

QUEEN'S BENCH DIVISION

MEDIA AND COMMUNICATIONS LIST

BETWEEN:-

LAURA MURRAY

Claimant

-and-

(1) TELEGRAPH MEDIA GROUP LTD

and

(2) IAN AUSTIN

Defendant

STATEMENT IN OPEN COURT

Solicitor/Counsel for the Claimant

1. My Lord, I appear for the Claimant in this matter, Laura Murray. Mr Atkin appears for the Defendants; the First Defendant is the publisher of the Daily Telegraph newspaper.
2. From July 2016 until November 2020 Ms Murray worked for the Labour Party, first as a Political Adviser, then as Stakeholder Manager to the Leader of the Opposition, then as Head of Complaints. Ms Murray is now a secondary school History teacher.
3. On 23 December 2021, the Daily Telegraph published on its website and app an article written by former Labour MP Ian Austin (the Second Defendant) entitled "*Rachel Riley deserves every bit of compensation for the hard-Left abuse she's endured*".
4. The context of the article was the handing down, on 21 December 2021, of a judgment of this Court, whereby Rachel Riley had succeeded at trial in her claim for libel against Ms Murray concerning a tweet by the latter published in March 2019. Ms Riley was awarded £10,000 in damages. Ms Murray is currently seeking permission to appeal.
5. As the Defendants accept, the Telegraph article was very highly defamatory of Ms Murray, alleging that she was and is an anti-Jewish racist and part of what the article described as the "*vile anti-semitism of [Jeremy] Corbyn's Labour*", whose anti-semitism, the article suggested, was bravely stood up to by Rachel Riley in the libel proceedings.

6. As the Defendants also now accept, however, these allegations were wholly untrue. There was and is no basis whatsoever for suggesting that Laura Murray is anti-semitic or that she is in any way to be suspected of being so.
7. Furthermore, none of these false allegations were supported by the judgment in the libel claim on which the article purported to be commenting. In fact, quite the opposite is the case. During that trial, the Court heard unchallenged evidence of Ms Murray's tireless efforts to address issues of anti-Semitism and foster good relations with the Jewish community and indeed citing statements by Jewish Labour activists made in support of her. As the judge, Mr Justice Nicklin, put it during the trial: *"there has been no suggestion put, either by Ms. Riley in the witness box or by cross-examination of Ms. Murray, that Ms. Murray is in any way anti-Semitic. She has put in her witness statement what she has done during her career to tackle that and nobody has challenged that."* The judge found Ms Murray to be an honest witness who had sought to assist the Court in her evidence.
8. The article appeared prominently on the Telegraph website and app for more than 24 hours. Predictably, it was then disseminated more widely, not least on social media. Indeed, a link to it was tweeted by the Second Defendant to his thousands of followers.
9. Naturally, the publication and wider dissemination of the article caused enormous distress to Ms Murray. Under any circumstances, the publication of an entirely false allegation of anti-semitism would be a deeply distressing experience for an individual, but in this case was rendered all the more acute by the fact that Ms Murray had devoted so much of her working life to combating such prejudice and seeking to build bridges between communities. The equally false suggestion that Ms Murray's anti-semitism had led to successful legal proceedings against her was also deeply hurtful.
10. In recognition of the false and extremely serious nature of these defamatory allegations, the Telegraph and Ian Austin have published a full apology to Ms Murray on the Telegraph app and website; the Second Defendant has also tweeted the apology to his followers. The Defendants have agreed to pay Laura Murray substantial damages for libel, as well as her legal costs.

Solicitor/Counsel for the Defendant

11. My Lord, on behalf of the Defendants, I confirm all that my friend has said. The Defendants withdraw these false allegations and apologise to Ms Murray.