



THE JEWISH CHRONICLE
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It was about Israel

Few symbols of Anglo-Jewry are more resonant than the JNF collection box. The charity itself may no longer have the same pull on the community's collective consciousness – the scandals and controversies of recent years have seen to that – but the Prime Minister's decision to resign as a patron is still hugely symbolic. Certainly, the attempts of groups such as "Stop the JNF" to claim responsibility are sophistry; as we report, the decision was taken months ago, long before they began their campaign. But this week it became clear that No 10's own initial claims were equally wrong. Far from simply tidying up the Prime Minister's commitments due to "time constraints", as Downing Street put it last week, we are now told that it was because JNF is "specifically focused around work in one specific country". This was a decision, make no mistake, about Israel. And it is a decision which has had global impact, making the news across continents. In every case, it has been reported as an attack on Israel. One of two things has happened here. Either Mr Cameron has been badly advised and had no idea that his resignation would have such an impact. Or that is precisely what he intended. Whichever, he does not – to say the least – emerge with credit.

What was it all for?

The Chief Rabbi is patron of a new school in Mill Hill which is due to open in September. He is also backing another planned for Golders Green, to be headed by one of his rabbis, Harvey Belovski. Both are worthy projects; but they are not Orthodox schools. They are free schools, which are required to limit to fifty per cent the places offered to children on a faith basis, with the rest on proximity. It is not quite two years since the United Synagogue poured money into defending the Chief Rabbi's policy of preventing a child, whose mother's conversion he did not recognise, from attending the JFS. Given this latest development, one has to wonder: why?

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COMMENT & ANALYSIS

LETTERS

DAVID CAMERON'S DECISION TO QUIT THE JNF

► I was saddened by the Prime Minister's decision to boycott the JNF by withdrawing his patronage (JC, May 27). I say "boycott" because that is effectively what he has done.

I was born in the UK during the Second World War and lived all my life in England until March this year when my husband and I made aliyah and chose to live in a country surrounded by hostile Arab and Muslim nations whose declared ambition is to annihilate Israel.

We do not know many people in Israel and we do not speak Ivrit. We emigrated not because of any burning desire to live in Israel but because we no longer felt comfortable in London, where we have lived for nearly 45 years, because of the changing cultural mix and political outlook which has led to increasing anti-Israel rhetoric and antisemitism.

David Cameron declares himself to be a friend of Israel. Now is not the time to desert friends. If he is indeed

the friend that he says he is I hope that he will demonstrate this friendship and act like the Canadian PM Stephen Harper. I hope he will reconsider his patronage of the JNF and the work they do to develop and enhance the infrastructure and welfare of democratic Israel and to demonstrate the important Judeo-Christian values still shared by the majority of people in the UK.

Susan Fransman
King George Street, Jerusalem

► JNF UK was founded in 1901. Since that date, a British Prime Minister has always held the position of Honorary Patron. Since my tenure as a board member, then deputy president and finally president, and from Margaret Thatcher through to Tony Blair and Gordon Brown, each one held this position. How sad it is, then, that, for whatever reason, David Cameron has broken this chain.

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GUILT BY ASSOCIATION?

► I am increasingly concerned at the JC's apparent trend towards McCarthyism.

The editorial (JC, May 27) accused rabbis and communal leaders of "sup(ping) with the devil", implicitly including Rabbi Jonathan Wittenberg in that attack. Yet everyone who has had the slightest contact with Rabbi Wittenberg knows him to be a man of rare humanity, compassion and wisdom, always guided by the deepest Jewish scholarship. Such an attack does not shame him: it shames the *Jewish Chronicle*.

It followed a similar attack two weeks ago on Trevor Pears, one of the most enlightened philanthropists in our community: in each case, the attack is pure McCarthyism, relying solely on guilt by (very indirect) association.

It seems to me the effect, if not the aim, of all this is to leave only the hard right as "legitimate" voices within British Jewry. Everyone else – Pears, Wittenberg, and whoever this witch-hunt targets next – is to be branded as an appeaser or Hamas apologist.

Jonny Geller
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FORGOTTEN FARHUD

► The reminders by Sarah Ehrlich and Lyn Julius (JC, May 27) of the 1941 pogroms in Iraq are timely, but fail for the most part to make the crucial connection between that dreadful event and those of 1948 and after.

Whereas Julius rightly concludes the result was the exodus of nearly a million Jews from the Arab world, nowhere has anyone set in the context of that earlier tragedy the exodus of half-a-million Arabs from the nascent Jewish state, caught in a war not of its choosing against five insurgent Arab armies, including that of Iraq.

For 63 years, we have heard ad nauseam of expelled and dispossessed Palestinian refugees abandoned by their Arab brethren to wretched camps run by UNWRA, but next to nothing of twice that number of expelled and dispossessed Jews, willingly resettled by their Israeli brethren at their own expense.

Why is the word "Naqba" now in common currency but not "Farhud"? Why does the world consider the right to compensation for one set of refugees but not the other?

Eli Abt
Kidderpore Avenue London NW3

JEWISH GROUPS NOT 'BACKING SHARIA LAW'

► The article you printed about the referendum in the US state of Oklahoma that would bar the introduction of Islamic sharia law into state courts (JC, May 27) was inaccurately headed, *Jewish groups in US backing sharia law*.

The intent of the AJC's brief was not to support sharia law, much less – as some readers have presumed, judging from emails I have received – to advocate or defend an imposition of sharia in the US. The Center for Islamic Pluralism is led by moderate Muslims, who follow traditional Islamic guidance and oppose the importation of public sharia law into non-Muslim countries.

The second paragraph of the article claimed that a "coalition of organisations that include the Council on American-Islamic Relations and the American Jewish Committee (AJC) are

backing a legal appeal against a measure that would prevent Islamic law from being used in the state's courts."

No such coalition exists between the Council on American-Islamic Relations and the mentioned Jewish groups, much less with our organisation. We in CIP consider CAIR to represent radical, not "mainstream" Islam.

CIP defends private sharia in matters such as diet, burial, male circumcision, charity, and forms of prayer. In the words of the AJC's brief, "to a reasonable observer, the amendment's purpose plainly is to disapprove of the Islamic tradition." The amendment violates American constitutional protection of the free exercise of religion.

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MID-EAST MAYHEM

► I was interested in Paolo Torresan's letter (JC, May 27) regarding Geoffrey Alderman's observations (JC, May 13) on the killing of Vittorio Arrigoni, self-styled worker for human rights.

I agree that the death and killing of anyone is never a cause for celebration (with such exceptions as Hitler or Mussolini). But Paolo Torresan fails to mention that Mr Arrigoni's human-rights work was mainly, if not exclusively, devoted to the people of Gaza – who voted for Hamas, whose charter calls for the destruction of Israel and by implication the murder and destruction of its population (which, no doubt, if achieved would be the cause of much joy and celebration in Gaza).

Elliot Abraham
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► Binyamin Netanyahu's declaration that the 1967 borders are "indefensible" is ludicrous. These were the borders from which Israel defeated three nations in six days in 1967.

The IDF is one of the most advanced militaries in the world and with the introduction of the Iron Dome system to defend itself against rocket attacks from Gaza, it seems laughable that the threat to Israel would be existential with such borders.

It is interesting to see how Israelis are often rightly proud of their nation's military prowess, yet when the question of peace comes up, they suddenly portray themselves as weaklings. Even pro-peace Zionists such as myself are running out of patience.

Maxim Edwards
Pennsylvania Road, Exeter, Devon

► It is most appropriate in the light of recent world events, during this time of counting of the Omer – originally a joyous period, now for historical reasons observed in semi-mourning – to remember the many civilian losses that our people have had to bear.

Among many heartbreaking examples, let me recall one tragic case, on the *yahrzeit*, poignantly reported in May 2004. Tali Hatuel, a social worker who counselled terror victims, and her four young daughters, were callously murdered by Palestinian gunmen as she drove out of her family home in Gush Katif.

Tali was eight-months pregnant with a son, leaving behind a bereft husband and father, David, a much respected head-teacher. Not just intent on shooting innocent victims, the gunmen ensured that all five (and the unborn baby) were dead by firing again.

This is the nature of what Israel has to contend with while fighting a just war towards a just peace. Such shootings are in stark contrast to the exemplary behaviour of the IDF.

This was reinforced at the recent "We believe in Israel" conference in London. One of the important messages, also stressed by our valued non-Jewish friends, was that even when Israel does the right thing, whether on the battlefield or sending humanitarian aid to other countries, it is criticised, demonised or delegitimised.

There seems to be one law for Israel and one law for the rest of the world!
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