

Dealing with Lunatic Politics

In his provocative article in the *Wall Street Journal* of February 17, 2016, Joseph Epstein referring to current presidential candidates, ridiculed the “lunatic politics” of people with only one idea and one idea only, a phrase he took from a poem by Wallace Stevens. Such lunatic politics purports to make life simple: all other ideas or rational analysis are irrelevant to understand complex ideas.

This may be a rather harsh and incomplete assessment of presidential candidates, but it is perfectly applicable to those who are antisemitic and call for the elimination of the State of Israel and the destruction of the Jewish people either by violent action or by using boycott, divestment, and sanctions as a starting point. They live in a fantasy world, in which stereotypes of Jews with long noses, and demonization of Israel as imperialist, colonialist, racist, take enter stage.

Probably the supreme leader of the list of “lunatic politics” is the Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei who on February 17, 2016 declared that the policies of the United States and many European countries are dominated by the “global Zionist network.” Khamenei had in 2015 been rehearsing for the medal of exceptional merit for lunacy by telling us that Israel would not exist in 25 years, and in January 2016 by presenting a video that denied the Holocaust.

Only a little lower in the malicious hierarchy of lunacy is Hassan Nasrallah, leader of Hezbollah, who in a television broadcast of February 2016 threatened to blow up the ammonia plant near Haifa, an equivalent in destructiveness of a nuclear bomb, causing 800,000 casualties. Forgotten in this foolishness is the fact that more than 10 per cent of the population in the area is Arab, and that it contains the UNESCO Baha’i World Heritage Site.

The lunatic politics is one of hate, taking a variety of forms, political, economic, ideological, and academic. At its most absurd it equates Israel or "Zionism" or Jews with Nazism and racism. It is astonishing that a recent European Union report finds 40 per cent of Europeans believe that Israel is behaving like Nazis. If not all of those can be considered part of lunatic politics, many accept the existence of an "international Jewish conspiracy."

The politics of discrimination has lost any mental equilibrium. U.S. Ambassador Samantha Power put it well in a speech in Tel Aviv on February 15, 2016. Bias, she said, has "extended well beyond Israel as a country, Israel as an idea...Israel is just not treated like other countries."

This bias and lunacy of hate is becoming more pronounced, among many other places, at colleges and universities, throughout the democratic world. Academic behavior and research has open and free discussion and honest analysis as its basis. Open dialogue and exchange of differing views are expected; preventing or censoring speech by those with whom one disagrees is not expected. The latter behavior, expressed both physically and orally by anti-Jewish bigotry, has become the flavor of lunatic politics.

It is sad to record this lunatic politics in British universities, most recently at Oxford and London. At King's College, London, on January 19, 2016 a mob of pro-Palestinians prevented Ami Ayalon, the former head of Shin Bet, from speaking. Using tactics not usually employed at universities, the mob stopped the speech by breaking windows, throwing chairs, setting off fire alarms, and shouting abuse at Jewish students, who were made uncomfortable there as they been at other British universities, including Edinburgh and St. Andrews.

At Oxford the hatred of Israel was exposed on February 15, 2016 by a young man named Alex Chalmers, an undergraduate at

Oriel College, Oxford, who was the co-chairperson of the Oxford University Labour Club. He resigned this position because the Club supported Israel Apartheid Week at Oxford. Some of the Club members expressed sympathy with the terrorist Hamas and gloried about the Hamas rockets aimed at Tel Aviv. Many of the members are said to be guilty of singing anti-Semitic song and using slurs, such as the words "zio" and "filthy Zionist."

It is some consolation that King's College has re-invited Ami Ayalon to speak, and that the British Labour Party is investigating the behavior of the Labour Oriel students. This is necessary but insufficient. Stronger measures should be, and are now being used to counter lunacy. High priority should be given to legal action.

It is time for anti-Semitic behavior to be punished. The particular students at King's College and at Oriel who caused problems should, as a minimum, be reprimanded by college authorities at least, or expelled for their anti-academic behavior.

Legal action should be employed and the Jewish Human Rights Watch in Britain (JHRW) is doing so. The group is suing, or planning to sue, three local councils, Leicester, Swansea, and Gwynedd, because of their motions to boycott goods produced in Israeli settlements in the disputed areas of the West Bank.

It is not clear in general why British local councils get involved in Middle East politics, rather than concern themselves with local issues such as housing, employment, schools or road safety, but it is clear in the case of Leicester. Its city council is composed of 53 Labour members, one Conservative, and one Liberal Democrat. The anti-Israeli motion was introduced by a Labour councilor name Mohammed Dawood.

One other thing might be made clear. Boycotting Israel is

anti-Semitic, because this activity whether related to produce or university restrictions is confined to Israel, not to any other countries, especially those that oppress their own populations.

It is gratifying that a British court and the government are trying to deal with the issue of the boycott and the suing of the local councils, A High Court judge in February 2016 granted permission for a legal review of the Leicester motion to boycott. Courageous action has been successful. The JHRW was planning to take legal action against the Swansea city council that passed a similar motion to that of Leicester. That Welsh council offered to rescind its motion if the legal action was withdrawn.

The British government said on February 15, 2016 it was issuing guidance to public authorities stating that locally-imposed boycotts are "inappropriate" unless formal legal sanctions or embargoes have been put in place by the government. A speech by Matt Hancock, Minister for the Cabinet Office, warned that boycotts risk breaching the World Trade Organization agreement, signed by the EU and Israel, which requires equal treatment for suppliers from all signatory nations. Those who decide to go ahead with a boycott risk being taken to court and fined with severe penalties. Boycotts, he said, fuel antisemitism.

Political lunatics, the anti-Israeli bigots and anti-Semites, in Britain at any rate, have been warned. Now the Obama administration and U.S. courts should issue the same warning and act in similar fashion.