

## COMMENT

## Feminists' blind selection policy

Alona Ferber



**T**HE DAY after Donald Trump's inauguration, millions took part in women's marches protesting against the new president. It was reportedly the largest day of demonstrations in US history, and others joined in solidarity across the globe. Here in London, 100,000 turned out with their oh-so-English, tongue-in-cheek banners.

Nearly two months later, on International Women's Day, women in more than 50 countries rallied and abstained from work for an International Women's Strike. The aim of this, the strike's platform explained, was to kick-start an "international feminist movement that organises resistance not just against Trump and his misogynist policies, but also against the conditions that produced Trump."

The mass mobilisations that have followed the divisive president's election — from the women's marches to the sight of thousands at airports protesting against the US travel ban — have been hailed by sympathisers as cause for optimism, proof that people care enough to stand up for what they believe in. However, a recent debate around the ever-thorny issue of Zionism in this resurgent feminist movement gives cause for pessimism.

In a *New York Times* op-ed ahead of the strike, *Bustle* editor Emily Shire asked whether, as a Zionist, she is welcomed in feminism. The reason for her concern was the strike's platform, which states that, among other issues, "the decolonisation of Palestine" should be part of "the beating heart" of the new movement. "Why should criticism of Israel be key to feminism in 2017," she asked.

This week, Palestinian-American activist Lisa Sarsour responded to Shire. Far from reaching out to her fellow feminist, she reiterated in an interview to *The Nation* that indeed, Zionism has no place in this renewed push for gender equality. Sarsour's argument boiled down to the following: Israel's Occupation oppresses women, ergo, Zionism and feminism are mutually exclusive. "Anyone who wants to call themselves an activist cannot be selective," she said. But Sarsour is being selective herself. She ignores any discrimination Palestinian women may face in Palestinian society, and she ignores any discrimination Israeli women, including Palestinian citizens, may face within the country. And she seems to discount the fact that some feminists might just believe in the right of Jews to self-determination.

Of course, she doesn't see it that way. She thinks she is being inclusive. "When you talk about feminism, you're talking about the rights of all women and their families to live in dignity, peace, and security. It's about giving women access to health care and other basic rights," she says. "Israel is a country that continues to occupy territories in Palestine, has people under siege at checkpoints — we have women who have babies on checkpoints because they're not able to get to hospitals [in time]... You either stand up for the rights of all women, including Palestinians, or none. There's just no way around it."

The Occupation indeed violates the rights of Palestinians. Its detrimental effects are felt in myriad ways across Palestinian — and Israeli — society. But Sarsour relegates other problems faced by Palestinian — and Israeli — women to the bottom of the priority-list based on a divisive political agenda. Not only that, she extinguishes any potential for feminists who find themselves on opposite sides of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to find common ground and, who knows, perhaps work together to resolve the intractable bloodshed.

Sarsour advocates a fractured feminism, but the struggle for women's rights should unite women (and men) against common problems for a better future. It should not be conditional on taking a particular position on Israel and Palestine. That is not something we should be selective about.

Alona Ferber is deputy managing editor of the *Centre on Religion & Geopolitics*.

## Donald Trump is no antisemite

Melanie Phillips



**P**RESIDENT DONALD Trump seems to be a man who thinks (and tweets) from his gut. He appears emotional, self-absorbed and impulsive. His language is careless and inaccurate. He shoots his mouth off repeating something he's seen or heard on Fox News or talk radio which as often as not turns out to be false.

All these things are alarming and indefensible. Nevertheless, the unprecedented distortion, fabrication, selective reporting, double standards, wrenching out of context and character assassination by association in the mainstream media's general approach to Trump has created a false and self-replicating narrative.

As a rule, I don't use my columns to criticise remarks made by a colleague on the same paper. I consider it rather bad manners. However, since Jonathan Freedland singled me out for wrong-headedness in his column last week, I fear I must reply.

Jonathan is clearly astonished that I should think Trump is one of the most pro-Jewish US presidents ever to be elected, since Jonathan seems to think Trump is one of the most anti-Jewish presidents ever to be elected.

He cites as evidence the omission from the White House statement marking Holocaust Memorial Day of any mention of Jews or antisemitism. He claims as a fact that Trump officials stripped all such reference

from an initial State Department draft. He juxtaposes these officials' claim that they wanted to be "inclusive" towards all who suffered under the Nazis with his observation that the omission delighted "America's far right and white supremacists".

He fails to mention that a White House official said Trump's team had not seen the State draft before publishing its own and had advised it not to release the second statement late in the day.

I said at the time that omitting Jews from the Holocaust statement was very wrong. But I also noted the widespread liberal approach, which similarly downplays Jewish victimisation in the Holocaust in order to be "inclusive".

Indeed Hillary Clinton, when Secretary of State, issued a statement on Holocaust Memorial Day 2013 which made no mention whatever of Jews or antisemitism — although it did mention the "Roma, gays, persons with disabilities and others deemed inferior or undesirable by the Nazis" whose lives were "brutally taken".

Did Jonathan note at the time that Clinton's omission similarly delighted "America's far right and white supremacists"?

Next, Jonathan cites the way Trump accused a Jewish reporter, Jake Turx, of lying and told him to shut up when Turx sought his views on the antisemitic incidents surging across the US.

Trump's behaviour was indeed shocking. But if you look at it in context, with Trump maddened by near-daily charges of antisemitism, it's quite clear that he simply heard that word and went off like a rocket — not even hearing that poor Turx said he

wasn't blaming Trump for the outbreak.

Trump's outburst was a character flaw. He simply hadn't listened. To see this as evidence of antisemitism, however, makes no sense of what actually occurred.

The clincher, though, according to Jonathan, is that when asked about the wave of bomb threats to Jewish centres Trump speculated that, rather than taking these incidents at face value, people should consider that "sometimes it's the reverse, to make people — or to make others — look bad."

According to Jonathan, Trump could mean only one thing by this word "reverse" — that Jews themselves had invented these threats in the "classic antisemitic trope" that they were falsely claiming to be victims of attack to win themselves undeserved sympathy.

But this is demonstrably absurd. If Trump had literally meant the "reverse" of antisemitic attacks, he would have been claiming Jews were attacking non-Jewish targets. Which clearly wasn't happening.

Trump speaks loosely and inaccurately. From the context, it was absolutely clear he was suggesting these were "false flag" attacks — black-ops by unspecified enemies to damage him. Rightly or wrongly, Trump firmly believes his enemies perpetrated such attacks at his rallies to smear him with the taint of violence. That, not an anti-Jewish canard, was obviously what was in his mind.

He is currently confusing many by cuddling up to the Palestinians after love-bombing Israel. Whether this signals an impending Middle East policy car-crash or deal-making genius remains to be seen.

Trump's sympathy for the Jewish people, however, is revealed in what he has written, said and done over the years. The antisemitism charges are just fake news.

Melanie Phillips is a *Times* columnist

## LETTERS

## Difficult for some who love Israel to love Netanyahu's politics but plenty still do

► **The banner** headlines on the front page of last week's issue left me with a sense of sadness. The country I fell in love with over 40 years ago, is passing laws that are becoming ever more draconian. With a daughter living in Israel, I am becoming ever more fearful for the future democratic disposition of the country.

As with most Israeli prime ministers, Benjamin Netanyahu is in the thrall of disparate parties, who serve their own constituencies, as opposed to the greater good.

I am sure that, among Anglo Jewry, I am not alone in finding it increasingly difficult to defend the indefensible.

Whether it is banning people from entering Israel or settlements, as much as I want to I cannot agree with a government that since President Trump came in to power seems to be running amok.

Prime Minister Netanyahu should know that every past

president has always looked after America's interests first, and very often played lip service to its so called allies.

President Trump looks like being an expert achiever in that role. Despite my anxieties, when I make my annual pilgrimage to the Holy Land, as ever I will step off the plane and feel I am on home soil. It's the people I love not the politicians.

**Robert Dulin,**  
London N21

► **I am** disappointed but hardly surprised by your editorial. It does generate a lot of high-minded waffle by Western liberals. But would the UK or US or any other country welcome foreigners dedicated to destroying those countries, by economic means if not violence? Israel, however, is not meant to object. Why not? Israelis are allowed free speech in their own country, even if they are its avowed enemies, though of course some prefer

to find their way to UK universities. There are clearly some who believe that Israel should not behave like any other country but should constantly apologise for its existence. Why?

**M Schachter,**  
London NW6

► **In denouncing** Israel's Boycott Law which is directed primarily at the BDS movement, your leader is in good company with other mainstream Jewish bodies. But why is it undemocratic for Israel to refuse entry to representatives of organisations that are plainly anti-Zionist and antisemitic? Many countries, including the UK, have laws that enable them to bar hate-mongers and those that would damage the interests of the state and its citizens.

Why should Israel be different? Admittedly, the law may give rise to practical difficulties, such as you point out, for a Jewish member of the NUS. But the fact remains that the

NUS from the top down is anti-Zionist (not just against particular policies) and Jewish students are not obliged to belong to it. BDS is a vile, antisemitic movement and Israel has every right to take action against it and similar organisations.

**Lionel Blumenthal,**  
London NW11

## Memorial pride

► **Two Jewish** peers have registered their disapproval of the new Holocaust Memorial, one on the grounds of expense and one on location. British Jewry should be intensely proud that the government should choose to erect such a prominent memorial in this country and in a location the importance of which is second to none. Furthermore, the galaxy of famous artists competing for the design is another reason for pride. Could this be a reflection of the Jewish community's, quite disproportionate to its numbers, contribution to British life over

# Do we really need a new school?

Jonathan Boyd



## THE VIEW FROM THE DATA

IS THERE a statistical case for a new Jewish secondary school in North West London? The most up-to-date figures are now in, and the answer is clear. Maybe.

There is no question that more people are applying to Jewish secondary schools in the area than the existing schools can accommodate. There is also no question that the gap between the demand for places and the available supply has been growing over time. It is also clear that the current level of under-supply is projected to continue at the same level over the next few years, if not increase.

However, the figures in the new JPR/PaJeS report on this topic should be read very carefully. The only way to measure the level of demand for places is by examining the data that local authorities collect when parents submit their secondary school application forms.

These data allow us to see precisely how many people have applied to the Jewish schools in the area as a whole, and to each of the schools individually.

They reveal that, in 2016, there were 254 applicants who identified one of the Jewish secondary schools in the area as their first choice, but who failed to gain a place in that school. So case closed, right?

That must mean that there is sufficient demand for a new school?

Not so fast. First of all, the evidence suggests that close to 40 per cent of those applicants are being accommodated by the Jewish school sector. They may not have received an offer to their preferred Jewish school, but they did accept an offer from another Jewish school.

The remaining 60 per cent or so ended up in non-Jewish schools, private or state. Yet, of these, about half have taken themselves off the waiting list for their preferred Jewish school, suggesting a degree of contentment with their situation.

In short, our assessment would lead us to believe that, in 2016, there were about 80 cases of children who applied to a Jewish school or schools, failed to get a place at any of them, and remained eager to accept one if it became available. Our projections indicate

**It is very important to recognise the schools comprise an eco-system**

that this situation is expected to continue over the coming years, if not become even more acute.

But does this justify the establishment of a new school?

The figures suggest that the current and projected gap between supply and demand is probably not sufficiently large to necessitate a new school of the size of JCoSS or Hasmonean, for example (five or six form entry), but there may be a case for a smaller one.

However, with some of the existing schools now announcing plans to create booster classes, even that case begins to look a little weak.

Nevertheless, a case can be made for the “build it and they will come” position. Preference levels for Jewish school-

ing have risen consistently for decades, and while this trend cannot continue indefinitely, there is no particular reason to think it will change in the foreseeable future.

Yet in pursuing this approach, it is very important to recognise that the Jewish schools in London comprise an ecosystem. The actions of one school have a knock-on effect on the others.

To see evidence of this, one only has to look at how the attractiveness of JCoSS to Jewish children from Redbridge has affected demand for places at King Solomon. A new Jewish secondary school in North West London would certainly ease the under-supply issue, but it will affect demand for places at the existing schools too.

So, what to do? Probably the most sensible and cost-effective next step is for some of the existing schools to expand their provision slightly, adding two or three classes across the sector as a whole, as now seems to be happening. This measure alone should address any existing problem.

At the same time, statistical developments should be monitored very closely to extend and improve numerical projections. If, upon examination, the problem of excess demand continues, there would be a clear case for a new school, although any expanded capacity at other schools would probably need to be removed at that stage. What type of school that should be, or where it should be located, requires further research. That’s my best reading of the existing data – hopefully policy-makers will examine the figures closely and find the most appropriate ways to respond.

*Jonathan Boyd is Executive Director of the Institute for Jewish Policy Research*

## DIARY

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say the last one hundred years?

As to cost, the reported figure of £50m seems enormous. Could it be that a nought has been added by press exaggeration?

**Neville S Conrad,**  
London W11

### Fake news?

▶ **Yet again** the JC has left out so much of an important article that it is borderline “fake journalism”. It’s all very good to mention Mordy K. Silverstein and his research into the side effects of eating too much chicken soup, but the initial research goes back much further – and was concealed from public notice by the Jewish Chicken Soup Lobby in Washington. The original research was done by a famous Dr Osler from McGillah University, and also Johns Hopkins and Oxford University. Osler’s main controversial conclusion was

that high chicken-soup consumption leads to a person being ready to die by age 60 or at most 67. Three famous colleagues of Dr Osler disagreed. Dr Abigail Hadassah, a generation later in the early 20th century, further developed Professor Osler’s lead, but the medical profession concluded “What do women know?” – and discarded her life’s research!

Whenever there have been attempts to publicise the dangers of chicken soup the industry cries “antisemitism” with the result that many Jews continue to eat chicken soup, rejecting the volumes of research.

When asked to comment the Vashti Persian Beth Din replied: “A custom is a custom and we ignore doubtful research by antisemitic scientists.” The research continues.  
**Joseph Feld,**  
London NW11

### Was this a joke, too?

▶ **Your Purim spiel** on page 18 concerning the relaxing of kashrut fees for some simachot was almost believable had you said it applied to all celebrations rather than those for 174 guests.

However, I was, like most readers, surprised and disappointed to learn that chicken soup does not possess the therapeutic qualities we had all come to believe. I wonder if research is backed up by fact. Does Prof. H. Aman have figures to back up his claims? Or are they all stuck up at the Ahasuerus Research and Scientific Enterprises labs.  
**Flo Kaufmann,**  
London N2

### Self-fulfilling

▶ **“Your name** can determine the way you look” according to your recent article. The explanation suggested by research-

ers, Dr Ruth Mayo and Yonat Zwebner, is that this could be because of a process of self-fulfilling prophecy, as we become what other people expect us to become. But it is our parents, not us, who choose our names

Could it be that their choice reflects their own attitudes and expectations, which in the long run also contribute to turning the child into the sort of person they hoped he or she would be when they chose the name?

**Anna Lowenstein,**  
London N10

### Wrong melody

▶ **Daniel Sugarman** (JC, March 10), writing about the significance of the *Hatikvah*, attributes the tune to a Romanian folk tune. In fact it was composed by Czech composer Smetana. The *Hatikvah* melody is from his *Vltava* (the Moldau river) and is part of the symphonic cycle *Ma Vlast* (my homeland).  
**Melvyn Lipitch,**  
London W14