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# Jews, Antisemitism and Labour – A Letter to the BBC

By Jewish Voice for Labour
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*To Tony Hall, Director General of the BBC*
*cc: Fran Unsworth and Tracey Henry*

*URGENT – "Is the BBC Antisemitic?"*

We need to register with you our deep concern that, once again, and in the closing stages of an acrimonious election campaign, the BBC's coverage of antisemitism charges against the Labour Party has been both unbalanced and uncritical. Your reporting today of the Jewish Labour Movement (JLM)'s repetition of its flimsily-based charges against the Party that it used to support falls disastrously short of the Corporation's own formal standards of accuracy and balance.

This represents what we can only call a flagrant breach, and of all times during a general election campaign, of the BBC's legal commitment to due impartiality and fairness.

Over recent months, and with no remission during the election campaign, coverage of allegations of Labour antisemitism has featured repeatedly in the BBC News, and often as the lead item. In news programmes the allegations have been reported as quasi-factual, with no indication that they are fiercely contested. In more discursive formats such as the Today programme or Newsnight, presenters have consistently adopted a negative, attacking stance towards anyone who questions the basis of the allegations. In complete contrast, those making the allegations, usually based on hearsay rather than personal experience, are supplied with leading questions and softball follow-up.

Jews are as diverse as any other substantial group in society. Yet people whose representative status is highly doubtful are routinely presented by the BBC as 'representatives of the Jewish community'. Surely you can ensure that your broadcasting staff know the facts and convey them appropriately. The Board of Deputies, for example, has no supervised electoral process – and in any case its synagogue-based membership covers no more than one third of the UK's Jewish population.  Secular Jews make up at least 50% of British Jews and have no voice through the Board of Deputies.

In particular the voices of the large numbers of Jews who are Party members, who know how atypical the quite rare examples of antisemitic behaviour in the party are, and who are enthusiastic supporters of a Corbyn-led Labour government have been almost entirely ignored. The BBC has allowed itself to be used as a megaphone for deeply contested charges.

The BBC's Guidelines state that when a partisan political position is put forward, an opposing one, if it exists, should be broadcast too. The Labour Party does have many Jews

who support it and who are prepared to speak out, notably in the organisation Jewish Voice for Labour. Our many requests to be able to present our experience and our perspective are routinely ignored, and in the rare exceptions have never been given equal weighting with the negative voices.

The BBC's coverage of the JLM's release of its evidence to the Equalities and Human Rights Commission's inquiry (into any discrimination in Labour's processes for handling complaints of antisemitism) is a prime example of the BBC's systematic imbalance. This deliberately-timed attempted destabilisation of the Labour Party's position by JLM has appeared in virtually every main news bulletin today, including live coverage – uncontested – of the JLM news conference on BBC News Channel.

The evidence that Jewish Voice for Labour gave to the EHRC inquiry was made public at the time and is publicly available on our web-site. This evidence is directly relevant to your news item but was not even mentioned in today's extended BBC coverage. It seems that the BBC is treating us as the 'wrong sort of Jew'.

All Jews are not the same. Asserting that they are is an aspect of antisemitism. The BBC should be ashamed of its record in openness to the multiple voices of British jewry.

By behaving in the way that it has (and today's JLM coverage is only the latest example) the BBC has, constructively, been contributing to an assiduously promoted anti-Labour agenda.

We look forward to immediate corrective action.

This letter will be published on our website.

Sincerely,

Leah Levane and Jenny Manson, co-chairs JVL

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