

BDS: Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions Against Antisemitism

It is a welcome happening that the virus, the incubus of antisemitism, is receiving critical attention in a global way, and in some parts of the European political mainstream. It is equally welcoming, and sadly necessary, that democratic countries in Europe as well as in the United States are now providing and funding protection and security for Jewish organizations and synagogues.

However, it is time to argue that mere discussion of the bigotry of antisemitism though necessary is insufficient. International Covenants, laws in a number of countries in Europe as well as in the U.S. prohibit discrimination or advocacy of hatred that is an incitement to discrimination, hostility, or violence. It is not simply an issue concerning free speech or limits on it.

The crucial factor in the case of antisemitism is that the hatred may, and as history has shown so often in so many areas and times, does lead to violence against Jews, either individually or as members of a nation, or as citizens of Israel. What is now essentially required are actions to condemn and punish perpetrators of antisemitism in a meaningful way by boycotting, divestment, expelling them, and by sanctions taking legal action against them, since the perpetrators are responsible for behavior that has so often lead to violence.

The most recent discussion of the subject has taken place on March 14-15, 2016 in Berlin at the Inter-Parliamentary Coalition for Combatting Antisemitism, concerned with hatred on the Internet, in community relations, and in football,

among other issues. At it, German Chancellor Angela Merkel said antisemitism had no role in our society and needed to be combatted by all means and in all instances. Antisemitism masquerading as criticism of Israel must be considered hate speech, as violations of freedom of association and expression. It means that calls for the destruction of the Jewish State of Israel is a pretext for expressing hatred of Jews.

Irina Bokova, UNESCO Director-General, indicated that crimes against Jews and attacks on places of worship, culture and community were occurring and must be countered and punished. She suggested that they must be prevented and this must begin with education, education that fosters new forms of global solidarity She rightfully praised UNESCO's work in promoting global citizenship education and the advancing of Holocaust education. All will agree it is wholly desirable to defend the concept of defending humanity as a single community, sharing values and equal dignity. In similar fashion, Frans Timmermans, Vice-President of the European Commission, pointed to the need for education, education, education. This, he said, is the "only agora society as to meet, to learn to live together, to foster responsible citizens."

With all due respect to Bokova and Timmermans though their emphasis on the need for education is irreproachable it must be seen as only a starting point as just a few recent incidents, in educational institutions and in politics, show.

Behavior in great universities today is not gratifying. Former Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams, now Master of Magdalene College, Cambridge, shocked by the series of unpleasant incidents at British universities called for more action against the rise of antisemitism. He heard the echoes of past bigotry and violence.

The most striking exposition of the problem has come from a courageous young man, Alex Chalmers who resigned as co-chair

of the Oxford University Labour Club, affiliated to the British Labour Party. His account of the antisemitic attitudes of members of the Club is devastating. The word "Zio," derogatory for Jew and displaying hatred of Zionism and Israel has been part of the Club's lexicon, as is the singing of the song "Rockets over Tel Aviv." Why has education at Oxford not overcome the hatred? As a minimum the guilty students should have been reprimanded, and as true punishment should be expelled from Oxford.

Similarly, why has education at the London School of Economics not overcome antisemitic hatred? At LSE, a student named Rayhan Uddin, vice-chair of LSE Labour Society and a member of the Labour Party, was running for the post of general secretary of the LSE student union. Understandingly, he tried to prevent the election of a competitor, who happened to be a Jewish student. One might have thought that the election of a Jew, what Uddin called a "tragedy," would cause suffering limited to Uddin's fellow LSE students. But Mr. Uddin, who is said to use the word "Zio" believes that this momentous event, perhaps part of the global Jewish conspiracy will be terrible not only for "Muslims and pro-Palestinians at LSE but for Muslims and pro-Palestinians across the whole country."

Again, one may ask why education at LSE has not overcome the vicious hatred, let alone adherence to university rules? Uddin's real concern for justice and equality, but not suffering, was shown by his attendance on Sunday March 13, 2016 of a gala dinner held in a central London banqueting hall by the LSE Islamic Society. At it, a physical screen down the middle of the room separated and segregated men and women. Uddin was guilty of violating LSE rules that gender segregation by members of the LSE community was contrary to university regulations. What punishment if any is in store for him?

The courageous young man Chalmers was appalled that a considerable part of the political Left has turned a blind eye

to antisemitism. Recent British politics illustrates this. In Britain, Luciana Berger, the youngest Jewish MP, a member of the Labour party, was targeted by a coordinated campaign of antisemitic abuse, threats of physical violence, and death threats. Berger received messages of an image of her with a yellow star on her head. The leaders of the Labour Party did not give her adequate support. They should have seen that the perpetrators were tried in court and punished.

In contrast, a number of members of the Labour Party are concerned with the Global Jewish Conspiracy. A woman named Vicki Kirby who argued that ISIS should attack Israel was in March 2016 appointed as vice chair of the Woking Labour Party. She had previously been dumped as a candidate for parliament in the 2015 general election, and suspended from the Party following antisemitic remarks she made in social media in 2014. She has been relentless in her antisemitism. On March 14, 2016 Kirby was suspended from the Labour Party a second time after she has published a series of tweets attacking Israel. Among them was information that Hitler might be the "Zionist god," and that "Jews had big noses." Even the Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn, not regarded as friendly towards Israel, criticized "vile" antisemitic abuse that "had no place in our society."

This incident concerning Kirby followed another one when a Labour Party member member, Gerry Downing, a leader of the Socialist Fight group, was expelled from the Party that had readmitted him as a full member. Among his choice phrases were " Hamas heroism." Downing was concerned with a world Jewish-Zionist bourgeoisie. His ST group has defended ISIS, and still questions part of the facts of the Holocaust.

The answer to the virus of antisemitism is to eliminate it. This can be done only partly by education, but mainly by reacting strongly against perpetrators. They should be Boycotted from official organizations, expelled from universities and political parties. They should be Divested of

funding. They should be Sanctioned by the full force of laws against discrimination and incitement to violence. Only in this way will violence against Jews be ended.