

Jeremy Corbyn: Feeding the Hate of Israel

The first Saturday in September will see Israel's national soccer team travel to Cardiff, the capital of Wales, for a crucial qualifying game for next year's European Championship in France. As is becoming the norm when any Israeli athletes travel abroad, the team will also face protests off the field, led by activists who believe that Israel has no right to compete internationally in the first place.

I mention this forthcoming event because one of the speakers addressing the anti-Israel rally outside the soccer stadium is Jeremy Corbyn, a far-left member of the U.K. parliament for the opposition Labor Party and, more importantly, the current front-runner in the battle for that party's leadership. If Corbyn ends up winning the contest—triggered by the resignation of former leader Ed Miliband, following his poor showing in the U.K.'s general election earlier this year—we will have a vocal supporter of the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement at the helm of one of Europe's more august left-wing parties.

Corbyn is a patron of the U.K.'s pro-BDS Palestine Solidarity Campaign, which is well known for its anti-Semitic targeting of Israel through its constant comparisons of the Jewish state with Nazi Germany and apartheid-era South Africa. But that, arguably, is the least of it.

During the last week, Corbyn has been confronted in the media over his connections to a London-based Holocaust denier and "Palestine solidarity" activist named Paul Eisen. In the past, Corbyn has vocally defended Ra'ed Salah, the leader of the Islamic Movement in Israel, despite Salah's endorsement of the anti-Semitic blood libel and his claim that Jews were warned in advance of the September 11, 2001 al-Qaeda terrorist

atrocities.

When Salah got into a legal tussle with the British authorities during an extended stay in the U.K., Corbyn urged a parliamentary inquiry into the influence of the “pro-Israel Lobby” on government policy. This sinister statement was made after it emerged that the Community Security Trust (CST), a professional and highly respected body that deals with security for the U.K.’s Jewish community, had provided evidence of Salah’s toxic views to the government.

Now, Corbyn is seemingly going to lead the charge against the U.K. presence of the Israeli soccer team—which, ironically, only plays in European competitions because the Jewish state was expelled from the Asian Football Confederation in 1974, thanks to the diktat of the Arab League boycott of Israel. Since Corbyn is an enthusiastic supporter of dictators like the now-dead Hugo Chavez in Venezuela and the still-living Vladimir Putin in Russia, it won’t bother him that the Arab boycott was pushed by some of the worst human rights abusers in history. In fact, he won’t be content until Israel is completely isolated, not just in the Middle East but in every corner of the globe.

No wonder, then, that a poll from London’s *Jewish Chronicle* newspaper reveals that almost 70 percent of British Jews are “concerned” by the prospect of Corbyn leading the Labor Party, with an overwhelming 83 percent expressing alarm at Corbyn’s infamous description of Hamas and Hezbollah as “our friends.”

What does this tell us? Most immediately, it tells us that the vast majority of British Jews aren’t buying the nonsense that anti-Zionism isn’t anti-Semitism, and that BDS carefully separates between Jews on the one hand and Israelis on the other. Much of the crowd who will cheer Israel’s soccer stars will be composed of British Jews expressing their emotional and cultural affinity with the Jewish state. And because they

will dare to do that, they will be harassed by a mob baying slogans about Israel's supposed war crimes and racist roots, led by a man who aspires to become Britain's prime minister.

Corbyn clearly doesn't feel overly perturbed by the chatter about anti-Semitism that is dogging him; when the *Jewish Chronicle* published a series of questions addressed to him, instead of picking up the phone and calling them—as any politician who cared about the feelings of the Jewish community would naturally do—he appointed a spokesperson to engage in an email exchange with the paper. Thus did readers learn that “Jeremy” considers that “Holocaust denial is vile and wrong,” though at no point did “Jeremy” condemn by name any of the Holocaust deniers and conspiracy theorists (among them the followers of Lyndon Larouche, an American far-right leader) with whom he has associated.

Corbyn can take this relaxed attitude because he knows that his supporters regard accusations of anti-Semitism as a political smear with no credibility. This view is commonplace enough among progressives in America as well. By contrast, the term “anti-Zionism” is one they embrace warmly, regarding it as integral to their matrix of progressive values and goals, alongside opposition to austerity policies, environmental activism, “solidarity” with “progressive” regimes in the developing world, implacable hostility to any military actions undertaken by democratic governments, and so on.

Tellingly, the *Jewish Chronicle* poll includes a clever question that Jewish pollsters in America should also be asking: How do you feel when a politician describes himself or herself as “anti-Zionist?” The paper reported, “More than 44 percent say they ‘always’ think such a statement really means ‘anti-Jewish,’ with a further 27 percent saying they ‘often’ think the claim is anti-Semitic in its intent.”

It continued, “In total, almost 90 percent of Jews feel that ‘anti-Zionist’ is used as shorthand for ‘anti-Jewish’ by

politicians.”

Slowly, slowly, does the mask fall: anti-Semitism has twisted itself into anti-Zionism. We saw that graphically in Spain this week, when a reggae festival disinvited the American-Jewish singer Matisyahu after he refused to condemn Israel. Encouragingly, the fact that the festival backed down after a wave of protest, reinstating Matisyahu’s invitation, shows that there are many non-Jews coming around to a similar view.

We need to send a wake-up call to proudly identifying anti-Zionists like Jeremy Corbyn: refraining from attacks on Jews as Jews isn’t enough to absolve them of the charge of anti-Jewish bigotry. Substituting the word “Zionist” for “Jew,” or consorting with active anti-Semites (and then distancing yourself from them only once these meetings become public knowledge), is a shabby trick, and we are smarter than that. Crucially, we understand that the immediate target of Western anti-Zionists isn’t Israel, but Jews in their own countries who identify with Israel.

Before I close, I should answer any reader who is wondering whether Jeremy Corbyn could actually end up as British prime minister. Given that many pundits are predicting that his own party will split if he wins the leadership, and that Labour has invariably been unelectable when it leans too far to the left, one would think that the chances are slim. But even as opposition leader, he will gain a bully pulpit that he could only have dreamed of just a decade ago.

Ben Cohen, senior editor of *The Tower Magazine*, writes a weekly column for on Jewish affairs and Middle Eastern politics. His writings have been published in *Commentary*, the *New York Post*, *Haaretz*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and many other publications. He is the author of *Some of My Best Friends: A Journey Through Twenty-First Century Anti-Semitism*

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