

Anti-Zionism's links with anti-Semitism – RTE subscribes to Livingstone Formulation in Labour Party Controversy

RTE, the public service broadcaster of the Irish Republic, has the capacity to immensely influence the views and moral stances of the Irish nation as seasoned commentator (and one-time senior RTE insider) [Eoghan Harris](#) has often pointed out. Due to a virtual broadcasting monopoly, the way in which RTE treats contentious issues of major social concern, such as terrorism, migrant waves, the resurgence of European anti-Semitism, etc., arguably has a greater impact on the thinking of the Irish Nation than equivalent broadcasting institutions in other countries, such as the United Kingdom's BBC, that compete with a strong private sector.

RTE's audience reach extends beyond the Irish Republic, with media saturation in Northern Ireland, and its radio and [television channels](#) are viewed quite widely abroad, particularly in the UK mainland.

King Newt strikes Jerusalem

The controversy over Ken 'Newt' Livingstone's [suspension](#) from the British Labour Party, for defending Naz Shah, an MP accused of anti-Semitism, raged in the UK last month. Livingstone was suspended for an odd apologia of Shah's actions – he claimed that Hitler supported the Zionist movement until he "went mad" and instituted the programme of mass Jewish extermination. Livingstone has since doubled-down

in his attack on the Jewish State by [claiming](#) Israel's creation was a "catastrophe".

Livingstone's comments were without any [historical basis](#) but he would attempt to back-up his claims with the use of [bigoted ahistoric sources](#) cited by neo-NAZI types in the shadier side of the Internet. His assertion that Israel should not have been created "because there had been a Palestinian community there for 2,000 years," was similarly ahistorical, fitting the PLO's old propaganda-narrative that Jesus Christ was the first Arab-Palestinian [shahid](#) (martyr). He also [holds Israel responsible](#) for the military aggression of the Arab-Islamic world, and the creation of ISIS, whilst conflating the risk of a nuclear-Iran with Israel's arsenal.

Patchy coverage

The fracas has been given little attention to-date on RTE. Their sole article on the topic ('Livingstone defends Hitler comments in Labour row', [30th April 2016](#)) was peculiar because it only featured Livingstone's perspective and that of his defenders. The article also included Livingstone's obviously fallacious strawman of Benjamin Netanyahu's comments concerning Hajj Amin al Husseini's role in the Holocaust – the Israeli prime-minister [never suggested](#) that Hitler supported Zionism.

Broadcast coverage was similar. The story only featured passing mention on television, in an afternoon 'RTE News Now' bulletin on the April 28th, when the news of Livingstone's suspension first emerged but was not featured in RTE's lengthier [prime news programmes](#) later that [same day](#). By contrast, the election of Labourite Sadiq Khan, the first Muslim mayor of London, received substantive coverage on radio and television throughout the May 6th/7th period, and featured more strongly in online content.

The lack of coverage on RTE is rather peculiar. British political events tend to feature quite prolifically in RTE news schedules due to the close connections between the two States. Moreover, Livingstone is a politician of some renown in Ireland. He was the first senior British political figure to openly engage in talks with Sein Fein-IRA, and one of the very few to have advocated loudly for the Republican group's cause. While head of the Greater London Council, he talked prolifically with [the terror group](#) during an intensive period of its London bombing campaign, for which he earned a considerable degree of notoriety – principally hatred.

Livingstone also earned a lot of affection within the London-Irish community of yore by [pandering](#) to an exaggerated and unworthy victimhood. Indeed, Livingstone once [charged](#) that "What Britain did in Ireland was worse than what Hitler did to the Jews." It is worth noting that Livingstone's views would have also been perceived as extreme in Ireland! While many sympathised with the very poor treatment of the Catholic populace in Ulster, few would have agreed with his expressions of support for the IRA. Sein Fein only found electoral pre-eminence in Ulster after the Good-Friday Agreement, and only obtained electoral success in the Republic in more recent years.

Labour's electoral woes matter more?

Perhaps RTE's most notable input on Livingstone anti-Semitism controversy came when [Marian Finucane](#), a veteran RTE journalist and presenter of repute in Ireland, discussed the issue in the second hour of RTE Radio One's '[Marian Finucane Show](#)' on Sunday the 1st May 2016. Enda Brady, an Irish correspondent with UK broadcaster 'Sky News', was invited onto the show to provide some insights into the on-going row. However, the discussion was rather more revealing for its misleading and oddly slanted appraisal of the controversy.

The contributions to the radio slot focused far more on the impact that the controversy would have on the British Labour Party's electoral ability, than on the actual anti-Semitic content of the remarks that led to the very controversy. This peculiar focus may have led some listeners to wonder if there was any real substance to the criticism of Livingstone's remarks, beyond that of mere historical inaccuracy.

In a brief commentary to introduce the issue, Brady stated:

"Basically a row over comments Ken Livingstone had made earlier in the week defending a Yorkshire MP called Naz Shah. She had shared something on Facebook. She had shared a post calling for Israel to be relocated to the United States... Ken Livingstone waded in and attempted to defend her, and in doing so kept digging, making the situation just awful for Labour."

Finucane: "Just coming up to elections?"

Brady: "Yes, local elections here on Thursday, and you know the focus should be on, you would imagine from a Labour perspective, the focus should have been on fighting a Conservative Government, and austerity, and cuts, and what have you to public spending, and yes Labour riven by internal strife and division, and a rather unpleasant nasty row over allegations of anti-Semitism. [...]"

But yes it's a mess, and you just think the Conservative Party, David Cameron, everyone else, they must just be watching this with their mouths open"

Finucane: "Manna from heaven."

Brady: "Yes precisely..."

Finucane and Brady would go on to discuss how the controversy could undermine Sadiq Khan's prospects in the London mayoral election, with Brady adding:

"Again he's [Khan] being embroiled in this as well, and just by association, questions being put, you know 'are you anti-Semitic as well?' It just looks terrible for Labour. It really, really does, with day after day of headlines, and of course I guess its been a comparatively quiet news cycle, this has just been leading every single bulletin for five six days."

The questions surrounding Khan related to his own personal associations with extremists, rather than merely his being a member of the Labour Party. Senator Kevin Humphrys, a member of the Irish Labour Party, described the remarks as "wrong", but similarly focused on the damage it would cause to the British Labour Party vote.

There was a vague reference to a broader concern about anti-Semitism within the Labour Party but there was no mention of the many egregious comments by other Labour members, which would have assisted in framing a discussion to which Irish audiences have limited media exposure.

To cite a few examples of the scale of this problematic behaviour: Gerry Downing's suggestion that Marxists address what he termed "the Jewish Question", descriptions of Hitler as the "[Zionist God](#)", charges that Israel [uses the Holocaust](#) as "a financial racket in the West", media reports that Labour secretly [suspended](#) fifty Labour members for issues connected with anti-Semitism, and the resignation of a Oxford University Labour Club chairman spurred by the [endemic anti-Semitism](#) of its members. To Brady's credit, he did however note that Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn's critics point out his poor performance in dealing with the issue.

It should be noted both Brady and Finucane briefly mentioned the hatred exhibited toward Jewish people in France, with Brady describing it as a "massive issue". Finucane also noted that anti-Semitism is an unacknowledged problem, and disagreed

with Livingstone's view that Hitler supported Zionism. Ultimately however, it was a missed opportunity to discuss an issue that the Western mainstream media often [seeks to avoid](#).

Naz Shah's unfortunate 'Facebookery'

Finucane's radio segment reported that Naz Shah posted a Facebook entry stating that the conflict would be solved if Israel was moved to the US. Later the discussion strayed into flippant territory:

Finucane: "There's a lot to be said for keeping away from Facebook."

Sinead O'Carroll (News Editor with Journal.ie): "Absolutely, this started with a politician making a very flippant point on Facebook."

Such opining infers that Shah did not really mean anything of substance when writing the post. Neither Finucane, nor the other contributors, explained why this particular post is thought by many to be offensive. Shah's 'transportation' Facebook post was not intended to be a constructive idea (however bizarre) – another contributor later suggested that anti-Zionism is not necessarily anti-Semitic. Shah posted a kind of mocking [info-graphic that suggested](#) Israel was to blame for all of the troubles of the Middle East (presumably including Islamist terrorism spreading Westward), and that the existence of the Jewish State somehow made the world unhappy. By inference, the post recommends ethnically cleansing the Middle East of its Jewish people, much of whom were forced, by persecution, to flee to Israel from other regions of the Middle East in the first instance.

Finucane and O'Carroll present the post as little more than a 'blonde moment' but Shah added a comment that reinforced the

message of the infographic, and the contributors also failed to note that she has a record for making other [problematic comments](#) in the past.

Shah has also posted critical content about “Jews”, compared Israel’s policies to those of Hitler, and promoted an article that likened Zionism to al Qaeda, which charged that the movement had caused Jews to act in negative ways, akin to neo-Nazi claims of normative Jewish behaviour, with respect to control of politics, the media etc. in European societies, and offered a solution to the “Jewish Question in Europe”. Shah was a relatively senior politician. She is an MP, was private secretary to the Shadow Chancellor, and more remarkably, a member of a committee combating anti-Semitism in Britain, so critics, both within and outside the Labour party, were fully entitled to raise concerns about bigotry.

By the time of the discussion on the Finucane Show, news had also emerged that Shah’s aide, Mohammed Shabbir, had [engaged](#) in overtly anti-Semitic messages, inferring that Orthodox Jewish people were engaged in child abuse, prostitution, used the neo-Nazi term “Zio”, suggested Israel created ISIS to serve as a pretext to invade Syria, compared Israel to NAZI Germany, etc. These views echoed some of Shah’s comments, thus raising further questions about her beliefs.

RTE’s Livingstone, I presume

At the end of the discussion, Finucane stated that she had been suprised when she found out that Livingstone was involved in a row over anti-Semitism

“I have to say I was very surprised – I certainly wouldn’t have anticipated that Ken Livingstone would be in any way anti-Semitic.”

Livingstone, who has been a guest on [Finucane's show previously](#), has intermittently caused a quite substantive level of [controversy](#) over many expressions that displayed a strong disregard and dislike of Jewish people. And has expressed strong support for the likes of Yusuf al-Qaradawi, an individual who not only supports Arab-Palestinian terrorism, but has openly expressed [genocidal sentiments](#) toward the Jewish people.

After the odd focus on Labour's election worries, and some expressions of generalised concern about anti-Semitism in Europe today, the discussion strayed into contentious territory when Finucane stated:

"The tricky bit is that just because somebody says that they disagree with Israeli policy in Gaza, it does not mean they are anti-Semitic, and those lines have to be clarified. And they've kind of got blurred I think in this debate as well."

Brady: "Yes I think that's a fair point but I think in modern politics the speed the reaction of labour to clamp down on all of this, a lot of people here will feel very sore."

Shah posted the offending infographic during the Gaza war so Finucane appears to be arguing that the comment was not in itself anti-Semitic. However, Shah did not merely criticise Israeli policy in Gaza. Shah took issue with Israel's very existence. Another guest, Gerard Howlin, a former Fianna Fail Party advisor, agreed but also drew attention to the fact that anti-Zionism often coincides with anti-Semitism:

"There is this thing between anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism. And of course they aren't always the same. You can be perfectly anti-Zionist without being in any way anti-Semitic, and that should be very much acknowledged. You can be critical of Israel in particular without being in any way anti-Semitic. But of course Zionism is a response to anti-Semitism originally."

Livingstone reformulated

Finucane advanced the argument that criticism of Israel is not necessarily anti-Semitic, and that the debate confused or conflated anti-Zionism (as inferred by her defence of Shah's existentially anti-Zionist views) with anti-Semitism, as further indicated by Howlin's response. By inference, such a position would suggest that the views of the two main players in the controversy – both Shah's and Livingstone's – were not necessarily anti-Semitic. Therefore, it seems that Livingstone was quite entitled to defend Naz Shah since the MP did not express views that were inherently anti-Semitic. Such argumentation would lead to the conclusion that if her views are not inherently or necessarily anti-Semitic then, in effect, they should ultimately not to be regarded as anti-Semitic because such accusations are no longer deemed to be fair (in view of the supposed power of the accusation that may be reputationally damaging) or morally legitimate, and so the charge is presented as a vicious ploy.

The stance endorsed on the 'Marian Finucane show' constitutes a category error, because it forms a fallacious conflation of two divergent categories of argumentation. There is of course an area where the two categories coincide because anti-Zionism must by definition be critical of the existence of the State of Israel, and efforts to defend its existence. Yet there are circumstances where criticism of Israel does not originate from anti-Zionist positions. Anti-Zionism is a different category of argumentation that is advanced by those possessing trenchant anti-Israel positions. Anti-Zionism is necessarily extremist because anti-Zionists advocate for the dissolution of the sole principally-Jewish State in existence, regardless of its borders and compromises it has attempted to make with Arab-Palestinian society.

Perhaps unwittingly, Finucane may have advanced a strawman' argument created by anti-Israel advocates, not least by

Livingstone himself (for whom David Hirsh coined the term '[Livingstone Formulation](#)'), who wish to attack those defending Israel in debate. Such advocates present opponents defending Israel (from what is seen as unjustified criticism) as being disingenuous and attempting to silence all criticism of the Jewish State by using the "anti-Semitism card" to trump legitimate debate.

However, it does not appear that anyone has ever argued that all substantive criticism of Israel is inherently anti-Semitic. This cannot be a normative pro-Israel position because it is not uncommon to find criticism of the Jewish State emanating from those who do support Israel in a substantive and meaningful way (in contrast to Peter Beinart, J-Street, et al, who only claim to support Israel but adopt [staunchly anti-Israel positions](#)). Rightly or wrongly, many who genuinely support Israel express reservations about Israeli government policy.

Anti-Zionism is necessarily anti-Semitic

There is a strong material link between anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism, both in more traditional and the newer forms, the latter of which manifests most overtly as an intensive and aggressive demonisation of Israel, which is notably singular in its treatment. This reality leads to another question: *'Is anti-Zionism necessarily anti-Semitic or is it possible to be anti-Zionist without holding anti-Semitic beliefs or being discriminatory by holding the Jewish collective to a different standard to that of other peoples?'*

Anti-Zionism is notable for white-washing anti-Semitism. It disregards the oppression that Jewish people experienced in the Christian and Islamic worlds for over a Millennia, which arose with hatreds that continue to exist, albeit in a modified form in the Western World which normatively adopt the

language of humanitarianism. It often re-writes the oppression Jews experienced in the Islamic world.

Anti-Zionism disregards the ancient cultural link between Israel and the Jewish People, which may only continue with Jewish self-determination, given the continued rejection of Jewish religious rights within Arab-Islamic societies throughout the Middle East, and the likelihood that a Jewish presence in the region would cease to exist in a would-be Palestinian Nation, as it has ceased throughout almost all of the rest of the Middle East. Trenchant anti-Semitism is normative at all levels in Arab-Palestinian society, of a form that incites violence, terrorism and genocidal sentiment. Rather, anti-Zionists portray wholly improbable results to their advocacy, [claiming](#) (in contravention to all available evidence) that peaceful democratic and pluralistic scenarios would result, rather than a further purging of the Middle East.

Anti-Zionists do not accept the two-state solution. They unjustly blame Israel for Arab-Palestinian rejectionism. Ultimately, peace cannot be made with Israel – rather this nation must be compelled to surrender all and effectively abandon the aim of Jewish autonomy, or be cleansed ethnically – the Jewish people should all “go back to Europe”, even if they are Mizrahi purged from Arab nations.

While people can hate a nation for a variety of reasons, hatred that motivates criticism of Israel is typically anti-Semitic, because it directly or indirectly focuses on the Jewish character of the State, which can often be seen in those people who form negative obsessions about a distant nation, which they problematize, often by holding it to [absurdist double-standards](#). They do so while wholly ignoring (or sometimes defending) the manifest wrongdoing of Israel's regional opponents. Such posturing effectively denies the Jewish State's right to defend its own citizens.

Indeed, if Israel's existence is a fundamental wrong visited on another people, then it must necessarily follow that the military defence of Israel's physical integrity, particularly from attacks by its enemies seeking to remedy supposed wrongs that resulted in the Jewish State's creation, must also be wrong.

As a consequence, it is difficult not to conclude that anti-Zionism is a form of anti-Semitism that singles out one particular ethnicity of the world's diverse tapestry, as not deserving of autonomy in its homeland, whilst simultaneously denying the dangers of anti-Semitism that gave rise to Zionism.

These advocates often engage in hysterical demonising language, and sometimes classically anti-Semitic imagery. They project insidious forms of wrongdoing on their opponents, such as arguing that those who disagree are part of a 'Zionist cabal' engaging in 'hasabara'. Anger of an unusual intensity toward other perspectives is common in those advancing anti-Israel stances, whether it be in discussions [in the media](#) or [on marches](#), and indeed it is common to see anti-Israel activists disrupting or preventing pro-Israel speakers from expressing themselves, whilst commonly claiming that supporters of Israel silence their own arguments at various levels in political, media and academic domains.

True to form

RTE's treatment of the Livingstone controversy provides an illustrative example of their failings when dealing with issues that do not sit very easily with the normative [political culture](#) found at the Broadcaster. Unlike most of her colleagues at RTE, Marian Finucane does deserve some credit for having the presence of mind to allow space for other perspectives on the Israeli-Jewish/Arab-Islamic conflict,

besides the common anti-Israeli stances that pervade the media. Similarly, Brady and her guests were largely sympathetic to the difficulties Jewish society faces in Europe today. However, there are limitations, arguably due to RTE's staunch political culture, where those on the left always have to be the good guys. Red Ken, and so many others in the anti-Israel movement, professes to care about racism and deny being anti-Semitic so it must be thus! Such a level of trust and faith is not displayed toward the political right.

This bias, a kind of cognitive schtoma, thoroughly taints RTE's political coverage, where opponents of the recently defeated Fine Gael-Labour government were never meaningfully scrutinised, so leading to an [unprecedented degree of political instability](#), and the grave consequences of the leftist cause celeb of abolishing the new water-charges regime was rarely analysed by the media [as a whole](#) despite the longstanding failure to adequately fund Ireland's ancient water infrastructure, which has led to grave economic and public health issues, and etc., etc.

While it is fair to say that most people in Ireland do not particularly care all that much about the Jewish-Israeli/Islamic-Arab conflict, there is still an unthinking insistence that those loudly lambasting Israel possess only the very best of motives. Such people tend to insist their activism is motivated by humanitarianism but their activism in relation to other conflicts, such as the Assad slaughter in neighbouring Syria, is conspicuously absent, as one well known critic of [the movement](#) has noted. Supposed Jewish wrongs matter a lot more.

For [a long time RTE](#) has played no small role in advancing and reinforcing such perceptions, which neatly fit the Broadcaster's reflexively anti-US/pro-Islam posturing. Thus, the recent migrant waves are typically described as "refugees", and the spate of Islamist attacks on European soil are borne of economic disadvantage and Western Islamophobia

and/or racism rather than anything remotely associated with intolerance borne of religious ideology. The absolutist uniformity of RTE's narratives can be startling – the same on-message NGOs are trotted out for interviews and sound-bites, with nary a murmur of dissent ever afforded the briefest of airtime.

This blindness extends to the levels of coverage afforded to a given topic. RTE audiences are much more likely to hear about the enthusiasm British Labour Party leader [Jeremy Corbyn](#) has for Motown's style of music, than last year's concerns that he held [anti-Semitic views](#) after defending an anti-Semite of some notoriety, [giving support](#) to an anti-Israel Holocaust denier, etc., etc.

And when such unfortunate matters come to a head, and so demand to be addressed, we may expect just one perspective. Therefore, we only hear voices in defence of Livingstone's actions. But even when the 'right' or 'good' team wins out, it is difficult to find balanced coverage. For example, RTE presented several [unopposed voices defending](#) Labour's newly elected London Mayor, Sadiq Khan, with inferred charges of Islamophobia against competitor Zac Goldsmith and the wider Tory Party, even though it is widely known that Khan repeatedly [shared a platform](#) with an ISIS supporter, has [assisted other unsavoury characters](#), and has described moderate Muslims as... "Uncle Toms"!

[RTE](#), like the UK's [BBC](#), the US' [NPR/PBS programming](#), Norway's [NRK](#), et al., are more than conventional media sources. They are institutions constructed to serve the public of a given nation, funded in an enforced manner by the self-same public, with licence fees or a portion of the national tax spend. Thus there is every right to expect the highest of journalistic standards, which in turn can foster fair and informed debate, particularly as such institutions often have an especially powerful role in broadcasting. However, public service broadcasting has almost become a by-word for slanted unduly

politicised commentary of a form typically [reinforcing left-wing narratives](#).

If there is truth to the old saying, that “being on the left means never having to say you’re sorry,” then it may be presumed that public service media advocacy of certain political narratives play a significant role in the notable deficits of public scrutiny across their associated segments of the political spectrum.