

# ANTISEMITISM in context: Its use and abuse. An IJV Report

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## ANTISEMITISM IN CONTEXT:

### Its use and abuse



Cartoon courtesy of Carlos Latuff

**A Report by Independent Jewish Voices Canada**

**1 December, 2016**

[www.ijvcanada.org](http://www.ijvcanada.org)

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## Introduction

Why are accusations of antisemitism<sup>[2]</sup> being heard at an ever-increasing amplitude, intensity and pitch? Because it is one of the only ways of defending the indefensible.

The policies and actions of the State of Israel are under criticism as never before, and from sources that have traditionally supported Israel. States, political parties, non-governmental organizations, trade unions, human rights organizations, churches, and even a growing number of Jewish organizations around the world have condemned the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories, its denial of civil rights to Palestinians and its brutal treatment of Palestinian people. Experts now acknowledge that the two-state solution has been replaced by a one-state, apartheid-like regime. The current Israeli leadership (and an increasing number of Israelis) have no intention of bringing about a just settlement of this dispute.

And so, the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement is gaining in popularity and impact.

However, we are experiencing a reciprocal initiative. This counter-offensive does not, by and large, attempt to defend Israel's actions. Instead, it tries to change the channel. It would have us believe that, seventy years after the Holocaust, when Jews enjoy unparalleled respect and success, the world is subject to a new wave of Jew-hatred or a "new antisemitism." The robustness of criticism of Israel, according to this view, is either evidence of antisemitism or directly attributable to it.

This strategy attempts to divert the critique of Israeli policy and exploit Christian guilt, making Israel's government the victim and not the Palestinians. And it works; the majority of Canadians are not antisemitic, but they know well what happened in Europe under Nazism, and they are susceptible to accusations that they too might, even subconsciously, harbour ill will toward Jews.

This report is Independent Jewish Voices Canada's response to the question of antisemitism.

In the first place, it's not really about antisemitism: It's about Israel. Those who allege that human rights groups are antisemitic try to conflate all Jews with Israel. We believe Israel is and must be seen as a separate and distinct phenomenon. And that's where we must start.

The recent attention given to antisemitism can only be properly understood in light of the list of Israel's

violations of international human rights law.

## Israel and its crimes and misdemeanours

- Israel, an advanced economy, which characterizes itself as the only democracy in the Middle East [i] and as having the “most moral army” in the world, has waged a 68-year campaign of brutality, dispossession and indignity against the Palestinians. At its independence in 1948, Israel ethnically cleansed itself of more than 700,000 Palestinians, and they and their descendants have never been allowed to return, despite United Nations resolutions.
- That campaign has expanded in the 49 years since the 1967 “Six-Day” war that expelled a further 300,000 Palestinians [ii] (for a total of one million exiles). Israel occupied and still holds Gaza, East Jerusalem, the West Bank, populated by 4.75 million Palestinians, and the Syrian Golan Heights [iii]. All of that occupation is illegal under international law. Over half a million Jewish Israelis are now settlers in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. The construction of new housing and new settlements and “hilltop” outposts by these settlers continues apace, though condemned by the international community and illegal under international law. At the same time, Palestinian residents are regularly denied building permits, and the homes they build in contravention are destroyed. Water resources are disproportionately awarded to settler communities and denied to Palestinians. Settler groups regularly terrorize their Palestinian neighbours, with home, church and mosque burnings, crop destruction (including olive trees), beatings and murders. Much of this occurs under the watchful (and sometimes blind) eye and sometimes with the active participation of Israeli military and police forces.
- Though it withdrew its settlers from Gaza in 2005, Israel still tightly controls that benighted strip of earth, blockading it by land, air and sea, making it the largest open-air prison in the world. Using the ineffectual Gazan rockets as an excuse, Israel has submitted Gaza to frequent bombing and military incursion, disproportionately and indiscriminately killing more than 4000 people, 900 of them children. Much of Gaza still lies in rubble, denied permission to import building materials by Israeli fiat. Due to the blockade, water, fuel, electric services and sewage disposal are in continual crisis. Hunger and thirst and lack of medical supplies are endemic. Over 90 percent of its water is now unfit to drink. [iv]
- Possibly lost amid this destruction and carnage are the daily routine humiliations visited by the Israelis upon the Palestinians, including raids, arrests, interrogations, arbitrary detentions, torture (including of children as young as 12), insults, ridicule, damage to and confiscation of property, interruption of harvests, interminable checkpoint waits and denial of access to roads – among others.
- Beside the inhabitants of the occupied territories, 20% of Israeli citizens are Palestinian Arabs. They are subjected to second- or third-class status in their own country, deprived of anything approaching the service levels enjoyed by their Jewish compatriots, and suffering discrimination in education, housing, health care, public health and municipal amenities. Their rates of incarceration and unemployment are far higher than the Israeli norms.
- Migrants, especially those from African countries, and even Ethiopian Jews who are citizens of Israel, are subjected to racist outrages spurred by right-wing politicians [v],[vi].

- Israeli Jewish society has become increasingly intolerant and hateful in the past few decades. A recent Pew Research Centre poll indicates that almost 80% of Israeli Jews believe Jews deserve preferential treatment to others, while the same proportion of Arabs report heavy discrimination against them[vii]. “Transfer” of Palestinian citizens of Israel is favoured by almost half of Israeli Jews. One of the study’s advisers explained that “transfer” is understood as “forceful expulsion...putting them on trucks and sending them away across the Jordan River, to Jordan.”[viii] Israeli cabinet ministers are given to hyperbolic tirades against the Palestinians, from Prime Minister Netanyahu’s alarmist election announcement in 2015 that “Arab voters are heading to the polling stations in droves”[ix] to Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman’s advocacy of beheading Arabs disloyal to Israel[x], to Justice Minister Ayelet Shaked’s branding all Palestinians as enemy combatants and legitimate targets[xi].
- Even the vaunted freedom of speech among Israeli Jews is rapidly eroding. A raft of new laws restricts the ability of NGOs like Breaking the Silence (soldiers reporting their participation in or witness of abuse of Palestinians), the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions, and B’Tselem (Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories) to carry on their activities[xii]. Shaked and other right-wing politicians have called for restrictions on the Israeli Supreme Court’s powers to strike down such measures[xiii]. Reporters Without Borders has ranked Israel 101 out of 179 nations worldwide in press freedom, between Gabon and Uganda[xiv]. Even Israeli establishment figures like President Reuven Rivlin, former Prime Minister Ehud Barak and former Defence Minister Moshe Ya’alon have warned about creeping fascism in their country.
- Israeli governments have rejected legitimate Arab and Palestinian peace initiatives[xv] going back to before the 1970s. The Palestine Liberation Organization has given full and official recognition to Israel since 1993. In 2001, the Arab League, representing Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon and others such as Saudi Arabia and the Emirates, made a comprehensive peace proposal that received unanimous approval from all of Israel’s neighbours. The proposal was based on recognition of the Israeli state, normalization of relations between the entire Arab region and Israel in return for a complete withdrawal from the occupied territories, and a just settlement of the refugee situation based on UN Resolution 194. This was re-endorsed by the Arab League in 2007. Despite these proposals (or perhaps because of them), Israel refuses to take any meaningful steps toward an agreement with the Palestinians. On August 29, 2016, the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process gave a “biting moral and legal indictment” of Israel in his report to members of the UN Security Council, accusing Israel of “conducting a de facto one-state policy between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River[xvi].” As one Palestinian negotiator so aptly put it, the parties are negotiating about how to divide the pizza while Israel is eating the pizza. In the 2012 Israeli film *The Gatekeepers*, six former chiefs of Shin Bet, Israel’s internal intelligence agency, back up these allegations and condemn the growing impossibility of a resolution[xvii].

All of the above has been carefully documented, not only by the Palestinians but by international monitoring bodies and Israeli human rights groups and journalists. Even in Israel itself, and among its supporters abroad, nobody seriously denies these facts. Regardless of the motives of the accusers, the accusations are unassailable, and Israel fears descending even more quickly into the status of a pariah state. The world grows impatient even as Israel’s leaders temporize, prevaricate and attempt to reframe the discussion.

So rather than attempting to disavow these human rights abuses, the main strategy of Israel and its supporters is to accuse the messengers of antisemitism. Were it not for the bogus accusation that their critics are “antisemitic,” the policies and actions of Israeli governments would be revealed ever more clearly.

### **Independent Jewish Voices Canada Condemns Antisemitism**

Let us make it perfectly clear: Independent Jewish Voices Canada condemns antisemitism. From our inception, our Basis of Unity has included this commitment. It says:

1. Human rights are universal and indivisible and should be upheld without exception in Israel as well as in Palestine.
2. Palestinians and Israelis alike have the right to peaceful and secure lives.
3. Peace and stability require the willingness of all parties to the conflict to comply with international law.
4. There is no justification for any form of racism, including anti-Semitism, anti-Arab racism or Islamophobia, in any circumstance.
5. The battle against anti-Semitism is vital, and is undermined whenever opposition to Israeli government policies is automatically branded as antisemitic.

We acknowledge the historic scourge of antisemitism, especially in Christian Europe, over many centuries, and its consummation in the Holocaust. As with other Jews, many of us lost family members in that genocide. And some of us lost all our progenitors save for our parents.

We also acknowledge the existence of some antisemitic individuals in the movement against Israeli apartheid. And we have been especially vigilant in identifying them and either correcting them or condemning them outright, whichever is more appropriate. We believe however, that condemning antisemitism does not include imputing it where it does not exist, nor exaggerating its presence and its impact.

We are committed to realizing not only the goal “Never again,” but “Never again – for anyone.”

Why then has “antisemitism” become such a hot topic?

### **The Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions Movement**

One reason for a recent upsurge in accusations of antisemitism is the success of non-violent resistance to Israeli policy. As Norman Finkelstein has shown, “the new anti-Semitism is neither new nor about anti-Semitism[19].” Over the past 40 years, the Israel Lobby has raised the accusation of antisemitism every time Israel is attacked for its egregious behaviour.

The Palestinians have always resisted the Israeli seizure of their lands, as well as the occupation and the abuses inflicted upon them. Many of these acts of resistance have been violent (and international law does permit direct resistance to belligerent occupation). Some of these acts have targeted Israeli civilians and tourists, which we recognize and condemn as a clear violation of international law.

However, most Palestinians have long accepted that violent attacks not only are counterproductive against the eighth most powerful country in the world[20], but feed directly into the Israeli policy of overwhelming and disproportionate response and, in fact, have helped Israel become a world leader in the business of counter-insurgency, surveillance, and advanced weapons development[21]. They recognize that such violent attacks have harmed the legitimacy of the Palestinian message. In response, in 2005, 170 Palestinian civil society groups including trade unions, women’s organizations, professional societies and human rights associations devised a new strategy. Inspired by the anti-Apartheid movement in South Africa, the strategy would be non-violent and it would rely on the time-honoured tactics of boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS.)

The BDS movement promotes these peaceful mechanisms of protest until Israel complies with international law by meeting three demands:

1. End the Israeli occupation of Arab lands occupied since 1967 and dismantle the separation barrier
2. Recognize the fundamental rights of its own Palestinian citizens to full equality, and
3. Respect, protect and promote the rights of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes and properties, as stipulated in UN Resolution 194.

All three demands are rooted in international law and supported by official Canadian government policy.

In a mere decade since its launch, the BDS campaign has grown massively across the world, especially on university campuses. It is effective, both in penalizing Israel and in drawing attention to its misdeeds. According to a Pew Research Center poll in May 2016, 27% of American millennials now sympathize more with Palestinians, up from 9% in 2006 — while support for Israel has dropped from 51% to 43% during that time[22]. BDS has reportedly contributed to a 46% drop in foreign direct investment in Israel in 2014, and Israeli companies that do business abroad as well as foreign companies operating in Israel and its territories report a negative impact on their operations[23]. The Palestinian economy, though normally captive to goods from Israel, took 24% fewer Israeli exports in 2015[24]. The French transnationals Veolia (light rail) and Orange (cellphones), among others, have withdrawn from Israel entirely. Increasing numbers of entertainers including Elvis Costello, Beyonce and The Pixies have declined to play in Israel.

A 2015 article in Britain's *Financial Times* assessed BDS's impact on the Israeli economy thus:

*... there are signs that Israel's disquiet over BDS is genuine. This week an Israeli financial newspaper covered a leaked government report estimating that BDS could cost Israel's economy \$1.4bn a year. The estimate included lower exports from the settlements in keeping with the EU's plans to begin labelling goods made there — not part of the BDS movement, although many Israelis lump the two things together. The Rand Corporation, the US think-tank, says the costs could be more than three times higher: \$47bn over 10 years.[25]*

Precisely because of its non-violence, the BDS campaign is indeed the biggest threat to Israel's mistreatment of the Palestinians since the beginning of the state. Some Israeli politicians, like former Justice Minister Tzipi Livni (no friend of BDS) are alerting Israelis about the dangers of "living in a bubble." "The boycott," she claimed, "is moving and advancing uniformly and exponentially ... Those who don't want to see it, will end up feeling it.[26]"

Israeli leaders and cheerleaders veer wildly between dismissing the impact of BDS and denouncing it as an existential threat. In 2015, Prime Minister Netanyahu gave BDS one of its greatest compliments by appointing a government minister to fight it[27]. And seasoned Israeli spy-watcher Yossi Melman reported in the Hebrew language newspaper *Ma'ariv* that the fight will include so-called "black ops" or "defamation campaigns, harassment and threats to the lives of activists' as well as infringing on and violating their privacy[28]." Soon after Netanyahu's announcement, American billionaire and Netanyahu-supporter Sheldon Adelson convened, along with other wealthy business people (including Canada's Heather Reisman), a closed-door "summit" to raise \$50 million and to strategize how to counter the growing movement, especially on university campuses[29]. Haim Saban, another tycoon attending the summit, is reported to have warned of "an antisemitic tsunami coming at us[30]." The Adelson-funded "Macabee Task Force" has plastered California universities with posters reading "Stop the Jew Hatred on Campus," and BDS organizers have been named in blacklists as "Jew Haters" and friends of terrorists[31]. A shadowy organization called "Canary Mission" compiles and publishes a database of profiles of Palestinian human rights activists to harass, defame and threaten them, as well as to impede their academic and job prospects[32].

The successes of the BDS movement help to explain why the rhetoric of Israel's apologists has become more frantic of late. Understanding that their country is losing the public relations war because of its own policies and actions, they can put forward only one explanation: the BDS movement, and, indeed, the whole world, is seething with antisemitism. Whether or not they themselves believe it, the frenzy with which they deploy this epithet is now prodigious.

A report by Jewish Voice for Peace has helped debunk accusations of rising antisemitism on campuses in

the US[33]. And Michael Keefer, analyzing a broad array of Canadian official sources, has also challenged the validity of similar claims here, as well as in Britain, France, and other European countries.[34]

### **Recent accusations of antisemitism**

When the Green Party of Canada adopted a resolution supporting a minimal BDS resolution at its summer 2016 convention, Israel lobby groups reacted with predictable ferocity. Avi Benlolo of the Friends of the Simon Wiesenthal Center managed to allege antisemitism twice in a single sentence: “The Green Party of Canada’s vote in favour of the antisemitic boycott campaign against Israel shows the party has been infected by a vicious strain of anti-Jewish hate.” Other conservative Jewish groups like B’nai Brith Canada (BBC) and the Centre for Israel and Jewish Advocacy (CIJA) were hardly more restrained.

BBC began a campaign of hysterically false accusations against the Green Party of Canada and Independent Jewish Voices Canada (IJV), which supported the Green initiative. Not long afterward, editorials in Postmedia-run newspapers repeated almost verbatim BBC’s allegations. When IJV threatened the newspapers with legal action, the editorials were taken down, the newspapers apologized, and IJV was offered prominent space for rebuttal, both in print and on the web.[35]

But this phenomenon is much larger than Canada. Almost invariably, accusations of antisemitism are hurled all over the world at critics of the policies and practices of the State of Israel.

The same does not apply to other boycotts. When the world sanctioned South African apartheid or Russia’s ill-treatment of its Chechen minority, those countries tried to accuse critics of bigotry and intolerance. But it didn’t work. Canada currently imposes sanctions against 21 countries.[36] Even Israel itself conducts boycotts, such as the one against Turkey for that country’s outspoken criticism of the 2014 attack on Gaza. Most people can distinguish between hatred of a country’s policies and hatred of its people. The United States of America is one of the most vilified countries in the world, but few would accuse its critics of hating the American people. Only in the case of Israel is that distinction obscured.

Accusations of antisemitism still have resonance, of course, because of centuries of oppression and persecution of Jews, up to the Holocaust. Not only had many European nations worked with the Nazis in rounding up local Jews and sending them to death camps, but North American countries, including Canada, severely limited immigration of European Jews fleeing Hitler. Canadians are familiar with our 1939 copying of the Americans in refusing to allow the MS St. Louis to discharge its human cargo, and the previous year’s statement of our own immigration czar Frederick Charles Blair that “none is too many[37].” Christian churches in North America did little to protest these policies. And even Jewish organizations have faulted themselves for not doing enough[38]. A great guilt still weighs upon all of us for those failures.

But we cannot allow Israel and its faithful supporters to exploit those failures and that guilt so as to prevent us from denouncing a great injustice of our own time – the brutal treatment of the Palestinians. Two wrongs do not make a right. Moreover, that vile treatment puts Israel and Jews in more jeopardy, not less.

The founders of the State of Israel created – and their successors deliberately perpetuate – a myth. They insist that Israel is where every Jew belongs and should “ascend” to (or in Hebrew, to make aliyah), that Israel is a Jewish state, even that Israel represents all Jews and that, by implication, criticism of Israel is an attack upon the Jews. Of course, this flies in the face of the facts: most Jews in the world live elsewhere and have no interest in living in Israel; 25 percent of Israeli citizens are non-Jews; more Jews are now leaving Israel (for places like Germany[39]) than come to Israel; and a goodly proportion of Jews, both Israelis and those in other countries, oppose, often forcefully, Israel’s treatment of the Palestinians.

The twisted logic goes as follows (most succinctly formulated by Natan Scharansky, Chairman of the Executive of the Jewish Agency): Attacks on Israeli policy equal antisemitism because they embody the three Ds:

Delegitimization [of Israel], Demonization [of Israel], and [subjecting Israel to] Double Standards[40]. But this is mere word-trickery. Calling attention to the fact that Israel does bad things does reduce its legitimacy in the eyes of the world compared to, say, praising it. Pointing out those bad things does make Israel look bad rather than good. And saying that Israel cannot be disparaged as long as other countries do bad things, employs the logic of five-year-olds.

Add to this facile formulation the falsehood that Israel and Jews are one and the same and, presto, we have a specious case for antisemitism.

The thin skin of Israel and its defenders was lampooned acerbically by the late, great Jewish historian Tony Judt in an excellent piece entitled “The Country That Wouldn’t Grow Up”. “Seen from the outside,” Judt wrote, “Israel still comports itself like an adolescent: consumed by a brittle confidence in its own uniqueness; certain that no one ‘understands’ it and everyone is ‘against’ it; full of wounded self-esteem, quick to take offense and quick to give it. Like many adolescents Israel is convinced – and makes a point of aggressively and repeatedly asserting – that it can do as it wishes, that its actions carry no consequences and that it is immortal[41].”

### **The Abuse of Antisemitism**

Not long ago a Jewish friend, living in a Canadian city in the hinterland, received a panicked call from a relative in Toronto. “Do you have the same terrible antisemitism [where you live] as we have here in Toronto?” she asked. Our acquaintance could not believe his ears. But rather than insult the relative, he responded. “Well, let me see. Right now the lieutenant-governor of our province is Jewish. The chief justice of our provincial supreme court is Jewish. And the president of our largest university is Jewish...No, I guess the antisemitism missed us.” What is remarkable about this exchange is that the female relative, an intelligent woman, somehow believed that there was “terrible” antisemitism in Toronto.

Many Jews certainly feel afraid, even irrationally terrified. Many Canadian Jews have convinced themselves that the next Holocaust is, if not just around the corner, then around a few corners after that. Certainly, if one listens to Canadian Jewish leaders, or reads the Canadian Jewish media, it is not difficult to jump to that conclusion. For example, an Israeli-led campaign against a peace settlement based on the 1967 borders calls them “Auschwitz borders.”

Yet nothing could be further from the truth.

The irascible Mordecai Richler has a wicked scene in his novel *Barney’s Version* where Irv Nussbaum, a fundraiser for Jewish charities, tells Barney that “it was a blessing, antisemitism, if you feel as deeply as I do about Israel and Jewish survival[42].”

*We’ve got a problem this year. There’s been a decline in the number of antisemitic outrages. Don’t get me wrong. I’m against antisemitism. But every time some asshole daubs a swastika on a synagogue wall or knocks over a stone in one of our cemeteries, our guys get so nervous they phone me with pledges.[43]*

Richler himself was more than once denounced as a self-hating Jew, and he joins the long line of Jewish humourists to wear that proud moniker. But it is not about antisemitism. It’s about Israel. And panic and magical thinking are just what the doctor ordered to distract people from Israel’s crimes.

“Chaff” is the word which military jet pilots use to describe packages of tiny foil strips they eject to confuse radar-guided missiles. Confused by the metal strips, the missile chases after the diversion while the pilot and his jet survive to fight and kill another day. This is precisely what most accusations of antisemitism are – chaff. And, of course, the analogy to jets and missiles is particularly apposite.

In “Operation Cast Lead” in the winter of 2008-9, Israeli forces laid waste to Gaza and killed 1400 Palestinians including over 300 children. People all over the world were shocked and furious at Israel. As tens of thousands marched in Canadian streets, what was the response of the (then) Canadian Jewish Congress (CJC)[44]? To divert attention away from Israel’s murderous rampage, it asked the Canadian police to investigate, wait for it ... antisemitism. And the CJC demanded that all the unions and church groups, Muslim, Arab and Palestinian organizations that had been active in condemning the Israeli actions denounce antisemitism. And Canadian media outlets were obliging, repeating the message[45]. Thus, attention to the slaughter in Gaza was diverted to an irrelevant sideshow.

In 2003, as accusations of “The New Antisemitism” were just ramping up in earnest, Israeli scholar Ran HaCohen, of Tel Aviv University wrote a sobering essay, “The Abuse of Antisemitism,” in which he decries the way the accusation of antisemitism is exaggerated and exploited. It bears quoting at some length:

It is high time to say it out loud: in the entire course of Jewish history, since the Babylonian Exile in the 6th century BC, there has never been an era blessed with less antisemitism than ours. There has never been a better time for Jews to live in than our own...

Nowadays, an orthodox Jew [Joe Lieberman, then a Democratic Party contender for the presidential nomination] can run for the most powerful office on earth, the president of the United States... A Jew can be the mayor of Amsterdam in “antisemitic” Holland, a minister in “antisemitic” Britain, a leading intellectual in “antisemitic” France, a president of “antisemitic” Switzerland, editor-in-chief of a major daily in “antisemitic” Denmark, or an industrial tycoon in “antisemitic” Russia. None of this was imaginable a century ago. Jews have free and unlimited access to every institution in every country they live in; ironically, a converted Jew [Archbishop of Paris Jean-Marie Lustiger] is even mentioned as a possible successor to the Holy See. At the same time, “antisemitic” Germany (home to the world’s fastest-growing Jewish community) gives Israel three military submarines for free, “antisemitic” France has proliferated to Israel the nuclear technology for its weapons of mass destruction, and “antisemitic” Europe has welcomed Israel as a single non-European country to everything from football and basketball leagues to the Eurovision Song Contest, and has granted Israeli universities a special status for scientific fund-raising...

The abuse of alleged antisemitism is morally despicable. It took hundreds of years and millions of victims to turn antisemitism – a specific case of racism that led historically to genocide – into a taboo. People abusing this taboo in order to support Israel’s racist and genocidal policy towards the Palestinians do nothing less than desecrate the memory of those Jewish victims, whose death, from a humanistic perspective, is meaningful only inasmuch as it serves as an eternal warning to human kind against all kinds of discrimination, racism, and genocide[46].

### **Prejudice vs. oppression**

Canadian Jason Kunin makes the important distinction between *prejudice* and *oppression*. There still exists some prejudice against Jews, even in Canada. But it would be hard to make a convincing case that Jews are oppressed in Western countries, where they are unrestricted and prominent in the arts, politics, academe, commerce and many other fields.

Says Kunin:

*This does not mean that Jews are never oppressed. Many are. But when Jews experience oppression today, it is because they are queer, or disabled, or elderly, or poor, or women, or because they come from one of the many marginalized Jewish communities of colour, such as the Bene Israels, the Ethiopian Jews, the Mizrachim, or the Sephardim. Jews experience oppression based on race, class, sexual orientation, physical ability, and yes, even religious practice, to a point, since Judaism remains a comparatively marginalized religion even in places where Jews as a people prosper, even if finding a Bat Mitzvah card is easier today than it used to be.*

*But Jews are not currently oppressed on the basis of Jewish identity alone. Measured in terms of social power, a white Jewish male is just another white male, his Jewishness of no more relevance than if he were Dutch or Irish. Individual Jews may continue to understand themselves as a “race,” much in the way Hitler did, and they may still be perceived as such by some non-Jews, but the ability of Jews to access social privilege is not determined by this racial understanding of Jewishness. [47]*

Kunin insists that prejudice has the potential to become oppression only when it is held and used by those in positions of power who can translate the prejudice into oppressive laws and policies. We might add, as we do later in this piece, that a widespread popular animus against a group can act as an excuse for the powerful to turn their power against a group, just as fear and hatred of Muslims facilitates Donald Trump and his ilk to spew Islamophobia and promise serious violations of human rights.

But such is not the case nowadays when it comes to Jews.

Even Bernie Farber, former head of the Canadian Jewish Congress and not one to dismiss antisemitism, has concluded that, as far as Canadian Jews are concerned, “We have come to a point in the 21st Century where at least in the halls of government and I think very much in the mainstream of Canadian life, we are viewed as part and parcel of Canadian polity[48].”

Indeed, Farber has been among the few voices of moderation among the Jewish-Canadian leadership (some might say he represented one reason why the CJC was disbanded). When the United Church of Canada was debating a motion to boycott Israeli settlement products, and other Jewish leaders thundered, Farber told the *Canadian Jewish News*, “I wouldn’t wave the antisemitism flag [here], because I think when the Jewish community does that all the time, it confuses people and turns them off. It confuses true Jew-hatred from anti-Zionism, and we must see the two as separate battles[49].”

The organized Canadian Jewish community’s panic around antisemitism is profoundly puzzling, given North American Jews’ transition in the post-World War II period from a racialized and scorned minority to a whitened model minority in a white settler society. Jews’ positioning as firmly middle class, as highly educated and generally well compensated members of society, has done much to make Jews more palatable to a Christian majority culture. The recent leakage of Jewish political loyalty from the Liberal Party to the avowedly Zionist and decidedly neoliberal Conservatives[50] situates Canadian Jews on the “right” side of the “clash of civilizations.” This shift solidifies Jewish whiteness and respectability and serves to distance Jews from older, denigrating images and discriminatory practices that dominated much of the 20th century.

### **What is antisemitism and what is it not?**

Those who wish to incite panic by claiming that there is more, not less antisemitism can be said to argue the following (false) axioms:

- All slights and injuries to Jews, unless entirely accidental, are evidence of antisemitism.
- No incident of alleged antisemitism is isolated; all are part of a dangerous trend.
- Antisemitism is increasing, not diminishing.
- Any action or statement that makes Jews feel uncomfortable, even defending Israel against criticism, is antisemitic. (Thus Jewish students, facing critiques of Israel on campuses, face antisemitism.)
- All reported incidents by Jews of perceived ill-treatment are believable examples of antisemitism.

- Any negative depiction of a Jew committing a violent act, e.g., the bombing of Gaza, is tantamount to a “blood libel” (the noxious historical accusation that Jews killed Christ and drained gentile babies of blood to make Passover matzot.) Thus, even true and proven accusations of murder or animal-poisoning by Israeli settlers, for example, are not allowed to be discussed or condemned.
- In theory, some criticism of Israel is not antisemitism. But in practice, all criticism of Israel is antisemitic.
- Anti-Zionism is antisemitism. Even *non*-Zionism is antisemitism.
- Those who are especially persistent in their criticism of Israel must be antisemitic.
- If there are some critics of Israel who are bona fide antisemites, even if there is one such antisemite, then all critics are, by association, antisemites.
- There is no continuum between mild or unconscious disparagement of Jews and more virulent forms. All are equal.
- Antisemitism is a worse type of bigotry than enmity toward other groups. Antisemitism trumps all other forms of hatred.
- Jews who support Israel, even passively, though they observe no religious commandments, intermarry, and otherwise exhibit no sign of Jewishness, are legitimate Jews. But those who openly offer less than full support for Israel, are antisemites or “self-haters.”
- Those who suggest that accusations of antisemitism can be and are exaggerated must themselves be antisemites.

We, by contrast, define “antisemitism” as hostility, prejudice, or discrimination against Jews as Jews. Of course, the word “Semite” could include all of the putative descendants of Abraham. We could be using it to talk about both Jews and Arabs<sup>[51]</sup>. [“However, the compound word *antisemite* was popularized in Germany in 1879<sup>[6]</sup> as a scientific-sounding term for *Judenhass* ‘Jew-hatred,’ and that has been its common use since then.]<sup>[[52]]</sup> There are major differences among Ashkenazi (or Eastern European) Jews and Sephardic (descended from Jews from Spain and Portugal) Jews and Mizrahi (from Middle Eastern countries) as well as other Jews of colour (from Africa and elsewhere), and there are major differences among their experiences of negative discrimination.

Antisemitism is a form of discrimination directed at an identifiable social group. Its key marker is “Essentialism.” Essentialism typifies an entire social group as having certain inherent traits. The message is “Jews are (all) like that.” It discriminates against (or for) Jews as Jews. Characterizing an entire social group is erroneous epistemologically and potentially very dangerous. Social groups are not rigorous scientific categories. Even divisions by skin colour are notoriously unscientific, much less a group like Jews, who come in almost as many different skin hues and body types as exist in the world. Even if we could define social groups biologically, there is simply no way that all members of those groups also share other common traits.

But, of course, that has not stopped some people from trying to define Jews, sometimes for the purpose of exterminating them. The Nazis, attempting to put a pseudo-scientific gloss on the matter, defined Jews as those with at least three Jewish grandparents, whether those grandparents had converted to Christianity or not.

Attempts to portray Jews as acting in concert as a people, especially to do harm, because of inherent traits as Jews, are certainly antisemitic.

Recently B’nai Brith Canada complained that Nikolaus Balaskas, a laboratory technologist at York University, had made a number of antisemitic postings on his Facebook page over several years. Typical of those posts is the following, from August 2014:

| *Know thy enemy. If the Zionists (the same Communists of Jewish roots who killed 100 million*

*Christians from 1917 to 1945 and were responsible for the persecution and deaths of millions more Jews) will ask for forgiveness, compensate their victims (including the thousands they murdered in the U.S. on 9/11) and renounce violence forever, we can permit them to live in peace with the rest of mankind. The big worry among world leaders is that if the Zionist crimes against humanity are exposed and will be tried in world court for war crimes, the Zionists will not go down alone but will take everyone down (New York, London, Moscow, Tehran, etc.) with them in a global Nuclear Holocaust...*

In other posts, he suggests that the *Diary of Anne Frank* is a hoax and that Jews who have met with the Pope are “**really followers of the Evil One**[53].”

Statements like these are definitely antisemitic. They are so not because they rant against “Zionists” but because:

- They imply that Zionists and Jews are one and the same, and that both are attempting to take over the world.
- They imply that there is something essential about Jews that makes all or most of them act in a certain, usually evil, way.
- They imply a conspiracy on the part of Jews to do harm to humanity.
- They suggest that incidents and episodes of harm to Jews are invented.

Balaskas is an example of someone whose disparagement of Israel is only partly because of that country’s treatment of the Palestinians. He clearly bears great antipathy against Jews as Jews and is using Israel as a target for his hostility. And there are clearly other bona fide antisemites who do the same. However, it does not follow that all or even most critics of Israel are antisemites like Balaskas.

In a way, the Balaskas case is too easy; a slam-dunk. His statements are so over the top and such demonstrably incoherent fulminations that one can hardly take him seriously. B’nai Brith would doubtless love to claim that they are part of a cesspool of Jew hatred on the campus of York University. But that would be an invention.

### **Antisemitism in context**

Antisemitism is not a phenomenon whose characteristics persist across historical epochs and diverse political regimes. Rather, it arises in response to specific conditions. Therefore, what we identify as antisemitism in Canada is very different from antisemitism in some parts of Europe. As Jonathan Judaken argues,

*To analyse anti-Semitic acts, we must take the social conditions that give rise to them into account and do so within a global optic. Today, this entails comprehending how what happens in Palestine becomes a symbolic filter through which the concrete experience of Muslims in Europe and elsewhere is given meaning and internalized, and also how the Palestinian Intifada has become a globalized symbol for the throwing off of the shackles of oppression elsewhere. [54]*

It is important to examine the context in which antisemitic acts arise. For example, some of the attacks against Jews and Jewish institutions in Western and Central Europe, which have included firebombing of synagogues, desecration of Jewish cemeteries and murders of identifiably Jewish individuals, have been carried out by disenfranchised, socially and politically marginalized Arab youth who identify with the struggle of Palestinians against Israel’s nearly 50-year military occupation. Many French Jews, for example, emigrated from former French colonies in the Maghreb and elsewhere during the post- WWII period of decolonization, as did their Muslim

counterparts. However, these Jews have been more welcomed and have become considerably more successful economically, socially and educationally than Muslim immigrants. As Judaken explains, young French Muslims often direct their anger and frustration toward Jews and Jewish institutions. While this does not excuse their acts of antisemitism, it does challenge knee-jerk explanations that attribute Judeophobic acts to a perceived endemic and trans historical Muslim antisemitism (which, in fact, is Islamophobic rhetoric). Much like the Nazi invention of “der ewige Jude” (the eternal Jew) this would be “der ewige Musselman” (the eternal Muslim.)

## **A Principled Anti-Zionism?**

Since the rise of Zionism in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, many Jews and all three major branches of Judaism have opposed the establishment of a Jewish state.[55] Prior to the Holocaust, such Jewish movements as the Bund, Reform Judaism, Agudat Yisrael and others opposed the Zionist vision. Moreover, important Jewish intellectuals such as Hannah Arendt, Martin Buber, Albert Einstein and Judah Magnes and organizations like Brith Shalom and Ihud warned that dispossessing the Palestinian occupants of the land was morally reprehensible and would become a source of continual violence.[56] After WWII, Jewish opposition to Jewish political domination in Palestine continued in the United States and elsewhere. Groups such as the American Council for Judaism and numerous left-identified organizations continued to oppose the movement for a Jewish state, arguing among other things that diaspora Jewish life was necessary for Jewish continuity.[57] The Jewish state itself has always included Jewish groups opposed to Jewish political and military domination of Palestinians. After the Six-Day War this movement grew, eventually producing a generation of Israeli historians, philosophers and sociologists (“post-Zionists”) who unearthed and analyzed the history of the intentional ethnic cleansing of Palestinians, which contradicted official accounts of the establishment of the state. [58] Those who equate anti-Zionism with antisemitism often fail to acknowledge that many formidable Jewish intellectuals have raised troubling questions about the moral transgressions of the Jewish state and have done so using traditional Jewish precepts.

## **Philosemitism**

Trait-casting applies not only to *unfavourable or hateful* characterization, but to *favourable* as well. It is just as incorrect, nay bigoted, to say that Jews as a people are all marvellous and therefore we should commend and reward them, or to automatically excuse misdeeds of Jewish people, as it is to say that Jews are the opposite, and condemn or punish them. But, of course, we never hear complaints about these positive mischaracterizations, although they certainly exist.

In North America and arguably in much of Western Europe, since the end of World War II and the revelations of the Nazi genocides, and certainly since the early rise of Israel as a strategic ally of the West, Judeophilia or philo-Semitism, if you will, has attained equal prominence with antisemitism. But few Jews believe it or want to believe it.

Writes Rabbi Justus N. Baird of Auburn Theological Seminary:

*Paying attention to American philo-Semitism matters so much because young Jews are caught in a major cognitive dissonance: They are taught from an early age that the world hates the Jews, but they feel fully embraced by their American peers...*

*Are American Jews ready for a narrative of philo-Semitism? ...Middle East scholar Aaron Miller has said, “Jews worry for a living, because the arc of history has taught them to.” Is it any surprise we have trouble hearing a narrative of philo-Semitism?[59]*

In the US, for example, a 2009 nationwide survey by the Anti-Defamation League revealed “antisemitic attitudes equal to the lowest level in all the years of taking the pulse of the American attitudes toward Jews. The survey found that 12% of Americans hold antisemitic views, a decline from 15% in 2007 and matching the lowest figure ever recorded by ADL, in 1998[60].” Canadians were second only to the US in philo-Semitic attitudes and only

slightly higher in negative attitudes[61]. But Canadians with unfavourable views of Muslims are more than three times as numerous as those who dislike Jews.

## **Antisemitism in Europe**

Europe presents a more complex situation. Acts hostile to Jews and even murders have taken place in France and Belgium. And negative opinion toward Jews is higher in Eastern Europe than in Western Europe. But even so, negative opinions against Jews are more muted than we have been led to believe, and positive views have increased in many countries, to 85% in the UK and in France. Where a median of 43% in European countries held unfavourable views of Muslims, only 16% reported similar attitudes to Jews. Only in some Eastern European countries, like Hungary and Poland (which have very few Jews) did 32% and 24% respectively hold negative opinions of Jews[62].

Like any other people, Jews are neither collectively good nor collectively bad, but individuals are capable of both good and bad. Some critics of Israel ask, "How can a people [the Jews] that has suffered so much hatred and oppression treat another [the Palestinians] so badly?" This ignorant question itself engages in unfair prejudice. First, those Jews who treat Palestinians badly do not represent Jews as a whole. Second, being the victims of hatred and oppression does not immunize people, and certainly not their descendants, against being haters and oppressors themselves. Indeed, former subjugation can encourage a "free pass" to behave badly with impunity, if the opportunity and fear present themselves. In fact, Israel was founded largely by secular Russian Jews, who did not directly suffer during the Holocaust, and who treated Holocaust survivors with contempt.[63]

Many true antisemites are all-purpose bigots, hating all those unlike them with equal fervour. Why, then, should we focus only on their hatred of Jews, rather than on their enmity toward people of colour such as Roma, Muslims, Eastern Europeans, and others, especially since those groups are much more vulnerable to attack today than are Jews? A few years back, an Israeli woman visiting the former East Berlin was attacked by disaffected street thugs when she spoke Hebrew on her cellphone. Some Jewish groups rushed to denounce this as an antisemitic crime because its victim was Jewish. But how could her presumably ignorant attackers know she was Jewish? Unless they were trained linguists, it is unlikely that they could distinguish among Hebrew, Arabic, Russian or Swahili. They no doubt attacked her because she was a foreigner.

An exception to these equal-opportunity haters would be European nativist groups who spread racial and ethnic hatred, yet love the State of Israel. The thuggish European Defence League, the Netherlands' Islamophobic politician Geert Wilders and the extreme right-wing Austrian Freedom Party's Norbert Hofer, who barely missed election recently to his country's presidency, all profess their love of Israel and admiration for Israel's treatment of Arabs and Muslims. Indeed, Austrian Freedom Party leader Heinz-Christian Strache was the special guest of Israeli Likud Party official Michael Kleiner, who excused Strache's visit: "Mr. Strache is pro-Israel, is against the boycott [and] supports Israel's right to defend itself[64]."

## **The Christian Right**

Israel also holds a special place in the hearts of the American Christian Right. But unlike Israel, Jews themselves occupy a darker place in those hearts. The famous "Nixon Tapes" revealed that president's antisemitism[65]. At a 1972 meeting with President Richard Nixon in the Oval Office, Evangelist Billy Graham told the president that he detests how Jews [allegedly] control the media. Nixon responds "Oh, boy. So do I. I can't ever say that, but I believe it[66]." But neither Nixon nor Graham ever bore the degree of enmity from the Jewish community that it reserves for Israel-critics, because Nixon and Graham were considered friends of Israel.

American Christian fundamentalists are fervent in their affection for Israel, and the love affair is mutual. Yet Israel and its supporters conveniently forget that in the millennialist vision, Jews are cannon fodder for the Apocalypse. The ingathering of the Jews in Israel is a prerequisite for the Rapture, but Christian Zionists believe that those who refuse to convert to Christianity (including the Jews) will be swept into a lake of fire. One is reminded of

the joke about the Christian Zionist definition of an antisemite: “Someone who hates the Jews more than he oughtta.”

From these incidents and the reaction to them, we can surmise that for Israel and its supporters there are two types of antisemitism. One disparages Jews and the other disparages Israel, and only the second type is treated as the real crime. Indeed, support for Israel can seem to redeem or excuse disparagement of Jews, even if the goal is the eventual obliteration of the Jews as Jews.

A case in point: Once elected president, Donald Trump appointed known bigot and putative antisemite Stephen Bannon as his Chief Strategist and Senior Counselor. Not long afterward, West Bank Israeli settler Yossi Dagan, chairman of the Samaria Regional Council, and key operative in Binyamin Netanyahu’s Likud Party, sent Bannon an open letter of congratulations and “blessings” for being a friend of Israel[67]. The Zionist Organization of America denounced the US Anti-Defamation League for calling Bannon an antisemite, insisting that he was a true friend of Israel[68]. Even Alan Dershowitz, who has called the entire US legal profession and a president of Harvard University antisemitic, rushed to defend Bannon[69].

Antisemitism has certainly threatened to rear its perennially ugly head again in the Trump campaign and in the aftermath of his victory. But bigots have their sights on many others who are far more vulnerable and more lethally targeted. Blacks, Palestinians, Latinos, and Muslims are all lined up way ahead of Jews. Our integrity and our safety demands solidarity and alliance with them.

### **Incidents and Attitudes – A Binary Weapon**

Antisemitic attitudes and actions should not be conflated with criticism of Israel. Yet those who would have us believe that antisemitism is of epidemic proportions have no such compunction. Some criticism of Israel (like that of Mr. Balaskas, above) is really meant as enmity toward Jews as Jews. But this would be the exception and not the rule.

To use a real example, if someone has daubed the Jewish Museum in Paris with the slogan *Israël Assassin* after an Israeli bombing of Gaza, is that antisemitic? If one is looking for evidence of Jew hatred, it certainly is, and that is how it was portrayed at the time. To the more sceptical, it could simply be an act by an understandably enraged person looking for a convenient and visible place to exhibit that rage. If, as Israeli leaders insist, Israel acts for all Jews, then the act is antisemitic. But instead, we argue, the act better reflects outraged opposition to Israel’s murderous attack. If the museum-daubing is thrown thoughtlessly and carelessly into the antisemitism basket, then antisemitism is shorn of its meaning.

Reports of antisemitism must also be analyzed carefully and prudently to discern both circumstance and intent. In an article entitled “What Do We Mean When We Say ‘Antisemitism’?” Oxford philosopher Brian Klug[70] gives the example of three imaginary characters on a London bus: non-Jewish conductor Lucy, devout passenger Rabbi Cohen (dressed in Hasidic garb) and Jewish passenger Mrs. Goldstein. In each of five scenarios, Lucy throws Rabbi Cohen off the bus. Seeing only the expulsion of Rabbi Cohen, but not the circumstances leading up to it, Mrs. Goldstein complains in all five cases of an antisemitic incident. But only in the last situation is Lucy guilty of Jew hatred. In the first, the Rabbi refuses to butt out his cigarette (which is against the rules.) In the second, Rabbi Cohen refuses to stop singing *zemiros* (hymns) at the top of his lungs, disturbing other passengers. In the third, Lucy doesn’t recognize his Jewishness but expels him because he looks like a foreigner or asylum-seeker and she hates non-British people. In the fourth scenario, Lucy mistakes the rabbi for a *particular* foreigner, i.e., an imam, and decides to throw him off the bus in the belief that he is a *Muslim* cleric. In the fifth, Lucy does recognize him for a religious Jew and expels him for that reason alone. Despite Mrs. Goldstein’s complaint of antisemitism, which of these circumstances justifies that accusation? Only the fifth, where Lucy is hostile to Jews *as Jews*[71].

In 2002, on a Toronto street, Christopher McBride thrust a knife into the back of David Rosenzweig, killing the Orthodox Jew after engaging in a drunken rampage during which he had earlier slashed a restaurant employee. Immediately Frank Dimant of B’nai Brith Canada called Rosenzweig “a victim of the hate culture that has enveloped

Canada” and maintained that his death signified “open season on Jews.” However, police denied the incident was a hate crime and at trial both the Crown prosecutor and the defence attorney insisted that the killing was not motivated by antisemitism.[72]

In the 2009 film *Defamation*, Israeli filmmaker Yoav Shamir zeroes in on the American Anti-Defamation League. He reportedly made the film after a critic of one of his earlier films called him antisemitic. Investigating the ADL’s report of 1500 antisemitic incidents in the US in 2007, he finds that the ADL list consists mostly of minor incidents like a few anti-Jewish websites, a boss’s refusal to allow Jewish employees to take time off for a Jewish holiday and several African-American boys throwing rocks at a school bus full of Jewish students. In another case, a complainant overhears a policeman phoning his wife and saying he can’t come home until after he escorts a Jewish funeral, which he calls “this Jewish shit.”[73] (We will return to this incident presently.)

B’nai Brith Canada’s League for Human Rights operates a 24-hour Anti-Hate Hotline and has kept its own “audit” of antisemitic incidents in this country for over three decades. Invariably, it reports and the media amplifies an “alarming increase.” Indeed, it reported almost as many incidents in Canada in 2009 as had allegedly occurred in the ADL’s report on the ten-times-more-populous United States two years before.

In a 2009 editorial, the *National Post* (no enemy of B’nai Brith) criticized the audit:

*The greatest flaw in B’nai Brith’s annual audit of alleged anti-Semitic attacks on Canadian Jews and Jewish institutions is that it lumps the entirely trivial in with the truly appalling. An Internet blog posting blaming Jews for the H1N1 pandemic, for instance, is given equal importance alongside repeated death threats made to a rabbi. An 11-year-old boy “caught passing anti-Semitic notes at school” is seen as on a par with a man who pulled a knife on a Jewish father and his son while hurling racist epithets at them.*

*This fact alone makes B’nai Brith’s final tally — 1,264 anti-Semitic “incidents” in 2009 — largely meaningless. This newspaper alone gets dozens of hateful spam emails from random bigots every week. That sort of thing is inevitable in a country of more than 30 million people. If we were to “report” all of these episodes to B’nai Brith, the organization’s tally could easily double, or even triple. But that wouldn’t mean that anti-Semitic hatred “is on the rise,” as the group claims every year...*

*B’nai Brith’s claim that anti-Semitism in this country is a widespread and rising problem flies in the face of reality. This is probably the least anti-Semitic country in the entire world — including Israel — and it becomes more tolerant, not less, with every passing year.[74] [emphasis ours]*

2016: Journalist Jonathan Kay, himself a Jew, queried the audit in an opinion piece in the same journal in April

*But when you examine B’nai Brith’s catalogue of supposedly horrifying antisemitic episodes, what you find is a menagerie of demented Internet crackpots and teenage graffiti artists spray-painting backward swastikas on fences. There is no ‘rising tide of antisemitism’ in Canada. It only feels that way because whenever some loon in a strip-mall mosque does express a hate-on for Jews, the incident becomes a sensation on social media.*

*In other cases, the examples of antisemitism are padded out with hateful statements that aren’t really about Jews at all — but quite specifically about the Israeli government. The idea that criticizing Israel automatically qualifies as a form of disguised antisemitism has become a lazy debating trick. [75]*

If we really want to gauge the level of antisemitism, we cannot count only incidents of harm (that are serious and independently verified) directed to Jews as Jews. We must also monitor carefully the level of public enmity to Jews as Jews. A number of incidents, occurring amid general good will toward Jews, may be only, as Kay suggests, the work of isolated crackpots. At the same time, a growing level of anti-Jewish attitudes may be cause for only minor alarm if there are a small number of incidents. It is when the number of real incidents are combined with a rising level of measurable antipathy that we should truly worry. As we mentioned earlier, in reference to Jason Kunin's distinction between prejudice and oppression, popular rancour can embolden the powerful. Like a binary weapon (where two relatively harmless substances combine to produce a third toxic substance) incidents and attitudes must both be watched to gain a true measure of any rise in antisemitism.

Back in 2004, journalist Michael Valpy wrote a pair of columns in *The Globe and Mail* decrying an alleged rise in antisemitism in Canada. He repeated several tropes attempting to prove his point: B'nai Brith's audit of incidents, conflating criticism of Israel with real antisemitism, and the *feeling* among many Jews that they are disliked. But in both columns, he referred to "an extensive survey on antisemitic attitudes in Canada, soon to be published by the CJC [the now-defunct Canadian Jewish Congress] and the Canadian Council for Israel and Jewish Advocacy, [which] shows Canadians in a positive light, *significantly more positive than Europeans and Americans.*" (emphasis ours)[76] It is obvious that the people Valpy was interviewing gave him a rough outline of the survey. At the time, members of IJV contacted the CJC several times to ask when the survey results would be published. The CJC demurred. As far as we can tell, the survey was never released publicly. We can only surmise that this was because the results contradicted the narrative of rising antisemitism.

The truth is not only that Canadians by and large do not hold antisemitic feelings; there is a passionate love affair between Canada and Jews. Many of us have found that far from rushing to criticize Israel, quite a few gentiles modify their opinions in our presence, for fear of hurting our feelings. It is only when we give them "permission to speak frankly," that they will voice their disapproval of Israel's activities. Over the past two generations, except for the ravings of a few diehard bigots, many of us Canadian Jews have experienced the most warm-hearted embrace from our non-Jewish compatriots. There is a tendency for gentile Canadians to attribute everything they love about individual Jews to those Jews' existence as Jews and to attribute everything they imagine they love about Jews to individual Jews they meet. As mentioned, this too is a form of bigotry, but it is a very easy prejudice to get used to. So it is no wonder that many Jews feel they have been betrayed as though by a once-ardent lover when they hear an ever more insistent chorus of antipathy to Israeli policies and practices from their gentile friends. And it is no wonder that they take it personally. But that doesn't mean it is antisemitic.

The low rate of anti-Jewish sentiment in Canada did not deter a group of Canadian parliamentarians from forming the Canadian Parliamentary Coalition to Combat Antisemitism (CPCCA), linked to the Inter-parliamentary Coalition for Combating Antisemitism. Independent Jewish Voices Canada denounced the CPCCA as "an attempt to attack free speech and silence [criticism of the Israeli](#) government's oppressive and illegal policies" and "to label [criticism of Israel](#) and its behaviour, as well as organized efforts to change them, as antisemitic and to criminalize both[77]."

One place that antisemitism is said to be rife is on university campuses. Yet when the CPCCA called 25 university presidents to testify about this allegation, few appeared. Those who did, not only played it down but insisted that debate over difficult ideas should be encouraged, not censored. Fred Lowy, president of Concordia University (the Canadian campus most troubled by protest against Israel[78]), told the hearing, "By and large, Canadian campuses are safe and are not hotbeds of anti-Semitism of any kind." Police chiefs called to testify also denied that Jews faced serious threats. The problem of hate crime, the police insisted, was mostly directed at Muslims and LGBTQ people[79]. And yet, the CPCCA still managed to produce a report condemning, yes, a rise in Canadian antisemitism.

We can surmise why Jewish apologists for Israel might want us to believe that antisemitism is a major problem in Canada. But why do so many non-Jews, like those involved in the CPCCA, buy into this *meshugas*[80]?

There are several reasons: Some of them are fundamentalist Christians (including leading members of the Conservative Party of Canada) intent on hastening the end of days. Others want to use it as a multi-purpose club to beat the Left over the head. Indeed, some have conjoined anti-Americanism, anti-capitalism and antisemitism[81]. A Jewish community leader of our acquaintance is reported to have tried to put a new NDP[82] parliamentarian on the defensive with the leading question, “Are you part of the antisemitic left?” This is no joke, as we have recently seen the British Labour Party roiled by fabricated accusations of antisemitism.

Another example is the attack against the 2001 World Conference Against Racism in South Africa as an “antisemitic hate fest,” though a mild resolution supporting the rights of Palestinian refugees was only a small part of the proceedings. In the summer of 2016, detractors condemned the entire World Social Forum in Montreal as antisemitic, using as an excuse a single workshop (among thousands) which, in any case, was cancelled before the event began.

But for most of the gentile pro-Israel crowd, it is likely that in an age when bigotry is still ubiquitous but not acceptable, it is a way of trying to show that they are good, fair-minded, unprejudiced people. Jews are a safe group to embrace, since most of them these days, in Canada at least, are white and middle class. Or, as a friend of ours has said, saving the Jews 75 years after Hitler is “an easy get-out-of-racism free card.” If you love and defend the Jews, how can you possibly be a bigot?

### **Conclusion: All or Nothing? Using the A-Bomb**

One of the fallacies promoted by the alarmists about antisemitism, that is seldom applied to other types of bigotry, is that it is all-or-nothing, that there is a kind of on-off switch. In this fallacy, all perceived slights against Jews are of equal weight, and equally deserving of the charge of antisemitism (the “A-Bomb”.) Thus for some people, the use of the phrase “He jewed [cheated] me,” is tantamount to a one-way ticket to the gas chamber. In fact, in most types of bigotry, there is a continuum between more innocuous and more malicious forms. To be sure, the implication that Jews, as a people, are cheaters when it comes to sales and money, does disparage Jews as Jews, is loathsome, and should be called out as such. But, like its close cousin “gypped” (referring to Roma people), it has oozed into the language over time, so that often users do not even realize its poisonous origins. Often a patient explanation can be successful in disabusing the speaker of its use. “I’m sorry, are you aware of the origin of that word?” The American cop who spoke of “this Jewish shit” was apprised of his rudeness and insensitivity and he apologized – profusely, it turns out. Does his apology expunge the episode from the ADL’s compendium of antisemitic incidents? Or is it still part of the lore?

Take another example. At a 2012 demonstration following Israeli killings in Gaza, some students in Halifax, Nova Scotia drew depictions of the Israeli flag with swastikas equating to the Star of David. When these pictures appeared in a student newspaper, the Atlantic Jewish Council’s then Executive Director Jon Goldberg told the *Chronicle Herald*, “As far as I’m concerned, any attempt to draw comparisons between contemporary Israel policy and that of the Nazis is antisemitism,” and said he planned to complain to two Halifax university presidents about the students[83]. In contrast to Goldberg’s grandstanding, Jewish participants in the demonstration quietly met with the students and explained why the use of the swastika was inappropriate, as it offended those who suffered under the Nazis and their descendants. The explanation was well received by those who carried the signs. They claimed that their purpose had been to draw attention to Israeli war crimes, not to disparage Jews as Jews. But has this incident been logged as yet another antisemitic outrage?

According to the “Working Definition of Antisemitism” of several agencies (like the European Working Group on Antisemitism[84] and the US Department of State[85]), “drawing comparisons of contemporary Israeli policy to that of the Nazis” is not merely a crude error or an insensitive or overzealous reaction to perceived injustice, or even a hurtful exaggeration. No, it is full-blown antisemitism.

Individuals sometimes make rude, inappropriate or crude stereotypical comments about people who are different from them. None of it is acceptable and all of it must be challenged. But we need to be able to distinguish

between those that can be corrected by a friendly (or stern) intervention and those that require more forceful and public denunciation and shaming.

Few other groups receive as much solicitude. Just look at the comments sections of media websites. Actually, don't look. When indigenous peoples, Muslims, African-Canadians, even women are in the news, many comments have been so vicious that some media outlets have suspended their comments facilities[86].

Are Jews so unfortunate that we require a special Canadian Parliamentary Coalition to Combat Antisemitism, or parliamentary resolutions threatening free speech on BDS, or the A-Bombs dropped so frequently as to suffer from the law of diminishing returns?

Drop enough careless A-Bombs and we risk trivializing not only *real* antisemitism but other forms of bigotry as well.

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## Notes

[1] Larry Haiven, PhD, is professor emeritus at Saint Mary's University in Halifax. He is a founding member of Independent Jewish Voices Canada and a lifelong activist in the struggle for peace and justice in Palestine-Israel. Many thanks to Tyler Levitan, Sheryl Nestel, Diana Ralph, and Martha Roth who assisted with this report.

[2] We use the spelling "antisemitism," "antisemitic" and "antisemite." As Jewish Voice for Peace (a US sister organization to IJV-Canada) says in its statement on antisemitism (<https://jewishvoiceforpeace.org/fighting-antisemitism>), "We have chosen to use the spelling "antisemitism," following the advice of scholars in Jewish Studies who have made a compelling case for this spelling. The category "Semite" was developed as a part of European pseudo-scientific theories of race in the 19th century. We want to be clear that the spelling of "antisemitism" should not be used to further the separation of "Arabs" and "Jews." (For more, see Wilhelm Marr, "The Way to Victory of Germanism over Judaism," 1879).

[2] The statement that Israel is "the only democracy in the Middle East" speaks volumes about Israeli and Western arrogance, ignorance and racism. *Tunisia, Turkey, Lebanon, Morocco, and Kuwait are democracies by the same criteria as Israel.*

[3] Bowker, Robert P. G. (2003). *Palestinian Refugees: Mythology, Identity, and the Search for Peace*. Lynne Rienner Publishers

[4] Ha'aretz 2016. "Palestinian Population to Pass Jews by 2017 in Israel and Territories" accessed November 13, 2016 at <http://forward.com/news/breaking-news/328404/palestinian-population-to-pass-jews-by-2017-in-israel-and-territories/>

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[6] Harcombe, Kathy. 2016 "Israel's unwanted African migrants." BBC News. 3 February. Accessed November 13 at 2016 <http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-35475403>

[7] N.a. 2016. "Israel: No Promised Land for Ethiopian Jews." *Middle East Eye*. Web. 13 Nov. 2016. <http://www.middleeasteye.net/columns/israel-promised-land-ethiopian-jews-387651329> #####

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