- This document has been put together by students at St. Peter's College. While Oxford University Jewish Society has sympathy with much of what is said here, this document does not necessarily represent the views of the Jewish Society.

Ken Loach

- Made a number of comments that, according to the IHRA definition, are antisemitic:
    - When asked about allegations of antisemitic abuse made by Ruth Smeeth MP, he suggested that they were raised to destabilise Corbyn's leadership, due to Corbyn's support for Palestinian rights.
        - Echoes sentiment regarding a myth about the world Jewish conspiracy or of Jews controlling the media, economy, government or other societal institutions.
    - Asked about a conference fringe event at which Miko Peled suggested people should be allowed to question whether the Holocaust had happened, he responded**: "I think history is for all of us to discuss. The founding of the state of Israel, for example, based on ethnic cleansing, is there for us all to discuss, so don't try and subvert that by false stories of antisemitism".**
        - **IHRA**: Accusing the Jews as a people, or Israel as a state, of inventing or exaggerating the Holocaust.
        - **IHRA**: Denying the Jewish people their right to self-determination, e.g., by claiming that the existence of a State of Israel is a racist endeavour.
        - **IHRA**: Drawing comparisons of contemporary Israeli policy to that of the Nazis.
- Retractions around these comments were markedly general such as 'these do not reflect my position' and a broad acceptance that the event of the Holocaust happened.

Ken Loach and the Labour Party

- Despite this racism, he has associated himself strongly with the antiracist left.
- Heralding him and his films as 'left-wing' despite his racism promotes the idea that it is possible to be both progressive and antisemitic. The idea it is acceptable that, because one is anti-Zionist/pro-Palestine, they can pass judgement on and discuss the wider Jewish community is antisemitic.
    - Under the IHRA, antisemitism includes 'Holding Jews collectively responsible for actions of the state of Israel.'
- Loach has categorically denied the existence of antisemitism in the Labour Party, he has said there is "no validity" to it. This directly invalidates and claims false the experiences of Jewish individuals. Again, he has repeatedly suggested these accounts are part of a wider conspiracy of Jewish people *using* claims of antisemitism for political means.

Concerns from SPC Jewish students

- Racism and antisemitism being treated differently in regard to platforming
    - Certain views would disqualify a speaker from being invited to speak at college. The college has made the decision that Ken Loach's opinions are not enough.
    - Many students felt that if a speaker had made overtly homophobic, sexist or otherwise racist remarks, SPC would be less inclined to welcome them.
        - *Worth noting that College didn't do anything for Holocaust Memorial Day, many other colleges did.*
- What is antisemitic can sometimes be debated **within** the Jewish community. But the antisemitism of things that Loach has said are not up for debate within the community, let alone outside it:
- The historical moment of his invitation
    - Against the background of Corbyn's leadership and the harm this caused young Jewish people
        - Some alienated from their political party
        - The denial of antisemitism in the Labour Party
        - Being told by non-Jews what antisemitism is
        - The equating of being a British Jew with being a Zionist
    - Jewish people have recurrently felt that non-Jews feel able to define what is and what is not antisemitic. This is just one more example of that.
- Not appropriate to ask him about his antisemitism in the talk as a way to 'neutralise'
    - Gives him an opportunity to defend himself
    - Only way to oppose his views/be anti-racist is not to attend
- **We want to ensure that anyone attending the talk is aware of this context.**

SPC's approach or response

- Claimed there was no knowledge of the controversy when the invitation went out
    - Giving people a platform without checking if it would cause harm to the college community. This is unacceptable.
- The suggestion that the talk will concentrate on his films and not his politics – in the Master's words, 'set aside' the controversy and address him as an acclaimed filmmaker.
    - Loach has been acclaimed for the political impact of his films, praising his films inevitably praises his politics. College are therefore suggesting a selective approach regarding which aspects of his politics are relevant.
        - i.e his views on the benefits system is relevant, but his antisemitism isn't and would 'politicise' this event.
- Instead of assuring us that they would like to make college a better environment for its Jewish students, they urged us not to change our frame of thinking and not think of college as antisemitic lest that make us uncomfortable.
    - This is putting the burden on us, the Jewish students, to not feel discriminated against, by changing our mindset
    - Relieving college of the burden to address how they are responsible for the issues at hand

- Pushed us to explain why downplaying and doubting the realities of the Holocaust is ‘always’ unequivocally antisemitic.
- Asking Jewish students to do difficult and taxing emotional labour by reaching out to us at the last minute to help come up with a solution to validate the event; making us repeatedly have to explain why Ken Loach is actually antisemitic and that this is not up for (their) debate, while they continued to question whether it definitely was.
- Tried to downplay the issue by stressing college would not have an antisemitism problem because the previous master was Jewish.
- Acknowledged that the event will cause harm, while remaining unwilling to go to any significant lengths to prevent this harm.
- Categorical that St Peter’s would not uninvite him- despite TORCH co-hosting the event and thus SPC could distance itself from it.
- Approached the conversation defensively, treating it as a ‘cancel culture’-style controversy rather than engaging constructively with Jewish students’ concerns.