

Labour needs to get back to its purpose

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There are things to be put off. But most of them can only be delayed for so long. The issue of Jeremy Corbyn and antisemitism is one of them.

I have not avoided this issue because I am not a Jew. I have done so because I know how divisive it is in Labour. And I kept telling myself it was outside the remit of this blog, so I should leave it alone.

That, though, is wrong. This blog is about making change happens that impacts on the well being of those excluded from many of the benefits of living in the twenty-first century, both here and elsewhere. Call it, if you like, about creating a greater bias in society towards those who would otherwise be suffering both actual and relative poverty. And, in a democracy that requires that political parties with that bias be electable.

Jeremy Corbyn's stance on antisemitism does not help his party become electable. Far from it in fact. It does the exact opposite.

I am utterly baffled by Corbyn's stance, which I suspect is actually that of Seumas Milne, his de facto chief of staff. I also suspect that in reality it attracts little real support in Labour beyond the Leader's Office. But that's not the point. What is the point is Labour wholly miss the point by saying the difference between its rules on antisemitism and those of the [IHRA](#) relate to just one half of one example. That's to simply evidence the inability of the Labour leadership to see the issue that they are creating.

You don't show support for an oppressed group by saying you understand their oppression better than they do. If you decide their cause is just you listen to them. You accommodate their concern. And you ensure that your practice evidences that.

The Jewish concern is real, and just. And it has been ably summarised in the IHRA rule's. That said, I have no doubt that Code is not perfect. I can say that with confidence because there is no such thing as a perfect rule capable of covering all situations, seen and unforeseen. So that must be true here as well. But what that means is that perhaps

the most important issue is that you then apply this rule equitably.

This country has a long history of equitable application of the law, and so of rules. We expect those who interpret law to apply their common sense. We think they should interpret actions and rules so that the punishment fits the crime. And we do not expect rules to be applied unjustly, according to their letter, when that is inappropriate. That is what equitable interpretation requires.

That is what is needed here because I would, for example, defy anyone on earth to come up with a set of rules that define precisely when opposition to the action of an Israeli government becomes antisemitic. It would be impossible to do so. But it is still possible to have a rule that makes clear there is a difference, because of course there is. And then wise judgement can determine when it has happened.

The same wise judgement can also, if exercised, differentiate the intensely difficult issues around the Palestinian issues of concern, that also have to be properly respected. But again, you can't codify all such concerns.

So what was expected of Labour was that they might understand this, and that they should adopt a definition that was widely accepted, and which was widely also appreciated to accommodate the complexities of this issue. Then it was expected that Labour would put in place the right processes to ensure that those antisemites in its ranks (who, very obviously, exist) be appropriately rooted out. In other words, what was not expected of Labour was that it establish a whole new definition of antisemitism requiring a whole new range of judgements to be developed, but rather that it showed the wisdom of respecting an acceptable body of thought and use that wisely in its own proceedings.

That is the test Labour has failed.

It has, bizarrely, never got to the stage of being appraised on whether it can appropriately use the best guidelines rules, or not. Instead it has fallen at the hurdle of making sure it has rules fit for purpose.

I regret that. This failure does threaten many Jews, whether practicing their faith or not. And it fails Labour because it shows it cannot exercise the sound judgement on the processes of good governance that are in turn ultimately the processes required of good government.

Both issues matter. Put your weight on them where you will. It makes no difference. You still have to despair that a process that should have been so easy to deliver, where it is was clear all the nuance belonged in the equitable interpretation of the best available rules, can have gone so horribly wrong.

And this is important. It is part of Labour's ongoing litany of inability to deliver clear

leadership in opposition that fails to incite confidence that there might be good leadership if they were put into office. Which means that the chance of the required bias towards those with real needs in this country is reduced.

Labour needs to stop arguing with itself.

It needs to listen.

It needs to respect.

It has to appreciate that there will always be diversity of opinion, and to have the modesty to realise that in the position it is in it cannot ignore that, or always assume it is right.

It needs to deliver.

And it is not.

On this issue.

On Brexit.

On being an effective Opposition.

And that is why, left of centre as I am, I still have great difficulty in embracing Corbyn.

I'm not engaged in political debate to debate who and how many can dance on pin heads.

I am in this debate to make sure that all, in their glorious and mutually respected diversity and difference, can have an equal chance to do so. And that there are enough pinheads to go round.

I wis Labour was doing that as well.