**[Policing one’s own](https://www.dawn.com/news/1838780/policing-ones-own)**

[Muna Khan](https://www.dawn.com/authors/1320/muna-khan) Published June 9, 2024

WHAT did you have for lunch last Sunday? What about 10 Sundays ago? Or 10 years ago? What thoughts run through your mind as you try to answer these questions? Memory is the ongoing process of information retention over time, according to Harvard, and a lot of research continues to go into understanding how memory works. Fear not, my piece isn’t about cognitive science, but how our past actions, seemingly innocuous, can impact our present.

The British politician and academic Faiza Shaheen knows this well now. The former Labour candidate, who narrowly lost her constituency in 2019, learned last week that she’d been blocked by her party from contesting the election next month, reportedly over her tweets relating to Israel.

Earlier, she was asked by the party’s national executive committee to explain her tweet history from as far as back as 2014, when she was not a member of the Labour party. She was asked why she liked a tweet featuring a video skit by US talk show host Jon Stewart about not being able to freely talk about Israel and Palestine. As he begins to talk about the war on Gaza in that sketch, Stewart’s colleagues on the show jump up and rebuke him for daring to question Israel’s actions. It is a comedic but essentially accurate representation of how difficult it is to talk about Israel in the West without being shut down for being anti-Semitic — a trend that continues. “Just merely mentioning Israel or questioning in any way the effectiveness or humanity of Israel’s policy is not the same thing as being pro-Hamas,” Stewart says in the skit before he is shut down by the same colleagues. (You’d be forgiven for thinking this commentary is from today.)

Fast forward to 2024, and Stewart is back hosting the comedy show once a week and being critical of the Zionist state. However, liking his politics on social media has pretty damning consequences. Shaheen doesn’t even remember liking that tweet 10 years ago, but her detractors remember. She acknowledged that the tweet she liked references antisemitic tropes and apologised for it, but as we’ve seen well before the Oct 7 attacks, you can be forgiven everything but a hint of criticism of Israel.

Labour is already behaving like Israel’s newest best friend.

Shaheen has since resigned from the Labour party and plans to run as an independent. She has been replaced by a pro-Israeli candidate who is not from the area. Shaheen’s supporters are angry at the Labour party, which, in its defence, says they want the most suitable candidates. To be clear, Shaheen went through all the processes required and was cleared to run for the seat.

“They would rather lose than have a left pro-Palestine candidate. This is offensive to my community,” she tweeted.

Shaheen’s politics reflect issues Labour once stood for: wealth inequality, public ownership, environmental issues, and Palestine. But under Keir Starmer’s leadership, the party stands for something else. In fact, Starmer is accused of purging the party of left-wing candidates; coincidentally, all of them have one thing in common — they spoke in favour of an immediate ceasefire in Gaza.

Labour is widely expected to win next month’s election, and is already behaving like Israel’s newest best friend; a trusted one that can be counted on to do its bidding. I see its de-selection of Shaheen as one example of wanting to make its rich donors with ties to Israel happy. The manner in which political parties and other organisations like the media aid Israel in shutting down conversations by slapping the “antisemitic” label is horrifying. This is how meaningful conversations on Israel’s treatment of Palestinians — grounded in truth — are blocked. All critics are silenced and vanished from screens.

Two examples this year include female journalists Sanigta Myska of LBC radio and Belle Donati of Sky News, who were reportedly let go of shortly after difficult interviews with Isra­eli officials. Both women are respected journalists who were merely doing their jobs when they asked tough questions. Apparently you can’t ask these sorts of questions of Israeli officials. How can voters and audiences be OK knowing foreign powers have that kind of hold on their media? This is deeply worrying for a free press.

The double standards are all too clear to see. Shaheen’s social media activity is open to scrutiny, but Labour candidate Luke Akehurst’s is not. He’s a staunch supporter of Israel, has called the UN antisemitic, and said Palestinians actors “staged atrocities in Gaza” in his tweets. He isn’t policed for his views.

I’m hopeful that Shaheen stands a chance next month, because she has a strong supporter base which, I believe, has grown in the last week out of anger at Labour’s policies rooted in racism and Islamophobia. Shaheen’s courage should inspire young women here, too.

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