



# Paula Barker

Member of Parliament for  
Liverpool Wavertree

# I hope we can start to repair Labour relationship with Jewish community

**T**HE history of Jewish people in Liverpool extends back centuries.

I was interested to read that 20 Jewish people were registered here in our city in 1790 and, in the 70 years that followed, this number rose dramatically to 3,000.

The Jewish community grew further when some of the Polish and Russian Jewish refugees fleeing from the pogroms of eastern Europe settled in Liverpool.

As I stated in my maiden speech in Parliament, Liverpool is home to some of the oldest minority communities in our country. I want to do my utmost to engage with the Jewish community here in Liverpool and across Merseyside during my time in Parliament.

The Labour Party is the party of Marion Phillips, Manjiv Shindler, Ian Mikardo, Frank Allaun, Julius Silverman, Dame Louise



**PAYING RESPECTS:** Paula Barker MP at a Holocaust Memorial Day event in Bury, Greater Manchester

## I was unaware of scale of the destruction

Edelman and countless other Jewish voices spanning the last century.

The Labour Party has long been the natural political home for British Jews since the party was first founded.

It was the British Labour Party and our affiliated organisations in the trade unions that promoted Jewish voices and concerns throughout much of the last century.

It was the post-war Labour government, following the destruction and brutality of the Second World War, that supported and advocated for the self-determination of the Jewish people on their ancestral lands.

Given the Labour Party's and British Jewry's rich and interconnected history, it is tragic that relations over the last five years have deteriorated to such a degree.

I want to begin by placing on record my own apology for the pain and hurt felt by many in the community who felt they had no choice but to turn their back on the Labour Party.

At this point, I think it would be right to admit that while I was aware of the hurt, I was unaware of the scale of the destruction done to relations between the party and the community.

This year marks 100 years since the affiliation of Poale Zion to the Labour Party. On this centenary year, I hope we can at least begin to repair our broken relationship and win back your trust in the coming months and years ahead.

Upon my election to Parliament, one of my first acts was to sign up to the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance def-

inition of antisemitism in full as an individual MP.

I also wanted to reach out to representatives of the local Jewish community and so I contacted my friend and former Liverpool councillor Jeremy Wolfson early in my tenure.

I was able to sit down with Jeremy and Paul Levinson, from the Merseyside Jewish Representa-

## My support of Israel's right to exist

tive Council. It was a far-reaching discussion about the failures of the Labour Party to properly address the antisemitism that had all too often infected our political discourse.

I came away from the meeting under no illusions at the damage inflicted upon the reputation of the Labour Party within the community in Liverpool and across the country.

I want to place on record my own congratulations to Max Marcus as the new chairman of the Merseyside Jewish Representative Council.

The Labour Party is an organisation of nearly 600,000 people. The scourge of antisemitism within our ranks must be routed out.

One racist is one racist too many. The use of insensitive language has, on too many occasions, become common place. For some, dealing with individuals who use such language will require strong disciplinary action.

For others, education and training will have to be at the heart of how we address politically and emotionally-charged debates on subjects like the situ-

ation in the Middle East.

I have long been a campaigner for the establishment of a Palestinian nation. So many agree on the outcome of peace based on an equitable settlement in this conflict.

However, far too many believe the only way to achieve such is to make the conflict a binary one. While I have and always will be a Palestinian rights activist, I will always be steadfast in my support of Israel's right to exist and the self-determination of her people.

I never set out to be the MP for Liverpool Wavertree. Luciana Berger had served the people of Liverpool Wavertree since 2010.

She had raised the profile of hugely important issues like mental health during her time in Parliament and fought for constituents like Wilson Mukerjee, who I am now proud to represent as he fights for the right for him and his family to remain in this country.

Luciana leaving the Labour Party was a shock to many and I find it deeply regrettable that she felt she could no longer stay in the party. I wish her and her young family the very best for the future.

As a newly-elected MP, I am in the business of building bridges. By background, I am a trade unionist and local government worker.

Before entering Parliament, I was the full-time UNISON branch secretary for Halton Council as well as the regional convenor for UNISON North West.

As part of my work, I became involved with the Holocaust Memorial Project nearly a decade ago and have visited Auschwitz and Auschwitz-Birkenau on several occasions.

I encouraged our members from all service groups and branches to attend the study tour and upon return become living witnesses.

As the number of survivors sadly dwindle, it is important to ensure that people visit and can recount what they have seen.

I have also worked closely with Holocaust Memorial Day UK and led the commemoration in Halton on an annual basis.



**TRIBUTE:** Flowers are left at the birch tree in the grounds of the Municipal Building in Halton

One of the things I am most proud of is the planting of a Birch Tree in the grounds of the Municipal Building in Halton with a plaque commemorating those who cruelly lost their lives.

Birkenau translates into Birch Tree Forest so it was particularly poignant to choose the Birch Tree. This memorial has become the annual focal point on Holocaust Memorial Day in Halton Borough Council ever since.

I am most proud of my work with local schools across Halton to raise awareness and ran a competition for school pupils to submit poems.

We placed the poems at the "death wall" in Auschwitz and held a prizegiving session upon our return.

It is important we educate the next generation of the scourge of racism and where it can lead if left unchallenged.

The horrors that I have witnessed will stay with me for a lifetime. I want the phrase 'Never Again' to be an action that I and others live by.

## Luciana leaving Labour was a shock to many

I hope I can do that as the MP for Liverpool Wavertree as I look to engage positively with the Jewish community and every community here in south Liverpool.

I sincerely hope all in the Jewish community are keeping safe and well during these difficult times.

Coronavirus is causing so much economic and physical health uncertainty for so many.

In normal circumstances, I would have already arranged to have visited the local synagogues and the King David schools. I am in no doubt that Passover would have been very different this year, with the usual gatherings of family and friends simply not possible for so many.

I look forward to us all emerging on the other side of this crisis able to physically reconnect with our loved ones because if this crisis has taught us anything, it is that we are all co-dependent on each other.

The Jewish community like all communities across this land will have lost too much during this pandemic.

We must spend the coming period holding dear the bonds that make us human.

Once again, many thanks to the Merseyside Jewish Forum and, in particular, Jeremy Wolfson.

I hope to be able to speak to my many proud Seaside and Jewish constituents soon.

In friendship.



**PROUD ACHIEVEMENT:** The Liverpool Wavertree MP at a Halton Borough Council Holocaust memorial ceremony in the grounds of the Municipal Building