

Antisemitism is a Form of Racism

by Michael Curtis



Maxine Peake

On March 9, 1994 the UN Human Rights Commission, unanimously, expressed “concern that racism, racial discrimination, antisemitism, xenophobia, and related intolerance...was persisting, and even growing in magnitude, continually assuming new forms.” This was the first time that an organ of the UN had expressed such concern about antisemitism. The juxtaposition of racism and antisemitism is logical in that they both stem from the view that a distinct race or group have characteristics that are different from and inferior to the rest of society.

The UNHRC statement is a decisive rejection of the infamous UNGA Resolution 3379 of November 10, 1975, approved 75-35-32, which determined that "Zionism was a form of racism and racial discrimination," and which was revoked by UNGA Resolution 46/86 of December 16, 1991 by a vote of 111-25-13. Consequently, antisemitism can be considered as equivalent to a form of racial discrimination. Unfortunately, in spite of international condemnation both racism and antisemitism are present in contemporary life on social networks and in algorithms.

As a result of the death of George Floyd the world has become aware of and has repudiated past and present racism, but less attention has been paid to what can be considered an outburst of antisemitism in Britain in June 2020.

The reaction against racism, its artefacts and symbols, and the erasing of history goes on in the U.S. and elsewhere. Princeton University announced on June 27, 2020 it is removing the name of Woodrow Wilson, 28th president of the United States and president of Princeton University from the building of its School of Public and International Affairs and one of its residential colleges for his "racist views and policies." Wilson had largely been responsible for transforming Princeton into one of the world's great research centers, and had been awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace in 1917. But his policies as U.S. president included segregating a number of federal agencies which he argued was a strategy to keep racial peace, and barring blacks from the college. Princeton authorities now explained that Wilson had been honored without regard to or even in ignorance of his racism. Another educational institution, Monmouth College in New Jersey, had already removed Wilson's name from one of its buildings.

Another icon is being erased from the American pantheon as the Duke strikes out. John Wayne Airport in Santa Ana is to be changed to Orange County Airport, and all statues and other

likenesses of Wayne are being removed. Wayne, a top box office Hollywood star for three decades, is held to have been a racist and a bigot, most notably as a result of his interview in *Playboy Magazine* 1971 with bigoted remarks about blacks, Native Indians, and the LGBTQ community. In that interview he is quoted as saying, "I don't feel guilty about the fact that five or ten generations ago these people were slaves." Nor did he feel that "we did wrong in taking this great land away from Native Indians." In the U.S. the elimination of symbols of racism, or alleged racism, goes on.

In her book, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Hannah Arendt argued that political antisemitism was more than hatred of Jews. It was also an ideology that Jews were responsible for all the evils of the world. An implicit illustration of this, though not couched in any philosophical manner, is an outburst from Maxine Peake, a well-known and gifted British actress. Alluding to the murder of George Floyd, she stated in an interview that the tactics used by the police in America, kneeling on Floyd's neck to kill him, were learned from seminars of the U.S. police with Israeli secret services. Later, after she was subjected to criticism, she offered a "clarification" that was not an apology, "I was inaccurate in my assumption of American police training and its sources. I find racism and antisemitism abhorrent." But she does not take back her insinuation or implication that the Israeli secret services promote chokeholds. Her comment, implicitly a variation of the infamous blood libel that the State of Israel and Jews are linked to the killing of an innocent man, can be seen as a version of an antisemitic conspiracy theory.

As a result of criticism of her remarks and failure to offer a genuine explicit apology the issue arose of whether the BBC should end its contract with Peake, who ironically has starred in a TV series as a successful British barrister. This may be seen as censorship, but it is not unique although its political stance is different when in June 2020 a similar

problem has arisen over a conservative British actor Laurence Fox. He appeared on TV and said that the UK was not a racist country. A number of left-wing actors immediately demanded that he should not be employed by the BBC. Yet the rationale is clear, a racist should not, and will not, be employed by the BBC, or a public institution, neither should an antisemite.

Maxine Peake is not only a gifted and well-paid actress but also a 45 year-old political leftist with aspirations of punditry and with an unmistakable political point of view. With perhaps unconscious hubris Peake spoke of the power of actors, "I'm not saying we are the saviors of the human race, but a lot of people have TV."

Born in Bolton, Lancashire, to a truck driver father and a care working mother, soon to be divorced, Peake moved in with a grandparent who was a communist. Peake became a member of the Communist Party at age 21, and then became a socialist. For a number of years she has voiced unusual provocative pronouncements. One in 2011 was that there were no working class actors in Hollywood, and another in 2014 that actresses with accents were taken less seriously than others.

A left wing member of the Labour Party, in 2017 Peake called for violent revolution, a coup, which meant among other things making Jeremy Corbyn prime minister... "You can't have a peaceful revolution now." Most recently, she asserted that "we're being ruled by capitalist, fascist dictators. What's happening in America is about financial control. It's about keeping the poor in their place. Protecting capital is much more important than anyone's life." In general, Peake, a well to do member of the British establishment, calls for the overthrow of the "establishment."

There does not appear in Peake's public statements any criticisms of Russia or China. Her main concern seems to be the iniquities of Israel. She is a proponent of the BDS

Palestinian campaign against Israel, and a frequent signer of anti-Israel petitions. Peake has been a guest editor of the *Communist Morning Star* which on June 1 reported that the Minneapolis police were trained by Israel forces in restraint techniques. The absurd charge by Peake of Israeli responsibility for the death of Floyd may have been the effect of the theatrical dramas in which she has starred, but equally may have been the influence of the 2016 Amnesty International Report which dwelt on the cooperation between U.S, law enforcement officers and the Israeli police, and asserts that the Israeli military systematically targets black and brown persons. The *Morning Star* article explains the Israeli influence but not even the communist press nor Maxime Peake suggests that the Minnesota police flew 6,000 miles to learn tactics from Israel.

Peake's allegation of Israeli responsibility for the death of Floyd was retweeted by Rebecca Long-Bailey, Labour member of Parliament who was then sacked from her position as a leader, a "frontbencher" of the Labour Party in the House of Commons, for her support of Peake who she called an "absolute diamond."

Bailey was dismissed in a show of decisive leadership and firm action by the leader of the LP by Sir Keir Starmer who had become leader besting rival Bailey, heir to Corbyn, by 56 to 28% .

This action constitutes an important change from Starmer's predecessor Corbyn who, at the very least was tolerant of the antisemitism in the party. Starmer was emphatic. Bailey was approving of what was an antisemitic conspiracy theory. He asserted, "I will tear out this poison by its roots and judge success by the return to the LP of Jewish members and those who felt that they could no longer support us." Antisemitism, Starmer declared, " has been a stain on our party." Starmer's position however was as much managerial as moral, "my primary focus is on rebuilding trust with the Jewish communities."

Under Corbyn's leadership of the Labour Party there had been an influx in the Party of critics, such as Peake, of Israel. The Party had been infected with anti-Jewish racism, extremism, and intolerance. Starmer suggests change is to come.

The shameful diatribe of Maxine Peake indicated there should be zero tolerance for racism and antisemitism in public affairs. .