



COURTING CONTROVERSY

A Short Briefing Paper on the Campaign Against Antisemitism

mend



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The Campaign Against Antisemitism (CAA) is an organisation that claims it works to banish the scourge of anti-Jewish hatred and prejudice from Britain. More specifically, it focuses on combating what it describes as, “criminal antisemitism and antisemitic acts committed by professionals or institutions which are subject to special regulation, such as lawyers, teachers, sportspeople and charities”¹. While its stated objectives are laudable, CAA has on numerous occasions been met with controversy, including from other Jewish groups².

CAA is a relatively new organisation, founded in 2014 amidst the fallout of Israel’s 2014 military assault on the Gaza Strip. Almost immediately, concerns were raised by watchdogs about CAA’s activities. For example, a January 2015 report by the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Antisemitism suggested that CAA has a tendency to “conflate ... activity legitimately protesting Israel’s actions [against the Palestinians] with antisemitism”³. In 2023, The Charity Commission announced that it had opened a “regulatory compliance case” against CAA following numerous complaints against it, including by Jewish Voice for Labour (JVL)⁴. Reportedly, JVL has argued that CAA is a “partisan political campaigning group,” and is “not fulfilling its stated principle charitable objectives of promoting racial harmony”⁵. The group also stands accused of disproportionately attacking the Labour Party, particularly under the leadership of Jeremy Corbyn. Dame Margaret Hodge, who in 2018 became a honorary patron of CAA, has since fallen out with the organisation, and publicly accused them in 2022 of, “being more concerned with undermining Labour than rooting out antisemitism”⁶. Much like the APPG 2015 report, JVL also accuses CAA of “persistent conflation and equating of antisemitism with criticism of the state of Israel”⁷. Some Jewish groups have also expressed concern that CAA’s activities are explicitly political in aid of Israel. For example, following huge protests held in London in solidarity with Gaza, CAA organised its own protest.

However, some British-Jewish groups refused to attend. For example, Na’amod, a British-Jewish organisation, said that it could not join the protest “in good faith” because “we know this march is not just about antisemitism. It’s clear from the event description that CAA has organised this march in response to huge weekly ceasefire demonstrations in London”⁸. CAA also invited controversy in April 2024 when footage was released of its Chief Executive, Gideon Falter, having a heated exchange with a Metropolitan police officer at a Gaza solidarity protest in London. CAA released the initial video, in which Mr Falter was being told by the officer that his “openly Jewish” appearance at a protest in support of Palestine was antagonistic.⁹ CAA used this as evidence that the Metropolitan police were showing favour to the Gaza solidarity protestors, and making life difficult to Jewish Londoners¹⁰. However, Sky News later released a longer version of the clip, in which the officer explains that Mr Falter has been acting in a provocative way in an effort to create confrontation with the movement. A former Scotland Yard Chief said that the full footage revealed, “a totally different encounter to the one that Mr Falter has reported”¹¹. As one writer for the Guardian put it, the full account showed that Mr Falter was “attempting to manipulate the situation and the police”¹².

1. Campaign Against Antisemitism, ‘About Us,’ accessed November 27, available at: <https://antisemitism.org/about/>

2. Jewish Voice for Labour, ‘JVL Complains Again to Charity Commission Over Campaign Against Antisemitism,’ April 30, 2022, accessed: December 1, 2023: <https://www.jewishvoiceforlabour.org.uk/article/new-complaint-jvl-to-charity-commission/>

3. All-Party Parliamentary Group Against Antisemitism, ‘Report of the All-Party Parliamentary Enquiry into Antisemitism,’ February 2015, p.75, accessed November 27, 2023, available at: https://web.archive.org/web/20171222115800/http://www.safecampuscommunities.ac.uk/uploads/files/2015/04/antisemitism_report_january_2015.pdf

4. Haroon Siddique, The Guardian, ‘UK Charities Watchdog ‘Assesses Concerns’ About. Campaign Against Antisemitism,’ January 4, 2023, accessed November 27, 2023, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2023/jan/04/uk-charities-watchdog-assesses-concerns-about-campaign-against-antisemitism>

5. Ibid. Under the government’s Charity regulations, “an organisation will not be [considered] charitable of its purposes are political.” See UK Gov, ‘Campaigning and Political Activity Guidance for Charities’: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/speaking-out-guidance-on-campaigning-and-political-activity-by-charities-cc9/speaking-out-guidance-on-campaigning-and-political-activity-by-charities#:~:text=legal%20requirement%3A%20however%2C%20a%20charity,in%20this%20country%20or%20abroad>

6. Margaret Hodge, X, July 17, 2022, accessed November 27, 2023, available at: https://twitter.com/margarethodge/status/1548787881631686658?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etwemtembed%7Ctwterm%5E1548787881631686658%7Ctwgr%5Eb9479aa8a3e51d49545030627ab3b8ec6f7d4675%7Ctwcon%5E5e1_ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.middleeastmonitor.com%2F20220718-corbyn-critics-accused-of-hypocrisy-for-complaining-about-pro-israel-politicisation-of-anti-semitism%2F

7. JVL in Haroon Siddique, The Guardian, ‘UK Charities Watchdog ‘Assesses Concerns’ About. Campaign Against Antisemitism,’ January 4, 2023, accessed November 27, 2023, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2023/jan/04/uk-charities-watchdog-assesses-concerns-about-campaign-against-antisemitism>

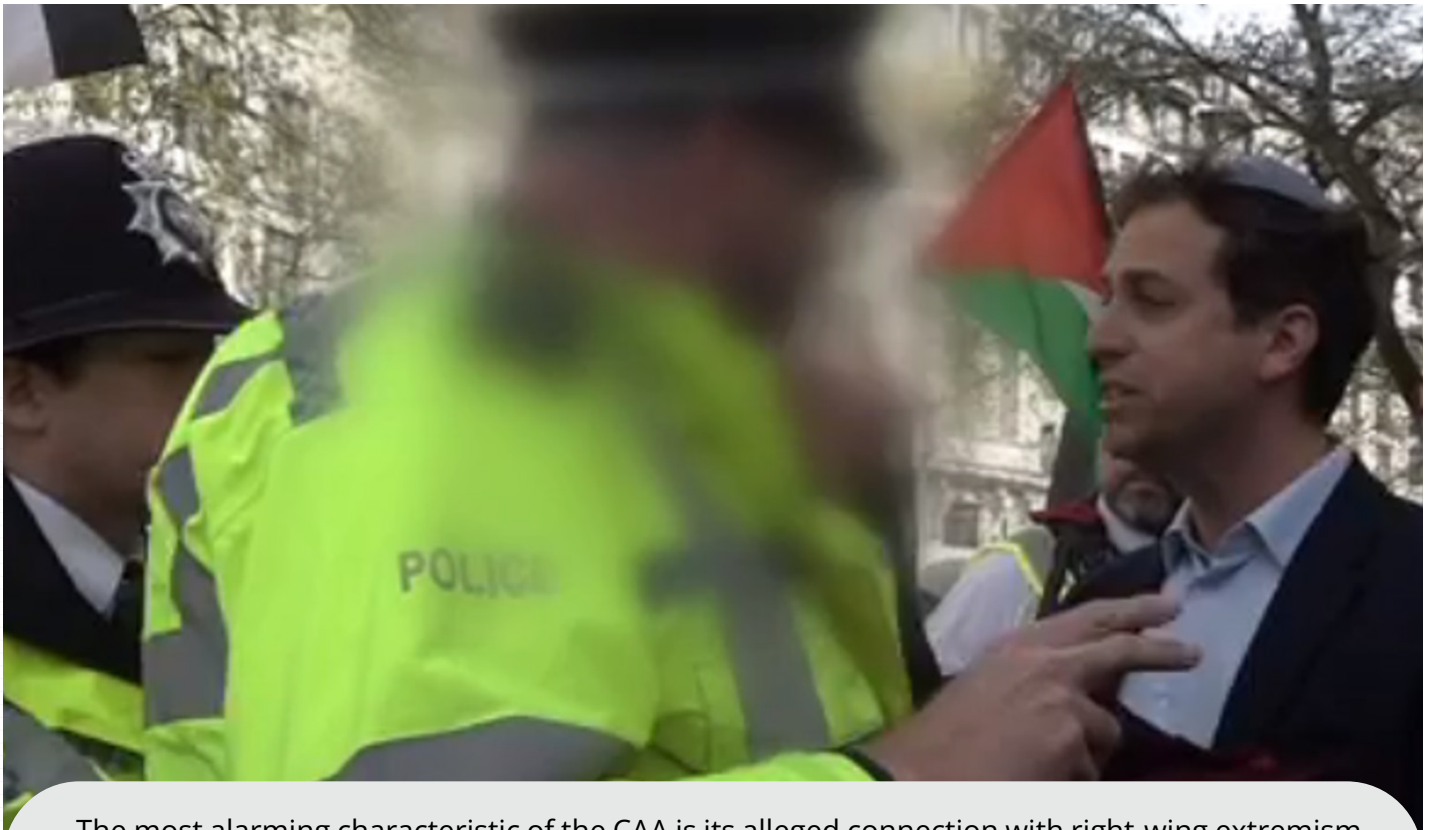
8. Maria Butt, November 26, 2023. Tens of Thousands Attend March Against Antisemitism in London. The Independent: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/anti-semitism-march-london-tommy-robinson-b2453771.html>

9. Andre Rhodan-Paul & Damian Grammaticas, BBC News, ‘PM ‘Appalled by Police Treatment of Jewish Man,’ April 21 2024, accessed April 22, 2024, available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cd130lp70x5o>

10. Kevin Rawlinson, The Guardian, ‘Initial Story About ‘Openly Jewish’ Incident Not Full Picture, Says Ex-Senior Met Officer,’ April 22 2024, accessed April 22, 2024, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2024/apr/22/initial-story-about-openly-jewish-incident-not-full-picture-says-ex-senior-met-officer>

11. Ibid.

12. Stewart Lee, The Guardian, ‘Context is Vital. That’s Why I’m Fuming Everything I Say and Do From Now On.’ April 28, 2024, accessed April 28, 2024, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2024/apr/28/context-is-vital-gideon-falter-met-police>



The most alarming characteristic of the CAA is its alleged connection with right-wing extremism and the Israeli state itself. In August 2023, an investigation revealed that CAA has received donations worth hundreds of thousands of dollars from a UK branch of the Jewish National Fund (JNF UK)¹³. Essentially, the JNF is the main Israeli body that has overseen and financed the development of stolen Palestinian land since 1948, or as one Columbia University professor described it, “the Zionist movement’s major financial and colonial arm”¹⁴. To understand the nature of the JNF UK, it is only necessary to look at the record of its leadership. In 2021, its Chairman, Samuel Hayek, gave an interview to the Israel-based Jerusalem Post in which he claimed that it would soon be too dangerous for Jews to live in the UK due to increasing numbers of Muslim “immigrants”¹⁵. Mr Hayek also echoed a far-right conspiracy theory known as ‘The Great Replacement,’ saying that “the process is the white Christian majority is shrinking. It shrinks to a degree where there is a point it cannot protect itself anymore”¹⁶. Moreover, it was revealed in an investigation by Jewish News that the JNF UK Deputy Chairman, Gary Mond, had liked social media posts by the US-based infamous Islamophobe, Pamela Geller¹⁷. Mr Mond also posted on Facebook in reference to Muslims that “all [of] civilisation ... is at war with these evil bastards”¹⁸. While Mond stepped down from his position amidst an onslaught of condemnation for his comments, including from Jewish bodies, Mr Hayek remains in his post to this day.

13. Rebecca Gordon-Nesbitt and Asa Winstanley, The Electronic Intifada, ‘Revealed: Israel Charity Funded Campaign Against Antisemitism,’ <https://electronicintifada.net/content/revealed-israel-charity-funded-campaign-against-antisemitism/38351>, August 25, 2023, accessed November 27, 2023, available at: <https://electronicintifada.net/content/revealed-israel-charity-funded-campaign-against-antisemitism/38351>

14. Joseph Massad, Middle East Eye, ‘Jewish National Fund: A Century of Land Theft, Belligerence and Erasure,’ February 1, 2023, accessed November 27, 2023, available at: <https://www.middleeasteye.net/opinion/colonial-chutzpah-jewish-national-fund>

15. Maayan Jaffe-Hoffman, The Jerusalem Post, ‘Jews Do Not Have a Future in England,’ December 2, 2021, accessed November 27, 2023, available at: <https://www.jpost.com/diaspora/antisemitism/jews-do-not-have-a-future-in-england-687711>

16. Ibid.

17. Lee Harpin, Jewish News, ‘Board of Deputies Senior VP Asked to ‘Step Down’ Over Far-Right Social Media Posts,’ January 12, 2022, accessed November 27, 2023, available at: <https://www.jewishnews.co.uk/board-of-deputies-senior-vp-asked-to-step-down-over-far-right-social-media-posts/>

18. Ibid.

Disturbingly, the CAA's relationship with an organisation actively involved in financing the mass oppression of Palestinians goes deeper than receiving donations. The CAA's Chief Executive, Gideon Falter, sits with Mr Hayek on the board of JNF UK as a Vice Chairman¹⁹. One rank above Mr Falter on the JNF UK board sits Alan Mendoza²⁰, the head of the notorious far-right Henry Jackson Society, known for churning out Islamophobic tropes in its work²¹. What this demonstrates is that there is a clear nexus between CAA, the Israeli state and right-wing Islamophobes in the Western world. This should be a major cause for concern because CAA has led the charge with foisting contestable understandings of anti-semitism onto the British public, particularly the controversial International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's (IHRA) definition, which as one Jewish writer pointed out, "has faced significant criticism for ... conflating criticism of Israel with antisemitism"²². Even one of the authors of the IHRA definition has written about how it has been "weaponised" by, as he put it, "rightwing Jews"²³. Indeed, it appears that this is a category under which CAA would fall.

What the publicly available evidence appears to demonstrate is that, far from being a politically impartial actor, the CAA approaches questions of antisemitism from a perspective which demands that the public image of Israel, and its interests, are put first. Putting aside the necessity of political impartiality from our charities - as is outlined in government regulations - this also raises serious questions about CAA's suitability for the role that it purports to play in our society, which, make no mistake, is an honourable one: expelling the vile spectre of antisemitism from the public psyche once and for all. By hitching criticism of Israel to antisemitism, the genuine meaning of this form of racism - that is, what it actually looks like, how to identify it - becomes lost in both the conflation itself and the ensuing debate with those who oppose such a move. In the end, this simply does a disservice to the cause of extinguishing antisemitism. Groups like CAA, who appear to whip up divisions between Jews and Muslims, or between the political left and right, are clearly unfit to bring about the social solidarity needed to end racism in general, and anti-Jewish prejudice in particular. Currently, there is little publicly information available on the Charity Commission's investigation into CAA. MEND have tried to contact them for updated information on the progress of those efforts, and will continue to do so. In the meantime, the Charity Commission should seriously consider revoking CAA of its charity status, considering the overwhelming evidence that it appears to function as a pro-Israel political pressure group. After all, government regulations on guidance for charities clearly state that, "an organisation will not be [considered] charitable if its purposes are political"²⁴. This would certainly appear to be the case with CAA.

19. JNF UK, 'Our People,' accessed November 27, 2023, available at: <https://www.jnf.co.uk/our-people/>

20. Ibid.

21. Muslim Engagement & Development, 'The Henry Jackson Society - Failings of an Islamophobic Think Tank,' October 7, 2020, accessed November 27, 2023, available at: <https://www.mend.org.uk/the-henry-jackson-society-failings-of-an-islamophobic-think-tank/>

22. Em Hilton, Novara Media, 'Keir Starmer is Finally Learning That Rightwing Groups Aren't Interested in Jewish Safety,' July 21, 2022, accessed 27 November, 2023: <https://novaramedia.com/2022/07/21/keir-starmer-is-finally-learning-that-rightwing-groups-are-not-interested-in-jewish-safety/>

23. Kenneth Stern, The Guardian, 'I Drafted the Definition of Antisemitism. Rightwing Jews are Weaponizing it,' December 13, 2019, accessed November 27, 2023, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/dec/13/antisemitism-executive-order-trump-chilling-effect>

24. UK Gov, 'Campaigning and Political Activity Guidance for Charities': <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/speaking-out-guidance-on-campaigning-and-political-activity-by-charities-cc9/speaking-out-guidance-on-campaigning-and-political-activity-by-charities#:~:text=legal%20requirement%3A%20however%2C%20a%20charity,in%20this%20country%20or%20abroad>



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