

Councillor Jo Bird - A674976

I re-joined the Labour Party in 2015 to work for justice and equality.

My mother, Rica Bird, talked recently about our long tradition of Jewish socialism. She said she is “very proud of how at least 4 generations of my family have defied antisemitism. My Grandma and her mother, poor Jewish peasants, fled to Britain from the terror of pogroms and persecution of the marauding Cossacks in Russian Tsarist-occupied Poland at the turn of the 20th Century. My father, her son, as a Jewish working-class conscript in the British Army defied the Nazi onslaught during the



terror of the Second World War. I, as a 7-year-old in my local council Junior school with 70% Jewish pupil population, of which I was one, defied the terror of the openly antisemitic headmaster”.

As a Jewish person, I have been very welcome in the Labour Party. Despite some of our political differences, I have a good working relationship with Alison McGovern, including as a popular candidate and ward councillor. She was my MP until last month when I moved out of Wirral South. We - as Chair of Progress and a spokesperson for Jewish Voice for Labour - set a good example of the ‘broad church’ the Labour Party can be at its best.

Response to questions from Governance and Legal Unit

1. Yes.
2. No, not exactly.

This meeting was recorded. I can confirm I said at this meeting “Jewish Voice for Labour is calling for disciplinary proceedings to be paused until a due process has been established based on principles of natural justice. Its what I call Jew process.” [no indefinite article “a”].

I continued, “Just this afternoon Jennie Formby has announced proposals for big improvements to the disciplinary process within the Labour Party and quite a lot of it is based on the principles of natural justice, so that’s excellent.”

I would hope the meaning, as explained above, would be clear to any ‘fair minded and unbiased observer’. I do not see how anyone would think it right to conduct disciplinary proceedings without due process and natural justice.

Your letter does not explain how my words in context could be seen as a breach of Labour Party rules. If you could explain, I will reflect and respond.

By way of further explanation, I refer to Shami Chakrabarti’s report, published on 30 June 2016. Her report has been accepted by the Labour Party and many of its recommendations have been included into policy and practice.

I was referring to Shami Chakrabarti’s advice on Publicity (p18) that “The Labour Party should seek to uphold the strongest principles of natural justice, however difficult the circumstances, and to resist subjecting members to a trial by media.”

I was supporting her report Recommendation 14, “a moratorium on triggering new investigations into matters of relevant language and conduct arising before publication.”

Regarding ‘due and Jew process’, most people recognise this as a play on words, as due and Jew sound very similar when said out loud.

Throughout my lived Jewish experience, self-deprecating humour and puns like this are very common. For example, this particular play on words was used by Woody Allen in Annie Hall, and the Jewish Chronicle only 3 years ago.

I am sorry for any offence caused by my plays on words – that was not my intention.

3. and 4. are related issues.

At this meeting I said, “Seriously, one of the things that does worry me is the privileging of racism against Jews over and above – as more worthy of resources – than other forms of racism and discrimination. Racism against black people, Muslim people and migrants can be measured in detentions, deportations and deaths. So let’s have a sense of proportion and perspective in this current situation.

“Now every form of racism does need a time and a place for discussion, and every form is different. But privileging one group over another is divisive. It’s bad for the many as well as bad for the Jews.”

Earlier in the meeting I said, “Because one of the good things that Chakrabarti did, and that her report did, was place antisemitism where it should be – not on a pedestal but alongside other forms of racism.”

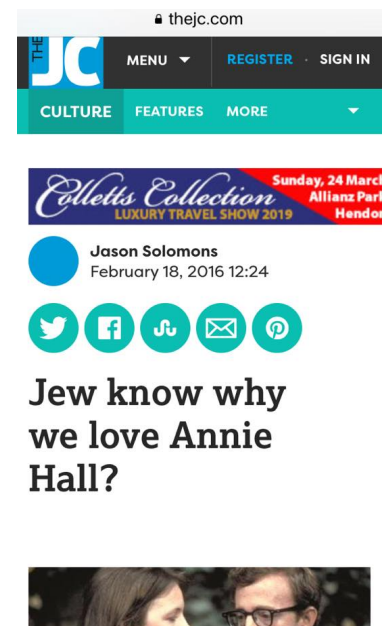
I was supporting many of Shami Chakrabarti’s Recommendations, including 1, 2, 3, which refer to different kinds of racial epithets, “any particular person or group” and “any group of people” respectively.

I had earlier talked about “Jeremy Corbyn’s track record of standing up for social justice – from Hillsborough to Grenfell and from Windrush to Anti-Apartheid and crucially to Gaza”. As well as these examples of social and racial justice issues, perhaps I should have added more explanation about structural racism, in this country, at this time in history.

I would hope the meaning, as explained above, would be clear to any ‘fair minded and unbiased’ observer. I do not see how anyone would think it right to privilege one type of racism, nor one group, over another.

Your letter does not explain how my words in context could be seen as a breach of Labour Party rules. If you could explain, I will reflect and respond.

By way of further explanation, I was also supporting Clause IV of Labour Party: our Aims, “where we live together freely, in a spirit of solidarity, tolerance and respect”; and Values “A JUST SOCIETY, which judges its strength by the condition of the weak as much as the strong, provides security against fear, and justice at work; which nurtures families, promotes equality of opportunity, and delivers people from the tyranny of poverty, prejudice and the abuse of power”.



Rule 2.1.8 places “race; religion or belief” and “racism, antisemitism, Islamophobia or otherwise racist language, sentiments, stereotypes or actions” alongside each other. This rule does not privilege one form of racism over another.

5. This meeting was held on 30 May 2018. A high proportion of people in the room were fellow Jews, as I know them personally. I was neither a councillor nor a candidate for local election at that point.

Given that all these issues have been in the public domain for 8 months¹, the nature of the complaint and my apology - I believe suspension (on 4th March 2019) before investigation is disproportionate in my case. Suspension goes against Chakrabarti’s Recommendation 10 on Interim Suspension and advice given in her report (p18-19).

I would like to know why and how complaints and suspension have been made at this time, in this way and by whom?

I have formally complained that the Labour Party press office told journalists about my suspension and linked it to antisemitism, thereby breaching my data, breaking confidentiality of the disciplinary process and smearing my name. I am experiencing the Party’s conduct towards me as bullying.

In addition, I now have to deal with hate emails and misrepresentation in the media. All this is causing me a great deal of stress. The Party owes a greater duty of care to its members than shown to me thus far. I hope to receive an apology.

I believe the Party’s decision to suspend me and link it to antisemitism through the media, continues to bring the Party into disrepute. It is in our mutual interest to expedite the process and clear my name.

6. Yes.

7. I repeat the answer in 2. Above

¹ 21st May 2018 – My article, Do No Harm, went onto *Jewish Voice for Labour* website. www.jewishvoiceforlabour.org.uk/blog/do-no-harm/

18th June – *Labour Briefing* website publishes the article you provided.

20th June – The *Jewish Chronicle* www.thejc.com/news/uk-news/jewish-voice-for-labour-jo-bird-antisemitism-1.465767 refers to the Labour Briefing article and to my other article on *Jewish Voice for Labour* website www.jewishvoiceforlabour.org.uk/blog/what-is-it-to-be-jew-ish/. This *JC* article reported that ‘Ivor Caplin, the new Jewish Labour Movement chair, told the *JC* “We have asked for the Party to investigate her comments.”’

4th March 2019 at 8:42 - the *Jewish Chronicle* reports ‘due/Jew process’ out of context. <https://www.thejc.com/news/uk-news/chris-williamson-warned-of-dark-forces-undermining-corbryn-as-councillor-joked-about-jew-process-1.480882>

8. I repeat the answer in 3. and 4. above.

I wrote, “abuses of power are measured in detentions, deportations and deaths – so let’s have a sense of proportion in perspective in the current situation. Of course, every type of racism is different, is wrong and needs a time and a place for discussion. And privileging one group over another is divisive. It’s bad for the many as well as the Jews.”

In addition, it’s a play on words in the phrase ‘for the many not the few’, because few rhymes with Jews.

I am sorry for any offence caused by my plays on words – that was not my intention.

Your letter does not explain how my article could be seen as a breach of Labour Party rules. If you could explain, I will reflect and respond.

9. I have upheld this rule. I demonstrated no hostility, prejudice nor hatred towards another person nor group based on a protected characteristic.

Owen Jones reflected many of the thousands of messages of support I have received. He tweeted, “Look, I really don’t think suspending Jewish members of the Labour party for making puns about being Jewish is in any way part of the fight against antisemitism. This is obviously absurd and an injustice.”



Owen Jones 
@OwenJones84

Look, I really don’t think suspending Jewish members of the Labour party for making puns about being Jewish is in anyway part of the fight against antisemitism. This is obviously absurd and an injustice.

10. I am not clear what is being asked. If you are asking did I treat all people with dignity and respect, then yes, I did.

I am sorry if my self-deprecating sense of humour has caused offence to anyone including fellow Jewish people – that was not my intention.

11. I am sorry for any offence caused by my plays on words – that was not my intention.

I apologised quickly and publicly – including on my facebook page and speaking at Wirral Council meeting held the same day, 4th March 2019.

As an elected councillor and having risen in the public eye, I am more aware that my comments could be mis-construed.

12. I am not clear what is being asked. These days, I am more likely to say the phrase ‘proper process’ than ‘due process’.

If, after understanding the context and meaning, you consider this content to be a breach of the rules - I would like to understand why, so I could reflect and respond.

10 March 2019