



Working Paper #2
**This Green and Pleasant Land:
Britain and the Jews**

Shalom Lappin, King's College, London
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Charles Small

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**This Green and Pleasant Land:
Britain and the Jews**

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The Working Papers Series is intended to initiate discussion, debate and discourse on a wide variety of issues as it pertains to the analysis of antisemitism, and to further the study of this subject matter. Please feel free to submit papers to the YIISA working paper series. Contact the YIISA Coordinator or the Editor of the Working Paper Series.

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ABSTRACT

According to a widely accepted view, Britain has provided generous sanctuary to waves of Jewish refugees fleeing European anti-Semitism. It has provided a tolerant environment in which they have progressed steadily from exclusion to full integration into British society. This article, will demonstrate that there are good grounds for regarding this view as largely inaccurate. Recent events have seen the emergence of an uncomfortable environment for Anglo-Jewry. It might be suggested that this is a new phenomenon, conditioned by current demographic and political factors. However, the historical record makes it clear that much of what is now taking place bears a clear connection to a pattern of wide spread hostility towards Jews, as a cultural and ethnic collectivity, that has existed in Britain for centuries. The current wave of anti-

Israel sentiment promoted by many generators of public opinion should be understood as intimately connected to deeply rooted social attitudes towards Jews that have been integral to British history.

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*I will not cease from mental fight,
Nor shall my sword sleep in my hand,
Till we have built Jerusalem
In England's green and pleasant land.*
from William Blake, *Jerusalem*, 1804

Introduction

In 2006 the UK celebrated the 350th anniversary of Cromwell's readmission of Jews to England.¹ This concluded a four hundred year absence of organized Jewish life in the country following the expulsion in 1290 under Edward I. According to a widely accepted view, held by many British Jews and non-Jews alike, Britain has provided generous sanctuary to waves of Jewish refugees fleeing European anti-Semitism. It has given them a tolerant, accepting environment in which they have progressed steadily from poverty and exclusion to full integration into British society. Britain is also frequently credited with leading the fight to save European Jews from the onslaught of Nazism and assisting the survivors to rebuild their lives after the Second World War.

Jonathan Sacks, the Chief Rabbi of the United Synagogue of the UK, expresses this attitude in his reflections on the anniversary of the readmission.

The Jews who came here loved Britain. They owed it their freedom to live as Jews without fear. In many cases they owed it their lives. Perhaps it takes an outsider fully to appreciate how remarkable Britain is. Jews loved its tolerance, its courtesy, its understated yet resolute commitment to liberty and civility. They loved Britain because it was British. It knew who and what it was: the leader of freedom in the modern world, the home of Shakespeare, Newton, the Industrial Revolution and the mother of parliaments. It had confidence in itself, and because it did so, it did not feel threatened by newcomers. Without that confidence, bad things happen.²

In fact, there are good grounds for regarding this view of Britain's traditional relations with Jews as largely inaccurate. Recent events have seen the emergence of a distinctly uncomfortable environment for Anglo-Jewry. It might be suggested that this is a relatively new phenomenon conditioned entirely by current demographic and political factors. However, when one consults the historical record it becomes clear that much of what is now taking place bears a clear connection to a well established pattern of widespread hostility to Jews as members of a cultural and ethnic collectivity that has existed in Britain over many centuries.

¹Earlier versions of this paper were presented in the seminar series of the Yale Initiative for the Interdisciplinary Study of Antisemitism in November 2007, and in the Oxford Hebrew and Jewish Studies Centre Israel Lecture Series in March 2008. I am grateful to the audiences of these forums for thoughtful feedback. I am indebted to Anthony Julius, Rory Miller, and Colin Shindler for invaluable discussion of many of the ideas presented in this paper, and for generous assistance with historical research material. I would also like to thank Mitchell Cohen, Lori Coulter, Eve Garrard, Norman Geras, Jonathan Ginzburg, Ariel Hessayon, Edward Kaplan, Yaakov Lappin, Joe Rothstein, Charles Small, Mort Weinfeld, and two anonymous reviewers from the YIISA Working Paper Series for very useful comments on earlier drafts. I bear sole responsibility for the content of the paper and any mistakes that it may contain.

²Sacks (2006).

The acute hostility to Israel that has become increasingly dominant in large segments of British public discourse is not simply a critical response to Israeli government policy and action, however worthy of criticism these may be. In this paper I will argue that the current wave of anti-Israel sentiment that is on such prominent display in the press, in academic circles, and among other generators of public opinion must be understood as intimately connected to deeply rooted social attitudes towards Jews that have been integral to British history. These attitudes have emerged over many centuries, and they have played a major role in conditioning popular social responses to the Jewish Community in Britain, as well as to Jews abroad. They have also received direct expression in public policy on Jewish issues throughout Britain's history.

To make the case for this view I will briefly survey some of the defining events in the history of British Jewry from its origins in the Middle Ages to the postwar years. I sketch this long historical perspective in order to show the depth and consistency of certain clear themes that have characterized Britain's treatment of its Jews. I will also use these events to illustrate the strategies that the leadership of British Jewry have evolved for dealing with the hostility and ambivalence which has frequently greeted their efforts to integrate into the British social fabric. These survival techniques have also made a significant contribution to the situation that British Jewry occupies in its host country, and they continue to characterize the leadership's response to current events.

Before turning to the historical aspect of this discussion it is necessary to clarify the terms in which much of the contemporary debate on Israel is being conducted in British public discourse.

The Current "Debate" on Israel: Lobbies and Boycotts

Since the start of the second Palestinian Intifada in September 2000, the press and public discussion in Britain have been dominated by strident and obsessive attacks on Israel. Apart of this comment constitutes legitimate, and in some cases, well motivated criticism of Israel's policies and conduct towards the Palestinians living under a repressive occupation in the territories beyond its 1967 borders. Vigorous critique is a feature of normal political debate to which any country involved in a bloody and longstanding conflict must expect to be subjected. However, much of this discourse goes well beyond objections to the policies of a government. It paints Israel as a demonic entity whose people are collectively guilty of unprecedented criminality. The country is portrayed as the instrument of an international conspiracy headed by a "Zionist lobby" that dictates American, British, and, on some versions, all of the West's foreign policy.

These claims are no longer the preserve of extremists operating on the fringes of the political spectrum. They have seeped into mainstream discussion, where they are increasingly accepted as unexceptional. Several recent examples give an indication of how far this process has progressed.³

Clare Short, Secretary of State for International Development in Tony Blair's government from 1997 until May, 2003, posted the following statement on the *Skies are Weeping* website (<http://weepingskies.blogspot.com/>), set up to promote a cantata written in memory of Rachel Corrie, the peace activist killed by an Israeli army bulldozer in Gazain 2003.

I am supporting the World Premiere of the Cantata for Rachel Corrie because there has been the usual campaign to silence even a cantata to commemorate a young woman who gave her life in order to stand for justice. I also believe that US backing for Israeli policies of expansion of the Israeli state and oppression of the Palestinian people is the major cause of bitter division and violence in the world. Best wishes. Clare Short MP

³ For additional cases and a detailed discussion of the rise of a demonizing mythology in mainstream British discourse see Lappin (2003) and (2006).

In September 2006 the All Party Parliamentary Inquiry on Antisemitism released its report, in which it pointed to a disturbing increase in anti-Semitism in Britain in recent years.⁴ It identified the frenzied demonization of Israel, to the exclusion of other countries involved in human rights abuses, in the press and on university campuses as a case of a political debate spilling over into group defamation. It also pointed out that this phenomenon was generating alarming levels of hostility to Jews in Britain, some of it realized in increased violence directed at Jewish targets. In fact the threat of attacks is such that the Jewish Community is the only major ethnic or religious group in Britain that is forced to provide a permanent system of guards and surveillance for its schools, religious centres, and communal institutions, which it maintains largely at its own expense.

The report was greeted with widespread indifference. Many on what currently passes for the liberal left in Britain dismissed it as a deliberate attempt to reduce all criticism of Israel to anti-Semitism. David Clark writing on the report in the *Guardian* said

Real anti-semitism is a serious and growing problem, and there is a need for political consensus about how to tackle it. But debate is poisoned and consensus becomes difficult when allegations of anti-semitism are bandied about for reasons that have nothing to do with fighting racism. An inquiry that wants to confront anti-semitism should also confront those who cheapen the term through reckless misuse.⁵

This response stands in marked contrast to the near universal expressions of concern and support for the victims of prejudice that have attended other government inquiries into racism, such as the Macpherson report, published in February 1999, on the racist murder of teenager Stephen Lawrence in 1993.

Richard Dawkins, who holds the Charles Simyoni Chair for the Public Understanding of Science at Oxford, is well known for his writings on genetics and evolution. He presents himself as a militant defender of scientific humanism, and he has achieved considerable notoriety for his polemics against religion, which he identifies as the major cause of war and repression.⁶ In the course of a recent interview in the *Guardian* on his campaign to promote atheism in America Dawkins is quoted as saying

When you think about how fantastically successful the Jewish lobby has been, though, in fact, they are less numerous I am told - religious Jews anyway – than atheists and [yet they] more or less monopolise American foreign policy as far as many people can see. So if atheists could achieve a small fraction of that influence, the world would be a better place.⁷

Unlike Short, Dawkins has not made the Middle East one of his major public interests. His comment is (if accurately presented in the article) all the more revealing for being an off handed remark tangential to his primary concerns. Not less significant is the fact that it provoked very little critical reaction. These sorts of remarks carry minimal (if any) cost to the career or public credibility of the people who make them, and they are now generally regarded as unexceptional in public discourse here.

Britain is unique among Western countries in hosting a large, high profile campaign to boycott Israel. In 2007 four British unions passed boycott motions of one kind or another. These include the National Union of Journalists, UNISON (the public service union), the Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU), and the Universities and Colleges Union (UCU). The latter three are major organizations representing hundreds of thousands of members. The campaign for an academic boycott of Israel within the UCU (and

⁴ The report is available from the Committee's website at <http://www.thepcaa.org/Report.pdf>.

⁵ Clark (2006). The article carries the subtitle text "Attempts to brand the left as anti-Jewish because of its support of Palestinian rights only make it harder to tackle genuine racism".

⁶ Dawkins (2006).

⁷ MacAskill (2007).

its predecessor unions the AUT and NATFHE) has generated intense controversy both in the UK and abroad.

Organized labour in the United States, and North American academic institutions have, for the most part, strongly rejected the British campaign, particularly the academic boycott.⁸ Active hostility to Israel has increased markedly across Western Europe over the past seven years in a manner comparable to the emergence of extreme anti-Israel sentiment in the UK, and often surpassing it. However, the boycott has gained little if any traction on the Continent. In fact, the Confederation of German Trade Unions has recently spoken out against it.⁹

On September 28, 2007 the UCU announced that it had cancelled its planned year long debate of the boycott (called for by a resolution passed at its annual conference in May 2007) in light of legal advice stating that the proposed academic boycott of Israel would violate the UK's anti-discrimination laws.¹⁰ Many boycott supporters greeted this decision with a volley of protest, charging that pressure from external lobby groups had suppressed free speech in the union through legal manoeuvres.

Six members of the UCU's Strategy and Finance Committee (the body that took the decision), who are affiliated with the UCU Left group, issued a statement explaining the Committee's reasons for accepting its lawyer's advice. In the course of this clarification they say "We do not doubt that well-funded groups are ready to engage in legal action against the Union, but even before that stage was reached, the Trustees made it clear that they would feel obliged to fulfil their legal duty to ensure that union funds were only spent on lawful purposes."¹¹ The hint at the dark workings of an illicit lobby waiting in the wings to bankrupt the union with expensive legal action is unmistakable here.

Interestingly, Anthony Lester, the head of the legal team that advised the UCU to drop the campaign, is a leading human rights lawyer who helped pioneer anti-racism and equal opportunity legislation over the past thirty years. The revelation of this fact seems to have had little impact on those boycott advocates who are describing the union's withdrawal from the motion as another instance of the effectiveness of a powerful international "Zionist" operation to suppress all criticism of Israel.

At its May 2008 conference the UCU Executive introduced a slightly modified version of the 2007 resolution, and it was passed without opponents of the motion being permitted a significant opportunity to speak against it.¹²

While the influence of the "Israel/Zionist Lobby" is an increasingly prominent theme of public discussion in Britain, other cases of lobbying which affect both British government policy and academic freedom cause little, if any, concern, even when they are widely reported in the press. On December 14, 2006 the Attorney General, Lord Goldsmith, acting on Tony Blair's instructions, cancelled a major criminal investigation by the Serious Fraud Office into allegations that the British arms manufacturer BAE was paying large bribes to Saudi government officials in order to secure military contracts. The inquiry was

⁸ See the statement of American Labour Unions of July 18 condemning the boycott at <http://www.spme.net/cgi-bin/articles.cgi?ID=2647>, and Traubmann (2007) on the statement by 300 US university presidents against the boycott.

⁹ The Deutsche Gewerkschaftsbund (DGB)'s anti-boycott resolution of September 6, 2007 is reported on the Jewish Labor Committee website at http://www.jewishlaborcommittee.org/2007/09/german_unions_follow_us_labor.html.

¹⁰ The UCU press release on this decision appears on its website at <http://www.ucu.org.uk/index.cfm?articleid=2829>.

¹¹ The full statement is available at <http://www.engageonline.org.uk/blog/article.php?id=1456>.

¹² See Eve Garrard's account of the process through which this motion was adopted, at <http://normblog.typepad.com/normblog/2008/05/passing-motion-25-by-eve-garrard.html>.

halted to avoid losing Saudi business and to prevent possible damage to Britain's relations with the Saudi regime. In his statement announcing the decision Lord Goldsmith said

It has been necessary to balance the need to maintain the rule of law against the wider public interest. No weight has been given to commercial interests or to the national economic interest.

The prime minister and the foreign and defence secretaries have expressed the clear view that continuation of the investigation would cause serious damage to UK/Saudi security, intelligence and diplomatic cooperation, which is likely to have seriously negative consequences for the UK

public interest in terms of both national security and our highest priority foreign policy objectives in the Middle East.¹³

The OECD issued a sharp criticism of Britain's action, which, it said, may have violated the country's treaty obligations on the elimination of bribery and corruption in the awarding of international contracts.¹⁴ This affair represents a clear interference in domestic British legal processes by Saudi economic and political interests. It has also damaged Britain's international standing within the OECD. While it was widely covered in the media, it has had little impact on mainstream political debate on the influence of foreign lobbies in British public policy.

In 2006 Cambridge University Press (CUP) published *Alms for Jihad* by J. Millard Burrard Robert O. Collins, both of the University of California at Santa Barbara. The book studies several Islamic charities which, the authors claim, have provided funds to terrorist groups. In the Spring of 2007 Sheikh Khalid bin Mahfouz, a Saudi businessman and banker, brought a libel suit in the British courts against CUP over assertions made in the book concerning members of his family. Libel laws in the UK strongly favour the plaintiff. To avoid a costly court case CUP withdrew the book from publication, destroyed the remaining unsold copies, and asked libraries to remove it from circulation. It also paid an undisclosed amount in a settlement. bin Mahfouz has brought previous libel suits in Britain against several other authors and publishers who attempted to link him to financial support for Al Qaeda. All of them were settled without a trial, through the payment of damages. He has not been required to appear in court to provide evidence that the assertions which he has challenged are false.¹⁵

These suits would seem to constitute an obvious instance of a wealthy businessman using his financial resources, and the skewed British libel laws to suppress the publication of material that he disapproves of. They have attracted little, if any attention in the British media, and no reaction from people who express deep anxiety over the role of pro-Israel pressure groups in Britain and America in restricting discussion on the Middle East.

Given the intensity of this discussion and the deep animosity to Israel on display in much of the British media, the "Lobby" does not appear to be enjoying much success in controlling public debate. Its inability to constrain this debate is further indicated by the best seller status of Mearsheimer and Walt's *The Israel Lobby and US Foreign Policy* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2007), and the massive publicity generated by their article "The Israel Lobby" in the *London Review of Books* (March 23, 2006). The widespread protests over the putative suppression of criticism at the hands of the "Lobby" are strikingly selective in their concerns and bear little relation to the facts.

Arab and Islamic governments provide substantial funding for Middle East and Islamic studies programs throughout UK and American universities without attracting the stigma of illicit lobbying. Saudia Arabia supports Mosques and Islamic religious institutions in Britain and throughout Europe, sometimes with acutely problematic consequences, but this phenomenon does not seem to provoke the same sort of intense

¹³Leigh and Evans (2007).

¹⁴Rob Evans (2007).

¹⁵Donadio (2007).

anxiety as the "Israel lobby" does among most representatives of what is now packaged as "progressive" opinion in Britain.

The theme of collective Jewish malevolence driving a powerful international conspiracy that subverts the workings of government, the press, the economy, and foreign affairs is a staple of classic anti-Jewish mythology. Its rapid permeation of British public discourse requires explanation. If the popular view of Britain as historically benign in its view of Jews is accurate, then the rise of Jewish conspiracy obsessions in the context of Israel demonology constitutes a new phenomenon in which traditional European attitudes

have been imported into a society where they have previously been denied a firm hold. One might seek to explain this event by pointing to the emergence of a multicultural ethic in Britain that, in legitimizing alternative cultural norms, seeks to appease radical Islamist ideas concerning Israel and Jews.

Rabbi Sacks seems to suggest something along these lines when he says

The paradox of our time is that multiculturalism, designed to make minorities feel more at home, has had the opposite effect. Britain is a less tolerant society today than it was fifty years ago when I was at school. Never once in those years did I experience anti-Semitism. Many of our children and grandchildren do experience it. Our post-modern culture with its moral relativism and its emphasis on rights rather than responsibilities has, by the law of unintended consequences, made things worse, not better.¹⁶

In fact, this explanation is not convincing. While the growth of Islamist ideology in Britain has, as in the rest of Europe, played a significant role in promoting anti-Israel and anti-Jewish attitudes, Islamists do not occupy the positions of influence required to account for the current onslaught. The journalists of the British press, the politicians, the academics, and the leaders of the unions who are conducting this campaign and importing it into the political mainstream are, for the most part, neither Islamists nor Muslims. Moreover, “liberal” apologists for radical Islamism do not, in general, embrace its hostility to feminism, gay rights, or Hindus. If they are sympathetic to its deep hatred of Israel and its anti-Semitism, then it is, apparently, because these resonate with their own beliefs.

The popular notion of Britain as a society tolerant of Jews seriously misrepresents the history of the country’s relations with its Jewish population. This history reveals a widespread and deeply rooted view of Jews as fundamentally alien to British life and illicit as a collectivity. Within the confines of this view Jews are acceptable to the extent that they can be rendered invisible through Anglicization, and they are problematic in proportion to the explicitness of their Jewish cultural identity. The social entry that Jews have been granted is, in general, conditional upon suppression of one’s Jewish associations and cultural properties in the public domain, with those who distance themselves from these associations completely enjoying the highest level of acceptance.

These attitudes have shaped British conduct over many centuries on a wide range of issues, from Jewish immigration to Jewish political rights. That Jews are now fully enfranchised and protected by anti-discrimination laws has not eradicated many of the social views that have stigmatised and excluded them in the past. Moreover, the leadership of the British Jewish Community has over, many generations, evolved strategies for surviving in this environment that involve accommodating and cooperating with many of the demands imposed by the non-Jewish framework in which they live.

When considered from this perspective, the current outburst of anti-Israel demonology and Zionist conspiracy mongering is not an entirely novel phenomenon foreign to traditional British political behaviour. Instead it appears as a new version of a longstanding hostility to Jewish collectivity, a hostility to which Israel is the greatest challenge in modern history. The current reaction to Israel, then, mixes

¹⁶Sacks (2006).

legitimate political criticism with deeply held social attitudes toward Jews. It is frequently difficult to disentangle these elements in the debate now occupying such a prominent place in British public discourse. To understand these attitudes more clearly and to trace their sources, it is necessary to recall several important occurrences that have determined the shape of British Jewish history.

Medieval Persecution and Expulsion

Organized Jewish life in England began with the Norman invasion in 1066. The Jews came to England in the Medieval period largely from France and Germany, and they were concentrated primarily in London.

They were dependent upon money lending and commerce for their livelihood, due the restrictions imposed on Jews owning land and their exclusion from craft guilds. They achieved a fair degree of prosperity in their initial century in the country, and they supplied the royal treasury with an important part of its revenue through a special department of the Exchequer (the Jewish Exchequer) devoted specifically to collecting taxes from Jews. Henry III subsequently subjected them to ruinously heavy levies (tallages) to finance his military campaigns and building projects. This resulted in the virtual bankrupting of the Community, which greatly undermined the incentive for his successor, Edward I, to continue the royal protection that secured their right of residence in England.¹⁷

Incitement and violence against the Jews of England began in the twelfth century. The first recorded instance of the blood libel occurred in 1144, when Jews were accused of the ritual murder of William of Norwich during the Passover period.¹⁸ Further charges of ritual murder were made in, among other places, Gloucester in 1168, Bury St. Edmunds in 1181, and Bristol in 1183, and they were accompanied by escalating attacks against the local Jewish Communities. These accusations continued in England throughout the thirteenth century, reaching a climax in 1255, when close to 100 Jews were accused of the alleged ritual murder of a young boy, Hugh of Lincoln. Nineteen were executed, but the remainder were eventually released.

England was the first European country to implement, by royal decree in 1218, a Church directive that Jews wear a badge to distinguish them from Christians. This was part of a series of anti-Jewish measures that the Church authorities mandated at the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215, and England led the rest of Europe in enforcing these measures.

Large scale violence against the Jews began at the end of the twelfth century, when a Jewish delegation appeared at the gates of Westminster Abbey in an attempt to present gifts to Richard I, on the occasion of his coronation on September 3, 1189. They were prevented from entering the cathedral and rioting against Jewish homes throughout London followed, with many killed or injured. The attacks spread to other parts of the country during the next six months, culminating in the bloody assault on the Jews of York during Passover in March 1190 in which over 150 people were killed.

In the next hundred years numerous attacks occurred in the course of which several small Jewish communities were entirely destroyed. In addition, local exclusions were imposed, banning Jews from many towns and counties. On July 18, 1290 Edward issued an act expelling all Jews from England as of November 1 of that year. This effectively ended the organized Jewish presence in Britain for four hundred years.

Although Jews did not reside openly in England after 1290 until the readmission in 1656, a community of Spanish and Portuguese crypto-Jews (alternatively referred to as “Conversos”, “New Christians”, and

¹⁷ For a detailed and authoritative description of Medieval English Jewry and the expulsion see Roth (1964), chapters 1-5.

¹⁸ For a history of the blood libel see Julius (forthcoming). Julius’ book provides a comprehensive social and cultural history of anti-Semitism in Britain from the Middle Ages until contemporary times.

“Marranos”), fleeing the Inquisition in their native countries, established itself in London in the sixteenth century. They lived under cover of their forced conversion to Christianity, and they were in constant fear of being exposed. In 1609 an argument broke out within the Portuguese group, leading one faction to denounce its adversaries as Jews. This resulted in the expulsion of the entire Portuguese Converso community. Interestingly, Shakespeare’s *Merchant of Venice* and Marlowe’s *The Jew of Malta* were both written and performed less than twenty years before this event, indicating the persistence of virulently anti-Jewish imagery in the popular imagination of the Elizabethan era.

England's action was the first global deportation of Jews from a country in Europe. It occurred over two hundred years prior to the Spanish expulsion of Jews and Muslims in 1492, and it set a precedent for later events of this kind. The animosity that motivated it was rooted in a toxic combination of religious prejudice and economic resentment that provided the engine for European anti-Semitism throughout subsequent centuries. While the number of Jews in medieval England was small (Roth (1964) cites an estimate of 16,000 in 1290), the fact that it played a particularly prominent role in the anti-Jewish persecutions of the Middle Ages is significant.¹⁹ This history established a set of cultural attitudes that continued to influence mainstream British perceptions of Jews well beyond the medieval period.

Contemporary popular British approaches to the country's persecution of its Jews in the Middle Ages contrast sharply with the dominant view of the Spanish expulsion. The latter is generally acknowledged as both a Jewish and a European catastrophe. The former does not, in general, figure in the medieval history curriculum for UK schools, and it is rarely mentioned in the many documentaries on medieval English history aired in the British media. It is airbrushed out of most official and unofficial discussions of the monarchs under which the violence and the expulsions took place, and it occupies no real position in the country's understanding of its medieval past, a period that is widely venerated as of formative importance in laying the foundations for British culture and institutions.

Cromwell and the Readmission

According to a popular account of the readmission, the Puritan revolution produced amore favourable attitude towards Jews, and in 1656 Cromwell extended an invitation to Dutch Jews to settle in England. In fact, no such invitation was issued, and the recognition of the right of Jews to live in the country was not achieved through legislation or executive decree.²⁰

In 1655 Rabbi Menashe ben Israel, an influential religious leader of the Amsterdam Community, arrived in London to submit a request to Cromwell for readmission of Jews. He had written a pamphlet describing his proposed conditions for their residence. These included freedom of religious practise, the right to trade and engage in commerce, repeal of the Medieval laws enacted against Jews, and communal autonomy for internal issues. The plan also specified the appointment of a special government officer to control the influx of Jewish immigrants, an oath of allegiance to the government, and strict surveillance of the newcomers.

Cromwell was interested in improving Britain's trade and commercial position, and he saw considerable advantage in attracting well connected Jewish merchants from Amsterdam to relocate their business activities to London. He presented the proposal to the Council of State on November 12, 1655, but the Council was unable to agree on it. It referred the request to an external consultative conference, which met on December 4 and again on December 18 of that year. Various religious figures, and business interests in

¹⁹ See Roth (1964), p. 91 and p. 276, note (a) for a discussion of the size of the Jewish population in England in this period.

²⁰For descriptions of the readmission and Jewish life in the time of the Restoration see Roth (1964) chapters 7-8, Katz (1994), and Hessayon (2006).

the City of London expressed considerable opposition at these sessions, and noisy popular resentment was also very much in evidence. In the end, the conference did not reach a decision, and Cromwell adjourned it.

At the time of this controversy a community of Spanish Converso merchants existed in London. England and Spain had been at war since the Fall of 1655, and, as a result, this community was in a vulnerable position. Government officials seized the property of a wealthy member of the group, Antonio Rodriguez Robles, when he was denounced as a Spanish national by one of his rivals. He petitioned Cromwell for restoration of his interests on the grounds that he was not Spanish, but a Portuguese Jew who had fled the

Inquisition. After some delay the Council of State appears to have approved the petition, and Robles' property was returned to him on May 16, 1656. This action created the informal basis for legalizing the Conversos' status as Jews, and they established a Synagogue on Cree Church Lane in London. It was through this individual precedent, then, that the existing Jewish presence in England, previously concealed by forced conversion, was recognized. Immigration of small numbers Jews from the Spanish and Portuguese Community in Amsterdam followed.

The precedent on the basis of which the Jewish presence in London was accepted did not provide legal recognition of a Jewish right to live in England. With the restoration of the monarchy under Charles II in 1660 (in fact, immediately after Cromwell's death in 1658) a significant movement of reaction agitated to reverse the readmission policy. Charles had no sympathy for this movement, and he deflected its demands, effectively placing the Jews under royal protection.

In the years following the restoration the Jewish Community in London was able to prosper and slowly expand. They were left largely in peace and, several of its wealthier members achieved a high degree of social acceptance. However, they were subject to numerous economic and political restrictions (so, for example, they were not permitted to trade in retail as freemen of the City, nor could they occupy major political or judicial positions). When attempts were made to rescind the legal constraints imposed on them, widespread popular opposition emerged in which the traditional hostility was on full display.

The Jewish Naturalization Bill (the Jew Bill) of 1753 provides a particularly clear instance of this pattern.²¹ Alien residents were subject to a variety of disadvantages, such as prohibitions against owning or inheriting land, owning ships, or trading with overseas plantations. Jews could escape some of these limitations through a costly procedure of partial naturalization known as 'endenization', which still did not remove the ban on land inheritance. They were not, however, eligible for full naturalization, as this was open only to Christians. In the Spring of 1753 both houses of Parliament passed a bill permitting naturalization of foreign born Jews who had been resident in Britain or Ireland for at least three years, and it became law with royal approval. During the following six months a massive popular campaign against the law was waged in the press, public meeting places, churches, and the streets. It featured traditional anti-Jewish prejudice, and played on the spectre of foreign Jews taking control of the country. This campaign was so vociferous that it forced repeal of the law on December 20, 1753.

Pogroms in Poland and the Ukraine in 1768 brought a wave of impoverished East European Jewish immigrants to London, where they were supported by the Jewish Community. This influx created social problems and resentments that resulted in the government imposing restrictions on Jewish immigration in 1771 and 1774. The Jewish Community itself supported these restrictions because of the negative reaction that the immigrants were attracting, and the strain on its charitable resources. The Lord Mayor of London offered free passage to Jewish immigrants willing to return to their countries of origin.²² Variations on this response to Jewish immigration were to be repeated throughout the first half of the twentieth century.

²¹ See Roth (1964), pp. 212-223 for the details of the Jew Bill controversy.

²² See Roth (1964), pp. 235-236.

Popular notions of Cromwell inviting the Jews to return to England and their arriving to a generous welcome have no basis in fact. The opposition that Cromwell encountered in his attempt to secure legislative approval for Rabbi ben Manashe's proposal for readmission led him to abandon it. He succeeded in achieving limited recognition of the legitimacy of an already existing Jewish presence in London through an indirect precedent. This ruling was made in the context of a war with Spain in which Converso Jews fleeing the Inquisition were acknowledged as less problematic than agents of the Spanish monarchy. Once permitted to live openly in the country, the Jews were able to increase their numbers and gradually secure their positions through a series of informal arrangements and incremental improvements. Their willingness

to sustain a low public profile was a perennially necessary condition of this process. Their position as a collectivity remained tenuous, and when efforts were made to address this position through progressive legislative changes that would have granted them recognition as a Community with guaranteed rights, strong popular opposition and deep prejudice quickly emerged into full view.

Political Emancipation

Another popular misconception concerning Anglo-Jewish history is the idea that Jews were granted full political rights by an act of Parliament in 1858. This is by no means the case. Until this date Jews were excluded from sitting as members of the House of Commons by the requirement that all newly elected MPs take a Christian oath in order to take their seats. Many Jews converted in order to overcome the legal and social obstacles that barred them from a wide variety of professions, and many public offices.

Four bills for Jewish emancipation were introduced into Parliament between 1830 and 1836, but, but none of them passed. The first two were defeated in the House of Commons, while the latter two were overturned in the House of Lords. A Jewish Disabilities Bill was blocked in the House of Lords twice in 1848, and again in 1849, 1851, and each year from 1853 to 1857. Between 1830 and 1858 thirteen bills designed to permit Jewish membership in the House of Commons were rejected because of strong opposition, most of it in the House of Lords.²³

Between 1847 and 1852 Lionel Rothschild was elected to the Commons three times and, on each occasion, he was prevented from taking his seat. In 1858 Disraeli introduced a bill that permitted each chamber to determine its own conditions for membership independently. It encountered significant opposition in the Lords, but it was eventually passed by both Houses. This law resulted in the Commons suspending the required Christian oath for MP's, and Rothschild was finally allowed to enter the House with an alternative pledge, eleven years after first being elected.

Contrary to a widespread impression, no general act of Jewish political emancipation was adopted. Rothschild established an individual precedent that permitted Jews to enter the House of Commons. This precedent applied only to the Parliament in which it was passed, and it would have lapsed with its dissolution. To prevent this from happening, the provisions of the bill modifying the oath for the Commons were converted to a Standing Order, not bounded in time, in 1860. It was only with the passage of the Parliamentary Oaths Act in 1866 that Jews gained the right to sit in the Lords.

There is a clear analogy between the way in which Jews were readmitted to England in 1656 and the process of their political enfranchisement in the latter half of the nineteenth century. In both cases (as with the Jewish Naturalization Bill of 1753) attempts to extend rights to Jews through legislation failed, due to strong political opposition with a significant popular base. Eventually an individual precedent was created that was gradually expanded to open the way for incremental Jewish entry into British public life. It might be thought that this pattern is not unique to Jewish issues, but simply constitutes the way in which major social change is achieved in Britain. It is a country without a written constitution or charter of rights, and it

²³ For an account of the struggle for Jewish political rights in the House of Commons see Enriques (1968), and Roth (1964) Chapter 11 and Epilogue.

has historically relied on case law for its progress to more liberal and democratic institutions. Such a view would miss the sharp contrast that exists between the history of Jewish rights and that of other social causes in this country.

Broadly based movements for progressive reforms launched large scale public campaigns from the end of the eighteenth century throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. These were responsible for major changes in British institutions and attitudes. So, for example, seven years of protest and agitation throughout Britain by the Catholic Association produced the Catholic Emancipation Act of 1829. A large

abolitionist movement with strong support from churches and liberal opinion brought about the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act in 1807, and the Slavery Abolition Act of 1833. A militant, well organised suffragette campaign achieved the right to vote for women over 30 in 1918, and for women over 21 in 1928. Beginning with the Chartists in 1838 the British labour movement waged a continuing struggle for the economic and social rights of workers which eventually brought about acceptance of collective bargaining, extensive employee protection legislation, and the creation of the welfare state.

It is important to note that there were prominent supporters of Jewish political rights among liberals, dissenting Protestants, and evangelicals.²⁴ Thomas Babington Macaulay's speech "Jewish Disabilities", delivered to the House of Commons on April 17, 1833, provides one of the more compelling statements of liberal principle in the nineteenth century. However, no genuine political movement supporting Jewish emancipation, of the kind that generated the great reforms of British public life, ever emerged in Britain. This matter remained a marginal concern to progressive circles, as well as to other political constituencies in the country.

Moreover, the Jews themselves were deeply ambivalent about the emancipation debate in Parliament, with a significant number not wanting to see it turned into a high profile public issue for fear of attracting a negative response. Here, as in previous (and subsequent) cases the Anglo-Jewish leadership preferred to pursue a traditional strategy of protecting Jewish concerns through quiet diplomatic engagement. They relied on a few prominent members of the Community to bring influence to bear on sympathetic figures in the British political elite. This strategy led them to shun public political activism in favour of discreet appeals to authority.

Immigration and Anti-Alien Restrictions

A large wave of East European Jewish immigrants came to Britain in the twenty-five year period from 1880 until 1905, escaping pogroms in Russia and anti-Jewish government actions in other East European countries. Many of them settled in the East End of London, where they established a major centre of Jewish communal life. This influx increased the Jewish population in Britain from 65,000 in 1880 to 300,000 in 1914, with 200,000 concentrated in London.²⁵

The arrival of large numbers of generally impoverished East European Jews gave rise to a strong anti-alien response that manifested itself in hostile press comment and popular campaigns demanding that the government restrict immigration. The Conservative government introduced the Aliens Act in April 1905, which was approved by Parliament and passed into law on August 11 of that year. The Act specified a number of criteria by which immigration officials could exclude aliens from entering the country. It was the

²⁴ This period also saw the emergence of a small but prominent philo-Semitic element in English literature, as illustrated in some of the work of George Eliot, particularly *Daniel Deronda*, published in 1873. This positive view of Jews co-existed with the persistence of virulently negative images, like Dicken's Fagin in *Oliver Twist* (1838), within English literary culture of the nineteenth century.

²⁵ For a discussion of turn of the century East European Jewish immigration to Britain and the sequence of alien restriction acts which it provoked see Defries (2002), Chapters 2 and 5, and London (2000), Chapter 2.

first of a series of measures adopted in the early years of the twentieth century in order to severely limit entry of newcomers into the country.

These restrictions were, in large part, motivated by widespread animosity to the presence of Jewish immigrants. Arthur Balfour, the Conservative Prime Minister under whom the Aliens Act was passed (the same Balfour who, as Foreign Secretary, later issued the Balfour Declaration of 1917 for the establishment

of a Jewish national home in Palestine) gave clear expression to this current of public opinion in his speech during the debate on the bill in the House of Commons, in July 1905

....it would not be to the advantage of the civilisation of the country that there should be an immense body of persons who, however patriotic, able, and industrious, however much they threw themselves into the national life, still by their own action, remained a people apart and not merely held a religion differing from the vast majority of their fellow country-men, but only inter-married among themselves.²⁶

The First World War greatly intensified anti-alien sentiment, with hostility to Jewish immigrants prominent in this movement. There was strong pressure for the mass internment of all people from enemy countries, which would have affected large numbers of German and Austrian Jews. In 1914 the government passed the Aliens Restriction Act, which granted it special emergency powers allowing it to deport aliens, and requiring them to register with the police. In 1918 it imposed additional administrative restrictions that included a review of naturalization certificates issued during the war, a ban on civil service positions for people who were neither citizens of Britain or an Allied country (Russia ceased to be an ally after the Bolshevik revolution of 1917), and the requirement of identity cards for aliens. These restrictions and the conditions of the 1914 Act were extended under the Aliens Restriction Act amendment of 1919. Additional regulatory procedures were specified in the Aliens Order of 1920. As a result of these bills and administrative provisions Jewish immigration to Britain was virtually cut off by the end of the First World War.

Agitation against aliens in general, and Jewish immigrants in particular continued throughout the 1920s. David Cesarani (1989) cites a series of articles published in *The Times* at the end of November 1924 on "Alien London" as expressing the tenor of this campaign. One of the articles contains the following statement.

They stand aloof- not always without a touch of oriental arrogance- from their fellow citizens. They look upon us with suspicion and a certain contempt. Mixed marriages between orthodox Jews and Gentiles are forbidden. These people remain an alien element in our land.²⁷

Throughout this period William Joynson-Hicks, a leading Conservative politician, promoted anti-Jewish attitudes within the government. In stark contrast to Balfour, he was also a strong opponent of Jewish settlement in Palestine, and he played a leading role in supporting the Palestinian Arab lobby in Britain.²⁸ He became Foreign Secretary in 1924 in Stanley Baldwin's government. During his tenure (1924-1929) he reinforced the discriminatory practises that the Home Office had been implementing against East European Jewish immigrants prior to his assuming his position.

Although the Aliens Act was passed by a Conservative government, it was applied by its Liberal successor. Moreover, significant sections of the Labour movement, particularly the TUC, and the left supported the

²⁶ Quoted in Defries (2002), p. 28.

²⁷ *The Times*, November 27, 1924, cited in Cesarani (1989).

²⁸ See Cesarani (1989) for an account of Joynson-Hicks' activities as an anti-Jewish politician.

exclusion of Jewish immigrants and participated in the agitation against them that provided public support for anti-alien legislation.²⁹

While anti-alien agitators and politicians frequently avoided explicit reference to Jews, they used the rhetoric of xenophobia to press for the curtailment of Jewish immigration, and to support the imposition of severe restrictions on Jewish immigrants who had succeeded in entering the country. This form of anti-

alien discourse anticipated later campaigns in which anti-Semitism and other types of racism have been encoded in more indirect and politically palatable terms.

When large numbers of desperate Jewish refugees fleeing the Nazis sought sanctuary in Britain in the 1930s there was no need for new immigration controls to exclude them. The necessary restrictions had already been installed over the previous two decades to stem the flow from previous anti-Jewish violence in Eastern Europe.

Refugees from Nazism and Survivors of the Holocaust

After the Nazis took power in Germany in 1933 Britain, like other western countries, was besieged by requests from German Jews seeking to escape the escalating violence of the regime. Their numbers were greatly increased in 1938 with Germany's annexation of Austria and the Sudentland in Czechoslovakia, followed by the *Kristallnacht* pogrom. Austrian, Czech, Slovak, and Polish Jews joined German refugees in their flight from the Nazi onslaught.

Throughout the pre-war period Britain maintained its system of rigorous controls on immigration, treating Jewish refugees as aliens subject to the existing restrictions.³⁰ These limited entry to people who were of benefit to the British economy. As the 1930s was a time of economic depression, the prospects for refugees obtaining visas under these conditions were minimal. The German Jewish refugees who did come to Britain were financially supported by the British Jewish Community under the terms of a commitment that it made to the government. The Community did not extend this commitment to Austrian and Czech refugees after the *Anschluss* of Austria, as it could no longer afford to absorb the expanding numbers of visa applicants.

The labour movement, as represented by the Trade Union Congress (TUC), supported the government's policy of drastically limiting the flow of Jewish refugees. While strongly opposing the Nazi government and its persecution of Jews, it did not feel that it could accommodate an influx of cheap labour at a time of economic hardship.³¹

One area of the economy which did enjoy a robust demand for labour was the market for female servants, and many of the Jewish refugees who came to Britain in the pre-war period gained access under a plan to import foreign domestic workers. As domestics were not heavily unionized and organized labour did not see them as a major area of concern, this was a relatively soft route around immigration restrictions.³²

There were notable exceptions to the TUC endorsement of government policy. Eleanore Rathbone, a social activist, feminist, and independent MP, campaigned tirelessly throughout the 1930s and the war for government action to save European Jewry. Roy Harrod, an Oxford economist and a member of the Labour Party, argued that immigration promoted growth, and urged the labour movement to support a liberalized

²⁹ See Cohen (1985). Cohen also documents government policies designed to exclude aliens, particularly Jews from some of the key benefits of the welfare state that emerged in the early years of the last century.

³⁰ For detailed accounts of Britain's response to Jewish refugees from Nazism see London (2000), Kushner (1994), and Wasserstein (1979).

³¹ For the attitude of the British labour movement to the refugee crisis see Kushner (1994) Chapter 2.

³² On refugees in domestic service see Kushner (1994) Chapter 3 and London (2000) pp.75-80.

approach to refugees. However they, as well as other critics, had little if any impact on either government policy or organized labour's restrictionist position.³³

Throughout the 1930s and the war years the British policy on Jewish refugees was driven by the view that only small numbers of individuals who came from cultural and professional backgrounds that facilitated assimilation into British society could be accepted. In general, a program of temporary refuge and

resettlement abroad was the strongly preferred option, with most refugees granted only transitional status. Government officials argued that if large numbers of the “wrong” kind of refugee were admitted, it would create anti-Semitism in the country. Hence a West to East hierarchy was applied on which Germans were considered more desirable than Austrians, who in turn, were ranked above Czechs, followed by Poles and other East Europeans. The Home Secretary Samuel Hoare expressed this attitude in his comments to an Anglo-Jewish delegation on April 1, 1938.

It would be necessary for the Home Office to discriminate very carefully as to the type of refugee who could be admitted to this country. If a flood of the wrong type of immigrants were allowed in there might be a serious danger of anti-semitic feeling being aroused in this country. The last thing which we wanted here was the creation of a Jewish problem.³⁴

Although the Jewish Community invested vast efforts and resources in refugee relief, its leadership, for the most part, accepted the government restrictions and the rationale behind them. Otto Schiff, a leading figure in Anglo-Jewish refugee work, responded to Hoare’s remark in the following terms.

It was very difficult to get rid of a refugee ... once he had entered and spent a few months in this country. The imposition of a visa was especially necessary in the case of Austrians who were largely of the shopkeeper and small trader class, and would therefore prove much more difficult to emigrate than the average German who had come to the United Kingdom.³⁵

The extent to which the leadership of Anglo-Jewry had internalized the government policy on refugees is indicated by the reservations that a Jewish immigrant liaison officer expressed to the Chief Rabbi, J.H. Hertz, over the hostel for German Yeshiva students that the Chief Rabbi was sponsoring.

How can this loyalty be demanded of any body of young men who are taught nothing about English ways, English history, or the English outlook? If they are not to be trained in this loyalty from the very first week of their arrival, what chance have they of merely comprehending, let alone feeling, that love of England which is the veritable fountainhead of these traditions of Anglo-Jewry of which we English Jews are so proud and which is itself the strongest bulwark against antisemitism in our midst.³⁶

This correspondence took place in the context of an effort by the Community to resist a government move to intern all refugees from Axis countries after the outbreak of war in 1939.

The *Kindertransports* of 1938 brought approximately 10,000 Jewish children from Germany and Austria to Britain. They are frequently cited as an instance of British generosity towards Jews escaping the Nazis, and indeed they stand as an important act of decency in a dark time. A point that is not generally addressed in

³³ See Kushner (1994) pp. 74-76 on Harrod, and Chapter 6 on Rathbone.

³⁴ Home Office minutes of the meeting with the Jewish delegation, April 1, 1938, PROHO 213/42. Quoted in London (2000) p. 61.

³⁵ Home Office minutes of the meeting with the Jewish delegation, April 1, 1938, PROHO 213/42. Quoted in London (2000) p. 61.

³⁶ Rothschild archives, London RAL 000/315C. Quoted in Kushner (1994), p. 154.

discussions of this operation is the fact that the children were forced to come alone because British immigration regulations, rather than German exit controls, prevented their parents from accompanying them. These regulations insured that they became orphans in the course of the war that followed their arrival.

A significant feature of government refugee policy was an insistence on not recognizing Jews as a distinct entity in any official rules or procedures. This was ostensibly motivated by the desire to avoid discrimination among different groups of refugees. In fact, it seriously disadvantaged Jews and created a bizarre paradox. The Jews were a primary target of Nazi racial persecution and genocide, but Britain, as well as other allied countries, refused to acknowledge them as such in their refugee programs. In fact, political refugees, Jewish or non-Jewish, who were pursued for their resistance activities were given strong preference for asylum over economic or “racial” refugees, a class that included most Jewish victims of the Nazis.

During the war the government continued to enforce its highly restrictive immigration procedures, even for small numbers of Jews who were able to escape Nazi controlled territory to neutral countries like Portugal or Turkey, that accepted them on condition that they be transferred to other venues. At the end of the war approximately 60,000 Jewish refugees remained in Britain, with another 10,000-20,000 having entered and then re-emigrated or been deported. Therefore, from 1933-45 a total of 70,000-80,000 received refuge in the UK.³⁷ In addition, a net total of 216,000 moved to mandatory Palestine in the 1930s, until the government White Paper of 1939 curtailed Jewish immigration there.

The British response to the refugee crisis before and during the war was not different in kind from that of other western democracies. The United States also imposed severe limitations on immigration in 1924 which remained in effect throughout the 1930s and the war years. Canada had perhaps the worst record, accepting fewer than 5,000 Jewish refugees between 1933 and 1945.³⁸

Britain and the United States co-managed the Evian Conference of July 1938, which was designed to give the appearance of an international effort to assist the refugees while avoiding any substantive measures to accommodate them. Britain was particularly concerned that the conference not create a situation in which East European countries like Poland and Romania could use liberalized immigration policies in the west to unload their large and unwanted Jewish populations. Similarly, the Anglo-American Bermuda Conference in April 1943 was called in response to growing public pressure in both countries to rescue victims of the Nazi genocide, with both governments making certain that it yielded no tangible results.

Significant differences between British and American policy on assistance to victims of the Holocaust began to emerge when President Roosevelt established the War Refugees Board (WRB) in January 1944 at the urging of Henry Morgenthau, the Secretary of the Treasury. The WRB began to pursue a proactive program of aid, primarily in the form of US government currency licenses through which the American Joint Distribution Committee was able to use cash to fund Jewish resistance and escape from concentration camps. The British government opposed these efforts on the grounds that they undermined its economic blockade of Axis territory.³⁹

In July 1944 Admiral Horthy, the regent of Hungary, offered to permit large numbers of the remaining Hungarian Jewish population to leave if Allied countries would grant them entry. Both the British and American governments were, in principle, prepared to accept the offer. But while the Americans urged immediate action, the British Cabinet delayed a formal commitment over a period of several weeks for fear that it would produce a large flood of refugees. In the end, despite a joint Anglo-American statement in

³⁷ London (2000) pp. 11-12.

³⁸ Abella and Troper (1983).

³⁹ London (2000), pp. 230-245.

August indicating a willingness to assist Hungarian Jewry, the Germans resumed the deportation of Jews to the death camps.⁴⁰

The shift in the US government attitude that occurred at the beginning of 1944 was, in no small part, due to public pressure exerted by American Jewish groups and their supporters. They held a well publicised mass

rally in Madison Square Gardens in New York on March 1, 1943 to highlight the absence of government support for rescue operations, and they lobbied politicians and government officials. By contrast, the British Jewish Community consistently refrained from publicly challenging the British government on its handling of refugees and worked within the restrictions that it imposed. In effect the British government was able to use the Anglo-Jewish refugee aid committees and their resources as instruments of its policies.

A chasm opened up between British and American responses to Jewish refugees in the post-war period. In the years immediately following the war the restrictions on Jewish immigration to America remained in place. However, President Truman intervened in 1948 to insure that the Displaced Persons Act of that year was not used to disadvantage Jewish refugees from the DP camps of Europe. As a result, they were permitted to enter the US in proportion to their numbers in the camps, and over a 100,000 immigrated between 1945 and 1950.

In the period immediately following the war the British government kept the legal restrictions on the 60,000 Jewish refugees still in the country. This included people who had served in the British army or worked for the war effort in other ways. They remained aliens without full rights to seek employment, and their presence in the UK was still officially temporary. In fact, there was no solid legal basis for these restrictions after the war, but the refugees were not informed of this fact. They were also frequently not told when some of these constraints were quietly lifted. The government retained hopes of encouraging as many refugees as possible to emigrate. It was not until the end of 1948 that their position in Britain was regularized, and they were granted the status of permanent residents.⁴¹

The post-war Labour government was unwilling to accept survivors in anything but token numbers. The Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin insisted that Jews were not easily assimilated into British life, and he argued that allowing in a substantial group would intensify the already considerable anti-Jewish sentiment that had arisen as a result of Britain's conflict with the Yishuv in mandatory Palestine. As a result, fewer than 5,000 survivors were granted entry from 1945 to 1950, under a family reunification program (the Distressed Relatives scheme). During this period Britain was experiencing a severe labour shortage and recruited foreign workers. It absorbed approximately 365,000 non-Jewish immigrants, most from Eastern Europe and many from the same DP camps that housed Jewish refugees. The government issued over 600,000 alien work permits. The East European immigrants were not carefully screened, and, as a result, a number of war criminals and Nazi collaborators were permitted entry. It seems that for the British government the non-Jewish foreign workers did not pose the same problems of cultural incompatibility that the Jewish survivors did.⁴²

Bevin was committed to repatriating Jewish refugees in the countries that they had come from. Not only was he unwilling to allow them into Palestine, but he also wanted them excluded from Britain. Although post-war pogroms were taking place in Poland in 1946-47 and most refugees were desperate not to return to hostile environments in eastern and central Europe, the Nazi genocide had made little if any impact on Bevin's pre-war hostility to Jewish refugees.⁴³

⁴⁰ Kushner (1994), pp. 194-195.

⁴¹ See London (2000) pp. 260-66 on the post-war status of Jewish refugees in Britain.

⁴² Kushner (1994), pp. 229-237.

⁴³ See Borowicz (1986) on the post-war pogroms in Poland.

Britain's record on Jewish refugees has been meticulously documented and published in well known work by mainstream British historians. Oddly, this record remains largely invisible in public discussion of the war. In fact, a self-congratulatory attitude is common in much of this discussion.

The Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU) recently provided a particularly striking example of how this attitude can be recruited into the service of the anti-Israel boycott campaign. When the TGWU passed its resolution calling for the boycott of Israeli products in July 2007, Barry Camfield, the deputy general-secretary of the union, was quoted in the *Jewish Chronicle* as seeking to deflect criticism of the motion by commenting that Britain had stood alone against Hitler and liberated Jewish victims of the Holocaust. “So we will not have the Israeli state telling us that the boycott is antisemitic.”⁴⁴ Camfield’s remarks (if accurately reported) are rich in unintended irony. Bevin was general secretary of the TGWU from 1922 until 1940, and a member of the General Council of the TUC from 1925 to 1940. During this period he played an important role in shaping organized labour’s support for the Conservative government’s restrictions on the entry of Jewish refugees. After the war, as Foreign Secretary in the Labour government, he took the lead in excluding survivors from the country. The current leadership of the TGWU, like many other boycott supporters, appear to be either unaware of their historical antecedents or simply indifferent to their significance in the context of the current discussion.

Many of the most vociferous anti-Zionists on the contemporary British “left” insist that a solution to the Jewish refugee problem in the period of the Holocaust should have been found in the diaspora rather than in Palestine. They remain impressively obtuse to the fact that their own political precursors were instrumental in ruling out such a solution by helping to block Jewish immigration to Britain.

During a debate with the right wing American commentator Daniel Pipes at the Clash of Civilizations conference in London on January 20, 2007 Ken Livingstone, London’s former “radical” mayor, claimed that the creation of Israel was a mistake which could have been avoided if the United States and Britain had accepted Jewish refugees from Nazism. In an earlier statement concerning his clash with a reporter from the *Evening Standard* Livingstone observed that the paper’s sister publication, the *Daily Mail*, had campaigned against Jewish immigration in the early part of the twentieth century and expressed sympathies for Nazism in the 1930s.⁴⁵ He has carefully avoided acknowledging the part played by the British labour movement and large segments of the British left in keeping Jewish refugees out of the country during this period.

In fact the successful effort to restrict the entry of Jewish refugees was not the work of a specific political group, but a broadly based enterprise that spanned ideological differences. It was the result of a consensus that ran across the political and social spectrum, from upper class Conservative politicians to working class Labour activists and the unions.

Post-Colonialism and Israel

In the past forty years Britain has developed into a post-colonial society in which it has (in large part) come to recognize the injustices of the empire that it imposed on large portions of the world’s population in previous centuries. It has accepted historical responsibility for its role in colonialism and the slave trade, and this process has transformed its understanding of its past. It has also significantly changed the standards of political acceptability determining at least its official relationship to the large post-war immigrant communities that have come from the Indian subcontinent, the Caribbean, Africa, and other parts of its former overseas territories. Mainstream attitudes towards the British colonial presence in Ireland prior to

⁴⁴ Josephs (2007).

⁴⁵ “Ken Livingstone statement in full”, CNN, February 22, 2005, <http://edition.cnn.com/2005/WORLD/europe/02/22/livingstone.statement/index.html>.

the emergence of the Irish Free State and the establishment of the Irish Republic have been similarly, if less completely affected by this evolution of historical and social attitudes.

Interestingly, the history of Britain's relationship with its Jewish population has not been subject to a comparable revision. Although the hostility to Jews that figured prominently throughout this history is closely related to the prejudices and the mindset that fuelled colonialism and its attendant racism, it has not been subsumed under the European practises that have formed the main targets of post-colonialist criticism and historiography.

In fact, the Jews have been quickly shuffled away from the status of victims of European racism into the role of the new colonialists. In the 1970s and 1980s the anti-Zionist left portrayed Israel and its supporters as instruments of western imperialism in the Middle East. In recent years, they have been promoted to the primary agents of an international imperial project of which the West is increasingly seen as a hapless dupe.

This view is anticipated by Arnold Toynbee in the 1960s, who describes Israel in the following terms.

Israeli colonialism since the establishment of the state of Israel is one of the two blackest cases in the whole history of colonialism in the modern age; and its blackness is thrown into relief by its date. The East European Zionists have been practising colonialism in Palestine in the extreme form of evicting and robbing the native Arab inhabitants at the very time when the West European peoples have been renouncing their temporary rule over non-European peoples. The other outstanding black case is the eviction of five agricultural Amerindian peoples—the Chickasaw, Choctaw, Creeks, Cherokees, and Seminoles—from their ancestral homes in what are now the states of Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, and Tennessee to 'reservations' in what is now the state of Oklahoma. ... This nineteenth-century American colonialism was a crime; the Israeli colonialism, which was being carried out at the time when I was writing, was a crime that was also a moral anachronism.⁴⁶

It is important to recognize that the basis of Toynbee's objection to Zionism is not, in the end, Israel's behaviour towards the Palestinians, but his view of the Jews as an illicit people who have no right to be a nation. Writing of Jewish religious culture he says

This is a great spiritual treasure which the Jews have to give to all peoples. But one cannot give a treasure and at the same time keep it to oneself. If the giving of this treasure is the Jews' mission, as it surely is, then this mission requires them, now at last, to make that their paramount aim in place of the incompatible aim that they have always put first, so far, ever since their experience of the Babylonish Captivity. They will have to give up the national form of the Jewish community's distinctive identity in order to become, without reservations, the missionaries of a universal church that will be open, on an equal footing, to anyone, Jew or Gentile, who gives his allegiance to Deutero-Isaiah's God and seeks to do His will. In our time the Zionist movement has been travelling in just the opposite direction to this. It has not only clung to, and accentuated, the national form of Jewish communal life. It has also put it back on to a territorial basis.⁴⁷

...

The Jewish religion is meant for all mankind. So far from its being 'unthinkable' without the 'Chosen People', it cannot fulfil its destiny of becoming a universal religion unless and until the Jews renounce the national form of their distinctive communal identity for the sake of their universal religious mission.⁴⁸

⁴⁶Toynbee (1969), pp. 266-267.

⁴⁷Toynbee (1961), pp. 515-516.

⁴⁸Arnold Toynbee (1961), p. 517.

Toynbee is expressing a classic Christian European notion of Jews as a community that ought not to exist as a collectivity. As we have seen, it has been at the core of deep rooted mainstream attitudes towards Jews in Britain throughout the centuries. It is also a vintage case of what Edward Said has identified as

“Orientalism”.⁴⁹ Jews are not to be entrusted with the stewardship of their own culture, nor are they entitled to understand themselves in their own terms. The significance of their culture and their place in history is a matter to be determined by those who exercise power over them and have a true understanding of their significance and their needs.

Most proponents of Said’s critique of orientalism (like Said himself) have adopted a variant of Toynbee’s view of Jews. Unlike other objects of European (and Middle Eastern) racism they are not entitled to liberation from external colonial coercion as a national group. They are in no position to decide who they are or where they belong in a properly constituted social order. Political independence and cultural autonomy are inappropriate concessions to a backward looking particularism for a people that ought not to exist. Instead, they are to achieve “freedom” through dissolution into other peoples’ societies, so that their “talents” can be responsibly harnessed. As in the past, their degree of acceptability is to be measured by their willingness to conform to an externally imposed notion of “universalism” that excludes their collective existence in all but the most diffidently unobtrusive and compliant mode.

As in the case of Toynbee, the root objection that contemporary “anti-colonialists”, who are now defining mainstream discussion of the Middle East in Britain, bring against Israelis not what it has done (or is doing) but the irredeemable sin of its existence. Australia’s ethnic cleansing of its aboriginal population does not undermine its integrity as a country, and America’s history of internal colonialism, slavery, and military adventurism abroad has no bearing on the right of its people to constitute a nation. Pakistan’s religiously motivated partition of the Indian subcontinent and the associated mass flight of Hindu refugees from its territory is irrelevant to its standing as a state.

By contrast Jews ought not to have a country, even if it is reformed into a model of secular liberal democracy. To allow them one is to grant legitimacy to a people that has none. The fact that the host societies in Europe, the Middle East, and North Africa through which they were driven for centuries were not able to provide for their basic physical survival is not taken to be a relevant factor in assessing the historical processes that created Israel and populated it with refugees from these societies. Nor is it admitted into consideration when framing the current Israeli-Palestinian conflict in anti-colonialist terms.

Toynbee’s approach to Jews was, in turn, anticipated by a small group of militant anti-Zionists within the British Jewish Community in the 1940s. The Jewish Fellowship was established in 1942 to combat Zionism and to promote the idea that Jews are a religious group rather than a national community. Their leaders came from the highest economic and social echelons of Anglo-Jewry, and they were heavily influenced by members of the Progressive Movement.⁵⁰ The Fellowship compared Zionism to Nazism as early as 1944, just as the nature of the Nazi genocide was becoming fully known in the West. One of the Fellowship’s leaders, Colonel Louis Gluckstein, said in testimony to the Anglo-American Committee on Palestine that “to believe this [Jewish suffering] is a justification for Jewish separatism and Jewish nationalism seems to me the adoption of the Hitlerdoctrine.”⁵¹

The Jewish Fellowship was the antithesis of a radical organization. It represented a largely conservative elite of Jews who were concerned to protect their precarious position as charter, if sponsored members of the British power structure. They saw in Zionism and the creation of Israel a threat to their own position. They also seem to have been more than a little embarrassed by the Holocaust and its implications for their

⁴⁹ Said (1978).

⁵⁰ For a detailed and informative history of the Jewish Fellowship see Miller (2000).

⁵¹ Quoted in Miller (2000), p. 49.

idea of a comfortable de-national Jewish life in Europe. In this they followed a long standing pattern in Anglo-Jewry of accommodating themselves to the demand for invisibility as a condition for social acceptance. The idea that failure to conform to this demand will generate anti-Semitism was shared with

British policy makers who invoked it too exclude refugees from the country. The attitudes of the Jewish Fellowship have been echoed by a small but vocal minority of contemporary Jewish anti-Zionists who see Israel as an embarrassment that threatens them with a resurgence of anti-Semitism.

Conclusion

In the second half of the twentieth century explicit expression of hostility to Jews was rare in Britain. The emerging recognition of the full dimensions of the Holocaust created an environment where even coded anti-Jewish expressions were heavily stigmatized, and the traditional imagery of anti-Semitism was almost entirely banished from public discourse. In recent years, particularly since the end of 2000, increasing animosity towards Israel has been attended with a precipitous decline in the constraints against the language of group defamation, generally formulated in terms of “Zionists” rather than “Jews”.

Israel is a country like any other, and, as such, it should be held accountable to the same standards and norms that are applied to other nations. To criticise it on this basis is entirely legitimate, and when the criticisms are accurate, they should be vigorously pursued. But the view of Israel that has emerged recently within the mainstream of British public discourse holds it to be not a normal country at all, but a criminal aberration that is sustained by a malicious conspiratorial lobby of international dimensions. At the foundation of this view is a perception of Jews as an illicit collectivity with no claim to legitimacy or recognition.

This idea is a central element of traditional European (and Middle Eastern) attitudes towards Jews. In this respect, Britain shares its cultural history with the rest of Europe. However, unlike most of continental Europe Britain continues to promote a largely sanitized and self-laudatory understanding of its past relations with Jews in its own popular imagination, and this has served to misrepresent a history whose details are fully accessible as a matter of public record.

The leadership of the British Jewish Community has, for the most part, actively cooperated with this exercise in misrepresentation over the years as part of a strategy for surviving in an environment in which Jews enjoy an acutely conditional acceptance. This strategy is a continuation of the politics of accommodation and low profile engagement with government power that the Community has deployed in pursuit of acceptance and mobility in the face of hostility and social resistance. It contrasts sharply with the self-assertive community activism of American Jews. While the latter have taken their place as one among many ethnic communities that make up the mainstream of an essentially open immigrant-based society, British Jewry has, in many respects, continued the political and social traditions of pre-war European Jewish Communities. Although British Jews enjoy a high level of individual integration within contemporary Britain, Jews as a collective entity remain marginal and subject to cultural stigmas that often find expression in current debates on the Middle East.

While current hostility to Jews in the UK is frequently packaged as “progressive” political comment, its origins are in traditional social attitudes that have been integral to Britain’s history for centuries. The fact that this history has been effectively rendered invisible to the public imagination facilitates the expression of views that might otherwise be identified as prejudicial and ruled out of mainstream discussion. To recognize the origins of these views requires a frank and realistic encounter with an aspect of the country’s past that mainstream British opinion has so far managed to avoid.

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