

Anti-Semitism in its New Form in Europe Remains a Major Evil To Be Confronted

by Denis MacShane

*Speech by Rt Hon Dr Denis MacShane, House of Commons, Thursday 20
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I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann), whose energetic, coherent and sterling work on anti-Semitism has been a model for parliamentarians around the world. I am grateful to him for bestowing on me the honour of chairing an inquiry into anti-Semitism.

Two or three months ago, my hon. Friend attended the Inter-parliamentary Coalition for Combating Antisemitism in Canada. What reward did Canada receive for hosting that conference? On Sunday, there were horrible, brutal anti-Semitic attacks on four schools and a synagogue in Montreal. They took place in the Montreal riding-constituency-of Mount Royal where my good friend, Irwin Cotler, the former Justice Minister in the last Liberal Government of Canada, is the MP.

Professor Cotler is one of the world's greatest human rights advocates and, as a Minister, he dedicated himself not only to combating anti-Jewish hatred but to wider human rights questions, including the defence of human rights activists in Palestine and Egypt as well as aboriginal Canadians. There is a move in Canada and elsewhere to nominate him for the Nobel peace prize, and I can think of no worthier recipient.

Two years ago, I had the pleasure of working with Professor Cotler in Geneva at the Durban 2 conference. The first Durban conference degenerated into an anti-Semitic hate fest. It had been called to combat racism around the world, but the only country that was denounced as racist was-surprise, surprise-Israel. Although I was a Foreign and Commonwealth Office Minister at the time, I was not responsible for that area. It was to Britain's shame that we did not withdraw our delegation.

At Durban 2, our ambassador walked out as Iran's President Ahmadinejad launched into one of his traditional appeals to Jewish hate. I hope that the Minister will assure the House that in the preparations for Durban 3, the UK

will take the strongest position to ensure that the anti-Semitic elements in international political affairs will be kept in their ugly holocaust-denying and Israel-hating box and that the issues around the racism and Christianophobia that is endemic in many middle east countries get a full airing.

I am concentrating on international affairs, because the two previous hon. Members spoke very adequately about what is happening in the UK and at the Department for Communities and Local Government. Before this debate, I checked on the Foreign and Commonwealth Office website under the heading "anti-Semitism" and found that all the references were to the previous Government and the initiatives that were undertaken-I must stress that they were undertaken on an all-party basis-after the all-party parliamentary group against anti-Semitism made its report three years ago. Many of the recommendations are still relevant today.

We have far too many examples of hate preachers. The woman who attacked my right hon. Friend the Member for East Ham (Stephen Timms) was inspired by one such hate preacher. So, too, was Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, who studied at University College London.

There he helped to organise a day of hate with leading anti-Jewish Islamists invited to take part. As previous speakers have said, we must ask why our vice-chancellors are so unwilling to take robust, clear action on this issue. On the whole, our campuses are fascist-free. The British National party is not welcome. Its core ideology is rooted in anti-Semitism, and its leader, Nick Griffin, has written widely to promote classic anti-Jewish themes, such as holocaust denial and accusations about secret Jewish cabals and lobbies wielding undue influence. Although we are happy to keep the BNP at bay, vice-chancellors do not take similar robust action against Islamist ideologues. I stress the word "Islamist" in its ideological sense as a political world view and not as the religion, Islam, which has the same rights as other religions and also the same obligation to be questioned and criticised by those who are concerned about the rise of religious politics across the world.

We also asked for greater involvement by the Foreign Office in monitoring the rise of political anti-Semitism in Europe and on the internet. Today, Baroness Warsi is to make remarks about attacks on Muslims with a reference to anti-Muslim remarks now leaving the dinner table and going public. In April, she told people in south Yorkshire that she did not want to see more Muslim MPs or Muslim Lords because

"Muslims that go to Parliament don't have 'asool'."

Asool is Urdu for "morals" or "principles". I am glad that she is now defending the Muslim community against unfair attacks. I hope she also tells her audience

that anti-Semitism has never been returned to dinner table coarseness and that it is out there as public discourse. We have heard the casual remarks, such as the one by the European Commissioner, Karel de Gucht, who said that it is impossible to have a conversation with a Jew about Israel. The German central banker, Thilo Sarrazin, said that Jews have different genes. If those comments were said in the 1930s, we would see them as a historical reminder of the anti-Semitism of that period. However, those remarks were made in the past 12 months by mainstream, senior, responsible, moderate Social Democratic, Liberal and Conservative Europeans.

Mrs Ellman: Will my right hon. Friend reaffirm that anti-Semitism is shown in a wide variety of ways? Will he join me in condemning a statement made by a former Member of this House, who is chair of Labour Friends of Palestine? His statement was made at a meeting in this House. It was reported in the media and not denied. He said that there are

"long tentacles of Israel in this country who are funding election campaigns and putting money in the British political system for their own ends."

Does my right hon. Friend agree that that is, or is very close to, anti-Semitism?

Mr MacShane: That is an intolerable remark, as I told the former Member himself. It is perfectly possible to criticise Israel and to defend the cause of the Palestinian people without making a 1930s-style allegation. We can see in Europe the rise of political anti-Semitism. We have many open anti-Semites in the European Parliament, supported by the two Nazi MEPs from Great Britain.

In Hungary this week, we have had the surreal spectacle of a court allowing a convicted Nazi war criminal, Sandor Kapiro, to sue for defamation Dr Efraim Zuroff, Israel office. I know that Hungary is not the home of Kafka but this is Kafkaesque, as the Hungarian authorities are allowing a Nazi war criminal to persecute a Jew whose job is to expose and bring to justice the last remnants of the perpetrators of the holocaust.

Today the Prime Minister is hosting a number of right-wing parties from Baltic states at Downing street. I welcome the outreach to Baltic and Nordic states, but I hope that he is telling their leaders that the attempts by many of the conservative right-wing parties in the Nordic countries in particular and in the Baltic states to make an equivalence between the holocaust and the crimes of communism-the so-called "double genocide" campaign-is odious and offensive, and it is condemned by all democratic parties in Europe. Lord Janner of Braunstone has written eloquently about this issue.

Given my own family background, I certainly do not need any lessons on the evils of communism and Stalinism in eastern Europe. However, this

downplaying and devaluation of the holocaust is a cold-blooded tactic by politicians, some of whose pre-war ancestors were openly anti-Semitic. The European right in many of the Baltic states is nationalistic and populist. Latvian right wingers celebrate the Waffen SS. Mr Michal Kaminski, the Polish nationalist politician, says that he will apologise for what happened to Jews on Polish soil when Jews apologise to Poland for what they did during world war two. Frankly, that is unacceptable language. There is very great concern in the Jewish community-tiny as it is-in those countries about this growing attempt to airbrush out of history the crimes against Jews between 1941 and 1945.

I quote Lord Janner:

"For Jews in Europe during the Holocaust there was little complication. The truth was and still remains that the Soviet and Allied forces were the heroes and that Hitler's Nazis were the perpetrators and the war criminals. Any attempt to pervert this history is an attack on the memory of the hundreds of thousands of Jews from that region who were murdered including many of my own family, who were in Lithuania and Latvia."

Lord Janner is right. Just as the Islamists seek to devalue the holocaust as part of their ideological assault on the right of Israel to exist, so too elements of the ultra-nationalist and populist right in Baltic, Nordic and eastern European countries seek to devalue the holocaust as a unique event to justify their own anti-Jewish ideology of the past and, in some cases, of the present.

The British ambassador in Lithuania, along with other ambassadors, signed a letter to the Lithuanian Government protesting about the "double genocide" phenomenon. I asked the Foreign Office to publish that letter but to my surprise it has not, praying in aid to pre-WikiLeaks rules about secrecy and confidentiality. I think that it would do the Foreign Office no harm at all and in fact every credit to publish that letter because I know Foreign Office officials and other Government officials, and they want to work hard to promote the matter as solidly as possible.

I will stop shortly to allow others to speak. Very briefly, however, I want to highlight some sentences from the European Union's formal definition of anti-Semitism. It is an important international document that tries to explain what anti-Semitism is and it was agreed after many debates and discussions a few years ago by all parts of the European Community. It says, among other things, that it is anti-Semitic to make

"mendacious, dehumanizing, demonizing, or stereotypical allegations about Jews as such or the power of Jews as collective-such as, especially but not

exclusively, the myth about a world Jewish conspiracy or of Jews controlling the media, economy, government or other societal institutions."

We still hear that today.

The EU definition continues, saying that anti-Semitic activities include:

"Denying the fact, scope, mechanisms (e.g. gas chambers) or intentionality of the genocide of the Jewish people at the hands of National Socialist Germany and its supporters and accomplices during World War II (the Holocaust)...Accusing the Jews as a people, or Israel as a state, of inventing or exaggerating the Holocaust. Accusing Jewish citizens of being more loyal to Israel, or to the alleged priorities of Jews worldwide, than to the interests of their own nations...Denying the Jewish people their right to self-determination...by claiming that the existence of a State of Israel is a racist endeavour. Applying double standards by requiring of it a behaviour not expected or demanded of any other democratic nation...Drawing comparisons of contemporary Israeli policy to that of the Nazis."

I will sit down shortly, but I could bring to the House cartoons and articles in our main newspapers-our liberal newspapers, our left newspapers and our conservative newspapers-that precisely draw that moral equivalence between Israel and Nazism, which attempt to typecast all Jews as supporters of Israel and thus having a double loyalty.

The battle is intensifying; it is now about the demonisation and criminalisation of Israel. I salute my friend Ian McEwan for going to Israel to accept a literary prize. I want to see more academic, journalistic and political exchange with Israel, and indeed with its neighbouring states and the people of Palestine and their leaders. I had hoped that the marvellous work of the all-party group against anti-Semitism would somehow come to an end. Today I find that its work is more necessary than ever.