

RESPONSE TO THE ALL-PARTY PARLIAMENTARY GROUP AGAINST ANTI-SEMITISM INQUIRY

SUBMISSION BY THE BOARD OF DEPUTIES OF BRITISH JEWS

DECEMBER 2014

1. How do you believe the nature of antisemitism in the UK has changed, if at all, since 2005 and what evidence do you have to support this?

The Board of Deputies of British Jews ('The Board') believes that antisemitism has changed somewhat since 2005. In addition to 'traditional' forms of anti-Semitic discourse, some new forms have emerged, particularly in relation to strong sentiments about the conflict in the Middle East. These have included antisemitic attacks directly related to or caused by conflict in the Middle East and (at times) the UK's policies towards Israel and the Palestinian Territories

The Community Security Trust (CST) works closely with police to monitor antisemitism and protect Jewish communities against it. The CST's most recent Antisemitic Incidents Report, covering the first six months of 2014, recorded 304 antisemitic incidents, a figure consistent with data from most years since 2010. However, there is a noticeable spike in antisemitic incidents when tensions intensify in Israel and the Palestinian Territories, exemplified during outbreaks of violence in 2009, 2012 and 2014. July 2014, for example, was the worst month for antisemitism on record with 302 antisemitic incidents in the context of fighting between Hamas and Israel – almost the same as the previous six months combined. Similar raised levels of antisemitic incidents have also been seen abroad, especially in France, and form part of a greater context of the Jihadist threat emanating from conflicts in the Middle East and wider Islamist ideology.

It is also important to note that in 2005 the use of social media was very limited, whereas now it is prolific, and many incidents of antisemitism occur on social media. Social media is also used to share antisemitic incidents which occur in the context of anti-Israel boycott campaigns or at anti-Israel rallies and so on, therefore making access to all of this information much easier. Antisemitic abuse on social media differs from antisemitic abuse in person as people are often bolder and more radical when hiding behind an online persona or avatar – this is attested in other areas too, for example racist, sexist or homophobic trolling. Social media also forms an important part of the new spreading of antisemitism. A good example of this was the Dieudonné/Anelka case where 'comedian' Dieudonné used the quenelle salute (a modified version of a Nazi salute) as a form, of antisemitism, encouraging others to make the quenelle and spread images doing it at famous sites across the world. This was all done under the guise of anti-establishmentarianism; the use of social media helped propagate this salute. Famously Nicholas Anelka, used this salute to celebrate a goal at a widely watched football match, he was subsequently banned from five matches and fined in Feb 2014 for using the quenelle salute.

More 'traditional' incidents of antisemitism, relating to Jewish identity or practice, have continued to occur. However, the introduction of the Equalities Act in 2010 has greatly affected how people understand this area of antisemitism. Having a clear legal framework, especially in relation to workplace issues, has made it clearer what constitutes antisemitism and antisemitic discrimination. The Act itself is also a valuable tool in cases of discrimination, where individuals and companies may not realize that their actions are a violation of the Act. The Board of Deputies is often contacted by individuals who are having problems with workplace issues of antisemitism. The Board is often able to assist individuals with these difficulties (especially regarding religious practice, but less so relating to Jewish identity) by using the legal framework, but this is not always the case, and some situations regrettable cannot be amicably resolved.

2. Do you believe the sources of contemporary antisemitism have changed?

Antisemitism most commonly originates in religious extremist beliefs, the far right and the far left of the political spectrum. The number of individuals empathizing with the political extremes has grown in recent years due to disillusionment with the centrist and mainstream parties, creating a fertile breeding ground for antisemitism. A contributing factor to this change is immigration, in part because of the ideologies (including Islamism) that are more prevalent in some recent migrant communities, but also because of the fact that immigration is a strong driver of change in the general public towards the far right. This can clearly be seen as many far-right parties' focus on immigration and perceptions of Britishness in their policies and campaigning material.

For a variety of reasons, it is becoming more acceptable to hold views associated with the far left and far right, and to express them publically, even whilst being broadly affiliated to centre groups on other political matters. For this reason, comments that can (and indeed have been) interpreted as antisemitic, for example disparaging remarks about a Jewish lobby, have come from parliamentarians during meetings at Westminster and inside the chamber and in additional meetings sponsored by MPs in the parliamentary estate.

3. Did you notice any specific differences over the summer during the period of increased violence in the Middle East?

Over the summer there were a very high number of antisemitic incidents reported to the Community Security Trust (CST), with July 2014 being the highest number of incidents in a single month on record (as detailed in question 1). As the representative body for the UK Jewish community, the Board received many more messages from Deputies, community organisations and individual members concerned about antisemitism than we would usually expect for that time of year.

Some activities, whose primary thrust was anti-Israel, have had antisemitic elements. These include the disruption of Israel-related cultural events, also undermine communal confidence and morale and are perceived by members of our community as being antisemitic in motivation and impact, preventing the enjoyment of Jewish as well as Israeli culture.

The removal of kosher products at a Sainsbury store at Holborn as a result of anti-Israel protests outside the store was widely reported and gave rise to widespread concern in the community that anti-Israel extremism and intimidation was impacting on the enjoyment of a normal Jewish life in a way not seen before.

Where incidents have occurred in smaller, regional communities, the impact on local morale has been particularly severe. Since the summer, the Board has worked with communities in Belfast, Birmingham, Bristol, Brighton, Glasgow, Edinburgh, Leicester, Manchester and Newcastle among others. Incidents have included graffiti and windows being broken at synagogues, to Jewish customers being jostled when trying to enter or exit Israel-related stores.

As well as being a substantial number of incidents, these incidents were very visible, and there was a tremendous level of concern from the Jewish community about the number and severity of these incidents, further exacerbated by the availability and prevalence of material on social media. Although this argument is somewhat cyclical, as perceptions of antisemitism cause people to talk about it more and the Jewish media to focus more intently on this area, and that in turn leads to further increased perception of antisemitic incidents, it is still very important and an indication of how severely this reflected on those in the Jewish community. The increase of antisemitic events, and the concern felt because of this, has also been seen globally, with some Jewish visitors from other countries expressing concern about visiting the UK for fear of being caught up.

The concern over the amount of antisemitic incidents and the perceptions that more focus was needed to deal with the growing nature of this threat, led to the creation of several grassroots groups, and a blossoming of grassroots activity.

Compared to the nature of antisemitic incidents when there is not a surge in the conflict in the Middle East, it is unsurprisingly that many of these events had an anti-Israel angle, and crossed over the fine line between valid criticism of a foreign state, and unacceptable antisemitism. The Board of Deputies has registered concerns that the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC) definition of antisemitism has not been adopted by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) since the changeover, and this means that the previous clause that stated that equating the actions of Israel with Nazism, and criticizing all Jews for Israel's policies, is currently missing. This clause provided protection for many Jewish people in the face of antisemitic incidents as it allowed them a defined framework to agree what was and was not antisemitic. The current absence of a definition is worrying, and we would support and advocate adopting this definition, or something very like it, more widely in the future.

4. What is your assessment of the policing of antisemitism? Are you aware of any prosecutions?

The Board of Deputies has received many concerns regarding the policing of antisemitism, in particular relating to the apparent unwillingness of the CPS to bring any prosecutions under the Public Order Act, and also relating to the police strategy of not making arrests at the time of the event happening but preferring to follow up antisemitic events after the event, causing many individuals to slip through the net, and victims and witnesses to perceive that no action is being taken.

There is a feeling, especially amongst grassroots activists, that a more robust system of arrests and prosecutions would provide a deterrent to others who may act in a criminal manner in the future, and also a worry that the lack of police action indicates that Jewish community concerns are not being taken seriously. Additionally, we are concerned about the policing of antisemitism on social media, which appears to be an area that is greatly under resourced. Antisemitism on social media can spread very quickly, for instance when #HitlerWasRight was trending over summer 2014 on Twitter. Although there have been prosecutions for antisemitic abuse on social media, the most notable case being that involving Luciana Berger MP, it is

insufficient that the police will only pursue high-profile victims of abuse. Whilst we appreciate that this policy comes from a lack of resources to pursue all cases, and an acknowledgement that prosecutions in high-profile situations will garner more publicity and therefore send a stronger message, this is still poor comfort to other individuals who have suffered greatly on social media and not had their cause championed by the police. The Board believes that, for example, people who used #HitlerWasRight, should be pursued, to deter people from using social media for abuse.

There is a further concern that the frequent blurring of the lines between anti-Zionism and antisemitism make hate crimes more subtle and harder to police. To that end, we would advocate for more education for police forces on the multifaceted nature of antisemitism as compared to some other forms of hate crime.

Regarding prosecutions, the Board of Deputies is aware of one prosecution that was made in the specific case of the 102 bus in Temple Fortune which the Board was very involved in and campaigned for vocally, and also the prosecutions that came out the Luciana Berger case mentioned above. Aside from this we are aware of few prosecutions for hate crime for crimes committed during the summer of 2014, and this is a cause for concern.

5. Do you think that the Government, parliament and civil society has reacted responsibly in addressing antisemitic concerns, through for example educational programmes and public statements? Are you able to specify programmes that you think have been successful?

The Board would like to see strong, swift statements against antisemitism in all of its manifestations at times of tension across the establishment, as were given by the Prime Minister and the Home Secretary. There are also concerns that many matters registered historically by the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Antisemitism have not been acted upon.

There are several projects that the Board is aware of and has been involved in. However, although there are many excellent interfaith initiatives, including the Inter Faith Network and the Near Neighbours project, the Board would welcome more strategy and funding in this area, especially in promoting integration and community cohesion.

In the education sphere, the Board responded to the 2014 Holocaust Commission with many recommendations including strengthening and broadening existing Holocaust modules within the National Curriculum, educating children to become activists for human rights and social justice, and increasing the number of Holocaust related educational trips, amongst others. The Board is also worried about the loss of teachers and the downgrading of Religious Education within the overall educational context, and the impact that this has on teaching of diversity issues. We welcome school linking programmes, and would encourage more of these projects to be rolled out across the country.

We appreciate the opportunity to work with the Government to formulate other appropriate, responsible schemes, and to ensure that public messaging in this area is unequivocal in its condemnation of hate crime in all of its many guises. In this regard, we pay particular tribute to the Cross Government Working Group on Antisemitism, which facilitates this vital dialogue.