

Councillor Small's Allegations of Antisemitism

NS alleged that three questions addressed to Ellman in CLP meetings early in 2016 were “deeply offensive, ill-founded and anti-semitic.” He said that in each case “criticism goes way beyond legitimate criticism of the actions of the Israeli government and uses Israel and Israeli citizens as proxies for attacks on Jewish people” and that this created a “deeply hostile and intimidating environment.” Bear in mind that the questions to Ellman are a response to the lack of detail in reports she reads out at CLP meetings where there is no other opportunity for political discussion.

Allegation 1. According to NS, a member “said that he’d seen on the internet that airstrikes had killed a member of the Israeli armed forces operating covertly in ISIS and asked Louise did she now regret her vote to support airstrikes on Syria by the RAF now that Israelis were being killed.”

The member actually said: “There was a picture on the internet allegedly of an Israel special forces soldier (a Lt Colonel) who had been captured [ie not killed] by the Iraqi army while fighting with ISIS. His army number was given. If this person is the person the Iraqi army claims him to be, does Louise have second thoughts about voting for airstrikes by the RAF on ISIS in Syria, since it may lead to the death of Israeli military personnel?”

This refers to earlier discussions where members had expressed strong opposition to the proposed bombing of Syria, which Ellman supported. Given Ellman’s well known and vociferous support for Israel’s military, the question is doing no more than suggesting that she might now have cause to regret her earlier position on bombing Syria.

Allegation 2. According to NS, “Another member made the statement saying that Louise talks about the global rise of anti-semitism, but anti-semitism is caused by the existence of Israel.”

This was an inaccurate reference to the same Riverside Jewish member’s response to a recent speech by Louise Ellman at the inauguration of Merseyside Friends of Israel. The member said that if there is a rise in antisemitism, the actions (not the “existence”) of the state of Israel could be a contributory factor. She was referring to the frequent practice of Israeli politicians trying to deflect criticism by conflating Zionism with Judaism. This carries the inevitable risk that uninformed people may 'take their word for it' and conclude from Israel's oppressive conduct that the Jewish people are naturally oppressors. As a Jewish woman the member feels particularly concerned about that.

Allegation 3. According to NS, a member “made a comparison between Gaza tunnels and tunnels created in the Warsaw ghetto by those being persecuted by Nazi Germany.”

This reference arose because Ellman had deflected questions in Parliament about Israeli settlements by making references to “Gaza tunnels”. In the resulting CLP discussion, a member likened the essential supply lines of the Gaza tunnels to the essential supply lines of the Warsaw ghetto tunnels, observing that both were a natural and commendable reaction to an oppressive siege. Such comparisons have been made by people all round the

world, by anti-war movements in Europe and the US, on the opinion pages of major US newspapers, by Richard Falk (the former UN Human Rights Rapporteur) and a host of others. It can only be considered offensive by people determined to avoid acknowledging that Gaza is under siege.

Councillor NS, making the allegations, claimed that the members who asked these questions do not “have any place within the Labour Party.” Why then were they not challenged by the CLP chair at the meetings where the questions were asked? Why have no disciplinary proceedings taken place?