

The Times, April 2, 2018, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/labour-loses-17-000-members-amid-anger-at-antisemitism-f8fjfpsx7>

Labour loses 17,000 members amid anger at antisemitism

By Oliver Wright

More than 17,000 Labour members have quit the party in the past three months as disputes over antisemitism and Russia erode Jeremy Corbyn's support base. The Times understands that internal membership figures show the party has lost about 3 per cent of its paying supporters since the start of the year. Last week hundreds of members resigned from the party and more than 3,000 did not renew their direct debits, insiders said.

Mr Corbyn shut down his personal Facebook page yesterday after he was accused of belonging to groups in which people had posted anti-Jewish content. It was his use of the account to criticise the removal of an antisemitic mural that caused the latest row in the party.

Labour sources suggested that the closure of the account had been planned for weeks. They denied it was linked to a Sunday Times report, published yesterday, that uncovered more than 2,000 racist and abusive comments on pro-Corbyn Facebook groups. Senior Labour figures said there were signs that the row was taking its toll on the party's record high membership level.

After the general election last year membership grew to record levels of about 570,000, up from 530,000 before the campaign. But the latest figures suggest many of these gains have been wiped out, with the decline coinciding with Mr Corbyn's failure to blame Russia for the chemical weapons attack in Salisbury and his handling of the antisemitism allegations.

The drop is understood to have caused alarm at the highest levels in the party, who fear it has damaged the Labour leader's appeal, particularly among younger voters.

The most recent figures show that not a single English region has reported a rise in membership since the start of the year. London has now lost more than 3,500 members and a further 2,000 have gone from the northwest.

One source said: "The figures are pretty telling. What's clear is that it is damaging Jeremy and his brand, at least among some sections of the party. The fear is that unless they get on top of this, the trend will continue."