

## **The Berl Katznelson Center (BKC)**

### **Statement on the rise in anti-Semitism within the UK Labour party**

December 4, 2019

#### STANDING STRONG IN SOLIDARITY WITH THE BRITISH JEWISH COMMUNITY

We, progressive Zionists in Israel from the Berl Katznelson Center, wish to express our support for those activists and members of the Labour party in the UK who are standing strong against the rise and legitimization of anti-Semitism within their political home. We cannot turn the other way while devastating anti-Semitic statements are not appropriately addressed and eliminated.

Last week, Britain's Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis published a harsh letter warning of the anti-Semitism that has spread through the Labour Party and of the failure of party chairman, Jeremy Corbyn, to deal with it in a real and effective way.

The issues brought up in the letter are part of the deep concern expressed by many in the Jewish community in the UK, including Jewish members of the Labour Party and the Jewish Labour Movement, as was the resignation of a Jewish member of Parliament (Labour) who has been a party member for 55 years, protesting his own party's inaction and legitimizing of the phenomenon.

The Jewish community in Britain and the Labour Party have a rich history of cooperation. Leaders of the Jewish community held senior positions in the Labour Party in particular and in the British Labour movement in general. As an institution that represents the Zionist left in Israel, we believe that the social-economic line that Corbyn leads gives hope to the renewal of Britain's welfare state. The political positions expressed by some leaders of the Labour Party, who criticize Israeli government's settlement policy and demand progress towards a two-state solution, are completely legitimate.

At the same time, none of this can justify Corbyn's shameful turning of a blind eye at the alarming rise of anti-Semitism within the Labour Party, not being held accountable for his role and contribution to it. For example, Corbyn has met with Hamas and Hezbollah leaders – organizations advocating, and actually participating in, the killing of Jews – claiming they are “friends who work for peace, understanding and dialogue.” Corbyn stated that British Jews “have been living in this country for a very long time, and they do not understand English irony. They needed two lessons, which we can perhaps help them with”. Corbyn even refused a public invitation to visit Yad Vashem, saying in the past that “our Jewish friends are no more responsible for the actions of Israel than our Muslim friends are for self-styled Islamic states or organizations.” He opposed Hezbollah's inclusion in Britain's list of terrorist organizations and, while visiting Tunisia, placed a wreath over the tomb of the planners of the murder of the athletes in Munich 1972.

And it is not just Corbyn himself. Ken Livingstone, who previously served as mayor of London, claimed that “Hitler was a Zionist”, and Salim Mula, former mayor of Blackburn, claimed that Israel was behind the Islamic State and responsible for the November 2015 terrorist attacks in France. The party suspended them, but Corbyn strongly refused to publicly condemn them. In addition, during Corbyn's administration, a former Member of Parliament was readmitted to the party after being suspended due to stating that the party was “too apologetic” about anti-Semitism. Corbyn's partner in Labour leadership, Peter Willsman, said that “extremist Jews who support Trump and can falsify evidence in social media are behind the allegations of anti-Semitism”. To this day, Corbyn has refused to apologize

for these offensive statements, further legitimizing the dangerous rise in anti-Semitism within the party and in the public discourse.

Anyone who chooses to turn a blind eye to this worrying trend, arguing that it is anti-Israel and not anti-Semitism, is pretending naiveté. Treating UK's Jewish population as a foreign element in their own homeland is intertwined with old anti-Semitic sentiments that should have been uprooted a long time ago. Insinuating a so-called Zionist-Jewish conspiracy against the Labour party associated with capital and capitalism, as hinted by some voices in the party, is THE epitomizing of anti-Semitism in its worst, and should be called out clearly by all, especially progressives across the board and across the continents.

We stand strong with those opposing these anti-Semitic sentiments and wish for serious reflection within the Labour Party and for better days for the Jewish community in the UK.

Berl Katznelson Center, Israel