

## **‘Left-wing antisemitism’ – the new anti-Corbyn trope. Why I’ve turned my back on the charity Hope Not Hate**

Hope Not Hate (HNH), a charity dedicated to using research, education and public engagement to challenge racism and extremism, published its [2019 State of Hate](#) report in February. Six of the 103 pages in the report focus on a particular strain of antisemitism in the UK, characterised by the authors as ‘left-wing antisemitism’. This article deconstructs this six-page section of HNH’s report. Any reference here to HNH’s report is restricted to those six pages.

Prior to the election of Jeremy Corbyn as Labour leader in May 2015, the Labour Party did not have a perceived problem of antisemitism. If it did, it was certainly very well concealed. Tony Blair, arguably [Labour’s most successful leader](#), was a member of the pro-Israel lobby group Labour Friends of Israel and, following Gordon Brown’s short reign as leader and PM, the party elected its first Jewish leader in Ed Miliband. Are we to now believe that Corbyn is an antisemite instigating and presiding over a surge in Labour Party antisemitism?

HNH has now given its imprimatur to this view with a report that reads like a disingenuous attempt to moderate the Israel/Palestine debate using a mangled mélange of pseudo-research, consistent conflation of antisemitism with anti-Zionism and parroted mainstream media tropes about Labour Party antisemitism that purport to represent the views of ‘large sections of the Jewish community’. However, the report completely ignores scholarly research, reliable survey data and sections of the Jewish community whose voices are being drowned out by a concerted campaign to discredit Corbyn’s leadership of the Labour Party by painting it as incorrigibly antisemitic. Once you unpick the report, it becomes apparent that the authors have acted as stenographers for political groupings opposed to harsh anti-Israeli critiques and, by implication, to a Corbyn-led Labour Party. The HNH report marches to the tune of a powerful trope that the Labour Party has completely failed to debunk: left-wing antisemitism, the anti-Corbyn trope.

### **Politicising research**

The first section of the report is titled: “A smear campaign? Left-wing antisemitism on social media”. Having asked the big question at the heart of a raging debate between Corbyn supporters who feel victimised by relentless accusations of antisemitism and those in the media and certain political groups who are levelling the accusation, the authors do not deem it necessary to answer the question. The complete bypassing of any analysis of the validity of the accusation is justified by them on the grounds that left-wing antisemitism is now a forgone conclusion and that ‘relativising’ antisemitism amounts to denialism and is therefore counterproductive to dealing with it. This is the authors’ cursory dismissal of the question:

‘No matter the relative scale between different forms of intolerance or where it’s most commonly found, *the issue with antisemitism in the left remains*. [Emphasis added.] A presumptively defensive stance against accusations of antisemitism and an unwillingness to deal with it should be considered a problem.’

There are a number of problems with this assertion, not least of which is the bizarre achievement of a seamless shift from the Orwellian to the Kafkaesque, as the denial of antisemitism is incorporated into the scope of a report on antisemitism, with the deniers then

hauled into a trial in which the charge of antisemitism cannot be avoided because its denial per se is viewed as contributing to the problem. The strange preoccupation with denial of antisemitism rather than actual antisemitism is reinforced later in the report by the finding that the largest group of offenders emerging from the authors' dubious Twitter sample consists of "people who deny that there is a problem with antisemitism on the left, dismiss the problem as nothing more than smears against the left and/ or attack those who believe there is a problem."

But the question of a smear campaign is central to the debate and cannot be bypassed despite the authors' disingenuous attempt to do so. It goes without saying that pointing to other perpetrators of race hate as a means of deflecting blame cannot be a defence. But if a particular group is being singled out as warranting special attention, as in the HNH report, when it is not a problem demonstrably specific to that group, it is incumbent on those pointing the finger of blame to justify the reasons for this singling out. There are two main reasons for this:

Firstly, it is counter-productive to understanding and treating the issue if you don't identify its source correctly. Strategies and policies for tackling antisemitism will not succeed if they are focused on a group in which the problem is neither prevalent nor extreme to the exclusion of groups which exhibit more entrenched and virulent antisemitism. If it is a problem in the general population it needs to be treated as such and the strategy for doing so could be quite different to a strategy aimed at a specific group.

Secondly, if it's not a demonstrable group issue but is being treated as such, the members of the group who are susceptible to ignorance but who would be amenable to education if correctly approached will simply adopt a defensive stance because they perceive that their valid political viewpoint rather than antisemitism is the target of the campaign. Attacking an individual's identity rather than their behavioural problem simply engenders resistance – precisely what the authors of the report bemoan but have invited owing to the peremptory dismissal of the smear campaign question and the lack of any evidence presented for left-wing antisemitism being a problem warranting special attention.

In September 2017, two years after Jeremy Corbyn took up leadership of the Labour Party, Dr Daniel Staetsky, a Senior Research Fellow at the Institute for Jewish Policy Research, issued a [report on 'antisemitism in contemporary Great Britain'](#). The report is based on the largest and most detailed survey of attitudes towards Jews and Israel ever conducted in Great Britain. In relation to the issue of antisemitism in the general population versus antisemitism in political sub-groups, the report finds that [emphasis added]:

- **about 5% of the general population can justifiably be described as antisemites** based on a split into two groups consisting of: (i) strong, sophisticated, perhaps internally coherent and at times even 'learned' antisemitism, where open dislike of Jews is combined with developed negative ideas about Jews [which] does not exceed 2.4% of British adults, and; (ii) an additional 3% of the population who can be termed 'softer' antisemites, "expressing fewer, but nonetheless multiple antisemitic attitudes, often couched in less certain terms".
- **Levels of antisemitism** among those on the left-wing of the political spectrum, including the far-left, **are indistinguishable from those found in the general population.**

- all parts of those on the left of the political spectrum – including the ‘slightly left-of-centre,’ the ‘fairly left-wing’ and the ‘very left-wing’ – exhibit higher levels of **anti-Israelism** than average.
- **The most antisemitic group on the political spectrum consists of those who identify as very right-wing:** the presence of antisemitic attitudes in this group is 2 to 4 times higher compared to the general population.
- **levels of antisemitism in Great Britain are among the lowest in the world.** British Jews constitute a religious and ethnic group that is seen overwhelmingly positively by an absolute majority of the British population: **about 70% of the population of Great Britain have a favourable opinion of Jews and do not entertain any antisemitic ideas or views at all.** In this respect, Jews are in a similar position to some other religious minorities, most notably Hindus.

The research conducted by Staetsky contrasts starkly with HNH’s political posture and makes a mockery of the HNH authors’ attempts to politicise its anti-racism mission. Staetsky’s findings are hugely damaging to the assertions made by the authors for a number of reasons:

- it is disingenuous to raise the question of a smear campaign in relation to left-wing antisemitism and then summarily dismiss its relevance when the entire focus of the report is on both left-wing antisemitism generally and the Labour Party leadership specifically.
- By making a distinction in its findings between antisemitism and anti-Israelism, the Staetsky study confirms that the left-wing as a political sub-group is more exercised by Israel’s treatment of Palestinians than other political subgroups. This should hardly come as a surprise given that the left-wing is defined by its values of social justice and equality.
- HNH has expressly chosen to ignore the political and religious sub-groups exhibiting the most problematic levels of antisemitism, which is extremely puzzling for an organisation whose stated mission is to combat racism.

When you study the facts and research, it becomes clear that the hysteria being whipped up over alleged left-wing antisemitism is baseless and that politicising the issue of antisemitism by disproportionately targeting the least culpable group while ignoring these facts is plainly irrational. What’s more, the investigative reporting and analysis done by non-mainstream journalism such as [Jonathan Cook](#), [Electronic Intifada](#) and [Media Lens](#) makes a smear campaign look very plausible. It is also hard to explain away HNH’s arrogant dismissal of the issue as a simple failure to discover and analyse the available data in light of its vaunted claim to “[undertake powerful in-depth research which informs \[its\] work on the ground](#)”. The [press page on its website](#) also boasts: “We’re always on hand to provide you with world-class research and information”.

## Bad science

Jewish Voice for Labour (JVL), founded in July 2017 to promote a platform for progressive Jewish supporters of the Labour Party, has posted a [definition on its website of antisemitism](#) which has guided my thinking on the subject:

Antisemitism is a form of racism. It consists in prejudice, hostility or hatred towards Jews as Jews. It may take the form of denial of rights; direct, indirect or institutional discrimination; prejudice-based behaviour; verbal or written statements; or violence.

Such manifestations draw on stereotypes – characteristics which all Jews are presumed to share.

While the JVL does elaborate on aspects of the definition in order to provide clarification on the different forms that antisemitism may take, it has resisted attempts to widen the definition of antisemitism beyond its meaning of hostility, prejudice or discrimination towards Jews as Jews. This was a stance taken in the wake of the IHRA’s controversial release of its Working Definition of Antisemitism and its implications for free speech in relation to the Israeli state.

Dealing specifically with the conflation of groups that can lead to antisemitism, the JVL states:

Jews, Israelis and Zionists are separate categories that are too frequently conflated by both supporters and critics of Israel. This conflation can be antisemitic. Holding all Jews responsible for the actions of the Israeli government is antisemitic. Many Jews are not Zionist. The majority of Zionists are not Jewish but fundamentalist Christian Zionists. Over 20 percent of Israeli citizens are not Jewish.

Four groups are identified in the HNH antisemitism report as being responsible for left-wing antisemitism:

- ‘At the most extreme end is a very small group of left-wing people who engage in extreme, violent or pro-genocide antisemitism or outright Holocaust denial’;
- ‘a larger group of left-wing people who engage in conspiratorial antisemitism and use antisemitic tropes, especially in relation to supposed Jewish power and influence’;
- ‘then there are those left-wing activists who use antisemitic language when discussing issues relating to Israeli/Palestine’;
- ***‘The final group is the largest and these are people who deny that there is a problem with antisemitism on the left, dismiss the problem as nothing more than smears against the left and/ or attack those who believe there is a problem.’***  
[emphasis added].

Taking the authors’ relative size analysis at face value, **we find that the largest group which HNH sees as problematic consists of people who are deniers of left-wing antisemitism rather than actual antisemites.** Furthermore, we know that this denial does not spring from a vacuum but that people within this group have in fact been unfairly targeted.

As to the source of the data, the authors tell us that they:

“analysed approximately 27,000 Twitter accounts that follow a manually selected set of UK based left-wing accounts that we identified as regularly spreading antisemitic ideas”.

They then claim that:

“5,000 accounts in the sample have expressed these ideas twice or more.”

The analysis is deeply flawed for the following reasons:

- If you're setting out to measure a trait (antisemitism) in a human population (the 'left wing'), and you have chosen not to survey that population directly, then you need to justify why your alternative data source (Twitter accounts) is a reliable proxy for both the population itself and the measurement of the trait within it. There is no discussion in the report of the problems this type of data poses as a reliable measure of antisemitism. Tweeting is not a form of communication which encourages nuance. By its nature, opinions are often expressed quickly, telegraphically, unhesitatingly and often with minimal reflection. Consequently, they can be filled with ambiguity.
- The assertion that 5,000 accounts are expressing antisemitic ideas is not credible because a significant proportion of the examples provided later in the report (and presumably taken from the sample) do not pass the test for antisemitism owing to a persistent conflation of antisemitism with anti-Zionism and to the categorisation of legal political speech critiquing Israel as antisemitic.
- The assertion that the unspecified number of 'manually selected' left-wing accounts being followed are 'regularly spreading antisemitic ideas' is questionable for the same reason. The integrity of the total sample of 27,000 follower accounts also collapses owing to the dubiousness of the antisemitic nature of the accounts they are supposedly following.
- We are asked to simply take the authors at their word that the accounts being followed are 'left-wing' accounts. What criteria did the authors use to conclude with reasonable certainty that a twitter account is a 'left-wing' account?
- Following a 'left-wing' account does not automatically render the follower 'left-wing'. The 27,000 social media accounts subjected to this unscientific analysis belong to individuals with complex, varied and overlapping affiliations and loyalties. This speaks to the problem of using a particular type of data as a proxy for a population.

The authors unintentionally hint at the questionable integrity of their data under a section titled 'Antisemitism in the Labour Party', where they pat the political activist group Momentum on the back for running 'social media campaigns to expose left-leaning antisemites while warning supporters to steer clear of groups *masquerading as Corbyn supporters* which also post racist content. [emphasis added]' The glaring question raised by the authors' smug observation is: to what extent has their own sample of supposedly left-wing accounts been polluted by 'accounts masquerading as left-wing accounts'?

### **Redefining antisemitism**

Notwithstanding the scientific baselessness of the report, one of the grubbiest tricks pulled throughout the report is to insidiously confer antisemitism on tweets or statements which are in reality expressions of valid political speech about the Israeli state. The authors often pave the way for this false transference by first defining an act of antisemitism that is indisputable. This is a consistent feature of the report – the introduction of an idea that is universally considered to be unacceptable followed by examples which do not accord with the principle but rather seek to make anti-Zionism completely taboo by linking it to antisemitism.

For example, we should all unequivocally agree with the authors that conspiracy theories about Jewish influence in world politics and business are Hitlerian. But what is the hideous exemplar provided by the authors for this particular crime? It's this tweet:

‘We need to stand up against the Zionist lobby in the UK they are not putting Britain first but Israel first, why are we allowing them to dictate British politics when they put Israel’s interests above any other interests, their agenda is making other nations sons die for Israel.’

The language may be crude and poorly chosen and allows for misinterpretation or misrepresentation, but this tweet, directed expressly at the Zionist *lobby* (and therefore possibly, by extension, Zionism) and the state of Israel, its main promoter, is *political speech* which cannot, prima facie, be imbued with hostility to Jews as Jews. Zionism is a political ideology whose proponents are not all Jewish. Indeed, some Jews are strongly opposed to it. [Peter Beinart’s debunking of the worrying trend to label anti-Zionism as antisemitism](#) should be required reading for staff of organisations like HNH. The conflation of Jews, Zionists and Israelis can itself be antisemitic and inferring that Jews have been targeted in a tweet like this is an extreme and exaggerated tendency that is unwarranted in the absence of proof that hatred of Jews is the motivating factor. Such tweets not only fail to meet the [test for antisemitism](#) but should not even be politically controversial for their valid questioning of the role of the Israel lobby in the UK. If anything, they cry out for open political debate on the issues they raise.

The fundamental point of this tweet concerns the valid questioning of the Israeli lobby in the UK. That such a lobby exists is undeniable. In January 2017, Al Jazeera Investigations released a series of [documentaries which exposed how the Israel lobby](#) influences British politics and how Israel works at different levels of British democracy. Each of the major political parties has a group of MPs dedicated to furthering Israel’s political interests in the UK – Labour Friends of Israel (LFI) and Conservative Friends of Israel (CFI). The Labour Party is also home to a group called the Jewish Labour Movement (JLM). The [JLM was originally founded in 2004](#) to “promote a progressive, just and secure Israel” and its founding principles confirmed its view of “Zionism as the national liberation movement of the Jewish people”.

Israel as the embodiment of the collective Jewish right to self-determination is a view that is contested in the Jewish diaspora but its advocacy in the JLM’s original founding principles explains why that group has consistently sought to make political capital out of the conflation of anti-Zionism with antisemitism. Moreover, there is convincing evidence that [the JLM was revived in 2015 primarily to oppose Corbyn](#).

In the Al Jazeera documentary, the close ties of some of these groups to the Israeli embassy are revealed. The undercover investigation shows an Israeli embassy official discussing how to “take down” pro-Palestinian MPs. Campaigners also reveal that they were funded by the Israeli embassy in London to oppose the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement. This documentary confirms that the tweet’s reference to Israeli interference in British politics is not even controversial, let alone antisemitic.

The JVL, an inverted analogue of the JLM, outlines its political priorities in its Statement of Principles. These are “universal human rights and dignity; justice for all; freedom of

expression; and democracy in the Labour Party.” In dealing specifically with the conflation of anti-Zionism with antisemitism under a [section on ‘Political Discourse’](#), it states:

‘The terms ‘Zionism’ and ‘Zionist’ describe a political ideology and its adherents. They are key concepts in the discussion of Israel/Palestine. They are routinely used, approvingly, by supporters of Israel, but critically by campaigners for Palestinian rights, who identify Zionist ideology and the Zionist movement as responsible for Palestinian dispossession. Criticising Zionism or Israel as a state does not constitute criticising Jews as individuals or as a people and is not evidence of antisemitism.’

The HNH authors confidently claim that:

“the most common trope regarding undue influence propagated by left-wing antisemites is the suggestion that the ‘Zionist lobby’, the ‘Israeli lobby’ or even Mossad are somehow steering UK domestic politics to such an extent that political leaders cannot be trusted.”

However, the series of Al Jazeera investigative reports are just one excellent example of how this is not a ‘trope’, as claimed by the HNH authors, but valid political discourse.

### **The montage of tweets – a libel suit waiting to happen?**

Occupying half a page midway through the ‘Smear Campaign’ section of the report is a montage of eleven tweets, a few of which are unquestionably antisemitic – for example two tweets offering vile praise of Hitler. What is more interesting is the inclusion of tweets that are not antisemitic – like the one that is merely the fantastical product of an over-active imagination crediting Theresa May with a degree of Machiavellian creativity and organisational ability which, if even half true, might actually redeem her unmitigated botching of the Brexit crisis:

“Sarin gassing [*presumably referencing alleged chemical weapons attacks in Syria*] was filmed by the BBC at Pinewood on the orders of Mrs May and the Israeli lobby.”

You would not want to rely on this individual for daily news updates, but nor could you accuse them of unambiguous antisemitism purely on the strength of this tweet.

Two of the tweets are dated 2011 and 2012, raising some questions about the current nature of the ‘research’, such as it is, and its relevance to the ‘State of Hate’ in 2019. The authors’ claim of 27,000 tweets sampled did not specify a time period but they have offered 2011 and 2012 tweets in evidence, which suggests that the examined time period is quite extended and raises further questions about the data and its integrity.

The montage has the quality of a didactic chart aimed at a pre-high school audience. This callow approach to a grim subject is disappointing but unsurprising in the context of the quality of the report as a whole. But what should really concern readers of the report is that a significant portion of tweets displayed in the montage do not fall within the scope of antisemitism but are included with the intention of representing antisemitism. The criteria for inclusion of these tweets as antisemitic almost invariably seems to be the use of the words ‘Israel’, ‘Zionist’ or ‘Corbyn’, like this one highlighting a news report about the JLM’s call for a ban on Hamas and Hezbollah:

“Labour Jewish Movement calls for Hamas and Hezbollah ban [[link to bbc news article](#)]. A party within a party. A 5<sup>th</sup> column. #IsraelLobby”.

The inference in the tweet that such a move by the Jewish Labour Movement could have been influenced by the Israel lobby is plainly political speculation and not antisemitism. You can disagree with the sentiment expressed. You can see it as crude, exaggerated, or even plain wrong. But it does not meet the antisemitic test of expressing hostility or hatred towards Jews as Jews.

Also included in the montage of supposedly antisemitic tweets is this one from an account in the name of Tony Greenstein:

“the only warning signs are fears that people no longer support an Israel that shoots child demonstrators, press etc. Jews supporting Israel causes ‘antisemitism’ since Israel describes itself as a Jewish state”

One may balk at the language in which the tweet is cast, but the political argument implicit in the tweet relates to a potential negative association of Jews with Israeli state crimes as a consequence of Israel’s ongoing efforts to define itself as a Jewish state and to portray the Israeli state as the voice of all Jews worldwide. Sir Stephen Sedley, retired Appeal Court Judge, who [spoke out against the government’s use of the IHRA definition of antisemitism](#), made a similar argument when he highlighted the danger of the Zionist claim to represent all the world’s Jews:

“Nothing suits Islamic fundamentalism better than the idea that all Jews are equally implicated in the excesses of Zionism.”

Another tweet expresses a similar idea concerning potential blowback in relation to gratuitous allegations of antisemitism and mentions Robert Cohen whose blog post generated the discussion:

“Pertinent and frightening. The Jewish ‘War Against Corbyn’ risks bringing real antisemitism to Britain.”

In a [blog post](#) originally titled ‘The Jewish ‘War Against Corbyn’ risks bringing real antisemitism to Britain’ and, following criticism, subsequently amended to ‘The Jewish establishment’s ‘War Against Corbyn’...’, Robert Cohen made this argument stating:

“As the most radical version of Labour for many decades, a Corbyn victory could well herald serious change and the reversal of the neo-liberal economic agenda pursued by Thatcher/Major/Blair/Cameron/May for the last thirty years. The quality of life for millions of people in this country is at stake. For a change, who wins the next election will actually make a difference.

But none of this is of the slightest concern to the Jewish community’s leadership or its media. They only have one issue on their mind – Israel, and how best to protect it from criticism. On this basis they are willing to brand the main opposition party in Britain as irredeemably antisemitic under Corbyn’s leadership...

And that's what makes me fear where we could be heading.

If you vote Labour will that make you antisemitic in the eyes of the Jewish community?...

And what if Corbyn losses by a narrow margin? How will the millions who voted for him see the Jewish community and its three-year campaign to brand him toxic?

The 'Jewish War Against Corbyn' is not good Jewish communal politics. It's playing with fire."

By including this tweet in their montage of antisemitic exemplars, the HNH authors have effectively branded as antisemitic the tweet's sender and, by extension, Robert Cohen, one of the most thoughtful Jewish philosophers and bloggers around. (He is mentioned in the tweet as the source of the idea being communicated.)

This montage of supposedly antisemitic tweets is devoid of any structured framework for credible analysis and is scurrilous in its portrayal of political speech as antisemitism. The authors of the report must be well aware that calling someone an antisemite is a potent defamation of character.

### **Adopting the IHRA definition and its strange consequences**

Having failed miserably to build a case for 'left-wing antisemitism on social media', the authors round up this section of the report by launching an attack on the final two largest problematic groups – 'those that deny or relativise that there is a problem with antisemitism on the left and those that make use of antisemitic tropes when discussing the Israel/Palestine conflict.' The first-mentioned group is, by definition, not antisemitic and the strange focus on it only detracts from addressing real antisemitism. Its inclusion in the scope of a report on antisemitism is a disingenuous attempt to obfuscate the political wrangle over accusations of antisemitism and the report unintentionally amplifies the validity of this group's denial by framing accusations of antisemitism within the context of the Israeli/Palestinian debate. The second group accused of using 'antisemitic tropes when discussing the Israel/Palestine conflict' is an obvious clue to the authors' real concern – policing the Israel/Palestine debate.

With the second group now in its crosshairs, HNH launches into what appears to be an attempt to referee the political debate between supporters of Israel and its critics using the IHRA rulebook. It is at this point that the report morphs into a press release for the IHRA by uncritically enjoining the intent of the IHRA in muting criticism of Israeli state policy and action. The authors scantily acknowledge the controversy that surrounds the IHRA definition but then use this controversy as a platform to attack those who are opposed to it by doing exactly what the IHRA has been roundly criticised for – conflating antisemitism and anti-Zionism, with the intention of muting criticism of the Israeli state.

HNH's decision to politicise a debate on racism in this way is hugely problematic but, having decided to paint its own report in IHRA colours, it is understandable that HNH would then compound this error by choosing not to provide a balanced context to the controversy, since to do so would necessarily bring to the fore all the arguments for steering clear of both the IHRA line and the whole Palestine/Israel debate in the first place.

Providing more context about the resistance to the IHRA definition would have necessitated discussion of a few more opinions on the matter – like those of renowned human rights and free speech legal experts [Hugh Tomlinson](#) and Geoffrey Robertson, who expressed grave concerns in formally commissioned opinions about the IHRA definition. [Geoffrey Robertson concluded](#) that it is ‘not fit for purpose’ because it is “confusing and open to misinterpretation and even manipulation”. Crucially he highlighted that:

“A particular problem with the IHRA definition is that it is likely in practice to chill free speech, by raising expectations of pro-Israeli groups that they can successfully object to legitimate criticism of their country and correspondingly arouse fears in NGOs and student bodies that they will have events banned or else have to incur considerable expense to protect themselves by legal action.”

Sir Stephen Sedley, distinguished retired Appeal Court Judge, contributed to the debate by pointing out that “[criticism \(and equally defence\) of Israel or of Zionism is not only generally lawful: it is affirmatively protected by law.](#)” He points out that attempts to conflate antisemitism with anti-Zionism are not new. The disturbing development in his view, precipitated by the IHRA’s attempted revision, is “the adoption by the UK government (and the Labour Party) of a definition of antisemitism which endorses the conflation.” He argued that the IHRA seeks to create a spurious level playing field in relation to state criticism by setting the acceptable limit of criticism of Israel as being “similar to that levelled against any other country”. Sedley highlights the absurdity of this bar by pointing out that the IHRA is asking the world to place “the historical, political, military and humanitarian uniqueness of Israel’s occupation and colonisation of Palestine beyond permissible criticism.”

Despite this, the HNH authors’ introduction to their stance on criticism of Israel is in lockstep with the IHRA’s intent:

Israel, *like any other state*, can be criticised for its policies, such as the controversial nation-state law passed in 2018. However, in the case of Israel such critique sometimes veils antisemitic ideas. [emphasis added.]

HNH’s steer is clear: criticise Israel as you would criticise *any other state*, even when it is passing racist laws that no other OECD state is passing. If you buy into setting a bar that caps criticism of Israel at a level comparable to that of ‘any other state’ then you are automatically locked into a muting of the criticism of Israel’s crimes, however egregious. The racist nation-state law referred to by the authors is hence passed off as a ‘controversial’ piece of legislation – a misdemeanour comparable to ‘any other state’. That an organisation supposedly dedicated to combatting racism could sweep a fundamentally racist law under the carpet using the mere term ‘controversial’ is a mind boggling irony that ranks high up on the long list of clangers this report has dropped. And to immediately follow it up by suggesting that the criticism of such a racist law sometimes masks racism requires a level of cynicism and intellectual bankruptcy commonly exhibited by the groups HNH purports to fight. You need look no further than these two seemingly simple sentences for an example of how horribly wrong things can go when you attempt to defend the indefensible.

That Israel is not like any other democratic state in the OECD, the bloc of countries with which it wishes to establish some sort of equivalence in standards of criticism, requires very little effort to prove. Israel controls the lives of close to six million people in the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem, who are [ineligible to vote in Israeli elections, and yet are](#)

[being governed by Israel](#). That Gaza itself, home to roughly 1.8m people, was described by former UK Prime Minister David Cameron as the world's largest "open-air prison" should be a source of immense shame to Israel. Israel's abuses are unique when viewed in the sphere of the OECD umbrella and criticism of its gross human rights and international law failures cannot be recalibrated to suit its low threshold for embarrassment.

Seemingly incapable of any intellectual introspection, the authors bizarrely add:

"In addition, the singular focus on criticism of Israel can in some instances indicate underlying antisemitic sentiment."

Yes, possibly it can. But framing it in this way suggests that this isn't just a theoretical possibility but a likely one (if rare, why bother to mention it?). So, once again, the presumption is made that criticism of Israel is likely to be antisemitic unless the critic gives good reasons as to why it is not. This implied requirement to explain or avoid a 'singular focus' on Israel would entail introducing other similar rogue states in the critique. This is where the twisted logic to their madness reveals itself: Any attempt to critique Israel's racist nation-state law or the Gaza open-air prison will almost certainly be met with a failure to identify another OECD country that has sunk as low as Israel in its record on human rights and, under the newly established IHRA equivalence standards, endorsed by HNH, you will simply be required to remain silent or risk being labelled an antisemite.

### **The referee's decision is final**

Rounding off their cack-handed endorsement of the IHRA's view of antisemitism, the authors blithely issue their facile conclusion on the IHRA spat, using language entirely sympathetic to the IHRA's intention to falsely level the playing field of state criticism and bring Israel undeservedly into the orb of other respectable states in the free world:

"There is a line between legitimate criticism of the Israeli state, *in line with criticism of any other government*, and antisemitism. We've found that the *strong feelings for the plight of Palestinians in some cases take the arguments over that line.*" [emphasis added]

Here the authors reiterate the absurd view that criticism of Israel is 'legitimate' provided that it is 'in line with criticism of any other government', and the referee's decision is final.

The authors round off the denial and relativisation section by ironically bemoaning the lack of understanding 'within sections of the left...of what constitutes antisemitism', completely oblivious to the fact that they are very far from scoring a pass mark in this respect. Ominously, they enjoin 'more work...to formulate some guidelines for how the left more generally can support the Palestinian cause without engaging in antisemitism...'. This is a portentous statement by HNH and indicates that this report is likely the forerunner to its next foray – full censorship of the left's support for the Palestinian cause. Given this report's abject failure to make a case for Palestinian rights activists generally engaging in antisemitism and also its clear steer on muzzling criticism of Israel using the deeply flawed IHRA re-definition of antisemitism, it's hard to see how any future guidelines issued by HNH would be warmly received by Palestinian rights activists or anyone seriously interested in political free speech for that matter.

## Antisemitism in numbers

The attack on the left-wing is followed up by a one pager titled “antisemitism in numbers”. The top half of the page consists of three statistics on levels of Holocaust ignorance superimposed on a graphic depiction of a prison camp. The source of the statistics is attributed to “polling of 2,000 individuals in the UK from January 2019 by Holocaust Memorial Day Trust.”

As with all the statistics presented in this section of the HNH report, there is no discussion or explanation of the statistics provided. The first statistic is:

“5% of UK adults don’t believe the holocaust actually happened.”

Active denial of known historical facts and not being aware of the facts owing to a failure to encounter them are entirely different propositions. This ambiguously worded statistic doesn’t tell us whether we are dealing with the more sinister antisemitic holocaust denial, whether the ignorance about an important historic fact stems from a failure in the education system or the extent to which there might be a mix of the two. It’s also impossible to relate this ambiguous statement to Staetsky’s clearly stated finding, based on robust interpretation of reliable survey data, that “about 5% of the general population can justifiably be described as antisemites” based on a split into two groups: ‘strong’ antisemites (2.4%) and ‘softer’ antisemites (3%).

The second and third statistics provided by the HNH authors under the heading “antisemitism in numbers”, are equally problematic:

- “8% say the scale of the holocaust has been exaggerated”.
- “64% do not know how many Jews were murdered or grossly underestimate the number”.

With regard to the 8%, one would have to understand how the question was put to those surveyed before concluding whether this statistic signifies holocaust denial in principle or simple ignorance of historical events. The only way to interpret the 64% is that it is ignorance of the historically accepted number, which does not in itself equate to antisemitism.

Unceremoniously dumped under the simple heading “antisemitism in numbers”, the clear intention of the authors is that these statistics should be used as accurate measures or reliable proxies of antisemitic belief and attitude. If you were able to put aside the serious questions about the qualitative aspects of these statistics with regards to interpretation (and you can’t), you are still left asking if the level of antisemitism in the population is 5%, 64% or anything in between. This, coming from an organisation that claims to use research and education to challenge racism, is unhelpful, to put it mildly.

The second half of the page on “antisemitism in numbers” shifts from the abysmal to the ludicrous as the HNH authors attempt to immerse their readers in their favourite playground for measuring hate in the population – online traffic, specifically google searches.

This section opens with the simple statement:

“170,000 google searches with antisemitic content are made per year in the UK. Approximately 10% of these searches involve violent language or intentions.”

There is no explanation or narrative to accompany this. The obvious questions to ask about this are:

- Precisely how does one use google searches to measure antisemitism in the population?
- How has “antisemitic content” been defined? This is crucial to understand in light of the authors’ consistent conflation of anti-Zionism and anti-Israelism with antisemitism.
- Why should a search with “antisemitic content” automatically render the searcher antisemitic? *Researching* racism is not per se a racist act.
- Is the reader expected to gasp at the number of 170,000 and, if so, why? Even if you could justify using google searches as a reliable proxy for antisemitism, how do you arrive at the total pool of google searches in order to arrive at a relative measure for the antisemitic searches. (170,000 as a percentage of a 1,000,000 might be concerning, assuming you could overcome doubts about the reliability of google searches as a proxy for antisemitism, but 170,000 as a percentage of 1 billion might not be a cause for panic).
- The authenticity of the 170,000 figure is questionable, partly because of its purported annual consistency - “170,000 per year”. Is it really 170,000 every year, for an unspecified number of years, or is there any fluctuation in the number and, if so, to what degree?

This meaningless pseudo-statistic is followed by four more search descriptions supposedly denoting antisemitic intent, the most absurd of which is:

- “The United Kingdom ranks third in the world for searches about Zionism, behind only Israel and Lebanon. Searches for Zionism are 29 per cent higher in the United Kingdom than in the United States”.

Again, it needs to be stressed that this appears, with no added explanation, under the heading “antisemitism in numbers”. The most obvious flaws, among many, are:

- The inclusion of searches about Zionism under the heading “antisemitism in numbers” is one of the clearest of many statements by the authors that they regard the mere interest in Zionism as antisemitic. If this is the case, the authors should request the JLM to remove the word from both its 2004 founding constitution and its 2016 revised constitution which advocate for Zionism as “the national liberation movement of the Jewish people” and “as the movement for self-determination of the Jewish people within the state of Israel”.
- If you accept the absurd notion that google searches on Zionism are clear indicators of “antisemitism in numbers” and Israel is the leader in these google searches, does this imply that Israel, the country with the highest per capita Jewish population in the world and which has declared itself a Jewish state, has a bigger problem of antisemitism than the UK? Or perhaps it’s no coincidence that the country that did the most to facilitate the Zionist movement (Great Britain) and the country that benefitted most from it (Israel) have populations that are the most curious about it.

The absurd presentation of google searches about Zionism as “antisemitism in numbers” is entirely consistent with the dominant theme in the report of conflation of anti-Zionism with

antisemitism. The blanket labelling of all forms of curiosity about Zionism as antisemitic has the chilling effect of making the word completely taboo. If we get to that point, we risk shutting down both the understanding of the historical roots of the founding of the state of Israel and the historical roots of the Palestinian struggle for statehood. The battle to police the use of the word Zionism, enjoined by HNH in this report, is a battle to re-write history, to shape the narrative in the present and so ultimately determine the future.

It's hard to find the report's lowest point among so many low points but this laughably amateurish smattering of meaningless numbers, superimposed on a grim tableau of a concentration camp scene, may well be it. The authors' google search statistics are attributed to a report by CST and the Antisemitism Policy Trust titled: "HIDDEN HATE: What google searches tell us about antisemitism today". The answer, based on HNH's representation of that report, is – absolutely nothing.

### **Antisemitism in the Labour Party**

The authors round off the antisemitism report with a one-pager on "Antisemitism in the Labour Party" in which they patronisingly purport to speak for 'large sections of the Jewish community' about its concerns regarding the party's "lack of action" over its alleged antisemitism problem. Once again, the authors see no irony in painting the Jewish community with one homogenous brush, ignoring the views of many in the [UK's large Orthodox Jewish population](#) and failing to make any mention of groups like [Jewish Voice for Labour](#) and [Jewdas](#) who do not share the authors' and JLM's concerns about Corbyn. The arrogance in claiming to speak for a whole community is eloquently articulated by David Rosenburg in a [blog post re-posted by JVL](#) titled: "Speak for yourself, not for us".

As with HNH's other imperious rulings such as its forgone conclusion about the grave peril of left-wing antisemitism or Palestinian rights campaigners crossing the line in their criticism of Israel's human rights violations, the HNH authors hand down their peremptory judgement on Jeremy Corbyn and the Labour Party – Corbyn is alleged in the report to have been involved in "several instances" of antisemitism while, in their view, "the problem of antisemitism within the Labour Party goes well beyond Corbyn".

However, if the authors of the report had had any intention of being balanced, they would also have reported that [over 200 Jews recently signed an open letter in the Guardian in support of Corbyn](#) stating:

We believe that the Labour party under the progressive leadership of Jeremy Corbyn is a crucial ally in the fight against bigotry and reaction. His lifetime record of campaigning for equality and human rights, including consistent support for initiatives against antisemitism, is formidable. His involvement strengthens this struggle.

They would also have had to acknowledge Jewish Voice for Labour's branding of the JLM's vote of no-confidence in Corbyn as a [shameful day for the JLM](#), scotching the presumption that the Jewish community speaks with one voice.

They would also have had to acknowledge [data curated by YouGov](#) showing that since Jeremy Corbyn became leader of the Labour Party in 2015, antisemitic views among Labour party voters have actually reduced substantially and that the statistics show that all other political parties (apart from the Lib Dems, whose results are comparable to Labour's) have a

far bigger problem with their voters agreeing with antisemitic statements. For example, twice as many Conservatives as Labour party members believe typically antisemitic stereotypes.

Consistent with previous sections, this section of the HNH report contains at least two examples of conflating antisemitism with anti-Zionism. In this paragraph of their report, the authors attempt to smear Corbyn as antisemitic:

“A video has recently surfaced, filmed not long after this, in which Corbyn responding to a question by saying that Zionists “clearly have two problems. One is that they don’t want to study history, and secondly, having lived in this country for a very long time, probably all their lives, they don’t understand English irony either”,

The authors thus accuse Corbyn of ‘mobilising old antisemitic tropes of Jews as outsiders, lacking loyalty and not belonging in the UK.’ What they don’t disclose is that they, like others who have cynically attempted to use this incident to smear Corbyn, have taken his words out of context by not providing a fuller explanation of the event giving rise to his comment and by omitting Corbyn’s own entirely credible explanation. At an event hosted in Parliament, the Palestinian ambassador made a remark in his speech that was intended to be both humorous and ironic. The ambassador was subsequently berated for his remark by two pro-Zionist individuals whom Corbyn felt were being deliberately obtuse in failing to acknowledge what he saw as the ambassador’s deft and playful use of irony. Not only was Corbyn **not** referring to Jews in any codified way, he was not even referring to Zionists in general. He was in fact taking two specific individuals to task by contrasting their inability to appreciate correct use of English irony with someone whose first language was not English but had used English irony to good effect. For a forensic analysis of this incident, read Larry Derfner’s [“The Missing Information that Exonerates Jeremy Corbyn”](#).

The conflation is repeated in the following paragraph of the report which, more tellingly provides a link, albeit historic, between HNH and the JLM:

“In a House of Commons speech in April, MP for Stoke-on-Trent North (and *former Deputy Director of HOPE not hate*) Ruth Smeeth explained in no uncertain terms the deluge of antisemitism she had experienced from the left such as: “Hang yourself you vile treacherous Zionist Tory filth. You are a cancer of humanity”. The chair of the Jewish Labour Movement’s parliamentary group, Luciana Berger, has faced abhorrent abuse online simply for highlighting instances of antisemitism within the Labour movement.” [Emphasis added.]

Ruth Smeeth is now the Parliamentary Chair of the JLM and Luciana Berger served as Parliamentary Chair of the JLM and a director of Labour Friends of Israel before her defection from the party in February 2019.

The tweet sent to Smeeth is reprehensible for its extremely vitriolic personal attack but not for antisemitism. It expresses, however distastefully, two political sentiments that do not convey hostility towards Jews as Jews. Firstly, there is the anti-Zionist sentiment, of which it can be said that there is a direct correlation between the strength of venom directed at Israel and Zionism and the severity of the plight of Palestinians (even if, as I say, the expression of it is reprehensible). The second sentiment goes to the heart of the ongoing battle for ownership of the Labour Party and embodies the visceral desire of the majority of Labour party members who voted for the Corbyn leadership to wrest control of the party from the old

‘centrist’ Blairites. Unless you can prove that the sender was motivated by a hatred of Jews per se, it is disingenuous to read antisemitism into it.

Berger did indeed face abhorrent online abuse. However, [Bob Pitt’s forensic analysis of the cases which resulted in convictions](#) is revealing in the context of the source of the abuse. In an interview on LBC in February 2019, Berger herself stated that “six people have been convicted of antisemitic threats and abuse against me ... four of which have come from the far right and two of which have come from the left”. This simple analysis alone raises questions about why a broad spectrum of the media has persistently engaged in a blurring of the distinction, wholeheartedly endorsed by HNH, between antisemitic abuse originating from the left and that from the far right, the effect of which has been to associate left-wingers with crimes that were in fact committed by right-wing fascists. But the detailed analysis of the two left-wing offenders is even more revealing because we find that one of those convictions was for sending an email which was indeed abusive but not antisemitic. The offender, reportedly Jewish himself, abusively denounced her as a “vile useless Tory cunt”, complaining that she was “using Judaism as a weapon” against the party. The other case dates back to 2013 for an incident arising in November 2012 in which the offender was indeed fined for a racially aggravated public order offence. So, of the two left-wing cases affecting Berger that resulted in conviction, one was not racist in origin and the other dates back more than six years, thus long pre-dating the outbreak of ‘left-wing antisemitism’ in the Labour Party which germinated in the election of a pro-Palestinian rights MP as party leader in 2015.

The very complaints which Berger cited as evidence of the party’s alleged “institutional racism” when she defected to the Independent Group were investigated by the Labour Party and its findings were released before her defection. These findings, [made public on 11 February 2019](#), completely contradict the claims by MPs like her and Smeeth. Over the previous 10 months, 673 complaints had been filed against Labour members over alleged antisemitic behaviour, many based on online comments. Insufficient evidence had been produced in a third of those cases. The balance of 453 cases, which includes an inconclusive number of 211 who “were issued with a Notice of Investigation”, represents 0.08 percent of the 540,000-strong Labour membership. This is 30 times below the rate of ‘strong’ antisemitism (2.4%) in the British population reported by [Staetsky](#).

Bearing in mind that Staetsky’s measure of the 2.4% encompasses virulent antisemitism, the multiple of 30 could be adjusted even further upwards if one considers that Staetsky adds an additional 3% of the population who can be termed ‘softer’ antisemites, bringing the total occurrence to about 5%. Comparing the 0.08% rate in the Labour membership with this 5% rate in the general population, the rate of expressed antisemitism in the Labour party membership is 67 times lower than the level in the general population. One should qualify this statistical comparison by stating that the 0.08% represents reported manifestations of antisemitism whereas the 5% reported by Staetsky represents attitudes some of which will not manifest. Nevertheless, this is hardly evidence for “institutional racism”.

### **Did HNH attempt to gaslight its followers?**

Adopting a generous view, one could say that the subject of Israel/Palestine and the IHRA re-definition of antisemitism are political hot potatoes that the HNH authors were patently ill-equipped to handle. It’s difficult to adopt this generous view because there is so much wrong with the HNH report and, after piecing together all the errors, I was left with a worrying

question: did HNH set out to gaslight its followers into accepting the deeply flawed IHRA re-definition of antisemitism in order to assist the aim of the JLM in muting the growing criticism of Israel's increasingly criminal and brutal oppression of Palestinians?

The key fault line in the report from which all other cracks emerge is the framing of the entire report within the context of the political enmity between supporters of Israel and campaigners for Palestinian rights, accompanied by a disingenuous attempt to set the ground rules for this engagement. This is a negation of HNH's mission to tackle race hate at its core and has, instead, resulted in a report that advocates for political censorship. The accumulation of all of the following errors has led me to question HNH's independence from political influence and therefore its competence to tackle race hate:

- the raising of the smear campaign question and its crude dismissal without proper and balanced analysis of the issue or its relevance to denials of antisemitism by the very groups HNH attacks, namely 'the left wing' and the Labour Party leadership;
- Multiple flaws in the integrity and analysis of data from social media accounts including examples provided from the data which do not constitute antisemitism.
- Ignoring political and religious sub-groups exhibiting the most problematic levels of antisemitism confirmed by reputable studies and surveys and opting to focus instead on those who deny or 'relativise' antisemitism rather than those holding demonstrably antisemitic beliefs signifying hostility towards Jews as Jews.
- Consistently conflating anti-Zionism or anti-Israelism with antisemitism.
- Scurrilous representation as antisemitic of tweets which are expressing political speech.
- Uncritically employing the language and intent of the IHRA in condemning criticism of Israel by Palestinian rights campaigners.
- Representing 'Antisemitism in numbers' with the inclusion of several statistics which cannot be regarded as reliable measures of antisemitism and which employ data sources that cannot be used as reliable proxies for measuring antisemitism in the population.
- Attacking the left-wing and the Labour Party leadership on antisemitism but ignoring [analysis of data by YouGov](#) showing that antisemitic views among Labour party voters have actually reduced substantially since Jeremy Corbyn became leader of the Labour Party in 2015.
- Attacking the leadership of the Labour Party, specifically Jeremy Corbyn, in a manner that purports to represent the views of 'large sections of the Jewish community' to the exclusion of other sections that have expressed support for Corbyn, specifically rejecting the allegations of antisemitism.
- Failure to acknowledge the true level of complaints of antisemitism within the Labour Party and how the analysis of these complaints measures up against the level of antisemitism in the general population.

I am not a Labour member or even a Labour voter but I do know that singling Jeremy Corbyn out for racism, to the exclusion of known dangerous groups on the far right, is an unwarranted insult to his proven track record of fighting racism and injustice. I cared deeply about Hope Not Hate, a charity that was dedicated to fighting racism, and have supported it since 2010. Turning my back on it was a decision I did not take lightly but the blatant politicisation of its work has demonstrated that its values are no longer aligned with mine and has severely dented my trust and confidence in the organisation's commitment and competence to tackle racism in general.

Matt Carr brilliantly summed up the current McCarthyite circus when he wrote:

“by prioritising one form of racism over another and exaggerating and manipulating it in order to defame their political opponents, Corbyn’s accusers are more likely to undermine the unity and clarity required to hold back the far-right forces that threaten all of us – and which in this country are growing in strength and confidence as a result of the Brexit debacle.”

My question to HNH is a simple one: why has it so enthusiastically joined the circus?