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Judeophobia and the New European Extremism

**Barry A. Kosmin
Trinity College, Hartford**

My definition of extremism is open or tacit support for the ideas and policies of totalitarian political ideologies and parties as well as Manichean ideas. The clearest evidence that, as the immortal Bard wrote, “something is rotten in the state of Denmark” or rather in this case France, was the first round of the French Presidential elections in 2002. It produced results that shocked the western world. For most commentators the shock event was that the Front National’s Jean-Marie Le Pen an unrepentant apologist for Fascism and the wartime Vichy regime edged into second place. However looked at more closely the voting record demonstrated a level of support of totalitarian oriented extremists that was unprecedented in Europe since the 1930s. The Far Right was divided but together it garnered 19.1 percent of the vote. The revolutionary and far Left was split even more but an assortment of Communists and Trotskyites managed to poll 12.4 percent of the vote. So in a free election in 2002 nearly one in three French voters supported candidates associated with totalitarian extremism and so with the gulags, death camps, wars and purges that that had brought misery and death to millions across Europe during the previous century.

The question before us is what is the attraction of extremism to large numbers of contemporary Europeans? Unlike their grandparents they have not endured war, hunger and mass unemployment. Moreover unlike earlier generations they have the historical record of Fascism and Communism plainly before them. That shows that utopian idealism produces hate, prejudice and discrimination and almost always ends in tragedy. The answer I believe is that there are clear incentives and motives for hatred and prejudice – particularly of the political variety - in any society. It serves the personal agendas of individuals. It also meets their psychological need to make sense of the world around them. This is particularly true regarding Jews, especially in Europe. My task is to offer a logical political and psychological explanation for what appears at first sight to be irrational thinking and behaviour. I shall not dwell on the usual manifestations of this phenomenon i.e. the outcomes, the so-called antisemitic incidents or hate crimes nor the electoral support for extremist political parties and candidates that usually measure its intensity but instead on the intellectual processes

that underlie the behaviour and actions of the perpetrators. I shall also focus on the role of the intelligentsia in creating a “climate’ of bigotry and hate in society.

There is a coalition of political interest in post 9/11 Europe, according to some commentators, between elements of the new left, the far right, radical Islamists, anti-globalists, and human rights campaigners and activists. Despite their disparate ideologies, they share an animus against Israel and the United States.

Writing in the leftist *New Statesman* in 2004, Mick Hume, editor of *Spiked online* argued that the current fashion for Israel bashing is not old-fashioned antisemitism, but the ‘anti-imperialism of fools’. According to Hume, many involved in this strange alliance “had previously shown little interest in the plight of the Palestinians: the Israeli state has become a sort of ersatz America, a symbol of all that they hate about contemporary capitalism. For Israeli, read western; and for the west, read modernity.” In taking the analysis further, Paul Igansky and I as the editors of JPR’s book *A New Antisemitism? Debating Judeophobia in 21st Century Britain*, argued that the singular obsession with Israel by many in this new political alliance both manifests, and promotes, Judeophobia—a fear of, and hostility towards, Jews as a collectivity.

These new political alliances have been observed across Western Europe. In the case of Italy, for instance, Oriana Fallaci, writing in the *Corriere della Sera* newspaper controversially argued that the phenomenon in evidence in Europe is “a new fascism, a new nazism. A fascism, a nazism, that is much more grim and revolting because it is conducted and nourished by those who hypocritically pose as do-gooders, progressives, communists, pacifists, Catholics or rather Christians, and who have the gall to label a warmonger anyone like me who screams the truth.”

One of the fallacies under which many Jews and other well-meaning people suffer is that educated people are inherently less prejudiced than the uneducated. Racism and nastiness, like crime generally, is commonly associated with the so-called ‘lower orders’. Conventional wisdom holds that prejudice equals ignorance and therefore can be fought—and ultimately eradicated—through education. More education begets more enlightenment. In 1776 Adam Smith postulated that “an instructed and intelligent people ... are always more decent and orderly than an ignorant stupid one.”¹ This belief is a twin version of a worldview that contrasts the physicality and boorishness of the benighted with the refinement and sophistication of the learned class. Both relate to a theory of individual pathology and the mob’s proclivity to violence. The frustrated, inarticulate, alienated and angry simpleton is juxtaposed with the balanced and mentally healthy scholar.

The problem with this psychological construct is that it relies on class prejudice rather than historical facts. It is a liberal myth. The educated clergy in Europe were not always less cruel than the illiterate peasants. Shopkeepers are not necessarily morally superior or better behaved than truck drivers. Sophisticated, cultured France is not necessarily better than simple, materialistic America when it comes to the treatment of outsiders. Nor did Marxist leaders do much to redress the essential fatuousness of this binary theory. In fact, the historical record suggests that socialism is not necessarily better for minorities than capitalism when it come to human rights

¹ Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, 1776, Book V, Chapter 1, Part 3, Article II.

on the one side—or as regards the body count of its victims on the other. This may explain why, for example, a paradigm shift has occurred in the past few years whereby Britain’s Jews have found more to complain about when it comes to nasty slurs and malicious cartoons in the *Independent*, *Observer* and *New Statesman*—newspapers aimed at an educated so-called ‘left liberal’ readership—than in the *Sun*, *News of the World*, or *Daily Express*, which supposedly cater to a less discerning and sophisticated public.

The focus of this paper is the realm of ideas. Ideas are crucial to explaining the problem of the efficacy of hate. Ideas are what people have always been prepared to live, kill and die for. The famous economist, John Maynard Keynes suggested that:

Ideas . . . both when they are right and when they are wrong, are more powerful than is commonly understood. Indeed the world is ruled by little else. I am sure the power of vested interests is vastly exaggerated compared to the gradual encroachment of ideas.

Neitzsche claimed the root of political psychology is resentment – *resentiment* – and that it was the distinguishing social emotion of modern societies (Friedrich Neitzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals*, 1899). His thesis was that other people’s or group’s success breed resentment and resentment in turn breeds hate. It’s a passion bound up with the identity of the one who feels it and he rejoices in damaging others by virtue of their membership of the targeted group. Moreover, particularly in insecure epochs hatred brings order out of chaos and decision out of uncertainty.

Thus, my main theme in this paper is particularly appropriate to the contemporary university campus in Britain and much of Western Europe. The current atmosphere in many arts and social science departments requires one to revisit the thesis in the 1927 attack by the French essayist Julien Benda in *La Trahison des clercs*. Benda accused the intelligentsia of his day of:

abandoning their traditional panoply of philosophical and scholarly ideals [whereby] for centuries [they] had exhorted men . . . to deaden the feeling of their differences [and instead had come to support and favour] the intellectual organization of political hatreds”.

This great French writer once defined intellectuals as people whose function was to defend eternal and disinterested values like justice and reason. Events in Europe were to disappoint him.

One fact often forgotten about interwar Europe is that in Germany and Austria the Nazis controlled the universities before they controlled streets or the organs of government. Looking back at the history of the Third Reich, what stands out is the conspicuous absence of resistance by means of faculty strikes or student protests to the mass expulsions of Jewish staff and students from universities. One result, as Daniel Goldhagen showed in his controversial 1996 book *Hitler’s Willing Executioners*, was that the *Einsatzgruppen*, the mobile killing squads of the Eastern Front in 1941-2, were definitely a ‘better class of German’. There was a surprisingly high proportion of university graduates among these fanatics and psychopaths.

Another prime example is Nazi Minister of Propaganda Dr Josef Goebbels, who earned a Ph.D. in literature and philosophy from the University of Heidelberg in 1922.

Let me add a historical event closer to academia to reinforce this argument. Bill Williams the distinguished local historian of Manchester related to me an incident that occurred on that British campus in January 1933. The German Lutheran Church there was seized by German students studying at the University of Manchester—not in order to protest the Nazi takeover of the liberal Weimar Republic—but in order to celebrate Hitler's rise to power and to proclaim it National Socialist Party headquarters.

All this makes prescient the words of that leading light of the *Aufklärung*, the German Enlightenment, Georg Christoph Lichtenberg (1742-99) when he suggested in one of his trenchant aphorisms:

Today we are trying to spread knowledge everywhere. Who knows if in centuries to come there will not be universities for re-establishing our former ignorance?

Lichtenberg, one of the most famous scientists of the 18th century might just as aptly be describing today's post-modernist academics. Education, after all, has two core aspects: the cognitive and the affective. Thus I would suggest that knowledge is essentially a good thing. By themselves, ideas are neither good nor bad. It is through their application—and combination—that the two become deleterious. This is the problem—and danger—of modernity: the linkage of knowledge with bad ideas. Historically, the most dangerous people have not been soldiers or scientists, but political philosophers and ideologues.

Thus in the 19th century it was the intelligentsia who sought to reverse what they saw as the illegitimate and unwarranted intrusion of Jews into European culture. The composers Richard Wagner (1813-83) and Franz Liszt (1811-86) excoriated their Jewish peers Mendelsohn, Offenbach and Mahler, claiming that their music undermined the purity of European civilization. Wagner's pamphlet *Das Judentum in der Musik*, first published anonymously in 1850, contained what were then regarded as lunatic ideas. He called for the banning and boycott of Jewish composers and the expulsion of Jewish musicians from German orchestras. Yet in 1933 Wagner's extremist programme became state policy in the citadels of classical music.

The problem here resides in the unenlightened or retrograde centre of higher education. In fact, this phenomenon emerged much earlier—and in the highest echelons of academia—than even Lichtenberg could have imagined. For it was the greatest German historian of his age, Heinrich von Treitschke, Professor of History at the University of Berlin, who in 1879 coined the phrase *Die Juden sind unser Unglueck* – 'The Jews are our misfortune'. While von Treitschke died in 1896, his idea lived on. Fifty years later this identical phrase became both a slogan and a rallying cry, as it was to be incorporated into the banner of the Nazi Party newspaper *Der Sturmer* in order to inspire Hitler's storm troopers. Post-modern fashion would classify such things as coincidences. Yet it is significant that that the editor and publisher of this newspaper, Julius Streicher, was to be tried at Nuremberg and executed for crimes against humanity. Why? In the words of the prosecution,

Streicher was convicted of “poisoning the minds of a generation”. It is a resounding endorsement of Keynes’ axiom about the power of ideas. It is equally important for us to note this innovation in international law. Ideas and words have consequences: The incitement to hatred and advocacy of murder and genocide is as much a crime as the act itself.

Once we understand that ideas are both freestanding and powerful we gain an indispensable tool for combating the insidious argument that victims cause the hatred they receive. Jewish behaviour or actions can—and does—affect the arguments and narratives of our enemies. Yet this recognition does not mean that the actions and behaviour of Jews, rather than their simple existence, causes antisemitism. In the 1930s it was the individual economic or racial Jew who was the claimed cause of Germany’s, Europe’s and the world’s misery. Biological anti-Semitism logically requires a genocidal solution. Anti-Zionism offers a very different—and theoretically less murderous—prospect. The logical targets for eradication are Zionist political institutions and the leadership, rather than the whole population. The assault on these political institutions may involve violence and death but it is not inevitable.

Whereas the intelligentsia whom Julian Benda criticized were drawn from the nationalist right, the situation is different now. Today’s treacherous *clerics* are largely found on the left of the political spectrum among the journalists, pundits, moralists, and pontificators of our fast expanding media, along with their supporting cast of ‘critical’ academics. In the past four years we have been inundated by a barrage of sophisticated agitprop with apocalyptic insinuations that indicts Israel and the Washington Neo-Conservatives as the world’s misfortune and directly to blame for war, terrorism, and globalization. This narrative, whereby Jews are out there somehow frustrating the international community’s best interests and firm commitment to peace, prosperity and human rights, is not new. It is a modern adaptation of the conspiracy thesis of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. Boiled down to its essence the idea bears an eerie similarity to Hitler’s favourite rhetorical line at his rallies when railing about Germany’s economic misery and geo-political problems. “*Wer ist schuldig? Der Jude!*” – “Who is guilty? The Jew.”

The sociologist Pareto’s theory of revolution, which focuses on social mobility might be relevant here as an explanation for this paradigm shift between the 1920s and today. The social mobility of the European intellectual elite that Benda criticized was ultimately blocked by the economic downturn and overall sense of pessimism and crisis of his time. In 2005, in the wake of post-war decades of plentiful opportunity and mobility for the New Class are not European intellectuals once again becoming similarly frustrated? Certainly the intelligentsia—especially the university professor—has forfeited social and economic status in Britain as the result of the ‘big bang’ in finance in “the City” and Thatcher’s economic legacy, which generally favours entrepreneurs and commercial activity over public service and teaching. For example, Britons today live in an economy that privileges *Financial Times*’ readers over ‘Guardianistas’, many of whom are frustrated and angry with the current state of a world dominated by the United States, which, in turn, is dominated by you-know-who.

The French left intelligentsia has been down this road of tacit support for bigotry before during the Vichy regime 1940-4 when Jews were boycotted, their assets

confiscated and Jews and Jewish influence were removed by statute from public life the national economy. Yet for its prominent writers – André Gide, Paul Claudel, François Mauriac, Jules Romains, Rodger Martin du Gard, even André Malraux until nearly the end of the war – the rule was silence or inaction. This silence was even more deafening in the case of Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir, who so strongly influenced the climate of intellectual opinion after the war. The ‘heroic’ Simone de Beauvoir worked for a time on a cultural programme for Radio Nationale in occupied Paris. Her companion Jean-Paul Sartre, happily replaced a dismissed Jewish professor of philosophy. The liberal professions were no better. It was only in 1999 that the French doctors’ association, representing 180,000 members acknowledged that the ‘basic values of their profession had been violated when they acquiesced in legislation that discriminated against and excluded their Jewish Colleagues’ from practicing.

Yet we must beware of historicism what we are seeing today is a mutation in the virus of anti-Jewish ideas and prejudice that marks the morphing of antisemitism into another form. For this reason and others the phenomenon in evidence may be more accurately termed Judeophobia—a fear of, and hostility toward Jews as a collectivity, rather than the propagation of the racial ideologies of the old antisemitism. Not widespread in "Middle England" at the moment, it nevertheless resides among certain "cognitive elites" within the news media, churches, universities, NGOs and trades unions. It is a mindset characterized by an obsession with the sins of the State of Israel, and Diaspora Jews in general as a consequence of the majority’s well-documented strong sense of attachment to Israel. Today's Judeophobia is an assault on the essence of the Jewish collectivity, both in terms of a Jewish sovereign state in its ancient homeland, and the nature of robust, emancipated, and self-aware Diaspora communities. What the new opponents of the Jews share with the pre-war fascists and Stalinists is a similar predilection for utopian idealism which in turn adopts a simple approach to problem solving - eliminate the cancer permanently from the body politic.

Thus there are strident calls for an academic boycott of Israeli universities and scholars and campaigns for economic divestment from Israel but not for similar actions or boycotts against other states such as China or Sudan. Are the pacifist Tibetans and their admirable leader the Dalai Lama inherently less deserving of support and attention than the Palestinians? Are Sudan’s raped, pillaged and murdered black Africans not worthy of a boycott or petition? Could it be that the Tibetans and Africans just have the wrong sort of oppressors – Communists and Arabs? That European elites are once again obsessed with “the sins and crimes of the Jews” is neither unprecedented nor unexpected. Yet I think it is worth noting that Judeophobia produces collateral damage when the cry for “Free Tibet” vanishes before that for “Free Palestine”.