

Nick Cohen's tour de force on Labour antisemitism

On Sunday 8th July 2018 the **Observer** published an article by Nick Cohen entitled [*Why has Labour run the risk of alienating progressive Jews?*](#) The piece is a culmination of three years of constant repetition in the mainstream media of accusations of antisemitism against Corbyn supporters, the Labour Party and the left in general. This repetition has included the use of a tiny number of cases of alleged antisemitism some of which are factually incorrect. Once this type of evidence-lite commentary was established as a media norm some journalists felt emboldened to increase the scope of their exaggerations and the force of their vitriol against the Labour leadership. So it is with this article by Nick Cohen.

What Nick Cohen says

... you should marvel at how “progressives” have progressed: antisemitism is no longer on the edge but at the centre of leftwing life.

Labour cultism fools members, who never had a racist thought before Corbyn became leader, into believing accusations of antisemitism are Zionist “smears”.

To think otherwise would mean their leaders have dark flaws, and that remains a truth large numbers of otherwise robust democratic citizens won’t grasp.

Labour has taken it upon itself to reject the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance’s definition of antisemitism. ... Its working definition is accepted by thousands of public bodies. But not the British Labour party.

Labour dropped the alliance’s stipulation that it was racist to accuse Jewish citizens of having a greater loyalty to world Jewry than their own country, or to hold Israel to a higher standard than other democratic nations.

The international definition implies that Ken Livingstone’s “Hitler was a Zionist” fake history or comparisons of Israel with Nazism are racist.

Comment

No one has ever attempted to justify the absurd proposition that antisemitism is at the centre of left-wing life. Nick Cohen doesn't offer any evidence for it. He clearly feels that such accusations no longer require the facts to be established.

The suggestion here is that not only is left-Labour sanctioning the views of racists but that it is actually converting non-racists into racists. No one in the Labour Party has ever argued that all accusations of antisemitism are Zionist smears. Everyone accepts that there are some people with antisemitic views among Labour's half a million members. Everyone agrees that appropriate action must be taken whenever they appear.

Here the accusations get to the point of claiming that the Labour leaders are not just wrong but that they suffer from “dark flaws”. One is left to imagine the darkness of these flaws which are unspecified.

This the opposite of the truth. Labour has adopted the IHRA definition of antisemitism. It did so months ago. Nick Cohen confuses the definition with the examples that have been attached to it. The latter are clearly not part of the definition and are a matter of considerable dispute. Some public bodies (e.g. Liverpool and Manchester City Councils) have adopted the definition but not (all of) the examples. Labour has done the same in its [NEC Code of Conduct: Antisemitism](#).

This is incorrect. The NEC guidelines state explicitly that “It is also it is antisemitic to accuse “Jewish citizens of being more loyal to Israel, or to the alleged priorities of Jews worldwide, than to the interests of their own nations”. The text also includes “Holding Jews collectively responsible for actions of the state of Israel” is antisemitic”.

This is incorrect. Ken Livingstone did not say “Hitler was a Zionist”. It is indicative of the media discussion of this question that this is constantly repeated. Why let the facts get in the way of a good story? Livingstone's remarks may have been unhelpful, historically inadequate and were clearly very upsetting to some - but if we are going to discuss them let's at least establish what he actually said.

What Nick Cohen says

It is normal to draw metaphors from history, its Jewsplainers state. It is not antisemitic to use them “unless there is evidence of antisemitic intent”. As you can rarely look into another person’s soul and prove intent, I take that to mean Labour is giving many of its racists a free pass.

... the party’s decision to make Jews the only ethnic minority Labour denies the right to define the racism they face.

Dissident leftists are already providing examples of the anti-Jewish hatred the new guidelines might allow.

Understand that its leaders care only about the creation of a new extremist party, and you know all you need to know. From Labour’s point of view, the toleration of antisemitism is in its interests.

All three [Islamists, Stalinists, Trotskyists] are united by conspiracy theory, however. And all conspiracies go back to Jews in the end.

The successors to 20th century fascism find Jews "responsible for everything from 9/11 to the Salisbury chemical weapons attack.

It ought to be notorious that antisemitism is an anti-democratic project built on almost two millennia of religious prejudice.

Comments

This is deliberately misleading. The NEC guidelines argue that historical comparisons cannot be ruled out in discussion the actions of the Israeli state. However, it is immediately added that “Chakrabarti recommended that **Labour members should resist the use of Hitler, Nazi and Holocaust metaphors, distortions and comparisons in debates about Israel-Palestine in particular.** In this sensitive area, such language carries a strong risk of being regarded as prejudicial or grossly detrimental to the Party within Clause 2.1.8”. (Emphasis added)

Definitions of racism in its various forms requires listening to those who experience it. It does not mean that its victims have a “right” to define it any more than victims of criminal behaviour have the right to define what is “criminal”. It is not even clear what that could mean. Besides not all Jews agree on a definition. So what should Labour do? It should discuss the issues and think about them while examining any of off-the-shelf solutions carefully. This is what Labour has done.

This is incorrect. Nick Cohen gives a link to a group called “Red Rage”. This website gives no names of who runs it and no contact address either physical or electronic. It gives a list of alleged left Labour tweets such as “And we're not supposed to dislike Israeli's. There a bunch of f-ing nazis” and “I like to refer to Zionism as Zionazism”. This stuff (to which no links are provided) could not more clearly contravene the guidelines from Labour's NEC. It is no part of any left that I can recognise.

This is beyond comment. Labour's leaders “care only about the creation of a new extremist party”.

Nick Cohen's rhetoric is now running without any sort of control or reality checks. All conspiracies do not “go back to Jews in the end”.

What has this got to do with the Labour Party? This is rhetoric run riot.

It is. Who says otherwise? That's why the left has always been in the forefront of opposing antisemitism.

David Pavett, 8 July 2018