



Home Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: [Anti-Semitism](#), HC 136

Thursday 14 July 2016

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Members present: Keith Vaz (Chair); Tim Loughton; Stuart C. McDonald; Mr David Winnick.

Questions 397-509

Witnesses

I: Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis, Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth.

II: Sir Mick Davis, Chairman, Jewish Leadership Council, and Mark Gardner, Director of Communications, Community Security Trust.

III: John Mann MP, Chair, All-Party Parliamentary Group Against Antisemitism.

Written evidence from witnesses:

- [Jewish Leadership Council](#)
- [John Mann MP](#)



Examination of witness

Witness: Chief Rabbi Mirvis.

Chair: I call the Committee to order. I highlight the Register of Members' Interests, where the interests of members of the Committee are noted. I welcome the Chief Rabbi, who is giving evidence to our final session on antisemitism, which is the subject of our inquiry. Thank you very much for coming, Chief Rabbi.

Chief Rabbi Mirvis: It's a pleasure; it is lovely to be here.

Q397 **Chair:** You wanted to start with a couple of opening comments?

Chief Rabbi Mirvis: Yes. Thank you very much. First, in all my travels throughout the UK, meeting up with Jewish people and Jewish communities, there is an enormous amount of appreciation for the fact you have established this hearing. It is a clear signal that antisemitism is taken very seriously here in Westminster and I would like to record that level of appreciation to yourselves for taking that interest and raising the profile of this serious problem.

Secondly, because I know that I am going to be speaking about the problem of antisemitism, I believe we should see it in its overall context, which is that life is good for Jews in the UK. I shall quickly scribble something for you on this sheet of paper and ask what you see. You will be thinking that that is a crazy question and that there is obviously a large dot on the paper, but there is actually a much better answer, which is that it is a white sheet of paper, and on the white background there is a large dot. The white area represents the situation of Jews in the UK today. It is great to be Jewish in Britain and we are proud to be British. This is a truly wonderful country. But, in that context, we've got a problem. It used to be smaller, but it has now got bigger, and it could get bigger and bigger unless we deal with it effectively. Let us not forget, while we are discussing a genuine problem that we are concerned about, that the overall context is thankfully good for Jews.

Q398 **Chair:** Excellent. Thank you very much for that. Maybe we could keep your piece of paper and submit it as part of our evidence and auction it at some stage. Thank you. Do you think antisemitism is on the increase in Britain?

Chief Rabbi Mirvis: Unfortunately, it is.

Q399 **Chair:** And what is the reason for that?

Chief Rabbi Mirvis: Another area of context is the continent. I don't think that levels of antisemitism here are as worrying as they are for our Jewish communities on the continent. However, we find that, during periods of uncertainty, there is a higher level of antisemitism. There are also trigger points such as events in the Middle East and we have found that, in terms of activities, online hate and comments to us, unfortunately there is a rise.



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Q400 **Chair:** How steep is that rise? You talk about certain incidents that might cause a surge for one reason or another, but do you see it as being a steep rise or do you think it is gradual?

Chief Rabbi Mirvis: It's a worrying rise. First, there shouldn't be any incidents at all, but that there is a rise and that it is coming to us from many directions is cause for deep concern.

Q401 **Chair:** But we don't live in a perfect world, do we? We cannot expect everybody to have absolute respect for the religion of other people. Some kind of criticisms are expected, are they not?

Chief Rabbi Mirvis: Yes, but there is a difference between criticism and hate; criticism can sometimes be something very positive and constructive. One example I could identify, among many, is campuses. There are Jewish students leaving home for the very first time who are very excited to be part of the open, free world and feel so liberated when coming on to campus. They express certain views and are immediately being identified, stereotypically, as people with a certain mindset and with a certain outlook and being demonised and linked to who knows what. Some ugly things are happening and that causes us a lot concern.

Q402 **Chair:** And that is different from the situation five years ago?

Chief Rabbi Mirvis: Yes.

Q403 **Chair:** Has it become more open? Are people more confident in being antisemitic because they think they can get away with it?

Chief Rabbi Mirvis: In some respects, within some groupings and some areas, yes.

Q404 **Chair:** Within which groupings?

Chief Rabbi Mirvis: For example, within the Labour party. We have found a situation through which, since the leadership of Mr Corbyn, it has become more acceptable for an element that used to be a fringe group to appear on centre stage and express their ideology in a more open and confident manner.

Q405 **Chair:** You have taken us to the Labour party. I was going to raise it later, but let's go with the flow, so to speak. Both Mr Corbyn and Mr Livingstone have been witnesses before the Committee, as you are. You have probably had the opportunity to see their comments to this Committee, if not their general comments. Do you think the comments that Mr Livingstone made in respect of Hitler were antisemitic comments?

Chief Rabbi Mirvis: Yes.

Q406 **Chair:** Why?

Chief Rabbi Mirvis: The context. He was being asked about an antisemitic message that had been sent by a Labour Member of Parliament and that suggested that it would be a good idea for the State of Israel to be moved to the United States of America. The implications would be that some 5 million Jewish Israelis would be picked up somehow and forced to



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abandon their homes and to be moved somewhere else—a simply horrific idea. When asked for his comments on this, of course what he should have said was, “This is unacceptable. This has no place within our party.” Instead, he started to talk about Hitler, and this was not the first time that he had started to talk about the Holocaust when asked about Jewish issues or speaking to Jewish people. On many occasions, it had been pointed out to him that this was offensive, so with that knowledge, raising Hitler, of all names, of all things, in that particular context only exacerbated the situation.

Q407 **Chair:** But during the recent referendum campaign, some other people raised Hitler and what Hitler did, in a different context. Do you think nobody should be allowed to speak about Hitler?

Chief Rabbi Mirvis: It is very important, from an historical point of view, that we be well educated with regard to the Holocaust, with regard to what transpired in Nazi Germany. I referred to continuous remarks, which, as far as Mr Livingstone is concerned, I believe were intended to offend, given that context.

Q408 **Chair:** You mentioned Jeremy Corbyn, who is of course the Leader of Her Majesty’s Opposition. Given that, why are you so critical of the way in which he has dealt with this issue? Mr Corbyn is on record, even before this Committee, as sending out a message to the Jewish community that he is not antisemitic and that the Labour party does not have a problem with antisemitism.

Chief Rabbi Mirvis: I have had a concern, which is shared by many Jewish people and many others, that antisemitism is not being taken seriously enough within the leadership of the Labour party.

Q409 **Chair:** But we have the Chakrabarti report. Shami Chakrabarti, former director of Liberty, has produced this report, which makes recommendations. Do you not think that’s enough? Have you read the report?

Chief Rabbi Mirvis: I have indeed read the report. I was interviewed by Ms Chakrabarti in her process of preparation of the report and I believe that the Chakrabarti report should not be seen as the last word on antisemitism in the Labour party. If you will allow me to expand on my views on the report—

Chair: Yes, of course.

Chief Rabbi Mirvis: I believe that there are some positive features of the report and I am also disappointed about certain elements of it. For example, on positive features, there are some very basic, elementary ones such as a call for the end of the usage of abusive terminology such as “Paki” and “Zio”, a call for the end of ethnic stereotyping and a call for the end of references to the Holocaust, Nazis and Hitler when it comes to debates relating to Israel and the Middle East. She does give some guidance with regard to compliance procedures relating to allegations and she also recommends some rule changes.



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Q410 **Chair:** But this should actually be standard practice. I was a little surprised. Were you surprised that people are being told to behave in a certain way when one would expect people to behave in that way in Britain in the 21st century?

Chief Rabbi Mirvis: The word “surprised” is a good term to use, yes—surprised that it is necessary, surprised that I, as Chief Rabbi, find it necessary to sit before you and spell out what should be absolutely obvious for a decent society in terms of tackling a serious phenomenon.

Let me point out my reservations about the Chakrabarti report. For example, she calls for a moratorium in relation to historical instances of antisemitism and for time limits. I can’t understand that. What is wrong is wrong, regardless of whether it is contemporary or historical.

There is no reference to events at the Oxford University Labour Club, and more surprisingly no reference to the Royall report on matters that transpired at Oxford. When the Royall report reached its conclusion, the resolutions were published, but the Labour party leadership decided not to publish the report. There had been some indications that the Royall report would be incorporated into the Chakrabarti report, but that has not happened, and one wonders, what is there to hide and why is it that the Royall report is being somehow hit into the long grass?

Q411 **Chair:** But are you telling me that you have had no reports of antisemitism in any party apart from the Labour party? When David Ward, the Liberal Democrat, was a Member of the House, he said some pretty critical things, did he not? Are you telling me it is only the Labour party that has a problem?

Chief Rabbi Mirvis: It is in the Labour party that senior members of the party during the past number of months have publicly stated that there is a serious problem of antisemitism in their party. It is in the Labour party that there have been more than 20 suspensions. It is in the Labour party that a special inquiry was set up in order to investigate antisemitism. If you would like to cite for me any contemporary instances of antisemitism in other parties that need to be dealt with—by the way, there probably is antisemitism in other parties—please do so and let them be dealt with.

Q412 **Chair:** So you are telling this Committee that you do not think Mr Corbyn has acquitted himself on this issue and more must be done?

Chief Rabbi Mirvis: Oh yes. Interestingly, when I met with Ms Chakrabarti, I asked her a question. I said, “What would you like the headline story of your report to be? What quote of yours?” She hesitated for a moment and her reply to me was, “We need to do better.” That actually isn’t what has been reported. It is more the opening sentence of her report relating to what is not happening in the Labour party, rather than highlighting what is happening. I think her comment about needing to do better is a good comment, because the Labour party has an outstanding tradition of dealing with the ills in our society and taking a lead in combating racism. Many Jewish people have been proud



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members—rightly so—of the Labour party, and we want continuity of those values.

I would just like to identify two more reservations that I have about the Chakrabarti report, because one is my main reservation, which is an absence of a definition of antisemitism. If the *raison d'être* of the report is to provide guidance as to how the party can deal with a phenomenon, you can't deal with a phenomenon if there is no definition of it.

Q413 **Chair:** Do you subscribe to the European Monitoring Centre's definition of antisemitism?

Chief Rabbi Mirvis: I do, and that definition is linked to that of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance.

Q414 **Chair:** So you think that should have really been the starting point in this report?

Chief Rabbi Mirvis: Yes. Indeed, you read that definition to Mr Corbyn during the session.

Chair: Indeed.

Chief Rabbi Mirvis: And I cannot understand why Ms Chakrabarti did not incorporate that definition into her report.

Q415 **Chair:** Let me turn to other matters before other Members come in. One concerns a meeting that this Committee had in private with the Labour, Conservative and Liberal Democrat friends of Israel and Palestine—a sequential meeting; they weren't all in here together, because we are not here to try and find peace in Palestine. One of the issues that we put to all of them was the issue of criticism of Israel. Sometimes people feel that if you criticise Israel and the activities of the Netanyahu Government, which Mr Corbyn is very critical of, as are Mr Livingstone and others, you are accused of being antisemitic. Are people allowed to say how they disagree with the Netanyahu Government without being accused of being antisemitic?

Chief Rabbi Mirvis: If you go to Israel, which is a robust democracy, you will find some of the world's greatest critics of the policies of the Israeli Government, and that is at any given time in the history of successive Israeli Governments. It is a healthy phenomenon within our democratic world to have the right to criticise the policies of any particular Government.

Q416 **Chair:** So people are allowed to do that without being accused of being antisemitic?

Chief Rabbi Mirvis: Absolutely. Sometimes lines are crossed. For example, where there is an element of anti-Zionism through which one is relating exclusively to the activities of Israel—not to the activities of an enemy trying to destroy Israel and what Israel is responding to; not to the misdemeanours and crimes of nations surrounding Israel; not to other problems in the world—and if one is obsessively concentrating on Israel



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alone, one asks the question, "Where is this coming from and what is the intention?"

Q417 **Chair:** But you yourself have said that one can no more separate Zionism from Judaism than separate the City of London from Great Britain.

Chief Rabbi Mirvis: Thank you for mentioning that. That was in my article in *The Telegraph*.

Q418 **Chair:** We read your articles very carefully, even if they are in *The Telegraph*.

Chief Rabbi Mirvis: Zionism has been an integral part of Judaism from the dawn of our faith. The very first imperative given to the founders of our faith, Abraham and Sarah, by God, as recorded in the book of Genesis, was to uproot themselves from Mesopotamia and go to live in Canaan. Ever since that time, that part of the world has been the centre of our spiritual universal. We have prayed towards Israel. Open any prayer book and you will find Israel jumping out at you. It is the centre of what we are.

As a result—further to a political development in the latter part of the 19th century through which Zionism gained an added dimension, spelling out the right of the Jewish people to live within secure borders with self-determination in their own country, which they had been absent from for 2,000 years—that is what Zionism is. If you are an anti-Zionist, you are anti everything I have just mentioned. If you want to criticise a Government, that's fine.

Q419 **Chair:** Let me put a question to you before I bring in Mr Winnick. Is it possible that the rise in antisemitism is due to the increase in the use of social media and the ability for anonymous people—we don't know who they are—suddenly to start such abuse online? This was not here 10 or 15 years ago. I am describing the conditions that face my parliamentary colleague, Luciana Berger, who is Jewish. In today's *Guardian*, she has described how, at one point, police told her that she was the subject of 2,500 hate messages in just three days, which used the hashtag #FilthyJewBitch. Those messages are to an elected Member of Parliament.

Another MP, John Mann, is coming in. He has sent us a huge amount of abuse that he has been subjected to. On the other hand, Richard Burden, a Birmingham MP, said that whenever he raises the Palestinian issue in the House of Commons, he is subjected to the most incredible amount of abuse because he talks about the rights of the Palestinians. How much of that is due to the fact that it was there always, but we are getting to know that it is there because of social media? This is the real problem. If we shut some of these areas down, would it be better?

Chief Rabbi Mirvis: It is part of the problem, but not the whole problem. I totally agree with you about the change that has happened. When, 20 years ago, Mr Smith said to Mrs Smith something abusive about the Jews, in their kitchen in Nottingham, only the two of them were aware of the comments. Today, when Mr Smith says the same thing, he just types it out on Twitter and I see it in the palm of my hand in a split second, as can



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anybody throughout the world. Looking at that message in the palm of my hand—gosh, it really has an effect on me. It also encourages other people likewise to raise their ugly heads, come out into the open and do the same.

Q420 **Chair:** So should the internet companies and social media companies do more to filter these messages before the world reads them?

Chief Rabbi Mirvis: Yes, I believe that these companies do have responsibility. Freedom of expression of speech is an integral part of our great society—

Q421 **Chair:** But this is abuse?

Chief Rabbi Mirvis: You need to express that freedom with responsibility. Where it is irresponsible, we as a society should be doing something about it.

Q422 **Chair:** So would you be in favour of putting restrictions on the use of social media, leaving responsibility with the company so they have to filter before this kind of appalling abuse gets online?

Chief Rabbi Mirvis: I certainly support such a call to those companies.

Q423 **Chair:** And do you think that it is not happening now and that they need to do much, much more?

Chief Rabbi Mirvis: I totally agree with you.

Q424 **Mr Winnick:** Chief Rabbi, it may have appeared on occasions since we have started on our inquiry that this was an inquiry into the Labour party's stance on antisemitism, but of course it is an inquiry into antisemitism. Recognising the pretty well-documented increase in antisemitism, which we all, hopefully, deplore, is it your view that the Jewish community have a safe haven, to say the least, in the United Kingdom? That has been the position for some time—has it not?—and so it continues. Is that your view?

Chief Rabbi Mirvis: Mr Winnick, it was for that reason that I made my introductory statement that the concern we and many in this country have about antisemitism needs to be seen within that overall context.

Q425 **Mr Winnick:** I don't know if you are aware, Chief Rabbi, but one of the witnesses who came before us was the Archbishop of Canterbury, who acknowledged and apologised for the centuries of what could be described as religious antisemitism. I am sure you welcome that.

Chief Rabbi Mirvis: Yes, absolutely. The Archbishop of Canterbury has made a good number of outstanding comments on this and other issues. I very much welcome his comments.

Q426 **Mr Winnick:** As far as the Labour party is concerned and recognising some of the problems that undoubtedly have arisen—John Mann will be a witness later this afternoon, as the Chair said—would you accept that the Labour party has, over the years, opposed racism of all kinds? I think you



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touched on that. As far as Jewish people are concerned, the party has welcomed Jews from the very beginning and has had Jewish MPs. I wonder if you know, for example, that in 1945, of the MPs who happened to be Jewish—they were, of course, first and foremost MPs, but by race they were of Jewish origin—not a single one was non-Labour. Well, there were two communists, but apart from them, they were all Labour Members. Does that not say something about the position of my party?

Chief Rabbi Mirvis: The outstanding track record of the Labour party on racism, on the ills of our society and on antisemitism in previous years leads us to have added concern. Why has there been a shift in the recent past? Surely we need to encourage the Labour party to get back on track with regard to the true nature of this great party.

Q427 **Mr Winnick:** Would you accept that however unfortunate—to use that expression again—it is that some characters in the Labour party have had to be subject to discipline, and if they haven't they should be, the Labour party is not in any way an antisemitic party by its traditions or values? It continues to be a party that welcomes all—Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Christians obviously and anyone else. Would you accept that the cases that have come to light are very much on the fringe, and that the overwhelming majority of members of my party, be they active or otherwise, are as much opposed to all forms of racism, including antisemitism, as yourself?

Chief Rabbi Mirvis: My concern relates to the apparent indifference with regard to antisemitism shown by the leadership of the Labour party. We would like to see greater importance attached to this genuine problem. So far, we have not seen that. It is very important, post-Chakrabarti report, with its weaknesses and its strengths, that we now see action and an outright condemnation by the party leader, without the necessity of being prompted, where there are incidents, immediately to say, "This is not something we want to happen within our party. This is something that brings us shame. I will be personally involved in monitoring the questioning of the person concerned, leading from the front"—that is the term Chakrabarti herself used. The Labour party has always led from the front on these issues. That is what it now needs to do. Our concern is—we have not yet been satisfied—about how serious this issue is for the leadership of the party.

Q428 **Mr Winnick:** The final point I want to make is on the issue of Israel, which the Chair raised. You have said, like other witnesses, that criticism of Israel is not antisemitism. Am I correct? You have said that criticism of Israel in itself is not antisemitism?

Chief Rabbi Mirvis: If it is in an appropriate context, it is not antisemitism. Correct.

Q429 **Mr Winnick:** You mentioned people in Israel who are critical. It is a democracy, and they are critical of their Government—in my view, with a good deal of justification; that happens to be my view. As long as it is criticism that is a million miles away from all the filth and stench of antisemitism, would not criticism that the Government are not doing what



they should do—like criticism of any other Government, including the present one in Britain, and whether you agree with those views or not—strengthen those in Israel who are critical of their Government?

Chief Rabbi Mirvis: It is an open society and people are free to comment as they wish. As I have indicated before, that is fine—in fact, it is a healthy situation—as long as it is not part of an overall denial of the right of the Jewish people to have their own country in safe borders.

Q430 **Tim Loughton:** Chief Rabbi, I think this is the first time that we have had an audio-visual aid presented to the Committee, which is greatly valued. Talking about antisemitism in a wider context, how do you think antisemitism differs in various continental countries from the experience in the UK, or is it the same thing?

Chief Rabbi Mirvis: Broadly speaking, I think we are experiencing more or less the same thing. There was a time when it came from the far right; now increasingly it is coming from the far left. There is an element of radical Islam that is part of this narrative. Events in the Middle East serve as trigger points.

I would highlight a significant difference here in the UK. I have noticed that antisemitism here is not seen exclusively as a Jewish problem. It is seen, correctly, as a problem for our society. What starts with the Jews ends up happening to others, but even if it just stays with the Jews, it is something that affects all of our citizens.

That is why I am so proud of the fact that the fight against antisemitism is not left up to the Jewish people. It is led, here, from the Palace of Westminster. For example, the All-Party Parliamentary Group against Antisemitism is an outstanding example for other Parliaments around the world to follow. We are trying, from the top down, in this country to be one step ahead. I believe that that surely has inspired the creation of this inquiry that you are staging here.

Q431 **Tim Loughton:** So, are you suggesting that in certain continental countries there is some form of more institutionalised antisemitism, which means that it is taken less seriously and a blind eye is turned in the actions of certain of Governments compared with the UK?

Chief Rabbi Mirvis: I do not think that one, in one broad sweep, can generalise. Every country needs to be looked at on its own merits in what is transpiring over there. We do find in a number of instances that some countries are being reactive. It is only in the aftermath of a terrible terrorist attack against a Jewish target that suddenly the authorities wake up and say, “Ah, we need to send soldiers in. We need to put in place certain policies, pass legislation and so on.”

I am very proud of our situation here in the UK. Our legislation serves a good purpose. As a society, we detest racism and antisemitism is seen, correctly, as a specific strand of race hate. I am very pleased with how our society is relating to this. In fact, the reaction of our society to recent



developments in the Labour party has been a great one because people have said, "This is not acceptable."

Q432 Tim Loughton: So far you have talked mostly about antisemitism in a political context. I am interested in getting your view of how antisemitism actually manifests itself among politicians, non-politicians, ordinary people. I am interested in your views because I think there is a difference between the way it has sprung up on the continent and the way we see it here—not the way we then deal with it but what antisemitism looks like in France and Germany rather than England.

Chief Rabbi Mirvis: Our Community Security Trust, from whom you will hear later, will be able to provide you with exact examples and percentage figures relating to the types of phenomena that we experience here as part of antisemitism. That covers small details such as a car passing by, the window rolling down and the calling out of something unrepeatable; online hate; graffiti on buildings; sometimes physical attacks; sometimes discrimination, which could be hidden. A Jewish person might wonder, "Why did I not get that job? Why did I not get that prize? Why was I sidelined?" There was a time when many Jewish people changed their surnames in order to sound less Jewish—there are many examples of that. One would have thought, "Please, God, we will never have to return to a time such as that," but there are elements of such discrimination that do happen. Again, in the overall context, it is a healthy situation and this is a country where it is good to be Jews.

Q433 Tim Loughton: To come back to the UK, what links do you think there are with the fact that, historically—going back quite a long way—we have large Muslim communities in this country, because of connections with places like Pakistan and the old imperial connections? How does that make antisemitism different here, if it does, and does the proximity of some of those Muslim communities to, say, the Labour party for those who are political, make an integral difference?

Chief Rabbi Mirvis: Recent studies and surveys have shown there is a worrying trend within Muslim communities when it comes to antisemitism, but I say that together with my own outstanding experiences of collaboration with many friends within the Muslim community. There is a lot of work that needs to be done within Muslim communities with regard to their Britishness and the way that they relate to their fellow citizens and, as I mentioned before, there are trends relating to their views of the Jewish community that are somewhat worrying. Sometimes—one can presume in a political context—people calculate whom they should please and whom they don't need to, and so on. By and large, overall, the Jewish community is appreciated and well respected and I find that to be the case right across the board. There is far more of that respect and appreciation than there is of ongoing problems.

Q434 Tim Loughton: One last question. For the vast majority of British citizens who happen to be Muslims, people of the Jewish faith are not an issue, but for some, to be part of that community means that you have to be anti-Jewish or antisemitic in some way. That is a tiny minority who are



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perhaps fired up by some of the more extreme, radical doctrines that we have seen. That is not true in reverse for the Jewish faith. Do you think some politicians are guilty of playing to that prejudice because those communities feature more heavily in their constituencies than in, say, constituencies like mine that have a very low non-indigenous population? Do you think that is at the essence of some of this for certain politicians—who may just happen to be Labour politicians because of the sorts of areas they represent; I am being very broad and generalist here—and that they have played to their constituent audience and some of the more base instincts that might give them an electoral advantage? That could be at the heart of the problems within the Labour party.

Chief Rabbi Mirvis: I would hate to think that any Muslim feels that he or she “has to”—to quote what you said—hate somebody or to take issue with those of another faith. I don’t believe that is the case, nor that it should be. With regard to politicians and how they operate, I wouldn’t give a sweeping generalisation. I think how politicians in their constituency act, how sincere and genuine and how politically motivated they are and what considerations they have is up to individuals. I would not suggest that an entire party could be described in a particular fashion, in that sense.

Q435 **Tim Loughton:** I am not trying to broad-brush any party in such a way. We were questioning Jeremy Corbyn and some of the company he has kept—in retrospect he perhaps regrets the way he has articulated what he said about them and that he consorted with them—where very clearly the tenets of that company require you to hate people of the Jewish faith and want to inflict violence upon them. That was the concern. It is about how clearly you distance yourself from people with whom you may have some things in common but who are ultimately fired up by an absolutely pathological hatred of another group of people. It goes beyond just antisemitism; it is really serious stuff.

Chief Rabbi Mirvis: You are right to raise the issue of the company that people keep, with whom they intend to have tea and with whom they wish to associate, because that adds legitimacy to those people and their standing in our society. That is indeed an issue, but if you are trying to suggest that that is indicative of how an entire party operates, I wouldn’t suggest that.

Q436 **Stuart C. McDonald:** Chief Rabbi, thank you for your evidence today. I am interested that you raised a point about the Chakrabarti report not having a definition of what antisemitism is. I asked Mr Corbyn about that when he was here. I assume that the reason is that what you want is for members of the Labour party, and for anyone else who reads the report, to be absolutely clear on what is acceptable, what is unacceptable and what is regarded as antisemitic. Your solution to that is the EUMC definition. Do you think that people reading the EUMC definition would themselves necessarily be clear about what conduct is regarded as acceptable, unacceptable or antisemitic?

Chief Rabbi Mirvis: The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, which has the same opening statement, provides two pages of applications



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and examples, which are excellent. Those need to be read and incorporated in the understanding of what antisemitism is; the opening statement itself is not sufficient, if that is what you are alluding to. I think that is very important. A definition is so crucial because, if not for a definition, you could have a person who is guilty of antisemitic comments and who goes on to say that in his 47 years of being a member of a party he has never seen any antisemitism. If you don't have a clear definition, anybody can say anything about what is or is not, which is why it is so important for there to be that clear definition. That is why I am disappointed that there is no such definition in the report.

Q437 Stuart C. McDonald: You were also quite clear about where you draw the line between legitimate criticism of the actions of the Israeli Government and what oversteps the mark into what is unacceptable and antisemitic. It has been suggested that some politicians have become too focused on the actions of Israel, and there is almost a suggestion that that in itself tends towards antisemitism. Is that something you agree with?

Chief Rabbi Mirvis: That can sometimes be the case. It depends how repetitive it is and what the context is. Are people being fair minded? Are they also speaking out against those who have been aggressive towards Israel and to whom Israel is responding? What is the overall context in the area? There are so many considerations. Are they using the term "Zionism"? Can the term "Zionism" be replaced with "Judaism," or can "Zionist" be replaced with "Jew"? What is the intention? You are correct that, unfortunately, there are many instances in which criticism of Israel crosses the line.

Q438 Stuart C. McDonald: But surely you wouldn't accuse most MPs who, for example, have a particular interest, or who make that one of the causes on which they work, of being antisemitic?

Chief Rabbi Mirvis: I have been very clear in saying that that is not the case.

Q439 Stuart C. McDonald: Other politicians focus on different countries, and you can't focus on every single country in the world.

Chief Rabbi Mirvis: Correct.

Q440 Stuart C. McDonald: Okay. Finally, on a general point, we have spent some time questioning what the Labour party can do to resolve the situation in which it has found itself. We have recently seen a rise in antisemitism. Does there need to be a change of approach in Government policy, or is the current approach correct? What more can the Government be doing? Does there need to be a radical rethink of our strategies here, or are we doing the right things but just not enough of them?

Chief Rabbi Mirvis: I think there needs to be activity on quite a number of levels, including implementation of all legislation in an appropriate way. Right now, we are finding that there is added tension and added worry. I am particularly concerned, in the past few weeks since the referendum, that there has been a serious outbreak of hate crime in this country, which



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makes this hearing and some of the other hearings all the more important. We must concentrate on how we need to increase understanding, co-operation and tolerance in this country, and on how we need to educate people.

Education is a core element of how to treat such an ill within our society. What makes people have this kind of mindset? What enables this to be within their comfort zone to say and to do? When you educate people appropriately, it helps a lot. I am very pleased that former Prime Minister David Cameron established the Holocaust Commission, as a result of which there will be an appropriate memorial and learning centre in this country.

We have some outstanding Holocaust memorial groups in this country. Only a few days ago, I addressed the ambassadors of HET—the Holocaust Educational Trust. One hundred and fifty people from schools right across the country who have spent days in Auschwitz—this happens every year—are now ambassadors, to teach their contemporaries about the ills of hatred, racism, xenophobia and antisemitism. Education, it is clear, is key.

I would also like you yourselves, at the conclusion of your deliberations and the hearing, not just to leave things up in thin air but rather to make a very powerful statement—“We here from the Palace of Westminster want to send out a message: zero tolerance of antisemitism on campuses, in political parties, in faith groups, within a working context and the like.” Please, I would love it if this group referred to the European Union Monitoring Centre definition, linked to the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance’s definition, as the guideline: “This is what we would like everybody to follow. This is how we want authorities to apply the rules for anyone who steps out of line.” That would be exceptionally helpful.

Q441 **Chair:** Chief Rabbi, thank you very much for coming here today, sharing your thoughts with us and answering our questions. If there is further evidence you wish to put before the Committee, please do so, but we are planning to close the oral sessions today, with John Mann giving the last set of oral evidence. You, I understand, have met with our parliamentary colleague Naz Shah. Is that right, or was it others in your organisation?

Chief Rabbi Mirvis: No, I haven’t—not with Naz Shah.

Chair: It was not your organisation. Maybe it was another. Thank you for coming, and please keep in touch with us if you feel there is anything you need to add to what you said today. We are most grateful.

Chief Rabbi Mirvis: It was a pleasure.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Sir Mick Davis and Mark Gardner.

Q442 **Chair:** Sir Mick Davis and Mark Gardner, thank you very much for coming in. We hope to have some good, short, succinct questions to you with



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some good, short, succinct answers. Can I declare an interest? I have been a recipient of the hospitality of the Community Security Trust. I am invited every year as Chair of this Committee to their annual dinner. I did not go last year, but I went the year before.

Can I start with you, Sir Mick Davis? Do you agree with the Chief Rabbi—it would be unwise to disagree with him, I suppose—that there is an increase in antisemitism?

Sir Mick Davis: Yes, I believe there is an increase in antisemitism in the UK.

Q443 **Chair:** And what do you think the reason is?

Sir Mick Davis: In my view, he is correct in identifying the fact that events in the Middle East give rise to the release of passions within the United Kingdom among certain communities, which has caused antisemitic incidents and antisemitic rhetoric, but there is a worrying rise of antisemitism within the left-wing community. I am not looking at the left wing in a political sense, but the left-wing community has an almost pathological focus on Israel, and that is giving rise to the issues we are having today in the United Kingdom.

Q444 **Chair:** Was it always there or has it come to the fore recently? If it is connected to the Israel-Palestine problems, they have been there for a very long time. Why is it now that we are seeing more of it? What is the spike that is causing this to happen?

Sir Mick Davis: Since the Holocaust and after the second world war, it was no longer fashionable to speak of Jews in the way they were spoken about in the centuries leading up to the Holocaust, when their physical appearances, the nature of their business dealings and the nature of their religion were characterised negatively. It was no longer fashionable to do that. Many people who bore ill will to the Jewish community essentially were under pressure to conform to the norms of society. The rise of the State of Israel, the tensions in the Middle East, the issues around Israel and Palestine, and the lack of settlement of a Palestinian country for them to exercise their own self-determination have given licence to many people who have issues with Jews to use Israel and Zionism as a vehicle to give expression to that.

Q445 **Chair:** We dealt with the evidence of Jeremy Corbyn and Ken Livingstone earlier. I assume that you agree with what the Chief Rabbi said on that.

Sir Mick Davis: Yes, I do indeed.

Q446 **Chair:** Mr Gardner, you have given us figures stating that the number of individual antisemitic incidents in 2015 was 924.

Mark Gardner: That is correct.

Q447 **Chair:** That is a fall of 22% from 2014, which was the worst year on record ever for reported incidents. Do you have any figures for the first six months of this year, or do you just compile them like everyone else does at the end of the year?



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Mark Gardner: We are actually working on them right now.

Q448 **Chair:** Does it show that there has been an increase or is it a gradual—

Mark Gardner: Unfortunately, I am unable to give an indication but I am aware, for example, of the social media abuse, which you have referred to, of personalities such as Luciana Berger. Something like that, in a purely data analytical sense, presents difficulties for us. If we were suddenly to catalogue every one of those thousands of hateful tweets including those against Ruth Smeeth and John Mann—the list goes on and on because part of our work involves monitoring those tweets using sophisticated software to keep a handle on what is happening, to report these things to Twitter and to report them to the police—that would throw the statistics totally out of kilter.

Q449 **Chair:** Of course. I referred to Luciana Berger and the evidence that we have received from John Mann, who we will hear from shortly, and we will be publishing that evidence. It has come as a big shock to me to see that level of abuse. I am not saying that nobody abuses me or other members of the Committee on Twitter, but what they have to put up with is in a league of its own. You talk about the monitoring of the abuse by CST. Is there a view that you have had to monitor because the mainstream systems just do not protect Jewish people? Indeed, the very existence of CST—I have visited it and I have am impressed with what I have seen, but I thought to myself after my visit, “Why on earth does the Jewish community have to do this? Why does not the Metropolitan police or other police forces have to do this?”

Mark Gardner: Your point is correct. There are many times when I have discussed CST with MPs and journalists. They have said, “Hold on a minute. This isn’t normal. You’re talking about it as if it’s normal.” The idea that the Jewish community requires certain levels of security protection and the idea that we have to monitor the levels of antisemitism should not be normalised.

Q450 **Chair:** Is there no parallel in any other religion of an organisation like CST that has been created to protect one section of the community?

Mark Gardner: We have worked successfully with the Muslim community to help establish an organisation called Tell MAMA, which now performs the same function that we do. They brought out a report very recently that was of a high professional standard. They monitor abuse against Muslims and provide information to Twitter, Facebook and others about social media abuse. The amount of resource that it takes to monitor thousands of cases on Twitter and Facebook, to tabulate them, to send them on to Twitter and Facebook and to make the case as to why each individual sender—

Q451 **Chair:** Is that what you have to do at the moment? You are not an automatic referral unit? Luciana Berger—an elected Member of this House—received 2,500 messages of that kind, and Mr Mann received thousands of abusive messages. Do you still have to make the case for them to do something?



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Mark Gardner: Yes, we have what is called whitelisting status so, if we contact these companies, our concerns are dealt with more quickly and there should be a 24-hour turnaround either way—either the account is suspended or it is not.

Q452 **Chair:** Is there?

Mark Gardner: Generally, yes with Twitter. With Facebook it is less productive, to be honest with you. The resource onus falls upon us or on Tell MAMA or on an MP's office to put this material together, and I think that is very unfair.

Q453 **Chair:** Do you agree with Sir Mick Davis that this phenomenon has just been brought to our attention because of social media—it was there anyway but is now more obvious because people can communicate within minutes all over the world on issues of this kind?

Mark Gardner: The Chief Rabbi expressed it very well. You have on social media the visual impact. Something occurs that gets shared on social media. You look at it literally in the palm of your hand and it hits you right here. That is why hate crime is taken so seriously in general, because a hate crime is defined as a crime against an individual that also impacts against a particular minority community.

The other problem with social media is that it both facilitates and normalises that behaviour by the perpetrators, and it drives them always to be more extreme than before. For us, the social media reports make up about 20% of our annual antisemitic incident total. It is actually not that different from the percentage that hate mail or hateful phone calls used to comprise in the 1990s when we did this work, but the impact of it is multiplied each time, because it does not just occur against one single victim.

Q454 **Chair:** At the dinner I attended last year, when the former Prime Minister David Cameron was speaking, he announced specific funds to be given to CST for the protection of schools or other buildings. Was that forthcoming? Was that enough? Is it time-limited?

Mark Gardner: The funding was for £13.4 million, which is administered by CST: £250,000 of that money goes to CST to administer the funding. The money is renewed each year. It was renewed by Theresa May at our annual dinner in March.

Q455 **Chair:** Is that why you keep inviting them?

Mark Gardner: You know, our community really wants to see those people there, because it gives them a very important—

Q456 **Chair:** If you get a cheque for a quarter of a million every year, it is worth having them, isn't it?

Mark Gardner: You can say that.

Q457 **Chair:** It has been renewed; I was concerned. You said £13.4 million but you get only £250,000.



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Mark Gardner: We get £250,000 to administer the remainder of the money.

Q458 **Chair:** What happens to the other money?

Mark Gardner: The rest of the money gets spent on commercial security guards, primarily at Jewish schools. Every Jewish school across the country has commercial security guards.

Q459 **Chair:** So it's divided—right, I understand. So it still goes to the community but not administered by you.

Mark Gardner: We administer the entire process but we don't receive any money for that. It is a very complicated process.

Q460 **Chair:** How do you raise the rest of your money? There is obviously the dinner that I keep referring to, which is an opportunity to do so. What is your budget for the year to look after the whole of the community?

Mark Gardner: It is now over £7 million.

Q461 **Chair:** Do you raise that all yourself?

Mark Gardner: Yes, we do.

Q462 **Chair:** That is a big task.

Mark Gardner: It is a considerable burden on a community of under 300,000 people.

Q463 **Chair:** That is something that no other community that I can see has had to do. Do you think that you have got to do this in order to protect your community?

Mark Gardner: We believe that the patterns of antisemitic terrorist attacks, which by the way go back to the late 1960s but have continued to worsen since then, now demand that Jewish communities have proper security in place. We are extremely grateful for the financial support that the Government put towards that effort. My primary request of this Committee would be that the money is continued into the next financial year.

Q464 **Chair:** We will all expect the invitation to the dinner.

Sir Mick Davies, let me raise with you finally the issue of Israel and Palestine. Richard Burden told us yesterday that he had been the subject of abuse by raising the Palestinian cause. It seems to be interlinked. When you talk about the left or the left community, is it not usually in the context of the discussion that is ongoing and never ending, as old as life itself it appears, about the problems that are happening in the Middle East? If you took away that problem, would it still have a political dimension?

Sir Mick Davis: I do not believe that taking away the problem of the Israeli-Palestinian impasse would take away the problem of antisemitism. I think antisemitism would find another vehicle.



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As I said earlier, we have had antisemitism for 2,000 years across Christian Europe that took a very blunt form of characterising the physical characteristics of Jews, what they did and how they operated to create an image within society where Jews essentially were not really part of the community of man—they were something apart, something separate, something not quite good enough, something almost dirty. That led to the proposition that I think is the most significant thing in the work of the Holocaust Commission, which is that it enabled society to stand by and watch as the Nazi machine propagated and eventually executed the Holocaust. They could not have done that without the acquiescence of European society across all the countries of Europe that were occupied by Nazi Germany.

Q465 **Chair:** I accept that, but specifically in terms of the Middle East?

Sir Mick Davis: We now have a different manifestation of antisemitism. Antisemitism is about trying to denigrate the Jew and what the Jew stands for. Israel sits at the very heart of Jewish identity. Over 90% of Jews in this country identify their Jewish identity with Israel and the establishment of the modern State of Israel. If you successfully denigrate Israel, and if you successfully demonstrate that Israel is a pariah state that has no right to exist, you effectively challenge what the Jew himself stands for.

Q466 **Chair:** But you can successfully criticise the Government of Prime Minister Netanyahu, or any other Prime Minister, without being accused of antisemitism.

Sir Mick Davis: Indeed. I am on record as criticising Prime Minister Netanyahu, so I absolutely hold that view.

Q467 **Chair:** But you can't be accused of antisemitism. You lead the Jewish Leadership Council.

Sir Mick Davis: At times I have been accused of being a self-hating Jew. You can certainly criticise the actions of Governments and Ministers.

Q468 **Chair:** Can you criticise Zionism?

Sir Mick Davis: No, I don't believe you can criticise Zionism.

Q469 **Chair:** Is that the same as antisemitism?

Sir Mick Davis: Yes, I believe it is.

Q470 **Chair:** But not everyone does?

Sir Mick Davis: I accept that not everybody does, but I also accept that everybody who makes an antisemitic utterance does not think they are being antisemitic. That is not the point; the point is that Zionism is so totally identified with how the Jew thinks of himself, and is so associated with the right of the Jewish people to have their own country and to have self-determination within that country, that if you attack Zionism, you attack the very fundamentals of how the Jews believe in themselves. You create a picture in the mind of society that Jews are associated with



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Zionists and that if Zionism is bad, the Jews are therefore bad. I find no distinction.

On your last point, it is perfectly possible to be philosemitic and a Zionist and yet believe in the right of the Palestinian people to their own land and to an independent country in their own land. There is no contradiction between those two positions.

Chair: Thank you.

Q471 **Mr Winnick:** Would you not accept that one can be totally free of the poison of antisemitism and not accept Zionism?

Sir Mick Davis: I can accept that you might not believe that you are being antisemitic, but I do not believe that, today, you can be against Zionism and not be antisemitic.

Q472 **Mr Winnick:** Would that not lead to a situation where, in the Middle East, you would have to include Muslim people—who have all kinds of different views, as Jews do—as being antisemitic? Can you really not accept the possibility that antisemitism is different from anti-Zionism—that you can be totally opposed, no less than you or I, to antisemitism but at the same time be of the view that— In other words, you can be critical of Zionism while accepting the legitimacy of the State of Israel, which was brought into being, as you know, by a resolution of the United Nations in 1947.

Sir Mick Davis: Mr Winnick, that is what Zionism is. Zionism is about the right of the Jewish people to self-determination in their own state. That is what Zionism is. Zionism is no more than that. If someone doesn't believe in any people's right to self-determination and they are critical of Zionism, I will accept that they are not antisemitic, but if you are prepared to accept that every other nation has a right to self-determination but that the Jewish people do not have that right, I have to say that I think they are antisemitic.

Q473 **Mr Winnick:** Do you think there should be some sort of guidelines so far as Britain is concerned, but not other parts of the world? Inevitably—this includes yourself, apparently—criticism will be made of Israel's Government, not of the right of the state itself to exist. Do you think that one should be able to say, "Yes, obviously, Israel should be subject if necessary to the same criticism as all Governments, but it shouldn't include A, B, C and D"? Do you see some purpose in that?

Sir Mick Davis: Mr Winnick, I am sympathetic to the thrust of what you're saying. I think it might be quite difficult to construct guidance that is all-encompassing. My concern about criticisms of the Government of Israel, Mr Netanyahu or any of his Ministers is not the actual criticism itself; as I said, I am critical of many of the things they do as well. It is when, as the chief ambassador says, I see disproportionate criticism, or criticism only of them and of nobody else who might be guilty of doing the same things. Since 2010, in our own Parliament, we have had 97 early-day motions critical of Israel. We have had only 16 on Syria and nine on North Korea.



To take it more broadly, at the now-reconstructed United Nations Human Rights Council, in the 10 years since it was reconstructed in that form, they have had 67 resolutions on Israel and 61 on the rest of the world. When you have that level of disproportionality, as the Chief Rabbi said, it raises questions about the motivations of the people doing it. I certainly think you should be entitled to criticise the policies and actions of the Government of Israel as you would criticise any other country for doing the same thing if you found it offensive. If you do that, you should not be labelled an antisemite.

Q474 Mr Winnick: You will be pleased to know that in the exchanges during Foreign Office questions this Tuesday, Israel certainly came under criticism from both sides, but following that question, virtually every other country in the world was subject to criticism as well. As I said, that should meet the point you were making.

The final point I want to make is this. To some extent, Mr Loughton raised this with the Chief Rabbi when he was giving evidence. Recognising that there is a section of Muslims—fortunately, I hope you would agree, a small number—who are certainly hate preachers in the business of trying to incite hatred against Jews using Israel as an excuse, and only as an excuse, are you impressed by the way in which the newly elected London Mayor has been conducting himself in carrying out his duties, trying his utmost to work with all communities, not least the Jewish community?

Sir Mick Davis: I am exceptionally impressed. I think he's doing an outstanding job, and he should be warmly congratulated on how he has conducted himself.

Q475 Mr Winnick: Do you think that will help build bridges, particularly in London, leaving aside the hateful elements I have mentioned—perhaps there are some on the Jewish side—between the Muslim and Jewish communities? There is a very strong feeling—I don't know if Mr Gardner accepts it; I think he does, as he is nodding his head—that there is such a gulf, which needs to be narrowed.

Sir Mick Davis: I agree with that, Mr Winnick. I think you're absolutely right.

Q476 Tim Loughton: Mr Gardner, what sort of message do you think it sends when Jewish schools have to have security guards to patrol them?

Mark Gardner: I think it sends a message about the reality of Jewish life across Europe today, and about the reality of the targeting practice that is carried out by jihadist terrorist organisations. I think that Jewish communities are remembering the tragic example of what happened in Buenos Aires, Argentina, in 1994, when a Hezbollah truck bomb destroyed the Jewish community centre, murdering 84 people. It literally ripped the heart out of the Jewish community, destroying the Chief Rabbi's office, the equivalent body to CST and the representative bodies of the Jewish community. The impact of that on a community's sense of belonging in a country and of the willingness of neighbours to have them in their midst is well-nigh catastrophic.



We understand the impact that a successful terror attack against the Jewish community, God forbid, would have. We have seen the impact that it has had in France, for example. Thousands of French Jews now leave that country every year. We have to protect ourselves. We don't want to be in that situation. We worry deeply that it might cause some kind of long-term psychological trauma—for example, when children have to practise hiding under desks and things like that—but unfortunately that is the reality we live in today.

Q477 Tim Loughton: In the UK, obviously there is the terrorism issue, but we have had security guards stationed at Jewish schools for lesser violence or threats of violence not connected with the very serious violence we have seen in terrorist attacks, and because of antisemitic treatment, bullying, physical abuse of our children as well. What impact does that have on the Jewish community who have to send their children to school, but only with some form of protection, and on the neighbouring communities who have in their midst a group of people who have every equal right to be in that community and who require additional protection?

Mark Gardner: I should point out that the security guards are there only because of the terrorist threat, not because of the kind of antisemitic abuse that I suffered as a matter of routine as a Jewish schoolchild growing up in Glasgow, for example. They are there because of the terrorist threat. The UK raised the threat level to "severe" in August 2014, as you know. After the terrorist attacks occurred against Jews in Paris and Copenhagen at the beginning of 2015, there was a reassessment of the threat level against British Jews. As a consequence of that reassessment, the Government felt compelled to make a significant expansion in the number of security guards and in the funding that was available.

That is that particular situation. I accept that it does not send a good message to Jewish children, Jewish parents or the neighbours who live by the schools, but when I look at the pictures from Paris and Brussels and I see soldiers—not commercial security guards, but soldiers—positioned outside synagogues and schools, I think "We mustn't reach that situation. We must do what we can not to end up there."

Q478 Tim Loughton: Sir Mick, I asked the Chief Rabbi this, as you saw. You are well travelled in your business career. How do you think antisemitism in the UK manifests itself differently from in many other countries, including beyond Europe? Obviously you have South African business experience as well. Is there something different about antisemitism here?

Sir Mick Davis: In the UK, as I said earlier, there is a significant amount of antisemitism in the left-wing community that is perhaps not as pronounced across Europe and certainly not across South Africa and Australia, which are countries that I know reasonably well. In France, for instance, the antisemitism unfortunately comes in the main from the Islamic movements, and we have seen that manifested in Belgium and Germany as well. The issue here is that because it comes from the left-wing community, and because the left-wing community generally has a



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strong interface with young Jewish students at universities and things like that, it is so much more pernicious and so much more worrying.

We are dealing with something that is systemic in society. Individual gross incidents of physical antisemitism are intolerable and should not be accepted—they should be dealt with by the law. What we are talking about here is how you create a vision in society, where society emerges having a view of another people as being somewhat less than they are. That is the biggest concern about the nature of antisemitism and the way antisemitism is built up.

Mark Gardner: I have data on this that I can quickly run through. The European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights conducted a survey on exactly this issue in 2013, for which I was part of the survey panel. Basically, it shows that in France and Belgium, in the majority of antisemitic incidents in which somebody is identified, the description is of someone with a Muslim extremist view. In the UK, it is very narrowly less than those with a left-wing political view. Throughout western Europe, those with a left-wing political view and those with a Muslim political view jockey for position as the most predominant perpetrators. In central and eastern Europe, it is someone with a right-wing political view. There is statistical evidence on this and I am very happy to provide it.

Q479 **Tim Loughton:** That is interesting, and it might be useful for the inquiry, but what I am trying to get at, although I may be going down a completely blind alley on this—

Mark Gardner: No, I don't think you are. It's a very interesting question.

Q480 **Tim Loughton:** I just get the impression that in other European countries— I am taking this out of the political context, because you have framed it only in the political context, as did the Chief Rabbi. I am more interested in whether there is some inherent insidious racist or antisemitic gene—not the right word for it—in the population that is not necessarily fired up by politics. Am I right that in certain European countries, Jewish communities are targeted as Jewish communities?

Mark Gardner: Yes.

Q481 **Tim Loughton:** So the vandalism and the daubing of the Star of David on buildings is more pronounced. In the UK, there is antisemitism but, for ordinary people who are not fired up by political doctrine, is it more because they don't like people who are different? It just happens to be that here's a group of Jewish people, but another day it could be that here's a group of black people or whatever. Is there a subtle difference to how we view antisemitism in the UK?

Mark Gardner: There are differences. Part of it may be down to our greater sensitivity to the reporting and classifying of racist incidents than elsewhere throughout Europe. So here, CST and the police both have aggravated criminal incidents. If there is a road-rage crash and somebody throws the word "Jew" into the invective, it becomes racially aggravated. I think we are more sensitive to recording that sort of thing.



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For me, the crucial difference that lies in your question is that antisemitism has never been a political force in the UK in the way it has been on the continent. Antisemitism has been a force in France and in Germany, obviously, so the meaning of these things on the continent is different from here. I did a lot of work for CST in the EU. The difference there when we talked about antisemitism was quite profound. First, they denied that there was a problem, whereas the British Government, through Tony Blair, Gordon Brown, the coalition Government and then David Cameron, did not. This cuts across all political parties, which is why I find the concentration on Labour today so upsetting—necessary, but upsetting. This should be a cross-party political fight. In Europe they denied that it was a problem because they did not want to stain the European project. Now, they can no longer deny the problem. They regard antisemitism as, “If we can’t even keep our Jews safe, what does that say about our European project and what lies beneath it all?” It really is a profound difference.

Q482 Stuart C. McDonald: Thank you both very much for your thought-provoking evidence. I just want to challenge one aspect of your evidence. You focused on early-day motions over a particular period. One of the examples was that there were 97 early-day motions on Israel and nine on North Korea. I wouldn’t go as far as saying that that is a back-handed compliment, but surely that is simply a reflection of the fact that MPs expect that possibly this Parliament or the British Government might have a degree of influence over Israel that they would not have over North Korea—that there are ties and links and that, in terms of human rights and respect for international laws, we would expect higher standards of Israel than of North Korea.

Sir Mick Davis: It is an interesting proposition that you should expect high standards of Israel but not of other countries.

Q483 Stuart C. McDonald: We want all countries to live up to those standards, but, Israel being a western democracy, we anticipate that the views of this country might have greater influence and resonance there than in North Korea.

Sir Mick Davis: That’s a difficult thing for me to comment on. I am not quite sure how early-day motions influence and impact on how politicians and players in Israel think about things. I am sure that they take the views of the British Government and Parliament very seriously, and so they should, because Britain is a very strong ally of Israel. Generally speaking, the political parties across the spectrum have been very good friends of Jews and very supportive of Israel.

Having said all that, there is a fundamental problem when we have a structural issue in society that focuses predominantly on issues and ills that they perceive in Israel, without equivalence for other countries. That is a potential indication of an unhealthy approach to trying to address what is a very complex issue in Israel. Maybe you are right; maybe it is because people have this close affinity and love of Israel, and they are



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challenged by the fact that this errant child is not doing well and they want to urge it on to do better. You could well be right.

Q484 **Stuart C. McDonald:** No, I wasn't suggesting it. You are obviously suggesting that there might be almost sinister reasons for that sort of focus. I am just suggesting that in many cases there are perfectly legitimate reasons why people will take on a particular cause and have a particular focus on the Government of Israel, for example.

Sir Mick Davis: I am not going to disagree with you. Many people take on causes with very good reasons and justification. One would hope that they had equal passion to take on causes where there are much more problematic issues taking place around the world than simply Israel.

Q485 **Stuart C. McDonald:** Moving on, the definition from the European Monitoring Centre is widely accepted as the go-to definition, as it were. It has received some criticism, for example from Professor David Feldman. Do you have any sympathy with criticisms from Professor Feldman or others, or do you agree with EUMC?

Sir Mick Davis: Would you mind if I asked Mr Gardner to pick that up because he is more capable of giving the best answer than I am?

Mark Gardner: When we talk about definitions of antisemitism we should begin with Macpherson, and that complaints should be taken seriously and properly investigated. The failure to take Jewish complaints seriously and investigate them is a very significant factor in the fears that the Jewish community has at the moment about the current leadership of the Labour party.

The first principle should be Macpherson: take the fears seriously and investigate them properly. In particular—we have a name for this; we call it the Livingstone formulation—do not accuse Jews of making it up in order to defend the State of Israel. The reason we have that name for it is because that is what Ken Livingstone has unfortunately become notorious for doing.

When you do that, what do you do? You basically say that all Jews are part of a conspiracy to defend Israel; that a British Jew owes their loyalty primarily to Israel. So, first take Macpherson, then EUMC. The European Monitoring Centre no longer exists. Its role and function were taken over by the Fundamental Rights Agency, which has some different clarifications in its mandate, so does not do definitions any more.

I would advise that we stopped calling it the EUMC because it is no longer that, and it is not the FRA because the FRA does not have that mandate. The FRA does not have definitions for antisemitism, homophobia, ageism, sexism, Islamophobia and so on.

The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance has brought out a very slightly refined version of the EUMC definition, and I think we should use that. I would gladly read it out for you, if you want. I think the bit that has



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caused most contention is the fact that it dares to mention that criticism of Israel might show antisemitism.

It is all about context. Everything is always about context. If you say that Israel is the only country on earth that does not have the right to exist, you probably are antisemitic. If you say, as Sir Mick put it, that all of these Muslim countries do not have the right to be Muslim and, by the way, Israel does not have the right to be a Jewish country, all right. It is not very good for Jews, but I would not call you out as being an antisemite.

Q486 Chair: Thank you. I'm afraid we have to end there. Mr Gardner, I thank you on behalf of the Committee for all the work that your organisation does. It provides an enormously important service. We will bear in mind your wish list when we come to agree the report. Sir Mick, thank you also for coming in. If you have anything to add to what you said, just email us.

Mark Gardner: Can I say that I look forward to Naz Shah returning to this Committee? I met Naz Shah and her contrition and confession of ignorance of the subject and her desire to learn and engage with the Jewish communities was exemplary. I look forward to her return to the Labour party and to this Committee.

Chair: I think she has already returned to the Labour party. She has never been away from the Committee. She stepped aside and she will be rejoining deliberations as soon as this inquiry is over. John Mann is our next witness.

Examination of witness

Witness: John Mann MP.

Q487 Chair: Mr Mann, thank you very much for coming to this meeting. You do so not only because of your knowledge of this subject, but because you chair the All-Party Group Against Antisemitism. This Committee is extremely grateful to you; we are drawing very heavily on your published documents in respect of the inquiry that we are conducting.

May I start by asking you a question about your leader, because you've sent us today a synopsis of what Mr Livingstone said—Mr Livingstone is not your leader, of course—and you have also made comments about Jeremy Corbyn in respect of what has been said. How serious a problem do you think this is within the Labour party?

John Mann: I think antisemitism is a problem in all parties, and over the last 10 years I have documented it in my evidence and we as a committee have documented it. We've challenged all the main parties, without exception, including all the parties whose MPs sit on your Committee here, Mr Vaz. We have challenged them; normally, we have done it privately. We haven't publicised it because we haven't needed to, because those parties have acted and acted effectively, and that's across the political range.



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However, there is certainly a current problem with the Labour party, because in the document that I submitted about what I think it is reasonable to term abuse of myself, a lot of that abuse is from people who purport to be or currently are Labour party members. So clearly, problems that were perhaps previously outside the Labour party have come in more. The role of the leader is to deal with that robustly and I think with the Chakrabarti report he, or whoever is the leader in a month's time, has the basis for—

Q488 **Chair:** Are you planning to stand, Mr Mann?

John Mann: Well, I'd seek nominations, if so. *[Laughter.]*

Q489 **Chair:** Do you think Mr Corbyn has done enough to rebut the serious criticisms that have been made? We ask you because he was a witness before this Committee.

John Mann: If he can see the Chakrabarti report through and implement it that will be significant. In particular, the Chakrabarti report has three key bits in it: the use of the term "Zio", which is to be banned; the use of the term "Nazi" and other descriptors in relation to Israel and the Jewish community, which is to be prohibited; and the use of the term "Zionist" as a term of abuse and insult, which is to be banned.

If those three are delivered within the Labour party, that will have huge positive consequences for the Labour party and well beyond the Labour party. That one on stopping the term "Zionist" being used as a term of abuse and insult could be applied to other political parties in this country and across the world, and in wider civic society. That would be a very significant breakthrough. If he can deliver that, I would be the first to say that he's made a huge breakthrough.

Q490 **Chair:** You've given us and we will publish the list of abuse that you have suffered over a very short period of time. I'm not going to read them all out, but one of them says, "John Mann, why don't you admit you're a Zionist whore then?", and that's probably the mildest of the insults. I don't think it's necessary for me to read them all out, but we will publish this list. This is appalling abuse. How long has this been going on for?

John Mann: This has been going on for the last year. This is a snapshot; I've not got either desire or the time to keep them all. This is a tiny snapshot of the volume. The volume goes into thousands.

What's particularly worrying to me, and I would suggest that it ought to be worrying to your good selves, is that I get criticised on lots of things—like you, Mr Vaz, I often speak my mind and people want to disagree vehemently—but only when I do anything on antisemitism do I get accused of having a puppeteer, do I get asked repeatedly, "How much are you being paid for this?" and do I get accused of being part of a conspiracy. Those are unique—unique—to when I have raised issues of antisemitism.

Anything else that I might say that people might want to disagree with vehemently, it's maybe robust—I think it's fair to say that my exchanges



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with the Scottish National party in the referendum were robust and perhaps occasionally the responses were unacceptably aggressive—but nobody suggested I was being paid to do it, or that someone was my puppet-master, or that I was part of a conspiracy. That, I think, demonstrates that there is a particular invidiousness when it comes to antisemitism.

Q491 Chair: On that subject, do you think the internet communities need to be providing more of a filter? Our mutual colleague, Luciana Berger, has also had a serious amount of abuse on the internet. Do you think others, like Twitter, Facebook and other areas of social media, should be intervening earlier to filter these kinds of abusive remark? Why should it be left to you?

John Mann: Yes, I think they should. I think that we may need to look at consolidating legislation in this country and perhaps adding in the concept that they are required to keep their own conditions of service. They all say in their conditions of service—Twitter, Facebook and so on—that abuse and that kind of thing isn't accepted. If they were to enforce that, it would have a huge impact. But as well, I would suggest that your Committee could consider another point: it is my experience that the police do not have sufficient expertise—or resource—in dealing with hate speech and hate crime on the internet, and everything that we have ever said in relation to antisemitism, and the recommendations that have been implemented also apply to every other group in society that faces discrimination. We have seen that with the disaggregation of hate statistics. My group's recommendation is that that applies to all hate crimes.

There is a final thing that would be hugely significant. Luciana Berger and myself faced abuse from a gentleman who has been in prison and is in prison. My dealings with that case show that there needs to be a single point of contact with the police and the Crown Prosecution Service. There isn't. They say there is, and there isn't. If we—MPs or anyone else who gets this kind of abuse, particularly that is clearly crossing into the criminal sphere—knew a person in a police force dealing with it, who then dealt with other people in other police forces and a single point of contact in the Crown Prosecution Service, that would speed up prosecution and make it far more effective. That isn't working at the moment, and that is one small change that could have a very, very big impact quickly.

Q492 Chair: You mentioned the Labour party, but of course there has been another party in power for the last six years: the Conservatives in a coalition with the Liberals and now a Conservative Government. It is quite clear that they have supported organisations like CST. What is the responsibility of the Government in respect of this rise in antisemitism? We look across to the continent and we see a lot of criticism of the French Government and the way in which they have dealt with the situation there. What practical steps can the Government take to protect the Jewish community?



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John Mann: What I would like from the Theresa May Government is a continuation of the policy of the David Cameron Government, which was a continuation of that of the coalition, which was a continuation of that of the Brown Government and the Blair Government. The biggest success of the All-Party Group on Antisemitism is that over those changes in Government, the framework with which the British Government has dealt with antisemitism has been robust and hasn't been watered down. If the Ministers responsible for specific actions are fast on their feet, the work is superb. We have seen that from Liberals, from Conservatives and from Labour Ministers and from every single party represented in Parliament attending Parliament. We have had good positive interaction without exception, with every party, including over the last year, which is a positive sign.

Q493 **Chair:** You said nice things about the Chakrabarti report, provided it is implemented, but Ms Chakrabarti also said that it is "dangerous to argue guilt by association" and that if one did, it would, "undermine the kind of dialogue and debate that is the basis of peace". She is talking about the Middle East. There is nothing really wrong—is there?—with the leader of your party sharing a platform with a representative of Hamas, if he is trying to persuade Hamas to come to the negotiating table. Is there anything wrong with that?

John Mann: In itself, no. I think people need to be judged on what they do and what they say. What I want to see from political leaders is robustness.

Q494 **Chair:** So it is okay that Jeremy Corbyn has had tea with Salah, and has shared a platform with Hezbollah and Hamas? That's fine, is it?

John Mann: If you, I, Mr Corbyn or anybody else wants to meet with those organisations, it seems to me that if they are doing so to try to further positive ends, that is a good thing. What we shouldn't be dragged into is, when we get caught up with people who are beyond the pale, not being prepared to specify and condemn them.

Q495 **Chair:** Is there someone worse than Hamas and Hezbollah in this respect?

John Mann: There are people around all over the place who say things that are inappropriate and offensive. If they do, and if any of us have shared platforms or been with them, which we may well do in the course of our work, we should be prepared to call them out for it and not pretend that these things have not been said. The key duty of each party leader is to sort out the problem in their own party. That is the position that, as chair of the all-party group, I have expressed for the past 10 years. Sort out your own back yard and your own problems first. If there are people who are transgressing, deliberately or ignorantly, in any of our parties, the role of the party leadership is to sort those people out and, if they are not prepared to apologise and change their tune, to get rid of them.

Q496 **Stuart C. McDonald:** Mr Mann, you spoke about the Chakrabarti report being the basis for robust action. I think everyone has widely welcomed that report, as you would anticipate, but you might have heard the Chief



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Rabbi making one criticism of it, which was that it does not include a definition of antisemitism. Is it problematic in any way that the report doesn't have a clear definition?

John Mann: No, I do not share his criticism. When I had a meeting with Ms Chakrabarti I specifically suggested to her not to include a definition. I am not really one for great intellectual debates on this. We have two working definitions available. We have the Macpherson definition, which is widely accepted in relation to defining racism and what should be done about it, and we have the EUMC definition, which the police use in the College of Policing training manual as guidance to inform in the context of any incidents that arise. I think that provides an effective framework—a package—that allows action to be taken on antisemitism, rather than our spending forever trying to discuss precisely what it is.

To get to the nub of this, I will give an example of what I think is antisemitism and what isn't. If you or I or anybody else wishes to go and protest outside the Israeli embassy about the policies and actions of a democratically elected Government, that is not antisemitic. If you or I or anyone else chooses to go outside a synagogue and do so, that is antisemitic. It seems to me that in the practical application in the real world, the British police are quite a way ahead of the political world in their application of definitions of antisemitism, and in knowing what it is and acting on it. That is key.

For Chakrabarti, in a political party, if someone uses Zionism as a term of abuse or insult and is not prepared to change their approach, you should throw them out. I suggest that your party should adopt the Chakrabarti report, as should other parties in this country, as a working document for how to deal with antisemitism among the membership.

Q497 **Stuart C. McDonald:** You mentioned the EUMC definition of antisemitism. It is broadly accepted, as you have pointed out, but it has had some criticisms, including from Professor Feldman, who I think did some work for the all-party group and was a co-chair of Ms Chakrabarti's report. Do you have any sympathy with where Professor Feldman's coming from in that regard?

John Mann: No. I commissioned the work from Professor Feldman. It is part of the second report—you have our report—and I think the CST outlined that the question of antisemitism is the context in which it is done. I gave the example about protesting outside the Israeli embassy or outside a synagogue. That is a very clear-cut one, but for a lot of people it hasn't been. If you go and daub "Free Palestine" on a Jewish communal building, what on earth is going on there? What is going on in your mind? That is clearly an antisemitic act. In terms of practical application, the dividing line is normally very, very clear. If you want to go and criticise a Government for its actions, go and criticise it, but do not hold the collective of Jewish people in this country responsible for Israel. I also think it is reasonable that if we are looking at human rights, we ought to be looking across the world and with equal vigour holding every country to account. The difference with Israel tends to be that some people manage



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to conflate existence of a democratic state with criticisms, however strong, of its actions. When we do that with Zimbabwe, there is probably quite a lot of uniformity that it is not a particularly well run state or Government and we are happy to robustly criticise it, but we don't say "Let's question whether Zimbabwe should exist." It weakens the case when people do that. I see no rationale for those who want to influence things doing it.

Q498 Chair: We spoke to Richard Burden yesterday when we met the Friends groups—the Labour Friends, Conservative Friends and Liberal Democrat Friends of Israel and of Palestine—and he said that he faced a huge amount of abuse when he spoke in the House or outside in support of the Palestinian cause. Do you accept that those who support Israel are not the only ones who might face that kind of abuse on social media?

John Mann: I think it would be inaccurate to do a comparison. When I visited Ramallah, Nablus and Hebron with what was then called the Palestinian Liberation Organisation, I received some strong criticism for doing so. I would not regard that as abuse; I regard it as political criticism. There is a world of difference between the kind of stuff I receive pretty much on a daily basis and the stuff that Jewish Members of Parliament—particularly Jewish Members of Parliament who define themselves as Zionist—receive. There is a world of difference between that and even unacceptably robust challenges in the other direction, so I don't think the analogy is a fair one at all. I think there is a danger in it, because it undermines the dangers of antisemitism, which is part of racism.

Q499 Chair: Here's one: "Richard Burden MP and his peaceable Arab neo-Nazi Jew-hating Muslim friends". That sounds pretty strong. It doesn't sound of a different order.

John Mann: Entirely unacceptable.

Q500 Chair: Yes, but you were saying that the abuse you get for supporting Israel was of a different order. The volume may be much higher, but it seems pretty upsetting to receive something of that kind.

John Mann: One of the interesting things—it is upsetting for anyone to receive any kind of abuse. Social media is leading to people expressing, from a cowardly sedentary position, things that they may not be prepared to say to your face. But I come back to the fact that I have received plenty of abuse, but it is only when I speak about antisemitism, such as in my challenges to Mr Livingstone, that I get repeatedly asked, "Who is paying for you? Who is your puppet master?"—talk of a Zionist conspiracy. Interestingly, I am also abused for being Jewish or indeed for hiding the fact that I am Jewish, which I happen not to be, though I don't see why that should make any difference at all. I get abused for being Jewish, I get abused for not being Jewish and I get abused for it not being clear in some people's eyes whether I am Jewish. I don't get that when I make remarks that are perhaps controversial to people on other issues.

Q501 Chair: Like drugs, for example?



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John Mann: Like drugs, or anything else: Europe or Scottish independence. It is pretty robust and sometimes over the top—sometimes too over the top—but it is not even vaguely in the order of this. That comparison with the Scottish referendum is a reasonable one: it was pretty heavy dialogue on the internet, and sometimes it was too heavy, but it wasn't anything like this. Interestingly, there wasn't racism thrown into it, just what I call general abuse—anti-Labour abuse, anti-Westminster abuse, etc. Here it is racist abuse, and that is critically, distinctly different.

Q502 **Chair:** Do you regret the abuse to which you subjected the elderly gentleman who was trying to get into the BBC at Millbank a few weeks ago, when you confronted him and made very serious accusations about him? Do you regret all that?

John Mann: I always think that moderation in language and use of non-expletives is more appropriate, given the opportunity. Again, with Mr Livingstone, I would politely, calmly show him this book from the Left Book Club, "The Jewish Question", written in 1934 by George Sacks, a Marxist, which fairly dramatically shows what was happening to the Jewish community in Nazi Germany when Mr Livingstone was suggesting they were working with the Zionists. I refer to my evidence, where—

Q503 **Chair:** Yes. Having seen what he said to this Committee, do you think that he has now clarified that he was not actually antisemitic in the comments that he made, or do you think that—

John Mann: Not in the slightest, and in some of the things that the press broadcast highlights didn't include: in a rather long debate I had with him, a corridor debate which went on for about 15 minutes, he repeatedly said that the 1932 Nazi party manifesto was his evidence base to show that Hitler supported Zionism. There was no 1932 Nazi party manifesto. He cannot source it from anywhere else, because it didn't exist. The Nazi party policy at that time—I have included it in my documents—was the 1920 policy. It was express in relation to the Nazi view of Jews, and how they weren't Germans but aliens. I have included the extract from "Mein Kampf". Hitler was not pro-Zionist; indeed, Hitler's whole ethos was ensuring there was no Jewish state to allow international Jewry to organise themselves against him and against the rest of the world.

Q504 **Mr Winnick:** Wouldn't it be unfortunate, Mr Mann, if what I hope is considered to be a serious inquiry into antisemitism became an issue of Mr Livingstone? I don't think he has such significance, and I very much doubt that his interpretation of what happened in Nazi Germany and the agreement which was made is held by any serious-minded person. Would you agree that it would be best—perhaps the Chair couldn't resist—to leave Mr Livingstone aside and concentrate on the more serious issue of antisemitism?

John Mann: The only problem with Mr Livingstone is the question of why he chose to intervene that day. I remind the Committee that his commentary, which I had heard half an hour before I accidentally bumped into him, was to defend the comments of Naz Shah, MP. I had spent the



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previous day with my office, working with Naz Shah and her office. She was working with the Jewish community. She had understood the offence created by what she had said a year before. She had recognised that, and taken a very brave and courageous stance to do something about it.

I had actually spoken twice in the media saying I hoped the Labour party wouldn't suspend her—they did—precisely because she had come to terms with it, yet the next day, Mr Livingstone went on to Radio London supporting the statements that Naz Shah had disassociated herself from. What is going on in his mind?

Q505 Mr Winnick: Mr Mann, is it not the fact that virtually every historian of the Nazi period—Richard Evans, and many others—has dismissed Mr Livingstone's warped interpretation of that particular agreement? Every historian realises that the aim of the Nazis from the moment they took power—indeed before, but they could implement it when they were in power—was to do everything to harass and persecute Jews and make their lives as miserable as possible, and to drive them out of Germany? Really, there is no significance in emphasising Mr Livingstone's remarks while I am asking you questions, because they are not upheld by any serious historian.

John Mann: Or indeed even any non-serious historian, Mr Winnick. You are absolutely correct.

Q506 Chair: Indeed. I think enough of Mr Livingstone. Let me end with this comment, which came up yesterday as well, about the issue of people who are anti-Zionist as opposed to antisemitic. Do you think someone can be anti-Zionist without being antisemitic?

John Mann: Of course they can, but as the Chakrabarti report very effectively highlights, expressly the use of the term "Zionist" as a term of abuse or insult should be wholly and absolutely unacceptable in any context. If a Jewish person wishes to define themselves as being a Zionist, that is their right and privilege. Similarly, if they choose not to, that is their right and privilege.

Q507 Chair: But some have said that being an anti-Zionist is actually the first stage on the process of being an antisemite.

John Mann: Where I like the Chakrabarti report is that she equated the use of the term "Zio" to the use of the term "Paki", and I agree. That is an appropriate analogy.

Q508 Chair: But Mr Mann, you have been in the Labour party for 40 years. That is even longer than me, although obviously not as long as Mr Winnick. Have you ever been to a meeting where people have used these terms?

John Mann: Yes.

Q509 Chair: You have? In Bassetlaw?

John Mann: Absolutely. I have been in meetings in the Labour party over my 40-odd years of membership where people have made overt antisemitic remarks about Jewish members in the room. I will not name



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any individuals, but for anyone to suggest that they have been in the Labour party as long as me and have not heard or seen antisemitism, they are in self-denial. It is not as bad as the traditional antisemitism, as it used to be. You do not get people in Labour party meetings now, as you did, talking about the "tight Jews" and things like that. You certainly did.

Antisemitism still exists. It exists now. Some of the events this year in local Labour party meetings were overtly and expressly antisemitic. That is why it is vitally important that whoever is leading the Labour party gets a grip on it and gets these people out, because that discourse damages the Labour party and the body politic in this country, because this is not simply a Labour party problem.

Chair: Mr Mann, you have been extremely helpful. Thank you very much. We are going to draw on much of the reports that your all-party group has produced. We thank you and through you, them, for the incredibly important work you do on behalf of Parliament in highlighting this issue. We are really grateful that you came here today. As a Committee, we totally deplore the abuse that you personally have suffered in pursuing your legitimate duties as a Member of this House, and we will reflect that in very robust terms when we come to publish our report.