

'WHERE WORDS HURT, PHYSICAL VIOLENCE FOLLOWS'

A 21st century pogrom needs to be stopped, now

DAVID KNOLL,
BRIAN SAMUEL,
& HELEN SHARDY



AST month, misinformation about Sheikh Jarrah began to flood social media, and Israel had to defend its people from thousands of missiles aimed at civilian targets. As described by Eve Barlow in *Tablet Magazine*, May 26, 2021, the world's first social media pogrom began. The activity that Jews experienced all over the web has been and still is abusive to say the least.

The genie has been creeping out of the bottle since the 2001 World Conference Against Racism, held in Durban, produced unprecedented levels of antisemitism and anti-Zionism under the banner of the United Nations.

Paraphrasing Orwell, Anti-Zionism good. Zionism bad.

What then is anti-Zionism? Why is it antisemitic?

Zionism is the proposition that the Jewish people are entitled to their right of self-determination in their ancestral homeland. It transcends which party is governing Israel. It is a fundamental right enshrined in Israel's Declaration of Independence.

From inception, Zionism has been neither left wing nor right wing. Jews of all persuasions – left, right, religious and secular – formed the Zionist movement and have long worked together toward its goals, albeit not always harmoniously. The debates have been vigorous, and regrettably, not always respectful.

In a world where racism is socially unacceptable, antisemitic tropes and canards – very thinly veiled racism against Jewish people – are again seen as socially acceptable.

Is it alright, as Professor Alan Dershowitz asked many years ago on a visit to Sydney, to criticise Israel to show you care about how the country is going and about what is best for the Jewish people? He answered in the affirmative.

For example, those who criticise Israel for discrimination against minorities within its borders, but do not describe it as a Nazi, apartheid, colonialist or inherently racist state, often are pressing for Israel to apply Jewish values towards human dignity.



Protesters at an anti-Israel rally in Australia last month.

By contrast, anti-Zionism is the proposition that every people on this planet, except Jews, are entitled to the right of self-determination. It is anti-Zionism that is plainly racist. We need to call it out as such, while making clear that legitimate criticism of Israeli government policies, like legitimate criticism of Australian government policies, is acceptable political debate.

Experience has taught that those who advocate violence towards Jews or the Jewish people or Israel, and those who equate Zionism with apartheid, Nazism, colonialism or racism, are anti-Zionist and antisemitic. They usually can be distinguished from those advocating a peace involving a Jewish State of Israel and a Palestinian state living side by side. The battle cry “Palestine will be free, from the river to the sea” heard at demonstrations in Australia and elsewhere, is not a call for peace. It is not a call for a two-state solution. It is a call for an end to Jewish self-determination, and for the Jewish population of Israel to be ethnically cleansed and replaced by Palestinian Arabs returning en masse.

In a world where racism is socially unacceptable, antisemitic tropes and canards – very thinly veiled racism against Jewish people – are again seen as socially acceptable.

Where words hurt, physical violence follows. That is now happening worldwide to differing degrees. The past few weeks have seen shocking incidents of antisemitic abuse and attacks, detailed in *The AJN* and other publications:

In the US, a brick shattering a win-



Hamas official Fathi Hammad in an address last month called on followers to buy cheap knives to behead Jews.

Photo: MEMRI

dow of a kosher pizzeria on Manhattan's Upper East Side; Jewish diners outside a sushi restaurant in Los Angeles attacked by men shouting antisemitic threats; vandalism at synagogues in Arizona, Illinois and New York.

The tone from the top in the US has been right. President Joe Biden has denounced the recent assaults as “despicable” and said “they must stop”. “It’s up to all of us to give hate no safe harbour.”

In the UK, meanwhile, a convoy of pro-Palestinian thugs drove up and down London's Finchley Road (a known Jewish part of town) proclaiming through loudspeakers vile obscenities against Jews and threatening to rape Jewish women and girls. And a BBC reporter was discovered to have a long history of tweeting comments like

“Zionists can't get enough of our blood” and “Hitler was right”.

Here, in Australia, the ABC has not covered itself in glory, giving disproportionate voice to extremist anti-Zionist views; witness *Q&A* on Thursday, May 27, 2021.

In the fight to restore decency and human rights for Jews, as for everyone else, there are no dividing lines between streams of Judaism. In this conflict we are not Reform, Progressive, Masorti, Orthodox etc. We are Jews, and we all have to stand up and be counted, together, to address and repel the new pogrom.

David D Knoll and Brian Samuel are co-presidents, Union for Progressive Judaism.
Helen Shardey is president, Australian Reform Zionist Association.