

COMBATING ANTISEMITISM: LESSONS FROM THE UNITED KINGDOM

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Antisemitism is a very perplexing and enduring form of hatred. My former teacher, Professor Robert Wistrich, one of the world's leading experts in antisemitism, entitled one of his books *The Longest Hatred*, and it has always seemed to me that he got that right – antisemitism has been around for millennia, and in spite of numerous attempts to eradicate it, particularly in recent decades, it just seems to keep coming back.

Over the course of history, the justifications for antagonism towards Jews have come from multiple sources. In pre-modern Europe, a world dominated by Christian theological ideas, Jews were maligned as Christ-killers, a corrupting, even demonic presence that blindly and obtusely preserves its own archaic tradition even though God's covenant with the Jews has long been superseded by God's new covenant – or testament – with Christians.

Jews traditionally fared somewhat better under Islam, but, like Christians, were nonetheless cast as “*dhimmi*” – protected, but second-class citizens, compelled to pay a special tax in return for protection and security.

In post-enlightenment Europe, as the power of religion began to decline and new political ideologies began to take hold, new forms of antisemitism began to emerge. In the eyes of capitalists, Jews were stigmatised as communists; in the eyes of communists, Jews were stigmatised as bourgeois capitalists, but all falsely agreed Jews controlled the media and were part of a secret plot to control the world.

And as science started to become an ever more influential force, it too became a petri dish within which the bacteria of antisemitism could multiply. Indeed, in the eyes of late 19th century/early 20th

century racial theoreticians, who based their ideas on a wide range of pseudo-scientific discoveries, Jews were cast as racially inferior, scientifically proven to be a cancer within society that needs to be eliminated in order to protect all that is racially pure.

And today, in a Europe dominated by the noble ideas of human rights, we are increasingly seeing Jews harassed, victimised or even murdered as supporters of Israel, on the grounds that they are defenders of a racist, genocidal state that subjugates the innocent, and murders children. Or, perhaps even worse, in an extraordinary abuse of history, as Nazis, victims turned perpetrators, who use their status as victims of genocide to commit genocide on others.

And in every single one of these historical and contemporary contexts, the hatred was justified as a legitimate attempt to rectify an anomaly in society, something that perverts all that is right and true and needs to be corrected. And in the interests of that goal, Jews have been variously victimised, stigmatised, harassed, beaten up, expelled, murdered and slaughtered.

So I approach the question of how best to combat antisemitism with a huge dose of humility. There is no simple solution; if there was, it would have been resolved centuries ago. Antisemitism sometimes feels like that computer game where every time you hit an object with a hammer, another object pops up somewhere else – every time you think you have tackled it in some way, it turns up in another form somewhere else. Scholars have often likened it to a virus – every time we find a vaccine to defeat it, it mutates, allowing it to infect society in a new way.

But I also approach the question of how to combat it with it a degree of hope. In spite of all of the discourse about a recent resurgence of antisemitism on the streets on Europe, we live in a period in which racism of all sorts is strongly condemned by most European governments, and in an age in which more political leaders than perhaps ever before appear determined to rid the world of xenophobia.

One only has to look at recent comments made by David Cameron, Manuel Valls and Angela Merkel, among other government leaders elsewhere, to see some of the most damning condemnations of antisemitism ever uttered by leading European politicians. So viewed from the vantage point of history, there has probably never before been a better time in which to finally rid the world of the scourge of antisemitism. The question is how to do it?

In 2012, the research institute I head up – the Institute for Jewish Policy Research in London – teamed up with the research organisation Ipsos MORI and won a competitive tender from the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) to conduct the largest ever study of Jewish perceptions and experiences of antisemitism in Europe. Since we completed our work for them, we have been looking at the data in more detail, with a view towards publishing a series of individual country reports about antisemitism in each of the eight countries that the study investigated. There was a strong case made for beginning our work by looking at the situation in France, or perhaps Hungary or Belgium – three countries which consistently exhibited the highest levels of antisemitism and anxiety about it in the study, and have all been in the news in recent years for the wrong reasons. But we ultimately opted to begin by looking at the UK for one key reason: whilst we found plenty of evidence to indicate that many British Jews have both experienced and witnessed antisemitism, and even more are concerned about it, we also found that overall, the situation in Britain is markedly better than any other country in Europe. And so we titled our report “The Exceptional Case” – because when we look at the data, there is something different about Britain, something better about it. And the question is why?

Part of the answer to this question almost certainly comes from the extensive efforts that have been made by the UK government, the police, educational institutions, sporting organisations, civil society and Jewish community organisations to try to tackle the problem. There have been two major parliamentary inquiries into antisemitism in recent years – one in 2006, and one published last month. It is too early to assess the impact of the second one, but it is striking to assess the effects of the first

one, which can be done, in part, by looking at a report issued in December 2014 by the Department for Communities and Local Government which summarises government action on antisemitism in recent years.

In examining the actions taken, it is clear that the inquiries have understood that antisemitism – and indeed hate crime as a whole – requires multiple strategies to be put in place simultaneously in order to address the challenges. At the most basic level, one has to improve security around particularly vulnerable sites – and in the UK, the government now provides £2 million per annum in tightening up security measures around Jewish faith schools to support the counter-terrorism needs of Jewish schools. The fears of an attack on a school are real – just three years ago, a teacher and three children, aged 3, 6 and 8, were murdered by an Islamist extremist at a Jewish school in Toulouse – and there are few things that frighten Jews in Europe more than this type of incident.

Government has also recognised the importance of prosecuting antisemitic crime. The 2006 inquiry demanded to know why fewer than one in ten suspects of antisemitic violence went on to be prosecuted, a challenge that is now being met by the Director of Public Prosecutions who last year approved a new Hate Crime Strategy to address that. And alongside work on prosecutions, Greater Manchester Police has piloted a restorative justice programme in Salford which gives victims an opportunity to meet and communicate with offenders in a safe space and on the victims' terms, and which has served to challenge the behaviour of the offender, bring some degree of closure to the victim, and has helped to improve reporting levels. More generally, the College of Policing – the professional body for police in England and Wales – has issued a document called Hate Crime Operational Guidance that provides essential information to police officers in how to recognise, understand and tackle hate crime that includes a specific section on antisemitism.

There is growing concern about online hatred and antisemitism – indeed, the FRA survey identified the Internet as the space in which most Jews encounter and experience antisemitism today and online antisemitism as the foremost problem that needs to be addressed. That said, policing the Internet is incredibly complex, and the UK Government is encouraging self-regulation as the best means towards promoting a civil online environment. The Inter-Parliamentary Coalition for Combating Antisemitism established a Cyber Hate Working Group to engage with the Internet industry to draw up a ‘Best Practice’ document that was published by the US-based Anti-Defamation League and has been endorsed by many Internet companies including Facebook, Twitter, Google and others. It pushes Internet providers to issue clear explanations about how hateful content will be managed, to offer user-friendly mechanisms and procedures for reporting hateful content, and to enforce sanctions in a consistent and fair manner.

In addition to trying to combat various forms of antisemitic prejudice, the government has also taken proactive steps to help build interfaith relations. It now runs Inter Faith Week every November celebrating “Different faiths, shared values, one United Kingdom” – over 350 events took place in 2013, including film screenings, interfaith cricket, talent contests, music-making and fundraising events, not to mention educational activities in schools. Government funding has also been provided for the ‘Near Neighbours’ programme, which offers small grants (£250 to £5,000) to local groups to bring together neighbours and work to develop relations across diverse faiths and ethnicities to build community cohesion. This work is perhaps particularly important in multicultural Britain; 2011 Census data showed that more than 100 languages are spoken in more or less every London borough, and 22% of Londoners do not speak English as their mother tongue. And it may also be particularly important in trying to combat antisemitism – data indicate that whilst most British people do not hold unfavourable views of Jews, a disproportionate proportion of British Muslims do.

As someone employed in the world of social research, it is striking to me that it is a piece of social research that has brought us together here today. Beyond its value in and of itself, research can do that, and the UK government has recognised the need for accurate data on the issue. Indeed, the call for research on antisemitism has been a continuous one, and remains a challenge going forward – no problem can be effectively resolved unless we develop as full an understanding as possible of its nature, scale and direction of travel. For many years, antisemitic crimes could not be identified within hate crime data – they were not specifically recorded as anti-Jewish. But that has now changed – all police forces across the UK now record antisemitic hate crimes, and the first official antisemitic hate crime statistics were published in November 2010. A strong partnership has also been developed between the police and the Ministry of Justice on the one hand, and the Jewish Community Security Trust on the other – a Jewish organisation that gathers its own statistics on antisemitic incidents in the country, and has been doing so on a month-by-month basis for over thirty years. This is important because only a small proportion of hate crimes and incidents are reported to the police, and some victims prefer instead to go to a Jewish community body where they assume they will receive a sympathetic hearing. Different types of incidents are also picked up by different bodies – looking at the FRA data for example, we can see that cases of antisemitic harassment – typically street level comments or threats – are more commonly reported to a body other than the police, whereas vandalism and violence are more commonly reported to the police. Thus creating a multi-faceted approach to reporting where the various different bodies work in close cooperation with one another is one of the fundamentals, and whilst improvements can certainly be made, the UK appears to lead the field in this regard.

Bearing in mind the particular focus of the research work that has been presented at this seminar, it may also be helpful to review some of the initiatives that have been established in the UK with regard to the Holocaust and Holocaust education. The Department for Communities and Local Government funds the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust, the body which has delivered Holocaust Memorial Day in

Britain every year since 2001 on or around January 27 – the anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz. Government funding helps the Trust to fund originally four, and now ten freelance support workers around the country to contact local organisations to encourage them to run Holocaust Memorial Day events, and that work now achieves some 2,400 local activities around the country. The UK currently also has two museums that focus on the Holocaust – the Imperial war Museum in London that houses a major Holocaust exhibit, and the privately-established National Holocaust Centre in Nottingham – and most school children in Britain visit one or other of these during the course of their schooling, often when studying the topic which is officially part of the national curriculum in England. On top of this, the Prime Minister established a Holocaust Commission last year to look into further measures that could be taken to commemorate the Holocaust, and it has called for the establishment of a new national memorial to the Holocaust in London and a new world-class Holocaust learning centre. In addition, the government co-funds with Pears Foundation London University’s Institute of Education’s Centre for Holocaust Education which trains teachers and develops teaching resources in Holocaust education. Since 2011, it has reached almost 5,000 teachers around the country. The government also funds the Holocaust Educational Trust’s ‘Lessons from Auschwitz’ project, which aims to take two students from every state school and sixth form college in the country on an educational trip to Auschwitz-Birkenau in Poland. Since 1999, over 25,000 student and teachers have participated in that scheme. It is worth noting too that the Holocaust Educational Trust works with the Community Security Trust to co-fund visits to Auschwitz for up to twenty serving police officers every year.

All of that said, I want to issue a word of caution about the place of the Holocaust in combating antisemitism. On the one hand, the Holocaust stands as probably the best example of man’s inhumanity to man – an extraordinarily powerful reminder of what can happen when hatred takes root. “To forget the dead,” says Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel, “would be akin to killing them a second time.” “If we forget,” he goes on, “we are guilty, we are accomplices.” And he’s right. But, at the same time, the Holocaust is also so extreme, so beyond most people’s experience and understanding, that

it can also obfuscate forms of contemporary antisemitism that don't come dressed in SS uniforms or insignia, or appear in the forms of killing squads, gas chambers and death camps. And, in truth, most forms of antisemitism today bear little, if any, resemblance to the worst excesses of Nazi antisemitism. If antisemitism equals that, it is easy to dismiss accusations of antisemitic behaviour today as hysterical over-exaggerations. Moreover, we see the Holocaust used far too often today, as a rod to beat Jews. Indeed, in the realm of social research on antisemitism, some of the statements that are used by researchers to test whether someone holds antisemitic views include "Jews talk about the Holocaust too much in order to get sympathy", "Israelis behave 'like Nazis' towards the Palestinians" and "The Holocaust is a myth or has been exaggerated." So whilst it is obviously important to teach about the Holocaust, it is also important to acknowledge some of the risks and unintended consequences that can occur when doing so. Commemorating and educating about the Holocaust is an imperative for all sorts of reasons, but it should never be seen as the single antidote to contemporary antisemitism.

Which brings me to my penultimate point. In taking stock of the efforts that have been made to tackle antisemitism in Britain, I am struck by the fact that multiple different UK government departments are all involved in multiple ways. It is not uncommon for the issue of antisemitism to sit in one particular governmental office, something that is very much *not* the case in Britain. The official governmental response to the inquiries has come from the Department for Communities and Local Government, but policies designed to address antisemitism can be found in the work of the Home Office (which, for example, works with third sector organisations to develop and deliver services that benefit hate crime victims), the Department for Education (which funds various educational programmes on antisemitism as well as the counter-terrorism security needs of Jewish schools in the state school sector), the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (under whose authority sits the UK's Post-Holocaust Issues Envoy), the Ministry of Justice (which co-administers the Race for Justice programme with the Home Office – an initiative which seeks to address victims' experiences of the reporting process, and improve levels of reporting), the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (which has established

a mechanism to strengthen relationships between higher education stakeholders and the Jewish community to help address antisemitism on university campuses), and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (which has hosted a ministerial seminar looking at online hatred). What this means is that antisemitism is being tackled by multiple bodies in multiple arenas – higher education, sport, police training, the media, the judiciary, online, etc. – all of which is a tacit acknowledgement of the complexity of the issue itself. It has been almost twenty years since Edward Wilson wrote his landmark book, *Consilience. The Unity of Knowledge*, which showed just how important a multi-disciplinary approach is in terms of tackling many of the challenges facing humanity today, and by situating the challenges of antisemitism in multiple different government departments, establishing a Cross-Government Working Group to Tackle Antisemitism, and engaging many third sector organisations in the issue, the UK has taken many of his lessons to heart.

It is also important to note that this multi-disciplinary approach in the UK has occurred within a wider context. Like all nations, Britain has a unique history that informs and shapes contemporary reality. Compared to other churches, the Anglican Church has long been relatively tolerant towards Jews – other Churches retain far more antagonistic attitudes towards Jews to this day. Compared to other forms of nationalism, right-wing extremists have never established much of a foothold in Britain – other parts of Europe have on-going issues with extremist forms of nationalism that include antisemitic attitudes in their platforms. Compared to other political environments, post-enlightenment Britain never underwent the types of political revolutions or upheavals seen elsewhere in Europe – other parts of Europe retain a stronger and more militant political culture. These contextual factors unquestionably inform the character of antisemitism in different places today, and pose challenges in how to tackle it. Furthermore, it is now over twenty years since Stephen Lawrence, a black teenager was murdered in a racist attack on the streets of London, and 17 years since the Macpherson Inquiry concluded that the Metropolitan Police was “institutionally racist.” That episode in recent British history compelled the government, the police, and British society as a whole to take

stock of itself, and actively address racism in the country. The Stephen Lawrence affair served as a national wake-up call, and Britain has changed as a result of it. Racism is almost universally condemned in Britain today – few, if any, are able to express openly racist comments and not be called to task for it – and that has been achieved by seeking to address it in every corner of British society – in politics, in education, in law, in the workplace, in sport, in the arts, etc. And this suggests to me that if we want to tackle antisemitism, we have to actively create a context which shuns and condemns racism as a whole. This cannot be about Jews and antisemitism alone; it has to be about locating the detailed and particular experiences of Jews alongside the detailed and particular experiences of other minorities in a general programme to secure the dignity of all human beings and the right to live one's life free from prejudice and hatred. But it is also essential that is about Jews and antisemitism to some extent, not least because antisemitic sentiments are still tolerated in Britain today in a way that is simply not the case with anti-Black or anti-Asian sentiments.

This is not a vision for the short-term. As I said earlier, antisemitism has been around for millennia. It's not about to disappear overnight with a few well-chosen policy initiatives. If we are really serious about tackling it – as well as other forms of racism – we have to acknowledge that this is an agenda item that will never go away. However successful we are, the scourge of racism will always lie dormant, waiting for an opportunity to re-emerge. And, in spite of everything the UK government has done, 2014 still saw more antisemitic incidents than any previous year since records began, according to Community Security Trust figures. If we want to tackle antisemitism, if we want to tackle racism, we have to work to create and sustain a context in which it is given no oxygen whatsoever and where we maintain a constant watchful eye for any signs of a revival. There is, I'm afraid, no other way.