It was about Israel

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, Harley 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 attempt 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?

GUILTY 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 “souring their relations with” others, 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 respected and influential rabbis in our community: in each case, the attack is pure McCarthyism, relying solely on guilt by 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 an “Hamas apologist”. Jonny Geller

THE JEWISH CHRONICLE

Please contact us by email whenever possible

LETTERS

JEWISH GROUPS NOT ‘BACKING SHARIA LAW’

The article you referenced in the supplement to the US edition of Okahama’s American Jewish Chronicle is not a fair representation of us and our stance on Islamic sharia law into state courts.

The intent of the AJC’s brief was to counter the misperception that there was a single, monolithic body of Islamic Sharia law — from which states, we contend, do not have a duty to adopt or oppose the implementation of public Islamic sharia law into state courts. The Center for Islamic Pluralism is led by moderate Muslims, who follow guidelines that forbid the introduction of “extremist” interpretations of Islamic law into state courts.

There are no such bodies as United States Islamic American 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 organisations. We believe in the rule of law, which is to say, “mainstream” Islam. CIP defends private sharia in matters such as diet, burial, marriage, circumcisions, 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.

Stephen Pollard

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