

Giving praise to Burnham and Miliband when it is due

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I think it's only appropriate to give praise where praise is due, and it was yesterday to Ed Miliband and to Andy Burnham for letting him say what he did in the House of Commons on a new foreign policy approach to Israel.

It can be argued that the sanctions that Ed Miliband announced yesterday may have little economic impact.

It can be said that more might have been announced.

Both of these things might be true, but the fact is that this was an enormously significant statement and a substantial rebuff to Keir Starmer, explicitly rejecting the comments that he made when Israel began its occupation of Gaza using inhumane methods of abuse. No wonder he wanted to quit the Commons.

It is very welcome that the UK government has made some important distinctions.

It has said that criticising anyone for being Jewish is unacceptable. At the same time, it has made entirely clear its view that criticising the Israeli government is not an act of antisemitism, because, of course, it never could have been.

It has made clear that Israeli occupation of the West Bank is illegal, which as a matter of fact, it is.

It has said that Israeli action in Gaza amounts to ethnic cleansing, because that is what it is and what it has been from the outset.

It has not yet said that the Israeli government has committed genocide, but it has made very clear that it is inclined to think that is the case and that it would support legal action to confirm that opinion.

These are major restatements of UK foreign policy, and without exception they are welcome.

The Tories, Labour Friends of Israel, and others did, of course, condemn Miliband for what he had to say. It is very difficult to condemn a Jewish man whose grandmother sought sanctuary in Israel after World War II for not being Jewish enough, but these charlatans tried to do just that. Concern for human life, the rule of law, and the rights of Palestinians, which are as important as the rights of Jews, matter nothing to them. Flag-waving to support the neo-fascism of Netanyahu and Trump does, and it is that flag-waving that Ed Miliband called out yesterday.

I was delighted to note that other countries, including France and Canada, have agreed to support the UK in this initiative. A realignment of international opinion around Israel has been long overdue. It would appear that we are going to get it.

I might be critical of Andy Burnham for his failings on economics, and his obvious endorsement, through his Chancellor of the Exchequer, of neoliberal economic policy that will be profoundly harmful to this country in the months and years to come, but he has made a difference by letting Ed Miliband make this statement, and by very publicly supporting him in an article in the Guardian this morning.

As I said at the start of this article, I think it is appropriate to recognise when praise is due, and on this occasion, it most definitely is.