

The Prevalence of Antisemitism

by Michael Curtis



Let us remember; what hurts the victim most is not the cruelty of the oppressor, but the silence of the bystander. When I use a word, it means just what I chose it to mean, neither more nor less.

Antisemitism is the canary in the coal mine of hatred. Throughout the years and in a unique manner Jews have experienced prejudice, discrimination, critical stereotypes, exclusion, accusations of conspiracy theories, plans to control the world, and being exterminated. Modern societies must reject the view, as the British Education Secretary said, that antisemitism is a less serious or more acceptable form of

racism. In views of the resurgence of antisemitism in general and within the increasing anti- vaccination movement, all should be aware of and not be complacent about the level of misinformation and falsehoods on social media and elsewhere about Jews.

Since language influences the way in which we view reality, it is desirable for purposes of clarification to make clear the subject of analysis. It is antisemitism, not anti-Semitism.

The concepts were coined in the late 18th century to designate a number of oriental languages. The word "semitic" was used by the German theologian Johann Eichhorn in 1787 to link languages of Middle Eastern origin, including Arabic, Hebrew, Amharic, and Aramaic, that have linguistic similarities. The speakers of these languages do not have a common history or heritage, nor is there is a "semitic peoplehood." Nor is there something called "Semitism" against which action should be taken. Interestingly, the speakers gave birth to the three great monotheistic religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. However, this led to the false assumption that adherents of these religions constituted racial groups.

This assumption became central in attitudes of venom towards Jews. In 1879 the German journalist Wilhelm Marr focused on the supposed racial, as opposed to religious, characteristics of Jews. He warned his countrymen that the Jewish spirit and Jewish consciousness had overpowered the world and this foreign power must be resisted. Jews became "Semites." He coined the term "Antisemitismus", a unique term, to mean hatred of Jews. This marked the beginning of the many different paths that antisemitism has taken racial, political, economic, social, and hostility to the State of Israel.

Though not all agree, the most useful definition of antisemitism is that formulated by the IHRA, the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, that "it is a certain perception of Jews which may be expressed as hatred towards

Jews, with rhetorical and physical manifestations towards Jews, their property, Jewish community institutions, and religious facilities.” In addition, the definition, in a statement that is controversial, indicates that contemporary antisemitism is often directed against the State of Israel, focusing obsessively on Zionism which is maligned, and therefore on Jewish history, identity, and safety. Antisemitic statements flourish under the guise of anti-Israelism and anti-Zionism. It is regrettable that only 29 of the 133 universities in the UK have adopted the IHRA definition. More than 80 universities have said they had no plans to adopt it.

There is of course a line between legitimate criticism of the State of Israel and its actions and expressions of antisemitism, but too often “Zionism” has been equated with Nazism or apartheid or racism, a characterization that has justified the elimination of Jews. On April 10, 1948, a month before the creation of the State of Israel, the Arab League decided to invade the forthcoming state. The vice chair of the Arab Higher Committee, Jamal Al-Husseini, declared, “The Arabs have taken into their own hands the Final Solution of the Jewish problem. The problem will be solved only in blood and fire. The Jews will be driven out.”

Historically, a negative attitude to Jews and Judaism is deep in western culture. The German scholar Theodor Mommsen wrote that “hatred of Jews and Jew-baiting are as old as the diaspora itself.” Evidence for this hatred is found in Greek and Latin works, and in actions in Egypt and in Syria in second century B.C. Allegations are frequent; Jews are held guilty of human sacrifice, ritual cannibalism, worship of an ass in the temple, unsocial, hatred of foreigners. Anti-Jewish riots took place around 410 B.C. in the colony of Elephantine. Cicero spoke of the barbaric superstitions of Jews and criticized the crowd of Jews that “on occasion set our public meeting ablaze.”

Throughout the ages Jews have been held responsible for

disasters, plagues, the Spanish flu, World War I, and now for the present coronavirus and collusion to affect banks by conspiracies to spread of the virus, and investing in vaccination activities. This is a modern version of the alleged responsibilities of Jews for infectious diseases.

Once primarily focused on religion and deicide, antisemitism has become more secular, more centered on race, more concerned with allegations that the State of Israel is a colonialist and racist state.

Today, two things are perturbing: one is the persistence of antisemitism seventy years after Auschwitz; the other is the diversity of individuals, groups, and institutions, who in one way or another manifest hatred of Jews and of Israel.

The first proposition is clear from empirical evidence. In the U.S. there are physical attacks, 2024 were reported in 2019, thousands of antisemitic websites, and cyberattacks against Jewish institutions, use of Nazi swastikas in propaganda demonstrations, and conspiracy theories that Jews had created and were spreading COVID-19. Attacks have taken place in a neo-Nazi rally in Charlottesville, August 2017, Pittsburgh synagogue on October 27, 2018, Chabad of Poway, April 2019.

The new Pew poll of May 2021 notes that over the past twelve months, 51% of American Jews have experienced some manifestation of antisemitism: graffiti, harassment online, physical attacks, and other forms of discrimination.

It is troubling that the quarantines imposed by Covid-19 did not stop antisemitic attacks. Instead, there were disruption of Zoom meetings and hostile video events, cries of kill and gas all the Jews, accusations against bankers and their undue control of banks, allegations of conspiracy of space lasers, initiatives by Rothschilds to use a secret powerful weapon to set wildfires in California, and vitriolic comments in the social media such as Clubhouse. Rallies in a number of U.S. cities in May 2021 all exhibit signs equating the star of

David with the swastika, and with accompanying text, what's the difference.

The second disconcerting issue is the wide range of the haters, from both the far left and the far right, from intellectuals and on university campuses, national political parties and international organizations who stress the imperialist, colonialist and oppressive Zionist state and the Jews who run it.

Two indications may suffice. Lawrence Summers, when president of Harvard, said in September 2002 that the campus had not been immune to the global increase in antisemitism. He warned regarding activities that are antisemitic in their effect if not in their intent, "Where antisemitism and views that are profoundly anti-Israeli have traditionally been the primary preserve of poorly educated right-wing populists, profoundly anti-Israel views are increasingly finding support in progressive intellectual communities." It is familiar that anti-Zionist ideology and antisemitism are openly disseminated on many campuses, in classes and in events. They are often promoted by pro BDS events, by course curricula, and by invited speakers.

The association of intellectuals with antisemitism is not new, as examples like Heidegger, Brasillach, Celine, or Blanchot, show. They have been condemned and so should the famous author Roald Dahl, a man who wrote strange but highly successful children's books but was an avowed antisemite. In an article in 1983 he wrote "There is a trait in the Jewish character that does provoke animosity, maybe it's a kind of lack of generosity towards non-Jews. I mean, there's always a reason why anti-anything crops up anywhere; even a stinker like Hitler didn't just pick on them for no reason." Among his other prejudiced remarks he said that Israeli actions showed that "a race of people had switched so rapidly from victims to barbarous murderers," and that the U.S. was "utterly dominated by the great Jewish financial institutions."

The other comment is from the report in October 2020 of the antisemitism in the British Labour party. Its caustic conclusion was that there was a culture in the party which did not do enough to prevent antisemitism and at worst could be seen to accept it. The party's approach and leadership in tackling antisemitism was insufficient. The problem has not been solved. In May 2021 the Labour party suspended 14 members, mostly from the Cambridge area, because of alleged antisemitic remarks.

In a sense antisemitism today is more prevalent and dangerous than in the past because of the ability to spread vile messages globally and instantly . It is time for all to overcome the real nature of antisemitism in its various manifestations. Among them are: Proliferation of web sites by right wing extremists and anti-Israeli activists, the rhetoric of left wing anti-globalization groups, the Islamist proponents, the intellectuals, such as Portuguese author Jose Saramago who compared Israel's action to those of the Nazis and composer Mikis Theodorakis, who called Jews "the root of all evil," the morally upright celebrities who demonize only one country in the world, the academics who focus on race and identity, but ignore the discrimination against Jews.