

The Fight Against the Virus of Antisemitism



by Michael Curtis

It is arguable whether the U.S. is out of the pandemic phase of Covid-19, and too early to say that Russia has been defeated in Ukraine, but it is dispiriting to acknowledge that the virus of antisemitism survives, has been increasing, and cannot be stamped out completely. The sad conclusion, from recent studies, is that the virus of antisemitism, a malignant form of racism, still infects populations throughout the world, in spite of efforts by official and non-official bodies to confront bigots and to inoculate people against the disease. The antisemitism is global: murders in synagogues in Pittsburgh and in Sweden, attacks on kosher restaurants in Paris, physical violence against civilians in the streets of London and New York.

What has become increasingly distressing is the availability and prominence of social media companies to provide opportunities for antisemitic expressions from their platforms, and for hostile obsession with and hostility towards the State of Israel. The issue has in recent years become more troublesome. Antisemitism has been openly and commonly expressed by individuals and groups of all kinds: general racists; far-right and neo-Nazis open, believers in the perpetuation of Adolf Hitler, and direct in their hatred of Jews; far-left, Marxists, and post-colonialists, critical of Israeli policies but using antisemitic stereotypes; radical Islamists; and pro-Palestinians.

What is now evident and needs more attention by officials is the propounding of antisemitism by bigots using the "dark web," the invisible part of the internet available only through special software. The dark web, with programs and sites that have provided platforms for antisemitism allows almost complete anonymity and invisibility and thus shelters extremists who cannot be prosecuted or forbidden in any way. It provides an opportunity to spread extremism. It is very much larger than the surface web, and more dangerous. The extent of its antisemitic activity is difficult to penetrate.

Antisemites, as well as pro-Palestinian groups and some international organizations, supposedly concerned to promote and protect human rights, have in recent weeks been particularly malicious in presenting a false equation. Despite the horror of the activities of the war criminal Vladimir Putin their priority has been their obsession with the State of Israel. They are annoyed that more attention is being paid to the Russian aggression against Ukraine than to the evils of Israel. For them, the relentless bombardment and killings of civilians, and the plight of millions of Ukrainian refugees should have attracted less attention than the evils of Israel.

The findings of the new study presented in the report of the Center for Study of Contemporary European Jewry at Tel Aviv

University, based on information from around the world, are disturbing. The study indicates a dramatic increase in the number of antisemitic incidents in the U.S., the UK, Canada, and other countries. The increase stems from four different sources. First, the protagonists do not come from a single ideology or belief system but may come from either the far-right or the far-left political movements. Secondly, the increase in manifested in social networks which in alarming fashion spread the disease. Thirdly, conspiracy theories of the impact of Jews have thrived during the lockdowns due to the pandemic that have kept people at home. A main theory is that Covid-19 was engineered and spread by Jews and by Israel for financial and other reasons. A fourth reason is the pro-Palestinian animosity and the antisemitic incidents connected with the continuing conflict between Israel and Hamas terrorists in Gaza. It is noticeable, according to UN figures, there was a surge in incidents in May 2021 when 261 people were killed in Gaza, and 14 in Israel.

It is also apparent that antisemitic utterances and incidents emanate from different types of personalities, from the envious for religious or economic reasons or simply bigoted prejudice, from white supremacy groups , the Goyim Defense League, from minorities resenting the prominence of Jews, from those swallowing false images and stereotypes of Jews, from fashionable persons in the media, theatrical and film professions, sports networks such as Brett Favre, former quarterback of the Green Bay Packers.

Ignorance is the spur to the animosity of these bigots.

It is important to survey the dramatic rise of antisemitism in some countries.

In the U.S. the number of antisemitic incidents reached an all-time high, a total of 2,717 incidents of assault, harassment, and vandalism, an increase of 34% from previous year. The Anti-Defamation League, ADL, states this is the

largest number on record since it began keeping records in 1979.

The number of anti-Jewish hate crimes recorded in New York and Los Angeles, was almost double that of the previous years. Antisemitic protests took place in a number of U.S. cities, and Jews, of whom was the chaplain, a Jew, of the NYPD, were physically beaten in the streets.

The NYPD recorded 214 crimes (126 in 2020), and the LAPD recorded 79 (40 in 2020). According to the survey of the American Jewish Committee, AJC, 2.6% of American Jews said they had been the victims of antisemitic physical attacks in the previous five years.

The Anti-Defamation League, ADL, recorded a significant increase in white supremacist antisemitic propaganda.

In France, the number of antisemitic incidents increased by almost 75%. Surveys record 589 incidents in 2021. In the UK the Community Service Trust recorded 2,255 antisemitic incidents in 2021, an increase of 34%, and a rise of 78% in physical assaults against Jews. In Canada, fourth largest Jewish community in the world, reports are that a 40-year record has been set in assaults, 61 in May 2021, against Jews. In Germany, there was an increase of 29% of antisemitic incidents, 3,028 in all. Equally sad, German anti-vaxxers compared their situation to that of the Jews in the Holocaust.

Intriguingly, the facts about Ukraine are surprising and encouraging in two senses. One is that Ukraine has the lowest level of antisemitism of other East European countries. The other is that a Ukrainian law was passed in September 2021 banning antisemitism. Estimates of public opinion in Ukraine are that Jews, once a large number who were virtually wiped-out during World War II, are now 0.2% of the population.

Only a small minority of Ukrainians say they are uncomfortable with Jews being among them. The far-right

movement, including Neo-Nazis, in the country, got only 2% of the national vote in 2019.

It is significant to relate the fight against antisemitism to the question of the tactics of Ukraine against the Russian aggression. Regarding assistance to overcome the evil forces, there should in both cases be no distinction between defensive and offensive weapons. Militarily, tanks can serve in both capacities. So should the actions against the evil perpetrators of antisemitism. In both cases Volodymyr Zelensky can direct the way.