian deaths, including 66 children.

As already raised, the conclusion of a spike is weakly supported given the large number of undated cases. In addition, to the degree there was a spike related to the Israeli assault on Palestine, to which individuals reacted with hostility to Jews, then this was not a left-wing response, based on the social categories of class, but an ethnic nationalist one—to a considerable degree encouraged by assertions like Mann’s that Zionism is British Jews’ “identity... who they are.”

None of this justifies the conclusion that more “accurate” recording

would turn the findings on their head, yet this is what the report’s author Charlotte Littlewood insisted in comments to the media on its release:

“Case descriptions, when given, nearly entirely concerned incidences relating to the Holocaust and Nazism, this alongside inconsistent reporting, causes me to fear that this is just the tip of the iceberg and that an understanding amongst staff of modern manifestations of antisemitism and the real risk the Jewish minority face is dangerously lacking.”

Anti-semitism and the growth of the far-right

Here is the essence of the “left antisemitism” campaign laid bare. Its concern is not to protect Jews but to attack the left—particularly left-wing Jews—in pursuit of which it dangerously obscures the resurgence of anti-semitism fuelled by the fascist right.

In fact, the one case found by the HJS in which it provides additional details involves a neo-Nazi terrorist. “Only one school reports having referred a case to the CST. Perhaps of note, is that this school had previously seen a student convicted of a terrorist offence for plotting to attack a synagogue”.

Although no names are provided, this almost certainly refers to the January 2020 case of a Durham 17-year-old sentenced to six years and eight months in prison for six terror offences relating to plans to firebomb synagogues. The individual was inspired by fascist terrorist Anders Breivik’s manifesto and wrote his own, including plans for “warfare against the [Jewish] system in Durham city area, *sieg heil*.” He was active on the forums Ironmarch and Fascist Forge and a self-declared admirer of Adolf Hitler.

More examples of young neo-Nazis charged with terror offences could be cited. Counter-terror police have now identified right-wing extremism as the fastest-growing terror threat in the UK.

Mann is forced to acknowledge this threat in his report, writing under a subhead “Antisemitism on the right” that “With highly concerning levels of support in Europe and the United States, the far-right in the form of neo-Nazi and white supremacist groups maintains that in addition to Muslims and Latinos, the Jews are coconspirators in the ‘Great Replacement Theory’, a conspiracy to use immigration to undermine white Christian populations. This theory was shown to be a factor behind the deadly attacks in Christchurch, El Paso and Pittsburgh.”

He also notes, “The far-right has used the Covid pandemic to promote antisemitic narratives such as the virus being a Jewish hoax and vaccines invented by Jews to poison the population.”

But this is minimised through reference to the Board of Deputies of British Jews (BoD)—another leading organisation in the campaign against Corbyn and his supporters—and their “positive note” that “there tends to be ‘wide political and societal consensus against recognisable antisemitism from the far-right and so the Jewish community does often feel supported in this regard’.”

There is undoubtedly broad popular hostility to the far-right. The threat, however, comes from its promotion and protection by capitalist governments and major parties around the world.

Former US President Donald Trump still sits at the head of the Republican Party, called “colleagues” by President Biden.

Marine Le Pen of the National Rally has twice made the runoff in the French Presidential elections, with many of her policies embraced by rival Emmanuel Macron’s Renaissance party. The Alternative for Germany has been given national prominence far beyond its vote share, while fascist coup plots are hatched among the country’s special forces.

Israel’s Benjamin Netanyahu, a courter of the anti-semitic Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban, has returned to government with the help of

the far-right, fascistic forces of Ben Gvir's Religious Zionism movement.

Most nakedly, the world's imperialist governments and media have spent the past months glorifying fascist groups such as the Azov Regiment, whose heritage traces back to Nazi collaborationist organisations in the Second World War, as fighters for democracy in Ukraine.

The BoD's "positive note" is sounded to make it easier to put this real danger on an equal footing with the concocted phenomenon of "left anti-semitism". Listed first in the report, the subsection "Antisemitism on the left" repeats the old slanders of Corbyn and includes the outrageous line, "Although not exclusive to the left by any means, long-perpetuated conspiracy theories about Jews controlling the global financial system and the media to oppress working people still run amok."

This is not just a lie; it is the foundational right-wing lie for modern anti-semitism and one whose history proves the intimate connection between anti-semitism and fascist anti-socialism.

"Jewish Marxism": the history of antisemitism and the fight for socialism

In 1903, the infamous fabrication, "The Protocols of the Elders of Zion" was published in Tsarist Russia, purporting to give evidence of a Jewish plot for world domination through control of the banks, media, culture and governments; and the foment of revolutions against "Christian Capitalism".

The text was heavily pushed by the Russian government to scapegoat the Jewish population for the calamitous Russo-Japanese war, and later to attack the Russian Revolution of 1905 and divide the working class. It gained a new lease of life among the anti-Bolshevik White forces of the civil war which followed the Russian Revolution, denounced as a Jewish plot.

White emigres carried the text to America, where they were heavily promoted by US industrialist Henry Ford, and to Europe where it fed into Germany's National Socialist movement which ultimately waged a war of annihilation against "Jewish Bolshevism" and "Jewish Marxism".

Whether in the form of the QAnon, "Great Replacement" or "Great Reset" conspiracy theories, or the minimisation of the crimes of Nazi Germany, this filth is being revived today as sections of the ruling class turn again to fascism as a bludgeon against a working class moving rapidly to the left.

Their efforts are aiding the campaign, motivated by the same fear of growing socialist and anti-imperialist sentiment, to weaponise anti-semitism against the left.

The Socialist Equality Party and the International Youth and Students for Social Equality have opposed this reactionary witch-hunt from the outset, warning of its dire implications. The fight against anti-semitism, the far-right and all forms of nationalism, including Zionism, requires a struggle to reconnect workers and young people with the history of the Marxist movement and to mobilise them in an international socialist movement.



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