

Jews Confront Radical Evil

Ken Livingstone, the former Labour Party Mayor of London, is one of the most, perhaps the very most, nauseating figures in British politics. It is welcome news that he has been suspended from the Party for his ongoing disgraceful and ignorant remarks about Jews and the State of Israel. However, inadvertently he raised the issue of Jews, the victims of the Holocaust, being blamed for their own victimization.

A generation ago, a more serious figure, the political philosopher Hannah Arendt, in her controversial book *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, wrote unkindly about the Jewish Councils or *Judenrate* that were organized by Nazi Germany to enforce Nazi orders affecting Jews in occupied countries. Arendt's notorious comment was that "wherever Jews lived, there were recognized Jewish leaders, and these leaders almost without exception cooperated in one way or another, for one reason or another, with the Nazis." The great Jewish scholar, mentor and friend, Gershom Scholem rebuked her for her harshness about those "who were compelled to make terrible decisions in circumstances that we cannot even begin to reproduce or reconstruct."

Livingstone is not living in similar dire circumstances as the Nazi era but he repeatedly blames the Jews for their predicament. He has said on a number of occasions that Adolf Hitler had supported Zionism "before he went mad and ended up killing 6 million Jews." He asserted that when Hitler won the German elections in 1932, which in fact he did not, and came to power, his policy was not directed towards killing the Jews.

Livingstone tells us that Hitler wanted to deport all the Zionists (sic) to Israel. This ignorant statement is a surprise since 1932 was sixteen years before the State of Israel was created. Nazi Germany had expelled Polish and

stateless Jews from Germany to Poland in October 1938. Of course, various proposals, lacking in seriousness, were made by different European countries for the transfer of Jews to overseas colonies of their countries: Mauritania, a French colony, was always high on the list.

Yet the reality was clear at the international conference at the French resort of Evian-les-Bains in July 1938, called supposedly to promote the emigration of Austrian and German Jews, that was attended by delegates from 32 countries.

The issue of Jewish emigration was an immediate one after the *Anschluss*, the German takeover of Austria, on March 12, 1938. Yet it is all too clear that President Franklin D. Roosevelt suggested the conference and used it to save face and evade action in view of domestic and political opposition. No high level US official attended: the US representative was Myron Taylor, a businessman and friend of Roosevelt, not a diplomat.

Livingstone would do well to read the commentary on Evian given by Golda Meir in her autobiography, *My Life*. For her, it was a terrible experience hearing the delegates hypocritically explain how much they wanted to take in substantial numbers of refugees, and how unfortunate it was they were unable to do so. In fact, as the Nazis well knew, the Dominican Republic was the only country that agreed to accept any Jewish refugees.

Livingstone is not only a bigot in his concentration on the evils of one country in the world, but also a masochist who has deprived himself of a delicious product. He has advocated an international boycott on Israeli goods, and said he would never buy Israeli goods. He explained, "I like dates, but I don't buy dates that come from Israel."

Livingstone's comments of world affairs are imaginative even if they lack sense. He believes that the failure, only Israeli failure, to resolve the Palestinian problem fuels terrorist

attacks. In blaming the victim he believes that ISIS terrorism and the terrorist attacks in Paris and Brussels are connected with Israel.

Livingstone needs lessons in history as well as in political judgment and civility of expression. He had already swallowed the fallacious Palestinian Narrative of History by telling us that the creation of Israel was a great catastrophe and fundamentally wrong because there had been a Palestinian community there for 2000 years. At a moment in history when the civil war has led to the deaths of thousands of Arabs and millions of migrants, Livingstone attributed the mass expulsion of Jews in the Arab world to the creation of Israel. As a consequence of this creation, "all the Israeli (sic) communities in the Arab world were deported to Israel."

Livingstone tells us that prior to the creation of Israel in 1948, "there were large Jewish communities that never suffered threats or attacks...they lived in peace alongside their Arab neighbors. He should have known that not only prior to 1948 but prior to the First Zionist Congress held in 1897, Jews were persecuted in Arab lands: Aleppo, 1850, 1875; Damascus 1840, 1848 1890; Beirut 1862, 1874; Jaffa, 1876; Jerusalem 1847,1870,1895; Cairo, 1844,1890; and in Alexandria 1871, 1873, 1877, and 1891.

Livingston's absurdities have outraged even the leader of the British Labour Party, but he did inadvertently touch on a controversial issue that is a reminder of the World War II problem, the dilemma for Jews in fighting evil and the threat of persecution.

This particular issue concerns the Haavara (transfer) Agreement made in August 1933 between Nazi Germany one side and the Zionist Federation of Germany and the Anglo-Palestinian Bank, to facilitate Jewish migration into the area of British Mandate Palestine. By it, some German Jews would be able to sell their properties in Germany in exchange for funds

that would allow them to buy property and German goods in Palestine. Also, German Zionists would not participate in the boycott of Germany.

Was this Jewish collaboration with Hitler? The Agreement was a success and brought resources to the Yishuv in Palestine to which 60,000 Jews immigrated, mostly well educated, and bringing with them £1,000 each. This was not an example of Hitler's support for Zionism, but part of his policy to rid Germany of Jews, as well as deal with the practical problem of the end of the Jewish boycott of Germany. The Holocaust put an end to it.

Livingston's remark that Hitler supported Zionism is a pernicious distortion of the Nazi consistent hatred of Jews. It may be true, and the historical argument continues, that Hitler may not at first have wanted the extermination of all Jews. It is certainly true, and Hitler was no Zionist, that he wanted them removed from Germany and elsewhere in one way or another. Jews had to make the terrible decision of how to survive, even if it meant at times that Nazis benefitted financially or practically. Like everyone else, whether hostile to the State of Israel or not, Livingstone should take the advice of Gershom Scholem, and not presume to judge the Jewish people in the effort to save themselves from extermination.