

The Board of Deputies of British Jews
1 Torriano Mews
Kentish Town
London NW5 2RZ

29th August 2018

For the attention of Marie van der Zyl, Deputies President

Dear Marie,

Since writing to you on 21st August, there has been an online backlash against Margaret Hodge and many have expressed their disgust at her trivialisation of the sufferings of those who suffered in the Holocaust. She had self-pityingly claimed that she felt like one of the Nazis' Jewish victims when she was told she would face a disciplinary hearing by the Labour Party. The misappropriation of Holocaust memory is as troubling as indifference to the horrific events.

Simon Johnson, a Trustee of the Jewish Leadership Council, is right when he says "I am no psychologist, but I know that it is possible for someone's views, prejudices and biases to be influenced by events that happened to their parents." One way this reveals itself is when the malign influence of a family 'elder' is passed down through the generations. Their misguided wrath can end up affecting grandchildren who may hear only distortions about their family history. This means that the children could be unaware that a grandparent was a survivor of the Holocaust and, because of lack of information, the youngsters are ill equipped to participate in a meaningful conversation about historical events and the family connections.

The wise Rabbi Berel Wein said "Knowing the past generations is somehow a crucial and necessary component for Jewish survival." If Shoah awareness means anything to the Board, other than grandstanding, it must be proactive in identifying families where there is failure to disclose personal links with the Holocaust, and encourage the parents to engage with the education schemes.

And Rabbi Alex Chapper's observations in his Orthodox Judaism commentary in the JN are relevant when he says: "Just as you will bequeath your material possession to your progeny, so to will your spiritual legacy live on within them. Your children are heirs as much to your wealth as to your morals, values and ideals." He cautions: "... if you are shallow, irreverent and mean spirited, so your future generations will tend to be."

As you said in the co-authored article which appeared in the New Statesman: "Let us be clear, it is not words, but only actions that have ever mattered." Within living memory of the Holocaust, this is one such issue that urgently needs to be addressed by the Board of Deputies with immediate action.

Your actions vis-à-vis Roslyn Pine were criticised, quite rightly, as having brought disrepute upon the Board. The risible statements made by you last week, that Jeremy Corbyn has "declared war on the Jews" and a Corbyn government could represent a "threat to world

security” bring the Board close to being ridiculed. I suggest that you are getting out of your depth.

In my letter to you of 15th May, congratulating you on your appointment as President of the Board, I did notify you that you would be expected to live up to the reputation of the respected *van der Zyl* name, even though you were the daughter of Barry Kaye. You should take time to reflect on this.

Yours sincerely,

George Rooker,
Historian