

Antisemitism in British Universities

by Michael Curtis

It is sad to learn the truth about bigotry and intolerance concerning antisemitism being exhibited at British universities these days. This prejudice of course was always present among some British intellectuals, if expressed in discreet and prudent form. Isaiah Berlin referred to J.M. Keynes' critical view of Jews as a kind of club antisemitism, but it was not deep, as it was in the case of Hilaire Belloc or G.K. Chesterton. Now however antisemitic utterances and behavior have become not only trendy but poisonously noxious.

We already know the persisting dismal sort of antisemitism in the British Labour party and the lack of action of the leader of the party, Jeremy Corbyn in dealing with it. After a weak and useless appraisal, indeed a whitewash, of the problem in the Labour party by Shami Chakrabarti, a cross party parliamentary committee inquiry in October 2016 reported that the Labour party was demonstrably incompetent in dealing with incidents of anti-Jewish abuse by its members. The leader lacked backbone to confront the issue. No real punishment had been given even to the most egregious offender. Certainly, the party leadership had refused to denounce its former leader Ken Livingstone for his absurd remark that Hitler was supporting Zionism before he went mad, and ended up killing 6 million Jews.

It is therefore welcome that Lady (Ruth) Deech, alumna of Oxford University, Crossbench member of the House of Lords since 2005, law professor, and the first person appointed as Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education, indicated the problem. She spoke of some of the main universities in the UK are "no go zones" for Jewish students. She mentioned in

particular Manchester, Southampton, Exeter, and SOAS (School of Oriental and African Studies) in London.

Her main point was that universities, like the British Labour party, turned a blind eye to the issue of hostility towards Jews on campus. She realized that it was trendy on the British political left to be antisemitic. Antisemitism merged with anti-Israel rhetoric and activity. Deech and others have raised the crucial problem. What is it about Israel that provokes such passion and animosity of a kind not exhibited towards other countries and non-Jews?

Deech also was concerned that there had been no official investigation of specific complaints and allegations of antisemitism at Oxford, though officials had been given a dossier with a catalogue of incidents of harassment of Jewish students. The disillusioned and disgusted co-chair of the Oxford University Labour Club (OULC) resigned in 2016 as a result of these incidents. OULC members, he said, had "problems with Jews." Those problems included their use of the word "zios" to refer to Jews, and their statements that Auschwitz was a "cash cow," for Jews. Some dismissed concerns about antisemitism as "just Zionists crying wolf." Members of the OULC expressed support for the Palestinian led Israel Apartheid Week, and expressed solidarity with Hamas.

Why had British universities failed to curb the hatred of Jews expressed and illustrated within their halls? One significant reason given was that heads of British colleges were afraid of offending potential investors, including those, such as Saudi Arabia and the Gulf, countries, who gave very large donations. In 2005 the late Saudi Crown Prince, Sultan bin Abdulaziz al-Saud gave 2 million pounds to the Ashmolean Museum at Oxford. Exeter University received more than 8 million pounds from Sheikh Dr. Sultan bin Muhammad al-Qasimi, the ruler of Sharjah, one of the UAE emirates.

The British story is disquieting. The Community Security Trust

recorded 27 antisemitic incidents on British campuses in first six months of 2016. It is worth indicating a few of the incidents at the universities, in addition to the problem at Oxford.

At King's College, London on January 19, 2016 protestors, mainly the KCL Action Palestine, prevented a talk by Ami Ayalon, former head of Israel's Shin Bet and head of the Navy, and now a peace activist. The meeting was stopped when the protestors threw chairs, smashed windows, and set off fire alarms.

At University College, London on October 27, 2016 a violent protest, barricading Jewish students, prevented a talk by Hen Mazzig, former Israeli IDF Commander. Ironically, he was due to speak about his humanitarian work in the West Bank concerning medical facilities, schools, roads, and water infrastructure.

At SOAS on November 2016, the Palestine Society hosted a speaker who spoke of Israel as racist and fascist state and linked the "cult" of Zionism to Nazis. At Manchester, student motions endorsed BDS. At Exeter students wore T shirts on which were AS slogans.

The most troubling manifestation was a conference titled *Legitimacy, Responsibility, Exceptionalism*, to held in 2015 at Southampton University, that was intended to question the legal and moral right of the state of Israel to exist. The organizers were all well-known critics, even haters, of Israel, and advocates of boycott of Israel, as were almost all the expected participants.

The main organizers were Oren Ben-Dor (Southampton University law school) a constant anti-Israeli critic, and George Bisharat (U of California, Hastings School of Law) who favors a one state solution and compares Israel presence to a rapist. Ben Dor, former Israeli, has criticized the Israeli actions in

Lebanon in 2006 and in Gaza in winter 2009. He has supported boycotts of Israel, written about alleged "apartheid" of Israel, and the bias in the Israeli educational system. In a barely comprehensible article in 2012, Ben-Dor referred to 'pathologies pertaining to Jewish thinking and being.'

Though 929 academics supported a petition for the conference to be held at Southampton, as the result of strong protests the University cancelled it on the grounds that it gave legitimacy to antisemitism. However, the conference with the same cast of characters is now to be held in March and April 2017 at University College, Cork, Ireland, part of the National University of Ireland.

The list of speakers, including die-hard critics of Israel speaks for itself. The presence as speakers of individuals such as Richard Falk, Ilan Pappé, Azmi Bishara, and Hatem Bazian suggests the objective of the conference. It is not to discuss the problems of the Middle East in any objective fashion. It is to emphasize the illegitimacy of the state of Israel. It is to link the alleged suffering of Palestinians to the foundation and nature of Israel, and in essence to argue for the nullification of Israel's existence.

It is ironic that Southampton University where the biased conference was to be held houses the Parkes Institute for Jewish/non Jewish relations based on the work of Rev. Dr. James Parkes. Parkes was an Oxford scholar, Anglican clergyman and historian, who understood the evil of antisemitism, and the pain and victimization that Jews suffered from antisemitism, and devoted his life to end persecution of Jews. All British universities as well as the Labour party should learn from Parkes' courageous life story and end the travesty of the misuse of both the campus and the political arena.