UK Labour members ‘radicalized’ on Israel since Corbyn’s election, report claims

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<https://www.timesofisrael.com/uk-labour-party-members-radicalized-on-israel-after-corbyn-election-report/>

Britain’s Labour party has become “an incubator for anti-Semitism,” a new report has claimed.

Since the election of the party’s hard-left leader Jeremy Corbyn in September 2015, Labour members have become “radicalized” about both Israel and Jewish people, according to a [study](http://david-collier.com/obsessive-radicalised-labour-party/) by researcher and blogger David Collier.

In “[The British Labour Party: Obsession and Radicalization](http://david-collier.com/obsessive-radicalised-labour-party/),” Collier presents evidence of a pattern by which members who had rarely or never commented about the Jewish state, Zionism or Jews prior to Corbyn’s election as leader nearly five years ago began to post about them on scores of occasions afterwards. They often shared anti-Semitic conspiracy theories, denied the existence of Jew-hate within the Labour party and rejected the mainstream media as controlled by “Zionists.”

Mark Gardner, director of communications at the Community Security Trust, which monitors anti-Semitism and protects Jewish venues, said Collier’s research showed “the radicalizing effect upon some Labour members of prolonged heated debate on the party’s anti-Semitism problem.”

He labeled it “a sadly inevitable outcome of any such political argument: creating interest where there was none and then people adopting ever stronger positions on it.”

Collier last year [exposed](https://www.timesofisrael.com/before-elected-labour-leader-corbyn-was-part-of-an-anti-semitic-facebook-group/) rampant anti-Semitism in the Palestine Live Facebook group of which Corbyn was formerly an active member. His new 200-page dossier has been submitted to the UK’s Equality and Human Rights Commission, a government anti-racism watchdog which is now [investigating](https://www.timesofisrael.com/uk-labour-is-subject-of-probe-spurred-by-anti-semitism-watchdog-it-helped-create/) anti-Semitism in the Labour party.

The report disputes the view that anti-Semitism exists only among a relatively small number of new members who joined Labour in 2015 to support Corbyn’s campaign for the party leadership.

While some of these new members “held extremist or anti-Semitic views” prior to joining Labour, writes Collier, the “general assumption” that the problem in the party is confined to this minority is “woefully misplaced.”

Collier examined both online Labour party forums and social media posts, analyzing material related to Israel, Zionism and the Jewish people.

He presents 40 case studies involving both individuals who were members of the Labour party prior to 2015, as well as those who joined during the 2015 or 2016 leadership elections. In July 2016, less than 10 months after he was first elected, Corbyn faced a challenge for the leadership by party moderates. The summer 2016 campaign, which saw Corbyn win re-election by an increased majority, led to a second surge of new members into the party.

Luke Akehurst, the director of the We Believe In Israel campaign group and a former member of Labour’s National Executive Committee, said Collier’s research was “invaluable.”

“It reveals something very disturbing, that the phenomenon of anti-Semitism in the Labour Party hasn’t just involved people with anti-Semitic views being encouraged to join Labour by the party’s lurch to the left in 2015, but that people who had not previously expressed such extreme views have become increasingly radicalized over the last four years,” Akehurst said.

### Coming out of the woodwork?

Collier identifies one individual, who was a member prior to 2015, who made no public posts about Israel in 2014, despite it being the year of both the Gaza war and the vote by the British parliament to unilaterally recognize a Palestinian state. In 2015, she posted twice about Israel and 22 times in 2016.

By 2018, the member made over 300 posts on Israel – more than on any other topic. Among the anti-Semitic material she shared were conspiracies about the Rothschilds. She also posted that “Zionists and other US corporations” bankrolled Hitler “all for one goal Israel.”

Another member described by the report didn’t publicly comment on Israel in 2014, and in 2015 shared a post supporting a “two-state solution.” But, the report says, after Corbyn’s election “things deteriorated rapidly.” By 2016, she was sharing articles suggesting Israel created ISIS, “suddenly had an interest in rabbis and Judaism,” and posted anti-Semitic videos which promoted Holocaust denial and blamed Jews for their persecution.

This member, believes Collier, “seems to have been a loyal Labour member who was posting semi-positive messages about peace until her views were corrupted by the new environment created within the Labour Party framework.”

That framework, the report argues, saw Labour ignoring many allegations of anti-Semitism, with prominent supporters of Corbyn dismissing the crisis as “either a hoax, a smear, invented, or at best a tiny problem.”

At the same time, the Labour leadership has received crucial backing from a “Jewish fringe that leans towards Marxism and is not part of the mainstream Jewish community to provide a ‘kosher’ cover.”

The anti-Zionist message of hard-left groups such as Jewish Voice for Labour, which often dismiss allegations of anti-Semitism in the party as driven by a desire to suppress criticism of Israel, was then “amplified” by pro-Corbyn media outlets and websites which “took it to the loyalist masses.”

Collier describes a “template” for the process of radicalization of those members who previously showed little or no visible interest in Israel prior to Corbyn’s election as Labour leader. Afterwards, they suddenly began sharing articles about Israel, Zionism and Jews; joined numerous pro-Corbyn Facebook groups; began to post “outrageous lies” about the Jewish state, commenting on the subject more than any other; and attacked the “Zionist” media.

They went on to share anti-Semitic conspiracy theories from obscure websites; repeated the mantra that “criticism of Israel is not anti-Semitism”; began to make anti-Semitic arguments in their own words; promoted the defense of Corbyn offered by hard-left, anti-Zionist Jewish groups; and developed “an outright hostility towards mainstream British Jewry.”

### New ‘influx of extremism’

Alongside the radicalization of existing Labour party members, Collier describes an “influx of extremism” in the run-up to Corbyn’s election and re-election. This “template,” according to the report, is of individuals, some of them “frontline anti-Israel activists,” who were already sharing “toxic and anti-Semitic” posts before joining the party.

Collier accuses some of these new members of bringing “conspiracies and anti-Semitism” with them in to the party, and having “no problem sharing material from rabidly racist, fundamentalist, white supremacist sources.”

The report notes that Corbyn had long been involved in pro-Palestinian activism with some of these individuals. “It is therefore somewhat disingenuous for defenders of Corbyn to fall back on the ‘extremists came into the party’ argument. These were Corbyn’s friends and allies,” it argues.

The report also details an “ethnic cleansing” of Jewish voices from Labour party online forums, especially those which advertised their loyalty to Corbyn.

“Zionist Jews were being removed from the discussion,” writes Collier. “If the most skillful and educated voices on the Jewish side were silenced and the more vocal anti-activists were amplified it creates an additional imbalance.”

“Those inside this bubble cannot help but face an atmosphere of radicalization,” he suggests.

Examining discussions on one of the largest Labour Facebook groups, which has over 38,000 members, the report says the forum became “Israel obsessive.”

“At times Israel seems to have been discussed in the Labour Party forum more often than ‘austerity,’ ‘housing,’ and the ‘NHS.’” While the Facebook group saw a spike in discussion about Israel during the 2014 war, after Corbyn’s election there was “no longer any correlation between events in Israel and the amount of discussion.”

“It is worrying that at the height of the Gaza conflict, Israel was not discussed as much inside the forum as it would be during a normal month during Jeremy Corbyn’s leadership,” it notes.

David Hirsh, author of [“Contemporary Left Antisemitism”](https://www.amazon.co.uk/Contemporary-Left-Antisemitism-David-Hirsh/dp/1138235318) and senior lecturer in sociology at Goldsmiths, University of London, believes the report points to the differing impact the anti-Semitism crisis has had on those who initially supported Corbyn.

“The experience of throwing all your hopes and dreams into Corbyn’s movement could have two outcomes,” he said. “If you find that it becomes impossible to defend the Corbyn movement against charges of anti-Semitism, you may end up excluded and alienated, constructed as an enemy of the movement.”

“But if find yourself willing to go all the way with supporting and defending Corbyn then you are likely to end up believing that Jewish hostility to Corbyn is a dishonest trick, intended unfairly to silence criticism of Israel. This second outcome may be fairly characterized as ‘radicalization,’” Hirsh said.