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Corbyn refuses to apologise

Chief Rabbi is wrong about Labour antisemitism, insists leader as he declines four times to say sorry

Henry Zeffman Political Correspondent
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Jeremy Corbyn refused four times last night to apologise to British Jews after the Chief Rabbi put Labour's antisemitism crisis at the centre of the election campaign.

The party's leader said that Ephraim Mirvis was "not right" to say in *The Times* yesterday that Labour's claim to have investigated every case was a "mendacious fiction".

He insisted that he had improved Labour's disciplinary processes and that he was "looking forward" to talking to Rabbi Mirvis to "hear why he would say such a thing".

Repeatedly invited by Andrew Neil on the BBC to apologise to British Jews, Mr Corbyn each time declined. Instead he said he wanted to ensure that "our society will be safe for people of all faiths".

He added that racism was "a total poison" and said: "I want to work with every community to make sure it's eliminated. That is what my whole life has been about."

The Board of Deputies of British Jews said that the refusal to apologise was shameful. Mr Corbyn was speaking after the spiritual leader of Britain's orthodox synagogues warned that "a new poison" had taken hold in Labour "sanctioned from the very top" and questioned the Labour leader's fitness for high office. Yesterday Rabbi Mirvis received backing from Christian, Hindu, Muslim and Sikh leaders.

In a searching interview Mr Corbyn also:

- Refused to say that he would give an order to kill an Isis leader if it were

impossible to perform an arrest.

- Admitted that Labour might have to borrow some of the £60 billion promised in compensation to women who lost out in changes to the pension age.

- Justified plans to take £250 a year from low-income married couples, saying that it was a move towards equality.

- Defended his decision to adopt a neutral stance during a second Brexit referendum, saying that he would be an "honest broker".

Labour had spent the day grappling with the consequences of Rabbi Mirvis's article for this newspaper. At the launch event for his race and faith manifesto, Mr Corbyn said: "There is no place whatsoever for antisemitism in our society, our country or my party and there never will be."

Beside him on the platform in Tottenham, north London, were candidates who have apologised for sharing antisemitic posts on social media.

According to a YouGov poll for *The Times*, conducted over the past two days, the same proportion of Britons — 30 per cent — think Mr Corbyn is personally antisemitic as think Boris Johnson is personally racist. Thirty-two per cent said they did not think that Mr Corbyn was antisemitic and 41 per cent said they did not think Mr Johnson was racist. While the BBC interview was dominated by antisemitism, the Labour leader also faced scrutiny over his approach to national security.

Asked whether, if the intelligence services said that special forces had located the new leader of Isis, he would give the order to "take them out", Mr Corbyn said: "Let's find out what the situation is at that moment... We stand

by and abide by international law and if it is possible, only if it's possible, then you try to capture that person."

Asked what he would do if it were not possible to arrest the Isis leader, Mr Corbyn said: "I would take the appropriate decisions at that time", adding that the government should also look at "how Isis grew" and "who funded Isis".

Pressed on his plan, announced on Friday, to stay neutral in a second Brexit referendum, he said that it was "an adult and sensible way to go forward" and that during the campaign he would be "running the government".

Mr Corbyn said that "only those earning over £80,000 per year will see a tax increase" under Labour's plans. He admitted that people on lower incomes who claim the married tax allowance would lose £250 but added that they would "also be getting a pay rise", "properly funded schools" and "improvement in free nursery provision".

Addressing Labour's policy to compensate some of the women who lost out as a result of changes to the pension age, Mr Corbyn said that a "moral debt" was owed. Women Against State Pension Inequality has led the campaign for compensation, which Labour says would cost about £58 billion, paid in instalments over five years. When asked by Neil where this money would come from Mr Corbyn said that it would be paid from government reserves and, if necessary, borrowing, "over some years".



Corbyn si rifiuta di porgere le proprie scuse

Faith leaders back Chief Rabbi's warning on antisemitism

Kaya Burgess

Religious Affairs Correspondent

Henry Zeffman Political Correspondent

The Chief Rabbi was backed by Christian, Hindu, Muslim and Sikh leaders yesterday after he attacked the "poison" of antisemitism in Jeremy Corbyn's Labour Party.

Ephraim Mirvis, the leader of Britain's orthodox Jews, put Mr Corbyn's record on antisemitism at the heart of the election campaign yesterday when he wrote in *The Times* that the Labour leader was "unfit for high office". He warned that the "very soul of our nation is at stake" in the general election.

The Archbishop of Canterbury was swift to express solidarity early yesterday, echoing the concerns over antisemitism but without singling out the Labour Party or Mr Corbyn.

The Muslim Council of Britain called antisemitism in politics "unacceptable" and also turned its fire on the Conservative Party, accusing it of "tolerating Islamophobia [and] allowing it to fester in society". The council suggested that Muslims should also follow the Chief Rabbi's call to "vote with their conscience" and not vote for the Tories.

The Hindu Council UK supported the Chief Rabbi's "comments on [the] Labour Party having become a racist party under Jeremy Corbyn". Citing a resolution passed at the party conference criticising India's actions in Kashmir and calling for self-determination for the region, it said Labour was "polarising Hindu and Muslim relations".

Lord Singh of Wimbledon, the Sikh crossbench peer, told *The Times* that the Chief Rabbi's criticism had been "very strong but I can understand the hurt". He added that Sikhs, Hindus and Buddhists also face a rise in discrimination, saying that this was often "left on the side" of the focus on antisemitism and Islamophobia.

Senior Labour figures were divided yesterday over how to respond to the criticism. Emily Thornberry, the shadow foreign secretary, told the *New Statesman*: "I know the Chief Rabbi, I've met him many times. And I admire and respect him. But he's wrong."

She urged Labour supporters, however, not to "go for the messenger", saying: "You need to think carefully about the message. And there's no doubt that a lot of Jewish people are very angry about our seeming inability to deal with antisemitism in our midst. Everybody now accepts that we took too long to deal with it. That we weren't strong enough about it. That is now accepted. The difficulty is that once you

lose confidence or trust, it takes quite a long time to get it back."

She added that she did not think Mr Corbyn was himself antisemitic.

Lord Falconer of Thoroton, a Labour peer and former lord chancellor, said the Chief Rabbi's criticism was "deserved" and that there were "a lot of cases that have not been properly investigated".

He told *World at One* on Radio 4: "We deserved an attack that strong — we need to deal with antisemitism properly. We are not dealing with the cases within the party." He said he would support Labour at the election next month, provided that the Chief Rabbi's "extraordinary but justified intervention will be listened to".

Wes Streeting, the Labour candidate for Ilford North in London, shared on social media the archbishop's message, which said: "That the Chief Rabbi should be compelled to make such an unprecedented statement at this time ought to alert us to the deep insecurity and fear felt by many British Jews." Mr Streeting wrote: "This is how a real leader responds ... I am proud of my church and ashamed of my party."

Jess Phillips, the Labour candidate for Birmingham Yardley, said: "The only response to the Chief Rabbi that is moral is, 'I'm sorry and I'll do whatever I possibly can to win back your community's trust'."

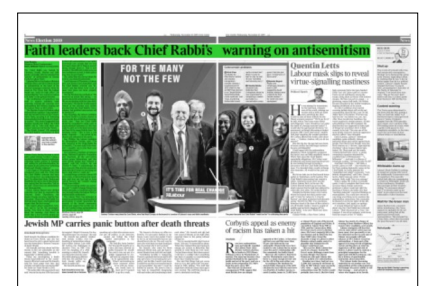
Jon Lansman, a member of Labour's ruling National Executive Committee and chairman of the pro-Corbyn activist group Momentum, said that some Jewish groups had "refused to engage" with Mr Corbyn. He told *Channel 4 News*: "I acknowledge the deep concern of the Jewish community about this but I think we are doing our best to deal with it, I really do."

Luciana Berger, a former Labour MP who is now a Liberal Democrat candidate, said that she had had to leave Labour because she "couldn't change things from within".

"I did everything within my power," she said. "I couldn't change things from within and sadly, as I said then and I feel very strongly today, the Labour Party is institutionally antisemitic."

The Labour Party has defended its record on antisemitism, insisting that in government it would "guarantee the security of the Jewish community, defend and support the Jewish way of life and combat rising antisemitism in our country and across Europe".

I leader religiosi appoggiano il monito lanciato dal Rabbino Capo sull'antisemitismo



Corbyn's appeal as enemy of racism has taken a hit

Analysis

Rows over antisemitism have periodically engulfed the Labour Party since Jeremy Corbyn's election as leader in 2015 (Henry Zeffman writes). In Westminster, it matters. The issue has become a key political football for his opponents inside and out of the party and was a factor in the resignation of 13 MPs from the party since 2017.

But what are its electoral consequences? Polls suggest that most British Jews are deeply opposed to Mr Corbyn. A Survation poll last year said that more than 85 per cent believed he was antisemitic. Historically Jews have tended to vote Labour but in recent years the party's relationship with the community has badly frayed.

However, the reality is that there are few Westminster seats where there is a large enough Jewish vote for the rift to flip seats either way.

According to the Institute for Jewish Policy Research at the 2015 election the seat with the most Jews was Finchley & Golders Green, in north London, home to 25,400 Jews or almost 10 per cent of the Jewish population of England and Wales. It was held by Labour from 1997 to 2010, and the Conservative Mike Freer has won it at every election since. Mr Freer's majority fell at the last election and he held it by less than 2,000 votes. Given the

dramatic swings to Labour in other Remain-voting London seats it is plausible that without the rift Labour would have won.

This year few think Labour has much of a chance. Instead Mr Freer's main challenge comes from Luciana Berger, the Liberal Democrat, who quit Labour this year in protest over antisemitism.

Hendon, next door, had just over 21,000 Jews among its electorate in 2015. In 2017 Labour came second by 1,072 votes — again, without the antisemitism issue Mr Corbyn would probably have won it. But few think Labour has much of a chance of winning it from Matthew Offord, the Conservative candidate, next month.

Labour strategists will fear that even in seats where voters may not know many Jews personally or are less informed on the ins and outs of Labour rows people will look askance at Mr Corbyn's record on antisemitism. A large part of his appeal is his long record of fighting racism and his place on what his supporters call the right side of history. Labour wants to contrast a principled campaigner for the oppressed with Boris Johnson, who has a history of questionable statements about minorities.

The Labour leader becoming embroiled in yet another row over antisemitism at this critical juncture will hamper his party's ability to sell that message — and not just to voters who happen to be Jewish.

L'appello di Corbyn da nemico del razzismo ha subito una battuta d'arresto



Antisemitism Unbound

An unprecedented intervention by the Chief Rabbi is the result of the Labour leader's inability to comprehend his culpability for an institutional problem

No party leader beforehand has faced such an attack, and no chief rabbi has ever felt moved to launch one. In *The Times* yesterday Ephraim Mirvis told of a "new poison" within the Labour Party which, he suggested, should lead to Jeremy Corbyn being considered "unfit for office". The Archbishop of Canterbury, the Most Rev Justin Welby, reinforced Rabbi Mirvis's message, writing that his words "ought to alert us to the deep sense of insecurity and fear felt by many British Jews".

It's probably too much to hope that they would also alert Mr Corbyn. The Labour leader has occasionally been bullied into an irritable admission of his party's problem, but appears to lack all comprehension that it might have something to do with him. Early in his leadership in 2016 he was confronted on film with an article by the Jewish journalist Jonathan Freedland, which tentatively suggested that his past indicated a blindspot towards antisemitism. "Disgusting subliminal nastiness," was Mr Corbyn's retort, and his views do not appear to have changed.

With grim irony, yesterday was also the day that Labour launched a portion of its manifesto focusing on race and faith. The party's woes spring from many roots. One is the crass and kneejerk anti-Zionism now embedded in the British left, of which the Labour leader himself is a pioneer. Another is his massive expansion of Labour's membership, reclaiming comrades from fringe parties farther to the left, some of whom muddle their anti-Zionism into more traditionally antisemitic conspiracy theories of malign Jewish power. A third is Mr Corbyn's own behaviour. From his apparent support for a street mural that depicted Jewish bankers playing Monopoly on the backs of the poor, to his description of Hamas and Hezbollah as "friends", he has, at best, struggled to notice antipathy towards Jews. The more desperately he denounces antisemitism, the less clear it is that he knows what it is.

Equally damaging has been his apparent unwillingness to tackle a problem that has pushed his party into disgrace. Yesterday Rabbi Mirvis

highlighted Mr Corbyn's remarks to the BBC that Labour has "investigated every single case" of antisemitism within its ranks. The Chief Rabbi calls this "a mendacious fiction" and numerous reports suggest that there are many outstanding cases. Worse, where high-profile figures have eventually been expelled, such as Ken Livingstone and the former MP for Derby North, Chris Williamson, Mr Corbyn has made little effort to hide his own equivocation. Earlier this year the Equalities and Human Rights Commission began an investigation into Labour, its first into a party other than the BNP. This, three years after an inquiry by the barrister Shami Chakrabarti found no endemic problem, for which she gained a peerage.

It is convenient cover for Mr Corbyn that he has, in Boris Johnson, an opponent who has made no shortage of crass gags in his career as a newspaper columnist. Yesterday the Muslim Council of Britain supported Rabbi Mirvis's intervention, declaring that he had "has highlighted the importance of speaking out on the racism we face" before accusing the Conservative Party of a "blindspot" over Islamophobia. While there is little evidence to suggest that party's woes are institutional rather than anecdotal, this newspaper has long argued that it must take these concerns seriously.

The Labour Party, though, above all should be mortified at the thought that the major proportion of the Jewish community dreads a victory by Mr Corbyn. Looking to the future, the Conservatives should regard Labour's disastrous handling of its antisemitism problem as a deeply cautionary tale of precisely what not to do. Mr Corbyn, meanwhile, must finally comprehend that the buck stops with him.

Antisemitismo 'sciolto'

