



CEC STATEMENT

Tackling Anti-Semitism

Everyone is entitled to be treated with dignity and respect. The ability to live and work without prejudice is a fundamental right. We are proud to be the successor to the Amalgamated Jewish Tailors, Pressers and Machinists' Trade Union, and to have represented Jewish workers since the earliest days of our union. Challenging discrimination and winning equality is at the heart of GMB, and our union has been at the forefront of the battle against hatred and division for many decades.

GMB recognises anti-Semitism is a problem in the Labour Party, but it is not limited to one political party and is a problem in wider society. The anti-Semitic abuse levelled against Jewish people individually and collectively in recent months, particularly on social media, has been shocking. Anti-Semitism, like all forms of hate and discrimination, are a scourge on our society and must be challenged.

The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) developed a working definition of anti-Semitism, which was adopted in 2016. The European Parliament voted to adopt a resolution calling on European Union member states and their institutions to adopt and apply the definition on 1 June 2017. These examples include anti-Semitic tropes, Holocaust denial and attempts to apply a double standard to the State of Israel.

The United Kingdom was the first country to adopt the definition followed by Israel, Austria, Scotland, Romania, Germany and Bulgaria. The European Parliament voted in favour of a resolution calling for member states to adopt the definition in June 2017. Institutions, including councils have widely adopted this definition.

Recent discussions over the Labour Party's approach to anti-Semitism has demonstrated the need for a more inclusive and thorough debate. The Labour Party's approach to consulting with Jewish members and the wider community has been rightly criticised. The Labour Party national executive committee (NEC) in July noted a code of conduct that included most but crucially not all of the IHRA examples in the definition. Although there was agreement from the NEC that the Labour Party must now fully engage and reopen dialogue around the code of conduct with a view to better reflect the views of Jewish communities, it is clear that this issue must be revisited and resolved as a priority.

GMB is clear that there is no place for anti-Semitism whether in our union, in the Labour Party or in our society – it needs to be tackled head on and that must be combined with political education and training. The Labour movement owes a huge amount to the contribution of Jewish members and campaigners. The Labour Party needs to get to work to rebuild trust across Jewish communities.

We note that the IHRA, in its introduction to the definition's 11 examples, says that the examples are not prescriptive: they provide guidance on interpreting actions that "could" be "anti-Semitic taking into account the overall context" in which those actions or comments occur. It also states that "criticism of Israel similar to that levelled against any other country cannot be regarded as anti-Semitic."

GMB agrees with the Home Affairs Select Committee that we must ensure
"that freedom of speech is maintained in the context of discourse about Israel and Palestine, without allowing anti-Semitism to permeate any debate."

It is vital that due process is upheld in disciplinary matters. It is also vital that legitimate criticisms of the policies and actions of the Israeli government are not inhibited both within the Labour Party and within our own union. We stand in solidarity with our Palestinian brothers and sisters – and we are committed to criticising continued inhumane actions perpetrated against Palestinian people, and to continuing to advocate peace and justice in the Middle East.

GMB Congress 2015 agreed to highlight the re-emergence of anti-Semitism in the UK "at every opportunity" and we are committed to speaking up for our Jewish members, standing up to racism, and combatting anti-Semitism, just as we are committed to combatting Islamophobia and standing up for our Muslim members – and tackling all forms of hate and discrimination in our society.

GMB is calling for common sense in the Labour Party and beyond. Acceptance of the IHRA definition and its examples are the starting point of this discussion and efforts to build and maintain trust with Jewish communities, while ensuring that freedom of speech is maintained in the context of discourse about Israel and Palestine.

THIS STATEMENT WAS AGREED BY THE CENTRAL EXECUTIVE COUNCIL AT THEIR TUESDAY 4 SEPTEMBER 2018 MEETING