

Mr Corbyn, time to say you were wrong

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[This piece, by David Hirsh, is in the Jewish Chronicle.](#)

Dear Mr Corbyn,

You want a fairer and more equal society. You want us to look after each other. You want a society of freedom, justice and reason.

But there is something preventing your message from getting a fair hearing. You seem ambivalent about democratic values.

You worked for Press TV, the Iranian regime's propaganda channel and you recommend Russia Today, Putin's version. You appear in cosy pictures with Hugo Chavez, with Hamas, with Gerry Adams (days after the Brighton bombing) and with Hezbollah. You said that Nato is the aggressor in Ukraine and that Daesh is no worse than the USA. You were the national chair of Stop the War even when it appeared to endorse the killing of British soldiers. You celebrated the anniversary of the Iranian revolution.

If you want to neutralise the accusations that you cosy up to dictators, and to antisemites, then let me help. What you need to do is simple.

You need to reassure us that you understand the problem and that you have put it behind you.

Be for warmer relations with Russia and for the deal with Iran if you want, but don't embrace the murderous authoritarians who rule them.

Reassure us that you value self-determination for every nation, including Ukraine, including Israel. Show that you understand why working for Press TV was wrong.

If you are for democracy, stop being soft on those who hate democracy. Kurds, Christians, gay people, women, secularists and socialists in Iraq and Syria have no choice but to fight Daesh; you should support them.

You think we were right to fight the Nazis in the past; why can't you oppose the kind of fascism that we face here and now?

You don't have to be for starting a war with Daesh and Assad; but you do have to make it clear that in principle you side with those struggling against fascism and for democracy. If you do side with them, say it now, say it clearly and put the ambivalence behind you.

And then there is the issue of antisemitism.

We know you don't hate Jews and you do hate Nazis. But you do have a history of leaping to the defence of blood libellers and conspiracists, consorting with Holocaust deniers and politically embracing antisemitic organisations.

Antisemitism is an indicator of something wrong at the heart of any world view that tolerates it. It is not a parochial issue only of concern to Jews.

There has always been a temptation to imagine Jews as powerful, selling the oppressed to the exploiters for silver. The image of Jews as enablers of injustice, twisters of words and doers of evil runs deep; it is old and emotionally virulent; it lurks still in the collective subconscious. Antisemitism mobilises around vile myth instead of around rational critique. The anger at injustice that powers democratic movements can resemble the radical resentment that fuels totalitarian movements; but they are profoundly different.

So far, you have treated allegations of antisemitism as a dirtier trick than antisemitism itself.

The assumption is that those who raise the issue do so because it will damage your campaign against austerity, not because they are really concerned about antisemitism. In any case, people increasingly downplay the importance of antisemitism, seeing it as an understandable response to Israeli cruelty.

The result is that we are taught to think of Jews who raise concerns about antisemitism as being enemies of the progressive movement.

It is in your power to neutralise this issue by showing that you understand the distinction between criticism of Israel and antisemitism.

Put the defence of blood libellers and conspiracists behind you; take notice in future, when people warn you that there are Holocaust deniers running campaigns you support. Thank the people who told you, instead of accusing them of being Zionist smearers. Tell us you now understand what you did wrong.

You are a patron of the Palestine Solidarity Campaign so you will know that the PSC's main business is boycotting Israel. Show us that you understand the menace of the campaign to exclude Israelis, and only Israelis, from the global community.

Show us that you understand how the campaign against ordinary Israelis is also a campaign against Jews here in Britain.

Sometimes you do say you are for a two-state solution; you say you hate antisemitism. So support those who fight for peace, not Hamas and Hezbollah who fight for victory over the Jews rather than peace with Israel.

Be clear and unambiguous about this and it will go away as an issue.

Please don't calculate that a little antisemitism among your supporters will buoy you along.

At the moment, lots of Jews feel locked out of the party; both the Labour Party and also the carnival of joy and optimism. Your new Labour Party does not feel like a safe place for Jews. Imagine how that feels.

I remember my dad telling me that no Jew in the East End, when he was a boy, voted Tory. If you choose, you can bring lots of us back. You wouldn't look weak for your new clarity on

democracy and on antisemitism. You would look like a new kind of politician, able to listen and able to learn.

Maybe you can't do it. Maybe you have supported and defended dictators, terrorists and antisemites because doing so really is core to your politics.

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