



# Antisemitism and Politics

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# Antisemitism and Politics

## Is antisemitism a party-political problem?

Nearly all UK political parties and movements have, at some point in their existence, faced allegations of anti-Jewish racism. Antisemitism crosses the political spectrum and historical time periods.

## Does antisemitism manifest differently on the political right and the political left?

Yes and no - antisemitic themes and terminology can often shift depending on the political perspective of those employing them. However, despite the apparent differences, antisemitism on both the right and left finds roots in some of the same antisemitic sources.



The age-old antisemitic conspiracy theory of Jews' global control of the banks, the media, and politics for their own nefarious purposes, can be presented in different ways. On the far-left, this trope might be expressed through hostility to so-called 'global elites', in opposition to what some deem to be an international capitalist system, underpinned by international banking networks.<sup>1</sup>

While this antisemitic canard has sometimes centered on the Rothschild family, left-wing antisemitism often now includes allegations of a 'Zionist lobby', or unnatural Israeli powers. The suggestion being that Israel, here conceived of as both the collective 'Jew' and a capitalist instrument or imperialist outpost, is somehow steering world politics from the shadows.<sup>2</sup>

On the far-right, the allegation of Jewish power is less often framed as anti-Israel rhetoric;

1. <https://www.hopenothate.org.uk/2020/10/27/left-wing-antisemitism-an-explainer/>

2. *ibid*

instead, Jews are alleged to be secretly trying to destroy what its proponents term Western white Christian society, through mass immigration, particularly from the Middle East.<sup>3</sup> These tropes, known as the White Replacement Theory, often focus on Jewish groups or figures, for example, the Jewish billionaire philanthropist, George Soros.<sup>4</sup> This theory has been espoused by extremists responsible for terrorist attacks including the Christchurch Mosque massacre in New Zealand, the murder of 11 Jewish worshippers at the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and at white supremacist rallies in Charlottesville, Virginia.<sup>5</sup>

## Does antisemitism on the left or right occur in mainstream UK political parties?

Yes, there have been reports of antisemitism in a number of parties.

The Labour Party has been marred with allegations of antisemitism for several years. In 2020, the Equality and Human Rights Commission conducted an investigation into antisemitism in the Labour Party, and found that it had breached the Equality Act in respect of its Jewish members, acting unlawfully in respect of harassment, political interference in antisemitism complaints, and inadequate training for those handling the complaints processes.<sup>6</sup>



An image posted on social media by a Green party representative who later apologised

Labour MPs, Councillors, National Executive Committee members and others faced allegations of antisemitism, and the Jewish Labour Movement has repeatedly explained the hurtful impact that anti-Jewish racism had on its members and the wider Jewish community.<sup>7</sup>

Antisemitism is not restricted to the Labour Party, and allegations have been made against Conservatives too. For example, during a House of Commons debate in 2014, Andrew Bridgen MP suggested that 'the political system of the world's superpower and our great ally the United States is very susceptible to well-funded powerful lobbying groups and the power of the Jewish lobby in America.'<sup>8</sup> Bridgen later confirmed that he still stood by his original statement. In 2016,

3. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/aug/05/great-replacement-theory-alt-right-killers-el-paso>

4. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/sethcohen/2020/09/12/the-troubling-truth-about-the-obsession-with-george-soros/?sh=5336bc6d4e2e>

5. <https://www.thejc.com/comment/opinion/conspiracism-threatens-both-jews-and-muslims-1.494417>; <https://www.adl.org/education/references/hate-symbols/you-will-not-replace-us>

6. <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/investigation-into-antisemitism-in-the-labour-party.pdf>

7. <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/apr/28/timeline-events-leading-to-ken-livingstone-suspension-labour>; <https://news.sky.com/story/12-shocking-claims-of-abuse-in-leaked-labour-antisemitism-dossier-11879053>

8. <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201415/cmhansrd/cm141013/debtext/141013-0002.htm>; <https://jewishnews.timesofisrael.com>

Richard Fuller MP said of Sir Philip Green's sale of department store BHS: 'If the sale was done on the understanding that it was avoiding responsibility for those pension losses, then the £1 received was the equivalent to 30 pieces of silver in his betrayal of the employees and pensioners at BHS.' It was suggested that the use of '30 pieces of silver' was a reference to the price Judas allegedly received for betraying Jesus and was particularly offensive when employed in reference to a Jewish businessman.<sup>9</sup>

Former Liberal Democrat MP, David Ward, was expelled by his party in 2017 having accused Jewish people of;

## ***"inflicting atrocities on Palestinians"***

Prior to this, in 2013, he signed the House of Commons Holocaust memorial book with a note stating:

***"I am saddened that the Jews ... could within a few years of liberation from the death camps be inflicting atrocities on Palestinians in the new State of Israel and continue to do so on a daily basis in the West Bank and Gaza."*** <sup>10</sup>

He also stated that it is 'a shame there isn't a powerful, well-funded Board of Deputies for Roma,' playing into the age-old antisemitic trope that rich Jews buy power.<sup>11</sup> In September 2020, the Liberal Democrats were forced to suspend a London mayoral candidate,<sup>12</sup> Geeta Sidhu Robb, for previously urging Muslim voters not to vote for a Jewish candidate. Footage emerged showing Geeta Sidhu Robb saying, 'Don't vote for a Jew, Jack Straw is a Jew,'. She has apologised for her comments.<sup>13</sup>

In 2018, the Scottish National Party (SNP) suspended party member Gareth Wardell for a blog post that Wardell denied was antisemitic - despite citing Hitler and Mein Kampf, to criticise a prominent Jewish Labour activist.<sup>14</sup> In November 2015, former Scottish MP Sandra White retweeted a cartoon image of piglets representing amongst others the US, UK, and Al Qaeda,

9. <https://www.thejc.com/comment/opinion/green-bhs-and-the-ethics-of-business-1.56330>

10. <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/liberal-democrat-mp-david-ward-in-row-over-holocaust-remarks-g9bhnkrwffw>

11. <https://www.thejc.com/comment/leaders/libdem-s-inaction-over-david-ward-is-contemptible-1.51120>

12. <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/lib-dem-geeta-sidhu-robb-dropped-over-antisemitism-qsrvcfb>

13. *ibid*

14. <https://www.heraldsotland.com/news/17188181.blogger-snp-anti-semitism-row-defends/>

suckling a large pig with the word 'Rothschild' emblazoned across it, together with other antisemitic imagery.<sup>15</sup> A party spokesperson, and Sandra White herself, later apologised.<sup>16</sup>



An image retweeted on social media by an SNP representative who later apologised

## How can antisemitism in politics be countered?

Ultimately, educating oneself and others about anti-Jewish racism is key to rooting out antisemitism across society, including in politics. There are many examples of politicians who, having previously been accused of antisemitism, participate in antisemitism training programmes and are better equipped to identify antisemitic tropes and misinformation. Neale Hanvey of the SNP, for example, has detailed his experience and the impact that learning more about antisemitism had on his understanding of the phenomenon.<sup>17</sup>

Society bears a collective responsibility to tackle racism. Challenging antisemitism, so long as it is safe to do so, is a vital act. Having appropriate legal frameworks and anti-discrimination policies in place is critical. It is, however, also important that individuals not engage in so-called 'whataboutery', ignoring what happens in their own backyard, whilst pointing the finger of blame elsewhere.



An image in which Donald Trump is supposedly duped by Jews

15. <https://www.thejc.com/news/uk/snp-politician-apologises-for-offence-caused-by-antisemitic-tweet-1.62132>

16. *ibid*

17. <https://jewishnews.timesofisrael.com/mp-suspended-after-using-antisemitic-language-on-social-media-readmitted-to-snp/>

For parliamentarians of any party, they can also show their solidarity joining the All-Party Parliamentary Group Against Antisemitism, and many have. The group runs event briefings, and overseas visits, and has delivered three major inquiries which have changed the face of British action against antisemitism. Most importantly, it works on the principle that in any party, members will face down the problems on their own side, because antisemitism is not a party-political phenomenon.

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## Case Studies from The Million

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### 1) George Stoakley

In April 2018, George Stoakley, Conservative Council candidate for Fen Ditton and Fulbourn in Cambridgeshire, was suspended pending investigation after five-year-old antisemitic and homophobic posts were found on social media including one that he was “sweating like a Jew in an attic”.

[Read More : Sky](#) | [Read More : Jewish News](#)

### 2) Lyall Duff

In 2012, Scottish National Party council candidate, Lyall Duff, resigned from the party following the revelation of dozens of antisemitic, anti-Muslim, misogynistic and homophobic comments made online. The council candidate for North Lanarkshire, wrote, “kick every Jew out and send them back to Israel without tanks, f\*\*\* them too, give them back what’s theirs, f\*\*\* all.” Duff has also written about “y\*\*s versus Ragheads and Gaza” and stated that “Y\*d ladies were always fit although the y\*d men wore them silly wee ‘hats’ that made them look almost raghead”. Duff later apologised for his comments after the SNP rescinded his membership and he consequently resigned as a candidate.

[Read More : Jewish Chronicle](#)

### 3) Vicki Kirby

A Labour activist and former candidate, was suspended by Labour in 2014 over a series of Twitter posts in which she claimed Jews have “big noses”, are responsible for “slaughtering people”, and called Adolf Hitler a “Zionist God”. The Woking activist received a second suspension after she had been re-admitted following a hearing in 2014.

[Read More : Twitter](#) | [Read More : Independent](#) | [Read More : Huffington Post](#)

#### 4) Trayon White Senior

Washington DC local lawmaker, Councilman Trayon White Senior apologised for sharing a video based on a conspiracy theory that Jewish financiers control the weather. He had posted a video of snow flurries and warned of “climate manipulation”, blaming the Rothschild family. Mr White apologised for his comments on social media and said he “did not intend to be anti-Semitic”.

[Read More : BBC](#)

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