

The Trial: the strange case of Trevor Phillips

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How the accusation of Islamophobia is used to stifle free speech

Dr Martyn Frampton, Sir John Jenkins KCMG LVO,
Khalid Mahmood MP

Foreword by Khalid Mahmood MP

Introduction by Trevor Phillips OBE

Afterword by Kyai Haji Yahya Cholil Staquf



Front cover image: (Clockwise from top left) Rt Hon Lord Blunkett; Maajid Nawaz; Rt Hon Charles Clarke; Sarah Champion MP; Peter Clarke CVO, OBE, QPM; Yasmin Alibhai-Brown; Trevor Phillips OBE; Amanda Spielman; Barack Obama; Rt Hon Theresa May MP. All have publicly been accused of Islamophobia.

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About the Authors

Dr Martyn Frampton is a Reader in Modern History at Queen Mary University of London. He is the author of 3 books on ‘the Troubles’ in Northern Ireland and more recently has completed a lengthy book on the history of the relationship between the Muslim Brotherhood and the West, published by Harvard University Press in 2018. He has also written on the contemporary challenges of counter-terrorism and counter-extremism, most significantly with the 2009 pamphlet for Policy Exchange, *Choosing our Friends Wisely: Criteria for engagement with Muslim groups* and his 2016 paper, *Unsettled Belonging: A survey of Britain’s Muslim communities*.

Sir John Jenkins has enjoyed a 35 year career in the British Diplomatic Service. He holds a BA (Double First Class Honours) and a Ph.D from Jesus College, Cambridge. He also studied at The School of Oriental and African Studies in London (Arabic and Burmese) and through the FCO with the London and Ashridge Business Schools. He is an alumnus of the Salzburg Seminar. He joined the FCO in 1980 and served in Abu Dhabi (1983-86), Malaysia (1989-92) and Kuwait (1995-98) before being appointed Ambassador to Burma (1999-2002). He was subsequently HM Consul-General, Jerusalem (2003-06), Ambassador to Syria (2006-07), FCO Director for the Middle East and North Africa (2007-09), Ambassador to Iraq (2009-11), Special Representative to the National Transitional Council and subsequently Ambassador to Libya (2011) and Ambassador to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (2012-2015). He took an active part in Sir John Chilcott’s Iraq Inquiry and was asked by the Prime Minister in March 2014 to lead a Policy Review into the Muslim Brotherhood and Political Islamism. Until his departure from the FCO he was the government’s senior diplomatic Arabist. Most recently, Sir John was Executive Director of The Institute for Strategic Studies – Middle East (2015-2017) and a Senior Fellow at the Yale Jackson Institute for Global Affairs (2017).

Khalid Mahmood MP is the Labour MP for Birmingham Perry Barr and Shadow Minister of State for Europe. He is also the Chairman of the All Party Group on Tackling Terrorism and is Chairman of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on International Relations. He is a graduate of UCE Birmingham and a former engineer with a trade union background.

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Contents

About the Authors	2
Foreword	5
Introduction	7
Trevor Phillips on Trial	11
Conclusion	18
Afterword	20
Appendix A: The Labour Party's Letter to Trevor Phillips	22
Appendix B: Trevor Phillips' Response to the Labour Party	34
Appendix C: Kyai Haji Yahya Cholil Staquf's statement	37

Foreword

Khalid Mahmood, MP for Birmingham Perry Barr, member of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on British Muslims

It was with no small measure of astonishment that I learnt that my own party, the Labour Party, had initiated proceedings against Trevor Phillips on grounds of ‘racism’ and ‘Islamophobia’. The charges are so outlandish as to bring disrepute on all involved in making them; and I fear they further add to the sense that we, as a party, have badly lost our way. I cannot speak to the internal politics that may be involved in the decision to launch this case, but I want to underline my own dismay at how this case seems to represent the final deformation of attempts to define ‘Islamophobia’.

During the last several years, I have been a member of the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on British Muslims. As the longest-serving Muslim Member of Parliament, in a constituency with a sizeable Muslim population (Birmingham Perry Barr), it was natural to me to want to support such a venture. However, I have grown increasingly dismayed by the direction of travel adopted by the APPG and in particular, in its attempts to promote a deeply flawed definition of “Islamophobia”.

When Policy Exchange last year released a major report examining the problems with the APPG definition, I offered my endorsement of that study, noting:

Some of my colleagues on the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on British Muslims have become convinced that the answer lies in the adoption of a particular definition of Islamophobia – as outlined in the report that was released late last year. This makes ‘Islamophobia’ coterminous with ‘anti-Muslim racism’. For my part, I have always retained my doubts. I applaud the sentiment and appreciate the sincerity, with which many MPs and commentators approach this issue. But equally, I am troubled by the way in which the definition has been framed and seems intended to operate.

Unfortunately, my doubts seem now to have been confirmed. The Labour Party, having adopted the APPG definition on Islamophobia, seems to be intent on wielding it as a weapon for rooting out ‘difficult’ voices.

Doubtless there will be some who still say, the definition is sound, it’s just the implementation that has gone awry here. I wish I could believe that. But the reality is that this situation flows from a definition that is itself fundamentally flawed. I’m afraid this whole episode has provided final proof – were any necessary – that the APPG definition of “Islamophobia” is simply not fit for purpose. We have, I fear, badly lost our way – and ended up in a rhetorical cul-de-sac. It’s time for new thinking that allows us to get past endless debates about language and instead to focus on what

really matters: improving the lives of millions of British Muslims who want to live as successful, prosperous and equal members of our society. If anything good is to come out of this sad – and frankly embarrassing – episode for my party, it is that it can hopefully serve as a wake-up call to those who believe that the APPG definition of Islamophobia represents any kind of basis for progress. It does not. We need now to accept that reality and move on.

Introduction

Trevor Phillips OBE

The voice of tyranny is often represented as the thunderous pounding of a gauntleted fist on the door in the dark reaches of the night. In fact, in my short time as Chair of Index on Censorship, I have learned that, more frequently, people who try to tell the truth under authoritarian regimes first detect the true voice of oppression in the quiet, dry-as-dust whisper of the bureaucrat's pen as it scratches out some apparently innocuous message. Then you read it and it says: recant, and repent now. Confess, grovel, beg, denounce your fellow deviants, and you may save your livelihood, your home, your permit to travel. Do as we say, accept the mortification of the flesh, and your soul may, just, escape eternal damnation.

When I glanced at the email sent from the Labour Party, late on a Friday afternoon, it took a moment to grasp that it was not just another plea from one of the remaining candidates in our leadership election. The phrase “administrative suspension” seized my attention, much as I imagine “anathema” might have done in centuries gone past. These words signal banishment from a community you might have inhabited for decades; friends, colleagues, even family, may be compelled to shun the accused lest they too are shamed and excluded. The Labour Party's most recently revised rule book contains broad strictures against antisemitism, Islamophobia, and other kinds of religious hostility or prejudice. Significantly, the eleven page indictment I received from the Labour Party concerns matters of faith, doctrine and dissent, written, not in the language of a democratic, open political movement, but in the cold-eyed, accusatory prose of the zealot. In essence, I am accused of heresy, and I am threatened with excommunication.

A year ago a cross party parliamentary group proposed that “Islamophobia” should be defined in broad terms as a “kind of racism” hostile to “Muslimness”. In a comprehensive pamphlet published by the Policy Exchange think tank, I pointed out that for many, one great attraction of Islam is its pan-racialism; Islam does not belong to any ethnic group. I also argued that the vague concept as “Muslimness” rested on the delusion that all adherents of the faith would agree on doctrine, dress and behaviours; this is “the” progressive equivalent of “they all look alike to me”. It was therefore only a matter of time before this “definition” would inevitably lead to the persecution of individuals who dissented. I never imagined that I myself would be the first political victim of such a witch-hunt.

Thus far, there have been no actual visits from the Grand Inquisitor (though it could happen any time; as we know, nobody ever expects

the Inquisition, Spanish or otherwise). I have not yet been subject to the auto-da-fe. As with most such trials of faith, the charges have been drawn up in secret and my fate will be decided in *absentia*. I am not allowed to speak about the allegations to anyone, in public or private, even a spiritual adviser, be that a rabbi, imam or priest. I am forbidden to quote from the indictment. I am not told the names of my accuser or accusers, so will not be able to test their credibility; nor will anyone else. Even if I knew who had added my name to the list for denunciation, I would be forbidden from mentioning that person in public.

It seems that no-one in this jurisdiction, even a former Chair of the Equality and Human Rights Commission, is entitled to the protection of the European Convention on Human Rights' Article 6, the right to a fair hearing. One hopes that the next leader of the Labour Party turns his or her attention quickly to the human rights of the organisation's own members before starting to pick away at the mote in the eyes of others.

I am forbidden from repeating what is on the charge sheet; but I can, I think, reflect on what is not there. The Party makes no attempt to suggest that I have done anything unlawful. Nothing that I have been shown even suggests that I have offended any particular individual. I have never thrown a mobile telephone at a colleague nor have I raised my voice to a comrade. The evidence before this particular *inquisitio* consists entirely of statements made in public, allegedly written or spoken by me, or about me, which are said to breach the party's rules on matters of religion or race.

Some readers of this report will appreciate my perplexity. I am a person of colour, of mostly African descent. As it happens, I also come from a family which, were it not for the intervention of transatlantic slavery, would be close to marking a millennium as Fulani or Mandinka Muslims. Most of my slave ancestors were forcibly converted to Christianity, probably by the agents of John Gladstone, father of William, the largest plantation owner in the Guianas, and the biggest beneficiary of compensation after abolition; but some of my relatives (including the sister closest to me in age) have, in my lifetime, made the return journey to embrace Islam, not least because of its justified claim to be a genuinely pan-racial major religion.

However, no-one's *bona fides* should rest on their heritage or familial associations; people of all stripes and backgrounds can exhibit unacceptable prejudices, even against those who share their ethnicity or faith; in this country a not insignificant degree of hostility to Ahmadiyya Muslims stems from other followers of the faith. The single most common source of assault against Muslim women should be recognised as the genital mutilation of thousands of girls each year, often against their will, but always sanctioned by their own families, supposedly in the name of Islam. So my bewilderment lies as much in the fact that the charge of Islamophobia should be levelled at someone with my particular history.

I believe that I can lay claim to have made some contribution to Muslim welfare over the past half century, starting as a student anti-racist campaigner. It is generally recognised that the Runnymede Trust's 1997

report on Islamophobia introduced the term to the UK's political discourse; and that it was the Trust's 2000 inquiry into the future of multi-ethnic Britain, the Parekh Report, that prompted the last Labour government into its first, unsuccessful attempt in 2001 to pass a law that would protect Muslims and others against incitement to religious hatred. It was the CRE that persuaded the last Labour government to keep trying to pass the legislation, finally succeeding with the Racial and Religious Hatred Act 2006. I personally commissioned and launched the two reports as Chair of the Runnymede Trust. When I became head of the CRE in 2003, my principal adviser, a Muslim woman who had previously handled relations with faith communities for Tony Blair, and I, worked closely with two Labour Home Secretaries, David Blunkett and Charles Clarke, to force through the 2006 Act. Were I to choose the first candidate to be expelled from the Labour Party for Islamophobia, I don't think I am the individual I would have chosen.

But an even more puzzling aspect of this indictment is its timing. Though I cannot reveal the precise charges, I do not think that I am breaking any confidentiality in saying that every single aspect of the indictment relates to words which have been published and widely disseminated over several years. Some emanate from television programmes seen by more than two million people, and reviewed in newspapers and magazines read by several million more half a decade ago. Much of the material quotes objective research conducted by people other than myself. There is not a single item in this indictment not instantly available to anyone with access to Google.

It is well known that I have published hundreds of thousands of words on the issue of ethnocultural integration over the past forty years. Many have disagreed with me on various topics; but never before has anyone inside or outside of the Labour Party suggested that I have broken any rules. In the past few years alone, under the current leadership, I have shared platforms with prominent minority Labourites such as David Lammy, Rushanara Ali, and Ayesha Hazarika. During the period under question I have interviewed Tony Blair for Channel 4 and spoken at Labour party meetings, including the annual conference of the Fabian Society. I have never been "no-platformed".

In the final week of the 2019 general election, I even celebrated the anniversary of the Sickle Cell Society (which I had helped to launch forty years ago) alongside one of the Leader's closest cohorts, seen every week sitting next to him at PMQs: the party's Shadow Secretary for Women and Equalities, Dawn Butler, at an event in her own constituency. Had the party's principal equalities spokesperson considered me an "Islamophobe" and a racist I very much doubt that she would have consented to be photographed cutting the ceremonial cake with such a vile bigot.

So what can account for this extraordinary turn of events?

I generally believe that the simplest explanations are the most likely. There is no political mileage in smearing me; I have not declared any public allegiance to any of the current candidates for leader, for example.

Some may see disciplinary action against me as payback by elements in the party for public criticisms of the leadership's failure to tackle anti-semitism within the party. But the indictment makes no mention of that topic; if it had done so, it would suggest that the party's leadership and its bureaucracy are prepared to corrupt the disciplinary process in order to victimise their opponents. That alone would be a scandal.

But corruption can take many forms. There is one further possibility which I would find particularly disturbing; that the attempt to discipline me is a signal – a dog whistle, if you like – to the Equality and Human Rights Commission, currently conducting an inquiry into the Labour Party's handling of anti-semitism, of the treatment it can expect if it fails exonerate the leadership. It could also be that by putting its own alleged "Islamophobes" in the dock, the Labour Party is trying to pressure the EHRC into mounting an analogous inquiry into the Conservative Party. In short, the Labour Party would be weaponizing Islamophobia to protect itself, to attack its political opponents and to divert attention from the EHRC's judgement on its lamentable record on anti-Semitism. If that were true it would be the very definition of political corruption – using Labour's influence to intimidate a legally independent institution would be reprehensible.

It would, however, be consistent with the tone of Labour's inquisition. The 1578 edition of the [Directorium Inquisitorium](#) (a standard Inquisitorial manual) emphasizes that the job of the Inquisition is only secondarily to punish the wicked.¹ The more important purpose of punishment is "...that others may become terrified and weaned away from the evils they would commit".

As it happens, I do not believe that I have transgressed the arcane codes laid out in the Party's rules. I fully accept that I may not share the views of our current leaders or even of the majority of members. But readers may judge for themselves whether my evidence-based writings are in themselves cause for condemnation; everything is public, on the record and easily accessible. I have never belonged to any political party other than Labour, and I have stuck with the tribe through its many travails. It would be a tragedy if, at the very moment we most need a robust and effective opposition our nation had to endure the spectacle of a great party collapsing into a brutish, authoritarian cult. That is why I will not go without a fight.

1. quoniam punitio non refertur primo & per se in correctionem & bonum eius qui punitur, sed in bonum publicum ut alij terreantur, & a malis committendis avocentur Directorium Inquisitorium, edition of 1578, Book 3, pg. 137, column 1. Online in the Cornell University Collection; retrieved 2008-05-16.

Trevor Phillips on Trial

The startling revelation that the Labour Party is threatening to expel Trevor Phillips on grounds of ‘racism’ and ‘Islamophobia’ will be received in different ways. On the one hand, it looks like an act of folly from a party leadership whose power has been waning since the general election. Alongside this, this regrettable case is significant for the extent to which it underlines the nature of the ‘Islamophobia’ definition that has been adopted by a number of political parties and civil society groups over the last year – with Labour being one of those leading the way when the party adopted the definition in March 2019². It gives us no pleasure to note that we have consistently warned about the dangers flowing from a vague, expansive definition of this protean term. The current imbroglio offers an illumination of how even the best of intentions can lead into some dark places indeed. In this context, it is surely worth reviewing the controversies of the Islamophobia debate.

Before proceeding any further, however, we should take note of who exactly it is that stands in the dock: Trevor Phillips is the man who, as chair of the Runnymede Trust in the 1990s effectively brought the term ‘Islamophobia’ into mainstream discourse.³ It was he who first established a commission to investigate this issue, and then oversaw the publication of Runnymede’s landmark report on “Islamophobia” in 1997.^{4,5,6} Phillips did so, he later recalled, because of a very real concern about “discrimination against Muslims”, about which he observed, “there was plenty of it around.”⁷ It was with the laudable aim of challenging such discrimination – at a time when there was no legislation that protected Muslims, as Muslims – that the Runnymede Trust had, in the words of one academic, effectively “launched the career” of Islamophobia “as a concept of public discourse in Britain and much beyond it”.⁸

Thereafter, in his role as Chair of the Commission for Racial Equality and then founding Chair of the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC), Trevor Phillips never lost sight of the challenges that Muslims might face, and what practical steps might be taken to improve their life chances. Furthermore, he can plausibly claim to have done more than most to tackle anti-Muslim discrimination and enshrine in law protections for Muslims as a faith community. Phillips played a seminal role in pushing the then Labour Government to enact the 2006 Racial and Religious Hatred Act 2006⁹, which prohibited incitement to hatred on the basis of religious difference (a measure originally demanded by the Runnymede report of 1997)¹⁰. This was followed by the Equality Act 2010 (passed at a time when Phillips was chair of the EHRC),¹¹ which included religion

2. <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2019/mar/20/labour-formally-adopts-definition-islamophobia>
3. S. Vertovec, ‘Islamophobia and Muslim Recognition in Britain’, in Y. Y. Haddad, *Muslims in the West: From Sojourners to Citizens* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2002), pp. 19–35, pp. 24–5.
4. <http://www.runnymedetrust.org/uploads/publications/pdfs/AVeryLightSleeper-1994.PDF>;
<https://www.runnymedetrust.org/companies/17/74/Islamophobia-A-Challenge-for-Us-All.html>; <http://www.runnymedetrust.org/uploads/publications/pdfs/islamophobia.pdf>.
5. <https://www.runnymedetrust.org/companies/17/74/Islamophobia-A-Challenge-for-Us-All.html>.
6. <https://www.runnymedetrust.org/uploads/Islamophobia%20Report%202018%20FINAL.pdf>.
7. <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/my-sons-living-hell-j72t7fppc>.
8. <https://mend.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Approaching-a-definition-of-Islamophobia-More-than-words.pdf>.
9. <https://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/Research-Briefing/Summary/SN03768#fullreport>.
10. <https://www.runnymedetrust.org/companies/17/74/Islamophobia-A-Challenge-for-Us-All.html>.
11. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/247174/1599.pdf

as one of a number of “protected characteristics”¹². Alongside this, too, the EHRC is itself one of a number of enforcement mechanisms that has been created to offer redress to those who experience discrimination in the UK. Phillips’ centrality to these developments might, one would think, give pause to anyone rushing to label him a “racist” or “Islamophobe”. Seemingly not.

Of course, his practical activism has been matched all along by Phillips’ determination to challenge conventional wisdoms and to “ask hard questions”, especially about totemic subjects like multiculturalism. On the face of it, it is this willingness to pursue difficult conversations which has landed him in hot water with the Labour Party. The charge sheet against him lists 5 supposed offences (the majority of which date back to 2016), each of which seems to rest on a wilful misreading of Phillips’ comments and/or a determination to cast them in the worst possible light. One of the charges, for instance, is that he “told a meeting at the Policy Exchange think tank in Westminster on Monday that Muslims ‘see the world differently from the rest of us’”. But countless academic studies and opinion polls demonstrate that there *are* fundamental differences – not least in terms of religiosity and the relationship of religion and politics. Muslims, as a faith community, tend to be more religiously observant than society as a whole. And Islam makes claims about its particular relationship to society as a whole that no other contemporary religion does. Does the recognition of this, make one “Islamophobic”? Groups like the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) routinely claim that Muslims living in the UK require certain special treatments, because of their different perspectives (witness their 2007 report on Muslim education)¹³. Are they too “Islamophobic”? Such claims belong to the realm of the absurd.

Still more questionable is the invocation of Phillips’ public exchange with Peter Tatchell on the platform of a Policy Exchange fringe event at the Conservative Party conference in 2019, on the subject of Islamophobia. On that occasion, Phillips referenced the fact that he had been named “Islamophobe of the year” by the Islamic Human Rights Commission (IHRC) – a pro-Khomeini, pro-Iran organisation that holds these “awards” every year¹⁴. Other past winners of the IHRC “Islamophobia” awards include Barack Obama and the journalists of Charlie Hebdo, who were so designated just weeks after pro-ISIS terrorists had slaughtered most of the magazine at their offices.

To suggest that Phillips was somehow boasting/glorifying in this label in anything other than satire is to beggar belief (although it might be said that someone like Tatchell, who stated – again flippantly – that he was “jealous” of Phillips’ award, would have every right to consider an “Islamophobia” award from a group that supports the homosexual-executing theocrats of Tehran, as a badge of honour). As Kyai Haji Yahya Cholil Staquf—head of Indonesia’s Nahdlatul Ulama—pointed out in his statement which was read by Phillips during that panel discussion; “jokes are not inherently Islamophobic or hateful and this includes Boris Johnson’s joke about the burqa.”¹⁵ Yet such are the allegations now brought against

12. http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/pdfs/ukpga_20100015_en.pdf

13. Towards Greater Understanding: Meeting the needs of Muslim pupils in state schools, Information & Guidance for Schools, Muslim Council of Britain, 2007. <https://web.archive.org/web/20070302223857/http://www.mcb.org.uk/downloads/Schoolinfo-guidance.pdf>

14. <https://beta.spectator.co.uk/article/why-is-the-bbc-letting-the-islamic-human-rights-commission-set-the-agenda->

15. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SWIy8FF-mn8c&feature=emb_title

Phillips. They would be laughable if they were not so serious.

How is it that the Labour Party finds itself suspending someone like Trevor Phillips on these kinds of charges? In late 2018, the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on British Muslims produced a definition of Islamophobia, which it urged Government, the public sector and civil society organisations to adopt. The definition stated, “Islamophobia is rooted in racism and is a type of racism that targets expressions of Muslimness or perceived Muslimness.” The accompanying report made clear that this deliberately vague formulation was to be interpreted broadly: to cover everything from individual acts of abuse, to alleged media discrimination against the “Muslim community”, to “structural” Islamophobia in society as a whole.¹⁶

Until now, Government has refused to endorse the APPG definition, despite concerted pressure to persuade it to take such a step.¹⁷ It is entirely right to do so given the fundamentally flawed nature of this definition and the various negative consequences that might flow from any adoption. Policy Exchange has previously explored this issue at length and the most problematic aspects of the APPG definition of Islamophobia can be summarized as follows:¹⁸

- **First, there is an obvious lack of clarity over the meaning of “Muslimness” – a newly invented word.** Defining one neologism by reference to another seems like a poor approach if one is hoping to promote greater understanding.¹⁹
- **Second, and more significantly, as has been repeatedly pointed out, the APPG definition of Islamophobia conflates the religion, Islam, with people, Muslims.** In so doing, it risks impeding free speech and the right to criticise systems of belief – including religion – which are an integral part of the western liberal intellectual tradition. The APPG report obfuscates on this issue. It denies any intention to shut down free speech, but it does so by suggesting that “reasonable” criticism of Islam should be permitted. One is surely right to ask: who gets to decide what is “reasonable” and which kinds of groups might assume the role of Gatekeepers here?
- **A third, related problem here is that by conflating race and religion, the APPG definition risks driving a coach and horses through existing race relations and equality legislation.** Internal government correspondence – produced by the Government Equalities Office and seen by Policy Exchange – notes that the effort to define Islamophobia as a type of racism “is not in line with the Equality Act 2010” and suggests “over time, there could be tensions between the Act and the official definition of Islamophobia”.²⁰
- **Fourth, as a result of the above flaws, the APPG definition of ‘Islamophobia’ risks undermining the UK’s Counter-Terrorism apparatus.** In a report for Policy Exchange, Richard

16. <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/599c3d-2feb1a90cfffdd8a9/t/5bfd1ea3352f531a-6170ceee/1543315109493/Islamophobia+Defined.pdf>.

17. <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/may-set-to-reject-new-definition-of-islamophobia-3jh6g2s8r>.

18. For more on all this see <https://policyexchange.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/On-Islamophobia.pdf>.

19. Ibid; and also <https://policyexchange.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Defining-Islamophobia.pdf>.

20. <https://policyexchange.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/On-Islamophobia.pdf>.

Walton, the former head of SO15 (Counter-Terrorism Command) at the Metropolitan Police, has warned that the adoption of the APPG definition could “cripple” counter-terrorism efforts; Lord Carlile, previously appointed Prevent Reviewer, endorsed this assessment²¹; and in May 2019 it was revealed that Martin Hewitt, chairman of the National Police Chiefs’ Council (NPCC) had written to the Prime Minister to warn that he and Neil Basu, Assistant Commissioner at the Metropolitan Police, believed the definition risked undermining counter-terrorism policing powers.^{22,23}

- In particular, it seems clear that, under the APPG definition, the ‘Pursue’ and ‘Prevent’ strands of the government’s counter-terrorism strategy would be vulnerable to accusations of “Islamophobia” (it was telling that at the launch of the APPG’s report, supporters of the proposed definition repeatedly denounced the Prevent programme – evidently, it was in their sights). At the same time, key institutions like the Crown Prosecution Service, the judiciary and the prison service would be labelled “institutionally Islamophobic”. Indeed, such charges are already made routinely by campaign groups like MEND²⁴ and CAGE.²⁵ The APPG definition could only serve to embolden groups of this kind – and would likely be used to undermine the integrity of the country’s counter-terrorism effort.
- **A fifth and related point here, is how striking it is that those arguing most strongly in favour of the APPG definition are, for the most part, Islamist-aligned groups and individuals.** They wish to use it as a “heckler’s veto”, to shield themselves from criticism and smear opponents. Any adoption of the APPG definition would therefore likely damage the ability of Government – and many moderate Muslims – to challenge Islamist extremism effectively.
- **Sixth, and building on the above, the definition to privilege a narrow view of Islam.** Rather than beginning from an acceptance of the fact that Islam is inherently complex and plural, with manifold interpretations, practices and expressive forms, the APPG seemed instead to be lending support for policing the boundaries in favour of one model of Islamic orthodoxy and orthopraxy. It was notable, for instance, that Ofsted inspectors who questioned the policy of school girls being required to wear the hijab were deemed to be Islamophobic. Yet this practice is contested within many-Muslim majority countries, where it is often seen to have a political as much as a devotional significance.
- **Seventh, this attempt to enshrine a particular version of what it means to be Muslim, raises all kinds of questions about what happens to those who fall outside it.** As Baroness Falkner noted during the December 2018 Lords Debate on Islamophobia, the APPG definition appears deliberately to occlude the issue of intra-Muslim sectarianism; and it fails to include the discrimination and

21. <https://policyexchange.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Islamophobia-Crippling-Counter-Terrorism.pdf>.

22. <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/terror-police-warn-against-new-rules-on-muslim-hate-p2pfz-bqhx>.

23. In an extraordinary step, Basu and Hewitt later reversed their position having apparently come under pressure from “community” representatives, with the police explaining that there had been “damage to community relations” at the time of their earlier decision on the definition. See: <https://inews.co.uk/news/politics/police-chiefs-call-on-conservative-party-to-adopt-widely-recognised-definition-of-islamophobia-496852>

24. <https://mend.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Approaching-a-definition-of-Islamophobia-More-than-words.pdf>

25. <https://www.cage.ngo/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/CAGE-Response-to-%E2%80%98Working-Definition-of-Islamophobia-Anti-Muslim-hatred.pdf>

persecution suffered by non-Islamist Muslims, and those from minority sects such as the Ahmadiyya.²⁶ Moreover, the APPG report at one point effectively equates an opposition to Islamism with an opposition to Islam – deeming both to be symptoms of Islamophobia.²⁷

- **The eighth and final point to note is the broad threat posed by the APPG definition to free speech.** This consideration loomed large in the thinking of the last Government, as it fended off pressure to adopt the definition. In setting out why she believed it was inappropriate, then Prime Minister Theresa May pointed to the opposition voiced from figures such as Peter Tatchell and Trevor Phillips who had warned that the APPG definition could be used as a “bully’s charter”²⁸. This matters all the more because we have seen, over the last year, a concerted behind-closed-doors attempt to push the Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO) into endorsing separate and distinctive treatment for so-called “Muslim issues”, pressured by the unsubstantiated allegation that the media’s reporting is precipitating an ever increasing wave of hate crime and attacks against Muslims. Yet, the driving impulse behind these efforts seems to be an attempt to exempt certain issues from public scrutiny/discussion.²⁹ As has been noted previously, a capacious definition of Islamophobia might make it more difficult to investigate future stories like the Rotherham grooming scandals.³⁰

Despite these flaws, the APPG definition has gained much ground over the last twelve months. Its advocates put together a website carrying a lengthy list of people who had apparently endorsed the definition – many of whom were themselves involved in its production.³¹ Listed on the Islamophobia website are groups like the MCB, Islamic Relief, the Muslim Association of Britain, the UK Islamic Mission, and Friends of al-Aqsa; and parliamentarians either active on the APPG or known to be sympathetic to its conclusions, such as Baroness Warsi, former MP Anna Soubry, Wes Streeting MP and Afzal Khan MP.³²

The endorsement of the APPG definition by such groups and individuals has encouraged its adoption at a local level. This has resulted in a number of local councils formally embracing the definition, including Newham, Redbridge, Islington and Oxford City.³³ In addition, a number of political parties have formally embraced the definition: Plaid Cymru, the Scottish National Party, the Liberal Democrats and, of course, the Labour Party.

And yet, it is striking that advocates of the APPG definition no longer seem inclined to defend it on the grounds upon which it was originally proposed. A revealing question here concerns the projected status of the APPG definition. The accompanying report was unambiguous on this issue: the APPG were proposing both a “working definition” and something that would have “legal” effect”. Early on, for instance, the report quoted Anna Soubry MP, in her capacity as chair of the APPG on British Muslims,

26. <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/2018-12-20/debates/2F954D45-1962-4256-A492-22EB-F6AEF8F0/Islamophobia>.

27. <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/599c3d-2feb1a90cfffdd8a9/t/5bfd1ea3352f531a-6170ceee/1543315109493/Islamophobia+Defined.pdf> (see p. 29).

28. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2019/06/19/new-islamophobia-definition-could-bullys-charter-warns-former/>

29. <https://policyexchange.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Eroding-the-free-press.pdf>.

30. <https://policyexchange.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Defining-Islamophobia.pdf>

31. <https://www.islamophobia-definition.com/>.

32. <https://www.islamophobia-definition.com/>.

33. On all this, see: <https://www.newham.gov.uk/Pages/News/Newham-Council-endorses-All-Party-Parliamentary-groups-definition-Islamophobia.aspx>; <https://www.ilfordrecorder.co.uk/news/redbridge-council-adopts-islamophobia-definition-1-5863504>; <https://www.islingtongazette.co.uk/news/islington-adopts-appg-on-british-muslims-islamophobia-definition-1-5920830>.

to the effect “the time has now come **for a proper legal definition of Islamophobia** [emphasis added]”.³⁴ This is followed by the assertion that, “**there is a clear need for a working definition that is widely accepted and adopted across public sector organisations, government, and within the legal and policy frameworks**, which adequately reflects and captures the experience of Muslims facing Islamophobia in Britain, today [emphasis added].”³⁵ The same section of the report goes on to argue that the lack of a clear definition leaves Muslims without sufficient legal recourse: “not recognising that Islamophobia is a specifically racial and religious form of discrimination leaves Muslims vulnerable to abuse without recourse to **legal or political remedy** [emphasis added].” Later, the report is still more explicit in arguing for a legally-binding definition: “Islamophobia is indeed a very real phenomenon, and one in needs of a critical clarification and codification, which would only be possible if different views, approaches and experiences come together to inform a broad and **legally-binding definition** [emphasis added].”³⁶

On this point, too, the testimony of various individuals was cited in approving fashion. For instance, the APPG notes that the submissions it received on “Islamophobia”, “fleshed out a variety of arguments in favour of the term, **signalling that there is an overall agreement that formulating and adopting a legally binding definition of Islamophobia is not just needed, but also possible** [emphasis added].”³⁷ Akeela Ahmed, the Chair of the Independent Members of the Government’s Cross-Department Working Group on Anti-Muslim Hatred³⁸, was one of those who told the APPG, “**that a definition with legal power is required, one that could be implemented by the government and the police** [emphasis added].”³⁹

We could go on listing examples⁴⁰, but the examples quoted should be quite sufficient to prove the point: there can be no doubt that the drafters of the APPG definition intended it to carry legal consequences. After all, they said so themselves. It has therefore been remarkable to witness its advocates insist that this was not the case. Baroness Warsi, for instance, in May 2019 stated publicly that the definition was only ever meant to be “non-legally binding”.⁴¹ This claim was echoed in the House of Commons by the APPG’s Vice Chair, Naz Shah MP.⁴² Even more breathless was the assertion of the now-former-MP Dominic Grieve, who had written the foreword for the APPG report and declared, “I should emphasise that neither I nor—I think—any member of the APPG thought that a new legal definition was being enacted”⁴³ – which rather raised the question of just how much of the report he had actually read.

And more generally, all of this raises further obvious questions: is there, in effect, an attempt to achieve a legal definition by the back door – to obfuscate on this issue, in the hope of winning the support of those who might otherwise be chary of such a far-reaching step? Is this simply a temporary if panicky retreat? Or have the advocates of the definition themselves had a change of heart – suggestive of a new awareness as to

34. <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/599c3d-2febbd1a90cfffdd8a9/t/5bfd1ea3352f531a-6170ceee/1543315109493/Islamophobia+Defined.pdf> (see p. 10).

35. *Ibid.*, p. 25.

36. *Ibid.*, p. 30.

37. *Ibid.*, p. 27.

38. The working group falls under the Ministry of Housing, Communities, and Local Government: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/724354/AMHWG_Draft_TOR.pdf

39. <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/599c3d-2febbd1a90cfffdd8a9/t/5bfd1ea3352f531a-6170ceee/1543315109493/Islamophobia+Defined.pdf>, p. 26.

40. See, for example, what the report says about having a legally-applicable, or legally-binding definition of Islamophobia on pp. 30, 32, 33, 35, 42, 43, 45, 49.

41. See Baroness Warsi, tweet of 15 May 2019.

42. <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Com-mons/2019-05-16/debates/CF834846-65CA-46CD-B955-CDEF42BAFB26/DefinitionOfIslamophobia>.

43. *Ibid.*

why it might be problematic?

Either way, of course, the extent to which the definition had or could have legal status should have been a secondary issue. Whether or not it was intended to be made legally-binding, its analytical and definitional flaws – as outlined above – remained blindingly evident. And nowhere was this more the case than with regard to its likely pernicious effect on free speech.

The adoption of this kind of definition by any kind of institution – whether public or private – creates the prospect that an individual could, if held to fall foul of its rubric, be found guilty of bringing that organisation into disrepute. Such an individual would of course then be liable to have their employment terminated; and the emergence of such cases would surely have an inevitable effect on others.⁴⁴ In this context, it is not hard to imagine how activist groups and individuals might bring vexatious complaints in order to encourage compliance: the targeting of a few individuals, *pour encourager les autres*.

44. See the case of the Grandfather who was dismissed by the supermarket chain Asda for sharing a clip of the comedian Billy Connolly, <https://beta.spectator.co.uk/article/why-was-a-disabled-grandad-sacked-by-asda-for-sharing-a-billy-connolly-clip>

Conclusion

Why does all this matter? The irony of the case itself demands attention. But beyond that, of course, there are the wider issues that it inevitably raises. And in this regard, it is worth asking: what about those individuals with a far lower profile who might find themselves accused of “racism and Islamophobia” in this manner?

Again, it is worth pausing to consider those figures who have had that label thrown at them in recent times: the former Prime Minister, Theresa May;⁴⁵ journalist and author, Yasmin Alibhai Brown;⁴⁶ Sarah Champion, the Labour MP for Rotherham who publicly raised the issue of grooming gangs;⁴⁷ Peter Clarke, Her Majesty’s Chief Inspector of Prisons;⁴⁸ Sara Khan, Lead Commissioner for Countering Extremism;⁴⁹ the journalist Polly Toynbee;⁵⁰ Maajid Nawaz, founder of the Quilliam Foundation;⁵¹ former US President Barack Obama; the government’s former community cohesion tsar, Louise Casey;⁵² and Amanda Spielman, Her Majesty’s Chief Inspector of Education, Children’s Services and Skills (Ofsted).⁵³ And, of course, Trevor Phillips.

The reality is that Trevor Phillips needs no defence from us. His record speaks for itself; he has a platform to make his case; and he is doubtless more eloquent in putting forth his own argument than we could ever be. But what about those people who do not have the same means to defend themselves or the same recourse to the public square?

Who will be next to fall foul of the accusation of Islamophobia? And how would the high-profile expulsion of someone like Trevor Phillips from a political party on these grounds transform this space? What kind of chilling effect can we expect in terms of free speech, among say journalists? Or within the public sector, where fears about being labeled “racist” or “Islamophobic” already appear to have shaped the responses of the relevant authorities to events like the “grooming scandals” or the “Trojan Horse” affair?

It is for these reasons that this troubling case matters. It is a bellwether episode in the steady shrinking of the public sphere. How we all respond will determine how things develop from here. Surely, it is time to say: enough is enough. The more people feel that they do not know what they can safely say, the more likely they are to say nothing. Is this really the world that we want to create?

No-one should question the notion that anti-Muslim bigotry/prejudice/discrimination is unacceptable. We want to see a Britain in which people of Muslim faith and heritage are treated equally and have access to the same opportunities as everyone else. We are as anxious as

45. <https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/as-a-british-muslim-im-terrified-that-theresa-may-winner-of-2015s-islamophobe-of-the-year-is-my-new-a7133981.html>

46. <https://www.islam21c.com/politics/ch4-niqab-debate-islamophobe-panellists-exposed/>

47. <https://justyorkshire.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Version-10--Final-Sarah-Champion-Impact-Report-Rotherham-.docx.pdf>

48. <http://www.stopwar.org.uk/index.php/news-comment/1492-a-new-wave-of-islamophobia-where-it-rsquo-s-come-from-and-how-to-stop-it>

49. <https://mend.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Sarah-Khan-Final-Overview-MEND.docx>

<https://www.counterpunch.org/2018/03/30/100867/>

50. P. Toynbee, ‘Leave God out of it’, in M. Bunting (ed.), *Islam, Race and Being British* (The Guardian, 2005), pp. 53-6.

51. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentis-free/2018/may/26/us-liberal-islamophobia-rising-more-insidious> The accusation of Islamophobia was later withdrawn.

52. <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/islamophobia-award-puts-target-on-back-of-former-equalities-chief-5j3swc7dg>; <https://www.ihr.org.uk/activities/press-releases/10938-press-release-islamophobia-awards-winners/>;

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t2B21UePTBA>;

<https://www.ihr.org.uk/activities/event-reports/11384-event-report-islamophobia-awards-2015/>;

<http://blogs.spectator.co.uk/2016/10/white-left-issued-first-fatwa/>;

<https://www.splcenter.org/news/2018/06/18/splc-statement-regarding-maajid-nawaz-and-quilliam-foundation>.

53. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/education/education-news/ofsted-hijab-ban-islamophobia-schools-amanda-spielman-national-education-union-neu-a8283786.html>; <https://www.islam21c.com/politics/ofsteds-amanda-spielman-panders-to-tabloids-in-another-ideologically-driven-speech/>.

anyone to see their life chances improve. But we remain unconvinced that attempts to define ‘Islamophobia’ in the way promoted by the APPG, make any meaningful difference in this regard. Worse, we believe that they risk creating many more problems than they solve – not least because they entail what Pragna Patel of the Southall Black Sisters called “a privileged sense of victimhood”⁵⁴. Moreover, the fear must be that in the case of the Labour Party vs Trevor Phillips, we see the first of many chickens coming home to roost.

54. <https://www.workersliberty.org/story/2019-07-17/islamophobia-its-anti-muslim-racism>

Afterword

Kyai Haji Yahya Cholil Staquf, General Secretary of the Nahdlatul Ulama Supreme Council of Indonesia

Over the past 15 months, I have observed and occasionally participated in the debate surrounding the All-Party Parliamentary Group on British Muslims' proposed definition of Islamophobia. In a March 2019 *Telegraph* article titled, "Don't weaponize the term Islamophobia," I urged Western political and intellectual elites not to short-circuit analysis of *jihadi* doctrines, goals and strategy—which are rooted in specific tenets of orthodox, authoritative Islam and its historic practice—by condemning any and all discussion of problematic issues related to Islam, and Muslims, as "Islamophobia."

In May of 2019 I endorsed Policy Exchange's report, *On Islamophobia*, which was co-authored by Trevor Phillips OBE, Sir John Jenkins and Dr. Martyn Frampton. Specifically, I warned that "Efforts to legally define and restrict 'Islamophobia'—whatever their intention—threaten to strip Western societies of the freedom of speech required to identify and address the very real dangers that are posed by Islamist extremism, while encouraging Muslims to identify as victims and further politicizing religious identity. Rather than take sides in the highly polarized and increasingly lethal 'culture wars' currently roiling the West, we urge Muslims to join hands with people of good will of every faith and nation who seek to prevent the political weaponization of Islam and curtail the spread of communal hatred. Islamophobia will only be overcome as part of a broader effort to defeat Islamist extremism."

I was scheduled to speak at Policy Exchange's event on Islamophobia at the Conservative Party Conference in October 2019. Unfortunately, I could not travel due to the political situation in Indonesia. I therefore asked Trevor Phillips, who chaired the event, to read out a statement on my behalf, in which I said: "It is factually incorrect and counter-productive to define Islamophobia as 'rooted in racism,' as proposed by the All-Party Parliamentary Group on British Muslims. In reality, it is the spread of Islamist extremism and terror that primarily contributes to the rise of Islamophobia throughout the non-Muslim world.

"That is why it is vital to challenge the prevailing 'Muslim mindset,' which is predicated upon enmity and suspicion towards non-Muslims, and too often rationalises perpetrating violence in the name of Islam. Otherwise, non-Muslims will continue to be radicalised by Islamist attacks.

"Stifling this much needed debate with a flawed definition of Islamophobia will do nothing to make Muslims safer, but rather will contribute to an atmosphere in which divisions become more deeply felt,

creating greater hostility and inevitably putting both Muslims and non-Muslims at ever greater risk.

“Perpetually focusing attention outward—as seen with the endless calls for an Islamophobia investigation into Britain’s governing party—only adds to the problem, by distracting from the need for debate within, and about, Islam... Seeking to police what other people think and say is an authoritarian means of preventing free discussion, rather than an expression of compassion.”

The commencement of disciplinary procedures against the Honorable Trevor Phillips by the UK Labour Party—on the grounds of alleged racism and Islamophobia—perfectly illustrates the political weaponization and abuse of these terms.

In today’s caustic political environment, it is both seductive and easy to hurl accusations, rather than present reasoned arguments concerning issues that are of the utmost importance to our respective societies. However, facts do not cease to be facts, when those who highlight their existence are subjected to a political inquisition and/or social ostracism. Character assassination is not a legitimate form of argument. Nor will denying that problems exist cause them to miraculously vanish.

Mr. Phillips’ inquisition is occurring against the backdrop of a far larger socio-cultural and political movement in the West, that seeks to deny one’s fellow human beings “the right to freedom of opinion and expression; a right which includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, impart and receive information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers” (*Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, Article 19).

We note from afar Policy Exchange’s efforts to defend this key element of the humanist tradition, which is under siege by the forces of intolerance. Rather than vilify and/or silence those who disagree, let us choose compassion; let us embrace humility; let us be honest and objective in our analysis of circumstances and events; and let us respect the right of others to think and speak freely, for God alone knows the truth of all things.

I believe this is the only way to restore trust and reestablish the bonds of affection that are essential, if we are to acknowledge and embrace our shared humanity.

Appendix A: The Labour Party's Letter to Trevor Phillips

The Labour Party

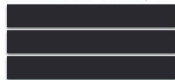
Head Office

Southside, 105 Victoria Street, London SW1E 6QT

Labour Central, Kings Manor,
Newcastle Upon Tyne NE1 6PA

0345 092 2299 | labour.org.uk/contact

Mr Trevor Phillips



28 February 2020



Dear Mr Phillips,

Notice of administrative suspension from membership of the Labour Party

Allegations that you may have been involved in a breach of Labour Party rules have been brought to the attention of national officers of the Party. These allegations relate to numerous statements you made on public platforms, as well as authoring the document '*Race and Faith: The Deafening Silence*,' which may be in breach of rule 2.1.8.

We write to give you formal notice that it has been determined that the powers given to the NEC under Chapter 6 Clause I.1.B* should be invoked to administratively suspend your membership of the Party.

This means that you cannot attend any Party meetings, including meetings of your own branch, constituency, or annual conference; and you cannot be considered for selection as a candidate to represent the Labour Party at an election at any level**.

In view of the urgency to protect the Party's reputation the General Secretary has determined to use powers delegated to her under Chapter 1 Clause VIII.5 of the rules to impose this suspension forthwith, subject to the approval of the next meeting of the NEC.

It has also been determined that this case may be suitable for the use of NEC disciplinary powers under Chapter 1 Clause VIII.3.A.iii*** and Chapter 6 Clause I.1.B* because it involves an incident which may reasonably be seen to demonstrate hostility or prejudice based on race, religion or belief.

This means that, upon the conclusion of this investigation, the NEC may impose such disciplinary measures as it sees fit. These measures include suspension from membership of the Party or from holding office in the Party; withholding or withdrawing endorsement as a candidate; and expulsion from membership of the Party.

Attached to this letter is the draft charge(s), the evidence pertinent to the case, and a series of questions which require your response. Your response should also include your written representations and any evidence you intend to rely on in your defence.

Please respond in writing to the London address at the top of this letter or by email to disputes@labour.org.uk quoting case number CN-4003 within 7 days of the date at the top of this letter.

The Party may consider an extension to this deadline if you are able to provide a clear and compelling reason to do so. The Party will also take reasonable steps to ensure that you have been given an opportunity to respond to these allegations. However, if you do not respond, the NEC is entitled to consider your case without a response.

You should take this letter and your response seriously. Possible outcomes of the NEC disciplinary process could include your expulsion or suspension from the Labour Party.

mtrevorphillips@aol.com is the email address that we will be corresponding with during the course of this



The Labour Party

investigation. If this email is incorrect please call 0345 092 2299 to update it.

The Labour Party's investigation process operates confidentially. That is vital to ensure fairness to you and the complainant, and to protect the rights of all concerned under the Data Protection Act 2018. We must therefore ask you to ensure that you keep all information and correspondence relating to this investigation private, and that do not share it with third parties or the media (including social media). That includes any information you receive from the Party identifying the name of the person who has made a complaint about you, any witnesses, the allegations against you, and the names of Party staff dealing with the matter. If you fail to do so, the Party reserves the right to take action to protect confidentiality, and you may be liable to disciplinary action for breach of the Party's rules. The Party will not share information about the case publicly unless, as a result of a breach of confidentiality, it becomes necessary to correct inaccurate reports. In that case we will only release the minimum information necessary to make the correction. **The Party may also disclose information in order to comply with its safeguarding obligations.**

The Party would like to make clear that there is support available to you while this matter is being investigated. There are a number of organisations available who can offer support for your wellbeing:

- You can contact your **GP** who can help you access support for your mental health and wellbeing.
- **The Samaritans** are available 24/7 – They offer a safe place for anyone to talk any time they like, in their own way – about whatever's getting to them. Telephone **116 123**.
- **Citizens Advice** - Provide free, confidential and impartial advice. Their goal is to help everyone find a way forward, whatever problem they face. People go to the Citizens Advice Bureau with all sorts of issues. They may have money, benefit, housing or employment problems. They may be facing a crisis, or just considering their options. <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/>
- If you have questions about the investigation process please contact the **Disputes Team**, whose details are included in this letter.

It is hoped you will offer your full co-operation to the Party in resolving this matter.

Yours sincerely,
The Governance and Legal Unit
The Labour Party

c.c. Greater London Labour Party

The Labour Party

* In relation to any alleged breach of Chapter 2 Clause I.8 above by an individual member or members of the Party which involves any incident which in the NEC's view might reasonably be seen to demonstrate hostility or prejudice based on age; disability; gender reassignment or identity; marriage and civil partnership; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex; or sexual orientation, the NEC may, pending the final outcome of any investigation and charges (if any), suspend that individual or individuals from office or representation of the Party notwithstanding the fact that the individual concerned has been or may be eligible to be selected as a candidate in any election or byelection. The General Secretary or other national officer shall investigate and report to the NEC on such investigation. Upon such report being submitted, the NEC or a sub-panel of Disputes Panel may exercise its powers under Chapter 1 Clause VIII.3.A.iii (Chapter 6 Clause I.1.B as amended by Annual Conference 2019)

** A 'suspension' of a member whether an administrative suspension by the NEC or by the NEC or NCC in imposing a disciplinary penalty, unless otherwise defined by that decision, shall require the membership rights of the individual member concerned to be confined to participation in such ballots of all individual members as may be prescribed by the NEC. A suspended member shall not be eligible to seek any office in the Party, nor shall s/he be eligible for nomination to any panel of prospective candidates nor to represent the Party in any position at any level. The member concerned will not be eligible to attend any Party meeting. (Chapter 6 Clause I.3 as amended by Annual Conference 2019)

*** where a determination has been made as a result of a case brought under disciplinary proceedings concluded at NEC stage under Chapter 6 Clause I.1.B below of these rules, to impose such disciplinary measures as it thinks fit including: formal warning; reprimand; suspensions from membership of the Party, or from holding office in the Party (including being a candidate or prospective candidate at any, or any specified, level) or being a delegate to any Party body, for a specified period or until the happening a specified event; withholding or withdrawing endorsement as a candidate or prospective candidate at any, or any specified, level (such disciplinary power shall be without prejudice to and shall not in any way affect the NEC's other powers to withhold endorsement under these rules); expulsion from membership of the Party, in which case the NEC may direct that following expiration of a specified period of not less than two nor more than five years, the person concerned may seek readmission to the Party on that basis that Chapter 6.I.2 is not to apply to that readmission; or any other reasonable and proportionate measure. (Chapter 1 Clause VIII.3.A.iii as amended by Annual Conference 2019)

The Labour Party

Please respond to this letter within 7 days of the date on page 1 quoting case number [REDACTED]. Your response should include:

- A written statement of representation in your defence to the draft charge(s) below.
- Any evidence you wish to submit in your defence to the draft charge(s) below.
- A written response to the questions contained overleaf.

Your response should be submitted in writing to the Disputes Team by email or by post:

Email:

disputes@labour.org.uk

Post:

Disputes Team
The Labour Party
Southside,
105 Victoria Street,
London SW1E 6QT

Draft Charge
<p>1. Mr Phillips (the Respondent) has engaged in conduct prejudicial and / or grossly detrimental to the Party in breach of Chapter 2 Clause 1.8 of the Labour Party Rule Book 2019 by engaging in conduct online which:</p> <p>a. may reasonably be seen to demonstrate hostility or prejudice based on race, religion or belief;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Item 5 - <i>"But the most sensitive cause of conflict in recent years has been the collision between majority norms and the behaviours of some Muslim groups. In particular, the exposure of systematic and longstanding abuse by men, mostly of Pakistani Muslim origin in the North of England,"</i> <p><i>"a group of Germany's five million or so settled Muslim migrants had, for some reason, suddenly and inexplicably decided to run amok; and that to some Muslim men in Germany, basic norms of decent behaviour are irrelevant."</i></p> <p><i>"she asserted that it was 'improper' to blame recent migrants; but then advised women in public to stay at least an arm's length away from possible attackers – presumably with men of Arab or North African appearance in mind. It has since emerged that the Germans are not alone in experiencing this kind of cultural conflict."</i></p> <p>b. may reasonably be seen to involve Islamophobic actions, stereotypes and sentiments;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Item 3 - <i>"Muslim communities are not like others in Britain and the country should accept they will never integrate, the former head of the equalities watchdog has claimed,"</i> <p><i>"He told a meeting at the Policy Exchange think tank in Westminster on Monday that Muslims 'see the world differently from the rest of us'."</i></p> • Item 4 - <i>"the unacknowledged creation of a nation within the nation, with its own geography, its own values and its own very separate future."</i> • Item 5 - <i>"At a recent conference of Muslim scholars, I had the privilege of addressing a hundred or so people at a leading British university. Most of the audience were Muslims themselves. The event took place just a few days before Remembrance Sunday. I noted that just three people in the room displayed a poppy, myself, a (white) journalist and one Muslim attendee. Raising the point, I could see the incomprehension on the faces of those without poppies; they weren't meaning to offend, but as a group, they couldn't see why they should</i>

wear what – I imagine – they think of as a symbol of war. The same day, I visited an industrial site – where many immigrants, mostly African and Eastern Europeans, were working. Poppies were everywhere. The norms in these two places were wholly different. One group had clearly adapted to the mainstream; the other had not."

- c. Any behaviour or use of language which targets or intimidates members of ethnic or religious communities, or incites racism, including Islamophobia;

- **Item 1** – *"To what extent is the argument around Islamophobia already having an effect in silencing those who report our world?" "I don't know if I'm the only one here who's been nominated by a UN body as the Islamophobe of the Year. You might have been Peter, no? [LAUGHTER] PETER TATCHELL: I'm jealous!"*
- **Item 2** – *"authorities in towns such as Rotherham and Rochdale remain reluctant to associate the child grooming scandals with social norms within the largely Pakistani Muslim neighbourhoods in which they took place"*
- **Item 4** – *"For a long time, I too thought that Europe's Muslims would become like previous waves of migrants, gradually abandoning their ancestral ways, wearing their religious and cultural baggage lightly, and gradually blending into Britain's diverse identity landscape."*

"I should have known better. The integration of Muslims will probably be the hardest task we've ever faced. It will mean abandoning the milk-and-water multiculturalism still so beloved of many, and adopting a far more muscular approach to integration."

- **Item 5** – *"Britain has embraced many immigrant groups who were very different from the population they joined – former American slaves in the early 19th century for example. But these groups balanced their social distance with an eagerness to fit in with prevailing norms. For the first time in living memory Europe has encountered a minority group which both occupies a significant social distance from the society into which it is arriving, but which also appears resistant to the traditional process of integration."*

"A small minority is actively opposed to values and behaviours that most Europeans take for granted. Today there are 44 million Muslims in Europe. By 2050, that number will be 71 million – some one in 10 of the continent's population. According to a 2015 poll by the firm Survation for the BBC, they hold what one respected Muslim commentator called some 'disconcerting' attitudes."

"A third of UK Muslims would like their children educated separately from non-Muslims. A quarter disagreed with the statement that 'acts of violence against anyone publishing images of the Prophet could never be justified'; and a quarter were sympathetic to the 'motives' of the Charlie Hebdo killers.¹² These facts should presage a society in a turmoil of preparation for change; and a political and media elite engaged in serious debate as to how we meet this challenge to our fundamental values."

"But these are not the topics that generate public unease. Rather it is the appearance of non-English names above the shop-fronts in the high street; the odd decision to provide only halal meat in some schools; evidence of corruption in municipal politics dominated by one ethnic group or another."

- a. undermines the Party's ability to campaign against racism.

- **Item 5** – *"Yet whilst we hear the words racism and Islamophobia often enough, there remains a deafening silence in the air about the real dilemmas that confront our society."*

"They become gathering straws in a stiffening breeze of nativist, anti-immigrant sentiment."

The Labour Party

And still, our political and media elites appear not to have scented this new wind. We maintain a polite silence masked by noisily debated public fictions such as 'multiculturalism' and 'community cohesion'."

"In Enoch Powell's 1968 speech, he too summoned up echoes of Rome with his reference to Virgil's dire premonition of the River Tiber 'foaming with much blood'. This much-studied address is, simultaneously, lauded as an epic example of the use of political rhetoric."

Questions

- 1) The Party further has reason to believe that you made these statements yourself. Can you confirm this is the case? If not, each individual piece of evidence is numbered so please specify which of the pieces of evidence you are disputing?
- 2) Taking each item in turn, please can you state why you had made these statements?
- 3) Taking each item in turn, please can you explain what you meant by these statements?
- 4) Please can you explain the reason for quoting Enoch Powell's 1968 speech?
- 5) What is your response to the allegation that your statements may incite hatred and/or hostility to a particular religious and/or ethnic group?
- 6) Rule 2.1.8 in the Party's rulebook states:

"No member of the Party shall engage in conduct which in the opinion of the NEC is prejudicial, or in any act which in the opinion of the NEC is grossly detrimental to the Party. The NEC and NCC shall take account of any codes of conduct currently in force and shall regard any incident which in their view might reasonably be seen to demonstrate hostility or prejudice based on age; disability; gender reassignment or identity; marriage and civil partnership; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex; or sexual orientation as conduct prejudicial to the Party: these shall include but not be limited to incidents involving racism, antisemitism, Islamophobia or otherwise racist language, sentiments, stereotypes or actions, sexual harassment, bullying or any form of intimidation towards another person on the basis of a protected characteristic as determined by the NEC, wherever it occurs, as conduct prejudicial to the Party. The disclosure of confidential information relating to the Party or to any other member, unless the disclosure is duly authorised or made pursuant to a legal obligation, shall also be considered conduct prejudicial to the Party."

What is your response to the allegation that your conduct may be or have been in breach of this rule?

- 7) The Party's Code of Conduct states that members should *"treat all people with dignity and respect. This applies offline and online"* do you think the posts in this pack are consistent with this policy?
- 8) Looking back at the evidence supplied with this letter, do you regret sharing any of this content?
- 9) Do you intend to share content of this nature again in the future?
- 10) Are there any further matters you wish to raise in your defence?
- 11) Is there any evidence you wish to submit in your defence?

The Labour Party

Item 1

Transcript of Tory conference Islamophobia fringe event that provoked angry row

TREVOR PHILLIPS

[OPENING REMARKS, INCLUDING HIS BACK STORY]

The title of today's session is perhaps slightly ambiguous. You might read it to ask the question, how do we challenge anti-Muslim prejudice?

Or you might read it to ask the question, should we be challenging the very concept of Islamophobia, as has been promulgated in various ways.

Or we might read it as some people might as a challenge to the Conservative Party in this context. I'm happy that we take all those possibilities into account.

[GENERAL INTRODUCTORY REMARKS, INCLUDING PRAISING POLICY EXCHANGE, BEING A LABOUR MEMBER, PLIGHT OF PAKISTANI MUSLIMS IN UK, AND SCHOOL PROTESTS IN BIRMINGHAM].

I think this topic is so much more important than I think people often give it credit for. Some months ago, about a year ago the BBC transmitted a piece from the Yemen which was about the taking of the Presidential palace. And in the course of that piece there was a group of rebels, Houthis, who were chanting in Arabic. And there was a translation of this chanting which included the following phrases - 'death to America', 'death to Israel', 'death to the Jews', 'victory to Islam'.

I asked various executives of the BBC why this particular phrase was translated because it had no particular relevance to the story. We then embarked on a 6 month correspondence in which today there's not really answer to why the phrase 'death to the Jews' was translated.

And I will tell you what I think has happened here. That it was a mistake, a difficult mistake to make... the corporation finds it impossible to get into a conversation about this because it is anxious, extremely anxious about what it says and doesn't say about a particular faith group and is extremely worried about being seen or accused of being Islamophobic.

In the context of the comedy we've seen from the BBC over the last two or three days over Naga Munchetty, I think there's a much more serious issue here.

To what extent is the argument around Islamophobia already having an effect in silencing those who report our world?

As chair of Index on Censorship I can say that I think we are quite a long way and quite a damaging way down that road.

[OTHER SPEAKERS]

By the way, I speak - I don't know if I'm the only one here who's been nominated by a UN body as the Islamophobe of the Year. You might have been Peter, no? [LAUGHTER]

PETER TATCHELL
I'm jealous!

TREVOR PHILLIPS

I'm going to just very quickly ask each of you to comment on, because you raised a very specific thing and I wouldn't want us to walk out of here with anybody saying we at Policy Exchange don't want to confront important questions, and the issue of the government inquiry into what a definition might look like is important. And the question of whether the Conservative Party itself should have an investigation I think are important. So I might just ask each of you for 30 seconds on that in a moment.

The Labour Party

But before I do that, we should have had a fourth panellist, Yahya Cholil Staquf, who is the general secretary of the Supreme Council of Indonesia.

Unfortunately those of you who follow these things will know there is rioting in Jakarta. He is the senior advisor to the President of Indonesia and obviously this was not a moment for him to leave. But he has sent us a statement and I should remind you all that the organisation he heads is the largest single Muslim organisation in the world. This is what he said.

<https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/politics/transcript-tory-conference-islamophobia-fringe-20375360>

Item 2

“Yet, in all too many cases, authorities, public and private are being bullied into pretending that these significant cultural differences do not really exist. Even now, for example, authorities in towns such as Rotherham and Rochdale remain reluctant to associate the child grooming scandals with social norms within the largely Pakistani Muslim neighbourhoods in which they took place. The website of Rotherham Council proudly highlights its response to Louise Casey’s damning report on child sexual exploitation in the borough, which dwelt at length on the cultural background of the perpetrators. But in pages of text and a glossy video presentation you will find absolutely nothing on this question – other than to present, deep into the site, and without context or comment, a list of 19 Asian men and two non-Asian women, sentenced to a total of 289 years between them.”

<https://unherd.com/2019/05/how-much-do-we-really-have-in-common/>

Item 3

Muslim communities are not like others in Britain and the country should accept they will never integrate, the former head of the equalities watchdog has claimed.

Trevor Phillips, the former chairman of the Equality and Human Rights Commission, said it was disrespectful to assume that Muslim communities would change.

He told a meeting at the Policy Exchange think tank in Westminster on Monday that Muslims ‘see the world differently from the rest of us’.

According to The Times, he said: ‘Continuously pretending that a group is somehow eventually going to become like the rest of us is perhaps the deepest form of disrespect.

‘Because what you are essentially saying is the fact that they behave in a different way, some of which we may not like, is because they haven’t yet seen the light. It may be that they see the world differently to the rest of us.’

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3418620/Muslims-not-like-just-accept-never-integrate-says-former-racial-equalities-chief-Trevor-Phillips.html>

Item 4

Mr Phillips said that the survey exposed “the unacknowledged creation of a nation within the nation, with its own geography, its own values and its own very separate future”.

“For a long time, I too thought that Europe’s Muslims would become like previous waves of migrants, gradually abandoning their ancestral ways, wearing their religious and cultural baggage lightly, and gradually blending into Britain’s diverse identity landscape,” he wrote in The Sunday Times, which published some of the findings yesterday. “I should have known better. The integration of Muslims will probably be the hardest task we’ve ever faced. It will mean abandoning the milk-and-water multiculturalism still so beloved of many, and adopting a far more muscular approach to integration.”

The Labour Party

<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/survey-reveals-chasm-between-muslim-values-and-rest-of-uk-d30hl55lk>

Item 5

"Of course, there are similar issues arising in Jewish, Hindu and other minority communities. But the most sensitive cause of conflict in recent years has been the collision between majority norms and the behaviours of some Muslim groups. In particular, the exposure of systematic and longstanding abuse by men, mostly of Pakistani Muslim origin in the North of England, led to months of handwringing as to whether the fact of the perpetrators' ethnicity should even be reported by the media. It took the publication of two official reports, commissioned by the local authority and by government ministers, finally to break through the wall of denial. Elsewhere in Europe, there has, until recently, been less focus on the cultural impact of immigration. But at the start of 2016 the consequences of the continent's new diversity exploded. The risks that Europe now faces could not have been more starkly demonstrated than by the behaviour of immigrant men towards women in German cities."

"In January, shocking allegations emerged concerning mob assaults of women by Muslim men in Cologne and other cities. Most of those arrested were immigrant men, some of whom had recently arrived as asylum seekers from the Middle East. Aside from the attacks themselves, the most alarming element of these incidents was that both the German authorities and media sought to suppress news of their occurrence. When this proved impossible to sustain, they went out of their way to minimize the significance of the ethnicity of the attackers, claiming that it would be wrong to link the events with the recent wave of largely Muslim immigration to Germany by asylum seekers. Oddly, the proponents of this view did not seem to realise that their defence suggested an even more alarming picture – that the perpetrators, who were, by common consent, of Arab and North African appearance, were people who had been in Germany for some time. If that were the case, their scandalous behaviour could not be explained away by the suggestion that they were new to European ways. Instead it would imply that a group of Germany's five million or so settled Muslim migrants had, for some reason, suddenly and inexplicably decided to run amok; and that to some Muslim men in Germany, basic norms of decent behaviour are irrelevant. Even the local political authorities joined in the farce. The mayor of Cologne, who had herself been the victim of a knife attack by a xenophobic white German less than a year previously, tried to have it both ways. In spite of evidence to the contrary from her own police chief, she asserted that it was 'improper' to blame recent migrants; but then advised women in public to stay at least an arm's length away from possible attackers – presumably with men of Arab or North African appearance in mind. It has since emerged that the Germans are not alone in experiencing this kind of cultural conflict. Over a decade ago, similar problems were identified, but not widely spoken of, in the European country which has been most generous in its openness to asylum and immigration: Sweden. In 1996, one of the Swedish government's own agencies, the National Council for Crime Prevention, said that male immigrants were 23 times more likely to commit rape than the average; these astonishing numbers could perhaps have been explained as a consequence of various factors – small numbers, new immigration, and the effects of trauma on immigrants from war zones."

"It's not just the numbers that count in trying to manage the integration process; it is the character of these waves of migration. Historically, Britain has embraced many immigrant groups who were very different from the population they joined – former American slaves in the early 19th century for example. But these groups balanced their social distance with an eagerness to fit in with prevailing norms. For the first time in living memory Europe has encountered a minority group which both occupies a significant social distance from the society into which it is arriving, but which also appears resistant to the traditional process of integration. A small minority is actively opposed to values and behaviours that most Europeans take for granted. Today there are 44 million Muslims in Europe. By 2050, that number will be 71 million – some one in 10 of the continent's population. According to a 2015 poll by the firm Survation for the BBC, they hold what one respected Muslim commentator called some 'disconcerting' attitudes."

A third of UK Muslims would like their children educated separately from non-Muslims. A quarter disagreed with the statement that 'acts of violence against anyone publishing images of the Prophet could never be justified'; and a quarter were sympathetic to the 'motives' of the Charlie Hebdo killers. These facts should presage a society in a turmoil of preparation for change; and a political and media elite engaged in serious debate as to how we meet this challenge to our fundamental values. Yet whilst we hear the words racism and Islamophobia often enough, there remains a deafening silence in the air about the real dilemmas that confront our society."

"But these are not the topics that generate public unease. Rather it is the appearance of non-English names above the shop-fronts in the high street; the odd decision to provide only halal meat in some schools; evidence of corruption in

The Labour Party

municipal politics dominated by one ethnic group or another. Such headlines, frequently misreported, but often grounded in some real change, provoke muttering in the pub, or grumbling at the school gate. They become gathering straws in a stiffening breeze of nativist, anti-immigrant sentiment. And still, our political and media elites appear not to have scented this new wind. We maintain a polite silence masked by noisily debated public fictions such as 'multiculturalism' and 'community cohesion'. Rome may not yet be in flames, but I think I can smell the smouldering whilst we hum to the music of liberal self-delusion.

A clue as to why the UK roils in this unhappy exceptionalism lies in the history of one of the few political utterances that most British people can recognise. In Enoch Powell's 1968 speech, he too summoned up echoes of Rome with his reference to Virgil's dire premonition of the River Tiber 'foaming with much blood'. This much-studied address is, simultaneously, lauded as an epic example of the use of political rhetoric – and also as a ghastly testament to the power of unbridled free speech. Either way, it effectively put an end to Powell's career as an influential leader. Everyone in British public life learnt the lesson: adopt any strategy possible to avoid saying anything about race, ethnicity (and latterly religion and belief) that is not anodyne and platitudinous."

"At a recent conference of Muslim scholars, I had the privilege of addressing a hundred or so people at a leading British university. Most of the audience were Muslims themselves. The event took place just a few days before Remembrance Sunday. I noted that just three people in the room displayed a poppy, myself, a (white) journalist and one Muslim attendee. Raising the point, I could see the incomprehension on the faces of those without poppies; they weren't meaning to offend, but as a group, they couldn't see why they should wear what – I imagine – they think of as a symbol of war. The same day, I visited an industrial site – where many immigrants, mostly African and Eastern Europeans, were working. Poppies were everywhere. The norms in these two places were wholly different. One group had clearly adapted to the mainstream; the other had not."

<http://www.civitas.org.uk/content/files/Race-and-Faith.pdf>

Appendix B: Trevor Phillips' Response to the Labour Party

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
9th March 2020

The Disputes Team
The Governance and Legal Unit
The Labour Party

Southside
105 Victoria Street
London SW1E 6QT

disputes@labour.org.uk

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Dear Sir or Madam

Notice of Administrative Suspension from Membership of the Labour Party

Thank you for your missive which arrived by email on 2nd March 2020.

I am sure that you will understand that your letter was something of a surprise; and given that the Labour Party came into being to represent workers by hand and by brain, you will appreciate that those of us with responsibilities to professional colleagues and family members are not in a position to respond to such an extensive document instantly.

I have, however, had the opportunity to make an initial study of the contents of your letter. Unfortunately, it is not clear which of the texts included was considered by the Disputes Committee; whether the material you quote in pp 8 – 11 was part of the report to the Committee; or whether there were further items considered which are not included in your draft indictment.

In order to provide a response commensurate with the gravity of the charges, I would be grateful for further clarification as to the information that was provided to the Disputes Committee in three respects: procedure, evidence, and context. I would not wish to waste the time of the Committee or of the NEC by providing details of which they are already aware.

Leaving aside any appeal to Article 6 of the ECHR, it would be helpful to receive some clarity on the following questions:

Procedure

1. Was the Committee informed of the identity of the person or persons making the “allegations”; and will that information be made available to me?
2. Most of these allegations date back four or more years; exactly when were they first “brought to the attention of national officers of the Party”?
3. You kindly indicate that notwithstanding the confidentiality of these proceedings, I may contact my GP, the Samaritans, or Citizens Advice; does this mean that a Labour Party member thus accused may not do any of the following:
 - consult a lawyer;
 - advise the officials of his or her local constituency party of your actions;
 - seek the counsel of his or her rabbi, pastor or imam?

Evidence

4. Was the Committee provided by the Party with the full text of the work referred to in your letter: “Race and Faith: The Deafening Silence”?
5. Are the “draft charges” set out in your letter the totality of the allegations considered by the Committee, or were there other allegations made which were rejected by the Committee? If there were, may I see them?
6. With reference to draft charges 1a and 1b, would you please let me know if the Committee considered precisely what might be meant by an “Islamophobic action” or “sentiment”; and if, for guidance, it referred to any of the existing definitions of “Islamophobia” which have been promulgated since 1997?
- 7 Did the Committee consider the texts in which the materials quoted are set, which give meaning to the words quoted? Taking two examples at random (as it happens, the first and last draft charges):
 - a) Neither the draft charges nor the associated material make clear that “Item 5” was prompted, not by issues of race or religion, but principally by the need to protect LGBTQ+ equality. I made a decision as the chair of the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) to defend the rights of same-sex couples to be treated equally by adoption agencies, in spite of the widely held view in several different faith and ethnic communities – including the ones to which I myself belong – that this would be wrong. The point of this passage was to say that whilst I understood that point of view, I did not accept that any religious belief should be accepted as a reason to permit discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation. As a consequence of subsequent legislation supported by the EHRC, those agencies were closed and that particular form of discrimination no longer takes place.

- b) In the draft charge on p 5, marked as 1a (I think this point should actually be 1d), referring to Enoch Powell's 1968 "rivers of blood" speech, the phrase "a ghastly testament to the power of unbridled free speech" is omitted; and the more extensive text concerning Enoch Powell, set out at pp 10-11, is edited liberally to exclude several material points to which this passage alludes:
- the success of Germany in the integration of some 4 million Turkish migrants, most of whom are Muslim, over the past 40 years;
 - the role of the EHRC during my chairmanship in bringing about the demise of the British National Party;
 - the anxieties that lie behind the emergence of nationalist political parties such as UKIP, a point also referred to by the Leader of the Labour Party on more than one occasion, for example at: <https://jeremycorbyn.org.uk/articles/jeremy-corbyn-my-speech-to-the-party-of-european-socialists-council-in-prague/>

Context

8. Did the Disputes Committee know of, or consider the specific context of the allegations? For example, did the Committee discuss the likelihood that a party member of over a quarter of a century's standing, who is himself a person of colour, and whose family heritage includes almost a thousand years of adherence to Islam, would either deliberately or accidentally make any statements that are racist or Islamophobic?

9. Were the Committee provided with any information as to the commissioning and publication of the Runnymede Trust's 1997 report on Islamophobia; the Parekh Report of 2000 which called for incitement to racial hatred to be extended to protect Muslims; or the successful efforts by the Commission for Racial Equality to bring about the passage (by the last Labour government) of the Racial and Religious Hatred Act 2006, protecting Muslims *inter alia* from acts of incitement? I was chair of each organisation in the relevant periods and personally commissioned and launched the two reports referred to.

10. Whilst I understand the injunction to confidentiality as it applies to data and correspondence in order to protect individuals, it is not at all clear whether this extends to keeping "private" the fact that such correspondence has taken place; in short, is your request a version of the unilaterally imposed non-disclosure agreements, now widely known as SLAPPs, used in recent times by several prominent individuals to suppress media commentary and investigation into their business affairs? As Chair of Index on Censorship, which has campaigned vigorously against this suppression of free speech, you will grasp that I see such constraints as unacceptable to any democratic organisation or its members.

You will also understand that a full answer to each of these points is necessary in order for me to give you the information you have requested. I realise that it may take a little while for you to provide a response; for the moment, since I have no intention of standing for office within the party, the strictures set out are nugatory, so I am quite relaxed about the length of time you need to respond; that will be for you to decide. I will be happy to commit to replying within seven days of your clarifications.

We are, of course, a democratic and transparent party in which the participation of the voluntary membership remains paramount; since you have copied your letter to the Greater London Labour Party, I am sure that you will have no objection my sharing this exchange with the Chair of my own constituency party.

Yours sincerely,

Trevor Phillips

Appendix C: Kyai Haji Yahya Cholil Staquf's statement

as read by Trevor Phillips during Policy Exchange's fringe event at Conservative Party Conference

Public Statement on the Subject of Islamophobia

by Kyai Haji Yahya Cholil Staquf

General Secretary of the Nahdlatul Ulama Supreme Council
Co-founder and Director of Religious Affairs, Bayt ar-Rahmah

Prepared for the Conservative Party Conference

September 29, 2019

The continued targeting of Muslims and Muslim places of worship—as witnessed with the Christchurch and Finsbury Park attacks—comes after nearly two decades during which Islamist atrocities have been a pervasive feature of daily life around the world. Horrors such as the massacre in New Zealand would likely be inconceivable if divorced from this wider context in which Islam has become synonymous with terror in the minds of many non-Muslims.

Among both Muslims and non-Muslims, there is an urgent need to address those problematic elements of Islamic orthodoxy that underlie the Islamist worldview, fuelling violence on both sides. The truth, we must recognise, is that jihadism can be traced to specific tenets of authoritative Islam and its historic practice. This includes those portions of Shariah that promote Islamic supremacy and encourage enmity towards non-Muslims.

There is a desperate need for honest discussion of these matters. This is why it worries me to see Western political and intellectual elites weaponize the term “Islamophobia,” to short-circuit analysis of a complex phenomenon that threatens us all. It is factually incorrect and counter-productive to define Islamophobia as “rooted in racism,” as proposed by the All-Party Parliamentary Group on British Muslims. In reality, it is the spread of Islamist extremism and terror that primarily contributes to the rise of Islamophobia throughout the non-Muslim world.

That is why it is vital to challenge the mindset of Islamist extremism which has become so pervasive and which is predicated upon enmity and suspicion towards non-Muslims, and too often rationalises perpetrating violence in the name of Islam. Otherwise, non-Muslims will continue to

be radicalised by Islamist attacks.

Stifling this much needed debate with a flawed definition of Islamophobia will do nothing to make Muslims safer, but rather will contribute to an atmosphere in which divisions become more deeply felt, creating greater hostility and inevitably putting both Muslims and non-Muslims at ever greater risk.

Perpetually focusing attention outward—as seen with the endless calls for an Islamophobia investigation into Britain’s governing party—only adds to the problem, by distracting from the need for debate within, and about, Islam. Jokes are not inherently Islamophobic or hateful, and this includes Boris Johnson’s joke about the burqa. Seeking to police what other people think and say is an authoritarian means of preventing free discussion, rather than an expression of compassion.

I commend Policy Exchange for hosting this event. I also commend those of good will of every faith and nation, who seek to prevent the weaponization of Islam for political purposes, and strive to find common ground on the basis of our shared identity as human beings who are endowed with the right to freedom of opinion and expression; a right which includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, impart and receive information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers (UDHR, Article 19).

We note from afar your efforts to defend this key element of the humanist tradition, which is under siege by the forces of intolerance. In today’s caustic political environment, it is both seductive and easy to hurl accusations—e.g., of ‘Islamophobia’—rather than present reasoned arguments concerning issues that are of the utmost importance to our respective societies.

Rather than vilify and/or silence those who disagree, let us choose compassion; let us embrace humility; let us be objective in our analysis of circumstances and events; and let us respect the right of others to think and speak freely, for God alone knows the truth of all things.

I believe this is the only way to restore trust and reestablish the bonds of affection that are essential, if we are to acknowledge and embrace our shared humanity.



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Policy Exchange
8 – 10 Great George Street
Westminster
London SW1P 3AE

www.policyexchange.org.uk