

The All-Party Parliamentary Inquiry into Antisemitism, UK

The All-Party Parliamentary Inquiry into Antisemitism was commissioned by John Mann MP, Chairman of the All-Party Parliamentary Group against Antisemitism.

The terms of reference for the inquiry were:

1. To consider evidence on the nature of contemporary antisemitism
2. To evaluate current efforts to confront it
3. To consider further measures that might usefully be introduced

The inquiry was chaired by the former Minister for Europe, Rt Hon Dr Denis MacShane MP (*Labour, Rotherham*) and included:

Rt Hon Kevin Barron MP (*Labour, Rother Valley*)

Tim Boswell MP (*Conservative, Daventry*)

Rt Hon David Curry MP (*Conservative, Skipton and Ripon*)

Rt Hon Iain Duncan Smith MP (*Conservative, Chingford and Woodford Green*)

Nigel Evans MP (*Conservative, Ribble Valley*)

Rt Hon Bruce George MP (*Labour, Walsall South*)

Lady Sylvia Hermon MP (*Ulster Unionist, North Down*)

Chris Huhne MP (*Liberal Democrat, Eastleigh*)

Daniel Kawczynski MP (*Conservative, Shrewsbury and Atcham*)

Barbara Keeley MP (*Labour, Worsley*)

Khalid Mahmood MP (*Labour, Birmingham, Perry Barr*)

Rt Hon John Spellar MP (*Labour, Warley*)

Theresa Villiers MP (*Conservative, Chipping Barnet*)

The inquiry issued a call for papers in late November 2005, requesting information from Government departments, the police and criminal justice agencies, academics, trade unions, community groups and NGOs, amongst others. Over one hundred written submissions were received from a broad range of interested parties and individuals. Whilst all members of the

panel were parliamentarians and the meetings were held within Parliament, this investigation held no official powers and the proceedings were not covered by parliamentary privilege. The panel heard evidence from representatives of key organisations and individuals in four oral evidence sessions held in Parliament during February and March 2006 and this report was written in the months following those sessions. In addition, there were delegations to Paris and Manchester with the aim of setting the oral and written evidence in a wider UK and European context. In addition, the Chairman visited Rome to discuss the phenomenon with senior Vatican officials and has carried out research into the rising antisemitism in Eastern Europe.

Summary

Until recently, the prevailing opinion both within the Jewish community and beyond was that antisemitism had receded to the point that it existed only on the margins of society. However, the evidence we received indicates that there has been a reversal of this progress since the year 2000, which has created anxiety and concern within the Jewish community. The aim of this inquiry is to investigate the current problem, identify the sources of contemporary antisemitism and make recommendations that we believe will improve the current situation.

In the introductory chapters we define the term ‘antisemitism’ and the nature of the problem. In this regard we have been guided by the definition of racism put forward by the Macpherson report of the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry and the definition of antisemitism provided by the European Union Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia. It is clear that violence, desecration of property, and intimidation directed towards Jews is on the rise and in chapter three we explore the increase in antisemitic incidents and the response of the law enforcement agencies.

With regard to the recording of antisemitic incidents, we were concerned to learn that there is a lack of consistency in police processes and procedures. Only a minority of forces have the capability to record antisemitic incidents. Without a clear and comprehensive understanding of antisemitism it is difficult to formulate adequate solutions and address the failure of some police forces to collate statistics and monitor anti-Jewish incidents. During the course of the inquiry, we have become alerted to a form of anti-Jewish prejudice which takes the form of

conversations, discussions, or pronouncements, made in public or private, which cross the line of acceptability. This is explored in chapter four.

‘Antisemitic discourse’ is the term we have adopted to describe the widespread change in mood and tone when Jews are discussed, whether in print or broadcast, at universities, or in public or social settings. We are concerned that anti-Jewish themes and remarks are gaining acceptability in some quarters in public and private discourse in Britain and there is a danger that this trend will become more and more mainstream. According to a significant amount of evidence we received, it is this phenomenon that has contributed to an atmosphere where Jews have become more anxious and more vulnerable to abuse and attack than at any other time for a generation or longer.

In chapter five we look into the sources of contemporary antisemitism. Whilst the far right, the traditional home of antisemitism in the last century, continues to be a problem, it is no longer its exclusive source. We heard that the recent surge in antisemitism is closely linked to the periodic outbreaks of violence in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; but given that the majority of victims are neither Israeli nor displaying support for Israel at the time of the attack, the precise reasons for this link require more investigation. This, in our opinion, reflects the complexity of antisemitism in Britain today; it is not one dimensional and is perpetrated by different groups in different ways.

The committee unanimously recognised that criticism of Israel should not, in itself, be regarded as antisemitic but equally recognised that anti-Jewish prejudice in any context should not be overlooked. Antisemitism on campus is a serious issue, especially because we feel that better education has a significant part to play in community relations. We heard that some universities are being targeted as recruiting grounds for extremists, and of tensions within student bodies, and we were concerned that not enough is being done to counteract the effects of antisemitism on campus.

In chapter seven we examine the measures that already exist to address antisemitism. Although government has a significant role to play, our recommendations are aimed at all agencies, organisations and individuals with a remit in this area. In the view of the panel, it is up to all of us – the media, university lecturers, politicians and community leaders – to understand the issue of antisemitism and treat it in the same manner as other forms of racism.

We make a number of recommendations to the police, the Home Office, Government departments, schools, universities, and others on steps that can be taken to better monitor and reduce levels of antisemitic abuse. However, we consider that further research needs to be undertaken in the UK on the correlation between the conflict in the Middle East and attacks on the Jewish community. This must be better understood if the problem is to be tackled.

Some witnesses to this inquiry pointed out that the level of antisemitism experienced by Jews in Britain remains lower than that faced by Jewish communities in some parts of Europe and that the Jewish community is not the only minority community in Britain to experience prejudice and discrimination. However, such arguments provide no comfort to the individual victims of hate and violence, nor should they be used as an excuse to ignore the problem.

Racism and intolerance must be challenged wherever they exist. We believe that Britain is at risk of becoming complacent in this respect and that antisemitic abuse, be it physical or verbal must be condemned in the same unqualified terms as other forms of discrimination and prejudice.

Main recommendations

- Only a minority of police forces in the UK have the capability to record antisemitic incidents. The panel recommended that the Home Office requires police forces nationwide to record such incidents using the current Metropolitan Police model of categorising them as both racist and antisemitic.
- The panel recommended that the Crown Prosecution Service investigates the low number of prosecutions and takes steps to address this problem.
- The panel called on the Department for Local Government and Communities to facilitate relations between faith communities and conduct an annual survey of community relations in Britain.
- The panel called on the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and Home Office to report jointly to Parliament annually on the extent of antisemitism in the UK and the actions taken to tackle the problem both domestically and in the context of international obligations.
- The panel recommended that the Department for Education and Skills places a statutory duty on all schools to foster engagement through joint activity and curricula.

- In response to evidence that, whilst there are examples of good practice there is a growing problem of antisemitism on university campuses, the panel called for all Vice-Chancellors to take an active interest in combating racist incidents of this nature, and recommended the establishment of a national working group to address the issue.
- The panel recommended that Government departments work together and with their counterparts in other countries to limit traditional broadcast and internet access to racist, including antisemitic, material. “The disturbing rise in antisemitism uncovered by the Panel has caused increased anxiety and vulnerability within the Jewish Community. Acts of violence and abuse towards Jews are an affront to any modern society. They must be dealt with swiftly and severely wherever they occur. But, the most worrying discovery of this Inquiry is that anti-Jewish sentiment is entering the mainstream, appearing in the everyday conversations of people who consider themselves neither racist nor prejudiced.