

Antisemitic Bigots at Oxford and Elsewhere

Every ranking of the world's higher educational institutions puts Oxford University at or near the top. This internationally renowned institution is the oldest university in the English-speaking world, existing in some form since 1096.

The University, with its dreamy spires, prides itself on its traditional role as an international focus for learning and as a forum for intellectual debate. Oxford numbers among its alumni numerous outstanding persons in politics, literature, mathematics, science, philosophy, and sport. Among them are 26 Prime Ministers, including the present one David Cameron, and 27 Nobel Laureates.

Oxford is now facing a test of intellectual integrity as a result of an investigation of antisemitism on the part of students who are members of the Oxford University Labour Club, that is linked to the British Labour Party. The issue began when a non-Jewish student named Alex Chalmers resigned as co-chair of the Club, alleging that many members of the Club supported Israel Apartheid Week, and had a "problem with Jews." Since then, many Jewish students have spoken about being troubled by left wing antisemitism at universities.

Let one thing be perfectly clear. Rational criticism of policies of the State of Israel is wholly appropriate as is discussion, to be welcomed, of controversial issues between Israel and Palestinians. Leftists in general go further and have long argued that it is a delusion to say that opposition to the State of Israel and its actions, means hatred of Jews.

However, though this may sometimes be true, it is more often a fallacy. This was apparent in London in November 2014. The

merging of opposition to Israel and antisemitism was already clearly shown by the events when there was an attempt by Palestinian activists and others to boycott the Jewish (sic) Tricycle Film Festival that had received a small grant from the Israeli Embassy in London. Not only was open dialogue being rejected. Jews in London were connected with and related to occurrences in the Middle East.

Leftist student politics in Britain has become poisonous, with varying attitudes towards Jews: casual antisemitism, fantasies of Jewish conspiracy theories, organized harassment and bullying. For some time there has been disquiet over reports in universities of anti-Jewish "racism," verbal abuse against Jews, and prejudice against Jews.

The allegations concerning the Oxford leftists show that anti-Israeli positions and antisemitism had come together. Indeed, this is commonplace since anti-Israeli condemnation is often accompanied by rhetoric of "Stop doing what Hitler did to you," or "Gaza is a concentration camp," or justifications of Hamas for killing Israeli Jews, or singing "Rockets over Tel Aviv," or mocking Jewish students protesting antisemitism as "filthy Zionists."

It is crucial that acknowledged and even alleged anti-Semites be publicly named and exposed. In the Oxford case two individuals have been named, though they have not yet been officially declared responsible for anti-Semitic behavior. They are accused of but not declared guilty, and as of yet no formal or legal charges or political criticism have been made against them.

One of them, James Elliott, a 22 year old third year history student, is a member of the youth section of the national policy forum of the Labour Party, and is an aspirant to become youth representative of the Party National Executive Committee. He is an ally of and was a political adviser of the campaign in 2015 of Jeremy Corbyn to become leader of the

Labour Party. He helped write the party's youth manifesto, and is considered a protégé of Corbyn.

The other named student is Max Shanly, a 25 year old who is a member of the Young Labour national committee. Both Elliott and Shanly are linked to or supported by the far left pressure group, Momentum, backed by and supportive of Corbyn. The student hard left has been infiltrated by Momentum, an activist group founded in 2015 that now claims 60,000 members and encourages mass mobilization for what it says is "a more democratic, equal and decent society." However, in spite of its claims to be opposed to racism, antisemitism, and all forms of oppression, more objective observers consider it a neo-Marxist, authoritarian group, intolerant of dissent.

The Oxford issue led to concern within the University and in the Labour Party. A member of the House of Commons, John Mann, chair of the all party parliamentary group against antisemitism called on Corbyn, the Labour leader, to begin an inquiry into the issue and to sever all relations with the Oxford Labour Club.

Within Oxford University an investigation by Labour Students, the student wing of the party, was conducted and given to the party. The national chair of the Labour Students, Michael Rubin, said it would be made public on February 23, but the report appears to have been shelved, at least for the moment.

Instead, the Party decided on February 29, 2016 to begin an investigation headed by Janet, Baroness Royall, former Labour leader in the House of Lords, a senior party figure. In view of the leftist inclination of part of the Party headed by Corbyn, it remains to be seen if a report will be an objective assessment of the extent of antisemitism among Labour groups at Oxford. The soul of the Labour Party is at stake.

Oxford is not the only British university to be the scene of alleged antisemitism. Pro- Palestinian activists, including

the son of Corbyn, at York University on February 24 2016 organized a production of the short controversial play, *Seven Jewish Children: a Play for Gaza*, written by Caryl Churchill, which is critical of Israel and which some consider beyond the boundaries of reasonable political discourse. The site of this production is particularly wounding since the city of York is shamefully memorable for the massacre of Jews in 1190.

Oxford among other things, such as being the murder capital of the world at least in the BBC TV series of Inspector Morse, has been called the home of lost causes and impossible loyalties. Both the University and the Labour Party must ensure that antisemitism is one of those lost causes. In December 2015, a senior Labour activist, Scott Nelson, was expelled from the Party for abusing a disabled member of another political party and for antisemitism in his attacks on the Jewish founded supermarket chains, Tesco, and Marks and Spencer's.

In similar fashion, responsible governmental, political, and educational authorities must insist the perpetrators of anti-Semitic actions and utterances be punished and where appropriate be expelled from their University institution. Education after all is intended to advance tolerance and open-minded discussion, not to foster destructive prejudice and hatred.