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In Britain and EU: The antisemitic monster rising from the slime is not Corbynism - it is white nationalism

Sunday 9 February 2020, by [BROWN Rivkah](#) (Date first published: 31 January 2020).

By focusing all our attention on preventing hatred from creeping in through the back door, we have allowed it to stride in through the front.

At 10pm on Thursday 12 December, millions of Britons felt their chests tighten. As the exit polls sounded the death knell of [Jeremy Corbyn](#)'s Labour and the birth of an all-powerful Tory Party, many people – from Britain's [Muslim community](#) to its undocumented migrants to its Universal Credit recipients – found themselves struggling to breathe.

How strange it was, then, to read of British Jews' response to the election in a Jewish Chronicle article headlined: "We breathe easily now". This reaction – from a community that had held its breath for a Corbyn defeat so long that it was, as it were, blue in the face – was entirely predictable. Jewish media and communal leaders had, for years, and with increasing intensity as the election approached, made it their mission to convince their community and compatriots to keep Corbyn out of No 10 – and had succeeded. Why wouldn't celebratory G&Ts be in order?

Sadly, these celebrations were short-lived. On the final night of Hanukkah, members of South Hampstead Synagogue left the Sunday service to discover the building [daubed](#) with antisemitic graffiti. Relief quickly gave way to bewilderment: how, when we had so recently "[crushed \[antisemites\] at the ballot box](#)", were they ever more emboldened on the streets?

What it made clear was that the [rendering](#) of Jeremy Corbyn as Public Enemy #1 had led many British Jews to believe that the end of Corbyn would spell the end of (at least the worst excesses of) antisemitism in the UK. Whereas under Corbyn, "anti-Jewish racism has been allowed to run amok", this "historic achievement for Boris Johnson" would, the Board of Deputies was [certain](#), set Britain on the path towards becoming "a beacon of inclusion and respect for all its inhabitants." If so, the events of the last couple of days are not a promising first step.

By focusing almost exclusively on antisemitism within Labour, British Jewish leaders have blinkered their flock to the broader catalysts of global antisemitism, whose [steady rise](#) long preceded Corbyn, and will long outlast him. Just hours before the attack in North London, five people were stabbed at a rabbi's home in Monsey, New York. An historian spotted a trend. "Taken together with the stabbings in New York," commented Simon Schama, "something truly monstrous is rising from the slime."

British Jews would do well to consider what, or perhaps who, that monster is. From Orban to Morawiecki, Trump to Bolsonaro, Boris Johnson is the latest strongman to sweep to power by indulging the racial scapegoating invited by the financial crisis. Like these men, Johnson is the

acceptable face of white supremacy. Two days ago, Britain First claimed 5,000 of its members had joined the Tories. "It's OUR party now," right-wing commentator Katie Hopkins [tweeted](#) at Muslim peer Sayeeda Warsi. "Nationalism is back. British people first." Premature as it may be to single out the perpetrators of yesterday's graffiti, there have been suggestions that neo-Nazis have been stickering the area for the past 18 months. The monster rising from the slime is not Corbyn – it is white nationalism.

This, however, is not what Jews appear to believe. Last year, the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) [conducted](#) the biggest survey of Jewish people ever attempted worldwide, canvassing 16,500 Jews in 12 EU member states for their experiences and perceptions of antisemitism. The results were resounding: left-wing antisemitism was much more of a perceived problem than its right-wing counterpart. Of respondents who reported having experienced antisemitism in the preceding five years, 21 per cent said the perpetrator was left-wing, 13 per cent right-wing (at 30 per cent, by far the greatest perceived predictor of antisemitism was holding "a Muslim extremist view").

Yet essential as it is to take seriously Jewish people's perceptions of antisemitism, the uncomfortable truth is that these perceptions jar with reality. Antisemitic attitudes and actions are and have long been demonstrably more prevalent on the right. A [report](#) by the Community Security Trust (CST) published in 2017 concluded that, while far-leftists were as likely to agree with antisemitic statements as the rest of the population, the far-right were two to four times likelier to do so. The CST diminished the seriousness of their findings by pointing to the fact that, "although the prevalence of antisemitism on the far right is considerably higher than on the left, the far right remains marginal in British politics in general, as well as on the broader political right." Needless to say, this observation has not aged well. As for action, Patrick Kingsley [writes](#) in the New York Times that, despite fears of anti-Zionism providing cover for antisemites, the "data ... suggests that most contemporary anti-Semitism is ... primarily still perpetrated by the white, far right."

[Video not reproduced here.]

How, then, have British Jews been so susceptible to the insistence of bad-faith actors such as the editors of certain Jewish newspapers, that our primary threat is from the left? The observation of one 20-something German Jew surveyed by the FRA provides a clue: "Nowadays antisemitism is unfortunately mostly present in Muslim and left-wing circles," he observes. "Sure, right-wing hatred against Jews exists as well, that's not a question." This comment may help us understand how the Jewish community has come to see left-wing antisemitism as its greatest "existential threat", despite mounting evidence to the contrary. For what his comment suggests is that the "old antisemitism" – the Jew-hatred spewed loudly and proudly by the right – has been so constant as to become a kind of background noise, "not a question" but rather a fact of life. Instead, our attention has been caught by the "new antisemitism", a curious flavour of anti-Jewish animus of that expresses itself in indirect ways and from unexpected people. It is almost too obvious to blame antisemitism of the kind we grimly witnessed yesterday on Nazis; much more compelling is the notion it was inspired by self-proclaimed antiracists.

In 2014, the Tories' disciplinary body ruled that MP Aidan Burley's Nazi-themed stag-do was "stupid", but not antisemitic. Just days before Britain went to the polls, journalists [revisited](#) a number of passages from Boris Johnson's 2004 novel *Seventy Two Virgins*, including this one: "Maybe there was some kind of fiddling of the figures by the oligarchs who ran the TV stations (and who were mainly, as some lost no time in pointing out, of Jewish origin)". The relentless revelation of flagrant antisemitism at the highest ranks of the Tory Party did little to sway Jewish opinion of them. The only reason I can give for this communal intransigence is that Tory antisemitism, and the right-wing nationalism from which it derives, has become so self-evident as to leave us unable to see the wood for the trees. As the aftermath of this election has proven, this is a dangerous perspective.

By laser-focusing on preventing antisemitism from creeping in through the back door, British Jews have allowed it to stride in through the front. It is time for my community to open its eyes and see that, while new threats might seem to present themselves at every turn, our greatest enemy is our oldest.

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P.S.

- Independent. Tuesday 31 December 2019 10:30:
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