

Cruel Britannia

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On January 13, 2005, the London *Sun* published a photograph of Prince Harry, third in line to the British throne, dressed in Nazi regalia at a birthday party. Expressions of dismay came from many quarters, including Michael Howard, then leader of the Conservative Party, and the heads of many British Jewish communal organizations, who widely expected a full-throated public apology.

The response was not what they expected. The prince, a twenty-year-old raised in the reserve of royalty and acutely aware of the resonance of public symbols in the media, chose the most limited of apologies—a brief statement read by his spokesman, declaring only that “Prince Harry has apologized for any offense or embarrassment he has caused. He realizes it was a poor choice of costume.”¹ No mention of the Holocaust, nor even any indication of whether his apology was directed at Jews, or—equally plausibly—at the memory of fallen British servicemen. Moreover, when Jewish leaders called upon the prince to make a more sincere effort, such as a public appearance explicitly acknowledging his insensitivity, they were swiftly drowned out by British elites saying that the poor fellow ought to be left alone. “I don’t think he needs to make a public apology,” said Lord

Falconer, who holds the title of lord chancellor, one of the senior positions in the House of Lords, and is a close adviser to Prime Minister Tony Blair. “I think already he must understand what has happened and I think that should be the end of it.”² According to one poll, more than half of British adults ages 18 to 24 “could see no problem with the outfit.”³

Taken in isolation, one could find reasons to ignore both the incident itself and the general reluctance of the British establishment to condemn it. Yet it comes at a time when anti-Semitism has emerged as a serious problem in Britain, turning in just a few years from a public nuisance into something of a crisis. According to the annual report of the Community Security Trust, which tracks anti-Semitic incidents in Britain, 2004 was the worst year of anti-Semitic violence, vandalism, and harassment since the group began keeping statistics in 1996. These numbers include 83 physical assaults (up from 54 in 2003, or a 54-percent increase) and 365 acts of abusive or threatening behavior (up from 233 in 2003, or a 57-percent increase). All told, the group recorded 532 serious anti-Semitic incidents in Britain in 2004—more than double the 228 recorded in 1996, and a rise of over 40 percent from the previous year. In absolute numbers, Great Britain is today second only to France in serious anti-Semitic incidents reported among European countries—with Russia a distant third.⁴

Yet Britain is unusual not simply in the frequency and severity of anti-Semitic incidents. While many European countries have come to associate anti-Semitism with the forces of either the extreme Right, radical Left, or the increasingly vocal Muslim minorities, in Britain anti-Semitic sentiment is a part of mainstream discourse, continually resurfacing among the academic, political, and media elites. Indeed, while a great deal of attention has been focused on anti-Semitism—often masquerading under the banner of anti-Zionism—across Western Europe in the past few years, and especially in France, in some ways British anti-Semitism is more prevalent, and enjoys greater tolerance in public life, than in any other country in Europe. While the French state, for example, has marshaled its resources to fighting

anti-Semitic words and actions, with greater or lesser success, in Britain the response has been far less decisive, its public denunciations frequently unsupported by institutional or government sanction.

There are many possible explanations for the unusual quarter that anti-Semitism in Britain enjoys. Whereas the efforts to combat anti-Semitism in France and Germany are intimately connected with the memory of the Holocaust that took place on their soil, Britain has never had to undergo a similar kind of soul-searching. At the same time, London has become a world center for Muslim anti-Semitism and the demonization of Jews and Israel that accompanies it. As Melanie Phillips, the *Daily Mail* columnist, wrote two years ago, “It is not an exaggeration to say that in Britain at present it is open season on both Israel and the Jews... I no longer feel comfortable in my own country because of the poison that has welled up toward... the Jews.”⁵ In a country such as Britain, with its proud history of tolerance, moderation, and multi-culturalism, this is indeed a damning indictment. Unless something significant changes, the United Kingdom risks becoming the country where anti-Semitism has the freest rein, and where Jews feel the least secure, in all of Europe.

To understand the unique nature of British anti-Semitism, and the surprising degree of legitimacy it currently enjoys in the public discourse, it is important to recognize its deep roots in modern British history. While it is true that, unlike Germany, France, Russia, or Poland, Britain was not a major stronghold of anti-Semitism in the modern era, its liberal democratic tradition has nonetheless been far more ambivalent toward Jews than is often assumed.⁶ As a result of immigration from Eastern Europe, the population of Anglo-Jewry rose from 65,000 in 1880 to 300,000 by 1914,⁷ of whom two-thirds settled in London. These immigrants were at times the target of malevolent anti-Semitic incitement; they were seen—especially by conservatives—as breeders of anarchism, socialism, and other subversive doctrines. The 1905 Aliens Act, intended to restrict further waves

of Jewish immigration, reflected this biased climate of opinion, which also found strong echoes in the British labor movement. Only a few years earlier, during the South African War (1899-1902), a left-wing, populist anti-Semitism had emerged in Britain, which attacked wealthy Jewish capitalists and financiers for having “engineered” an imperialist war to seize the gold-rich Boer lands in order to advance the sinister interests of world Jewry. Through their presumed control of the press and high finance, this “golden international” was said to be “poisoning the wells of public information.”⁸

In the first half of the twentieth century, however, Jews in Britain were associated as much with communism as with capitalism. The Russian Revolution of 1917 exacerbated fears of a world revolutionary upheaval instigated by Russian Jews purportedly engaged in a conspiracy against England.⁹ This was the murky background to the popularity that *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* initially attained in post-1918 Britain.¹⁰

In the aftermath of World War I, and with the establishment by the League of Nations of a British Mandate for Palestine, anti-Jewish feelings found yet another trigger. The *Morning Post*, for example, exhibited extreme hostility to the Jews and Zionism. Jews were portrayed in the early 1920s as expropriating the Palestine Arabs’ land under the protective cover of British bayonets and at the expense of British taxpayers. Anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism became an integral part of the rhetoric used by right-wing newspapers against the Lloyd George government and British rule in Palestine.¹¹

With the emergence of Oswald Mosley and his British Union of Fascists in the 1930s, a new anti-Semitic motif rose to the surface—one that carries a decidedly contemporary resonance. Jews were accused of trying to drag Britain into an unnecessary war with Nazi Germany.¹² Mosley’s arguments combined fascist rhetoric, calls for the preservation of the Empire and for “peace with honor,” and a populist appeal to lower-class anti-Semitic sentiment, especially pervasive in London’s East End. The residues of his campaigns carried through into World War II, requiring the British government ostentatiously to demonstrate that it was not fighting a “Jews’ war.”

During the war itself, an obsessive fear of “fifth columns” and “enemy aliens” existed alongside a perceived linkage of Jews with black-marketeering, spying, and subversion.¹³ This undercurrent of anti-Semitism probably contributed to Britain’s refusal to undertake any serious rescue effort to save the remnants of European Jewry during the Holocaust. Britain’s policy of blocking Jewish immigration to Palestine beginning in 1938, and especially from the end of the war until 1948, though mainly driven by *realpolitik* and imperial strategy, cannot plausibly be detached from anti-Jewish sentiment.

Even after the Holocaust, anti-Semitic attitudes only grew worse, resonating at the highest levels of the British government. The first U.S. ambassador to Israel, James G. McDonald, writing in his diary on August 3, 1948, recorded the “blazing hatred” of British Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin for “the Jews, the Israelis, the Israeli government” as well as for American president Harry S. Truman.¹⁴ Richard Crossman, the Labor MP who knew Bevin intimately, concluded in 1947 that British policy in Palestine was excessively influenced by “one man’s determination to teach the Jews a lesson.”¹⁵ The refusal of Palestinian Jewry to conform to British plans for them had tipped Bevin over into “overt anti-Semitism,” he said. The British foreign secretary was convinced that “the Jews were organizing a world conspiracy against poor old Britain” in which the Zionists, together with the Soviet Union, would seek to bring down the Empire.¹⁶ The Jewish resistance to British rule in Palestine in the summer of 1947 triggered anti-Jewish riots in Britain following the hanging of two British sergeants by the Irgun, which had in turn come in retaliation for the execution of an Irgun member by British authorities. On August 1, 1947, mobs of youths rampaged through Jewish districts in Liverpool, Manchester, Glasgow, East London, and other cities. Jewish property was looted, synagogues attacked, and cemeteries desecrated.¹⁷ Palestine—not for the first or last time—had become a catalyst for British hostility to Jews.

A superb example of the ways in which anti-Zionism merged with anti-Semitism can be found in the person of John Bagot Glubb, the supreme

commander of the Arab Legion in Israel's War of Independence in 1948. Like many of his Arabist friends, this conservative Englishman regarded the creation of Israel as a crime. Glubb was an unabashed anti-Semite, who firmly believed that the "unlikable character" of the Jews had provoked their persecution throughout history; that most Russian and East European Jews were really Khazar Turks with no connection to the promised land; that the Jews were by nature aggressive and stiff-necked; and that the "vengeful" mentality of the Jewish people had been "passed down without a break from generation to generation."¹⁸ Since biblical times, Jews had been imbued with "the idea of a superior race," whose blood must not be contaminated "by inter-mixture with others." Not only did Jews invent the idea of the "master race" theory, but their behavior towards Arabs was, he supposed, driven by Hitlerian politics.¹⁹

In a secret July 1946 memorandum, Glubb described the new Jews in Palestine as fusing the ancient, hateful Hebrew tradition with "a layer of up-to-date Eastern European fanaticism." He claimed that they had copied Nazi techniques—embracing "the theories of race, blood and soil, the terrorism of the gunman, the inculcation of hate into the young, and the youth movements." The young Jew of Palestine, Glubb concluded, was "as hard, as narrow, as fanatical, and as bitter as the Hitler youth on whom he is modeled."²⁰ At least four decades before it became fashionable to do so, Glubb described Zionism as a combination of "Judaism and Nazism."

But the intellectual pioneer of the idea that Judaism is a form of Nazism in the 1950s was another eminent member of the British establishment, the historian Arnold J. Toynbee. His monumental *A Study in History* unequivocally indicted the Zionists as "disciples of the Nazis"; they had even chosen "to imitate some of the evil deeds that the Nazis had committed against the Jews."²¹ Ignoring the Arab determination to strangle the infant State of Israel at birth, he suggested that Jews had gratuitously murdered and expelled peaceful Arabs in a bloodthirsty and unprovoked frenzy.

After the Six Day War, such comparisons became commonplace in the Soviet Union and spread more gradually in Western Europe, including

Britain. One source in the Western liberal democracies was the rise of the New Left, with its dogmatic “anti-racism” that pilloried Zionist policy toward the Palestinian Arabs as “genocide” and upbraided British Jews for being reactionary accomplices of Israeli “fascism.”²²

During the Lebanon war, the far-Left *News Line* accused the Zionists of employing “horrendous gas weapons which were once used against the Jewish people by the Nazis,” and of trying to carry out a “Final Solution” against four million Palestinians.²³ Another organ of the British Left, *Labor Herald*, published in 1982 a cartoon that anticipated present-day calumny down to the last detail. A bespectacled, obviously Jewish Menachem Begin, then Israel’s prime minister, is shown wearing Nazi jackboots, a Death’s Head insignia, and a Star of David armband, raising his right arm in a *Sieg Heil* salute over a mountain of skull bones, Lebanon lying bleeding at his feet. The headline, in Gothic script, reads: “The ‘Final Solution.’”²⁴

Then, as now, prominent British writers were in the vanguard of demonizing Israel, inverting the Holocaust, and spinning a web of anti-Semitic allusions. Best-selling children’s author Roald Dahl, for example, did not hesitate to brand Begin and Sharon in 1983 as “almost the exact carbon copies in miniature of Mr. Hitler and Mr. Goering.”²⁵ They were “equally shortsighted,” “bloodthirsty,” and as deserving as their Nazi models to be arraigned by a war-crimes tribunal. “Never before in the history of mankind,” Dahl proclaimed, “has a race of people switched so rapidly from being much pitied victims to barbarous murderers.”²⁶ For good measure he added that the Jews had been “cowards” in World War II.²⁷

Demonization of Jews, whether as individuals or as a collective, thus enjoys a long pedigree in the upper echelons of British public life. True, it has never become the mainstay of public expression, the way it was in Soviet Russia and continues to be in many Arab countries. Yet unlike the rest of Europe, where since the Holocaust anti-Semitism has become far less acceptable among the ruling elites, and tends to be relegated to

immigrant populations or political extremists, in Great Britain demonization of Jews and Israel has continued to enjoy the status of a legitimate minority opinion. It is especially troubling at so sensitive a moment for Europe's Jews.

Today, anti-Semitic expression in Britain most commonly takes the form of virulent, disproportionate criticism of the Jewish state. It is of course the case that not all disagreement with Israeli policy should be considered anti-Semitic or illegitimate. But in Britain, and especially in the media, such criticism frequently leaves the bounds of civilized debate and indulges in demonization, flagrant double standards, and the implicit denial of Israel's right to defend itself—in short, in the appropriation of the traditional modes of anti-Semitism.

One of the most important venues for anti-Israel views has been the media outlets, especially the state-owned British Broadcasting Corporation. While generally downplaying the jihadist motivations of militant Islam, the BBC has shown no such reticence in representing Israel's efforts at self-defense. In many current-affairs programs, the image of a bloodthirsty, implacable Ariel Sharon was frequently contrasted with a relatively benign Yasser Arafat, portrayed until his death last year as the amiable, fatherly leader of the Palestinians. In interviews, Palestinian spokespeople are usually treated to soft and respectful questioning on British television, whereas Israelis, unless they explicitly repudiate Israeli policies, tend to be handled far more harshly. This partiality extends to vocabulary. The BBC consistently calls Hamas and Islamic Jihad terrorists "militants" or "radicals."²⁸ The word "terror" is almost never used, even for the most brutal Palestinian assaults on Israeli civilians—even as the network has no qualms about using the word to describe the September 11 attacks in New York and Washington, the Bali bombing, or similar attacks in Djerba, Casablanca, and Istanbul.²⁹ The same pattern of bias is revealed when the BBC quotes

verbatim unsubstantiated Palestinian accusations against Israel—such as the use of poison gas or depleted uranium—but openly challenges the authenticity of evidence Israel presents in its defense. Israeli sources cited by the BBC merely “allege” while Palestinians “report.” This attitude was particularly apparent in the screening on *BBC Correspondent* on March 17, 2003 of “Israel’s Secret Weapon,” a documentary depicting Israel as a rogue regime, Ariel Sharon as a Jewish Saddam Hussein, and Dimona, rather than Baghdad, as the rightful target of UN inspectors.³⁰

The prejudice is not just a matter of bias among individual editors and reporters, but appears to be a consistent pattern throughout the BBC. Media Tenor, an independent, Bonn-based research group, conducted a 2003 study that found that the BBC’s Middle East coverage was 85 percent negative, 15 percent neutral, and 0 percent positive toward Israel.³¹

The Jenin affair offers a prime example of Israel-baiting in the British media. Many British journalists hailed the grossly inflated claims of 3,000 Palestinian dead after Israel’s assault on the refugee camp in April 2002 as proof of a major atrocity, without any attempt at serious verification. A.N. Wilson, a leading columnist of the London *Evening Standard*, informed his readers that “we are talking here of massacre, and a cover-up of genocide.”³² The *Guardian* compared Israel’s incursion into Jenin with al-Qaida’s attack of September 11 on New York. The Israeli action, it said, was “every bit as repellent in its particulars, no less distressing, and every bit as man-made.” The incursion, it added, “already has that aura of infamy that attaches to a crime of especial notoriety.”³³ The *Times*’ correspondent, Janine di Giovanni, wrote that rarely had anyone seen “such deliberate destruction, such disrespect for human life.”³⁴ Phil Reeves of the *Independent* spoke of Cambodia-style “killing fields,” quoting without any verification Palestinian claims of “mass murder” and wholesale “executions.” His dispatch began thus: “A monstrous war crime that Israel has tried to cover up for a fortnight has finally been exposed.”³⁵ Indeed, months after a UN investigation concluded that there was no massacre in Jenin, and even Palestinian leaders had

conceded the point, BBC anchors and its web site were implying that there were doubts about what had really happened.³⁶

A particularly insidious example of how easily anti-Israeli defamation slides into anti-Semitic imagery was afforded by Dave Brown's cartoon in the *Independent*, showing Ariel Sharon in the act of devouring the flesh of a Palestinian baby. Sharon is shown, nearly naked, wearing a Likud fig leaf, and in the background Apache helicopters fire missiles and blare, "Vote Likud."³⁷ This cartoon would not have looked out of place in *Der Stürmer*, but more strikingly recalls images of the medieval blood libels.³⁸ But the Press Complaints Committee in the United Kingdom dismissed all protests, and this caricature was subsequently awarded first prize in the British Political Cartoon Society's annual competition for 2003.³⁹

No less disturbing was the account given by the journalist Julie Burchill in an opinion piece published November 29, 2003, which explained why she was leaving the *Guardian*: Burchill, who is not Jewish, was dismayed by the British press' "quite striking bias against the State of Israel." (For all its faults, she retorted, Israel was still the "only country in that barren region that you or I, or any feminist, atheist, homosexual or trade unionist, could bear to live under.")⁴⁰ Burchill's critique went beyond her own paper; she was particularly scathing about Richard Ingrams, a columnist for the *Observer*, who demanded that Jewish journalists declare their racial origins when writing about the Middle East. Ingrams told his readers: "I have developed a habit when confronted by letters to the editor to look at the signature to see if the writer has a Jewish name. If so, I tend not to read it."⁴¹

This is not to say that the press makes no room for the occasional defense of the Israeli position—as the *Guardian's* willingness to publish Burchill's letter attests. Rather, the problem lies more in the perception that anti-Semitic canards, demonization of Israel, and the implicit endorsement of terrorism against Israeli civilians are considered legitimate in British reporting and commentary. This past May, for example, a new British play opened called *My Name is Rachel Corrie*, glorifying the young American

activist who was killed in the Gaza Strip in 2003 while attempting to prevent a bulldozer from destroying a home used to supply Palestinian terror networks. Instead of challenging the play's outright bias or raising the debate surrounding the play's controversial moral perspective, theater critics hailed the play, comparing it with dramatizations of the lives of Primo Levi and Anne Frank.⁴²

In the wholesale adoption of the Palestinian perspective and its anti-Semitic motifs, relatively little attention is paid to the extremist ideology, the culture of martyrdom, or the virulent anti-Semitism endemic in contemporary Islamism. Instead, suicide bombings against civilian targets are explained away as a product of the general misery induced by Israel's policies. Such beliefs, for example, led the prime minister's wife, Cherie Blair, to remark at a charitable event in London in June 2002 that young Palestinians "feel they have got no hope but to blow themselves up."⁴³ She made the comment only hours after a Hamas suicide bomber blew up a bus packed full of Israelis, including schoolchildren—killing 19 and injuring dozens. And more recently, Jenny Tonge, a British legislator who was back-benched last year after expressing sympathies for Palestinian suicide bombers and comparing Arabs in Gaza to Jews in the Warsaw Ghetto, was nominated to serve in the House of Lords.⁴⁴ With major public figures in Britain expressing such opinions, it seems only natural that this country has even begun producing its own homegrown bombers—such as Asif Mohammed Hanif, a Briton who blew himself up in a Tel Aviv seaside bar in May 2003, killing three civilians and wounding scores of others.⁴⁵

The mainstreaming of anti-Semitism and demonization of Israel is felt most acutely, however, in the public culture of the capital city of London. In the past decade, the United Kingdom's undisputed political, economic, and cultural center has also become a major world center of political Islam and anti-Semitic, anti-Israel, and anti-American activism. Through its Arabic-language newspapers, magazines, and publishing

houses, not to mention its flourishing network of bookshops, mosques, and community centers, radical Islam has taken full advantage of what British democracy has to offer for its anti-Western goals, reaping the benefits of London's significance as a hub of global finance, electronic media, and mass communications technology.⁴⁶ The effect of this with regard to anti-Semitism and virulent anti-Zionism has therefore been quite different from that found elsewhere in Europe: Although Britain's Muslim population of about 1.5 million is only a quarter of that of France, the growing influence of London's Muslims has given the most inflammatory of ideas a greater legitimacy in the capital's political and cultural discourse than they enjoy virtually anywhere else.

Much of this energy has been directed at mobilizing Muslims to fight against Israel and America. The impassioned calls of Sheikh Omar Bakri Muhammad, a leading Muslim cleric in London, to "celebrate" the September 11 attacks as a great moment in history and recruit Muslim youth for "holy war" in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Palestine, have struck an emotional chord in the Muslim ghettos.⁴⁷ This is less surprising when one recalls that 40 percent of British Muslims surveyed in a *Sunday Times* poll after 9-11 believed Osama bin Laden was "justified" in his war against America. They even supported those of their coreligionists from Britain who volunteered to fight with the Taliban against the Western allies.⁴⁸ At the same time, Islamists like Al-Muhajiroun ("the Exiles") spokesman Anjem Choudary regard Britain and the West as mere pawns, controlled by the "Zionists." Israel is invariably portrayed as a "cancer in the heart of the Muslim world" to be eliminated only by radical surgery.⁴⁹ Sheikh Bakri himself has warned Jews in Britain to avoid any support for Israel lest they "become targets for Muslims."⁵⁰ Al-Muhajiroun combines calls for "the black flag of Islam to fly over Downing Street" with demands for the liberation of Palestine and the jihadist demand to "de Judaize the West."⁵¹

This highly inflammable cocktail embracing Palestine, jihad, the dream of a worldwide caliphate, Koranic indoctrination, and classical Judeophobia, was exposed by the Old Bailey trial of Sheikh Abdallah el-Faisal, in

February 2003. The cleric, a Jamaican convert to Islam educated in Saudi Arabia, was found guilty of inciting to murder and racial hatred on the basis of his lectures and videocassettes—some of them on sale at specialty bookshops in Britain—and sentenced to nine years in prison. Overwhelming evidence was produced at the trial to demonstrate his encouragement for a violent jihad to kill non-believers. Particular venom was reserved for the “filthy Jews.”⁵² In a spine-chilling speech which seemed to anticipate the May 2003 suicide mission of Hanif to Tel Aviv, el-Faisal ranted:

People with British passports, if you fly into Israel it is easy.... Fly into Israel and do whatever you can. If you die, you are up in Paradise. How do you fight a Jew? You kill a Jew.⁵³

Such sentiments have long ceased to be limited to Muslim self-expression; the politics of London have begun to internalize the discourse of hate. In February of this year, the city’s mayor, Ken Livingstone, angrily compared a Jewish reporter for the *Evening Standard* to a concentration camp guard. Instead of later apologizing, Livingstone criticized the reporter’s employer for what he said was its history of racism, scare-mongering, and, oddly enough, anti-Semitism. Shortly thereafter, Livingstone published a piece in the *Guardian* claiming that Ariel Sharon “is a war criminal who should be in prison, not in office,” adding that “Israel’s own expansion has included ethnic cleansing.” Subsequently, the Muslim Public Affairs Committee, responding to Jewish critics of the mayor, published an article on its web site entitled “Zionists Want Their Pound of Flesh.”⁵⁴

Passions in London were further stirred by the recent election contest in the city’s Bethnal Green district, the second-most Muslim in Britain. The highly charged race pitted sitting Labor MP Oona King, a black Jewish woman, against George Galloway, a former Labor MP now representing the anti-war Respect Party, a blend of far-Left and Islamist politics (Galloway is currently under investigation by the United States government for involvement in the UN Oil-for-Food scandal).⁵⁵ After youths threw eggs at

King as she honored East End Jews killed in Nazi bombing raids, one young Muslim told the *Daily Telegraph*: “We all hate her. She comes here with her Jewish friends who are killing our people and then they come to our backyards.”⁵⁶ King lost by 823 votes.

Since the election, the climate in London has only grown more hostile. On May 21 of this year, a major rally was held in Trafalgar Square, with a crowd waving Palestinian flags and anti-Israel banners despite the heavy rain. Speakers included Palestinian representatives and local Muslim leaders, but most notable was the presence of non-Muslim public figures. Jeremy Corbyn, a backbench Labor MP, called for the British government to “cease all trade with Israel,” while Tony Benn, a former Labor MP and veteran of the British political scene, called George Bush and Ariel Sharon the “two most dangerous men in the world.” Paul Mackney, president of the country’s second-largest union of teachers, called for the widespread boycott of Israel by British academia, while Andrew Birgin of the Stop the War coalition demanded the dismantling of the Jewish state. “The South African apartheid state never inflicted the sort of repression that Israel is inflicting on the Palestinians,” he said to cries of *allahu akbar!* from the audience. “When there is real democracy, there will be no more Israel.”⁵⁷

The rally’s most prominent speaker, however, was George Galloway, fresh from his election victory over Oona King. Galloway used the rally as an opportunity to launch an international boycott of Israel. “We will join them,” he said, referring to the Palestinians, “by boycotting Israel. By boycotting Israeli goods. By picketing the stores that are selling Israeli goods.” To cheers and applause, Galloway added, “It’s about time that the British government made some reparations for the Balfour Declaration.”⁵⁸

Given the legitimacy that such rhetoric enjoys in Britain today, it should not surprise us to discover the emergence of efforts among the intellectual elites to convert their rhetoric of hate into action—principally through the boycotting of Jewish and Israeli products and people. It is

these which have turned the public atmosphere in Britain into perhaps the most uncomfortable for Jews in all of Europe.

These include the much-publicized Mona Baker affair, which involved her removal of two Israeli colleagues from the board of a scientific publication. Baker claimed to have been inspired by the boycott initiative of two Anglo-Jewish academics, Steven Rose and his wife, Hilary. Supporters of the petition included the AUT, NATFHE (the lecturers' union), and over 700 academics. Matters escalated when Andrew Wilkie, a professor of pathology at Oxford University, flatly rejected the application of an Israeli student simply because of his nationality. On June 23, 2003, Wilkie told the student that he had "a huge problem with the way that Israelis take the moral high ground from their appalling treatment in the Holocaust, and then inflict gross human rights abuses on the Palestinians."⁵⁹ Oxford promptly slapped him with two months of unpaid leave, although the same institution has failed to take any action against Tom Paulin, a lecturer at Hertford College, who published a poem last year that likened the Israeli army to a "Zionist SS."⁶⁰

Matters only worsened this April, when the AUT, which has some 40,000 members, voted by sizable majorities to impose a boycott on two Israeli universities, Bar-Ilan University and the University of Haifa, in solidarity with the Palestinian cause. According to the AUT secretary general, this ban would "take the form described in the Palestinian call for academic boycott of Israeli institutions." The rushed vote was held on Passover eve, preventing most Jewish members from taking part, and opponents of the motions were denied right of reply due to "lack of time." Just before the vote, speakers addressing the AUT's executive union meeting declared Israel a "colonial apartheid state, more insidious than South Africa," and called for the "removal of this regime." While some British institutions, such as Oxford, considered action to override the ban, in general it was international pressure, rather than repercussions within British society, that made the boycott a matter of serious controversy and ultimately led to its reversal a month later.⁶¹

Boycotts against Jews arouse painful associations. Attempts to remove Israeli products from Selfridges, Harrods, Tesco, Marks & Spencer, and other British chains, under the slogan “Isolate the Racist Zionist State,” are both a symptom and a rallying point for the resurgence of anti-Semitism in Britain.⁶² Demonstrators collect money and signatures, sell pamphlets comparing Ariel Sharon to Hitler, and shout slogans at passersby. One woman, Carol Gould, offered a telling example of her own experience of a demonstration outside the Marks & Spencer on Oxford Street, London, in November 2003. Gould described how the Moroccan conductor of her double-decker bus harangued his passengers about “all Marks & Spencer money that goes to the ‘Zionist murderers.’”⁶³ Once outside the store, she encountered “an hysterical crowd of hate-filled people,” in which non-Arabs easily outnumbered those of Middle Eastern origin. One woman in religious Muslim attire was screaming, “You Jews destroyed my country, Iraq.” Others shouted, “You people invented terrorism in Palestine!”; “Israel is expanding every day and will soon own the whole Middle East!”; “Israel is slaughtering thousands of Palestinians every day!”⁶⁴ An elegantly dressed English businessman told Gould: “I love and revere the suicide bombers. Every time I hear of a suicide bomb going off I wish it had been eighty or ninety Jews instead of a pitiful handful.”⁶⁵

With this sort of sentiment polluting the refined British air, it is only natural that Great Britain has become a leading center of old-fashioned anti-Semitic violence as well. Violent assaults in the last two years increased by 77 percent (from 47 in 2002 to 83 in 2004) and the number of synagogue desecrations leapt as well, with serious attacks in Finsbury Park, Swansea, and Edinburgh.⁶⁶ A near-tripling in anti-Semitic incidents in British schools prompted the National Union of Teachers to issue new guidelines in July 2003 for combating anti-Semitism.⁶⁷ There were also acts of vandalism in the months following the American invasion of Iraq, such as the desecration of a Jewish cemetery in the East End of London,

where more than 400 graves were smashed.⁶⁸ More recently, in June of this year, particularly ugly desecrations took place in Manchester and London cemeteries. In both cases, nearly 100 gravestones were broken, toppled, or daubed with anti-Jewish slogans. And whereas Britain's overall total of reported anti-Semitic incidents in 2004 was fewer than those in France by more than a third (532 compared with 970), the country's much smaller Muslim population could suggest a far greater involvement in anti-Semitic violence on the part of non-Muslims.

All this is accompanied by a deterioration in British attitudes to Jews in the past decade. According to a poll conducted in September 1993, negative feelings towards Gypsies, Pakistanis, and other groups were markedly higher than they were towards Jews.⁶⁹ Anti-Semitism in the early 1990s seemed like a negligible factor in British society. In 2005, much has changed for the worse. Between 15 and 20 percent of Britons might be defined as anti-Semitic according to a recent sampling by the *Jewish Chronicle*. As many as one in five Britons believe the Holocaust is "exaggerated"; a similar percentage would not vote for a Jewish prime minister, and a much higher number hold conventional anti-Semitic stereotypes about the link between Jews and money. As elsewhere in Western Europe, over 50 percent of Britons think Israel is the greatest danger to world peace.⁷⁰

It needs to be emphasized that the old-new anti-Semitism in Britain is not the kind of hatred which prevailed in Europe sixty years ago. The emerging multi-cultural society of Great Britain will not tolerate cries of *Sieg Heil*, jackboots, or the openly racist mythology that was irrevocably stained by the Holocaust. Nor is British anti-Semitism "with the boots off" quite what it used to be. The classic blend of British aristocratic hauteur, bourgeois snobbery, and working-class dislike of "bloody foreigners" is no longer politically correct.

Still, anti-Semitism in Great Britain is especially worrisome. Whereas in other European countries, expressions of anti-Semitism tend to be relegated to the political extremes and the mostly Muslim immigrant communities, in Britain they seem to echo throughout the central corridors

of society, turning classical myths of Jewish power and the demonization of Israel into a mainstay of polite discourse, permeating the political, cultural, academic, and media elites. In practice, increasingly virulent criticism of Israel has steadily converged with Jew-hatred; Sharon-bashing has led to the vilification of Jews and incitement to violence, even where no such goal was intended. Loathing for America and the West has provided its own poisonous additive. In this overheated atmosphere, occult myths of Jewish power have clearly revived. At the same time, anti-Semitism itself has mutated. As Britain's chief rabbi, Jonathan Sacks, has judiciously observed, this mutation consists of attributing to Jews and the State of Israel the worst sins of anti-Semitism: Racism, ethnic cleansing, genocide, and "crimes against humanity." This attempt to "Nazify" Judaism, Zionism, and Israel may reasonably be considered, Sacks writes, as "one of the most blasphemous inversions in the history of the world's oldest hate."⁷¹

None of this is to say that British culture is inherently or overwhelmingly hostile to Jews. Great Britain, which was the birthplace of liberalism in its modern political and economic senses, continues to be a liberal society today, with a healthy democracy, a free press, and an independent judiciary dedicated to protecting individual liberties. Indeed, in the last several centuries, and through World War II, Great Britain was, relative to the rest of Europe at least, a model of tolerance. Nor does it follow that the Jews of the United Kingdom are about to enter a dark era of persecution or the curtailment of basic individual rights.

What it does suggest, however, is that the widely held image of Britain as a realm uniquely hospitable to its Jewish citizens—similar in this regard to the United States, Canada, and other English-speaking countries—no longer seems accurate. In dry numbers, Great Britain has become home to a wave of anti-Semitic violence second only to France in all of Europe. Considered more substantively, anti-Semitic sentiments, motifs, symbols, and methods have gained a legitimacy in British public discourse that enjoys little parallel in the Western world.

Today the United Kingdom stands at a crossroads. Great ideological battles—over European unification, the effort to reassert elements of sovereignty in Scotland and Wales, and the future of long-standing traditions such as hunting and the monarchy—have brought about a profound erosion of the very idea of Britain. But when nations are so deeply unsure of the stability of their values and the security of their future, anti-Semitic sentiment often bubbles to the surface, as people deflect blame for a nation's problems instead of addressing them head-on. For this reason, it is often said that the way a nation treats its Jews is a litmus test for its true character. As Britain's subjects ponder their future among the community of nations, they would do well to keep these lessons of the past in mind.

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Notes

1. "Harry Sorry for Nazi Uniform Stunt," CNN.com, January 13, 2005, www.cnn.com/2005/WORLD/europe/01/12/harry.nazi/.
2. "Harry Public Apology 'Not Needed,'" BBC online, January 14, 2005, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/4170623.stm>.
3. "Young Brits Back Harry's Costume, Although They Learn About Holocaust," *JTA*, January 17, 2005, www.jta.org/page_view_story.asp?intarticleid=14933&intcategoryid=2.
4. See "Anti-Semitic Attacks Up 50 Percent," *Jerusalem Post Online*, January 24, 2005, www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?pagename=JPost/JPArticle/Printer&cid=1106450585777&cp=1078113566627; Community Security Trust Anti-Semitic Incidents Report (CST) 2004. In 2004, there were 970 serious anti-Semitic

incidents in France, 532 in the United Kingdom, and just 295 in Russia and Ukraine combined. (See EUMC report entitled “Racist Violence in 15 EU Member States,” April 2005, pp. 97, 148; “Report: Anti-Semitic Incidents Up in UK and France,” *Haaretz* online edition, January 21, 2005, www.haaretz.com/hasen/objects/pages/PrintArticleEn.jhtml?itemNo=530887.)

5. Melanie Phillips, “London: A Leftist Axis of Anti-Semitism,” *Hadassah Magazine*, September 4, 2003.

6. Colin Holmes, *Anti-Semitism in British Society 1876-1939* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1979).

7. See the report by the Center Genealogy Institute, a branch of the Center for Jewish History, www.cjh.org/family/pdf/GreatBritain.pdf#search='an%20introduction%20to%20jewish%20genealogy%20in%20great%20britain'.

8. See Claire Hirschfeld, “The British Left and the ‘Jewish Conspiracy’: A Case Study of Modern Anti-Semitism,” *Jewish Social Studies* (Spring 1981), pp. 105-107.

9. Sharman Kadish, *Bolsheviks and British Jews: The Anglo-Jewish Community, Britain and the Russian Revolution* (London: Frank Cass, 1992).

10. Gisela Lebzelter, *Political Anti-Semitism in England 1918-1939* (London: Holmes & Meier, 1978), pp. 13-28. The *London Times* took the *Protocols* very seriously until its correspondent in Istanbul, Philip Graves, exposed it as a forgery in August 1921. See Norman Cohn, *Warrant for Genocide* (London: Penguin, 1970), pp. 78, 166-171.

11. See Henry Defries, *Conservative Party Attitudes to Jews, 1900-1950* (London: Frank Cass, 2001). See also the review by Rory Miller in *The Jewish Journal of Sociology*, vol. 45, nos. 1 and 2 (2003), pp. 51-63.

12. See W.F. Mandle, *Anti-Semitism and the British Union of Fascists* (London: Longmans Green, 1968). See also Richard Thurlow, *Fascism in Britain: A History, 1918-1985* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987).

13. Tony Kushner, *The Persistence of Prejudice: Anti-Semitism in British Society During the Second World War* (Manchester: Manchester, 1989), pp. 78-133.

14. James G. McDonald, *My Mission in Israel, 1948-1951* (London: Gollanz, 1951), pp. 22-24.

15. Richard Crossman, *A Nation Reborn* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1960), pp. 69-72.

16. Crossman, *A Nation Reborn*, pp. 69-72.

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17. *Jewish Chronicle*, August 8, 1947; see also August 15, 22, and 29 reports. Most of the British press did deplore the weekend violence.
18. See Benny Morris, *The Road to Jerusalem: Glubb Pasha, Palestine, and the Jews* (London: Tauris, 2002), p. 23.
19. From a Glubb speech of May 6, 1949, quoted by Morris, *The Road to Jerusalem*, p. 23.
20. Morris, *The Road to Jerusalem*, pp. 81-82.
21. Arnold J. Toynbee, *A Study of History* (London: Oxford University Press, 1954), vol. 8 and vol. 12, p. 290. See also Yaacov Herzog, *A People That Dwells Alone* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1975), pp. 21-47. Herzog convincingly refuted Toynbee's claims in a 1961 debate at McGill University, Montreal.
22. Robert S. Wistrich, *Hitler's Apocalypse* (New York: St. Martin's, 1985), p. 228.
23. *The News Line*, June 11, 18, and 30, 1982; July 10, 1982.
24. *Labor Herald*, June 25, 1982, p. 7.
25. Roald Dahl, *Literary Review* (August 1983). The article was reprinted in the mass circulation *Time Out* (August 18-24, 1983).
26. Dahl, *Literary Review*.
27. *New Statesman*, August 26, 1983.
28. See the twenty-eight-page critical study by Trevor Asserson and Elisheva Mironi, *The BBC and the Middle East*, www.bbcwatch.com/old.html; and a thirty-nine-page BBC Watch report on the Iraq war, also by Asserson, at www.bbcwatch.com/fullReport3.htm. Both reports indicated a marked and consistent pro-Palestinian bias.
29. See "Friends Survive Bomb Terror," www.bbc.co.uk, October 14, 2002, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/2328233.stm>; "U.S. Urges Tunisia to Pursue Reform," www.bbc.co.uk, December 2, 2003, <http://newsvote.bbc.co.uk/mpapps/pagetools/print/news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/3257342.stm>; and "Mood of Defiance in Istanbul," www.bbc.co.uk, November 21, 2003, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/3228422.stm>.
30. See Bret Stephens, "Anti-Semitism in Three Steps," *Jerusalem Post*, July 3, 2003.
31. Tzvi Fleischer, "Beeb Outdoes Itself," *The Review*, September 2003, p. 8.
32. A.N. Wilson, "A Demon We Can't Afford to Ignore," *Evening Standard*, April 15, 2002. See also A.N. Wilson, "The Tragic Reality of Israel," *Evening Standard*, October 22, 2001. In this article he basically repudiated Israel's "right to exist,"
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called it an aggressor, and claimed that “it never was a state” and was in any case doomed to failure.

33. “The Battle for the Truth,” *Guardian*, April 17, 2002, lead editorial. After the release of the UN report, the *Guardian* pretended that its findings confirmed “what we said last April”—namely, that “the destruction in Jenin looked and smelled like a crime.” This is quite untrue. See the issue of August 2, 2002 for the paper’s self-justification.

34. Janine di Giovanni, “Inside the Camp of the Dead,” *Times*, April 16, 2002.

35. Phil Reeves, “Amid the Ruins, the Grisly Evidence of a War Crime,” *Independent*, April 16, 2002. The absurdity of this comparison can be easily exposed by a few basic facts: At least 100,000 Chechens have died in Russia’s brutal suppression of their fight for independence since the mid-1990s. In Bosnia between 1991 and 1995, 250,000 people were killed. The documented death toll in Jenin on both sides was about 80.

36. See Greg Barrow, “Jenin Report Reflects UN Dilemma,” BBC Online, August 1, 2003, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/2166871.stm.

37. See *Independent*, January 27, 2003 (which is National Holocaust Memorial Day in Britain). The newspaper’s editor, Simon Kelner, is Jewish.

38. “Independent Cartoon Sparks Protests Over ‘Anti-Semitism,’” *Jewish Chronicle*, January 31, 2003.

39. Editorial, “Cartoon Jews,” *Jerusalem Post*, December 1, 2003.

40. Julie Burchill, “Good, Bad and Ugly,” *Guardian*, November 29, 2003. Burchill made it clear she did not swallow “the modern libel line that anti-Zionism is entirely different from anti-Semitism.”

41. Burchill, “Good, Bad and Ugly.”

42. Yaakov Lappin, “Corrie Compared to Anne Frank,” *Jerusalem Post*, May 9, 2005. Writing in *The British Theater Guide*, Philip Fisher compared the Corrie play to Anthony Sher’s dramatization of the life of Holocaust survivor Primo Levi, who was deported to Auschwitz in 1944: “Like Sir Antony Sher’s ‘Primo,’ ‘My Name Is Rachel Corrie’ is a remarkably moving 90-minute solo piece about human dignity and suffering. Corrie was little more than a girl and while she could be naïve, she also had a saintly aspect, meeting death with the beatific happiness of a martyr.”

43. The *Independent*, June 19, 2002 and the *Guardian*, June 19, 2002, predictably defended Mrs. Blair. See Jonathan Freedland, *Mirror*, June 20, 2003, for a more nuanced view; also Trevor Kavanagh, *Sun*, June 20, 2003, who rubbished Mrs. Blair’s remarks and denounced “the brainwashed suicide zombies [who] want to wipe the State of Israel off the map of the Middle East....” See also “Cherie

Blair's Suicide Bomb Blunder," *Times*, June 19, 2002; and "What Cherie Really Thinks," *Daily Telegraph*, June 19, 2002, which reminded Mrs. Blair that "hope" rather than "despair" motivated the martyrs; first, the hope they would go to heaven if they murdered Jews; second, the hope they would destroy Israel; and third, the hope that their families would receive a \$25,000 reward from the Iraqi and Saudi governments.

44. Michael Freund, "Fired MP Nominated to House of Lords," *Jerusalem Post*, May 10, 2005.

45. Another example is the case of Omar Sheikh, a young Anglo-Pakistani terrorist and former London School of Economics student who masterminded the gruesome beheading of the American-Jewish journalist Daniel Pearl in Karachi in February 2002. Sheikh, a well-educated "Englishman" from a comfortable middle-class immigrant family, is as much the child of British culture as of radical Islam. Once he had metamorphosed into a Muslim militant, hating Jews, reading *Mein Kampf*, and quoting the Koran fused into a seamless web. Omar Sheikh was radicalized in the mid-1990s by the Bosnian massacres in Europe. His militancy was reinforced by a spell in the Afghan training camps of al-Qaida and by his return to Pakistan—a major ferment of Islamic fundamentalism and a hotbed of "anti-Semitism without Jews." Currently, he is on death row in Rawalpindi, Pakistan. For a compelling portrait of Omar Sheikh's passage from "perfect Englishman" to Islamist architect of a barbaric murder (in which Pearl's Jewishness played a key role), see Bernard-Henri Lévy, *Who Killed Daniel Pearl?* (Hoboken, NJ: Melville, 2003), pp. 101-210.

46. See Dominique Thomas, *Londistan: The Voice of Jihad* (Paris: Éditions Michalon, 2003), pp. 129-146. [French] See also Alexandre Del Valle, *The Assault of Islamist Totalitarianism on Democracy* (Paris: Éditions des Syrtes, 2002), pp. 227-247. [French]

47. For Omar Bakri's Salafist (fundamentalist) ideology, see Thomas, *Londistan*, pp. 187-197. For his position on Israel and Jews, see Robert S. Wistrich, "Muslims, Jews, and 9/11," in Paul Iqanski and Barry Kosmin, eds., *A New Anti-Semitism? Debating Judeophobia in Twenty-First-Century Britain* (London: Profile, 2003), pp. 169ff. Al-Muhajiroun's ultimate goal is global hegemony for Islam after the defeat of the West and the establishment of a single, unified Islamic Caliphate under Muslim law.

48. Farrukh Dhondy, "An Islamic Fifth Column," *Wall Street Journal*, December 27, 2001.

49. BBC Online, October 14, 2000.

50. Message of October 2, 2000 on Palestine and the Islamic ruling to Muslims. See Wistrich, "Muslims, Jews, and 9/11," p. 181.

51. See Del Valle, *The Assault*, pp. 243-245. For the rage of young British Muslims over the “Jewish conquerors” in Palestine, see Fuad Nahdi, *Guardian*, May 2, 2003. Nahdi lists “the expansion of illegal Jewish settlements,” “colonial-era racism,” “apartheid-style zoning laws,” Jewish control of Islam holy places and the plight of the refugees. Typical of this distorted litany is the refusal to acknowledge any Muslim, Arab, or Palestinian responsibility.

52. See Wistrich, “Muslims, Jews and 9/11,” pp. 178-179. I was able to see transcripts of the interviews el-Faisal and his wife gave in the course of acting as historical adviser to the Channel 4 documentary *Blaming the Jews* (June 27, 2003). I also viewed some of the cassettes and other material relating to the trial. My thanks to the film’s executive producer, Roger Bolton, for making this material available to me.

53. “Muslim Cleric Guilty of Soliciting Murder,” *Guardian*, February 24, 2003.

54. See Ken Livingstone, “This Is About Israel, Not Anti-Semitism,” *Guardian*, March 4, 2005; and “Zionists Want Their Pound of Flesh,” February 24, 2005, www.mpacuk.org/content/view/369.

55. David Leigh and David Pallister, “Iraq Oil Cash Funded MPs’ Campaigns,” *Guardian*, February 17, 2004.

56. Richard Alleyne, “Jewish MP Pelted with Eggs at War Memorial,” *Daily Telegraph*, April 11, 2005.

57. Yaakov Lappin, “Speakers at London Rally Call for Israel’s Destruction,” *Jerusalem Post*, May 22, 2005. Birgin later clarified that he was referring to Israel “in the sense that it exists now,” which in his view should be replaced with a “democratic secular state in which peace can move forward.”

58. Lappin, “Call for Israel’s Destruction.”

59. Robin Shepherd, “Blind Hatred,” *Jerusalem Post*, September 29, 2004.

60. See Neil Tweedie, “Oxford Poet ‘Wants US Jews Shot,’” April 13, 2002, www.telegraph.co.uk, <http://news.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml?xml=/news/2002/04/13/npauli13.xml&csSheet=/news/2002/04/13/ixnewstop.html>.

61. Yaakov Lappin and Talya Halkin, “Israel Fumes at UK Academics’ Boycott,” *Jerusalem Post*, April 22, 2005; Fania Oz-Salzberger, “Israelis Need Not Apply,” *Wall Street Journal*, May 8, 2005.

62. Anat Koren, “Israeli Hate Campaign Hits London’s Streets,” Supplement, *London Jewish News*, September 2002. Slogans like “Do not buy from Marks & Spencer” recall the Nazi catchwords of 1933, “Don’t buy from Jews.”

63. "I wish Eighty or Ninety Jews Would Die with Each Bomb," editorial, jewishcomment.com, November 30, 2003, www.jewishcomment.com/cgi-bin/news.cgi?id=11&command=shownews&newsid=569.

64. "I Wish Eighty or Ninety Jews Would Die with Each Bomb."

65. "I Wish Eighty or Ninety Jews Would Die with Each Bomb." A police-woman finally booked this individual after he screamed: "You people have been trying to acquire land across the entire globe and will soon own every nation if you are not stopped!"

66. "The New Anti-Semitism," in *CST* (London, 2002), pp. 12-13. See also *CST* (London, 2005), which indicated a sharp and alarming rise to 532 anti-Semitic incidents in 2004, the highest number ever recorded.

67. "Teaching Union Responds to Rise in Anti-Semitism," *Jewish Chronicle*, July 18, 2003.

68. Paul Callan, "Why Are Jews the Victims Once Again?" *Daily Express*, May 26, 2003.

69. See Jennifer Golub, *British Attitudes Towards Jews and Other Minorities*, Working Papers on Contemporary Anti-Semitism (New York: The American Jewish Committee, 1993). Only 7 percent of Britons at that time believed Jews had "too much" influence or behaved in a way that could provoke hostility to them.

70. See ICM Remembrance Day Poll, January 2004, www.icmresearch.co.uk/reviews/2004/jc-jewish-poll-jan-2004.asp. Also see Douglas Davis, "Poll: 18% of Britons 'Moderately Anti-Semitic,'" *Jerusalem Post Online*, January 23, 2004, www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?pagename=JPost/JPArticle/Printer&cid=1074841785670; "British Consider Israel 'Biggest Threat to World Peace,'" www.ananova.com/news/story/sm_835022.html.

71. Jonathan Sacks, "A New Anti-Semitism?" in Iganski and Kosmin, eds., *A New Anti-Semitism?* p. 46.