

Muslim Labour MP slams party's 'embarrassing' decision to suspend equality champion Trevor Phillips for 'Islamophobia' after he voiced concerns about Asian grooming gangs - as he claims he's victim of Corbynista revenge

- Trevor Phillips could face expulsion from Labour over past alleged comments
- Labour made the move as a matter of urgency to 'protect the party's reputation'
- Mr Phillips is the former head of the Equality and Human Rights Commission
- Refused to vote Labour last year due to handling of party's anti-Semitism crisis



Trevor Phillips (left) was suspended by Labour's general secretary Jennie Formby (right) over remarks that are said to date back years

By James Tapsfield | 8 March 2020

Labour MPs today voiced fury over the 'embarrassing' suspension of former equalities watchdog Trevor Phillips - accusing Corbynistas of 'weaponising' Islamophobia allegations as an act of revenge.

The anti-racism campaigner, who previously chaired the Equality and Human Rights Commission, faces an investigation and could be expelled from the party.

He was among a group of 24 public figures who last year declared their refusal to vote for the Labour Party because of its association with anti-Semitism.

However, Mr Phillips revealed he is now being investigated over past comments, some of which date back years, including remarks on Pakistani Muslim men sexually abusing children in northern British towns.

He stood by his remarks today, blaming 'gangsterism' and suggesting he was a victim of 'payback' after criticising the leadership's handling of anti-Semitism cases.

Labour backbencher Khalid Mahmood - the longest-serving Muslim MP - branded the charges 'outlandish' and said they brought 'disrepute' on the party.

The Labour Party

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Mr Trevor Phillips
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

28 February 2020

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

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 1.1.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 1.1.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.

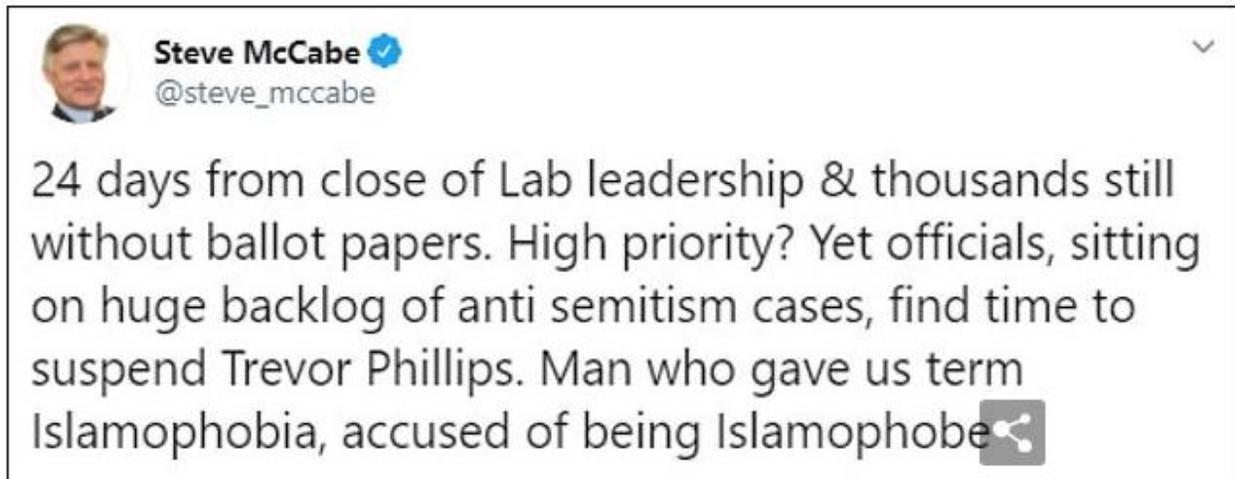
Please respond in writing to the London address at the top of this letter or by email to disputes@labour.org.uk quoting case number CN-4003 within 7 days of the date at the top of this letter.

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.



Labour wrote to Mr Phillips saying his membership of the party had been 'administratively suspended' pending an investigation



Labour MP Steve McCabe lashed out at the suspension of Mr Phillips on Twitter today

Comments Mr Phillips made about the failure of some Muslims to wear poppies for Remembrance Sunday are under scrutiny.

Other remarks refer to an opinion poll suggesting some Muslims had sympathy towards the motives of the Charlie Hebdo attackers.

However, Mr Phillips today mounted a robust defence. Speaking on BBC Radio 4's Today programme, he said: 'I'm surprised about what is and always has been an open and democratic party decides that its members cannot have healthy debate about how we address differences of values and outlooks.

Let us be clear about this. They say I'm accusing Muslims of being different.

'Well, actually, that's true. Muslims are different and, in many ways, I think that's admirable.'

In a column for The Times he questioned the motivation behind the sanction and accused Labour bosses of 'political gangsterism'.

'Some will see it as payback by Corbynistas for public criticisms I made of the leadership's failure to tackle antisemitism in the party,' he wrote.

'Another possibility is that it's an attempt to scare the Equality and Human Rights Commission, which I used to lead and which is investigating Labour's handling of anti-Semitism.

'Weaponising Islamophobia to attack political opponents may seem like clever tactics but trying to intimidate a legally independent organisation is pure political gangsterism.'

Labour MPs also voiced disquiet about the development.

In a report by the Policy Exchange think-tank on the case today, Mr Mahmood said: '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".'

Mr Mahmood said the action by Labour was 'embarrassing' and the party appeared intent on wielding allegations of Islamophobia 'as a weapon for rooting out "difficult" voices'.

Former minister Ben Bradshaw tweeted: 'This swift action against Trevor Phillips is in stark contrast to the complete lack of action against anti-semites I & many other Labour MPs have reported repeatedly to @JennieGenSec & who remain Labour members.'

The Policy Exchange report, which has an introduction by Mr Phillips, includes a copy of the letter written by Labour officials setting out the allegations.

The 'draft charge sheet' accuses Mr Phillips of using language 'which targets or intimidates members of ethnic or religious communities, or incites racism, including Islamophobia'.

He is also accused of engaging in conduct that 'may reasonably be seen to demonstrate hostility or prejudice based on race, religion or belief', involved 'Islamophobic actions, stereotypes and sentiments', and 'undermines the party's ability to campaign against racism'.

The Labour letter cites extracts from a 2016 pamphlet Mr Phillips wrote which contained the statement, '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.'

He went on to describe a visit to an industrial site where many African and eastern European immigrants worked but noticed a marked difference in those who were planning to mark Remembrance Sunday.



Mr Phillips fears the suspension might be connected to criticism of Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn for failing to deal with allegations of anti-Semitism in the party

He wrote: 'Poppies were everywhere. One group had clearly adapted to the mainstream, the other had not.'

Other remarks highlighted by Labour include a quote in *The Times* in 2016, where he referred to 'the unacknowledged creation of a nation within the nation, with its own geography, its own values and its own very separate future'.

Despite many of the statements dating back years, Labour's general secretary Jennie Formby suspended him as a matter of urgency to 'protect the party's reputation'.

In a letter to the *Guardian* in November, a group of public figures decided to take a stand against allegations of anti-Semitism in the Labour party.

[Redacted]
[Redacted]
[Redacted]

9th March 2020

The Disputes Team
The Governance and Legal Unit
The Labour Party

Southside
105 Victoria Street
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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:



The letter from the Labour Party to Mr Phillips, and his reply (pictured), were included in a report on the case by the Policy Exchange think-tank today - for which Mr Phillips wrote an introduction



Former minister Ben Bradshaw tweeted contrasting the action against Mr Phillips with the response to allegations of anti-Semitism

They said the path to a more tolerant society 'must encompass Britain's Jews with unwavering solidarity'.

They also accused party leader Jeremy Corbyn of having 'a long record of embracing anti-Semites as comrades'.

Mr Phillips told The Times there was no suggestion that he has done anything unlawful and 'no one inside or outside the Labour Party has ever suggested that I have broken any rules'.

Mr Phillips said he was shocked when he received news of his suspension and it suspicious of the motives behind it.

'Significantly, my indictment concerns matters of faith, doctrine and dissent,' he wrote.

'It is written, not in the language of a democratic, open political movement but in the cold-eyed, accusatory prose of the zealot.

'In essence, after more than 30 years of promoting the Labour cause, I am accused of heresy, and threatened with excommunication.'

A Labour Party spokeswoman said: 'The Labour Party takes all complaints about Islamophobia extremely seriously and they are fully investigated in line with our rules and procedures, and any appropriate disciplinary action is taken.'

Labour 'charge sheet' against ex-equalities chief Trevor Phillips

Labour's 'draft charge sheet' accuses Trevor Phillips of using language 'which targets or intimidates members of ethnic or religious communities, or incites racism, including Islamophobia'.

He is also accused of engaging in conduct that 'may reasonably be seen to demonstrate hostility or prejudice based on race, religion or belief', involved 'Islamophobic actions, stereotypes and sentiments', and 'undermines the party's ability to campaign against racism'.

Grooming scandal

In a 2016 pamphlet, Mr Phillips wrote: '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.'

Remembrance Day

Mr Phillips describe a visit to an industrial site where many African and eastern European immigrants worked but noticed a marked difference in those who were planning to mark Remembrance Sunday.

He wrote: 'Poppies were everywhere. One group had clearly adapted to the mainstream, the other had not.'

'Nation within a nation'

In 2016 Mr Phillips was quoted in a Times story on a survey of values, referring to 'the unacknowledged creation of a nation within the nation, with its own geography, its own values and its own very separate future'.

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-8089767/Trevor-Phillips-suspended-Labour-Islamophobia-allegations.html>