



ANTI ZIONISM AND ANTI SEMITISM IN BRITAIN

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In days full of anti-Semitism and even more riddled with anti-Zionism, it is important to recognize how far the two are really linked together and are proving Herzl somewhat mistaken: Hatred of the State of Israel in Europe – particularly in France and Britain, is frequently claimed not to be anti-Semitic per se. Yet the two are, in reality, deeply related and in Britain today appear to feed off one another.

The great 19th century writer George Eliot, (as studied by the historian Gertrude Himmelfarb), in the famous novel *Daniel Deronda*, saw Zionism as a natural result of being Jewish. As Melanie Phillips has stressed,

Zionism was not a response to anti-Semitism. As a self-evidently natural correlative of Judaism, it was something positive, noble and good in and of itself.

This is surely a vital point for today's Jews to grasp. For so often they present Zionism in a defensive manner. They justify it on the basis that Israel is an essential refuge for a people which uniquely has been persecuted in every country in which they have settled. In a similar vein, the founding of the State of Israel is misleadingly represented as Europe's response to the *Shoah*.

But Zionism's roots are far deeper. Zionism is simply the movement for the self-determination of the Jewish people. And its significance is greater than any other movement of national liberation because Judaism itself rests upon three legs – the people, the religion and the land. If one is lopped off by having its legitimacy denied, the whole thing collapses. That is why anti-Zionism is far more than an unpleasant political position. It is a direct attack on Judaism itself.²

This is exactly the crucial point: Jews suffer if associated with the State of Israel, and it suffers for declaring its right to exist and by its policies which, unlike any other state's, are begrudged and resented. So the Israeli defense of its security has such bad press that it is

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² Melanie Phillips, "George Eliot and the Essence of Zionism", *Jewish Chronicle*, 21 May 2009.

condemned out of hand, as it were fuelling the latent anti-Semitism in Britain. This is not new; it was well spotted by Natan Sharansky back in 2005. Its persistence is indeed ominous, however, and therefore noteworthy.

Mr. Sharansky attributed the British figures to “years of hostile reporting and commentary about Israel in the British press now spilling into the streets”.

His officials singled out *The Guardian* and the BBC, accusing them of “likening Israel to a Nazi state”. *The Independent* was also criticized. David Weinberg, coordinator of the forum and an adviser to Mr. Sharansky, said the report found that most acts of anti-Semitism in Britain were carried out by Arabs or Muslims, but press coverage of Israel, and the actions of some politicians created a climate that encouraged such attacks.

“Among west European countries there is a red flag flying over Britain and it’s particularly disturbing because Britain is a country friendly to Israel and the British government takes anti-Semitism seriously.” He added: “Sharansky believes you have to look at the intellectual environment that has developed toward Israel in Britain and the effect that has on the broader public.”

He singled out the coverage of the Israeli army assault on a Jenin refugee camp in 2002, in which 58 Palestinians were killed, mostly armed men.³

The military assaults on south Lebanon and even more on Gaza have made this situation worse. It is now socially difficult to mount a defense of Israel’s strategy and tactics, even though, by NATO standards and those of the coalition forces in Afghanistan and Iraq, Israel’s purity of arms doctrines and self-sacrifices, from refusing to gun down the “RPG kids” in Lebanon in the early 1980s, to refusing to bomb in Jenin and suffering numbers of deaths among the IDF as a result of booby traps, make it exemplary and sadly, self-harming. It is not a matter of honorable debate or rational discourse, however. The mindless condemnation comes from darker, deeper more elemental realms.

Anti-Semitism is rife within Britain’s Muslim community. Islamic bookshops sell copies of Hitler’s *Mein Kampf* and the notorious czarist forgery, *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*; as an undercover TV documentary revealed in January [2007], imams routinely preach anti-Jewish sermons. Opinion polls show that nearly two-fifths of Britain’s Muslims believe that the Jewish community in Britain is a legitimate target “as part of the ongoing struggle for justice in the Middle East”; that more than half believe that British Jews have “too much influence over the direction of UK foreign policy”; and that no fewer than 46% think that the Jewish community is “in league with Freemasons to control the media and politics”.

But anti-Semitism has also become respectable in mainstream British society. “Anti-Jewish themes and remarks are gaining acceptability in some quarters in public and private discourse in Britain and there is a danger that this trend will become more and more mainstream,” reported a Parliamentary inquiry last year [2006]. “It is this phenomenon that has contributed to an atmosphere where Jews have become more anxious and more vulnerable to abuse and attack than at any other time for a generation or longer.”

At the heart of this ugly development is a new variety of anti-Semitism, aimed primarily not at the Jewish religion, and not at a purported Jewish race, but at the Jewish state. Zionism is now a

³ [Chris McGreal](#), “Rising UK anti-Semitism Blamed on Media”, [The Guardian](#), January 25, 2005.

dirty word in Britain, and opposition to Israel has become a fig leaf for a resurgence of the oldest hatred.⁴

This is undoubtedly all part of a wider British moral collapse and a failure to replace left-wing shame at the empire with a willingness to confront the past's policy failures with honesty and integrity and to see Israel for what it is: An outpost for democracy (however open to corruption in both countries), for frequently remarkable intellectual and moral endeavors and the only ally in the region not willing to harbor bitterness and murderous intent towards the west in its bosom. And, given the history of anti-Semitism in Europe, it has reason enough to do so – and yet moral sense enough not to; unlike the Muslim world with which Britain shamelessly flirts continuously, all but heedless of its peril in doing so.

Oxford academic, Emanuele Ottolenghi has commented:

The argument that it is Israel's behavior, and Jewish support for it, that invite prejudice sounds hollow at best and sinister at worst. That argument means that sympathy for Jews is conditional on the political views they espouse. This is hardly an expression of tolerance. It singles Jews out. It is anti-Semitism.

Zionism reversed Jewish historical passivity to persecution and asserted the Jewish right to self-determination and independent survival. This is why anti-Zionists see it as a perversion of Jewish humanism. Zionism entails the difficulty of dealing with sometimes impossible moral dilemmas, which traditional Jewish passivity in the wake of historical persecution had never faced. By negating Zionism, the anti-Semite is arguing that the Jew must always be the victim, for victims do no wrong and deserve our sympathy and support.

Israel errs like all other nations: It is normal. What anti-Zionists find so obscene is that Israel is neither martyr nor saint. Their outrage refuses legitimacy to a people's national liberation movement. Israel's stubborn refusal to comply with the invitation to commit national suicide and thereby regain a supposedly lost moral ground draws condemnation. Jews now have the right to self-determination, and that is what the anti-Semite dislikes so much.⁵

There we have it. Israel inspires anti-Semitism in Britain because so many in Britain are, deep down, ignoring the need for what Conor Cruise O'Brien called "the suspecting glance" (at themselves), anti-Semitic. It was put well and with rare clarity by Jason Kenney, Canada's Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, when he commented:

...we acknowledge that so much of the criticism Israel faces is motivated by a dangerous form of anti-Semitism that tries to hide behind anti-Zionism and is represented by a coalition of the far left in the West with extreme currents of *jihadi* Islam that seek the destruction of the Jewish nation. They seem to believe that the Jewish people are the only people in the world that don't have a right to a homeland.⁶

Yes they do believe that and many others rue the day that one was ever created.

⁴ Melanie Phillips, "Britain's Anti-Semitic Turn A New Manifestation of the Oldest Hatred Demonizes the Jewish State", *City Journal*, Autumn 2007.

⁵ [Emanuele Ottolenghi](#), "Anti-Zionism is anti-Semitism Behind Much Criticism of Israel is a Thinly Veiled Hatred of Jews", *The Guardian*, November 29, 2003.

⁶ Melanie Phillips, "The Maple Leaf of Decency", *The Spectator*, May 26, 2009.