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UK: David Miller's Antisemitic Ideology

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According to David Miller, the former University of Bristol sociology professor, it is a ["fact"](#) that "Jews" are "overrepresented in positions of cultural, economic and political power", and are "therefore in a position to discriminate against actually marginalised groups." Miller [says that](#) Jews are "the most privileged" of all minority groups.

Miller has form when it comes to such claims. He previously asserted that almost every Jewish communal body in Britain was a [node in a vast, interconnected mechanism](#) geared towards the infiltration and domination of public life by "Zionists". Now Miller's primary affiliation is the Iranian state's [Press TV network](#), rather than the University of Bristol, he perhaps feels able to be more clear: he means Jews.

These claims are, on their face, something rather less than the "facts" Miller presents them as. For example, contrary to his claim of unparalleled Jewish privilege in educational attainment, research by the Centre on the Dynamics of Ethnicity showed Black African and Indian communities in Britain have [almost identical percentages of university degree attainment to Jews](#).

It is true that Jews in Britain are not systemically oppressed by the ruling class and its state. I am not more likely to be brutalised by the police, denied social housing, economically coerced into low-paid work, or deported because I am Jewish. But not all racism and discrimination is impelled by the state, nor is it necessarily a function of class exploitation. As racist attacks on synagogues, such as the [Tree of Life shooting in 2018](#), show, antisemitic ideology still leads to violence towards Jewish people. As a ["pseudo-emancipatory"](#) narrative explanation for how the world is organised, antisemitism can also be corrosive and dangerous to other groups, even when not linked to relations of power that directly oppress Jews: see, for example, the ways in which some transphobes argue a [conspiracy of \(mostly Jewish\) financiers](#) is behind the spread of "transgenderism".

Elsewhere, Miller [insists](#) he is upholding a "materialist view of racism", based on "reality" rather than "vibes and optics." On its own terms, this reduces "materialism" to, at best, vulgar economic determinism. As Camila Bassi [put it in response to Miller](#), "racism is an ideology. It is a way of making sense of material reality [...] Racism as an ideology intersects with and shapes material reality."

But it is Miller who proceeds on the basis of "vibes". He uses cherry-picked, decontextualised, and sometimes straightforwardly misleading or false claims about the position of Jews in society to support his overarching *a priori* claim of a Jewish-Zionist drive for domination. The discrimination suffered by "actually marginalised groups" is thus presented as a direct consequence of Jewish power. Not only are Jews not victims of racism, they are the cause of racism. This is the opposite of materialist analysis.

As raw data, statistics suggesting "overrepresentation" of a particular group in positions of power do not necessarily illuminate much. The [richest person](#) in the country is British-Indian; does his

“disproportionate” power protect all Indian-background people from experiencing racism? Is it, in any case, an aim of progressive politics to aspire to strictly proportionate ethnic representation? If Black representation in any sphere exceeds [4%](#), is that to be taken as evidence of the disproportionate social power of Black people?

Some “overrepresentation” may also have identifiable roots. As a sociologist, Miller might be expected to at least be interested in what those roots are. Jewish “overrepresentation” in banking and finance, for example, has at least partial origins in the way in which Jews were [forcibly siloed](#) into commercial and mercantile trades by antisemitism in mediaeval Europe. That history does not seem to concern Miller. To him, any overrepresentation seems to be merely evidence of the success of a conscious drive to accumulate power on the part of “Jews”.

Jews have also been historically “overrepresented” in the ranks of [radical and revolutionary political movements](#). That might tell us something interesting and important about Jewish history and experience; it might not. Miller doesn’t seem to care. Only “evidence” that supports his claims of Jewish power is presented.

Miller’s claims of the incomparably networked, power-seeking drives of Jewish communal organisations have been comprehensively dismantled by, amongst others, [Keith Kahn-Harris](#) and [Jewdas](#). Given that Miller is a scholar of Islamophobia, it is worth considering a comparison with Muslim communal and religious bodies. Some mosques have links to repressive states; the London Central Mosque and Islamic Cultural Centre, for example, were built with [funding from Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Qatar](#). But to assume everything those mosques do is merely an enactment of those states’ drive for power, or that Muslims who worship in them are effectively state agents or complicit in the crimes of those states, would be both a bigoted calumny and a facile misunderstanding of how power works.

Miller is engaged in a process of reification; the transformation of something abstract into something concrete and immutable. Jews are seen as a compact agency with a uniform project for political domination, named “Zionism”, which they collectively enact. This reification also turns Jews — human beings, with consciousness shaped by a variety of social relations and historical experiences, and, like all human beings, capable of processing those relations and experiences in a range of ways — into a singular, monolithic force. Some Jews have power? That gives those Jews power. It does not give “Jews” power.

(White) Jews in the west have been substantially integrated into the constructed social category of “whiteness”. But that integration is both recent and revocable. Trumpism, a political movement with latently, and sometimes overtly, [antisemitic themes about the conspiratorial power of “global financial elites”](#) at the centre of its worldview, was in power in the USA from 2016-2020, and may return to power in 2024. Conditions in which white Jews could be expelled from whiteness are not unimaginable, and anti-racists should not be complacent about the risks of antisemitism, to repurpose a phrase from Marx, “descending from language into life.” Miller, however, seems uninterested in meaningful analysis of the shifting boundaries of historic racialisation. Given his Press TV appearances include him promoting claims of a Jewish conspiracy to [“colonise” Odessa in the early-20th century](#) (which, for Miller, makes Ukraine, like Israel, partially a “Zionist settler-colony”), we can conclude that he believes that what he sees as the Jewish drive for power is transhistorical and perhaps innate.

The academics David Feldman, Brendan McGeever, and Ben Gidley’s metaphor of antisemitism as a [“reservoir of readily available images and ideas that subsist in our political culture”](#) is useful here. That antisemitism is not, in the West, currently overtly imbricated with state or economic oppression or exploitation does not mean its ideological claims have gone away. They can be drawn on and

mobilised.

To what end is Miller mobilising them? Is the likely consequence of his efforts that rich, powerful Jews will have their wealth expropriated and redistributed by some egalitarian political force? Or is it that a few people on the internet will be reaffirmed in the view that “Jews” are a harmful, nefarious, cancerous element in society, engaged in a conspiracy to control it? In a now-deleted tweet, one of Miller’s interlocutors asked: “Could you provide a detailed list with names/positions they hold re: their being members of an over-represented group?” Miller’s reply, still visible as of 14 August, was: [“Coming shortly!”](#) To what use, one wonders, will Miller propose his co-thinkers put his forthcoming “detailed list” of powerful Jews?

Miller is keen to contrast antisemitism (non-existent, in his view) with (real) Islamophobia. But in fact, antisemitism continues to provide, in Eric K. Ward’s term, the [“theoretical core”](#) of much other racist bigotry. A central element of the contemporary far-right nationalist imaginary is the [“Great Replacement” theory](#), the belief that Jewish financiers such as George Soros are sponsoring the immigration of predominantly-Muslim peoples to Europe and America in order to socially engineer the demographic decline of the white population. There is an opportunity here to conduct struggles against antisemitism and Islamophobia in parallel, and ultimately to fuse them into a consistent politics of anti-racist solidarity. Miller spurns that opportunity; indeed, his association with neo-Nazi figures such as Kevin MacDonald, [whose work he has promoted](#), and his [amplification on social media of Trumpist accounts](#), suggests he sees the white-nationalist far right as a potential partner in opposition to Jewish power.

When Miller was undergoing the disciplinary procedure at the University of Bristol that ultimately led to his sacking, a [campaign in his defence](#) attracted widespread support, including from numerous left-wing academics and activists. That campaign did not merely defend his free-speech rights (I [wrote at the time](#) that there was indeed a case for opposing Miller’s sacking on that basis), but lauded his “eminent” “anti-racist scholarship.” Ken Loach praised his “rigorous analysis and considered judgements”.

That scores of leftists saw Miller’s conspiracist anti-Zionism as “eminent” “anti-racist scholarship” shows clearly that the contemporary left has a problem with antisemitism. Some who have been sceptics or denialists on that question have now publicly condemned Miller; the poet and author Michael Rosen, said that, with his recent tweets, Miller had [“outed himself as an antisemite.”](#) But there is nothing in Miller’s recent remarks that was not implicit in his earlier work. Jewish Voice for Labour, a group whose main activity has been vigorous denial of claims of left antisemitism, condemned Miller’s tweets and said that he had [“crossed a line.”](#) In a comment on the JVL website, Jewish Socialists’ Group activist Julia Bard rightly [pressed JVL for greater clarity](#): “What line has he crossed? Between what and what? [...] JVL [should not] be so shy about naming antisemitism.”

In response, Miller [denounced](#) Bard as an Islamophobe for her historic involvement in [Women Against Fundamentalism](#), a feminist network that brought together women from a variety of backgrounds to campaign for secularism and women’s rights against religious oppression. It would be vulgar economic determinism of the kind I have already criticised in this article to suggest Miller’s apologism for Islamism is a crude consequence of the money he presumably receives from the Iranian state’s international broadcasting arm to produce [“Palestine Declassified”](#), hosted by the former Labour MP Chris Williamson. I have no doubt Miller would provide the apologism for free. In his worldview, no matter how materially oppressive the Iranian state is – to women, national minorities such as Kurds and Azeris, LGBT+ people, atheists and religious dissidents, and others – its “anti-Zionism” means it is a force for progress. Everything about Miller’s politics proceeds from his antisemitic ideology, based on feverish opposition to “Zionism” as the reification of an imagined monolithic Jewish power.

It is to be hoped that those who are jolted by Miller's recent statements into some greater realisation of the problem of antisemitism on the would-be left will not stop at a tweet or short online comment. An ongoing educational effort is needed to transform the culture of the left, so the antisemitic ideology David Miller and his co-thinkers promote is seen clearly for the toxic, chauvinist bigotry it is, incompatible with any emancipatory and egalitarian politics.

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