

Investigating Antisemitism in England

by Michael Curtis



Early in World War II the Polish underground obtained information about the monstrous torture and conditions at the newly opened camp at Auschwitz. It was communicated to the British government with a plea that the camp be bombed. However, any such proposal was rejected by the government, and regarded by Sir Charles Portal, Air Chief Marshal, head of British Bomber Command, as an undesirable diversion and unlikely to achieve its purpose, and no action was taken. Opposing arguments still debate the decision not to bomb Auschwitz, whether bombing would have been a distraction from the war effort, as well as whether it would have been effective, and whether it was in any way related to antisemitism.

Whatever one's opinion on this particular issue, it is

undeniable that the British government, and probably the Allies, knew of the reality and horrors of the Nazi regime. Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden in the House of Commons on December 17, 1942 declared that the "German authorities are now carrying out into effect Hitler's oft repeated intention to exterminate the Jewish people in Europe." However, it is doubtful that critics of the State of Israel acknowledge the truth of the past, and the meaningfulness of the rising tide of antisemitism and prejudice against Jews today. A new example of the hostility towards Israel, and more subtly Jews, has been illustrated by freshman Congresswoman Ilhan Omar (D-Minn), Somali-American in origin, who at different times has expressed her views: Israel has hypnotized the world, may Allah awaken the people and help the see the evil dogs of Israel; "people" in U.S. push for allegiance to a foreign power; Jewish money finances money for Israel. She thought support for Israel was all "about the Benjamins. baby."

Omar is not alone in antisemitic imagery by individuals and groups of both a leftwing and right wing tendency. Former British Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks held that "Jews were hated because they were rich, and because they were poor, ...because they clung to ancient religious beliefs and because they were rootless cosmopolitans who believed nothing." A problem today is to differentiate between severe criticism of Israel, anti-Zionism, and antisemitism. Consider accusations of globalism, conspiracies by Jews to run the world, attempts to deny or minimize the Holocaust, to be enemies of Islam, to be agents of the U.S.

Right wing adherents tend to focus on Jews at home, left wingers on Jews and Israel.

Both forms of hostility to Jews have long been and are present on the British Labour Party (LP). Throughout history, antisemites have swallowed fake news, including Jewish responsibility for the bubonic plagues, blood libels for murder of Christians, or plots to take over the world, or use

of wealth to exercise secretive control. Too many members of the Labour Party have engaged in contemporary fake news about both Israel and the Jewish community. Most recently, a number of distinguished and prestigious peers, members of the House of Lords, have resigned from the LP because of what they call institutional antisemitism. Among the more prominent are: Lord Darzi, an Armenian survivor of the Armenian genocide, one of the world's leading surgeons; former health minister, Lord Triesman, former general secretary of the Labour Party, foreign office minister, and chair of the Football Association, and Lord Turenberg, former President of the Royal College of Physicians. They allege there is antisemitism in the top leadership and National Executive of the Party. These persons shield antisemites, while solid and serious members of the Party are thrown out unceremoniously.

These strong statements have been denied by Party spokespersons. One of them, left winger Heather Mendick, a member of the militant Momentum group in the LP, claimed these allegations of antisemitism were being "weaponized" against leftists, and to silence critics of Israel. One member, Chris Williamson, MP for Derby North has said the LP has been too apologetic over accusations of antisemitism, holding, "We have done more to address the scourge of antisemitism than any other political party." Another member, Jackie Walker, vice-chair of the Momentum national steering committee, herself partly Jamaican, and partly Jewish, asserted that Jews were the chief financiers of the slave trade. Sadly, some members got death threats. Joan Ryan, former teacher, MP and chair of Labour Friends of Israel, critic of party leader Jerome Corbyn, was called a Jewish whore.

At one point, Corbyn stated that any one in the LP who commits an act of antisemitism faces withdrawal of membership or expulsion from the party. He held that less than 0.1 per cent of the members are involved in any accusation. But this finest hour of Corbyn lasted but a minute and a half. He has largely

ignored such accusations. Corbyn is a political ideologue who has rarely been critical of the regimes of authoritarian regimes, Russia, China, or Venezuela. He has however been a constant supporter of Palestinian claims to statehood, and a critic of Israeli policies, and advocate of anti-Americanism.

A major influence on Corbyn has been the economist and social scientist J.A. Hobson who wrote an influential book *Imperialism* in 1902, which also influenced Vladimir Lenin, attacking colonialism and arguing that imperial expansion was driven by the search for new markets and investment opportunities. International financiers had the largest definitive stake in the business of imperialism, and they were largely men of a simpler and peculiar race, Jews. In other works, Hobson spoke of Polish Jews in the East End of London who were "almost void of social morality." He was critical of Jewish immigration as well as Jewish financiers. Writing of South Africa, Hobson saw Jews there as the scum of Europe. In 2011 imperialism was republished, and Jeremy Corbyn wrote a forward in it.

It is appropriate to argue that the LP has repeatedly failed to address its antisemitic problem or to believe that its discrimination against Jews would stop. The Equality and Human Rights Commission, a non-departmental public body, was set up in Britain in October 2007 to monitor human rights and to protect equality in regard to age, sexual orientation, religion, and belief. In May 2019 the EHRC, in response to Jewish organizations, launched a formal investigation into whether the LP had unlawfully discriminated against, harassed or victimized people because they are Jewish, whether unlawful acts had been committed by the LP and/or its agents, and whether the party has responded to complaints of unlawful acts in a lawful, efficient, and effective manner. This investigation is notable because the EHRC has rarely acted regarding political parties. In 2010 it ordered the far right, even neo-Nazi, British National Party to rewrite its

constitution because the party had banned blacks and members of minority ethnic groups from becoming members.

All objective commentators will wish success to the EHRC, and hope it will be the shining light in the fight against antisemitism.