

Don't Kiss the Blarney Stone

by Michael Curtis

Fatin Al Tamimi

When Irish eyes are smiling, you know there's something afoot. Irish diplomacy is the ability to tell people to go to hell so that they will look forward to the trip.

For many centuries the Irish people and the Jewish people have suffered cruel persecution and discrimination and sought to achieve national sovereignty. There's a tear in one's eye, and I'm wondering why, that Ireland has been and is one of Europe's major critics of the state of Israel and of Jews. It did not extend de jure recognition of Israel until 1963, and did not set up an embassy in Tel Aviv until 1996. As a minimum, Ireland is not contributing to or playing a constructive role in efforts to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian differences.

The two peoples have both been involved in historical experiences with many dimensions, national, religious, and

geographical. Yet, though the conflicts and experiences of the two countries are not identical, they are similar in that both are complex, and analysis of them needs more than simple formula. It is not constructive for politicians and commentators in one country to identify in witless fashion the other country as colonialist or as an apartheid state.

Irish criticism and opposition to Israel and its policies have been made clear in many ways. One important sign of this was governmental introduction of legislation, "Control of Economic Activity (Occupied Territories) Bill" 2018, intended to prohibit the import and sale of goods, services, and natural resources, "originating in illegal settlements in occupied territories." The vote on the bill was eventually postponed, but it was a clear indication of the intent to boycott the Jewish state, and even more to delegitimize the state of Israel.

On May 26, 2021, after the parliament, the Dail, the lower chamber, passed a motion proposed by the political party Sinn Fein, and supported by other groups including Trocaire, Christian Charity and the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, Ireland became the first EU member to declare the building of Israeli settlements in the disputed territories of the West Bank as de facto annexation. The Minister for Foreign Affairs, Simon Coveney, said we "need to be honest with what is happening on the ground and call it out as "de facto annexation." However, the Dail did reject, 87-46, a proposal to expel the Israeli Ambassador and to impose comprehensive sanctions against Israel. In addition, minister Coveney said it was troubling that Sinn Fein, the constant critic of Israel, would not condemn the actions of Hamas in Gaza for killing children and innocent civilians.

Earlier, the legislature, Oireachtas, in January 2018 called for a national ban on imported products from "Israeli settlements considered internationally as illegal. In contrast, Ireland in 1980 was the first EU member to endorse

the establishment of a Palestinian state. There was a decision in 2014 to formalize diplomatic relations with the Palestinians but it was not implemented. However, Ireland upgraded the Palestinian diplomatic mission, the first EU country to do so. Ireland has not yet appointed an envoy on antisemitism to the European Commission, despite EC requests to do so.

Ireland is the last state in the EU to have full diplomatic relations with Israel. Today, no senior Irish political figure is pro-Israeli.

Yet, who would have thought that Ireland is the most antisemitic country in Europe? A new 200 page report written by British journalist David Collier reveals not only the extent of anti-Israeli expression, but also a deeply disturbing view of the ways in which Irish politicians, academics, and activists use criticism of Israel to promote antisemitism. The Collier report analyzes the statements and behavior of politicians, and hundreds of social media posts to reveal the extent of hatred of Jews in Ireland.

Collier argues, somewhat surprisingly, that the anti-Jewish racism spreads within the corridors of power, and unlike the U.S. or UK, appears to be as much driven from the top down as the reverse. The Report is full of examples showing rampant antisemitism accusations and tropes in anti-Israeli activism throughout Irish society. He exposes fake news stories, neo-Nazi activity or conspiracy web sites among the actions to demonize Israel and antisemitism.

Ireland was one of the only two EU countries to participate in the Dublin 4 Conference of 47 countries at the UN on September 22, 2021, the 20th anniversary of Durban in South Africa. The original Durban Conference 2001 was ostensibly against racism and racial discrimination, but it degenerated into expressions of antisemitism, a vehicle for scapegoating the Jewish people, an anti-Israeli tribunal. The Durban Conferences of 2009 and

2011 were similar exhibitions of anti-Israeli bias: in the latter the then president of Iran, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, took the stand to deny the Holocaust. In Durban 2021 the Iran foreign minister, Hossein Amir Abdollahian, took the platform to declare his country was “dedicated” to the elimination of Zionism. In 2001 only the U.S. and Israel boycotted Durban; in 2021 38 states did do, but not Ireland.

It is indeed revealing to indicate some of the anti-Jewish and antisemitic animosity exhibited by Irish politicians and citizens. To take a few examples.

Catherine Connolly, deputy chair of the lower house, announced the idea of Jewish supremacy, and asked foreign minister Coveney whether his indicating support for the Jewish character of the state of Israel meant he agreed with the treatment by Israel of Palestinian communities in its attempts to accomplish Jewish supremacy. She also artfully asked if the attempts to perpetuate the supremacy of Jews over Palestine amounted to apartheid. What is significant is that the accusation of “Jewish supremacy” is akin to the notorious Protocol of The Elders of Zion which proclaimed the Jews were planning, presumably in the back of a kosher deli in Brooklyn, to take over the world.

Niall Collins (Fianna Fail) Minister of State for Skills, referred to a huge Jewish lobby, that has influenced U.S. support for Israel.

Sen. Paul Gavan (Sinn Fein) , a supporter of BDS, lobbied artists not to perform in the apartheid state that calls itself. Aengus o Snodaigh (SF) stated Israel is without doubt one of the most abhorrent and despicable regimes on the planet. He seemed to suggest that Hitler may not have been too far wrong. He said that Alan Shatter, the only Jewish member of parliament, had exposed the Dail to propaganda, twisted logic, and half-truths, of which Joseph Goebbels would have been proud, an outrageous comparison of a Jewish politician

with the Nazi propaganda chief. Chris Andrews (SF) said that Israel were “murdering bastards” who wanted to wipe out Palestine, and that Israel was an apartheid, racist, terror state. It was time, he said, for Ireland to stop placating Israel, and to recognize the State of Palestine.

Hard core antisemitism is widely expressed in Irish society. The Ireland Palestine Solidarity Campaign is the largest anti-Israeli group in Ireland. Led by Fatin Al Tamimi, who has lived in Ireland for thirty years and is a proponent of BDS, the campaign accuses Israel of dual crimes against humanity, apartheid and the persecution of the Palestinian people. Manifestations of antisemitism are everywhere. The campus of Trinity University was the scene of a campaign to boycott Israel: signs appeared “there were no gas chambers in or concentrations camps... less than 1.5 million Jews were jailed.”

Irish academics signed a letter in support of David Miller, political science professor at the University of Bristol, who was fired in October 2021 for his comments that Jewish students on British campuses were pawns of Israel and were being used on behalf of “a violent, racist, foreign regime engaged in ethnic cleansing.”

Among civilians in the Collier Report, Elizabeth Coleman posted that the Protocols of the Elders of Zion were real, and that the Times of Britain only debunked them because it was Jewish owned. Another civilian activist, Tom Coughlan, called for Jews “to be thrown down the well.”

Fake news are used. Pat Buckley (SF) featured a doctored photo of an Israeli soldier standing on a young Palestinian girl: Frances Black informed the world that Israel was flooding the Gaza Strip , a travesty of the reality that Gaza and the western coastal area of Israel had been affected by floods during heavy rainfall. Sean Crowe posted what was said to be an attack by Israel on the trees of Palestinian farmers, but it was actually a photo of Cyprus trees in Morocco.

Animosity is present in culture. Sally Rooney. Irish author aged 30, has refused to allow her new novel *Beautiful World* to be published in Hebrew. She will allow this only if the Israeli publisher is compliant with the BDS movement. There is no likelihood that she will refuse translation into Mandarin because of Chinese brutality in Hong Kong or genocide against the Uyghurs, nor into Russian.

It is time for Ireland to return to the Dublin of Leopold Bloom, the Jewish protagonist of James Joyce's *Ulysses*.