

Hail Columbia University on Hanukkah

by Michael Curtis



It may be too dramatic to imagine there's no sun up in the sky, stormy weather, keeps raining all the time, at Columbia University in New York City, but the campus, no gem of the university cosmos, was defiled by a rude foe whose impious hand invaded the shrine of academic integrity and decorum.

How fitting that Professor Elizabeth Midlarsky, Professor of Clinical Studies at Teachers College, Columbia University and Holocaust scholar, should have lighted the Hanukkah menorah at the University in New York on December 2, 2018. This event is the rededication of the Second Temple in Jerusalem when the rebellion in Second Century B.C. by the Maccabees against Antiochus, King of Syria, was helped by the miraculous burning of candles in the Menorah for eight days. The Jews had risen and drove out their Greek-Syrian persecutors.

A few days earlier Professor Midlarsky had been the target of

a brazen incident when on November 28, 2018 the wall outside her office was defaced with swastikas and the word "Yid" sprawled in red spray paint. This was not the first time she has suffered from a similar atrocity. Already in October 2007, similar antisemitic graffiti was painted on her office door after she had protested about the appearance on September 25, 2007 at Columbia University of Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, antisemite, Holocaust denier, and advocate that Israel's Mossad, with or without U.S. intelligence and security groups, was responsible for 9/11.

The barbarous act against Midlarsky is yet another manifestation of the persistence of the foul disease, the virus of antisemitism, in spite of genuine attempts in European countries and in the U.S. to eradicate the affliction. ADL has reported a 57% increase in the number of antisemitic incidents in 2017, and at least one incident in every state in the U.S. The general problem is borne out by a new survey in November 2018 conducted by Comres on behalf of CNN of antisemitic attitudes in seven European countries.

The persistence of antisemitism is clear. Some of the findings are as follows.

Three out of ten adults, 28%, say Jewish people have too much influence in finance and business across the world, compared to other people. One in five adults, 20%, say Jewish people have too much influence in media. More than 44% agree antisemitism is a growing problem in their country today. One third, 32%, agree criticism of Israel tends to be motivated by antisemitism. Two thirds of Europeans said that commemorating the Holocaust is desirable to fight antisemitism, but three of ten adults, 31%, agree that Jewish people use the Holocaust to advance their position or to achieve certain goals.

All this confirms other surveys that show ignorance or distortion of Jewish experience. About 31% of U.S. citizens, and 41% of millennials believe that two million or fewer Jews

were murdered in the Holocaust. About 34% of Europeans knew only a little or have never heard of the Holocaust. Half of all millennials could not name a single war-time concentration camp, and 45% of all U.S. persons failed to do so. Oddly, in all this there is a constant overestimate of the number of Jews in the world; though they number only 0.2%, many critics state that the Jewish population is 20%, off by a factor of 100.

Certainly, the disease of antisemitism has appeared in many usual places and proclaimed by psychotic or unbalanced individuals. Following the massacre at the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh, a 32 year old man, a driver named Mohammed Abdi, in Los Angeles on November 31, 2018, yelling "hateful remarks about Jewish heritage" aimed his car at two men after they had left a synagogue, trying to plow into them. Prejudice in the British Labour Party seems endless. The latest example of that political bigotry concerns a man named John Shaw, a Party official in Easington, County Durham, who posted a statement that any MP, who was a member of the Labour Friends of Israel, should be "isolated by colleagues and the Party." Labour Party officials warned that any activist who publicly accuses another member of antisemitic prejudices risks "being disciplined".

Similarly, the UN General Assembly never ceases its antisemitic and anti-Israeli venom. On November 31, 2018, it approved six anti-Israeli Resolutions, including two ignoring Jewish ties to the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. One, by vote of 148-11 and 14 abstentions, disavowed Israeli sovereignty over Jerusalem. A second, passed 156-8 with 12 abstentions, referred to the Temple Mount solely by its Muslim name al - Haram al-Sharif.

The social media has been abused by antisemites. The well-known quarterback Brett Favre (Green Bay Packers) was duped by a white supremacist group into using coded language in a video posted on Facebook, supposedly coming from a veterans group

and supposedly appearing to support the US military, but in fact carrying an antisemitic message.

But also, the disease has appeared in unexpected places. Swastikas have recently appeared on Google maps in London, (Savoy Hotel and Bloomsbury Hotels), Dublin, Edinburgh, and Las Vegas, as well as on university campuses in addition to Columbia. At Cornell University on November 14, 2018 and on following few days, swastikas were drawn in the snow, near two dorms and dining hall. At Duke University on November 18, a memorial to the victims of the massacre in the synagogue in Pittsburgh was defaced with a swastika. At Temple University a professor of Media Studies, Marc Lemont Hill, called for resistance against Israel, using the words of Khaled Mash'al, leader of Hamas, that a free Palestine should exist "from the river to the sea," the formula for the elimination of the State of Israel.

The problem has been made clear in international public statements. On January 26, 2018 Jean-Claude Juncker, Luxembourg politician, president of the European Commission, spoke in Brussels on the occasion of Holocaust Remembrance Day, memorializing the liberation on January 27, 1945 by Allied Forces of the concentration camp Auschwitz-Birkenau, and brought the horrors there to an end. The day, Juncker said, should remind us to be vigilant in the face of hatred, discrimination, and dehumanization, and to condemn antisemitism in all its forms. We, meaning the international community, have a moral responsibility to ensure that the story of the Holocaust, the darkest chapter of modern European history, remains part of Europe's collective memory. Antisemitism is not only a threat for Jews but a fundamental menace to open and liberal societies.

Again on October 5, 2018, Juncker asserted that legislation tackling antisemitism as well as racism is currently applied across all EU member states. This includes Holocaust denial, but 15 EU states still don't apply it properly. Similarly, his

colleague Frans Timmermans, Dutch politician and diplomat, president of the European Commission, on May 23, , 2018, warned against antisemitism and the demon in us that can be unleashed when hatred is institutionalized.

These European officials, like counterparts in the U.S., are aware that the number of Holocaust survivors is decreasing daily, that Holocaust denial is spreading as is ignorance of the real nature of that genocide. It is urgent that there be remembrance of the infamous events of the annihilation of European Jews.

The swastika was not a Buddhist symbol of worship, but the representative insignia for the murder of Jews. As the late George H.W. Bush said in August 1990 about the invasion by Iraq of Kuwait, "this will not stand."