

Submission to the APPG on antisemitism parliamentary inquiry into antisemitism emanating from the Middle East conflict of July/August 2014

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A **PARLIAMENT STREET** briefing

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Note: This is a revised version of the submission which has been updated to reflect current events.

DEFINITION OF ANTISEMITISM

“Antisemitism is a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities.”

In addition, such manifestations could also target the state of Israel, conceived as a Jewish collectivity. Antisemitism frequently charges Jews with conspiring to harm humanity, and it is often used to blame Jews for “why things go wrong.” It is expressed in speech, writing, visual forms and action, and employs sinister stereotypes and negative character traits”

(European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC), 2014).

Introduction

“Tackling anti-Semitism goes right to the heart of what we stand for as a country (Cameron D, in Little, A, 2015)”

As this paper will highlight, whilst the UK has largely become a tolerant and welcoming place for Jews, antisemitism remains a significant problem that adversely affects the UK Jewish community which numbers around 300,000 people (Boyd, J & Staetsky, L, 2014,p.4).

A study that came out in July 2014 by the Institute for Jewish Policy Research called ‘*The Exceptional Case? Perceptions and experiences of antisemitism amongst Jews in the United Kingdom*’ discovered that almost 70% of UK Jews say antisemitism has grown in the past five years. Even more concerning is that three in five traditionally observant Jews say that they sometimes avoid public displays of Jewishness-such as wearing a Kippa or displaying a Mezuzah out of fear (Abrams, E, 2014). Sadly this can’t be treated as a rogue statistic, as a survey by You Gov for the Campaign Against Antisemitism of 3411 British people’s attitudes towards Jews, found that one in five believed their loyalty to Israel made them less loyal to the UK. Furthermore, the survey’s findings showed that one in four believed Jews chased money more than other British people (Quinn, B, 2015). This shows that in recent years Jews in the UK have become afraid to carry out their normal lives in the UK due to a rise in antisemitism.

As a nation that has championed individual and religious freedom based on the values of tolerance, a situation where Jews feel they have to compromise the way they go about their daily lives must not be allowed to continue.

1A- Charting the rise of a new antisemitism in the UK

Many hoped and believed that after the horrors of the Holocaust antisemitism was slowly dying. It was therefore highly disappointing that we have in fact found ourselves in a situation that has deteriorated to the extent that the APPG Against Antisemitism September 2006 report showed that Jews had become more anxious and vulnerable to attack in the UK for a generation or more.

Since the creation of Israel in 1948 a new form of antisemitism has developed in the UK. Perhaps the most curious facet of this is an unholy alliance between the far left, Islamists and the far right that uses demonisation of Israel to express antisemitic views. Whilst most anti-Zionists are not antisemitic, a significant part of modern day antisemitism comes from those who harbour a hatred for the state of Israel. This strain of antisemitism started to emerge in the UK when the Israeli Government deported Hamas activists in December 1992 and became much more noticeable after the start of the second Intifada in October 2000 (Whine, M in Iganski, P & Kosmin, B, 2003, p.31).

Criticising Israel is not in itself antisemitic. However, the manner in which Israel is criticised does manage to descend in to the prescribed definition of antisemitism mentioned in the opening segment of this paper. This is summed up well by the journalist, Thomas Friedman who stated that:

“Criticizing Israel is not antisemitic, and saying so is vile. But singling out Israel for opprobrium and international sanction -- out of all proportion to any other party in the Middle East -- is anti-Semitic, and not saying so is dishonest (Friedman, T, 2002).”

The antisemitism we see now stems from prevalent antisemitism in the Arab world due to the existence of Israel. It's best described by Per Ahlmark, former deputy Prime Minister of Sweden who said “In the past, the most dangerous antisemites were those who wanted to make the world Judenrein, ‘free of Jews.’ Today, the most dangerous antisemites might be those who want to make the world Judenstaatrein, ‘free of a Jewish state’ (Ahlmark, P in Cotler, I 2010).”

Whilst this ‘new’ antisemitism contains many similarities with classical anti-Semitism, it is different in its language and manifestation. Classical antisemitism was an attempt to discriminate or assault any rights Jews had, as antisemites believed Jews were not equal members of whatever society they lived in. Today, the new antisemitism denies or assaults the right of the Jewish people to be an equal member of the family of nations.

1B- Who are the main proponents of the new antisemitism?

Islamic extremists illustrated by Hamas's belief in the Protocols of the Elders of Zion detest Jews. This was something looked in to by the APPG Inquiry into Antisemitism in 2006 which recognised that a small minority of Muslims through a distorted and political version of Islam called Islamism had incited Jewish hatred (BBC, 2006). Due to the advancement of the internet and improved communications, Islamic extremist antisemitic views generated in the Middle East have been imported into Britain and radicalised a minority of Muslims. Islamists have brought these views to the UK and this has caused a heightened feeling of insecurity amongst Jews who feel rightly that Islamists are targeting them. This is not a irrational fear when you consider that on the Luton Islamic Centre's website it has been reported that Jews have been called as swine and pigs, as well as calling for the victory over the Jews and all other enemies of Islam (Gilligan, A, 2015). These views that paint in warlike time to hate Jews has developed since 2006 and heightened a feeling of insecurity for Jews living in the UK.

The other main protagonists have been a minority of public intellectuals who consider Israel an illegitimate state due to their anti-Zionist beliefs. This in itself is not antisemitic, but the ways in which it has sometimes been expressed it can be construed as anti-Semitic. Often this new form of antisemitism compares the actions of Israel to the Nazis. Jacqueline Rose, A professor of English at Queen Mary College, demonstrated this when she said “How did one of the most persecuted people of the world, come to embody some of the worst cruelties of the modern nation state (Rose, J in Julius, A 2010).”

It is an antisemitism that some try to ignore, believing that either accusations are used to shut down criticism of Israel or that antisemitism is justifiable because Israel is a *'pariah state'*. This was expressed by UK Film Director, Ken Loach who said in March 2009 “if there was a rise in antisemitism in Europe it is perfectly understandable, because Israel feeds antisemitism (Loach, K, in

Geras, N, 2013).” It is hard to imagine that someone could claim that the actions of ISIS in Iraq and Syria, for example, would serve as justification for Islamophobia without being pilloried.

This is not to ignore the far right and far left who continue to play a significant part in the spread of antisemitism in the UK, but about explaining the main protagonists of this new antisemitism.

1C The media as an outlet for antisemitism

There was a shocking cover story from the New Statesman in 2002 illustrating a golden Star of David stabbing a pliant Union Jack flag next to the headline ‘A Kosher Conspiracy’ (Clavane, A, 2014). Whilst the New Statesman apologised, it was indicative of how even the ‘moderate’ left had started to adopt an anti-Israel stance that invoked the use of anti-Semitic canards. It also expressed the view that the Jewish State was controlling Britain, and is simply replaced the idea of an all-powerful ‘Jewish Lobby’ with the ‘Zionist lobby’. This singling out of the Jewish state of Israel often goes beyond legitimate criticism of Israel, especially when a lot of the criticism is underpinned by an idea that goes back to the Protocols of the Elders of Zion, that powerful Jews or a powerful Jewish State are somehow manipulating the world and the news agenda. It also implies that rich British Jews are more loyal to Israel than the UK.

There has also been more recent incidents, such as that seen on Sunday 27th January 2013, when a Gerald Scarfe cartoon drawn in the Sunday Times depicted the Israeli Prime Minister, Binyamin Netanyahu, as an evil Quasimodo hunchback figure building a wall over Palestinian bodies with cement made in blood (Hoffman, S, 2013). The cartoon recalls blood libels against Jews. Furthermore, the timing of the cartoon was incredibly insensitive as it was published on Holocaust Memorial Day. It was another example of highly provocative imagery being used to attack Israel, and once again crossed the line between reasonable debate and anti-Semitism.

1D- Violence in the Middle East and its effect on antisemitism

There is a body of evidence that suggests violence in the Middle East spills over into violence on the streets against UK Jews.

This is shown by reports carried out by the Community Security Trust (CST) who calculated that from 2008-2011 there were an average of 55 antisemitic incidents each month. In January 2009, during Operation Cast Lead, there were 289 (CST in Boyd J, & Staetsky L, 2014, p.7).

This is not a new phenomenon. Following the start of the second Intifada in October 2001, antisemitic incidents recorded by the CST rose from 23 in September of that year to 105 in October, before falling to 21 by December (Whine, M in Iganski P & Kosmin, B, 2003,p.31).

This summer due to Operation Protective Edge that took place between July-August 2014 antisemitism has significantly increased as it has in previous conflicts between Israelis and Palestinians. This is shown by the fact that in July when Operation Protective Edge was continuing the CST recorded 302 antisemitic incidents. This was a rise of over 400% on the 59 incidents recorded in

July 2013(CST, 2014). Figures provided by the CST in February 2015 backed the upward trajectory of antisemitism in 2014. They recorded that there were 1200 antisemitic incidents in 2014, more than double the number in 2013, with a major factor being antisemitic feeling rising during Operation Protective Edge (Israel, S, 2015).

These antisemitic incidents included one in August 2014 whereby a sign saying “death to Jews” was posted on the shop window of a Norwood Jewish charity shop in North London. This happened on the same week that a brick was thrown through the window of Cockfosters and North Southgate Synagogue. Furthermore, during the conflict there was a rise in anti-Israel activism with Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) groups demonstrating outside stores that stocked Israeli or Kosher produce (Harris, S, 2014).

Due to incidents such as these, many Jews in the UK are starting to feel that they are being targeted in a way they had never experienced before and even starting to question whether Jewish people have a future in the UK.

1E- Has the nature of antisemitism changed?

Since 1992 there has been a trend for antisemitism to be expressed via a hatred of Israel. Whilst this becomes more virulent during times in war and conflict, the nature of this anti-Semitism hasn't changed; most worryingly, the evidence highlighted in this paper suggests it is slowly become more embedded in the UK. Like the anti-Semitism of old, it relies on the pervasive idea of a worldwide Jewish conspiracy, which treats the actions of the Jewish State of Israel as part of a sinister global plan to control the world. It also works on the assumption that Jews can never be fully loyal to the UK due to their support for Israel. The loyalty element of this new type of antisemitism links it directly with antisemitism over the centuries that works on the idea that Jews cannot be trusted in the state they live in.

2A- Is enough being done to address concerns about antisemitism

The APPG Against Antisemitism Inquiry of 2006 served as a wakeup call for many stakeholders from UK politicians, to the judiciary and police, amongst others. This was recognised by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) progress report in December 2010. One of the most important changes has been the recording of antisemitic incidents, leading to the first officially published antisemitic hate crime statistics on 30th November 2010 (DCLG, 2010.p.5).

The Government realised they need to react to the new nature of antisemitism in the UK when they supported the publication of a report- *Playing the Nazi Card*- By the European Institute for the Study of Contemporary Antisemitism (DCLG, 2010,p.5). Alongside this there have been greater resources provided to tackle antisemitism.

More can be done as recognised by Theresa May, the Home Secretary who in September 2014 stated that the Government is committed to tackling the rise of antisemitism that has occurred recently

(May, T, in Dysch M, 2014). Internet Service Providers should consider naming and shaming those who have used social media to post vile antisemitic comments anonymously. This would make people think twice about making antisemitic comments as it would make them more accountable and therefore easier to expose. The aim would not be to stop those from posting anonymously on the internet as this would stop people legitimately dissenting against authoritarian regimes. What the policy would do is put in place a system that those who repeatedly and anonymously make vile antisemitic comments face the possibility of losing their anonymity.

Another area where the Government needs to do more to stop the virus of antisemitism spreading is to make sure that Islamist groups are not funded under the mistaken belief that just because they are not actively taking part in violence they are moderate. Often these groups will make antisemitic statements and create the mood music for violent antisemitic attacks. Consequently, Government funding should be taken away from education centre, charity or community group that is engaged in antisemitism. This would send a clear message that antisemitism is unacceptable, would help challenge Islamism and empower the majority of moderate Muslims in the UK to challenge antisemitic views held by a minority in their community. In fairness this is something that the Government is starting to take action on. In January 2015 the Communities Secretary, Eric Pickles took away £250,000 that was being given to the Muslim Charities Forum. This happened due to the Telegraph discovering credible evidence that several members of the Muslim Charities Forum including the Union of Good had alleged links to the Muslim Brotherhood (Ross, T, 2015).

An absurd situation cannot be allowed to continue where British taxpayers' money is subsidising groups who are fuelling antisemitism in the UK. I do not doubt the Government's commitment to try and eradicate antisemitism in the UK, but until it can ensure that all Government funding of any groups who have encouraged antisemitism is stopped, these efforts will be hampered. With that in mind a thorough financial audit of the Government's anti-extremism Program called need prevent needs to happen. The purpose would be to shine a light on any Islamist groups that are being funded and from this take measures to stop this funding as soon as possible.

That said, attempts to no platform antisemitic speakers or stop online anti-Semitic publications may in fact be counterproductive. A sign of a free nation is allowing people to hold abhorrent views and express them. From that, their views can be challenged. If we stop antisemites from speaking in the UK, there is the danger they become a martyr for freedom of speech. As the gradual collapse of the BNP following holocaust-denier Nick Griffin's appearance on BBC Question Time demonstrates, the best way of tackling anti-Semites is to follow the words of the late US Supreme Court Justice, Louis Brandeis "Sunlight is the best form of disinfectant." Therefore, this paper does not recommend measures that would undermine freedom of expression.

2B- Conclusion

After the Holocaust we talked about never again. However, it has too easily become ever again with antisemitism remaining a scourge in the UK. In recent decades a minority of those delegitimising

Israel have done so in antisemitic ways. It is a form of antisemitism that is growing, but thankfully the Government is taking steps to tackle it. We need to be very clear that whilst the majority of those who are opposed to Israel are not antisemitic, some of the hatred of Israel we see in the UK is a result of antisemitism and cannot be excused as legitimate criticism. The APPG' inquiry will help create the framework for this.

2C- Postscript

Since I submitted this report to the APPG against Antisemitism in November 2014 a lot has happened. Unfortunately, much of this has been negative apart from the Government reaffirming its commitment to fight antisemitism.

Recently I tweeted my solidarity with the Jewish people who were murdered by Islamist terrorists in a Kosher Store in Paris. Regardless of one's opinions on Israel, I thought this was something that nobody would have a problem with. Sadly I was wrong.

This report has highlighted how a new phenomenon where Israel is used by people to express their hatred of Jews. This is illustrated best by Mira Bar-Hillel, the left wing journalist and property writer for the Evening Standard, tweeted in response to my tweets in solidarity with French Jews saying "The problem with juifs (Jews) is that they see EVERYTHING through juif spectacles. Hence Gaza and fallout (Bar Hillel, M, 2015)." This was not a one off statement as in the past she has said that, due to her views on Israel, she is prejudiced against Jews. (CiF Watch, 2013). That a high profile journalist feels comfortable expressing antisemitic views by treating Israel as the collective Jew shows we have a long way to go when it comes to defeating antisemitism.

It is a problem we cannot ignore when you consider that in December 2014, the BBC Director of Television, Danny Cohen declared he had never felt so uncomfortable being a Jew in the UK in the past 12 months (Burrell, I, 2014). It's obvious that the current rise in antisemitism that often increases when Israel is in armed conflict with Palestinian groups like Hamas is making some Jews feel uncomfortable in the UK. That is why it is heartening to see that the Government continues to take action to confront antisemitism, although more could be done when it comes to stopping Islamist groups spread their poisonous antisemitic views.

You would have thought with all of this when it came to reporting on the murder of Jewish people in Europe the British press would report it more responsibly. Unfortunately, for some papers this is certainly not the case. In response to the murder of 37 year old volunteer synagogue guard, Dan Uzan on February 14th 2015 who died protecting people who were marking a celebration in a Copenhagen Synagogue, The Metro had as its front page headline on February 16th 2015: FURY AS PM TELLS JEWS TO FLEE EUROPE (Scoopst, 2015). Surely the fury should have been directed at the fact that many Jews no longer feel safe in Europe. I found Binyamin Netanyahu's comments distasteful and wrong, as I believe do have a future in Europe and should not the terrorists win. That said the major issue is the situation across Europe has got so bad for some Jews that they no longer feel safe. If we

want to tackle antisemitism properly in Europe including the UK we need to concentrate on making sure Jews feel safe.

This report has concentrated solely on antisemitism in the UK. However, in the light of the terrible Islamist terror attacks in Paris against the left wing anarchist magazine Charlie Hebdo where 12 were killed due to it publishing cartoons about the Prophet Mohammad and against Jews at a kosher supermarket, antisemitism in Europe cannot be ignored. Therefore, I will be writing another report concentrating on the rise of hatred of Jews in Europe.

2D- APPG against antisemitism publishes its report

The APPG Against Antisemitism report that we submitted our comments to was published in February 2015. We wholeheartedly agree with the comments of the Chairman of the APPG against Antisemitism, John Mann MP who said that everyone in the UK must unite against antisemitism (Mann, J, 2015). Parliament Street would like to play a positive role in combatting antisemitism in the UK and I see this report as the start of this.

One of the most startling and perturbing mentions in its report was the fact that in the last three years there has been a ten-folded increase in online antisemitism over the last few years (Wright, P, 2015). As I have made clear in this report I do not believe in restricting free speech in any shape, way or form, which means that these hateful comments should be heard. However, I think giving antisemitism online is becoming a growing problem, I believe another recommendation I would like to add to this report is the creation of a taskforce of those involved in combatting antisemitism whose job would be to highlight and respond to high profile antisemitic comments. I believe there is now a need for this given the serious nature of online antisemitism that the APPG Against Antisemitism has revealed.

The APPG Against Antisemitism Report against Antisemitism makes 34 recommendations for Government, Parliament and civil society. I think there are many good recommendations in this report that will support the Government continued good work in protecting Jewish communities and making sure that antisemitism is recorded. That said I personally do not agree that those who repeatedly make antisemitic comments as the reports call for should be banned (Little, A, 2015). Freedom of expression means allowing noxious and antisemitic views to be heard. Furthermore, if you ban people they will not have their disgraceful antisemitic views challenged and can paint themselves as martyrs for freedom of speech. That is why instead I would prefer a taskforce to challenge and call out these antisemitic voices.

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