

LAW, IHRA and Me

Some of you might be interested in hearing how I fared with Labour Against the Witch-hunt (LAW) at their members' meeting in London on Saturday 1st December, when I arrived from Edinburgh to seek LAW support for the petition that 890 have now signed at www.tinyurl.com/israelihra. The lack of LAW support meant they cited what they saw as flaws in the petition at every opportunity and this was undermining the campaign.

To seek support, I had lodged a motion which stated "This motion calls upon LAW to withdraw its objections to the petition at www.tinyurl.com/israelihra and give its petitioner, Peter Gregson, support in publicising the project"

It was proposed by me, Pete Gregson and seconded by another LAW member, Jon de Rennes, who was stuck in Thailand and unable to attend. You can read our motion at www.tinyurl.com/lawihramotion

My motion fell. Nobody supported it.

The explanatory notes in our motion dealt with the two concerns that had been levelled at the petition to date by the LAW Committee (about whether there was in Labour "Full freedom of speech on Israel" and in the background materials my statement that "Jewish leverage accruing to the Holocaust and their being the most persecuted race in history").

But as soon as I had dealt with these concerns, other objections to the petition were raised. Every single one was, in my view, nit-picking. And I did offer to change the petition to help meet new concerns, an offer that was ignored.

But what were those new objections?

Someone objected to the third paragraph of the petition where I refer to Israel's claim to be a democratic nation. Why was this in? Was it pertinent to the IHRA? How? Why does my petition not mention class politics? Surely people would vote according to their class, not their ethnicity? How could I assume the Israelis would be ruled by Arabs (simple maths, I reckon!). Someone said it should not be framed in terms of Jews vs Arabs. Someone said that I was saying equality and voting would fix everything. And why did my petition not mention Zionism?

In my background materials, I had mentioned that Jews were accepted to be the most persecuted race in history. The man who objected to this thought this claim had only been around since the Zionists manufactured it in 1946..[he seemed to be ignoring the pogroms, why Zionism was invented, the history of the Jews over 2,000 years, etc].

Tony Grenstein, LAW Vice-chair, objected to the first line- why does the petition say "endeavour"? Surely it should say "state"? He did not like the word "endeavour".

Then someone said that my petition was too confrontational, that it openly challenged the NEC, when we should be working with them. Then it was said that my petition was well-meaning but poorly constructed and naive. Then they said that LAW should set up their own, less confrontational petition.

Eventually I was given the chance to reply to the concerns.

I explained that Israel DOES claim to be a democratic nation in the IHRA, an assumption that needed to be challenged.

I explained that the petition needed to be challenging, otherwise it would be ignored. I pointed out there were other petitions out there, most of which were ignored. Folk in authority had no duty to respond to petitions- especially in a Party of 550,000 members, why would a petition signed by even 3,000 get anywhere? (there is one such against the IHRA, by Camden Momentum, which asks that the membership get to decide on the IHRA. [See it here](#))

I pointed out that our petition was different, in that it was impossible for the NEC to ignore it. It forced them to take a stance on the IHRA. I said other kinds of petitions, such as the Momentum one, were being ignored.

I explained that this was a battle and in a battle it was necessary to be on one side or the other; that the nicey-nicey approach was ignored by those in power. We needed to provoke the NEC to help them see the error of their ways, by openly challenging them.

I told them that our petition could be changed to accommodate some of their concerns, such as the lack of a reference to Zionism and so on.

I pointed out that it needed to use the word "endeavour" because it referenced the exact words of the IHRA and must do so in order to assure maximum impact- that one could say that Israel was a racist state, but that would be less clearly challenging the IHRA definition – indeed, using the word "state" did not technically breach the IHRA definition.

I explained that the word “endeavour” was also important, because it referenced an intention - that since Israel was founded, it had been racist and that had always been the plan (apart from when there was a brief outbreak of sanity at the founding of the Israeli state – early suggestions were that it should an equal place; these were soon over-ruled by ardent Zionism). I tried to deal with the other objections, but the chairperson wanted me to wind up.

It was all to no avail. The other LAW members indicated they were determined to do their own LAW petition and they felt that to back my one would undermine their own (as yet unwritten!) petition.

There was a vote - I think 20 voted against me, there were 2 abstentions, and I was the only one in favour.

We swiftly moved to the second motion I had proposed - a model motion that could be used by any CLP/ union branch, in asking the Executive to drop their support for the IHRA. That was passed immediately, without discussion!. This is good; I hope LAW help promote its uptake. If you want to read it, go to www.tinyurl.com/unionihra

So there you are. I was upset but I am used to losing motions..

Anyway, it was worth going to LAW and doing this; I think they understand better where those who helped me draft it – and those who’ve signed it- are coming from. I think, in time, they might come to regret their lack of support. We shall need to see... But it has given me new energy to see this thing through.

Pete Gregson, 3rd Dec 2018