

Theresa May will Deal with Antisemitism

by Michael Curtis

On July 13, 2016 Theresa May, the present Home Secretary, became the new leader of the ruling British Conservative party and Prime Minister. Naturally, her main task is to redefine the role of Britain in the world after the Brexit vote to leave the European Union. Yet, though she has been mainly preoccupied in her ministerial position in the Cabinet with British internal problems she has made known her views on Middle Eastern issues, on Israel, and on antisemitism.

Those views emanate from a politician generally regarded as a non-ideological moderate conservative. They contrast sharply with what has increasingly become almost the mainstream view in the British Labour Party on those issues.

Teresa May has long been conscious of the threats to Israel and the pernicious existence of antisemitism. In September 2014 she spoke of Israel's right to defend itself against threats, including those from Hamas, Hezbollah, and Iran. Israel had to maintain a strong defense and security capability and to deploy it if necessary. May realized that when Israel faces enemies intent on its very destruction, it is almost impossible to know how to move to a two state solution with Palestinians.

At the Israeli Independence Day event in London in April 2016, May mentioned her strong support of Israel as "the fulfillment of many generations of struggle." She also spoke of her pleasure in visiting Israel in 2015 and discussing with experts issues of cyber security, and combating modern slavery. She honored the Israeli brave soldiers who had paid the ultimate price to defend their fellow citizens from

indiscriminate terrorist attacks and existential threats.

The safety of the Jewish people can never be taken for granted. May remarked it was a tragic fact of history that the Jewish people have had to protect themselves against repeated attempts to obliterate them.

May, echoing French Prime Minister Manuel Valls, replied to the increasing number of anti-Semitic utterances in UK that Britain would not be Britain without its Jews. She cherished the enormous contribution that Jews had made to UK. She argued the UK must redouble its efforts to wipe out antisemitism. She never thought she would see the day when members of the Jewish community would be feeling vulnerable and fearful of staying in the UK.

Interestingly, in May 2016 Teresa May, while saying that the Muslims in Britain benefit greatly from guidance of Sharia law also launched plans for an independent inquiry on Sharia courts now numbering 85 in UK. The inquiry headed by Mona Siddiqui, a British Muslim academic born in Pakistan, will investigate whether Sharia law is being misused and exploited to discriminate against women on issues such as divorce, child custody, and domestic violence in Islamic courts in UK, though not on the broader question of whether Islam itself discriminates against women.

What a difference is the political attitude by May, a liberal conservative, from the present behavior of so many in the British Labour Party. Those leftists in the party have been rife with anti-Israeli condemnations and implicit anti-Semitic utterances. If antisemitism is the barometer of the moral health of a country, the chart is below normal in the Labour Party.

Those leftist critics are relentless. Though Ken Livingstone, the former Mayor of London, was suspended from the party for saying that Hitler supported Zionism, he continues to insist

his statement is "factual." He explained that he spoke the truth when he said that Hitler wanted all the half million German Jews out of the country. Perhaps Livingstone does not know that Hitler was Austrian, not German. He did know however that Israel should be moved to the US.

Even more disconcerting was the readmission to the Party in May 2016 of a woman named Jackie Walter, vice chairman of the left wing group Momentum formed in 2015. She had been briefly suspended for saying Jewish people were the chief financiers of the sugar and slave trade, which of course explains why there were so many early synagogues in the Caribbeean, She complained that the Jewish Holocaust does not allow "Zionists" to do what they want regarding Palestinians. Even more, she complained with sick humor of "Jewish propagandists and their fellow travellers" who used all their working day to uncover "racists as rabid as me and are left to get on with their dirty work."

As a result of considerable criticism of the outrageous statements of some Labour members, and a number of suspensions of the offending individuals, especially Naz Shah, MP for Bradford West, and Ken Livingstone an inquiry was triggered by these unpleasant incidents. The leader of the Party, Jeremy Corbyn set up on April 29, 2016 a committee to inquire into the problem, the considerable concern and controversy leading to suspensions of high profile and senior individuals from the Party.

It was headed by Shami Chakrabarti, a barrister whose parents were of Hindu and Bengali origin, who was the director of Liberty, a human rights campaign group, and who is now Chancellor of the University of Essex. Curiously, she claims to be politically independent, but joined the Labour Party on the very day she was appointed to head the inquiry.

The report issued on June 30, 2016 is short and somewhat self-referential. It concludes with a number of sensible

recommendations for change in the working of the Party but is fundamentally disappointing for a number of reasons. It fails to be compelling on key issues; it is more general on the issue of discrimination than on the specific issue of antisemitism. Admitting that language evolves with events, politics, and identity, the report is overly careful not to offend anyone. It ends with a pointless non sequitur that the Party should increase the ethnic diversity of its staff.

It makes sensible suggestions even if some are banalities. She argues the word "Zio," now being used in colleges to indicate "Zionists," and the word "Paki" has no place in Labour Party discourse. The racial or religious tropes and stereotypes about any group of people also has no place in parlance.

All understand it is incendiary to compare the actions of Jewish people or institutions anywhere in the world to those of Hitler or Nazis, or to the Holocaust. Chakrabarti holds the Party must resist the use of such metaphor as the use of Hitler, Nazi, and Holocaust metaphors, and members should not deny or minimize the Holocaust.

But the report doesn't criticize any individual, and denies that antisemitism is endemic in the Party. She concludes the Labour Party is not overrun by antisemitism or other forms of racism, but "occasionally" has a toxic atmosphere.

One can only hope that Prime Minister May will dispose of that toxic atmosphere.